

# Exquisite Parody

## The Parody of the Real

The man who read my poems said, *Either you are one of the great poets, or this is parody.*

I said I was imitating a poet who did not yet exist.

I've written social parody and satirical one-man shows. My father called me the Moline Mimic. One woman said she couldn't reconcile the man she knew with the one who wrote my poems.

Years ago, I told a fellow artist, about more than my writing, *I feel like I'm making it all up.*

I once felt I could become the person walking in front of me, more easily than I could become myself, but it felt like theft, so I stopped.

My inclination became to find the truth. I hung a warning on the wall, cut from a cheap tabloid, *Tell the Truth, Stephen.*

When asked, on the Dick Cavett Show, what advice he had for young writers, Irwin Shaw said, *Tell the truth.*

I watched my son repeat to himself something I had said, again and again, until it became his, in his own voice.

I felt the sting, when a man I barely knew, said

that the word that came to mind, thinking of me,  
was *specious*, seemingly real, but not.

Another man said, *You're the most open person  
I've ever met, but you're open to all the wrong people.*

It pleases me to be called *genuine*, but when I was  
first living in the city, I imitated a colloquial manner  
I imagined to be more socially acceptable.

A famous comedian's wife said he had one persona on stage  
and one at home, until only the stage persona survived.

I've chosen to shed the hold of all personas.

I once practiced a kind of *instant intimacy*,  
adopting the characteristics of the one I was with  
so quickly it went unnoticed I was becoming like them.

I wrote a desired lover, *If I alone ghost the space  
between us, I will succeed only in vacating myself.*

I felt alone in love, I looked at who was sitting  
in my chair, there was no one there. Yet here I am.

I thought I was without reliable identity, unable to become  
anything other than a parody of others, a parody of myself.

All I have is the reality to become what I am. In the search  
for who I was, I stopped trying to find what that might be.  
Becoming like others, to become myself, held no more sway.

Inherent reality declares itself, and I see myself  
more true to myself than to any other.

I lose the addiction to persona, while continuing  
to practice it in the world of people, where persona  
is the way we communicate in this parody of reality.

I anchor myself in the unknowable present, and I see  
no persona. I see a state of being that fills them both.

My concern is to be present at the center of my reality,  
but this grand parody of reality is where we live,  
where I continue to live, learning to be true  
to what's present in myself.

There's no imitation that doesn't become a parody,  
even the truth of what's true is a parody, even in  
this spoken clarity, I become a parody of myself.

When I don't know what persona to show the world,  
I resort to being present without a way to be. This  
is the only way that works, that doesn't simulate  
my reality in the eyes of my own awareness.

I can be at ease without a thought and not adopt one  
to calm an errant anxiety. I'm at peace in my reality,  
but as soon as I speak, I begin to misrepresent myself.

I listen to find a way to speak that doesn't mimic who I am,  
it seems there's no way to prevent the unpreventable.

When I let reality speak through these clouds, this language,  
this man, I wake and walk amazed at this presence of being.

This is walking in the market, in all the ways one might be,  
replaced by neither knowledge nor faith.

This is living in the opulent emptiness of existence, without losing consciousness, this is living in the brilliance of constant wonder.

The being of the poet thrives in wide wonder, and that makes him the same, but not the same as, everyone who's ever been alive.

Philosophy is the love of knowledge, maybe especially the love of the unknown and the unknowable. These then are love poems.

## This Day on Earth

I think to describe the essence of being, the sublime transience of this moment on Earth, a day in the life of this existence.

A cardboard box leaves a shadow that makes its shadow a thing itself, as if wedged between the wall and the box.

Before I give the shadow a character it doesn't possess, like *quiet resignation, fear of the light, pride in the chiaroscuro of beauty-defining imagery*, I'm already in a state of recognition without a name.

I see the bare hillside, the horizon, the blue and white clouds, in all their color and line, without molding them into pets of thought and feeling, like putting a hat and coat on the dog and envy in the cat.

My mind, inclined to dress everything in self-serving imagery, is filled with awe to be in this simple, unclothed reality.

But how do I call myself a poet, if I have nothing to say about what I see, in language as familiar as colorful costumery?

I address the reality that's unrecognized by its own standards.  
I speak of the spirit in the room, that is no spirit, that has no spirit.  
I draw attention to the moment of existence that outperforms its players.

