

POETRY AND HEALING

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Poetry and Meaning-Making

Our text for this preach is a passage written by the healer William Carlos Williams--Twentieth century American M.D. and poet, who lived into his eighties. These lines he wrote when he was in his sixties, after a long life already, of healing, delivering babies, getting wisdom, and writing.

My heart rouses
 thinking to bring you news
 of something
that concerns you
 and concerns many men. Look at
 what passes for the new.
You will not find it there but in
 despised poems.
 It is difficult
to get the news from poems
 yet men die miserably every day
 for lack
of what is found there.
 Hear me out
 for I too am concerned
and every man
 who wants to die at peace in his bed
 besides.

Williams speaks of more than literal death here, in this poem "To Asphodel, That Greeny Flower." The asphodel, like life and love, is perennial. He is concerned with "peace" versus misery in our lives. The poem's themes suggest at least two

criteria of mental health that are also perennial, if not universal. One would be a peaceful answer to the purpose of human existence; the other is our need for meaningful relationship--of the individual to some "other."

We know that lack of meaning causes despair and disease. In our times especially, meaningless activity and information proliferate, dominate in the prattle and images of celebrities/technology/economy/politics/crime: the big five, the "news" for our times. "Look at what passes for the new!"

Williams proposes poems as another kind of "news" needed for balance and context. He goes on to give a solution. And his is: attention to the use of the imagination. He's getting to be an old man and surely thinking about his own dying, and his marriage, his good love with Flossie (dedicated the poem to her).

Only the imagination is real!
I have declared it
time without end.
If a man die
it is because death
has first
possessed his imagination.
But if he refuse death--
no greater evil
can befall him
unless it be the death of love
meet him
in full career.
Then indeed

for him
the light has gone out.
But love and the imagination
are of a piece,
swift as the light
to avoid destruction.
So we come to watch time's flight
as we might watch
Summer lightning
or fireflies, secure,
by grace of the imagination,
safe in its care...
Light, the imagination
and love, in our age,
by natural law,
which we worship,
maintain
all of a piece
their dominance.

Our text (a roused heart desiring the wholeness of "natural law," *meaning, light, and love in our age*) is now introduced. In academic fashion, I now establish my contention--that poetry can heal--by introducing an authority for supporting theory. C. G. Jung, in *Spirit in Man, Art, and Literature*, speaks of the function of the poet for the health of both the individual and the culture.

Whenever conscious life becomes one-sided or adopts a false attitude, images instinctively rise to the surface in the visions of artists to restore the psychic balance in the individual or in the epoch. The artist is not a person endowed with free will [but is]...collective...A vehicle and molder of the unconscious psychic life of mankind.

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Finding Balance

So the prescription is "images" in the visions of artists, and the product is health as "psychic balance." Then Jung goes on to give advice on how to read a poem and let it do this kind of psychological work for us.

To grasp its meaning we must allow it to shape us as it shaped the artist. He has plunged into the healing and redeeming depths of the collective psyche, where we are not lost in the isolation of consciousness...

That is, not identified with the ego and its errors and sufferings, but where we are all "caught in a common rhythm."

I like best of that passage, the "plunge" of it "into the healing and redeeming depths." This also describes how a powerful metaphor or image, as in dreams, can flow from and to the deepest levels of our being, the barriers to the psyche made permeable; meanings are joined to things. Jung elsewhere talks of "transcendent symbols" which similarly heal, and writes, that "...the creative quality.... and its methods of authentic expression are in fact the basic problem of all psychotherapy."

The passage also emphasizes that we suffer when we get lost in the isolation of consciousness and ego-error. This effort to find our way to balance and sanity reminds me of the famous Basho frog haiku. This ancient Japanese poem makes us smile. Basho says, "An old pond and a frog-jumps in....Plop!" This is

an "old-pond" issue, an old struggle to get out of ego to our connectedness. "I too am concerned," said William Carlos Williams; but his (and each of our own) efforts are relatively new. So, there's an old pond and a relatively new frog (that's us and our endeavors): "An old pond/and a (relatively new) frog-jumps-in--/'Plop!'" The one enfolds the other, with some transient ripples. *That's the way it is!*

The contemporary poet Gary Snyder also addresses the healing function of poetry, the "psychic balance" that Jung in his more academic way proposed. Snyder speaks also about the one-sided concerns of our culture and the need for balance. Snyder says the poet "introduces the semi-known to the tribe," or perhaps re-introduces the nearly forgotten, in a shamanic healing role. From cultural anthropology and mythopoetics, we know that poetic language has been central to healing ceremony from archaic times, and continues this function when spirit and soul--not just body--are involved, or when soul and body get split.

