

INNER TRUTH

“There is in all visible things an invisible fecundity, a dimmed light, a meek namelessness, a hidden whole-ness. This mysterious Unity and Integrity is Wisdom, the Mother of all, Natura Naturans. There is in all things an inexhaustible sweetness and purity, a silence that is a fount of action and joy. It rises up in word-less gentleness and flows out to me from the unseen roots of all created being...”

Thomas Merton, Hagia Sophia, 1963

My eyes lust for more, the apparent, the unnoticed, hidden, hermetic, everything. They ache to see further into a color, a contour of light and dark, textures of eyes' touch, the deepest and innermost caress of knowing, recognition, and intimacy. All things have this surface whose transparence is both expression and essence, conundrum that is its own solution, riddle that is tacit yet magnificent.

Stars hide in a shroud of day's light, but through the night, shimmer and taunt. Sunlight diffracts through inner layers as the world spins, and our skies blush to what must be heaven's chroma and hue, the human colors of inspiration, ardor, and devotion. Day imperceptibly tires of its gray duty as a light snow falls, and the city thinks of home in its bolting cars, blindered pedestrians, and autistic traffic lights.

A horse, unmoving as I look, stands apart from the other two, and stares into the foreground, conscious or not of its own moment or what it will think next? Pastoral and resolute solstice geese take my psyche's eyes up into a longing, both introspective and

free, melancholy when they have vanished suddenly. A Cooper's hawk perches precariously on a black telephone line, and intently pulls and rips tufts of fur from a limp field mouse under the grasp of one claw; I barely see the light grey plumes of hair wafting overhead on easterly breeze to disappear somewhere I will never see as I in my car rush away north along this highway.

An immobile but fractal dance of wintered bare and elegant trees, spindly limbed, attenuated, and reaching up as far as they will or can, rooted to a place yet seeking their source. In a row of Newport plums, one holds on oddly and stubbornly to its shriveled red leaves through Autumn and into Winter rains, wind, and snow— dead, it seems, from some secret species edict or personal torment, an empath, perhaps, among plums. Across a man-made lake gentrified estate homes conspicuously but aesthetically hidden by river groves of summer leaves and limbs expose themselves impotently now to the naked winter's curiosity and scorn.

At an intersection, four thick woven stainless steel cables jut and angle oddly and tautly up to support a new wooden electrical utility pole, as steel U clamps and half inch hex bolts and lock nuts tighten down on cable doubled back around clevises and covered in split warning sleeves of raucous yellow polyethylene. They strain mutely and thanklessly, straining under tension, approaching their tensile limit, unable to complain, commiserate, or philosophize about their ultimate purpose on this corner. I am understandably grateful for their work, the nature of the carbon, iron, nickel, chromium, and molybdenum atoms

busily spinning their web of strength and perpetuity, so that I can have light, television, and write this poem on a computer.

Small children in yellow and red rain coats stand patiently clustered in front of a newly built brick school building wearing gargantuan backpacks and holding each other's tiny hands. The new school will be quiet again, thoughtless, and cease to vibrate when the last custodian fumbles with his keys and turns the lock cylinder clockwise in the last door.

When it is night finally, in the parking lot, one or two cars remain orphaned under mercury vapor lights, forgotten, rendezvoused, or simply there, without thinking, like the school.

Aggregate scents of earth, wood fires, sea pungence from the Pacific, and the unmistakable smell of sagebrush and pine spice and musk the pungent air I breathe.

Winds from the west, from the sea, have stripped their surfaces of molecules without diminishing them somehow, so that they remain earth, wood, sea salt, sage, and pine, and I merge somehow into more than myself, yet less than the Universe— homunculus of this place and of this moment. My soul lusts for more of this moment, devours the apparent, peers into the unnoticed and hidden, the hermetic, everything, including a run-down flatbed trailer by the road piled with rusting bicycles, a tricycle, beaten tractor and farm implement parts, dented oxygen and acetylene bottles, and a still fading for-sale sign that has insisted its purpose for as long as I can remember, longer than the uncut sere beige weeds have hitchhiked up toward the sun.

Monks somewhere at this moment chant their Gregorian modes, are bowing profoundly across a world of choir stalls and palimpsests of civilizations. Infinitesimal dust motes float through sunbeams that penetrate and kindle Cistercian silence broken only by the sound of heartbeats, coughing, parchment pages rustling, and the creaking of oak benches. There are others in their own Byzantine mode slicing beauty's flesh into sacramental ribbons as their atonement, and there is no God to reconcile this universe with the other.

And so, the sensual mustard swell of this yellow ceramic lamp too, the book of Thomas Merton's Zen photographs I took down in the dark this morning from its two-year hibernation on the bookshelf, and the familiar clutter on my desk like a second skin— all these simple wonders point to it, are the pointing itself, are themselves what they point to. Is the light from this lamp the same inner essence that glows from the luminous and faithful bulb that reveals two forlorn patio chairs on the back porch of a small house I will pass again this morning on my way to work? Silence holds this all, holds the wonder and the longing, the history on the back of your hands, holds the map of your anguish's heart, the contours of your constancy.

A SIMPLE PERSUASION

*“Like the deer that yearns for running streams, so my soul is yearning for you, my God.”
Psalm 41*

Every incident is an opportunity to sense the presence of your other’s essence,
A Roman Holiday into a serendipitous detour, dead end, or direct route, perhaps,
And there there is a hidden compass—magnetic, electrolytic, galvanic, rousing—
A empyrean meridian, cosmos of valency, of sensation, spinning vortices
Of electrons, atoms, molecules, tissues, chemical faculties of messengers and servants,
Structure, muscle and skeleton, form and function, aura of aversion and attraction.

Movement tenders itself, the spirit of one’s spirit, concatenations of electrons’ dance,
Gestures of the heart take flight, careen into dimension and matter, leave footprints
Of the soul’s vigor stepped forward against the drift of time and mortal currents.
Leap up from the surface of surfaces, break the connections, bonds, and boundaries,
Synchronize each clock to a gentle heartbeat, set the alarm to wake up to wonder’s rhythms,
Wander like a gazelle, dimensionlessness as intention and vision, only given, only taken.

Approach, my dove, my inner chamber opens to you, gracious and lovely guest,
Find welcome for your earth and heavens, fellowship on your endless sojourn,
A place to sit with your heart’s society, a time to recount affection and kinship,
Everlasting the intention and memories, more than enough, more than enough.
I will be your mother and your true love, host of your blessings, your afflictions,
Call me, my dove, your inner chamber opens to me, gracious and lovely guest.

How forlorn the shakuhachi’s finger whose pitch and grasp speak for you,
Mirror the major or minor accents of your own sounds, inner and outer,

A lonely voice or strident, retribution or worship, frivolous or profound.
May your breath, instead, bless me, bathe me in the fragrance of your flowers,
Like sympathetic chords and melodies of an oud or sitar, played for this occasion,
As your ecstasy's shrieks and moans, unfathomable and eternal voice, cry out.

I will take the bouquet of your fragrance, as I approach, as you approach,
Imbibe the scintillation of your pheromonal boundaries and glistening magic,
A redolence unknown in time, spectacular in its concentration and intimacy,
Spread over my surface as it is yours, gift, warning, offering, splendor.
Through the incense of your body, I approach the altar of your god,
An unseen worship, adoration of a magi, innocent, a regal bearing and throne.

Honeysuckle and sea salt, balm for your perfect evanescence, flesh
That is your earth and sea, like lavender honey from invisible bees and
These tiny flowers of your body's apices, pinnacles and cusps, a sublimity
Of savor and tang, the piquant prescience of your inner wordlessness, eloquent like
Garlic slowly baked, cut rosemary and lemon thyme, mint crushed between lingering fingers,
And the foreplay of rapture, an onset of ecstasy, and the longing of my soul for yours.

Sensation and perception expand and cycle with an anodynic and mellifluous melody—
The Pala d'oro reredos, the 12th Baktun, you, all that agonizes ever to be and to be with God.
The most exquisite curve between your shoulder and breast, between love making and tea,
And the unutterable feeling memories from music and one once-loved and caressed,
Entwine, like our fingers, every imaginable way of seeking you, for whom every longing
Has been a simple persuasion, the capacity to imagine and recognize that love is here.

THE APPLES MUST FALL

Oddly ochre apples on a tree left unpicked where they grew on each tree limb
Snag my attention as I pass at what was, before I saw them, an uneventful forty-five.
They should have been picked, canned, made into pies, bitten into, let drop as windfalls.
But there they are, someone's intention not to have picked them, or someone's disregard.

Is it their singular turmeric hue, or their simple presence there where they shouldn't be
That makes me recall that circumstance, want to write this poem about such a simple thing?
I don't remember the tree itself or much about the 50's brick ranch house where the tree stands.
What I do recall is the poignancy of the moment, fleeting arrow of perception that left its claim.

Must be that something in me resonates with that tree, the frozen apples, odd color perhaps.
Or is it the metaphorical implications that concatenate so quietly and so beyond my control?
I must be like that tree and its fruit, and the atoms in my eyes recognized it, kept it a secret,
Marked it for later somehow, for now, when I would be wondering why I still think of it.

What makes that coincidence any different from when I left my daughter in the Boise airport,
Felt her beautiful and protected spirit, felt my death and the continuing of her life, felt her Heart's
adventure, felt the leave-taking as forever, felt my life and death as everyone's,
Then drove deeply into the frozen white, snow covered foothills to a silent mystical encounter?

How could my apprehension of that tree and its fruit be unrelated to my utter recognition
Of your regal expression, recondite lineage of my muse's beauty, personification, connotations,
The relentless and silent apprehension of how what must be your victories and conquests,

Your afflictions and stigmata, and your heart's will to survive, have crowned your majesty?

