



FIRE and RAIN

Selected Poems 1993-2007

RD Armstrong

Volume 1



© 2008 by RD Armstrong
ISBN 978-1-929878-96-3

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced without the author's written permission, except in the case of review.

Revised Edition

LummoX Press
PO Box 5301
San Pedro, CA 90733

Printed by CreateSpace.com

Acknowledgments

The author gratefully thanks Tom Armstrong for his help in bringing this project to fruition, Chris Yeseta for doing the layout and the editors of the following for publishing some of the poems contained herein.

Books:

Unkissed By The Angels; And Love Is Dancing Just Out Of Reach; LAST CALL: A Legacy of Madness; PEDRO BLUE; Mozart at 22; The Bukowski Page; Paper Heart; In Memoriam; Fool's Paradise; Bone; Eyes Like Mingus; Maytag Heights; Lost Highway; The San Pedro Poems; LUMMOX Journal; Last Call: the Legacy of Charles Bukowski; The Hunger.

In the following magazines and anthologies:

Random Lengths; REPORT TO HELL #10 & 11; SHEILA-NA-GIG #10; GENRE; Pearl 24; Chiron Review; Pearl 25; ON TARGET; Spillway; SIC; One Dog Press; Black Cross; bender #1; California Poetry Calendar; Nerve Cowboy #6; LUMMOX Journal; Wooden Head Review #8 & 10; Pitchfork; Vertigo Orb; Haight Ashbury Lit. Journal #17; Raising The Roof (anth); Poet Noise; Sex In Public #2; The Cherotic (R)evolutionary; Blue Collar Review; ZZZ ZYNE; CER*BER*US; ArtLife Vol.19, #6; Lucid Moon; Unwound; Drinking With Bukowski (anth); The Anthology of Orange County Poetry; Quercus Review; Louisiana Review; Flash!Point; Bukowski Review; Poesy; Comme Ca Et Autrement; Gros Textes 30; San Gabriel Valley Quarterly; Beyond the Pale #1; An Eye For an Eye (anth); So Luminous the Wildflowers (anth); I Love Your Poetry; Long Beach Press Telegram; Schuylkill Valley Journal of the Arts; St. Vitus Dance #2; Zen Baby; Cedar Hill Magazine; Poultry; Meat; Black Ace #8; My Time – The Lunch Break Book (anth); Telluride Watch; The Beatnik Cowboy #3; Poems-For-All #850.

In the following electronic magazines:

Black Cross E'zine; Yoni; Onedog Press; Zero City E'zine; The Open-ended It; Spokenwar; Poetry Mining Co.; Poetry Webring Webzine; Thunder Sandwich; PoetrySuperHighway; Eroplay; Poets On the Line; Jazz Zine; The Ragged Edge; Author's Den; Lazy Beat; Poetz; S.P.A.M.; Abalone Moon; Poetic Diversity; Poets Against the War; DUFUS; Deliric; The Poets Encyclopedia; Moonday; Juice Online; Metropolis France; St. Vitus Dance; CP Journal #1.

PREAMBLE TO THE INTRODUCTION

When I came up with idea for this book, I was going to have it done by a different online printing service. Since then I've discovered another, much more flexible company. I decided to republish this edition, which was very uncharacteristic of me. I usually stay in the saddle of the horse I road in on. But it would be stupid of me to do that on this project.

So while I was republishing, I thought it might be right to reformat as well. So, this edition of Fire and Rain, Vol. 1 is going to be a bit different. I don't know if that will be good or bad...for all I know it might be bad form to do what I'm doing.

Too bad.

This is my book and I'm refining it to meet my desires.

INTRODUCTION

When I first started writing poetry, I had no idea that there was a vast community of poets who both wrote and read/performed their work to audiences of hungry listeners. Nor did I know where it would lead me. In fact, it wasn't until the early nineties that I even went to a poetry reading! But, once I did, I caught the bug (because basically, unlike most of my poetry heroes, I had a serious streak of "ham" in me). Actually, now that I think of it, I did go to a few readings before that, but these were "professional" readings with big name poets like Charles Bukowski. I never thought I'd become involved with anything close to that.

When I started writing poetry again in the early nineties, after a ten year hiatus, I discovered that my poetry had matured, as if that ten year period had allowed my words to season (just as I had seasoned). My poetry tastes had seasoned, as well. I think I had absorbed the 'body' of many of my poetry "heroes" – Bukowski being at the head of this list. I began to write prolifically (at least for me) and started to send out poems to the little magazines out there – 'there' being the crazy world of the small press. I had some luck, but I also had some hard times getting published. (After Bukowski it was nearly impossible in this 'rush to judgment' atmosphere of what was hip...it was a virtual vacuum of Bukowski-esque kitsch). It seems that, like life, there were always going to be those souls who think that they can make your poem better than it already is. Eventually, I grew tired of these games and decided I would do my own magazine (the Lummo Journal), where I could publish who, what and whenever I wanted. I figured I'd make some stamp money for my own submissions along the way and everyone would be happy.

