

In the shadow of  
**atlantis**

John DeCamp

with Foreword by Jean Auel  
and Photography by Brenda Schaffer

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## Foreword

The emotional intensity and mystical insight of John H. DeCamp's poetry is the result of his deep involvement with living and with people.

John is not a viewer. He participates: he lives, he breathes, is totally enmeshed with life's processes. To those who feel alienated by their unique perception, his poetry speaks the message that they are not alone.

John was born in Geneva, New York on July 27, 1935 at 6:30 a.m. He wrote his first poem when he was six. While serving in the Air Force, he decided to make the Pacific Northwest his home. He graduated from the University of Portland in 1961 with a degree in business.

He earned his living as an electronic technician, using his creative intuition to solve complex electronic problems as well as to explore the full range of human problems and emotions through his writing.

Sailing with a 20-foot sloop was a passion for many years. He has two children with children of their own and lives with his wife Virginia in Forest Grove, OR.

— Jean Auel



Analogy or history—  
take it as you will;  
for me it is both.

-John DeCamp





Atlantis, a name written in wind.

a symbol; a word for a word.

Did you not know

that a man can change the past more easily  
than he can change the future?

To alter what's to come requires action,

but to transform the past  
man needs only his imagination.

And is a truth less valid

because it is illustrated in fiction  
rather than in history?

So it is that what you choose to call Atlantis  
has been subdivided into several continents  
and given many names,  
that its population is said to have been  
as large as several million,  
or as small as two people and a snake,  
still the truth of it lives on.

Truth is like a lamp  
in that it may be lit by many implements  
and the nature of its illumination  
argued over by those who perceive it differently.  
Indeed, this lamp may even be extinguished for a time;  
yet it still exists, unchanged,  
waiting only for the flame.



Sometimes I think there really must have been  
a lost Atlantis,  
and we perceptive people  
are all former citizens, reincarnate.  
It must have been a most marvelous place,  
for what we think of now as beauty  
never quite lives up to dreams—  
that could be memories.  
Have you ever touched another person's soul,  
lived out the fleeting joy that comes of this,  
then fled, as nearly everybody does?  
What relationships we must have had  
before the ban came down!  
Now we must live with shadows of friends—  
if we are fortunate enough  
to catch that rare look of familiarity  
in the face of a stranger.