There is this wanton euphony in the complications and bifurcations of complexification,
Life that attracts and repels, harmonization and discord, loves at first sight, intimations
Undeniable in the short and long run, beacons, like the tree, like a mystical journey,
Like love that witnesses to an undeniable phenomenon, feeling and touch, a magnificent.

Antiphonal and respiratory, what else could it be than this— the tree, my daughter, a muse?
At the heart of every atom there is this susceptibility, sensitivity to God whence it came,
Eagerness to return home, an inner altar, Holy of Holies, unequivocal recognition and response.
Why, a sunset's rainbow and lovers' ecstasy; when, by the detents of time, the apples must fall.

A CRANE IN THE WILLOWS

“You take your being from your mothers. You live fully; you were endowed with the strength of love, the ability to feel.”

Hermann Hesse Narcissus and Goldmund

“The function of poetry is religious invocation of the Muse; its use is the experience of mixed exultation and horror that her presence excites.”

Robert Graves The White Goddess

If I awaken to recall a flooding flight of veering stalls, soaring and floating,
Effortlessness rushing, pivoting reversals, tacking and wheeling according to my will;
If I mark my terrene journey forward with each dream-step back down from my sky-play,
Where my wings beckon and wield invisible authority to gambol with the wind's body;
And if I leave the skies assured of a capacity and understanding both veridical and vaulting,
Thrall to my body's plumed and volant perceptibility, a responsiveness to sky, air and wind;
Then I am a crane in the willows, man-creature floating in the realm of the White Goddess,
Touched down again to rest a moment, a lifetime, near the puissant mystery of The Beloved.

Let me dream again and coax the power from impermanence, snatch his hand in motion,
Guess the sacred names of each god and goddess, charm the power of their immutability,
And enter the lubricious pantheon of sensation and fecundity that multiplies my mothers,
Each caliginous breath an unconscious sea of swelling and inundation, diastolic embrace.
Absorb each germ and seed of wishing, willing, and invisible transformation, all in its time,
All in time to surrender convulsive sobbing ecstasy, spasms of impacted and shriveled images
Release their invisible hold, roots pierced through an unconscious floor into my flooded grotto,
Transparent and turquoise from the humming, deep currents of her dark, hidden basilica.

I will walk through an open doorway, approach her seat of power, disperse myself as incense,
And with fervent stylus inscribe words and pictures in her soft clay, a rebus for The Goddess,

Vast undulating fields of barley and oats, ripe heads swelling to an inner motioning,
Darkening green lengths of slender willow, strong, pliant and supple, put to good use,
Everything that savors divine adoration, hinge between the worlds of mind and sensation,
Intimate with under and over worlds, as if I'd blinked awake, and still been in her Presence,
Whose names are Woman, and when invoked, sonant, matronymic forces marshal and deploy,
Universes expand, galaxies merge, planets spin, moons revolve, seas swell, and I dream this.

Who can imagine reckoning such affairs of the heart back ten, twenty, or thirty-thousand years,
To stone— La Gran'mère du Chimquière, La Dame de Saint-Sernin, Venus von Willendorf,
Unearthed and chipped from her own granite and limestone ashes, parous and mesmerizing,
To the bewildering but sonorous metathesis of adoration— Isis, Ishtar, Aphrodite, Danu, Nerthus,
Gaia, Hera, Artemis, Venus, Umai, Maya, Mahimata, Aditi, Devi, Shakti, Mary, Black Madonna,
my mother's name, names which summon the od and auras of the women-creatures
Who have governed the shape and rituals of my own secret invocations, pastoral swellings of
Lush Vaughn Williams thronging strings, impressionistic Ponce guitar codas plucked pizzacato.

*Gather grain with stone and wooden sickle, gather and bind in bundles, thresh and winnow,
Prepare the ancient foods, divide bread, pour beer, eat honey, feed the family of The Goddess,
Endless cycles in her Earth, her Water, my seed, endless cycles of planting and harvesting,
In her body's furrows with planting sticks and seeds, from her rows with my strong hands
I pluck your roots, worship your earth with fire and seed, offerings of celts, arrowheads, beads,
Shaped and pierced with sacred words and chants, earth and body rituals, Ouroborous, I say,
Mounting her Earth, while seasons emerge from her altar— blood, water, Woman mystery.
I place stones around Woman, around her Woman altar, stones that will live far beyond me.*

With my finger I trace the double spirals on the stone door—dawn to dawn, dark solstice to Dark

solstice, my birth to my final journey, then on my knees I enter the beehive barrow, put on The sacred antlers of the stag, drink the blood of the white bull, eat the sacred toadstool of Dionysius, spin the wheel, enter the labyrinth, listen to the gods' voices, see four boxes, await The seven heroes and nine princesses, and with them we burn the oaken log, and in darkness we Hew a cunning vessel to the other world, Elysion, in darkness I travel to the other side, around And around I enter her, on my knees I enter, her darkness I enter, touch the sacred Omphalos I enter, realm of the darkest goddess where I die, realm of the goddess, where I live forever.

I pass houses from whose barren eyes issues golden incandescence, secret, from the center
It burns, a beacon, a warning, passage in the night, boatman on the river Styx, reminder,
Metaphor for the finest love filament of charred, smoldering, flickering, searing Goddess,
Incalescent and beckoning, like light, follow me inside, she whispers, where I will feed you,
Put bitter soma in your open mouth, burn white sage over your graceful body, touch your
Enthroned chakras, lift your dimensional presence into a sky of heavens, illuminate the golden
Point of your awareness, flood your emptiness with consecrated nectars from my innermost Altar,
blessings upon blessings, limitless, my love, with no arrival or departure.

Now, however, as these black and white plumes fall from my body and dark emerald leaves fall
From yours, each feather and blade syncopates on its breeze, rods and cones create their image
On my eyes' sun, and every neuron in every ganglion in every tissue in every creature resonates
To the way those feathers and leaves oscillate, the way photons penetrate invisibly ever more
Deeply, and how I am pulled and condensed even more thinly, densely to you like orphic
Hallucinations now recall years later, fractal blooms of urgent yet calming lucidity.
So I ask, must this seductive scurf of scales slough off unceasing, never still its syncopation,
Oscillation, assembling and disassembling, wrapping and encircling? and you answer.

There, as they encircled him with the five-fold bond, honey-sotted, within the circle of stones,
By the sacred oak, they beat Hercules, blinded and flayed him, castrated and impaled him, they
Divide his regal body into joints, catch his blood in alder basins and asperse the tribes gathered,
Roast his flesh over oak-loppings, dance the figure-eight and tear his strength with gnashing
Teeth, and in an alderwood boat send his head and genitals down the lost river to an islet where
He no longer makes the rain from meteors in an oaken chest; no longer does a lion-skinned hero
Make love to the fifty water princesses of the mountain goddess, heal with a quail and oak leaf,
Or bear his weapons of hawthorn blossoms, acorns, rockdoves, mistletoe and a serpent.

So I am adrift now, crane in this willow tree, abstracted in this scene, grieving a Hercules, and I
Write my grief with tree magic, divination from the thirteen consonants—the birch of inception,
Mountain ash of quickening, and ash of sea power, the alder is fire, willowed enchantment, the
Hawthorn invokes chastity, oak is the door to the gods, holly increases, hazel is the tree of
Wisdom, the vine is joy and exhilaration, ivy is resurrection and intoxication, elder is doom; And
the five vowels, favorites of the White Goddess—silver fir is Queen of the Druids, gorse is The
Spring equinox, heather is the queen bee's passion, white poplar is a shield of old age, and The
yew is the tree of death. I am all these, all these, and I write their sacred names on woman.

My words are enchantment, both a divination and a shield, and I am old now, beyond not
Knowing that all trees are hallowed and numinous, intimate with the body of their woman, as I
Too with each woman know that all are hallowed and numinous, and the instinct in my hollow
Bones and ethereal feathers guides me from willow to willow, blind, in other worlds, Unsleeping
when all sleep, vigilant and gratified, yet flying on, not to rest but to trace double Spirals on her
stone doors, spin the wheel again and enter her labyrinth on my knees, and there, Stare out into
the darkness from this darkness, see her honeyed incandescent eyes looking back For me, and
there follow her through the doorway of dreams to her darkest altar of sky-ecstasy.

PICTURES

"There has never been a time when you and I and the kings gathered here have not existed, nor will there be a time when we will cease to exist." The Bhagavad Gita 2:12

*"They perform all work in the spirit of service, and their karma is dissolved."
The Bhagavad-Gita 4:23*

Push pinned on walls behind me, in many small rooms I have called my office, in the several houses I have lived, are six pictures I have collected ever since I recognized that I was a man. Funny, as I lean back now, to see their vigilance there, waiting for when I need to call them again, recognize them again, touch them with the history of my eyes, wonder on their images, probe wordlessly my heart to find them there, men of my men, áxēs of my masculinity, strength of this world of men and of women, witnesses; their hands and arms and minds pierce the only darkness of ignorance with the kind of blessing or gift they had to give, bestow on us who are left behind here, pinned to our wall, in the house we live in, as we lean back to see ourselves.

Seen one-by-one they would be who they were, three monks, two social activists, a scholar. Yet, when I see them as two black and white columns of six eight and a half by elevens, they glisten in their heavy-weight page protectors as if they were ancient Russian Orthodox icons exuding holiness, devotion, reverence, and they reflect back their true nature and purpose. A close up of Thomas Merton's middle-aged, whiskered face; a white loin-clothed Mahatma, Gandhi, reading; César Chávez walking from a field with hoes over his shoulder; a calm and kind Tenzin Gyatso; Julian Jaynes in his intellectually bicameral prime; and beloved friend, Brother Paul Williams near his New Clairvaux Abbey office. These are my men. They are me.

