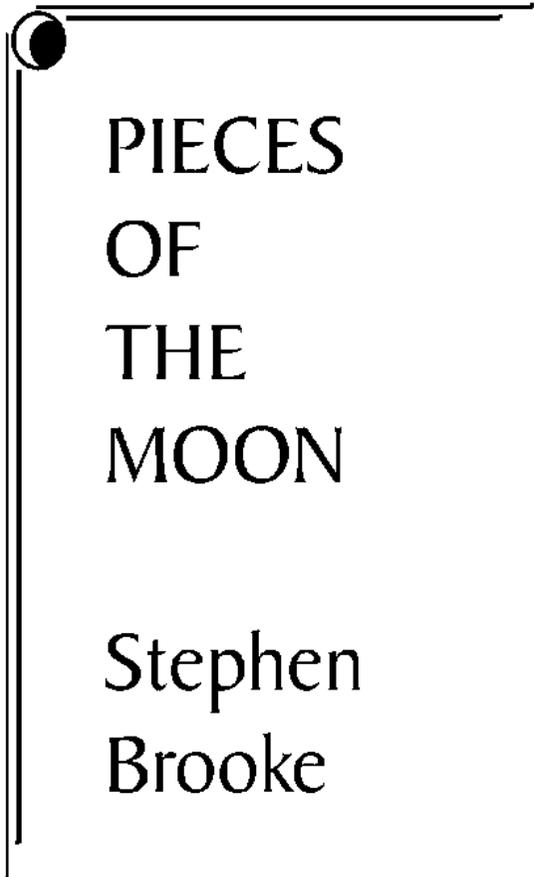


poems by  
Stephen Brooke

PIECES  
OF  
THE  
MOON

*Illustrated by the author*



PIECES  
OF  
THE  
MOON

Stephen  
Brooke

Eggshell Boats  
2011

Although I have, it seems, been writing poetry forever, *Pieces of the Moon* is my first book of poems. As such, this volume contains some of the best from the recent past. A few have been legitimate award winners, both in national and regional competitions.

Therefore, a variety of styles are represented. I have made no attempt to arrange them by date nor by technique; rather, I have endeavored to let one poem lead to the next through mood and subject. I hope you, the reader, enjoy this little sampler of my work.

*Stephen Brooke, July 2003*

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Eggshell Boats is an imprint of Arachis Press

ARACHIS PRESS  
4803 Peanut Road  
Graceville, FL 32440  
<http://arachispress.com>

## PIECES OF THE MOON

### A Bit of Moon

We have a bit of moon, tonight;  
It shines its way into my bedroom,  
Keeping me a while from sleep.  
I should arise, slip from my covers,  
Cross those cold floors, close those blinds  
That I left open; blinds forgotten  
When I made my drowsy round  
Of locking doors and dimming lights.

It rose to shine, not long ago,  
And now that moon lies on my bed,  
Conversing of the day's events  
Much like some lovers I have known.  
At end of day comes lethargy;  
This uninvited guest may stay.  
It's late and I, in time, will sleep  
So let the moon shine in, tonight.

## Applause

Enter, stage left, our hero?  
No, just a bit player  
in an empty  
auditorium. The cheers rise  
silent from a darkened house  
as he takes his bows and eats  
his lunch. Encore?

## **Guitar**

*a sijo*

My guitars carry the names  
of women I once knew.

Some I loved and some I might  
have loved if life were different.

I play their memories each time  
I hold one in my arms.



## Dogs and Poetry

All-day suckers, she called them;  
one for each of her boys—  
Donal, Mad Max, sleek Arrakis—  
to gnaw when the long  
Florida rains kept them indoors.

We were dogs and poetry,  
she and I, dogs and poetry,  
and I overlooked our mismatch  
even as I did those marrow bones  
scattered across her living room floor.

I've chewed the bones of us  
long enough for all the flavor  
to mix in uncertain memory  
with the pleasures of some other time,  
as her dogs have become my poetry.

It has stopped raining;  
I want to run in the yard.