The means of shamanistic "soul-catching" is a topic of its own; here I'd like to concentrate on 20th-century poets and present obsessions with old human needs: for meaningful relationship and for purpose. Assuming that meaning and purpose

(faith, hope, and love) are necessary for health, we seek to balance them in ourselves. Jung says we must re-join our "healing and redeeming depths."

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Order out of Chaos

Another proposal for balance comes in a metaphor by Wallace Stevens, who was contemporary with Williams. Not an M.D. he. Wallace Stevens was Vice-President of the Hartford Insurance Company. He lived in the real world, which he emphasized when he said, "It is of the greatest poverty not to live in the real world." So when he also recommends "imagination", don't think we're hearing it from some flake. This he says: "In a time of disbelief, it is for the poet to supply the satisfaction of belief." And who is the poet? Every person of Active Imagination. In other words, out of chaos we have to supply an "order" in a time of disbelief and fragmentation. Meaning-making is our responsibility "in a time of disbelief."

Wallace Stevens writes, "The bucks go clattering over Oklahoma." These deer (or they could be wild Indians) in Oklahoma portray the "wilderness" of the world as we find it. That "wilderness" phrase comes from a poem called *The Anecdote of the Jar*. "I placed a jar in Tennessee/ and round it was and

on a hill./ It made the slovenly wilderness/ surround that hill." In these poems, "wilderness" is just undifferentiated world stuff. The round jar (which ends up not really contributing anything) looks like a human brain--It's round, it's grey, as he goes on to describe it. Anyway that's us, or anything put in the middle of all this chaos; suddenly there's a central place, which functions to make an order around. There's a front and back and so forth. Aware and active, we must shape our world.

The way that the poem, "Earthly Anecdote" says it, the bucks are clattering chaos, and the firecat is you, the poet, the person who shapes:

EARTHLY ANECDOTE

Every time the bucks went clattering
Over Oklahoma
A firecat bristled in the way.

Wherever they went,
They went clattering,
Until they swerved
In a swift, circular line
To the right,
Because of the firecat.

Or until they swerved
In a swift, circular line
To the left,
Because of the firecat.

The bucks clattered.
The firecat went leaping,

To the right, to the left,
And
Bristled in the way.
Later, the firecat closed his bright eyes
And slept.

After Stevens says, "In a time of disbelief it is for the poet

to supply the satisfaction of belief," he goes on: "A time of disbelief is also a time of truth-loving." To restore order and balance we must love truth more. Need it more.

It is probably the purpose of each of us to write poetry to find the good. Which in Plato's sense is synonymous with God. One writes poetry then in order to approach the good in what is harmonious and orderly.

And these are key words too, the harmonious and the orderly. The harmonious; the orderly; peace; faith; hope; love. We are stacking up those good words.

It is true that the poets who most urgently search the world for what makes life so prodigiously worth living may find their solutions in a duck pond or a midnight wind. In the meantime we have to live by literature because literature is the better part of life. Provided it is based on life itself. From this point of view the meaning of poetry involves us profoundly.

That's Wallace Stevens again. Let us paraphrase that as a definition: Poetry proposes the human condition profoundly examined with the most precise resources that the language has

to offer, to bring awareness. Fuller awareness of the human condition can help us let go of fears, locate our place in the scheme of things, help us face pain and the rigor of life, and help us create beauty--or at least shapeliness--out of chaos. That's the poet's responsibility; the responsibility of each of us to answer, "Who are you?" "What do you mean?"