They are not JPEG's that exist digitally on a screen, but fading pieces of rag and cloth I try to protect as I carry them with me wherever I go, as if I would have them with me forever, as I do; as if I had not lost them to time; as if they still touch me in places no woman ever touched me; as if they could still burrow deeply into the arms of my hungry mind and into the heart of my yearning spirit, which they do; as if no one knew they were sentinels, beacons to a high mountain bivouac in times of need; as if when I cry with them, there are no tears but only strength to face the solitude, soldiers' batons, greed, ignorance, delusion,

and the pain of separation that they felt, and that all men run and flee from, strike out at with such effete arms.

I look at them now, as I write this poem, to hear them tell me how the voice of their flesh speaks, how the constancy of their patience endures, how the light of their witness burns, how the skin of their hands roughened, how the eye of their divinity penetrates, how the reverberations of their heartbeats thunder, and how their spiraled flight to God's resplendent face brought them back here, to dirt, a place, a room, confrontation, the will to persist. They all arrived at their place of battle, their Kurukshetra or plains of Troy— the hills of Kentucky, the volcanic valley of Mount Shasta and Lassen, colonial India, the classrooms of Princeton, Dharamsala, and the vineyards of California. And I, arrived with them; I arrived here.

Only one now lives in the flesh, the one they say is reincarnated from his blessed predecessors. And I live in my flesh now, carrying somehow the life of these men in the way I see sunlight change as the day arcs, in the way I fill an early morning emptiness with ideas and with silence, in the way I bow my words to each person with acknowledgement and presence, and in the way my fingers touch other pieces of rag and cloth, flesh and blood, immanent and incarnate. I hear their voices pointing and urging, see their faces' reflection and haunting guarantee, return to these maps of their minds' splendor, and I approach, eager and begging, to follow them out into the innermost universe of understanding, action, and wisdom. These are my men. I am them.

They are the sycamores on a river bank; they are the high jet stream, gales, and wind outside that buffet and howl around corners; they are deep green swells that cross distant waters; they are coastlines and beaches against which waves pound and dissipate; they are circadian rhythm, sleep, and dreaming; they are the bodhisattva's face; they are the breath of all sentient beings; they are the head and heart lines on the palm of the world; they are every face in a mirror; they are every tear that ever fell from every heart times you; they are the life force in all species, carbon and otherwise; they are this moment; they are an incontrovertible and unredeemable command; they are a scream, laughter, an embrace, a subtle gesture, an unopened letter.

Who then is the they I turn to look at now, knowing my every glance will span the open wound of my heart's longing, will burnish the mounting passion of my mind's youth, will displace all fey doubts with a fearlessness no weapon can deflect? How could I have embraced one and still know the others whom I have never touched? What is their flesh I embody that shimmers these pictures like a mirage on each road I travel, like a flashing short-lived beam of light that shoots up from the sun as it sinks into an ocean of despair or a sea of hope, like the pages I touched and turned, on which still glisten and radiate their words put down letter by letter, transmission of mind, now mission of mine, to find my own way out of their love, to every dark dawn vista.

Exactly when did their powers and prowess leave them stranded in their two-dimensional world failing and unable to act or project beyond the surface of their dying and decrepitude? Did they know at some moment of delirium or clarity that they were being unfolded like cardboard boxes for the stacking and recycling, for some other use, some other use? How did they let go of their universe? My children will take down these six pictures from the wall of my office after I die, wonder who these men were, what they meant to me, perhaps not wonder at all, what they, or maybe even I, mean to them. How will I let go of these men, of my children, my universe, when every picture I have ever hung on a wall must come down in time, my dearest children, in time?

COOKING LIKE LOVING

*“And my kiss will dissolve the silence that makes you mine!”
Nessun Dorma from Turandot, Giacomo Puccini*

The Autumn Leaves of Andrea Bocelli, and lush chord changes a lá bossa nova, make you throw back your head, roll your eyes deep in an ecstasy of kinesthetic deliria, welcoming and synesthetic, like delicious jus spilling, silken and euphoric, scraped from the warm pan bottom of life, reduced to intoxication, like the sudden swell of Puccini’s Nessun Dorma, the strings and timpani wiping your tears so gently, as if you held a handful of harp glissandos cut from wintered lemon thyme, stripped by callused fingers that keep the sweetly pungent scent, like recalling that haunting melody every day, as it returns with every precise slice of carrot or potato, every bit of piquant nutmeg grated onto a jungle green marble countertop, with the thinnest-cut julienne of fragrant lemon peel, and the charred skin of roasted green and red bell peppers sloughing off under cold running water, dripping their juices as probing fingers strip them of their seeds and stem, splay them out on a translucent white cutting board, and slice them coarsely crosswise into puckered and glistening jeweled agates of musky sweet flesh.

Cooking, like loving, must overlook a field, an orchard, frozen grass or an acre of wildflowers, snow-covered mountains like those distant Owyhees, must touch its own individual foreground, where you see the dirt, the bark, the debris, and its peculiar background, however far, of line and contour, haze, distance, and immensity. As you twist the neck of a heavy green bottle into the odd little curved knife of the bottle opener and remove the foil cap from a Merlot, you look into the past and presence of this scene,

screw the spiral into cork, lever it out, and pour the lambent magenta liquid into a transprence of your glass, the food and fragrance arrayed before you, and the moment is as if you had opened a velvet jewel box and lifted out strands of pearls or felt in your hands the cool surface and substance of Krugerrands or Maple Leafs, and the earth's blood you lift to your lips is the presence of all lovers and cooks, who quaff the bliss of wine or this moment, heady, into the wind, where the pressure of the wine on your tongue and palate is a sensation of melody, melancholy, and precision in the cut, the taste of every kiss.

Avocadoes surrender to your subtle and tentative suggestioning; tomatoes engorge and flush when squeezed; humble onions rebuff your advances, then, suddenly reveal their diaphanous membranes and flesh, peril and delight of their innermost layers and essence; voluptuous cloves of garlic are crushed beyond compunction under your knife, and you peel away a papery skin to yield their acrid sweetness that, when slowly and ardently warmed, becomes a honeyed balm for your tongue and for your soul. Then, only a milky gold tumescence of linguine or fettuccine can spread itself on a plate so self-indulgently and with such enthusiasm and anticipation that the cream and sheen of the smooth flesh and muscles of her flanks on that plate cry out for a virgin oil or simple sauce. These are intimacies between lovers, predilections and endearments that defy any recipe or formula, that transcend acceptability and decorum, that are an ongoing honeymoon of fruits and vegetable, a harvest of gratitude, cuisine of sensuality, that only a cook and lover could anticipate, create, both foreplay and indulgence, a consummation in the kitchen.

And this all makes a sauce of sensation and will, the first gathering of your splendors made up of color and shape, texture and aroma in your waiting hands because you wanted love that much to seek out these fruits of life, seduce and seclude them in your heart's small oasis, and with the prescience of your sharpest santoku, the concupiscence of your fingertips, and the world's fragrances and breath in your nostrils, imagine what it would be like to love a woman forever, without her aria ever ending, with your glass always full on a counter, with the morning dew, with eucalyptus honey, an essence of dark vinegar, fresh ginger and shallots, with green and salt-dried olives and the lingering and innocent incense of their oil, with grey and white salts from a sea, black pepper from distant trees, dry ancho and pasilla chiles, spicy cinnamon bark from Vietnam, smoked paprika and chipotle, anchovies and capers, all intermingled, transfused by the messiah in your fingers, arms, and heart, into a pristine, hidden grove where your body's warmth is laved by blood, wine, your history and moment, every spice, salty, sweet, and bitter.

Intaglio

“Then why was he not fully, not completely happy?”

Why did this strange pain penetrate his young joy...this subtle fear, this grief over the transitory?”

Hermann Hesse Narcissus and Goldmund

To swell from minor key to major chord, Puccini, Shostakovich, or Rachmaninoff, as so many lovers all at once rise and surge like the Fountains of Rome or Bellagio, coda upon coda, as if it were all worth recapitulating, like kisses, of course, pizzacato or impressionistic images in a dissonant mind, a score in hand and annotated here and there with the silence that precedes a dogged approach, an orchestral display of affection, moody and dreamy, oboe-like gestures of elbows perhaps or knees, junctures or juxtapositions of your world with mine, where the music I hear constantly, I write with calligraphic strokes upon your body, on a transparency, on vellum, on the sky, on a bass drum, ink sumi strokes lingering to a breath on rough-flecked mulberry paper, folded like a warm crepe or medieval Japanese communiqué from a shogun to samurai about seppuku, not for honor but for love, thrown to the wind, destiny, La Quebrada where waves rush in, rush out, and the diver must time his leap by watching the swells, and I do the same, with romance though, watch the swells cross my ocean, break gradually, suddenly, on an edge of my heart, where I stand expectant on this long beach, smelling salt spume and kelp.

I roost on a cliff by this poem, on a podium with small baton, ready to dive in or call upon woodwinds, percussion, bass, horns, all stringed instruments, all players and listeners, into a movement, a precession to an eventual centripetal point of intensity and smoothness, one way or another I must touch you, a rumba, body against body into rhythmical ethers of sensuality, a breathing in of the molecules of your skin as they slough off into the delicious universe of my hope, a glance so momentary that it endures a millennium of stupefied heartbeats, or an interval of bodies across which undulate yards of encyclopedically silken textures arrayed. I think your body is layer upon layer of buttered silk, shimmering rustling taffetas, sinuous jerseys cut on the bias, and thickly textured brocades, all pinned together along the chalked and dashed line of your contours, basted with your eyes' enigma, and secretly inner-faced with a pure white tulle or organdie warmed by your red blood and heart below the fabric-flushed and stormy shoals. Your surfaces peel away like the tiniest blue shadows of a melody I can't get out of my head.