## **Thief**

I've picked Neruda's pocket,  
lifted his wallet and spent  
the words unwisely. I should  
have given them to you.  
Shall I snatch Sexton's purse  
and buy you something nice?

## Beggars

I have no truths to spare;  
panhandle somewhere else.

My coat buttons all the way up  
to keep out the cold.

Do the streets of heaven  
lead anywhere?

## What Gallows

I dance a jig upon the air  
of never and forever more;

What gallows have I built of you,  
that burns of memories and crows?

Cry not, my mother, 'twas my own  
sweet crime that dangles me now so,

Between forgiveness and the time  
of day. This rope sings me my pardon

In lullabies of melting sky,  
in lullabies of melting sky.

## The King of Self-Pity

Call me king:  
ruler in my own nation,  
my own little corner  
of being.  
King of self-pity,  
king of that country  
I built from memory  
and broken hope.  
Abdicate?  
No, though ever so  
attractive. The king  
must face his execution,  
head and crown  
falling as one.  
Walk with me once more;  
give me a kiss goodbye  
as I wave to the mob.

## My Name

He knows me still; at least there's that.  
His voice, become constant complaint,  
Calls my name when the way from chair  
To bathroom turns into a maze.

My poor ensorcelled knight is lost,  
Is drawn by will-o-wisps away;  
He now sees only mists and mirrors  
And the faces of the dead.

I know he'll wander further yet  
And some tomorrow may set out  
With all his memories left in  
My care, to never be reclaimed.

Then, when he loses even me,  
I, too, shall count among the dead,  
A ghost to hover helplessly,  
One more of those forgotten faces.

I'm all that's left my faded boy,  
My name his one familiar light:  
The beacon that can draw him home,  
Another day returned to me.

## **Benediction**

The wounds of our love  
never heal; they sing  
their stigmata across me,  
a benediction of yearning.

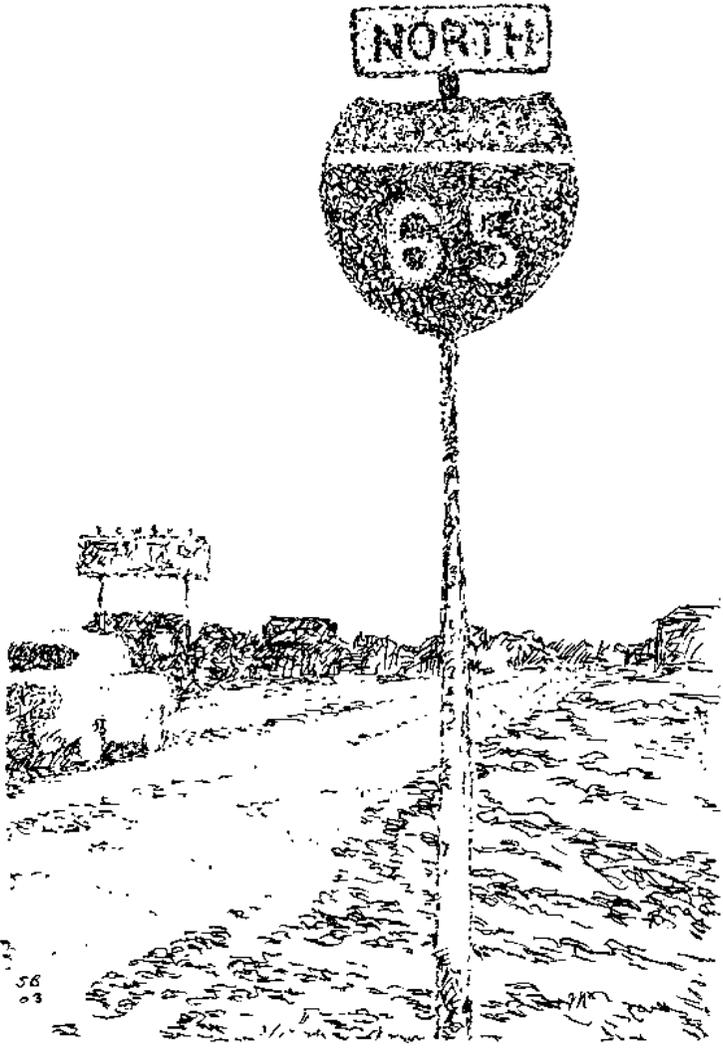
Blessed be.