I will shift from Wallace Stevens and play a small joke out, from his saying that poets may find a solution in a midnight wind or a duckpond. Before reading his statement, I had written a poem "Santa Ana Wind at New Year." It's a midnight season-turning poem; It's a renewal poem. And it's a poor man's attempt to bring in and connect with old sources of ritual. Specifically the midnight wind sounded to me like that sound made by the bull roarer, which is the voice of the gods for initiates in Australia and Africa, In Hopi America, and in Romania. Done in different ways, it's most familiar as the sound made by spinning a disk on a long thong. You've maybe done this with a big button, wrapped up on a double string and then pulled. A big one goes, "Whoooo! Whoooo!"

In Africa, they often whirl a disk on a long thong. In Romania, in a ritual remnant from the Greek festival of Pan, a leather drumhead is vibrated. Australian aborigines use a long

thin stick to make the deep grunting roar that I was hearing in the midnight wind. It gave me a little glimpse of...What did he say we're supposed to find? "Life prodigiously worth living."

SANTA ANA WIND AT THE NEW YEAR

Under the lowest swing of the sun further night pulls
under the wings of the wind, OOOoooo-Yaa, OOO0000-Yaa,

In the goatdance they stroked horsetail tied in a drumhead,
OOOoooo-Yaa, OOOoooo-Yaa, divine beasts enter the openings
made by pulses or air grunting under these canyon oak;

Beating off the bellowing disc on a zebra-hide thong,
the bull roars. In the bush, looping thin propellers
pull down the voice of sky-beings out of the dark

to devour our past. We remember how it was to be eaten,
to take a new form. We recognize how moans in the throat
mock our old ways of understanding.

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Poetry and the Science of Soul

I want to link poetry to psychology by going to the root of the words and reminding again that psychology stands for the "logos of psyche" or the science of soul. These words were used interchangeably in the Greek and Latin proposals of "psyche." And I'd like to make using "soul" respectable. I think that we're going to have to talk about soul and spirituality in these times if we're going to get any wholeness and potential for the future. It seems that there's some fear about admitting these

words into academic discourse, and I'm always curious to see how they come into mainstream psychology. "Empathy" I don't think quite gets at it. What I mean by soul, for this use, is that *capacity* we each carry inside us to make meaning from raw experience. That which Stevens was talking about, as if there's an organ or fire-cat in us that swerves things into meaningful order. Or you could think of it perhaps in another way, as a student inside us who's all the time shuffling notes in preparation for the final exam. And the question is going to be: to give the world an intelligible account of itself, at any given moment, and include one's meaningful place in that world. That's the function of the soul; it's not a thing. It's not an inner balloon to inflate. It is meaning-making, as process.

Psychologist James Hillman calls it "soul-making." Not a thing, there's an action involved. So that's the work, the responsibility we have: to make connections and meaning. And that's always been the obsession of poets, their primary professional occupation -- to obsess on meaning-making, variously carried on by shamans and pop singers and myth tellers and priests and us.

Meaning-making is inherent whenever we open up and speak of what profoundly matters; in Anglo-Saxon the poet is said to

speaking from the "word-hoard." Psyche or soul also means "breath," which suggests that we may breathe life into things, by "saying" our deepest concerns and naming our treasures.

To make meaning. Says Emily Dickinson, "There's a certain slant of light/winter afternoons/ that oppresses like the heft/ of cathedral tunes." Agh! Depression! Even a certain slant of light can affect meanings! (Or we could call it projection and be done with it). But she says,

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There's a certain Slant of light
Winter Afternoons--
That oppresses, like the Heft
Of Cathedral Tunes--

Heavenly Hurt, it gives us--
We can find no scar,
But internal difference,
Where the Meanings, are--
None may teach it--Any--
'Tis the Seal Despair--
An imperial affliction
Sent us of the Air--

When it comes, the Landscape listens--
Shadows--hold their breath--
When it goes, 'tis like the Distance
On the look of Death--

In that search for meaning, there's a haiku that says,

Ah, red-tailed hawk!
The disgrace of meaninglessness
is not for you.

Hawk is spared the responsibility of soul, with its religious connections to sin and redemption. Disgrace is not for that red-tailed hawk, not the sin of meaninglessness. That's the sin that we suffer from, the open wound in the fabric of our lives. A recent poll says that 85% of the people go to work hating where they're going, don't want to keep doing it. That's despair (or hysteria). Psychologists treat its symptoms all the time. To give the world an intelligible account of itself --and our place in it-- then, that's the soul work I'm talking about.