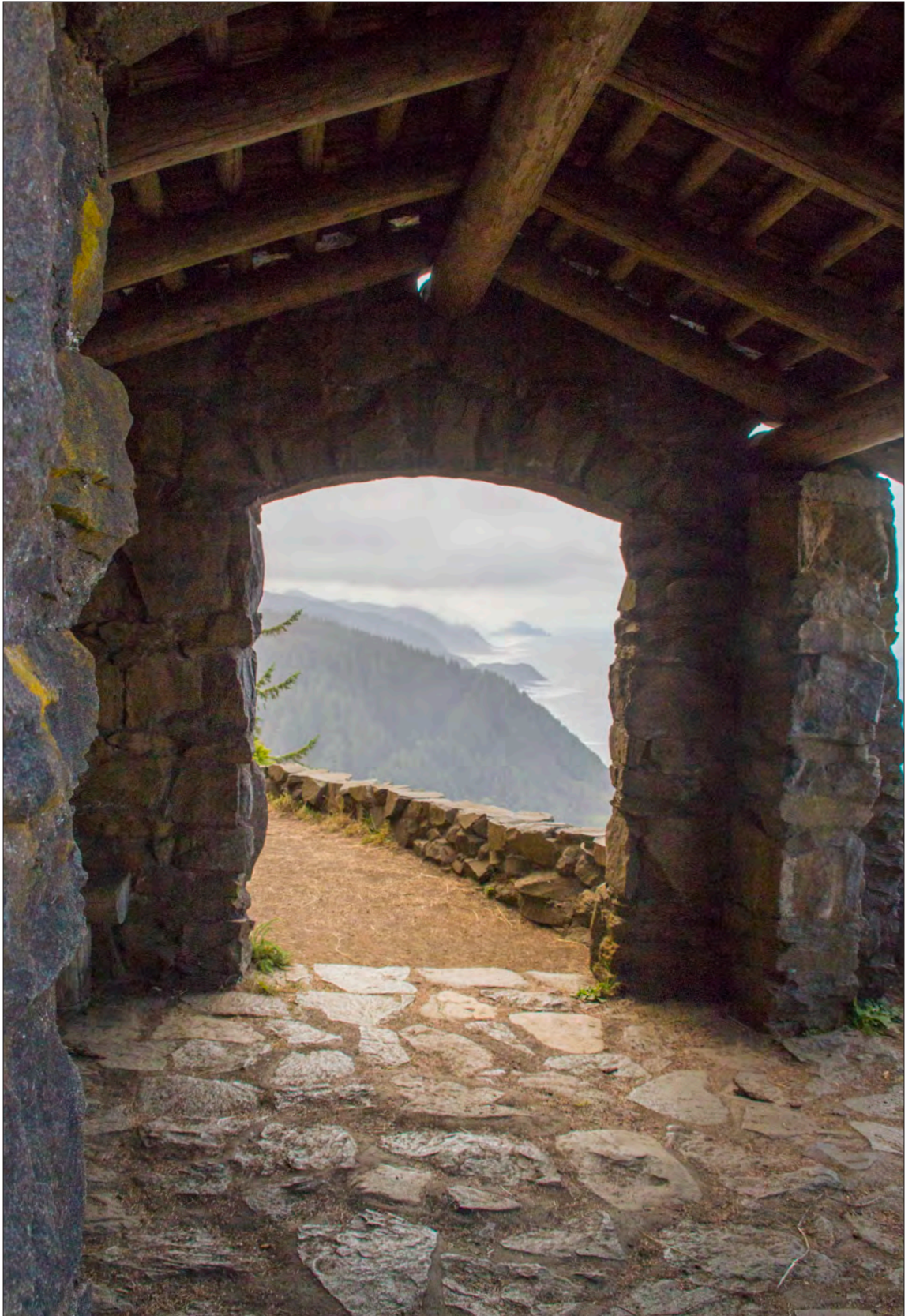
Have you ever noticed how  
we must nest quietly  
on the edge of what seems to be  
another people's world,  
try not to disturb them,  
lest they rise and push us out.

For me, at least, there is no resentment of these people;

I am grateful that they let us stay here.

But I stand in horror and great bitterness at the ban.

What sin could we have possibly committed  
that the punishment must last for all eternity;  
that caused our home to be destroyed,  
that polarized us, so that even in our despair  
we may take little pleasure in relationships  
with our own kind?



I had a vision, late one evening  
of another universe (nearby),  
And, suspended in it, was a giant gleaming globe  
of blue and gold.  
All about it was a many-stranded net,  
enclosing it, as the Japanese might weave a rope about  
a glass net float.  
It came to my mind that it was the unseen web of power  
that the natives of this place had woven over centuries,  
and that all this power was, as we judge men, misused.  
For the people, here, used power to manipulate their universe—  
and one another.  
However, no man's shaping pleased another;  
there were blocks and counter blocks,  
one against the other,  
until this whole world had frozen solid;  
fixed itself statically in its universe  
for fully half eternity.

But as I watched this world, it slowly expanded,  
    (for it is the nature of all things to grow)  
    and strained itself through this unyielding grid  
    even as a potato might be diced.  
And so, because of the misuse of power,  
    which tried to deny the natural law of growth,  
    a great civilization saw its home destroyed  
    and was banished to a lesser place for punishment.  
But then it came to me:  
    there was no crime, or no one punished here,  
    for of what consequence is it to the infinite God  
    if something is destroyed?  
Are not the atoms gathered up, and used again,  
    to build some other structure?  
This thing that I had seen, then,  
    was one span of a cycle—birth to death—  
    and not a thing was lost.  
...except a name

Atlantis...