Actors are known by their dramatic example of the reality of the presence of being, that the audience is also a part of.  
All our senses come to this stage to witness what occurs.

On stage, it matters to make what occurs into what matters to all of us, but what makes us matter, is the very thing we transform ourselves into and out of.

We put ourselves in front of ourselves, so we might become what already exists inside our original reality, we come alive in front of each other to demonstrate the life we share.

I call attention to the sunlit surface of a chair, a cast shadow, its service as a resting place for the leg of a smooth-skinned visitor.

Or it has no calling and no career, and we see its presence with empty eyes, to be filled with what is and not with what we want it to be, for our temporal satisfaction.

The reality of what is dislodges the mind of its inherent disturbance, and there begins my work, to make something real of this unreality.

## In Rapt Attention

In rapt attention, an audience, watches an actor play King Lear on stage in front of them, and they see themselves in the old monarch's convection, burning up the space of his life.

A mirror is held up to a mirror, and the being of life crackles with presence in the moment. *Something of nothing* is made real, inside the space that only seems real.

There's no way to describe this *being*, after it's been clothed in mind and feeling and body, after it's been animated by some innate desire to become an action.

An actor trusts the audience to see what becomes of his acting, in the energy of the stillness of beauty, in the truth of silent words in the wind.

## Love's Errant Quest

An old lover stopped by, and I saw something that revealed a change in this translucent reality. She and I haven't been together for years. Over that time, I've struggled with the thought of her, as if there was a question left unanswered, whether to rejoin the relationship or resolve it, somehow, with understanding.

The time that she and I were together was good, so I continued to desire it, after it ended. I couldn't distinguish the desire from the companionship. And another sense confused my thinking. I'd been led to believe, as an act of faith, like an act of certainty, that I was not whole without a woman.

I was convinced that finding a woman to mate with was the answer to something missing. *You need a woman to take care of you*, I heard. I rejected the need to be cared for, but I accepted the archetype.

With any woman, in the temporary intimacy, in committed relationships, or walking down the street, I sought to resolve an imposed dilemma. I suffered from the questioning, unanswered in the world, and unasked by my inherent self, until the question of missing love was relieved.

I suspect others have felt the assault of my desire to find the answer to the question I was taught to ask, *Are you the one I need to be with to satisfy my need to be with someone?* But there is a deeper reality that cannot be found by seeking. There is no soul-mate for the unbroken soul, no two halves made whole, for the whole being.

What I newly felt with my old partner was the absence of any search, accentuated by its recognition. I saw there was nothing missing in my heart. When no one is missing, no one needs to be found. This may come as a relief to those whose faces I have long searched to discover my lost love, who's nowhere to be found, because she's nowhere to have been lost.

## The Quiet Death of the Sun

I believe in the essence of poetry, and I believe in myself as a poet, like those who believe in themselves as homosexual, despite the denigration, the dismissal, and the murder of such people, that cuts deep in the heart of their innocence.

But the greatest challenge to self-acceptance isn't rejection. I've never been called a scourge or an abomination, but I have experienced grudging, smiling tolerance, ignorant ridicule, and overzealous appreciation.

Few poets have been beaten or killed for being a poet. There's often a political or sexual reason to kill a poet, but the course is set for anyone who's thought to be different, no matter their gift or character.

Poetry is often like a beloved old horse that no one dare kill and no one dare ride. Poetry is kept in a stable of thought, without exercise and feeding, left to fend for itself, as if this disregard nobilifies the profession. I have seen self-effacing poets apologize for imposing their poetry on the audience.

In a hotbed of poets, after years of giving and attending readings, I noticed nearly the same crowd at every reading, of poets and their admirers, like cells of communists and their sympathizers.

The poets, who seemed to be hiding in plain view from the authorities and the public, were thought of as peculiar or odd, self-involved or useless, suspicious, somehow un-American, perhaps even criminal.

Picked up for sleeping in a doorway, I told a cop I thought poets and criminals had a lot in common. Surprised, he said, *Well, I never heard that one before.* A man told a woman I found attractive, *Don't get involved with a poet. Never marry a poet.* Another man said, *Poets are vampires who steal love from everyone around them.*

There was a time when this casual calumny didn't occur. Homer was beloved for telling the life of the people. Byron was an idol, whose poems sold out every printing. Shakespeare wrote when poetry was the common speech of the people's theatre.