This is poet Stanley Kunitz speaking of the importance of poems as soul to the contemporary world.

Evil itself has become a product of manufacture. It's built into our whole industrial and political system. It's manufactured. It rolls off the assembly line. It's sold. It pollutes the air. Perhaps the way to confront the adversity is to confront it in ourselves. We have to fight for our little bit of health. We have to make our living and dying important again. And the living and dying of others. Isn't this what poetry's about?

That's Stanley Kunitz. He's a good conclusion to the premises that poetry heals by meaning-making, by restoring psychic balance, by making connections and order.

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Songs of Wholeness

For some other of poetry's specific functions, I'm going to Gary Snyder, my contemporary hero poet. He's done a lot of work

on what he calls "healing songs", and I think he classifies them most succinctly. He talks about how people have always sung songs, made poems when riding around slow trying to keep the cows quiet at night, or when hauling up nets, making up verses, and singing drinking songs, and all kinds of communal songs.

But before we go on to particular types of healing "songs", I'd like to bring all this soul-talk to a more common ground, with Wally McRae's poem, "Cowboy's Reincarnation."

COWBOY'S REINCARNATION
by Wally McRae, Montana

"What is reincarnation?" A cowboy asked his friend.
"It starts," his old pal told him, "when your life comes to its
end.
They comb your hair and wash your neck and clean your
fingernails:
Then put you in a padded box, away from life's travails.

Now the box and you goes in a hole, that's been dug in the
ground.
Reincarnation starts in when you're planted beneath that mound.
Them clods melt down, just like the box and you who is inside;
And that's when you're beginning your transformation ride.

And in a while the grass will grow upon your rendered mound:
Until some day upon that spot a lonely flower is found.
And then a horse may wander by and graze upon that flower:
That once was you and now [has bloomed] your vegetative power.

Well the flower that the horse done ate, along with his other
feed:
Makes bone and fat and muscle, that's essential to the steed.
But there's a part that he can't use, and so it passes through:
And there it lies upon the ground, this thing that once was you.

And if perchance I should pass by, and see this on the ground,

I'll stop a while, and I'll ponder at, this object that I've
found.

And I'll think about reincarnation, and life and death, and
such:

And I'll come away concluding: "Why, you ain't changed that
much."

(Livestock Market Digest, August, 1984)

Gary Snyder is particularly interested in those individuals
who go into solitude for songs which enable them to heal, in the
shamanistic tradition.

As an aside, there are five old ways to tell a shaman:
They seek solitude. They become absent-minded. They sing in
their sleep. They have visions. And they eat bark off trees.
I have suggested these criteria before our clinicians get their
license.

Later I'll talk a little about shamanic language-use, but for
general use Snyder goes on to say, "There are also some who
master and transmit the complex of songs and chants that contain
creation-myth lore and...cosmic gossip that whole People sees
itself through." The way we see ourselves in place. He also
notes that in "all the households for the past fifty thousand
years poetry has been around the fire at night with children and
grandparents curled up together and somebody singing or
telling." We still sing poetry/song to lovers and children and

always at funerals. "Poetry is thus an intimate part of the power and health of sane people."

Then he moves to classify; "The specialized variety of poetry which is the more sophisticated and the type most poets would aspire to, is the healing song type. This kind of healing that makes whole, heals by making whole." By making "whole." That's again about soul-making, the source of healthy reunification of parts: "that kind of doctoring." In our own word-hoard, "whole," "hale," "health," and "holy" all have the same root in the Old English word halig.

In our first category of poetry as healing, Snyder suggests,

The poet as healer is asserting several layers of...wholeness. [The first is] identity with the natural world, demonstrating that this social system, a little human enclave, does not stand apart from the plants and the animals and the winds and rains and rivers that surround it. Here the poet is the voice for the non-human, for the natural world, saying...there is a larger sphere out here; that the humans are indeed children of, sons and daughters of...the earth. So the first wholeness is the wholeness with the nature."

For illustration of this healing, this restoring of our relationship to the natural world, I want to introduce another of my Twentieth-century heroes, Wendell Berry. He is still farming in Kentucky, a great nature poet. You'll often see his common-sense essays in magazines, as he's a great essayist too.