So, find a dawn, your nagual, like an intaglio being carved somehow into your heart, where the parts cut away dissolve into desire, and you're left scarred and wanting, a love metastasizing into love, where the cool spreading light of morning leaves you mourning the night where you bandage your wounds with a dream of words, a reoccurring rhapsody or pennywhistle tune, an obsolete but persistent memory of a nearby shore, the inner colors of a spiral nebula galaxy, someone's name and scent, impalpable visions of eidetic beauty without dimension, whispered instructions from a clown or God, familiar self-effacing liturgies of vituperation, or yet, the certitude that my body's music is rays of light that never deviate, that the greenest emeralds of need find a color of love to intensify, that all samite silk or platilla linen will brush against a lover's skin, and that the invocation to dance is a symphonic murmur of gooseflesh on my neck and shoulders, like a peacock's iridescent display, or chocolate and amber-flecked jasper boulders whose trance shimmers transparent under icy magnification of mountain snow runoff.

Enchantment, fascination, intrigue... how romance dissipates, absorbed into the ground perhaps, evaporates into acrid smoke, cached in a calloused memory, clipped off with my fingernails, as if it were discarded inadvertently little-by-little with every grocery receipt in a plastic bag, or I'd left my phone on the top of the SUV and drove off somewhere else urgent and important, and even though I retraced my route I couldn't find it. Yet, I remember how stars burn for millions of years, lifetimes on standby, like my meandering heart had, before I knew it, been stranded in an oxbow lake and I continue to dodge the fact that the water will eventually dry up, or how I now strike a match with each of these words to light an urgent way a bit further into the dismay, how each moment becomes a shielding of the light and orgasmic music, each silk surface, my redshift of stellar light, a gathering and convoluted beauty that envelops my body, a hope that is more than my own dear children, because it is everyone's thirst for recognition and a liaison with ecstasy previously unknown, cast into our hips, arms, hearts, like iron magnets.

LAYERS IS WHAT MAKES

Layers is what makes poetry now, membranes of first sounds, laminar associations, lapping over each other like connotative shingles, armadillo or chiton shells, layers falling over one another sometimes in their sonant enthusiasm, slapped down faster than a deck at Blackjack, taut under blankets like fitted queen sheets at The Hilton, like the flocked veil on a woman's sequined emerald green satin pillbox from the 50's, like the heat dissolves the distance between your skin and the shower's hot water and you and your tears flow down the drain with it, like every riff of Jesus sermon and baby-love song compressed into a white porcelain coffee cup.

Like the shimmering murmur and Pointillist sound of Pissarro, Previati, Morbelli, Petitjean, Segantini, Cousturier, Cross, Luce, Seurat and Signac, their densely syllabled names whose minute points, daubs, glances, marks, flecks and flicks of mineral thick and colored oil still impress upon our assembling eyes those six primary and secondary planes of tint, shading, texture, form, volume, and saturation, because our avid minds want to see richness in form, such scale there, both a familiarity and a distancing, for we are here and we are there, the hope of blue and yellow always being green like that water in the painting.

Like an intuitive and kitchen countered invocation of spices, biting ground black peppercorns, rough pure white or drab grey sea salts, sweet and smoked carmine-colored paprika, a musty smoke of toasted cumin, the roasted pop-pop-pop of sesame seeds, ground round coriander, fresh thyme stripped from its twigs, all rubbed and warmed by these two or other hands into a pot or pan of molé, a sauce reduced from a concentrated essence, a French dressing or jus, dry rubs or honeyed marinade, a layered oblation that offers its non-verbal montage and flavor vision of connotative sensations to hungry travelers who will feast upon the culture of its islands and ports-of-call like Cristóbal Colón or Álvaro Núñez Cabeza de Vaca.

Like layers of a baklava, where cinnamon-infused honey drips to the pan bottom through diamond cuts in the dough, or a lasagna where a cubic foot of spinach cooks down to green gold and spreads alternately on floppy slabs of silky semolina pasta with scoops of honey and nutmeg-scented ricotta and creamy golden handfuls of toasted pine nuts, or like the antipasto plate where a lucky one lays down upon the heavy square ceramic serving platter matchstick cuts of carrot and celery, red green and gold strips of bell or pimento peppers roasted and stripped of their blistered black skin and seeds, the earthy crunch of jicama and kohlrabi, vinegared and garlicked artichoke hearts in olive oil, thickly sliced red onions, black and green olives with pit in, all peppered and salted, and on the side bread to mop up with.

Like layers of a 3-D Flash animation, sinuous duck flocks emerge from a coral-hued clouded sunset, entire cumulous cliffs meld with striations of airy cirrus feathers, a low-flying Bombardier turboprop turns into Treasure Valley headed for a Boise touchdown, and a foreground conclusion of giant beech elders sways arthritically perhaps yet somehow with youthful enthusiasm in empathic unison with the other layers, the Owyhee Ranges at a far distance, the two anonymous headlit cars eagerly southbound on Linder, an always oddly lone low-flying Canadian honker flapping back to Lake Lowell where hundreds of others wait nervously and perhaps worry, and I am watching, I am watching, I am watching.

Like the first layer of a scent, intensification of aromas warmed by desire, need, and mortality, the boundary of our skins touch, the boundaries of our selves dissolve, and the boundaried limits of our time melt and meld into an overflowing then flooded and dimensioned sensate liquid that flows through secret not-well-known beds of expectation, coruscation, and breath, all incurvating like a swan's floating and questioning gesture, impossible to define but quintessential to acknowledge at least once in a weighted and lifetime of limit, where reoccurring dreams of love are sitcoms rerun nightly to low Nielsen ratings, and the remote batteries are dead so I can't change the channel regardless of how hard I push the arrow button.

Like any one moment in my mind's time and space, a Coriolis of faces and desires swirls around the face of my watch, where the eye of a hurricane passes nightly, where torments of patience and compassion create a saint, where an I Ching vortex tube separates passion from morality into a maddening yet centering flux of creative and receptive, where a moment of the utmost mystical simplicity floods the world of skewing telephone lines dead muscled black grape vines an old woman's confused face at a Kodak print-your-own-pictures kiosk samba chords from "A Man and a Woman" and the ease with which you lean into a corner as the simple turning of a steering wheel moves a ton of plastic steel and wire through imaginary coordinates of space from Locust Grove into another blacktop parking lot.

Layers is what makes poetry, for life is both the cloth and the loom, the transparent and translucently entwined writhing of becoming, continuing, expiring, individuals singly and in pairs plaiting a weave apparently unknown to them, braiding an infinitely long and enduring lariat that connects the archived enormity and weight of the past with the outspread prairie expanse of the future, as if the invisible mesh, fabric, web, nexus, were a Nebraska crossroads, a Goyesque crucifixion, a quiet and awkward weekend neighborhood orgy, the execution of Saddam Hussein, a vicious and impoverished circle of incestuous ignorance and illiteracy, or the surprisingly green first shoots of Spring daffodils. The boundless sound of every word graced in place ever so delicately and precisely with the tweezers of sensibility, and the painstakingly assembled mosaic of connotations that the slowly revealing striptease of metaphors reveals, rises like prayer now, recitative, flushed—the sound of a sole oboe.

HABIT

Shadows, fell upon the ground, all levered west to east, are skewed, disfigured by their chronic heliophobic bent, diurnal evidence of destiny and darkness in the night, where your own lurking unseen shadows dare not follow.

Sleep alone or with another, solitary either way, and let the neural flood subside until the only sound unheard is friction between blood and vessel, as in your bed you finally nestle and forget your time and presence on the earth.

The stars in their place, Libra, Virgo, Leo, Ursa Major, all assemble, sense your need to see them in their dawn each morning, veiled by clouds or stark there, constant in the four and a half billion year darkness of the crystal sky.

Wake to pull on contradictory clothes, loose familiar shoes, threadbare underwear, a summer coat and brown Fedora, layered and revealing amniotic cottons and rayons, ripped denim, keep you from touching your own skin.

Peer into a favored mirror, plate glass or mind, to find the continuity or chaos of your nodding head, blistered heart, and sagging smile, as your fingers touch the image of your spirit face, and dare to look into your own two eyes.

Across a worded conscious web, arc néts of ingrained phrases, cryptic mists of spells and incantations casting verbal snares, entanglements that make another shadowed world, as thinking guides us into dead-end after dead-end.

Layered phosphors, tungsten filaments, and halogen gasses glow and incandesce as obstinate electrons move along atomic coppered ways, indentured destiny of illumination at the hands of human whim and will.

Hands around a clock dial twist ever tighter, tales of love and hope, light and desperation, a messiah's message, a vampire's swoon, broken hearts, a class buffoon, steeples built on every block, monsters sketched in colored chalk.

Look at words, think in words, write words in combination 'til you feel the ancient markings finally point North, to your life, your death, to your deepest self that no one ever knew, the world revolves, but where are you?

Slip again between cold sheets, pull up a blanket underneath another day, wonder what to think about while waiting, read an Oprah book, watch a Turner Classic Movie, 'til quiet merging with the secret moon and stars outside.

THE WRITHING SNAKES

A writhing ball of alicante snakes along a rural road in Mexico, and all the men from Ochómitas steer their fading pickups over each squirming ball of struggling snake they meet, and when they gape in the rear view mirror, the snakes are still thrashing, flailing, and jerking, even after the laughing men stop looking and are blithely away, many kilometers far down the same road.

A long fence running to their horizon, with infinite stiles and anonymous posts that converge in a point beyond their sight, pull us forward now into them all, and continue as we do, slightly bent to one side or another, rooted, connected, more decrepit, brittle, and white with every winter's freeze and thaw, still containing our lives' stock, to lean against who holds whom up.