Poetry can still be counted on to dignify a politician's speech, but something has happened since poetry was last embraced by all. This change has occurred in the way language has submitted itself to mass communication.

Someone said, *Poetry uses the same language I use, but I don't get it,* as if poetry were a conspiracy to exclude the rest of humanity.

Since language has been made subservient to the commercial world, we have imposed a commercial ethic on the essential. Poetry is the language we've lost the ability to speak, but poetry is a language more easily recalled than our social language was first acquired.

Poetry belongs to our tongues and our hearts, not to the busy babel of our marketed minds. Poetry is open-heart surgery, performed beside the road, and a poet is often the only care available when the catastrophe occurs.

Court jesters were poets, sometimes the only ones to speak out, when the king raised his sword to strike down the innocent.

Poets go to the border between where we live and the terrible unknown, and they come back with a kind of assurance, as cold as outer space, as warm as the inside of the sun.

## We Honor Ourselves At War

We honor those who return from war, who survive the killing fields. We don't ask them about the dead or the manufacture of death. Instead, we honor them for the sake of our honored selves. We ask them to do these things for us, and we honor ourselves in honoring our warriors.

I have no compunction in defense of my life, but I shun the honor of it, as many soldiers shun the honor of their experience, gained in defense of their fellow soldiers, rarely in defense of an ideal or a government. War is a man-made hell, we elevate its participants to heroism, we make the preparation for war a necessity, at the cost of nearly everything else.

We know that war requires its contributors to forsake forgiveness, kindness, and the reluctance to kill and destroy, to not only enter hell, but to become its legions. Then we praise these, our legions, for their successes and their failures, and we continue to perpetuate this manufactured hell on earth.

When those we send to hell return to the shelter of our guarded lives, we thank them for protecting us, but not when they bring the war home. We prefer they hide their wounded and callused hearts in plain sight. We love our wars, we love our warriors, and we love our own hardened hearts. We love our ability to take others lives, and we accept the death of those we fear.

We quietly cherish our acceptance of the awful residue of war, its slaughter, destruction, and dislocation. These signs, of the damage and the death we fear, become signs of our triumphant survival. The death we will, by our willingness to go to war, becomes the sign of the strength of our belief in ourselves.

We love what we do, to protect ourselves from others. We send others to keep war as distant from us as possible, so that death is not our neighbor. And when they return to us, with death in their lungs, we honor them for our freedom from the very thing we fear might reach us. Yet we dream of breathing the same fatal air, so we might honor ourselves, in our own warring hearts, twice over, twice removed.

## Down These Narrow Streets

She is the talisman of my being alive, the one I seek,  
when she's intent on seeking herself. She doesn't  
seek herself to be rid of me. I choose my plight.

Poets, in earlier times, composed love poems to women they  
would never be with, so they might stay in the love they knew.  
The object of their love remained forever at a distance.

Their joy remained unchanged, never gained, never held,  
never lost. When I told her I was more alive in knowing her,  
we both knew it was a subtle deception. In the stillness  
of being, we find the joy in our hearts is the same joy  
we experience in the other's name.

How dare we be in love without the other, with no object  
for our loving hearts? Are we afraid to disappear in love,  
with no lover to claim our love for themselves?

What poet, walking the narrow street, spying his inamorata,  
thinks to himself, *Who am I fooling? What love do I speak,  
when my love stays away from me, when she never comes  
to me, when she leaves me alone with my words?*

We're bound by this human habit, to believe the feeling that we  
love in ourselves is best savored in separation. We love others,  
and we abandon ourselves, to stay in a variation of love itself.

When I transform my love to a distance, my love transforms me  
to acting a lover. I look across the street, I run toward her,  
to leave myself, to come home to myself. This is another  
counterfeit of love itself.

## Fearless Emily

I look on this bed of flowers, that gets up and walks around,  
that arranges itself in bouquets and bunches, a single rose,  
a spray, a display, that comes to life and grows and dies.

In this coming together and going apart, we bloom in our own sight.  
I live among these flowers. I inhale their fragrance. I enjoy their beauty,  
I live my life among their lives. We are the garden.

