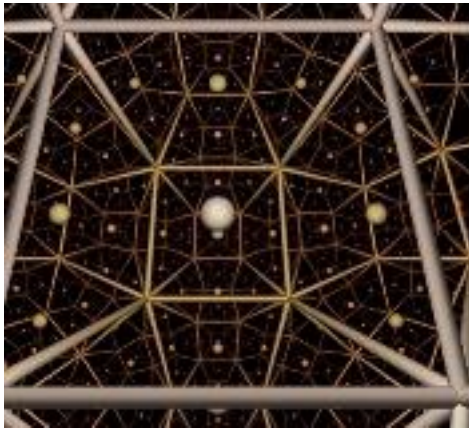


# STRING THEORY



Poems by  
Robert C. Covel

**A**

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## Dedication

For my mother Ruth McClintock Covell,  
who believed in me and made me who I am  
and  
my wife Deloris Covell  
for her staunch support and constant love



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# CONNECTIONS





## String Theory

“The rose window of Chartre is in it  
And Euclid’s lines upon sand.

–James Dickey, “The String”

Cat’s cradle, cup and saucer, made of string,  
we weave the airy images of thread.  
Our fingers pass the patterns back and forth,  
entangled in the web our fingers weave.

Across the sky, the patterns of the stars,  
like Indra’s Net, the constellations whirl.  
The cosmos cast upon a sea of black,  
the slow and silent glide of galaxies,  
as stars revolve in Fibonacci swirls.  
From light years to millennia of light,  
time warps and woofs the fabric of the stars.

The poets, saints, and scientists who search  
for patterns in the network of the stars,  
assign the numbers to connect the dots.  
They hear the silent harmony of spheres,  
describe the dance, the choreography  
of light. The poet’s rhythms intertwine  
with scientific theories, heart and mind.

As Euclid’s rule and compass measure space,  
Pythagoras triangulates the stars,  
creating geometric strings of thought.  
Einstein and Newton’s formulas compose,  
in skeins of numbers, symphonies of thought.

From subatomic particles to space,

from tiny to immense, they interweave:  
the luminescent threads of thought unite.  
As particles in waves, the forces swirl,  
creating patterns, on the cosmos cast.  
Like fingers meditating, counting beads,  
we seek illumination in the stars.

The string game plays itself with unseen hands.  
As fractal patterns replicate themselves,  
vibrations resonate across the strands.  
A woven web, in wonder, intersects:  
The universe is one—it all connects.

## Stars

Gazing upward at the stars and moon,  
I stand, gape mouthed, witnessing infinity.  
The light from eons past pours down.  
Light years beyond, I gaze into the past  
at points of stars  
and galaxies that whirl through  
immensities of time.  
The starlight penetrates my eyes;  
I stand, not deaf, but dumb:  
speechless, mute witness to the light.  
Mouth open wide,  
from Darl's dipper I swallow stars  
and drink the Milky Way.

# Seven Stars for Icarus

(For Christa McAuliffe)

## I: Movement

More than Icarus, they dared the sun,  
and not just the sun, but the stars.  
They challenged Newton's laws,  
dared to soar beyond human imagination,  
beyond scientists' squared distances.  
As they rose on a column of fire,  
we shaded our eyes against the blaze.  
We watched as they rose on wings  
of fragile technology,  
strained against the chains of gravity  
and the past, looked upward and outward  
to freedom and the future.  
But our blaze-blind eyes  
were seared to tears  
as a silent blast blew their spirits free  
of the chains of gravity, time, and space.  
Our retinas, like magnifying glasses,  
burned the after-image into our memories.

## II: Memory

Jarvis, McAuliffe, McNair, Onizuka, Resnick, Scobee, Smith:  
names that resonate in ripples,  
a shock wave that radiates across boundaries  
of geography and ideology:  
Seven explorers stood at the edge of space  
and dared the dragons of uncharted depths.  
Male and female, oriental, black, and white,

they stood for us, and we stood with them  
as they launched their names and atoms  
into space-time and into history  
and bequeathed to us their dreams.  
Their smiles of confidence and courage  
haunt the inner spaces of our memory.  
Their names float like echoes in a dream  
of the muted wail of a saxophone.  
The images unite us in a web of memory  
of seven stars that pass  
from memory to myth.

### III: Myth

Constellations in stately procession  
swirl into configurations that spell  
Orion, Hercules: man's images writ large  
on the blank, black page of the universe.  
But earthman, become starman,  
has left his track on the moon,  
pushed off to launch himself  
into his own mythology,  
to place himself among the star pictures  
of his own heroes.  
Seven stars rise in the east  
to become a new constellation—  
Icarus, the first man to reach beyond himself,  
to shed the bonds of earth—  
the failure of his melted wings  
transmuted from tragedy to triumph  
by the touchstone of mythology.  
Courage, discipline, honor, intelligence,  
curiosity, strength, sacrifice—

seven stars rise in the east,  
giving us fixed points to steer by  
in Einstein's universe of relativity.  
Seven stars for Icarus,  
Seven stars for mankind,  
points to triangulate uncharted space,  
they chart our outward path  
from our fragile, blue-green cocoon  
as our spirits follow their upward spiral  
to the stars and to our last rendezvous  
with destiny.