Muted and slow-motined shattering of the women's hearts, like the opening of a Shostakovich symphony for eleven-million Russian war dead, like the ice-cold silent answer of snow, like mutilation, rape, and impalement in Goya's "Disasters of War," like a fearful sequestering and mental handcuffing of their own dear children, and the brittle husks of those women's men.

In a scanned visual field the mind and eye's f-stop brings into focus another door, a scream, a speedometer, piercings, the white and light dawn gold, a moon and a sun, a woman walking a dachshund by a man in Madras shorts, a motorcycle bar, a slowly stumbling red-faced man, another left or right turn, all there, in every moment, picked out by a turn of the head's neck.

Images concatenate in mind like particles or waves of light, a sequence or a simultaneity of past and present, beyond someone's ken, an understated face or voice, the persistent memory of having once been loved, a scent of intimacy, a shopping list and stamps, the suddenness of a weekend, a rogue and transparent future, what to do next, emptiness, a silence, disappointment.

Cinnabar or vermeil exposures; viridian green vestigial washes; mazarine blue skies in a Hagia Sophia; leveled grey and atrous Iraqi cities of unseen golden sanctuaries; cretaceous faces mop up claret pools of inculpable

blood; then fulvous and gamboge fields of lentils, wheat, rice, and barley; a purpureal cape of mountain night: colors are the argent beauty of ecstasy and dread.

Every sound and utterance springs from a still-point of silence: a sob of loss, a bullet's crack, lascivious whispers, sudden rain drops starting and stopping, wheezing and snoring, a difficult question and painful answer, John Coltrane, a hammer on an iron anvil, washing machine's chuka-chuka, ravished shrieks of rapture, a knocking gasoline engine, and every "Thank you."

An onomatopoeic ocean of every thing and being's name, chanted in unison, antiphonally on every side by mortals, vapors, spirits, helpers, seas and earths, colors and songs, all musics of a common mind, and when a name is uttered, each colossal shadow echoed eclipses bystanders' hearts left behind, in line, who also wait for the symphonic invocation of their own names.

A melody sticks in your mind, and when you hum it, the rhythm of every wooden or skin drum, every plucked string of gut or steel, every calabash, thumb piano, flute, clavés, didgeridoos, berimbaus, throat singers, and all wailers everywhere, merge with the cacophonic clamor of all the world's music and song in harmony with the rhythm of the cave and concerto heartbeat.

All that is conceptualized and sensed by every sentient being, unspoken from scars of muteness, ignorance, and fear, now articulated and reverberating into the world's eardrum of suffering and delight, and every entity's innermost and intimate secrets flowing out, from the dissolution of dimension, the feeling inhibitions in every individual's breast, and with it the guardians arrive.

All minds beget the field where all leftovers of the past, the electrical excitation and vibratory presence of the present, and hopeful and evocative invocations of a future synthesize piece-by-piece the gruel of our thoughts, experiences, and memories, without dimension, a going-to and merging-with all other unapparent but gorgeous still vibrating othersides of everything.

Complex sensations, scents, aromas, tastes, and sheens of all cultures portaged through ancient stone and modern steel ports of intellection, curiosity, and commerce, on boats and the backs of mules and men, wealth, speculation, sweat, and slavery, sugar and spice, rope and gunpowder, a mulatto and mestizo exotica, a breathtaking bazaar of human allure, seduction and exchange.

The unmatched and singular mental vision of art and design, the crosshatching or shading of form, the disappearance of perspective to a point, a refracted beam of light makes ochre or madder red, mastery and technique disappearing into the material, a Rembrandt, Klimt, or Wright, who else breathes God's breath, touches His mouth, builds Eden of color and line?

On a sandstone and sedimentary portico of mind, a writhing ball gathers my consciousness, assembles and disassembles every faceted sparkle, scintillates across an array of synaptic network, rollercoasters around a roulette wheel of dates and time, a perpetual spinning of ionic fabric, awareness thrown out like a gathered fishing net that unfolds into a spiral galaxy.

The writhing ball is everything, controls autonomic nervous systems, voluntary and involuntary emotions, love at first sight, alienation and divorce, my recipe for double chocolate brownies, removing a stubborn staple with my fingernail, aiming a twelve-gauge at a flying clay pigeon, and deciding whether to write another stanza in this poem about my mind, or not.

Whirling planets precess to this life, velocity in Coriolis and oblique beauty of poignance and desolation after fifty, where a chromosomal eddy in a larger maelstrom sucks everything down into itself, an unavoidable undertow that hisses, snarls, and spits as a courtesy to itself, heavenly vertigo in a moment, bliss, and a reaching out to grab the snakes, the writhing snakes.

ALL ROADS THRONGING

A perfect etching of expansion joints unceasingly transects it, across darkly promiscuous and desultory chipseal smudges, perfectly parallel white coextensions along its edges, all federate around axial iterations of two or three or four or more white linear cryptographs— always line-space-reflector, and unresistant to these technological scratchings, the engraved iconographic asphalt concrete, and under the laminar asphalt and concrete barrier millions of cubic acres of small anonymous crushed filter stones, deeper still the vast mass of a larger inornate crushed stone layer, and then finally more abysmal yet, the tenebrous and recondite earth yields to its resolute sepulture, relentlessly absorbing, heaving, tolerating, waiting. This is any highway, connecting somehow at another intersection somewhere, an imminent freeway entrance or exit, odd corner, or an insistent merging from one way into one of many others. It is all, one way with many destinations; and it passes over and over again, passes over written and unwritten histories of rich and poor people and of unknown families, over once cities and outskirts; decaying and fallen stone foundations and monuments put by a man's hands; over burial sites of a tiny child, a child's mother, a murderer, an idiot, or a lover's inamorato; over decomposing vegetation once blue lilies, goldenseal, swaying tules, and the tallest redwoods; over inland waterways where touched down ducks, geese, egrets, ibis; over ancient migratory routes of four-footed animals and the native peoples who wintered there and summered here; generations of millet, corn, bean, squash, and rice harvest; over earth surfaces that people scratched and dug desperately for survival and shelter, animals rooted for winter stores and fat, and that still weigh a million billion trillion cosmic tons per quiet earthly click of a digital odometer.

It leads to a city, where the freeway overpasses and underpasses weave a veil of confusion but also of familiarity; where wider waterways converge to an airworld and waterworld of commerce; where city-states, nations, and commonwealths congregate upon pressed steel and forged aluminum and mirrored sheets of tempered glass, rolls of gracefully wide paper and the edgy writing upon it, polyglot wires and all methods of urgent communications, cultures of unusually spiced foods and newly expressive arts, visual and oral and aural and kinesthetic sensations of elucidation and style; where neighborhoods are jungles, ghettos, luxuriant cuisine, art forms, polyamorous intersections of an old gambit, a stage for someone's dramatic or melodramatic characterization, the aroma of bread or fish or incense or the sea, the sounds of clanging bells, voices clamoring, jackhammers and cranes, busses and taxis, shops like the perfection of someone's brain, markets with ginsengs and a multitude of other

unidentified dried foods and medicinal substances; where the many coldly alluring faces and lithe flanks of tall Anglo-Saxon women everywhere startle, where the intriguing mysteries of an imagination float in the pearlescent luster of a Chinese woman's aura, where the green eyes of a sensuously dark young man stare over a Starbucks Venti green tea while his filthy rundown tennis shoes wait to be tied, where the woman slumped by the fireplace nods awake to take out and adjust only the left shoulder pad in her red cotton coat then reapply her vermilion lipstick and liner before nodding back into her fashionable oblivion, and where this highway has taken me high above the city and city lights, where the hum and shush of the road echoes like a shriek, a moan, a prayer, a mantra, a curse, a naming, unending speech, guttural, inviting, blaspheming.

Follow the highway north onto 21 through the lush rolling green hills of wine country where the culture and nuances of color, swirl, nose, palate, and finish collide with an elite view over the valley, and the Visa or MasterCard refinement of boutique wineries is polished by the silent hands and built on the bent backs of Mexican field workers. Follow Sears Point 37 into a long-gone forest glen where a dusty parking lot became a Renaissance embarcadero from which delightful peoples, embracing couples, comely maidens, troubadours and minstrels, clowns and seductresses, knights and villains, the king and queen themselves and their princesses and princes, all strolled with the purpose of magick and enchantment, with the lightest of musicks of flute and lyre, lute and tambourine, where the smallest windowpane opened onto dauncing, merrymaking, and the loveliest of love-makings, and in each small glade the shadowed oakes claimed a kiss, or more, from a beauty's lips, followed the silence into every ancient semantic sylvan corner, and the harmony of disappearance and return still scribes an alternate history of winsome and wistful wonderment, a what-if and a what-was, still seared into a chivalrous and medieval bow of spirit, heart, and glisten. There also the many roads have razed the unnamed sacred camps of the Lake and Coast Miwok, the numinous sites of the Pomo and Patwin, the revered battlefields of the Costanoan, Esselen, Salinan and Chumash, the sacrosanct power sources of the Gabrieleño, and Luiseño, and the Ipai and Tipai valleys of transcendence, and no one man is left to tell the stories, initiate the young, sing the songs of strong medicine, make the objects of power to harness the effort of another nature, another magic, to transport the people from one lodging to another, from this world to the next, along the way of warriors and chiefs.