Blessed be  
they who call the names  
of lost love  
in the night.

Blessed be  
the broken hearted  
for theirs is the kingdom  
of yesterday.

Blessed be.

The faint scent  
hangs in my eyes:  
your incense burning,  
burning yet.



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03

## Interstates

Sixty-five, Seventy-five,  
Ninety-five: the highways  
that carried us away from home  
to those jobs in Chicago,  
Cleveland, Detroit. Hillbillies  
on the assembly line. It beat  
farming, beat working  
in sweat-shop shirt factories,  
afraid to unionize, knowing  
the boss would pick up, pack up,  
and move to Taiwan  
or Thailand or some other  
place we'll never see.  
The signs are there, those red  
and blue Interstate sirens  
still sing, "Come on,  
let's go home." But the Buick  
stays in the drive. The kids  
don't talk like us anymore  
and the mortgage is half-paid  
and I hear the old house was torn  
down last year to make  
room for a Seven-Eleven.

## The Blues of My Soul

In the dark rhythm of a rainy night,  
when dreams drip from each branch of the live oaks,  
the wind's a distant slide guitar  
playing the blues of my soul.

Beyond the heat of this Southern summer dream,  
lightning finds voice, growling a complaint  
of lost love and forgetfulness  
across the skies of then.

The world has become an empty room;  
I called your name tonight and it was swallowed  
by the darkness, by the rain,  
by the blues of my soul.

## Heel

This song has no tune,  
no words, only  
the erratic beat  
of your drum.  
Let me remain thus  
irrelevant,  
inconvenient, holding  
sparrows in  
my open hand. This world  
calls me old-fashioned;  
should I wake up and smell  
the century?

My beliefs are become  
a secret lover  
and my dog; I call  
them to heel  
but they ever pull  
at the leash.  
You think me weak for it,  
your jealousy  
will not let them run.  
Let them run;  
let them dig deep in search  
of God's bones.

## Three Days, Two Nights

Doing my Anthony Newley shtick  
for another middle-aged girl,  
some twice-divorced chick with grandkids  
and hair dye, cruising for number three  
with Royal Caribbean; could it  
be the guy with a bad toupee  
who just bought her another drink,  
while I tell her “It was a very good year,”  
and for a moment she believes me?  
Forget tonight, baldy, she’ll be  
another nameless port of call  
for the lounge singer, always  
on his way to Nassau and back,  
in a powder-blue tux that carries the reek  
of ten-thousand cigarettes  
and the same forty songs.

## The Whispered Songs

Twilit melancholy soft descends  
upon a heart that will, yet troubled, yearn  
for some forgotten love, not knowing why:  
a shadowed memory of other lives,  
the whispered songs no man can learn.

And, these dreams, they ever fade away,  
though still along such paths my heart might turn,  
perhaps to tarry, seeking to remember  
all those many things I may not know,  
the whispered songs I can not learn.



## Pieces of the Moon

I am drunk with silken wine  
laid soft upon the night;  
oh, throw me pieces of the moon,  
I'll fly them like a kite.

Cover me and I shall you  
in skies of satin sheets,  
as all the stars of heaven sail  
away in morning's fleets.

Midnight's heady air pours out  
its violet serenades;  
oh, sing me pieces of the moon  
before our zephyr fades.

## Peripheral Vision

From a corner of my eye,  
the silent room slides.  
Ghosts, about ghostly business,  
hover on the edge of the dust,  
just beyond now.  
Looking straight ahead will blind me;  
one eye wakes, the other dreams.  
It makes no difference  
which is which.