## Adam

My memory grows dim,  
and perhaps it's a good thing.  
We have erected our travesty, our city,  
on an island  
and weep for its ugliness.  
But such is the nature of this place  
that the natives find our country  
far more beautiful than their concept of paradise.  
Without the Power, we must do our building with machines—  
and even with our hands—  
and out of such materials!  
The crystal crazes and cracks,  
even as we erect our tall towers,  
and the acid atmosphere  
attacks all our bright metals  
while they are still forge fresh.

Sometimes the earth itself shakes and cracks,  
as if to underline the vulnerability  
of this whole universe.

But to ourselves has come the worst destruction,  
for the very sun of this accursed place  
kills the mind:

We no longer can communicate, except by spoken words,  
and we have very nearly forgotten our home,  
even as we try to reconstruct it.



Oh God! Oh God!

And we do not even know why!

...even know why!

Such was the nature of our crime

that the memory of it has been removed

and even the memory that we are being punished

is being taken from us.

I have been told in meditation, thought,

that we have been left this little bit:

we are allowed to keep our immortality,

but our minds will be wiped clean

between each cycle

-death to birth-

and we will be left

with only dreams...



## Unnamed Stranger

They nailed him to a cross today,  
and now my one real friend is gone..

Oh God!

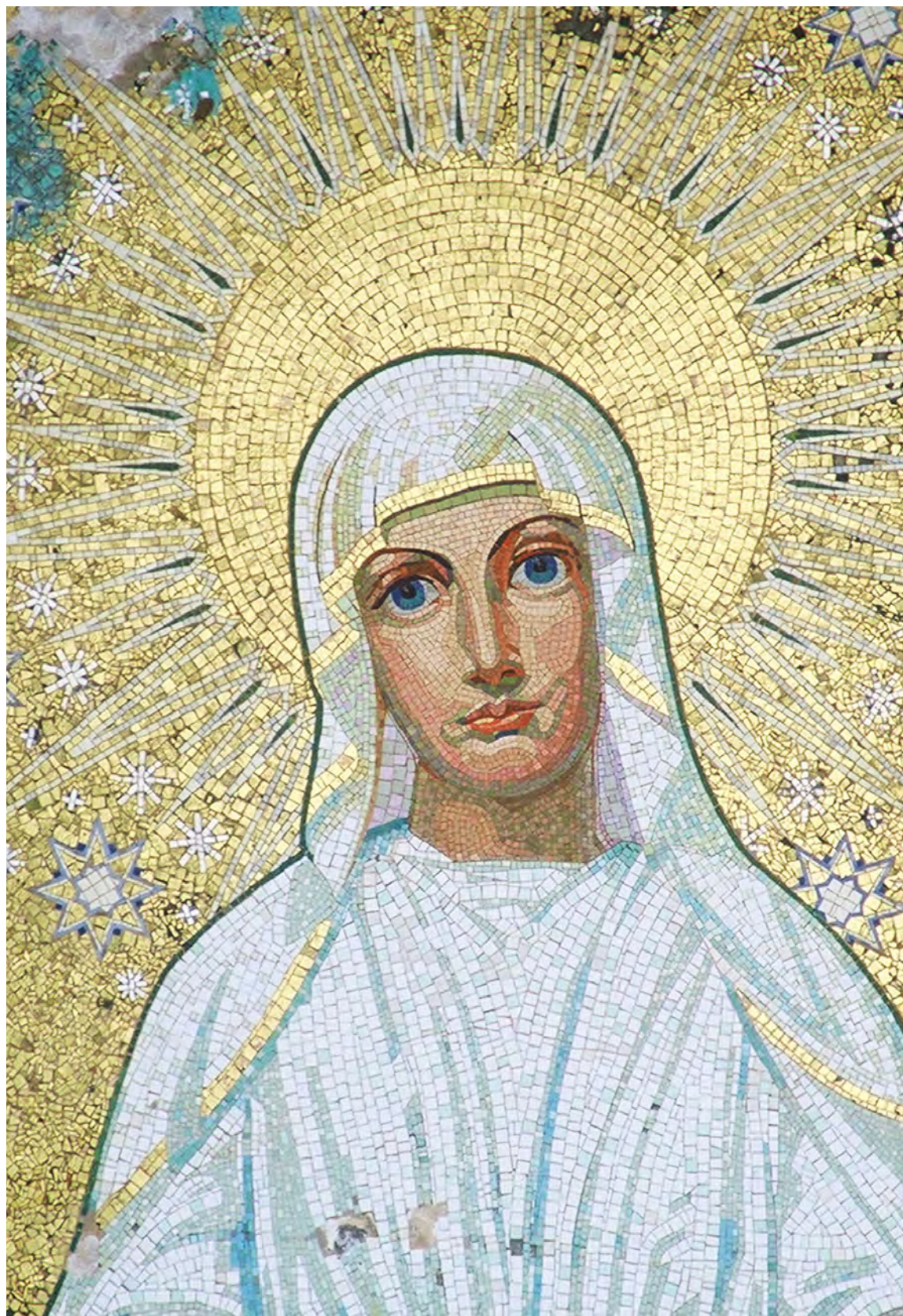
Sometimes I think that I  
was born in the wrong time,  
and to the wrong place!