All roads thronging, they swarm to mind, from each pre-synaptic Home Depot or Wall-Mart loading dock hidden in the back of neighborhoods to every post-synaptic yellow loading zone in front of a city corner sandwich shop, Freightliner and Peterbilt semi neurotransmitters dump their loads of thought, movement, arousal, addiction, sleep, inhibition, and pleasure onto the synaptic stage of the world's mind, and assembling and teeming around every block of nerve mass, the new and old Audis, Mercedes, Ford 250's, SUV's, Toyotas, slugbugs, Vespas, and ten-speeds— the dopamines, serotoninins, norepinephrines, and neuromodulators of the world's consciousnesses— all pullulate and flood, then converge and congregate onto the high ways, boulevards, country roads, and alleys of everywhere and everyplace, a convocation at every moment of time unspeakable and beyond words, undimensioned as is a glance or gesture of recognition, grief for a death or the world's tragedy, the joy of art and a lingering kiss. Huddle in a tiny vehicle, travel to other universes, arrive in time for another opportunity, then return for respite or remorse. The mind gathers, convolutes, and knots where it will, deep into itself, into reflections of its own cycling self-references where creativity and madness lurk, flung farther out, further inward into sensation and ecstasy, a destination where a neatly folded paper bag or cardboard carry-out is coincidentally waiting, where all humans and animals gather, the myopic, visionary, penitent or mystic, ecstatic or domesticated, adoring, excoriating, the eunuch or lover, priest and pedophile, psychic or psychotic, they all rendezvous there, a convocation on a road, in an alley or cul-de-sac, their looming departure from a garage of mindset, an imminent arriving at an internal harbor, across a bridge, where the scenic vistas look out and on forever.

DEFINING ECSTASY

Between Fernley and Winnemucca, high desert winds have rolled a far-reaching line of dried and dusty sagebrush balls up against the baked and tilted barbwire fence that parallels mile upon mile of the north side of Interstate Highway 95/80. In the plain desert distance beyond, a line of forty-eight railroad cars is unremittingly pulled and pushed on by two Union Pacific diesels, and the blue, gold, and white double-door boxcars look like a necklace of elongated malachite, amber, and onyx beads. Farther down the freeway on the south side and elevated on a cut-off, flattened earthen mound two twin faded white billboards still put up with having nothing painted on them. A pristine rectangular white house trailer sits by itself, oddly isolated and alone up against the foot of a massive and looming rock face of the Humboldt Range. On the outskirts of Imlay a faded green hand-lettered sign announces “R+R” in front of an unpainted wooden picket fence someone recently built around 100 feet by 100 feet of nothing. A blue-grey haze dissipates, and through binoculars the farthest peaks of the Trinity Range seem as close as the passenger side window of this Expedition that isolates me from them. Eventually, in Winnemucca, under garish glass and brass chandeliers at the Red Lion Casino restaurant, a lone man at an adjacent table methodically picks off the finest shreds of cheese from his eggs Benedict before finally pressing fork and knife into first the sauce, then egg, then muffin, cutting the layers into several pieces which he leaves on his plate uneaten before getting up slowly with his check in hand. I turn surreptitiously to watch him at the cashier, see him pay the bill with coins he counts out one-by-one from his front left pant pocket. No one in the casino restaurant dining room that morning acknowledged that they were defining ecstasy.

Fast forward a movie, read the daily newspaper, swipe a debit card, pick up dry cleaning, pump your gas, shop for groceries at a crowded store, idle at a familiar intersection, hear an unfamiliar sound from your car, brake suddenly to avoid hitting a dog or a person, pull over for a siren and flashing lights, curse an idiot driver, parallel park imperfectly, wonder momentarily if you left your keys in the locked car, check your cell phone, rub your eye, sneeze and look for Kleenex, insert and turn a key in a deadbolt, put a new roll of toilet paper in the holder, watch but don't pay attention to the TV news, take cash from an ATM without counting it, drink the last cold coffee in the bottom of the cup, wonder how many cardboard cups with corrugated slip covers are in land fills, put on your watch and rings, take off your watch and rings, look at your hands again and wonder, drop a letter into the drive-up postal box and hope it will get there, order on-line and wait anxiously for it to arrive, decide in which

trash can to throw away today's junk mail, remember again with relief that you've already done your taxes, wave to a neighbor whose name you don't know, watch children swinging and sliding at a park, choose your two favorite flavors for an ice cream cone, drop a glass jar or bottle and hear it break, wonder but don't recall if you dreamed last night, listen to your breath flow in and out of your nostrils, stare at another computer screen, keep mail order catalogues from which you know you will never order, shut a door quietly, massage the tense muscles in your neck, regret a decision, wonder how and when your death will come, take the clean dishes out of dish washer then put them away, make a place on the front seat for fast food, wonder if you'll ever find the kind of love you really want and need, close your sleep eyes and drift off into ecstasy without knowing it.

Something you just bought competes with the reflection of your face in a mirror, something you're wearing covers your imperfections perfectly, your life is constructed to distract you from yourself, your friends don't know what you can't bear to tell yourself, whatever you write no longer makes any sense to you, you have never seen the back of your neck or the soles of your feet, the blood circulates around your body and returns to your heart as it is supposed to (no thanks to you), you don't know when night changes to day but you do know when day changes to night, you can't say "I love you" to anyone including yourself, you don't miss those few people who were your lovers, you want to take a vacation but don't know where, you wouldn't know what to do even if you had the opportunity, your fantasies are just that, there is no silence in your world, you have no more keys that fit a lock, you can't cook and you don't want to eat, you don't know what you would like to do next, you can't recall a melody, your physical body prevents you from doing what you want, there are no constellations or even stars in your night sky, everything is in deep shade, the only fruit or vegetable you will eat is iceberg lettuce, you don't know where or how to touch someone, you lost your voice and you forgot what to say, you are never naked, you are never alone, you can't bear to be around people, you stay inside where it's better, you can't leave home, you don't know what a kite is for, you never went to anyone's funeral, you select fruit based on your ideal of visual perfection, someone bumped you inadvertently in an aisle, you never hurt anyone in your life, you don't drink, you have more time, this list is incomplete, you'd rather not say what else, you might find out, you *will* find out, that ecstasy is not on the tip of your wet tongue but in every leap of your supple imagination.

The bitterness or sweetness of green tea refreshes the one drinking it. Languorous stretching squeezes one's blood into places heretofore unheard of. Sitting still allows the observer to notice what's going on. A bikini is a liturgical vestment. The breeze or wind on one's face is ironically a three-dimensional mystical phenomenon. Speaking to other people is a prelude to life. Music is the fractal expression of the cosmos thinking. Silence is an atonal symphony of memories of everyone who has ever lived. Ripe avocados, papaya, mango, fillet mignon, nigari tofu, and the tip of one's index finger all yield to the sharpest knife in a similarly silken manner. Colors are aphrodisiacal and seductive, and emerald green is particularly concupiscent. The tensioned strings and the neck of a Flamenco guitar are meant to be grasped and squeezed by a man's fingers and hands. Some women are a source and mystery of life. Gesturing with one's hands and arms is significantly different and more inscrutably expressive than with one's feet and legs. The Doppler Effect is an appropriate metaphor for life. Duke Ellington, Steven Hawkins, and everyone else catch their breaths as they ride the arrow of time. Everything one has ordered will be delivered on time with no extra charge for priority shipment. The fingers on one's left hand fit nicely and purposefully into the spaces between the fingers on one's right hand and vice-versa. When someone calls out, someone else eventually hears it. Walking in a crooked line gladly defies the laws of physics. The moist dark dawn air carries a scent of manure and spring daffodils. Looking into someone's face for more than a few seconds allows one to perceive the intricate beauty of their spirit. A caress is an accomplishment far more significant than tuning a piano. The fingers of ecstasy curve ever so slightly, ever so tightly.

THE GLASSES AND HATS

“Galactic findings swell in 2008. Recent discoveries include 10 new planets, organic molecules, and the smallest known black hole.”

Idaho Statesman April 6, 2008

Before and after faces, when they were young and now that they're old, give a sense of duration to it all, and you see continuity in the appearance—the eyes, the mouth, an expression that carries across time—and each man or woman looking out at the undisclosed us they never met, creates a sense of time, continuity, reality, and you can see it particularly in the glasses and hats.

They look at me now from their limbo on page eleven of the Main section, and they would like me to know, perhaps just acknowledge, the fact that they lived—born into some family's arms, had siblings, rose to their challenges, fell in and out of love, and left someone or something behind that remembers or commemorates their presence and their passing from this place.

When you see ten obituaries on a page every day, you wonder where they all came from, ask yourself how can so many folks pass away each day and I not notice it, what were the gyrations, peregrinations, decisions, hands of fate, obvious factors, and haphazard strokes of luck or misfortune that brought them to their final knees, made them sit still for these pictures.

I divide them into two groups, who died before their time and who fulfilled their calling, yet this division makes no sense when I recall Frost's last line murmured a billion times with each passing, “And miles to go before I sleep,” and I wonder what work they had left undone, where they found themselves stranded, what love they kept under a blanket, what dreams they forgot.

During the early years of their marriage, he was the oldest of 15 children, her father was a baker, he had many memories of spending time at his grandpa's gun shop, during the war he was an electronics technician, she lit up the room with a smile, she married the love of her life, people appreciated his immense talent, she fought a courageous battle with pancreatic cancer.

Survivors include loving wife, devoted husband, cherished sons, daughters, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, preceded in death by his parents and one son, survived by her close friend, in lieu of flowers, at her request no service will be held, his ashes will be placed by his sons, he will be deeply missed, she was a long-time member, her life was her family, too many to list.

And on the next page, ten extra-solar planets discovered trillions of miles from today's obituary page, half Jupiter's size to 8 times bigger, one with a year no longer than our day, one "a bright clump of material in a dusty disk surrounding a star in Taurus," then two stars in the Big Dipper sharing astral blood and a life, all expanding into a farther darkness, where we never noticed.