There was just one drawback to this: doing the magazine and the other projects that sprang up from it (The Little Red Book Series, for one), left me with very little time to submit my own work to other mags and publishers. In fact, I had to publish my own books if I wanted any satisfaction. So, in trying to circumvent all the BS of submissions and rejections, not to mention the interminable waiting time-periods, I ended up providing others with the very service I was seeking.

This collection (volume's one and two) serves to present what I consider to be the best of my current catalog of poetry, representing a period of fifteen years (1993 to 2007). There are three exceptions, but because of the size of the three poems, I will be presenting them in a third volume entitled **On/Off the Beaten Path**.

As to the title, Fire and Rain seems fitting. Apart from the obvious connection to the James Taylor hit, this title resonates more closely with my experiences growing up in the 1960s followed by my resurrection as a writer in the 1990s.

RD Armstrong

FIRE and RAIN

Selected Poems 1993-2007

Volume 1

STEEL

I had been reading the letters of the "Old Poet"
and had gotten beyond
the mythological aspects
and beyond
the projection of
the presumption
that our lives of pain were similar
when
I came across the letter that summed it all up
for me.

The thing is like this:
you want to believe
that there is somewhere to get ahead to
but you have doubts.
Let's say that all the wrong turns
all the dead ends
all the unfinished ideas- turned to moldy lumps
all the unwritten inspirations
the unrecorded moments when the muse was speaking the same
language as you, to you
all the perfect little moments that
you failed to notice or appreciate
all those and then some will be/have been
lost underfoot as the mindless hoards march on
and you sit numbly
hoping that at the end of the trail
some sense will be made of all this.

The doubts congeal into fears while you are sitting
in a darkened room
daydreaming of a sexual encounter that will never come
or watching some kinda pornography
so you can get it up enough to get off
on fantasies so old and threadbare they are transparent.
Having the best sex in years
with yourself
cumming into a sheet and feeling that sad ecstasy-
knowing there's no one to share this aching with and wanting to
so badly
Wanting to stop being scared but not having the courage to act.
Dreaming of the taste of the gun barrel, knowing that taste
wanting to escape to something else, another life
and never having the courage to.....
Some of you will never fit
some of you will never survive the process of
fitting your round peg into a square hole
You will always be caught along the seams of the net
endlessly swirling at the edge of the
mainstream

or trapped like side-show freaks.
The factories will take their share
as will the "cool" mongers, the purveyors of "hip"
but some will survive
thru pathological perseverance
and others, like the Raindog, will struggle ahead
haunted by the stench of rot
the stale and musty smell of fear
mixed with the reek of decay
topped with a provocative sauce of angst and pathos
and sprinkled over with a little freshly grated death
just for that added spicy zip!

As each day progresses
as each hour unfolds
and each minute passes,
the glories and the gories continue
to floss the brain
in an eternal tug of war.

I lick my lips and taste the steel, again.

VACANCY

There was no vacancy
in fact the whole place had been shut down
locked up
the contents of each room
covered with sheets
shades drawn
doors shut
locked
The paint is peeling
the foliage
dying
A fine layer of dust
covers
all.
I will clean the old place up
make it livable
again.
Slap some paint on
open the windows
unlock all the doors
air it out
Get out the "Murphy's"
clean, clean, and clean some more.
Clean and polish
the old sign
so you'll know
There's a vacancy
You're room is all ready
bed made up
flowers
fresh picked
on the nightstand
The register is open
and ready for you to sign in.
The staff
ready to serve you.
"Do you have any baggage?"

SPRING ROSE

I had this brief involvement
last spring
and here it is spring again
and I am thinking,
reminiscing really,
about the beauty.
The beauty of the moments
that pass between lovers....
The beauty of wildflowers
in a vase by the window
as lacy curtains breathe
and the light plays across the skin;
her skin,
your skin....

I am with you now
again in that room,
in that moment.

And just when I get to feeling
lonely for that memory,
that moment,
I also remember
the trip to the wildflowers
and the horrendous fight driving home;
screaming at the top of our lungs,
lane changes unnoticed
in the heat of battle;
this sobers my nostalgia....

Still, the vase and the curtains
breathing;
and the beauty of the moment.
The beauty of all the moments
strung together like beads
reminding one that it isn't all in vain....

And that if there is truly a balance
an equilibrium to this life,
then, perhaps, the moments will
eventually balance.