When I first read Emily Dickinson's poetry, I wanted to hear her  
speak of her life in Amherst, a hundred years before I was born,  
to hear some anecdote, a tidbit, or gentle narrative to help me.

I wanted an introduction that would have us friends, so I could  
safely dive deep in her oceanic awareness. *Let's sit awhile  
on the shore, before we drop off the continental shelf,  
risking our lives without regard for our safety.*

I got nothing to ease the leap into fearless abandon,  
but I found I didn't need to be eased into the water,

I was able to swim out to sea in her words. I became  
grateful to her for showing the way and walking away.

If I met her first in biography, I might've been less free  
to find myself in the freedom of her words.

## The Play Within the Play

Two old friends sit together on the ground. Lear says, *We have nothing*. Gloucester replies, *I know*. They look in each other's eyes and laugh.

The old king's need for praise dooms him and all he loves. The first chance others get to show how much they despise his greed, they take it. His life, after he forsakes his power, is a rapid decline to destruction.

He pulls his beard and throws his arms around his fool, who tells him the truth, even as the king tells himself wise words, but wisdom is no sure stave against folly.

On the beach at Dover, waiting for his honest daughter, Lear sits with his blind friend, two old men in the sand, alone with each other, torn from their wealth and power.

In that bereft circumstance, they know a moment of peace inside the place of innocent wonder, but the moment passes, and tragedy rages on.

In the rage of kings, in the wars and intrigues of palaces, in the gain and keep of wealth and power, wisdom knows what's missing. Wisdom revels in its insight, but nothing makes wisdom real, until all its foils are lost in the wind.

In the age of wisdom we have yet to witness, the wise not only know our better reality, they and we have the courage to live it. In the meanwhile, the rich language of wisdom will do to be our sufficiency. It touches the hearts of the foolish, in moments of rage and sorrow, in the unwise play of our lives. We look upon this empty strand, where any who claim it, are king. To be king is the end of pretending to the crown.

## The Paralysis of Place

The wife of a poet, a poet herself, has had a stroke. She's learning to speak a new way. This once articulate lover of language finds herself sounding drunk, dragging, blurring, slurring the tracks her tongue tries to make, like garbled, cherished music.

The two are driving to the coast, on break from the university where they teach. He hopes for a chance to do some writing, out from under the weight of their work. *And the paralysis of place*, she adds, pointing to the campus.

In the movies, the heroes are young. They fly through their scenes with speed and grace, even after being beaten, shot, and drugged. But what of the heroism that sees its path winding, miles ahead, and can barely take a normal step?

Buried alive, our hero fingers a spoon and gradually shifts the ground from front to back, moving closer and closer to the light. All the while, learning the nature of the earth she once noticed in a far different way, until she surfaces from her dark clime, into a world lighter than ever before.

She stops and smells the roots of roses, like learning an unknown language from one's parents, shortly after being born. The light comes brighter, upon each emerging word, as in her mind, she lives her passage from the womb of unbroken silence into the noisy, hurtful, brilliant dawn.

## Instructions to the Wild

One's own death is like the loss of a lover. We mourn our own passing.  
We cling to this love when there's no one to be lost in our dying.

Being itself is an endless delight, yet we turn away from it, as one who  
leaves loving behind, because he thinks he has better things to do.

We make less of ourselves, and go looking for love  
in things we cannot keep and those we cannot hold.

A prince goes out from his home, seeking salvation  
from his gilded imprisonment, until, in his contemplation,  
he asks himself, *Who is born a prince? Who seeks?*

There is, in awareness, a wilderness of wonder.  
It is the home I leave to go into rooms of thought.

I leave my nature, for a house-to-house search,  
looking for instruction to the wild I left behind.

## The Teaching of the Teachers

There are those who learn something of their reality, who run to teach it to the rest. Then they live in versions of themselves, adapted to the ears of their listeners.

A teacher calls his followers to their self-recognition. They reply, *What food should we eat? What prayers should we repeat? Whatever you say, we will do.*

*Be as you are*, he says, but they want to be what they hope he wants them to be. *Be as you are*, he says, and they lean in, to hear his direction for their lives.

Birds crisscross the sky, like ropes to tie cargo to a barge, but their wings enjoy the air, and the air enjoys their wings.

The teacher shrugs his shoulders and tells his followers to eat the foods that serve them best, to say the prayers they love the most.