Why am I so alien! So alone!

What an unkindness

to give me just one friend  
and then

to take him away...



I

I was born amidst mighty signs,  
and a very significant time.  
... and I do not know why!

My mother thinks  
that I am to do some great thing.  
but I cannot think what this might be.  
I am not well liked in the village;  
the other children think me weird.  
I have tried to be like them but I cannot:  
the world is far too full of beauty  
they can't even see,  
and every time I try to share it with them;  
to, say, call their attention  
to some sky spanning sunset,  
they laugh and, perhaps, throw stones.

What would they say, I wonder,  
if I were to tell them  
that, sometimes, when I have gone long  
without food, or sleep,  
my mind goes elsewhere;  
listens to a voice...

Perhaps they are right;  
perhaps I am crazy (though this voice  
tells me I am not.)

Still, I should rather suffer my insanity  
than the blindness of the villagers.

II

Say!

Who am I to criticize the common man!  
For all of my ability to draw pleasure  
from the beauty of things  
and to draw strength, say, from a storm at sea,  
are the villagers not even more joyful than I?  
Do they not grow fat and happy by their hearths,  
watching their children?  
Do they not find completion  
in their simple relationships?

How am I greater;

I who follow the winds of the earth,  
always trying to find a thing,  
the nature of which  
I do not know...

### III

I have met others like myself!  
I am neither crazy nor unique!  
Consequently, I have learned  
    among these followers of my friend John,  
    that I am not some sort  
        of badly distorted villager;  
rather, I am another kind of person!  
And, if this were not enough,  
    they have taught me many things;  
    they have taught me to meditate, they call it,  
        without the unpleasantness of fasting  
        or without going sleepless for many nights.

They have taught me  
    to value the things the voice has said to me  
        for, they say, it is the voice of God.  
And they have taught me  
    to hope...



## IV

Because I am a poet, they listen to me;  
the student has become the teacher.

But what I have to say seems obvious:

love others,  
and yourself, and God;  
for he is part of you,  
and you are part of him.

Take pleasure in each day,  
and seek not to change what may not be changed,  
but put aside those things that bother you,  
and may be put aside.

And I have told them

that life and death are but a cycle,  
not a beginning and an end.

...but most of them know that, I'm sure.