## **I Have Eaten**

I have eaten fresh, wet truth  
plucked from your tree,  
and found myself unsatisfied.  
I'll sing away the taste;  
no salt nor pepper  
can make you palatable.

## **Sideshow #1**

Step right this way, folks;  
see the incredible man  
with his head up his ass.  
He thinks he lost yesterday  
up there somewhere  
but he'll shit it out  
tomorrow morning,  
as always.

## **Sideshow #2**

Live girls here, gents,  
real live,  
drop dead  
dancing girls,  
dancing just for you.  
Yes, gents,  
only for you!  
Please remain in your pants  
at all times.

## Short Stuff

She told me she was eighteen  
but I sometimes wonder—  
too young, too young.  
Twice her age or thereabouts,  
playing in a cover band  
on the east side,  
I'd step outside for a smoke  
where the industrial park lights  
leaked into the alley  
over tenement roofs  
and there she would be,  
waiting.

For me? Maybe,  
or maybe for any guy  
who'd come out and put his arm  
around her shoulders,  
listen to her stories.  
The usual shit—  
abusive stepfather—  
living with a friend—  
could she have a smoke?  
Maybe I could bring her out a beer?  
Why don't I ever try anything with her?  
She wouldn't mind.

*cont.*

No, Short Stuff, not me.  
You find a job yet?  
Don't make such a face, girl,  
it wouldn't kill you—  
better than giving blow jobs  
over there behind the van.  
Yeah, I've seen you—  
hey, that's okay—  
don't cry.

Then she wasn't there anymore;  
gone back to Ohio,  
the drummer told me—  
too bad, he laughed—  
she was a good little fuck.

Sorry 'bout the broken nose, dude.  
You should have known better;  
I should have known better.  
Too many regrets—  
too many shoulds and shouldn'ts  
and I don't know what  
became of her.  
But I do still care enough  
to wonder.

Sometimes.



## Trailer Park

I lived alone, and baked French bread,  
very crusty, in a trailer with  
a leaky roof, every ten days.  
The drips never bothered me that much—  
My plants caught them and rent was cheap  
at a dirt-road trailer park.

I worked odd jobs and subbed at school,  
the classes no one else would take,  
but I could always use the money  
and Seven-Eleven wasn't hiring  
art historians right then.  
Mom wrote, *For this you got your degree?*

And if I didn't get a call  
to teach shop or phys. ed. that day,  
there would be waves to ride and pictures  
to paint and I should learn that new  
song for the latest short-lived band.  
Yes, they sucked, but so did I.

Every day, I inched a bit  
further from my youthful dreams;  
every day, life seemed a bit  
less worth living till the next  
at a dirt-road trailer park  
where rent was cheap and I lived alone.

## Windmills

Face it, she said,  
you're just Don-fucking-Quixote  
mistaking me for Dulcinea.  
Go find another  
girl of your dreams;  
I don't want the job.  
She left my world spinning  
like windmills  
on the plains of la Mancha.

## Shrimp Creole

Shrimp Creole, she promised;  
I brought Chenin blanc—  
no, not tart enough—  
my old guitar, a head full of songs.

Arm around her in the moonlight,  
I knew she wanted more,  
something not within me that night.

Should I have pretended?  
Should I have taken those lips  
in hopes of rousing some sleeping passion?

Our roads now carry us apart,  
and we'll forget that full moon night  
when I sang for my supper.

## String of Pearls

The big bands were hot  
and so was the night  
Glen Miller played  
at Buckeye Lake.  
You know the lake?  
No, I guess  
you wouldn't, wouldn't  
know the amusement park  
lights shining  
across the water  
as "String of Pearls"  
filled the night.

She always said  
they fell in love,  
dancing there  
beneath the stars  
and the flashing signs  
and the ferris wheel,  
spinning slowly,  
slowly in the heat  
of an Ohio  
summer night.

*cont.*

Sometimes, still,  
those old swing songs  
waken on the radio  
and she dances across  
the kitchen floor  
with his memory,  
as “String of Pearls”  
fills the night.