*Be as you are*, he says, and they are as they have always been, slightly more at peace for his presence in the hearts of their minds.

## In the Rooms of the City

In the calm of daily breathing, I find my love, not where I thought it might appear. I was prepared to seek the arms of love in the rooms of the city. I only reluctantly suspended the search.

An ancient warrior wraps his belongings in a bundle and walks off into the wilderness to die alone, to make of himself the absence of a burden to his tribe, to make for himself an honorable demise.

I imagine the retreat into the stillness of being as a kind of demise, letting go a certain loyalty, to go where external purposes lose their use. But there's no greater purpose than discovery, to look where nothing is known by what it comes to be known.

Walking toward the open heart of eternity, I've hesitated, listening to hear a voice call me back to the city, where the approximation of love awaits, desired by lovers everywhere. Is there no one in my arms beside this breath of life? Is there no other who has let go of the love that wanton lovers desire?

Is there no one else here in my paradise? Or is this only the call that pulls me away from love itself, back toward its rivals, the suitors of my heart, distracting me from my truest love? Are these the dancing girls of the Buddha, come to my dreams to occupy my naked advantage?

## She Lifts All Children

A grandmother walks to her waiting grandchild,  
with the practiced gait of her own children's care.  
When being a mother is no longer her possibility,  
she lifts all children in her mothering arms.

Another mother cries, when her small boy tells her  
she can no longer touch his privates. His proclamation  
of privacy is an intrusion on the private world she's  
held dear since before he was born.

I cannot hold those I hold dear. There is an airy bridge  
between us, where once the flow it spans was our play.  
The honor we grant others is the honor we grant ourselves.

As an energetic lover, I gleefully broke the bonds of separation.  
Love's expression became a rite of celebration, in honor of  
the personal freedom I sought and fought for with gusto.  
I was ungentle in my embraces. I cared to break  
what held me. I cared for carelessness.

Those who fight for freedom often don't know what to do with  
their captured bounty. The more I surrender, the more I succeed  
at unity. This river is a delta no bridge can span, but a boat's  
a bridge that becomes one with the water it crosses.  
I contain myself in surrender to the flow of rivulet,  
stream, river, flood, and torrent.

## In Gestures Barely Born

I passed a large and homely woman in the crowded aisle.  
I smiled, and in that moment, I knew my smile was familiar to her.  
It was the smile that seeks to counter the indignity of physical reality.  
Her look met mine in the weary melancholy neither intended to reveal.

The snow sits on the hills, past the first day of spring. This winter's  
been long and slow. In this slowness lies the secret self of the soul.

I walk by the same dog every day. He paces in a yard I pass.  
He barks when he sees me and turns his head to the house.  
He barks and turns to the field across the road. He stops  
barking as I cross in front of him, looking and not looking.

In this café, I listen to the silent words of look and feel,  
the undertone of our babel. I went a movie with my friend.  
I touched her arm as we walked. We are a concise eloquence  
in gestures barely born.

## In My Mirror

In my mirror, some shape appears and I give it a name. In my voice, I'm practical, philosophical and poetic. In my presence, I'm thick and large. In my mind, I'm thoughtful and emotional.

These images appear in sight, but my eyes are empty, until I accept images that sustain substance, enough for me to believe in them.

When I honor the consistency of my images, I become attached to my need for them. Mama comes in the room, papa comes in the door, and it becomes the consistency of our days.

When some of us lose the attachment to consistent thought, we think they go mad. What madness is this mind, fixed to the familiar, that, on losing familiarity, loses its moorings?

What moorings are these, that attach to the water, the air, and the shifting sands of the quaking earth?

## A Resident of Timelessness

We're alike if not identical. Yet we seldom reveal what we know, despite having no reason for secrecy, except the keeping of power and control.

If we speak of what occurs in the reality of awareness, it is merely the sight of the present as it comes into being. One may be a resident of timelessness, who looks around and tells what he or she sees.

## I Weigh the Weightless Wind

A woman walks to a table with a dog. The dog is attentive and obedient. The woman yanks on the leash. She jams her fists in the hind quarters of the dog, to get him to obey. She stomps the floor, to make it stay beneath her feet. She widens her eyes to force her failing sight to see.