The smallest black hole yet, 15 miles wide, 4 times as heavy as the Sun, planet in The Little Fox constellation with elements of organic life, methane, hydrogen, there in the Main section with Robert, Warren, Tamara, Marjorie, LaVerne, Stephen, Roy, Gordon, Todd, Sheldon, and photo-less Fred, all circle a distant universe now, embryonic light or dark matter, no longer visible.

The article lists two URL's where the departed's survivors can see an animation of a baby star forming, and a catalog of all extrasolar planets found so far, and the other relevant links are "Internment will be at, a celebration of her life will be at, burial services will be Thursday, arrangements are by, memorials may be made," none of which opens in a new browser window.

Every day on a planet Earth, on an outer edge of the Milky Way galaxy, faces arrive electronically in email programs of hundreds of thousands of small town and big city obituary editors, attached to a brief story of their life penned by them some time ago, or hurriedly and painfully written by a son or daughter, and the daily page is assembled into cheerful star charts.

Each cosmic day, spiral, elliptical, and lenticular galaxies, dwarfs, and giants collide, emit hydrogen, ultraviolet and infrared radiation; dark matter points rationally to something else out there; visible matter gathers and scatters; so reasonable to spend our lives pinpointing and mapping how stellar bodies are born; how dying black dwarfs, neutron stars, or black holes live.

Can you balance the death of Gerald and Doris' first son with a previously unknown proto-planet, Otto and Goldia's daughter with a distinctive orbiting ball of gas and dust; what else is there to discover about this man, this woman, the furthest edge of the expanding universe of perception, other than a birth and death of individuality spewing out into a blackness of void?

The birth and death pangs of stars, planets, moons, and other beings is heralded in grey mists, and light, silent rain, from where and to where, a whole other issue, best left to appropriate experts who will determine the red and blue shifts of a dream life and will, longing and separation, memories and evidence of a time and body whirling, a body whirling through space.

April 9, 2008

POEMS ARE LIKE LOVERS

“Art was a beautiful thing, but it was no goddess, no goal—not for him. He was not to follow art, but only the call of his mother. Why continue to perfect the ability of his hands?...It led to fame and reputation... To money and a settled life, and to a drying up and dwarfing of one’s inner senses, to which alone the mystery was accessible.”

“You take your being from your mothers. You live fully; you were endowed with the strength of love, the ability to feel.”

Hermann Hesse Narcissus and Goldmund

There are rooms entered through doors opened only by the hands of poets and lovers. They are rooms where before time came to be measured, stars and planets filled an empty black sky, where poets struggled with their inevitable passing under the cold and immutable sidereal burning, and where lovers trembled to the stellar retrogression and precession by feeling their way together, blind back toward the vast waters.

There are rooms at some point indistinguishable on the journey where entering defaults to leaving, arriving yields to departing, where poets, always at this same juncture, sing off key, and the dissonance of their metaphors paints an eerie mural of déjà vu on the mind, and where lovers struggle to hold on to each other, stretching out their vibrating hearts into the thinnest white-hot harmonic strand of tensile immensity.

There are rooms like irrigation canals are crisscross, sere and dry in winter and then suddenly gush and flow in the springtime with water from filling highlands, where poets rhythmically empty and fill their water buckets, systole diastole, to quench the fire, fuel the fire, and where

lovers ignore the warnings and dive in without looking, swim with the current, against the current, only to swim together, move together.

There are rooms of sunrise where a softening flush of coral cotton pinks to a wakening day and the patchwork cloud quilt cover spreads a diaphanous gauze over us, where poets suddenly look up and picture writing the dawn again with connotations of mortality's kiss and mystery, and where entwined lovers rush flushed to the window of their hearts to relish the rouged and glowing dawn and dusk of a paradise far, far from other worlds.

There are rooms where dreams go when they're done, and they grok the Atmanic brume condensing there, where wistful poets knock and yearn to return but cannot, and where lovers pass by, oblivious, to their own consolidations, sweet pectins that thicken and quicken the vortices of their embraces to places unheard of in any dream of seas, horses, snakes, cliffs, or lands ever visited, ever imagined, ever forgotten.

There are rooms where fingers strike a pose according to the moment, where poets point each letter to its place, send each word on its mission, gather phrases into bundles, tie them up with purpose and intent, and where lovers' hands open in comely welcome, grazing the pastures of a lover's field of valleys, gurgling brooks, moist glens, warrens of darkness unfolding, headwaters of innermost secret, undulating fingers curving in.

Poems are like lovers; warm arms to fall back into; a fluent and effortless letting go; a music of laughter at each touch; detours into an intimate cul-de-sac; a halt to the acute and obtuse hands of death; the familiar silhouettes and shadows shape a shaded consolation for our weeping; dented indentations of dreams once dreamed but unreclected collect and congregate as the steadfast scents of lost lovers, with the bright watercolor flashbacks of each one's tentative and

probing kisses, the musked opulence of spilling hair, an episodic smile, candied confections and proclivities, hungered hankering and craving, a ferret and nuzzling thirst, and the particular plaiting of sinewed limbs that still weaves a silkenly kinesthetic shudder, as the worm of memory probes deeper into a fading afternoon light of that wistful and melancholy workshop, where the poet rummages through tumbled-down stones and replaces them one-by-one in their proper place on the timeworn fieldstone wall that winds mutely across a valley floor, and the poems shimmer in these reflections, as if the roughened fingers of the poet and lover had been hefting limestone and granite boulders all afternoon, had been touching an audacious blush of skin, and the thrushes rush up from there to meet the hearts in flight, the lovers' flight, confettied poems thrown up in serpentine dance.

MOSAIC

*“As we grow older/ The world becomes stranger, the pattern more complicated/
Of dead and living. Not the intense moment/ Isolated, with no before and after,/*
*But a lifetime burning in every moment/ And not the lifetime of one man only/
but of old stones that cannot be deciphered.”*

T. S. Eliot Four Quartets “East Coker”

Like cerulean surfaces on unbroken water, echoes glisten where only sunlight scintillates across an impetuous field of view and sparks a suddenly concatenating silver fire— like quail from low brush flush up or pigeons wheel and turn headlong, and the light shatters into shards of tiny tesserate messages, a pulsing, undulating web of silver-leaf light, fractal and faceted— tessellations of every color make metallic crackle in the air, fleeting pointillist dreams in a macular moment or flick of the eye, from one frame to the next, a panoramic wide-angle exposure to the world, linear reductions from the absurdity of an in-flight vegetarian meal to the elegance of the surfer's angled and torquéd cutback into the curl of a wave, and there is no space between moments, the scenes in a storyboard, phantasms across an eidetic stage, and it all fits together like the smallest anonymous piece of cardboard jigsaw puzzle pushed finally in place.

Haunted eyes of a once warm-bodied gypsy girl with aquiline nose and flowing auburn hair; a lecherous satyr seizes the beauteous Amazon, Antiope; and voluptuous Europa, ravished by a taurine Zeus – all stare back unblinking from the walls and floors of a Zeugma villa once unearthed, now inundated, along a Euphrates Silk Road crossing, and the urgency of their individual purposes and intents is punctuated by the historical deepness of each ocher, brown, black, or yellow tesserae of stone, rock or marble, terracotta or glass, and placed once one-by-one by a mason's hand, they were mere bits of colored stone first, yet as he mixed his mortar, his mind recalled the raven-haired Spanish girl he might have touched or wanted to, recalled the beauty of the women who teased him as they brought him bread, olives, cheese, figs, and wine, recalled fearful stories of the gods' escapades, and now, we see the mosaic shimmer of his mind.

And like the crackling light across a sea plane, the smallest tiles juxtaposed to coalesce a longing or regret for ancient lives, each scene that fills the smallest room of momentary tension or attention lays out the fresh mosaics' emerging understanding of a scene— trees along a road, branches on a tree, plum blossoms on a branch, petals on a bloom, scissors cut a page, wire bent and twisted, numbers multiplied or divided, a letter sent but not received, broken hearts and promises, figures turn and leave, lovers ache and grieve, an embrace lasting forever, love is understood and unspoken, all this is iterated everyday like an unseen nacre laid down in the thinnest shields of habit, dedication, and devotion, and I turn once more in inevitability to the whitest blush and blessing of your throat and laughter thrown back to find an elusive welcome and understanding growing, budding, emerging, from the tiniest light of each stride and step.

GRAVEL AND FERN

Somewhere near here, where animals browse and sleep—deer with deer, skunks, families of ducks and geese, squirrels together, voles, and field mice, where insects have also found their hiding places covered in by a dark and warming ground—the ants, termites, beetles, centipedes, millipedes, somewhere near this place but not this actual place, the night has come quietly in, covers and harbors the overhanging branches of dark green willows and white and brown mottled sycamores that lean out over the river, and the birds nesting on those branches are still, as still as the dark curving branches themselves, and under the branches and birds nested on them, the river unfolds by itself, quiet but not still, the waters of the river move together as a universe apparently moves, slowly and without effort, a world moves along the inner course it has chosen, moves to the silent pull of the earth current deep under it, and the river moves slowly westward into ever smaller and less delineated channels, low places on the other side, other waterways that at that moment are also quiet and yet moving, simultaneous within their own stillness, far from here now, under other branches in other darkness, in their own places, simultaneous with all other rivers and branches and animals and insects that would be hidden still if we had not already imagined and then known them too.