SAFE SEX

They come to my door
two or three times a week now
It's always the same
They always seem to know when
I'm eating dinner
They talk and talk and talk
about their lives
about their husbands
and boyfriends
They want someone to listen
to them
and I do listen.
And if there is any sex at all
it's always the "safe" variety:
They talk about it
and I listen
I try not to picture
the fingers groping
or the tongues darting
or the lips pressing
or the many and various ways
that one can fill the various orifices
with the bitter-sweet cocktail of "love".
Sometimes I get a hug
a reward for hearing their confessions
but mostly
they flit off into the night
back to their accursed husbands or boyfriends
or onto the next bizarre coupling.
And me?
I go back to my dinner
now cold and unappealing
much like my own sex life.

Real Weather

I thought of you today
and for the first time
there were no sadly played songs
in the background
No chorus of crooning caballeros
No chanteuse exhaling smoky lyrics
in a solo spotlight
I was not sitting at my usual table
in the corner by the bar
in the dimly lit twilight tavern
that sits at the bottom of heartbreak hill
on the wrong side of the tracks
in the bad part of
the town with no pity
that's located in the county strip
near the badlands
of my current
state of mind.

No, I sat by the window.
Outside, the air charged with ions
the overcast sky, a sullen grey, threatened us with
Real weather.
And as I imagined the first raindrops
evaporating on the hot, dusty asphalt
the moisture absorbed into every tiny crevice,
I thought about you
You and your kindnesses sprinkled about.
At the end of a long drought
You were the first rain to blow across the fractured two-lane
that cleaves the God-forsaken little huddle of shacks
that I call home
mostly.

Faceless and Nameless you
You could piss on the empty, parched streets of my soul
and every molecule of nurturance would be
quickly and gratefully absorbed.

Now, like the street, I await the next sprinkling
from love's mystic fountain.

Pound of Cure

I thumbed through the phone book
found the number
and dialed;
RING
RING
RING
RING
“Can you hold?”
“Uh...”
“Thank you (click).”
Insultingly, friendly muzac began to play
in the earpiece of the phone
My head was swimming and I
was having a hard time staying focused
on the task at hand.
For some unknown reason
I was still on my feet,
still vaguely rational and
still hoping this was going to turn out okay.
I was coming to the end
of a year-long depression -enhanced
drunk.
I thought that I had hit rock-bottom
and if I couldn't get some help soon
REAL SOON
I'd wake up wearing nothing but a toe tag!
Then a very perky voice came
over the line:
“Suicide Hot Line! How may I serve you?”
“You're kidding?!”
“Oh no, sir! Suicide is a very serious problem
in today's modern world!”
“Say, do you mind if I ask you a question?”
“Why, no, sir; as long as it's not a personal one!”
“Where was your last job?”
“Pardon me?!”
“Where was your last job?”
“I was the activities director at the Neuropsychiatric
Institute! Why?”
“Just curious, I guess.”
“Excuse me, sir, but you don't sound very suicidal;
can't this wait until morning, say around nine a.m.?”
“Excuse me!?”
“Can't this wait, sir?”
I had to think
Could this wait until morning?
Could I delay my inevitable demise
for just a few more hours?
Through the drunken fog
a great flame of anger shot up

and in the darkest corner of my despair
an army of self-deluded thugs
began to sharpen their
tiny knives of deceit.
Oh, yes, there would be vindication!
Heads would roll
they would all be made to suffer
just as I had suffered!
“Sir? Are you still there?”
“Huh? Oh, yes, um, yeah sure, I can wait, uh huh....”
“Well, good! That's very reassuring! You have a good night!”
“Uh, yeah, you too.”
I hung up the phone.
The room took a few more spins
and as the black tide came
swirling up around me
knocking me into the bar
I sank into the depths
and mercifully passed out.

I'll fix them
later

TIME

Something to do
while it's doing you.

Pueblo de las Putas

She stumbled down the sidewalk
fighting with a large white “sports” bag.
She wore a tight knit black dress
that seemed determined to ride up to an interesting height.
It was late, nearly one AM,
and I was heading south on Pacific
back to the point, back home.

I would’ve liked to stay and seen
who got the best of her first,
but the two gentlemen in the green
67’ Chevy behind me had a different idea.

Later, back home, I remembered,
when I first moved to this town,
I thought that this was an awfully
friendly town.
The women on Pacific were always smiling
downtown
Smiling and waving
at me.

Then I began seeing some of them regularly
on the same street corners or hanging around
the same telephone late at night;
and I became suspicious.....

I was embarrassed by my lack of sophistication
and felt repulsed by these Putas
who had tricked me.