But his simple proposal is that the earth is greater than the human. "To speak of the earth and its ways you must bend your mind to it." To "bend your mind to it!" So that in some way you become more in aligned or more congruent with the ways of the earth.

THE PEACE OF WILD THINGS

When despair for the world grows in me
and I wake in the night at the least sound
in fear of what my life and my children's lives may be,
I go and lie down where the wood drake
rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron
feeds.

I come into the peace of wild things
who do not tax their lives with forethought
of grief. I come into the presence of still water.
And I feel above me the day-blind stars
waiting with their light. For a time
I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.

"For a time I rest in the grace of the world and am free."

The following Fall Equinox poem also suggests that nature's parts combine to become "holy", inviting our healthy relationship.

TODAY

Finally today we took down the old white oak by the garden,
one of four that lived through a fire before any neighbor's
memory or story, her charcoal core swarming with tree ants,
full of rat droppings. The old one in the pasture draws bees.

After sunset, just under the lid of darkness, the bats
flap and peep in a frenzy over our oasis of a garden

rooted in its own darkness, its smells drawing the game;
the corn points "there!" and "there!" at their quick grace.

East, the fulgent moon through the desert thunderheads
veils mauve and salmon, above mesas of clouds bruise-blue.
The pregnant filly, always hungry, nickers for something
to hold her over through the night. Lightning far back.

Let's say today's a sacred day like any other. We're in it then
without comparison or memory or fit to tomorrow
so when the sleep end comes our motives did no damage.

And again we found an uninitiated part of our flesh to offer
the day's flint knife to line, draw blood, scar a permanence
we can keep in the name of--What shall you choose? Attention,
or beauty, versions of faith we gain from the arc of sun,
the expanding or fasting moon in harvest and change.

Beyond healing our ("wholing") our connection to the
natural world, in a second domain of reconnection, "the poet as
myth handler healer is also speaking as the voice for another
place." Snyder proposes this place as "the deep unconscious,"
when poems integrate interior unknown realms of psyche/mind with
present moment immediate self-interest consciousness.
California poet Robinson Jeffers had that moment of
integration/power at Carmel.

OH, LOVELY ROCK

We stayed the night in the pathless gorge of Ventana Creek,
up the east fork.
The rock walls and the mountain ridges hung forest on forest
above our heads, maple and redwood,
Laurel, oak, madrone, up to the high and slender Santa
Lucian firs that stare up the cataracts

Of slide-rock to the star-color precipices.
We lay on gravel and kept a little camp-fire for warmth.
Past midnight only two or three coals glowed red in the
cooling darkness; I laid a clutch of dead bay-leaves
On the ember ends and felted dry sticks across them and lay
down again. The revived flame
Lighted my sleeping son's face and his companion's, and the
vertical face of the great gorge-wall
Across the stream. Light leaves overhead danced in the
fire's breath, tree-trunks were seen: it was the rock
wall
That fascinated my eyes and mind. Nothing strange: light-
gray diorite with two or three slanting seams in it,
Smooth-polished by the endless attrition of slides and
floods; no fern no lichen, pure naked rock...as if I
were
Seeing rock for the first time. As if I were seeing through
the flame-lit surface in the real and bodily
And living rock. Nothing strange...I cannot
Tell you how strange: the silent passion, the deep nobility
and child-like loveliness: this fate going on
Outside our fates. It is here in the mountain like a grave
smiling child. I shall die, and my boys
Will live and die, our world will go on through its rapid
agonies of change and discovery; this age will die,
And wolves have howled in the snow around a new Bethlehem:
this rock will be here, grave, earnest, not passive: the
energies
That are its atoms will still be bearing the whole mountain
above: and I, many packed centuries ago,
Felt its intense reality with love and wonder, this lovely
rock.

Please note that both Berry and Jeffers call attention to
our children's lives in concern for the generational continuity
of values.

In this second category of relationship to "another place"
in Snyder's healing functions, "Great tales and myths can give
one tiny isolated society the breadth of mind and heart to be

not provincial, and to know itself as a piece of the cosmos." To bring wholeness to these unknown realms of mind, "another place" thus includes the collective unconscious, the cosmological, or the transpersonal--they are not that different. Lisel Mueller reminds us of our connection to this larger place in *One More Hymn to the Sun*.