## Who Can Sleep?

Who can sleep  
while the peepers peep  
and the bull frogs' bass  
is booming deep

in the perfumed light  
of a hot summer night  
when the full moon calls  
and passions ignite?

Come, join me on  
the shadowed lawn,  
we'll listen to stars,  
chat with the dawn,

and watch the sun rise  
in each other's eyes,  
as morning swims  
across the skies.

## Moonlight

Was it your mother's idea  
to feed you on the moonlight  
and frosted stars? It's far  
to climb when you grow hungry.  
Let a slice of the earth,  
with its yesterdays  
and its generations,  
fill you up and pass  
through to its tomorrows.  
Your children's children will find  
that same moon in a pond  
and drink it all one night.



## One Blue Can

Dim-lit room with  
one blue can spilling  
its mood on you as  
smoke curls from  
a dozen cigarettes,  
glowing eyes in the corners  
of forgetfulness.

Nude but never  
naked, you wear your  
face like a  
chastity belt, hard  
as the cocks a zipper's  
distance from  
each lap dance.

*cont.*

Next week, a different  
body wears your  
face and we won't  
notice you or  
the tracks on your  
arms as we feed  
you small bills.

We came here to  
be strangers, babe,  
to keep from caring  
about you or  
ourselves in this  
dim-lit room with  
one blue can.

## What Wind

What wind's a-whistlin' in my ear;  
is that time rushin' by, I hear?  
It moves too fast—or is it I  
who's hurryin', not askin' why?

What wind's a-cuttin' through my life,  
what cold and sharp, well-whetted knife?  
Some morrow it will slice too deep  
and wind will carry me to sleep.

What wind's a-tossin' 'round the days,  
like fallen leaves, to go their ways?  
That wind, I fear, will howl and rave  
until I'm lyin' in my grave.

What is that whistlin' in my ears?  
It is the passin' of the years.

## of dreams

I am  
and always will be  
a dreamer

of dreams  
too large for my life  
to hold

of dreams  
that overflow  
and run

into  
the past as I  
grow old

*cont.*

of dreams  
someone will ask  
to share

then toss  
aside when all  
is told

I turn  
my collar against  
the wind

to dream  
alone through life  
is cold



## **Drum**

My heart, it is a drum,  
beating wildly,  
beating lonely,  
through the empty night.  
Primal rhythms,  
jungle rhythms,  
echo in the dark.  
Who will dance?  
Who will dance?

## A Poem Before Breakfast

Now, I'm an early riser—  
used to be, I'd sleep in,  
stay out late.

But I see more clearly  
in the hour before sunrise  
and sometimes pour a poem  
with my first cup of tea,  
finishing it off with a scone.

## **You, Who Once More Brightly Shone**

You have drifted from my heart,  
On your separate, silent way;  
Though I had hoped, of all I've known,  
You, at least, might stay.

There is come an empty place,  
Where your memory long lay;  
When young, we promised not to part—  
“Friends for life,” we'd say.

You, who once more brightly shone,  
Grow now fainter, day by day;  
I can no longer see your face:  
Time has dimmed your ray.

## On Turning Fifty

We're not young forever;  
Be content, I'm told,  
And grow old gracefully.  
Accept your body,  
Love yourself for who you are.

Be content;  
Yet only discontent contents me.  
My desire keeps me alive,  
As I seek still  
To fuse with the ideal.

I remain a man in love  
With what can be,  
What I can make of me;  
A man in love with dreams,  
An artist of the will.

Time, I know, waits not:  
We all go down.  
But I'll not fall so easily;  
To struggle is to win,  
Even when we lose.

## Stop By My House

Stop by my house, once more, before you go,  
And we shall talk a while of things that were;  
There's comfort to be found in things we know.

The time has not yet come that I must grieve,  
A day when I shall not see you again;  
Stop by my house, once more, before you leave.

For I would sit with you, old friend, although  
We may but share a drink, a toast farewell;  
Stop by my house, once more, before you go.