But then, one night, at a stop light, I happened to make eye
contact with one of these ladies
and in the blink of an eye, all the desperation, fear and anger
of all the long nights
strung out and lonely, the stinky sex on a dirty rag
hopelessly trapped hellish days
it was all there.

I saw the comedic twist amidst the ruins of her life –
waiting for a phone call to make her one fuck closer to that final fix.
And across town and several months later
a woman drunk on sex (or whatever)
stumbles home, her skirt heading North faster than she can.

Nigger Bath

“My daddy calls this nigger bath;”
she calmly tells me as she spritzes herself with perfume
to hide the stale odor of sweating through
another shift.

My heart aches at her vulgar racism
but I let it slide because she has something I want.

Hers is an inherent funkiness
an earthiness that reminds me of some of the women
I knew when I lived in the East Bay
in the early seventies.

She won’t let “things” between us get out of hand
She’s in control
I let her take advantage of me
I don’t know what else to do.

We both know that this is just a moment in time
two strangers with excess baggage
My need to touch, to be touched
Her need to be touched.

I give her massage
she lets me
She gives me companionship
I let her.

We laugh at stupid, inane ideas
we come very close to being affectionate
But we are very mindful (she more than I)
not to get too lost in the mists of intimacy.

She thought that I might become her “in town man”
but that deal fell through.
When we first met, I thought she would be trouble
but, like Tom said, “I pulled on trouble’s braids..”

Some day, she’ll move uptown
or out west Texas way, to her rancherita
and I’ll be here, still
like the air on this hot, June day.

We never kiss.

MIDNIGHT BLUE

A thick, moist blanket of fog
grey and fuzzy
was being pulled over
the foot of the peninsula
like a wool sock
He was driving south on Pacific
as little golden parasols
illuminated the street
and traffic whizzed by
He was driving slowly
in a big, Midnight Blue Lincoln
with a trunk big enough to
land on
I was trapped behind him
lumbering along in the '54
Just past the B of A he braked
swerving towards the curb
as if to park
"Good!" I thought.
But then at the last moment
here he comes
back into my lane again
"Damn!"
For two more blocks he does the
little dance
"Just who the hell does this guy think he is?"
Finally with a break in the traffic
I tug the '54 out and around him
and as I tumble past him
I glare down into the drivers seat
He was big
big and blue
with a dark sports windbreaker on
His hair was white and poking out
in all directions
like a bad "punk" hair-do
He held onto the wheel for dear life
There was an almost exquisite look of
agony on his face
Old Man Death was twisting
the knife into his guts and was
one twist away from canceling his ticket
I kept going
south up the hill
my way lit by the golden parasols
thinking about that horrible look
on his face

PRE-PERFORMANCE JITTERS

On the eve of my first reading
My hands sweat
And there's a conga line in my stomach.
But I'll do it
this reading
or be done by it
Stand or fall, on my own
without the aid of
my friend Johnny Walker
or any of his minions.

The solitary path sounds very appealing
but it wasn't my first choice
Sitting alone, hunched at a desk
dissecting 43 years of living
In a kind of do-it-yourself autopsy
Gleaning the verse from skeletal remains
or turning an insignificant moment into an allegory.
The current trend says
Poetry has to be performed
It has to be raised above the ordinary
that which we call "The life"
the extra-ordinary is that which we call "The art"
Both are, most likely, "the shit"
though in art, the shit is more cleverly packaged.
And into this minefield I come stumbling
with my little collection of verse
all set to amuse and amaze
Disgorging my soul
while my heart pounds on in fear
And why do something that scares
the livin' Be-Jesus outa me?
Why get outa bed ever again
Why bother to cross the threshold each day
I don't live (with)in fear
I live in spite of it.

**This is only a sample of the book.
If you would like to see more, visit
www.lummoexpress.com**

FIRE and RAIN

Selected Poems 1993-2007

Volume 1

“RD Armstrong’s ‘Fire and Rain’ [Volume 1] is mostly all ball busters and roses. One of the best larger collections by an American poet, that this reader has read, in many moons”

—Doug Draime

“I usually don’t pay more than \$10 for poetry books unless your name is Bukowski, Ginsberg or Plath but nearly every poem spoke to me in a special way. Keep on doing what you’re doing.”

—CaLokie

“For Armstrong the Blues are not played, but lived – his poems are the observations of a life lived raw. He hides no sin, expects no redemption and asks no forgiveness...”

—Bill Gainer – poet, editor and publisher

“In this era of burgeoning social dysfunction, and its transitive residue on the person, through world, state, economics, religion, family, relationship and god knows whatever the hell else, autobiographical (not confessional) poetry is of paramount importance. At its best, it bears personal witness to all these things, declares supporting solidarity with others, and in the spirit of hope, points to salvation.”

—Steve Goldman