ONE MORE HYMN TO THE SUN

You know that like an ideal mother
she will never leave you,
though after a week of rain
you begin to worry

but you accept her brief absences,
her occasional closed doors
as the prerogative
of an eccentric lover

You know which side of the bed
she gets up on,
though, being a night person,
you are on more intimate terms
with the moon, who lets you watch,
while the sun will put out your eyes
for tampering with her privacy

She wants to be known by her parts,
fingers, a flashing leg,
a cheek, a shoulder; by things
spilled from her purse:
small change, a patterned scarf,
mirrors, keys, an earring

You like the fact that her moods
are an orderly version of yours,
arranged, like the needs of animals,
by seasons: her spring quirks,
her sexual summers,

her steadfast warmth in the fall;
you remember her face on Christmas Day,
blurred, and suffused with the weak smile
of a woman who has just given birth

The way she loves you, your whole body,
and still leaves enough space between you
to keep you from turning to cinders
before your time!

You admit she colors
everything you see,
that Renoir and Monet
are her direct descendants;
she could make you say
the grass is red, the snow purple

She never gave up on you
though it took you billions of years
to learn the alphabet
and the shadow you cast on the ground
changed its shape again and again

In a third category of wholeness, the poet appeals to our relationship with humanity, with people outside our own group. That connection, Snyder says, is actually hardest, perhaps because economics and politics and the other "news" puts us at odds with our human connectedness. One of Snyder's poems illustrates our common humanity. It's like Jeffers, not a pretty poem, but then like Stevens says, "We must live in the real world or not at all." Snyder always writes about relationships, and thus he is a good political poet. He sees nature poetry as political poetry because nature asks our connections to be morally congruent with that within which we

live. We have to make the cultural host within which we live healthy before we ourselves can be healthy. This poem, called "Breasts," names how we're all in this together.

BREASTS

That which makes milk can't
 help but concentrate
Out of the food of the world,
Right up to the point
 where we suck it,
Poison, too

But the breast is a filter--
The poison stays there, in the flesh.
Heavy metals in traces
 deadly molecules hooked up in strings
 that men dreamed of;
Never found in the world till today.
 (in your bosom
 petrochemical complex
 astray)

So we celebrate breasts
We all love to kiss them
 --they're like philosophers!
Who hold back the bitter in mind
To let the more tasty
Wisdom slip through
 for the little ones.
 who can't take the poison so young.

The work that comes later
After child-raising
For the real self to be,
Is to then burn the poison away.
Flat breasts, tired bodies,
That will snap like old leather,
 tough enough
 for a few more good days,

And the glittering eyes,

Old mother,
Old father,
 are gay.

Carolyn Forche's poem of El Salvador, called "The Colonel" also forces us to confront our common humanity, and to (emotionally) remember that our lives and deaths matter and connect, even outside our group.

THE COLONEL

What you have heard is true. I was in his house. His wife carried a tray of coffee and sugar. His daughter filed her nails, his son went out for the night. There were daily papers, pet dogs, a pistol on the cushion beside him. The moon swung bare on its black cord over the house. On the television was talk show. It was in English. Broken bottles were embedded in the walls around the house to scoop the kneecaps from a man's legs or cut his hands to lace. On the windows there were gratings like those in liquor stores. We had dinner, rack of lamb, good wine, a gold bell was on the table for calling the maid. The maid brought green mangoes, salt, a type of bread. I was asked how I enjoyed the country. There was a brief commercial in Spanish. His wife took everything away. There was some talk then of how difficult it had become to govern. The parrot said hello on the terrace. The colonel told it to shut up, and pushed himself from the table. My friend said to me with his eyes: say nothing. The colonel returned with a sack used to bring groceries home. He spilled many human ears on the table. They were like dried peach halves. there is no other way to say this. He took one of them in his hands, shook it in our faces, dropped it into a water glass. It came alive there. I am tired of fooling around he said. As for the rights of anyone, tell your people they can go fuck themselves. He swept the ears to the floor with his arm and held the last of his wine in the air. *Something for your poetry, no?* he said. Some of the

ears on the floor caught this scrap of his voice. Some of the ears on the floor were pressed to the ground.