There are many fish in this dark river, secret trout lurking in places of the river's darkest deepness, and the individual fishes let themselves be moved along with the river's own movement of propensity and will, where they suddenly flick a fin or tail with apparent unconcern, so that they push and glide against the current's flow, go off tangentially with a purpose or without, no one would know, and the river waters slide against the mucoused and brown-speckled sides of the fish, and its waters take on the fresh gravelly and fern smell of the trout, all the trout attendant to the river, and the willows and sycamores reach down through the ground with thirsty and probing roots and fine root hairs to find a cool water from the river, and with the water the trees take on the sweet gravelly fern smell so, so that through the darkness of the night, the molecules of fish and gravel and fern mingle with the molecules of willow and sycamore, and I here breathe in the cool ambrosial night air sloughed gently off by winds, bright green and sweet twinges, recollections far off, rich reminders of what is there still, far from this place where I have breathed it in, there where unnoticed and unnumbered fish swim within a larger cosmos under a surface disturbed by little, shaded, dark generations of willow and sycamore bud and leaf, noticed by no one ever-present here.

Before the mind of time, before the words to speak into mind the differences I now say between animal, insect, river waters and their fish, trees and tree spirits, winds and spirits of winds, even the ones then who looked and saw, and in their seeing, became what they saw—before that mind and time, everything was without boundary and appearance, everything was what everything else was, like waters of

the river move together as a universe apparently moves, slowly and without effort, and the distinctions between this's and that's were dazzling shimmering ripples, unrecognized reflections, distortions seen deeply into clear waters, currents under a surface of movement, time unfolding or perhaps disappearing, and it was without effort or remorse that the sentiency of those waters and creatures and the seeing of those waters and creatures permeated the observer, what was observed, and the observing, and an awareness propagated and suffused the darkness of a billion years of nights like another kind of ambrosia, and I, now, one of those creatures yet, observer and the observing itself, I breathe in this awareness like inhaling the sweet mingle of gravel and fern, willow and sycamore, water and movement in this moment, a merest moment, reflective sparkle across a low wide city I see over, into, see because of, because of the waters, simultaneous within its own stillness, and far, far from here now.

April 30, 2008

NATURAL FORCES

Somewhère far off, unknown, a change in temperature drives unseen movements in the air,
And differences of hot and cold set moving substances of air displaced, then shift their vectors
'Cross a landscape bleak and void of life or populated by the webs of men and women's voices,
Generates a wind that blows across it all, without a thought, and moves unseen into the night.

And when those winds reach dusk-lit shores, somehow the warmth and pressure find their way
Intó the tiny rills and valleys there and move along the inner paths of currents to their source,
So every surface feels the touch and beckon of the wind's caress and cannot help but shiver,
Quake, as winds from distant lands arrive with forces unexpected by the waters or the shore.

Underneath the warmed surface of the seas that pérturbate such sentient currents in the air,
The sea floor shifts abruptly, rifts and splits to even deeper earthen consonants within its fit,
Moves up into the water's flesh, displaces worlds of deep sea creatures, 'cross their world
A wave moves out as small as hands can grasp, molecular concussion tumbles out ahead.

And when those speeding molecules are somersaulting faster than they pile upon themselves,
Eventually they reach a shallow place and rear up like a dragon dripping with its hiss and spit,
Rear up and crash upon the unsuspecting shore where welcome sands absorb uncounted blows
To finger out the tiny salt-washed macroscopic gems of mica, agate, garnet, jade, and quartz.

These winds have blown into my valleys, shaken even tow'ring trees, the hidden fern unsettled,
Pried, finessed the thinnest fissures free of dirt and sand accumulated over time, accretions
Built up mindlessly now scattered somewhere else unseen inside my deepest grotto long ago
Neglected, disregarded in its dark, where now the winds from far-off swirl the space alive.

Inside the space exposed now, hidden colors shimmer in my marrowed crevices and darkness—
There, where waters rush from warmed seas, as so they must, to fill the empty wonder there,
Where wetted colors glisten and reflect a sheen of burnished luster from their matrix stone,
Fill up with living ocean, vortex historied from a scoured sea of ancient reliquary dreams.

The eagle soars on wings so light, the porpoise surfs the swells' delight.

The shore attracts the sea break's blast, the winds that blow through life hold fast.

My inner worlds of swell and surge, my heart with you I fain would merge.

The natural forces in my world, against my steady compass hurled.

In you, another force confronting, wind and sea's cold fury blunting.

Would that you could overflow your river, waters inundate, I'd never shiver.

The forces that contend in you, I could embrace, I would pursue.

Deepest deep'ning waters flow, filling up their worlds below.

THE GODS

Clouds

Many, of course, there are, as they said,
The slow, brooding gathering of warm air masses,
Their rising and expanding, converging and lifting
To the boundaries of human vision and touch.
They are the gods, Cumulus, Stratus, Cirrus, Nimbus.
In them condenses The Liquid's warm swarming gasses,
Condensate, sensate enumeration of demi-gods
Atmospheric, looming droplets, wet and wise.

Chaos

Primal emptiness, inchoate absence of shape, Chaos,
The unfolding and place of unfolding, χάος.
I am the god of all generative iterations, bifurcations of
Stability and instability, folding and amplification,
Until dense periodicity returns to darkness again as
Three point five six nine nine four five six liturgically
Tumbles inward—onward to filigrees of complexification.
Chaos is God, and Order is Her handmaiden.

Order

Number, zero, lists of listings, cuneiform marks in clay,
The penchant of mind to find Order, God of intelligence:
This is like that; that is like this; I am like that; I am like this.
Ouroborous backwards bends to where we start in the First Place.
God of Pi, The Golden Mean, Poesia. Order.
Prime numbers, sixteen, sixty-four, one-hundred and forty-four.
Line, perspective, contour, rhyme, meter, pattern, the
Angle-side-angle that built Stonehenge and Teotihuacán.

Harmony

Inner truth beckons Harmony, male to female they are,
Weak and strong they are, earth and water they are,
Inspiration and intuition's womb, feeling and word.
Come to me now, sounds, contours, turn of a line,
Colors of light, distillations of air vibrating my viscera—
Music, melody, rhythm, systole-diastole it is,
From inner truth, Non-Form to Form we arrive.
From inner truth, Form to Unformed we return.

Earth

Grottos where ice waters seep from cracks in rock,
Warrens of insane metallic forces— iron, copper, sulphur,
Distortions of plant energies, geotropic hallucinations
Craze and crackle the synaptic genetic symphony as
Hot, unseen magma flows broodingly, slaving
Inside God Earth, pushing against God Earth,
Pulling creatures into Earth's dust to dust's return,
Planted in God once more, births Eternal Springs.

Animal

And they said also that there are powers perceived
By no man's eyes, by no shaman's vision,
Impenetrable instinct whispering, resonant throbbing,
Beating pulsations, rushes, tremors and stillnesses
Combined, fermented and seething in silence.
The animal gods, animate-inanimate, dark,
Penetrating, invisible, unhurried subject-object.
Behind the silent psilocybin window, He-She murmurs.

Logos

Words from the mouth of inner truth are formed
In the clarity of intuition's mind, noumena, bliss, understanding.
λόγος is the truth I speak to every body's witness;
I speak λόγος across distances outdistanced by a touch.
λόγος speaks its own name in every God's shadow,
Gods before The Word, synthetic and digital gods,
The gods of flesh and blood, gristle and bone,
Crimson scenes hunted on the mindspace of hidden caves.

Consciousness

I no longer hear the voice of gods speak to me;
I write this dialogue for them to speak.
We lived, I live now, these words are proof.
What else can I leave to proclaim, "I am this one."?
I have created a room, sanctum sanctorum.
I go there to be with You and my people.
I meet there the myself I didn't know.

POETICS AGAIN

Given the fact that the life process, the flow of life, the day-to-day rush of events that make up the lives of people, becomes differentiated and relatively ordered when filtered through our individual sieve of consciousness, then the revered process of writing a poem serves the noble species purpose of making even more sense of those events and experiences and of our consequent feelings and thoughts. There are those recurring events that affect us all such as the seasons' change, hurricanes, night, marriage, the feel of salt water on the skin; there are also one time events that affect us all—landing on the moon, 9-11, comets, the life of Ghandi, the assassination of the Kennedys and King.

Against that common eventful backdrop are the individual events that only we as individuals know about, and they affect us even more because there develops within us no common public discourse and discussion to help us understand, cope, accept, move on, grow. Here is where poetry helps. Not the poetry in the paperback anthology but the solitary process of one human being struggling to identify what it is that is chaffing, itching, gnawing inside, and then to find the correct, the perfect combinations of words to soothe the discomfort, to give voice to the hidden feeling, to utter the unthinkable and wonderful desire, to mark the unmatched territory traveled for those who might follow, to document and affirm a heart and a mind for whomever might hopefully care enough to read the fractal artifact called poem.

The way the personal process of crafting a poem helps is that it creates a structure of specifically-chosen word and word order that embodies connections of relation, meaning, and so understanding by juxtaposing different dimensions or levels of time, location, perspective, measure, culture, endeavor, or domain. When the poet makes word and syntax choices simultaneously from both the inner and outer mind and feeling worlds, the synthesis created as the poem embodies and so articulates the essence, color, and nuance of what is on the poet's metaphorical mind. The fact that no one is directing the poet to assemble certain words in a certain order, but that the poet herself is freely making these hundreds of apparently simultaneous decisions in response to inner and outer forces means that each poem is a unique expression or reflection of the larger reality of experience and phenomena.

To understand what life or reality is, read every poem ever written. The indisputable fact that poets will continue to write new poems for as long as individual experience endures is so, not only because the external forces of life continue changing, but also because each person's life interprets those forces by living. Poets just carve additional facets into the gem of life with each poem they write. Everyone has a unique perspective on life and living, and, given the appropriate circumstances and training, everyone could write wonderfully revealing and illuminating poems about how it is to be human and mortal in this particular world. We are drawn to new expressions of content and structure in every art form. The reason there is such a phenomenon is because times change, and new generations of poets step up to the pen and keyboard. As long as these new poets continue living, loving, perceiving, and attending to our human passion, frailty, and mortality, there will be new poems to write and to read.