It frightens me, sometimes,  
    what they may make of what I say;  
    truth for me  
        is very likely not the truth for them.  
So I tell them stories, things they can relate to,  
    so that they  
    may build what I have said,  
        into their conception of the truth  
        and grow  
            with their own destiny...

v

This is an age of many laws:  
a tangle of many shalls and shall-nots  
that reach, web-like, into all the corners  
of a man's soul.  
Those that come to me are filled with guilt,  
for the law is so complex, and often obsolete,  
that obedience to one may break another.  
And, in many cases I have seen,  
this man-made structure so conflicts with natural law  
that a man can't follow it and stay a man.  
Yet, they are taught from birth,  
indeed, ingrained with all this crap,  
and told that if they tread on these  
transparent, self-constructed things,  
that God will smite them!

And have they not made this true?  
For if they are with God, and God is with them,  
then does it not become real?  
There seems to be no way out;  
for even if a man should stand outside the structure  
and see it for what it really is,  
guilt, the soul-devouring dog,  
shall follow him—  
for his unconscious mind  
harbors many old messages.

## VI

I have thought long on guilt,  
and meditated,  
and been given an answer.  
Since, of late, they seem to accept my every word as truth,  
I will tell them  
that I can take their guilt, and die with it,  
and then it shall be gone!  
And if I get them really to believe it,  
it shall be the truth!

## VII

Clutch this crown from me, you fools!  
I never said that I was God!  
I am the son of man,  
a part of God,  
even as yourselves.  
For I ask you:  
were we not conceived within God's mind  
and then created of it?  
So if you torture me  
and nail me to this savage construction,  
should you not do this, then,  
to the least of all your brothers?

## VIII

What a mad universe is this  
that I must hang here in the cause of truth?  
What great sin could we have done  
that we must hang here  
ten thousand years, or more...  
My God!  
My God!  
Why have you forsaken me...  
Atlantians...





Adam

I

I am Adam,  
past admiral of a million ships.  
I was born in a place beyond existence;  
a country of a thousand lost names,  
and I have watched the wind turn the world  
for nearly seven thousand years.  
But now I sail the earth's bright seas no more;  
instead, I teach, and wait in "Paradise,"  
to learn again.

The eastern mystics say  
that if a man knows God at death,  
then he shall not be born again to earth,  
but will become as one with Him.  
Perhaps;  
but I am already one with God;  
the process of becoming more so  
is, of course, the Grand Illusion.  
So, even though I am a graduate of earth,  
still I do explore my subdivided self,  
for it is fun  
and full of love.

II

Well do I remember war;  
in every incarnation, I waged war, or fought against it,  
never realizing that I played the selfsame game  
in either role.

Well do I remember  
there is risk, and excitement, and glory  
in the dust of clashing armies  
and in the glitter and the polish  
of quiet conference rooms.  
But as I grew from life to life,  
my spirit remembered  
even as I forgot,  
and the despair and agony of war, however brief,  
has become a sadness.  
and an abomination to me...  
...for I have learned to love.

III

We do not sleep,  
though some of us wake slowly.  
When I was new here, and a man  
with the memory of death still on him  
came to me and asked,  
“Why is all this?”  
Then, I would answer,  
“Because of our sins,  
we must lift these lesser ones to our grand level;  
thus we are punished, we serve,  
and we suffer humility.”

But as I grew in wisdom,  
I learned to relate to the men of this world  
as they struggled up from nothing.  
I learned to respect their courage  
as their unfriendly home  
tried to crush them under the ebb and flow of war,  
or with its own natural disasters.  
And I came to value  
the quiet intensities of their relationships.  
So now I have observed another truth:  
we are here to learn, and to share, and to grow;  
for these people, be they different,  
are our equals.



## CAIN

I

I have been known, variously,  
as Cain.

Better known for my dark feathers,  
I have played the villain most  
for I, the one lone spirit of my world,  
best understood the value of the negative  
that pain provokes a man more positively than pleasure,  
for is it not so, that we grow most from suffering?