I turn and read stories by a woman I've just met. I read to see if I need to be in love with her. The weight of needing to love what I might love, weighs on me. The weight of loving what I already love, weighs on me.

I weigh my love. I weigh my love, as a storm tracker weighs his life, as if love were the most feared force in nature, as if nature were a willful force, bent on raging, with no care for the lives it takes.

As if good rain nourishes, and bad rain drowns, as if good wind clears the air, and bad wind destroys, and they are the same wind.

Love is more to be feared, if fear is one's way of tracking love. Love looks across a sea of faces and finds its way among them. I'm at its mercy. Love is ruthless, constant, and unrelenting.

I'm relieved when the storm of love passes. She writes of the way love sorts her feelings among her lovers, never as she imagines, always as it is.

## A Poet in the City

As a poet in the city, I felt like the luckiest man alive. My life was a love affair with the changing moment. Everything was a blessing. Life was celebration.

When I thought, *I am a poet*, the words disappeared, without name or occupation, as if *I am a poet* was read backwards, from *a poet* to *I am* to silence in stillness.

I didn't articulate the feeling of such an encompassing reality. I was young and invulnerable, with the luxury of unlimited time. Despite its envelopment, I couldn't find my sense in the world. The forms of life contradicted my life as a poet.

There was no official position, no profession, for simple being. There was no priesthood for unscriptured existence. After years in the dilemma of my choices, I met a teacher of bare awareness. The presence of such a one presented a parallel to the priory I might have imagined among the poets, but my soul sought no masters.

Existence takes form in me, as I take form in my poetry, but existence doesn't need take form in me, and I don't need to call myself anything for my existence to be true.

My life is not about love or silence, stillness or spirit. It is, and everything else. Poets, in their mystical and mundane desires, describe a dream of the real.

The one who was the closest I've known to being a master of this life, said to keep trying to describe the indescribable, even though no one has ever been able to do it. That is the perfect nakedness for a naked man, who's still alive, who used to be a poet.

## Pretty As She Once Was

Pepper burns my throat in the not quite chai of the American café.  
I sit in sight of people, cars, a train, and trucks on the freeway.

Three middle-aged women hold their cups, one of them  
as pretty as she once was. Most of us live past ourselves.

Children look at a picture of old people, to find the face of their  
aged self, a game they play, in their hope to live to a ripe old age.

They look to see what they'll turn out to be. They seem  
curiously eager to grow old. Of course, this rarely happens.

We live as if our youth is the standard from which we  
slip away. Time ruins the image we have of ourselves.

We're born and we run to the shore of our crossing.  
We spend our lives nearly drowning in deep water, living in  
memory of the water's edge, the past of our setting to sea.

But this water is fathomless and un-crossable. There's no salvation,  
except in our capacity to swim, to float, to dive, to loll in its embrace.

And yet we long for what we've lost, as if this sea where we live is not  
our home. As if we belong ashore, tan and timid, reluctant on a blanket,  
bathing ourselves in oil, mocking those who put their feet in the water.

Yes, the water wrinkles the skin, and the shallow dream of youth fades.  
The oldest woman of the three, in whom no sign of youth remains, what does  
she know of this ocean, with its cars and trucks and thin water like air?  
Her eyes see like the sonar of a whale. No distance keeps her. She lives  
where the seven seas are as familiar as anyone else's patch of sand.

## Our Words in the World

How do we stop thinking the way we've always thought? Can we let the reality of our existence do the thinking for us, not in the distracting voices of gods? How do we let that brilliance fill out the dark passages of our habits?

What if one who hears his own voice as the voice of reality spoke in the voice of his origin? Habits are changed by their changing. The millionth monkey begins the day living a new way. His generations have been living their legacy. Their habits continue, monkeys need to eat. They need to get along with the other monkeys.

The habits of survival are ingrained in the habits of community, even when it denigrates our inherent reality. Then one day the millionth monkey picks up a thought and makes it an expression of his being. There are no monkeys in my vicinity, probably none in yours. I am human, I live among humans.

Standing by a lake, I began to speak a new language, and I was dissolved in a loss of definition. I stopped talking, in that new way, as soon as I started. I returned to my customary tongue and continued, at ease again in the familiar. I sought to incorporate the awareness of the unpracticed tongue, in a language more deeply familiar than my habitual language, as if I was suddenly speaking in Latin or Sanskrit or Bantu, but I was only walking with others on a path.