## **Enabling Ground**

(For Seamus Heaney)

Against honeysuckled breeze of Southern spring  
a brogue of Celtic poetry rolls.  
The verses break in waves,  
assault the vaulted rafters  
of the academy.  
The crash and flow of language  
sweep listeners like vessels  
to Ireland's emerald hills and stony ground,  
to Belfast's barricaded streets,  
to the stone tower of Thoor Ballylee,  
to the Irish crowning place  
of Tara's screaming stone,  
and back, back to Beowulf's mead hall,  
shaking with the songs of heroes' deeds.

The poet's ringing verse enchants.  
He stands on modern ground;  
with the ring of poetry  
his voice evokes the bards,  
the master spirits of each age.  
They arise from ancient soil,  
steeped in poetry and place  
as the sacrificial victims  
of Grauballe and Tollund  
are preserved in the dark waters  
of the eternal bogs.  
They arise and add their chants  
to the poems of Irish soil.  
They stand their ground:  
sounds and textures of their syllables  
add to the geography of language,

the flowing streams of Gaelic  
to the crags of gruff Germanic tongues.

Distant echoes blend  
their ringing syllables,  
assault the vaulted rafters  
of mead halls and bardic haunts  
beneath the gloomy shades  
of druids' oaks.  
Gaelic sacrificial chants  
join Anglo-Saxon battlesongs,  
hard-edged as swords on plated mail.

The Irish poet reads his verse  
in academic halls.  
Around him stand the wordsmiths, shades  
who forged their ringing song  
for stone-eyed men of battle  
in a rough-beamed place of listening.  
From academic auditorium to screaming stone,  
from mead hall to druids' grove,  
the poet's chanting voice creates,  
recreates the land.  
He stands at the place of making  
at the source of inspiration,  
at the sacramental site  
of the enabling ground.



# **Fiat Lux**

(For Virginia Spencer Carr)

## I

As sunlight through stained glass illuminates,  
its roseate glow igniting prayerful souls,  
the teacher's wisdom, filtered through a smile,  
enkindles smoldering sparks in glowing minds.  
Effulgence of the intellect ignites,  
by light and heat, the ember into flame.

Pure logic casts a cold fluorescent glare,  
its focus, like a laser beam, dissects:  
dispassionate analysis destroys  
the beauty of the object scrutinized.  
When thought is filtered through the human heart,  
the beam diffracts to prism's bold array.

## II

Her gracious southern smile testifies  
to intellect infused with gentle warmth:  
the teacher–master, guru, sensei, friend.  
Soft voice reveals the rigors of research,  
demands of academic discipline.

The facts and forms, discourse of scholarship,  
convey more subtle truths to seeking minds.  
The light and warmth of passion animates  
cold facts, inspires wisdom in the soul.  
As flame transmutes and purifies the dross,

emotion changes thought to purer being.

The course work finished, dissertation done,  
the graduation hooding ritual,  
the laying on of hands, through touch, confirms  
the transformation: student into friend.

### III

As beams of energy through time and space  
project in waves across the universe,  
from infrared to violet displayed,  
Bright light, at once a rainbow radiance.  
So thoughts, unchanged, eternal flow, combine.  
Teacher and student, one in higher Mind.

# The Return, an Elegy in Three Movements

## I. Adagio

When life's abiding suffering relents  
and passing pleasures dissipate like clouds,  
the spasms of the heart release; the grasp  
of passion eases; seeking mind is stilled.  
As sound and colors unify and fail,  
the spirit frees itself from clench of form.  
The anima like wine from shattered cup  
pours forth: the broken vessel stays behind,  
its clay returns to elements of earth.  
The crematory flame transmutes the flesh  
to elements: air, water, earth, and fire.

## II. Eroico con Maestoso

Atlantic: whispering blue expanse that calls  
us back, the source, Dark Mother of us all.  
Your restless waves cast up and then retrieve  
the empty shells and ragged seaweed shreds  
that mingle with the ebb and flow of sand.  
Beyond the breakers' throb of rolling surf,  
the multitudinous variety  
of urgent lives flows on beneath your waves.  
Like Brahma, Shiva, Vishnu all in one,  
you give, preserve, and take the flow of life.  
Your saline amniotic tide, that swirls  
from plankton to the whales' majestic bulk,  
gives life—and takes—with fang and grasping claw.  
The pastel hues of flashing fins and scales  
pursuing and pursued from life to life.  
No ends and no beginnings: only flow  
the forms and force of lives that interchange.

### III. Appassionato

The yearning whisper of the ocean's waves  
calls to the living at the water's edge,  
reminder of their own mortality.  
The lapping water sweeps the slipping sand  
from under feet, of those who bid farewell.  
The all-accepting sea in its embrace  
enfolds the sift of ashes scattered forth,  
reluctant hands release before the wind.  
The mortal grit swirls down and disappears  
beneath the ebbing foam, from death to life.  
No end, but a beginning, subtle shifts  
fulfilling forms of cosmic destinies.

### IV. Coda

The flesh and spirit: separate and one,  
disperse from form to formless, both transformed.  
The one moves down, the other up and out.  
The ashes swirl, becoming other beings,  
the infinite taxonomies of life.  
The luminescent life force dances free  
to waltz upon the dark face of the deep.  
It swirls with the slow and silent glide  
of galaxies and nebulae that spin  
beyond space-time, beyond the multi-verse.  
Our life and death, the dance of energy  
that flows in stately cadences of light,  
attuned to silent symphonies of stars.