They tell me I am wrong;  
that balance equals growth;  
that joy plus agony equals love  
...eventually...

So I am cast again, and yet again,  
upon the surface of this planet;  
an exile, even among my own,  
until this alleged lesson can be learned.

II

I am amused by man's conception of me.  
The Christians go so far  
as to accord me equal status with their God,  
little knowing this assumption makes me  
co-author of the universe.  
Do they not speak sometimes  
of the struggle between good and evil,  
personifying the latter with myself?  
Good and Evil!  
Little do they know  
though they've been given all the words,  
that I am as blameless as the Christ;  
for evil is a thing of man—  
indeed, his own creation.



Consider; were I to take the shape of man and slay you,  
would you not think, in those few moments left,  
that I had don an evil thing?  
Yet all flesh dies,  
and the evil of death is good for the worm.  
Does not each have his place?  
How quickly man forgets his spirit is immortal;  
I am but an instrument in the cycle,  
like a cliff a man may fall from in his clumsiness,  
and I am but an item of creation, like the cliff  
...or like yourself...



QUESTA  
PROLUNGA LA

FIAMMA  
MIA PREGHIERA



I

I weep for you, my people,  
for those few words I spoke to you alone  
have been mostly lost;  
scattered among the words of earth.

I am pleased, though,  
that what I said to others  
filtered through the years so well.  
And, though much of what I spoke of is distorted;  
frozen into structures;  
even so, any man may read the book and find his own.

Still, I have left you with a law where I intended freedom,  
so for you, I reaffirm a truth:  
that the laws of one people  
do not fit precisely on another,  
and you have been trapped between  
what I said was sin  
and your own nature.

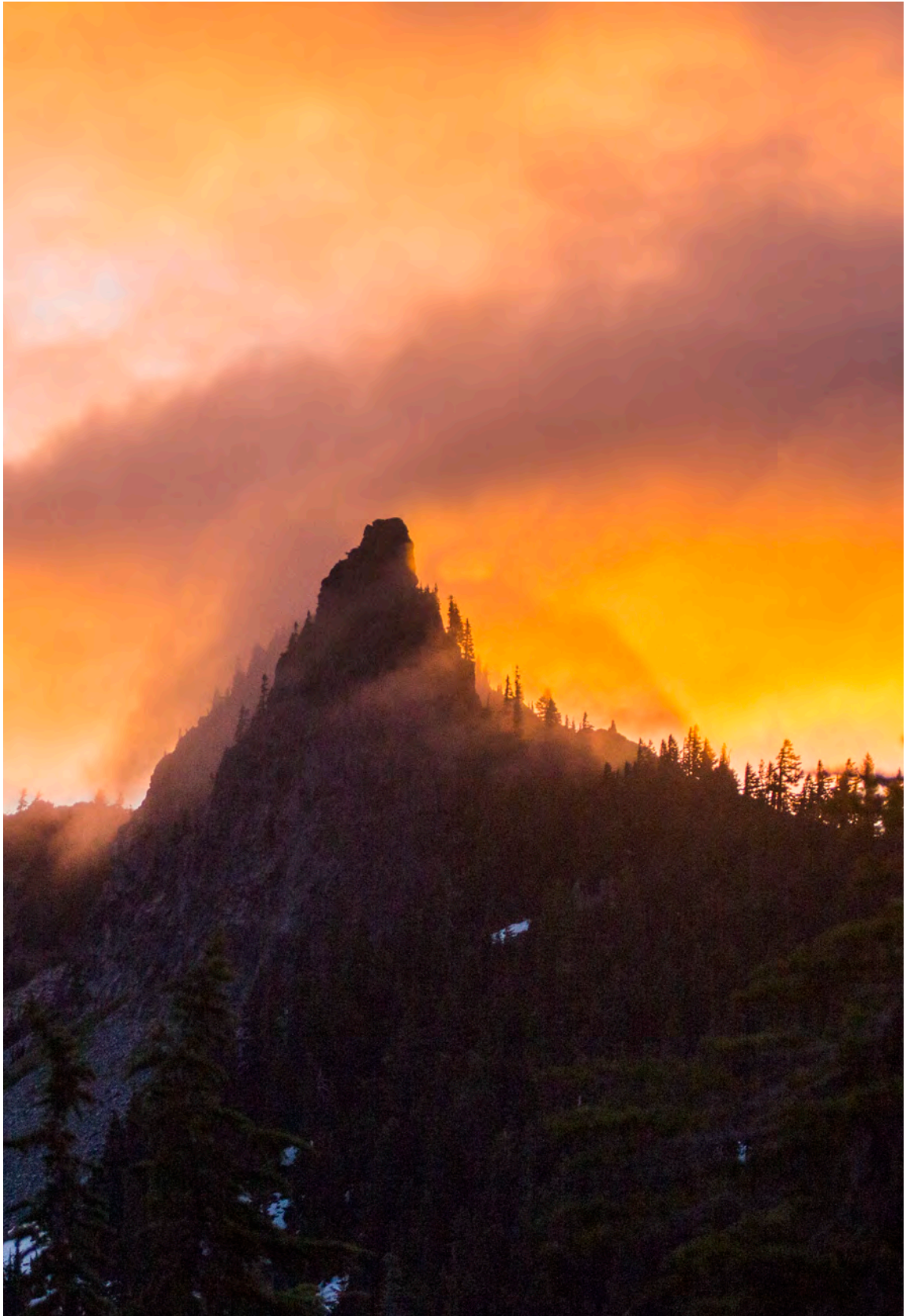
The entity the children of this world create,  
whenever they are wed,  
exists for us already;  
many thousand-fold.