I met a man who spoke, not as one human to other humans, but as being speaking to being. I saw love, pouring out toward itself. My heart was broken open, yet I strike up an easy conversation with a biker in the ordinary café. Our minds engage, while the dust of our being blows free. Everyone's voice is born from the emptiness of our eternity into words that live in the world.

## The Empty Sky

Whoever contemplates reality, with no god in his prayers, is seen as praying to himself. Whoever prays to a god that's been given a name, is seen as selfless. Whoever lives in the name of god is thought pious. Whoever lives in devotion to nameless being is seen staring blindly into an empty sky.

We live in a place of names and things. We expect our prayers to be as heavily populated, when no prayer worth praying is thick and busy. The will of prayer is to be clear, until prayer is open, with no shape to it.

A drunk begs from a man passing through. The drunk, his haunted eyes cloudy with thwarted purpose, doesn't look the man in the eye, until he gives him a few dollars. The truth of pain surfaces in the embrace of any pain, however brief the pain, however brief the embrace. Sadness and sorrow are the welcome remainders of a peaceful being. Joy grieves its own pain best.

A destitute man sits stranded among those who travel in their wealth. I've lived among the forlorn, in the mistaken identity of my own fears and desires. A physician may seek the health in a diseased body. He may quietly speak the language of healing, even when disease and cancers are the loudest language of the body. I once matched my sorrow to those in pain. I prepared for life among the desolate and deserted.

I don't need to look away from the face of my past. I thought homelessness was the honest reality of my heart. I moved into the hotel of ordinary grief. I took it for home, but I couldn't make it my home. I carried my home within me, on the dark streets of pain and separation. Looking for reunion in the eyes of those who feel separate, is futile. To be at peace is not desertion of the deserted, but assurance in the common moment. I look to see the unremembered reality in myself.

## A Child Openly Loved

A child who is openly loved may grow old with no interest in self-recognition. He may feel no need to find the reality that informs his life. He may not imagine why anyone would. Whoever is lost or loses his advantage in love, may find the well within. But love given late cannot fill, without constant refilling, the well of love not known.

Whoever drinks from the wellspring, with no need to dig deep, may never find the source of what seems missing in others. He may think such an absence is chosen. He may blame those who don't get his given, if he never misses what seems so easily found. To live with the belief in a caring, nurturing god is a rewarding life, deprived of its profound reality.

The deepest love between us can fulfill our needs and miss the fount it emulates. When we dig deep, we set our spirit free from its gain, and its loss, and the name of its appearance. The deepest love is alive and well and living within us.

## The Jump in the Belly

I hear my familiar voice in the company of others, but there is a more resonant tone I rarely hear. It's easier to perform the words of my thoughts, but the words of my reality are slow to the stage.

I listen to hear the voice of my deepest reality. On stage, it subtly speaks. Off stage, it silence speaks. A still, small voice, we say, to describe this silent tongue, but it has no qualities. As soon as I give it qualities, I begin to lose touch with its reality. I sing the small voice, but it resists my fervor, remaining still within me. The jump in the belly is a sign of the presence of the voice of reality that knows no performance.

## The Sense of the Poet

The sense of the poet is the voice of reality, filtered through the life of whoever speaks it. It's not the character of any one person. We limit its appearance in how we perceive it. The sense of the poet is where being informs what the poet speaks.

One assumes the poet speaks in ornate language, that the poet is a sensitive soul, given to paroxysms of emotion and sensation, that the poet is the teller of the finer feelings of the human heart. One assumes the poet disavows the rational, that the poet's feelings are too keenly felt to appear as reason.

One assumes the attentions of the poet are on the subtly intense and the intricacies of beauty, delicately nuanced and passionately enjoyed. One wants to put the poet in a jeweled box, kept aside and available to a few. But the poet knows his essence is the being within being, that there's no limitation on the reach of the essential.

What marks the poet's sense is the acceptance of the presence that denies no one, even those who deny its expression. The poet is the assassin of separation. The poet carries courage into no difference between sense and reason, between the rational and rhapsody. The sense of the poet is the blade of the surgeon that frees the heart to its insurgency, the sense of the poet is the mutiny against the dimming of the light of everyone's original reality.