This "hardest" kind of healing requires political awareness,

and activism. In El Salvador, Forche seems to have caught a

Hispanic wisdom about the use of poetry that Victor Hernandez Cruz

describes:

Writing must be specific to meaning to explore the center of spiritual and political existence. It is a personal and collective healing process. It is to fight oppression, whether it be of a family or governmental nature, that we express ourselves. Everything that I do in poetry must have a meaning beyond itself that is the center of the metaphor. In North American society the poet is isolated from the masses, making him a loner. Not so in the Hispanic attitude. Many of the poems of Federico Garcia Lorca are now the popular songs of Spain. The same is the case throughout the Americas. To create is to find yourself in others. That is why we are involved in language, which is the height of communication.

Socrates, Tolstoy, Thoreau, and Camus all tell us that, in the matter of human relationships, private dialogue with soul must provide the basis for judging--or for resisting-- the various tyrannies of society and state.

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Conclusions and the How of

Now that we've illustrated Gary Snyder's three kinds of "wholeness," after the kinds of news we can get from poems, I'd like to conclude with suggestions about how the process works.

First let's try another definition of poetry. Poetry is a kind of ceremony in which you handle objects which you treat as if endowed with magical power. Those objects are images and words, just as in psychology's "talking cure", same as in healing paradigms of the priests, the shamans. The real work is to call a thing by its right name, to reorder the world with your description of it. To do it right, the "Right Way!" is Tao. And aligning images is a primary work.

Whether called reframing or transpersonal or cognitive (in branches of psychology), we seek the benefits of inner and outer realities linked. Images provide the means to bypass the constructs and the defenses of the rational. Somehow they bypass and make permeable our compartment-barriers of memory and analysis. When W. C. Williams says, "A poem should move pre-thought into language", he doesn't want to stay in the intellect. He wants to propose a perception directly. And an image, if it's good, can do that. Robert Bly, who has done a lot of work with male initiation, uses the phrase "Going to the emotional body." Images and music get past the everyday frame of numb facts and habit to the emotional body where the meanings are.

Poetry uses images in a sort of "laying on of hands" with words. To do that in a rhythmic or musical way helps. But you know when it hits, when an image just comes right into you, transformative and numinous. That's why I like haiku, because they're so easy to swallow.

A clothesline
under the bouganvilla--
That's the way it is!

You can just take them all at once; they come inside sort of dehydrated. They explode and enlarge your head in vision. The effect of a right image is like being able to go right to the biggest suite, the penthouse of the transpersonal consciousness, without having to stop at the desk clerk to check in for a key (the desk clerk being Reason).

I'd like to read a poem of my own that I think may cross those three earlier-named domains or realms. They are (1) poems connecting us to the wholeness with the natural world, (2) poems trying to bring the unconscious and cosmos into personal integration, and finally, (3) poems of restoration for the alien human community. This poem came from a ceremony for a friend who was leaving the city. It's called "The Sunset Becomes A Burning Temple, Pulses Light" and it's prefaced by a quote from the Upanishads:

When the sun is set, and the moon is set, and the fire has gone out, and speech is hushed, what then is the light ...

That's meaninglessness, isn't it? That would be the state of despair. This poem will conclude that the fire can be renewed by intense language.

Some of my poems come chant-like. Probably incantation appeals through the hypnotic beat of the earth's dance, the repetition of planetary and seasonal metronomes and the heart's tidal rhythms. Against this duration, our own personal steps fall and rise in intensity. In the making of the poem, this intensity can bring a leap of awareness that completes itself with the poem, less in terms of idea, more akin to the completion of ceremony or ritual or chant.

Ritual suggests the right gesture, an inevitability of the next step to be taken, the right attitude and language to match. I'm interested in poems with primary images, coupled with words that come from the "hoard" of power-words to copulate with the thinking mind. In many archaic cultures, all members of the adult community were expected to have experienced at least one "out of the mind" journey, and to return with a wisdom inspired by having visited their "real home," as it were. Various techniques and plants were employed, but the most common was the

use of song-chants, rhythmic dancing along with magic words or image-language.