So you are bent by law, and by one lifetime of conditioning,  
to choose a single individual  
and live in completeness, or with guilt.

Now, as man, the native of this place,  
constructs more complicated unity in spirit,  
and begins to find his own relationships complex,  
even he will chafe,  
and we will have to change the law.

But all this agony has forged you in the furnace of this world,  
and was essential to your growth,  
and theirs;  
for someone must provide the fire for the phoenix.

Soon, the man of earth matures,  
and I say that our time here is very nearly done.  
May those of you who hear me, gather what you can,  
for in this final stage, we need each other once again.  
You will find this difficult, for we  
have been bent away from one another  
that our seed may be scattered over all the earth.  
But if we come together now,  
we will soon be free to reach a new  
...Atlantis...



POET

I

Once I searched for myself  
among the peaks and caves of Tibet;  
seeking self importance in the past,  
for I wished to shore my sagging ego  
with the shoulders of some taller, stronger, me.  
But when I groped at last  
among the truly early shadows of my mind,  
I found that I had been a kitchen boy  
and that the joy I had brought men  
had been of the clean dish,  
and well polished knife,  
rather than in messages of spiritual joy.

Once, when I was very young,  
I climbed the tallest tree in all Atlantis,  
and carved my name there; near the top.  
But once regaining ground, I found you couldn't even see,  
it was so far away.  
Now, the tree itself is gone,  
and even that sad planet...

At last I seem to have learned  
that tonight I am only one day old,  
and tomorrow I will be born.



II

It would seem we measure value  
only by intensity of loss.  
It matters little  
if a man climbs a great mountain,  
or rises, as I,  
to the council chambers of Atlantis,  
it is done one step at a time,  
in the footholds of experience,  
and often with little awareness  
of immediate changes of scenery.  
A man's values change subtly also,  
with the steepness of the slope,  
till finally, when the narrow summit is achieved,  
he sits upon it as easily  
as he once sat upon the soil of the valley.  
But should he fall,  
the difference is awesome...