Crossing the frontiers of memory, vision-songs allow the shadows of primordial experience to come into the knowing mind. Whether more or less deliberately than other cultures, we may still evoke the symbols of transformation that root in the race's experience with moons; magic animals; fire, earth, and water; star and season-words; with suffering and lover-uttered words, that carry power. When named in a right order, they may evoke meaning and renewal.

THE SUNSET BECOMES A BURNING TEMPLE, PULSES LIGHT

--Leave-taking poem for Larry Shaefer

When the sun is set, and the moon is set, and the fire has gone out, and speech is hushed, what then is the light of man? Upanishads

Come ceremonial need-fire/wood
ritual, matter has grown cold; my
father's yearly festival with earth
is lost

we would
put our hands on old rhythms, move
toward another season

Put the firestick now to the forehead
draw the smoke into the mind
blow it to the earth, to wind,
to midnight water;

In the night I tremble, knees and elbows
and forehead on the floor;
there is no single wisdom,
your stomach heaves

as if it could empty you of pain;
you suffer defeat/she cries out from darkness
we are totally defeated it belongs to
no particular thing
we can die without purpose
we answer love with selfishness, I
don't know how to help you
"we are weak and poor,
we don't know anything"
ourselves charged, how else should you learn
"fire-boring," rhythmic motions
spiritual feeding from breasts, the
woman sobbing in the candled dark?

we discover ritual, it gives form
to our suffering, it remembers
what we are, who would forget: our humility
shapes to a waiting bowl:

Then as it happens just before dawn
she brings into this house earth
you bring the bowl for fire

We speak of suffering
we thus make fire with our mouths

Naming again; we can "make fire with our mouths."

Reshaping our suffering with our humility and awareness and
"evoked" participation, those are old ways.

Suffering and humility are correctives of the emotional
body, necessary to healing but not the goal. Because finally
the gift that we get from poems is celebration. The
celebration, for example of William Carlos Williams, who said in
the first poem that "Men die miserably every day for lack of

what is found there." He also wrote this lovely little thing to Flossie. Stuck it on the refrigerator, we suppose.

I have eaten
the plums
that were in
the icebox

and which
you were probably
saving
for breakfast

Forgive me
they were delicious
so sweet
and so cold

So poems can also hand you a live, sweet, cold plum. In "To a Poor

Old Woman" he says,

Munching a plum on
the street a paper bag
of them in her hand

They taste good to her
They taste good
to her. They taste
good to her

Comforted
a solace of ripe plums
seeming to fill the air
They taste good to her

And to us! He's great! He's like all poets who love to celebrate, to create that union of faith, hope, and love-- and who use poems to try to accomplish those connections. Poems are

an act of intentionality seeking psychological balance and human purpose. They seek images for our meaningful connections with each other. Relationships for health must also connect us to our unconscious domains and our history and the earth and cosmos around us. The formal definition of *cosmology* includes our urge to fit into a system of harmony and order. That's a soul-function, to provide meaning, balance, and relationship. Poetry even celebrates what Ann Sexton says is our "common awful..." (meaning also, "full of awe."), our common awe-full "rowing towards God," in mortality.

We seek to bind hearts and human sympathy and seek community in a place of harmony and relationship. Yankovich's fifty-year surveys, of what the American character is up, to has found that the most telling movement is this: peoples' increasing longing for a sense of place. We feel disenfranchised and dis-identified, longing for the kinds of place that poets have traditionally sought and continue to image: locating balance in a deeply-known place, with human purpose in common, and in meaningful relationship.

So finally, from Williams this last advice:

Man is to thrill as the great horses of existence prance by him, he being one of them himself. To thrill and to keep from getting stepped on, by knowing where the hoof will

fall next. Our only actions are to prance, to cheer and to point.

"To prance, to cheer and to point!" To point at experience with words may be just "description", but if one describes the "whole" world faithfully, it's a political as well as a healing act, *"To prance to cheer and to point. All of which are but one thing: Praise!"*

Praise. Williams uses that word perhaps more than any other. And finally at the end of his long life, he says that *"it is always possible to be genuinely thankful."* That's a closing comment in line with poetry's healing potential: to be genuine, and to be thankful.

Don Eulert, Ph.D.
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