

THE LUMINOUS SEAM : POETRY AS A STITCH BETWEEN WORLDS

Mary Ellen Lough, Haden, February 2024

Our life is a faint tracing on the surface of mystery. . .

- Annie Dillard

Does your prayer have roots?

Does your story have fur?

Does your metaphor have an ecosystem?

Is your philosophy edible?

What does your God smell like?

- Sophie Strand

SOMETIMES WRITING

- Pat Schneider

Sometimes writing sits in you
like a wild animal. Maybe
you see its eyes.
Maybe you don't see it at all,
but the hair on the back of your neck
knows it is there
where the deepest shadows lie.
Often the shadows lie
about what's hiding in them
The panther that has stalked you
since you were a child
is old now. No longer wild,
and tired of guarding the treasure
you yourself left behind-
blind and deaf she will give it all to you
if you just let her go.
But how are you to know
whether the fox on the hill
in the cemetery carries your mother's name
or is the same fox you saw
crossing your back yard in the snow
unless you put your pen to paper
and use it to release the animal
that hides in the shadow of your hand?

A mysterious quickening inhabits the depths of any good poem—protean, elusive, alive in its own right. The word “creative” shares its etymology with the word “creature,” and carries a similar sense of breathing aliveness, of an active, fine-grained, and multicellular making. What is creative is rooted in growth and rising, in the bringing into existence of new and autonomous being. We feel something stir, shiver, swim its way into the world when a good poem opens its eyes.

- Excerpts, Jane Hirshfield, 10 Windows

The main interest of my work is not concerned with the treatment of neuroses but rather with the approach to the numinous. But the fact that the approach to the numinous is the real therapy, and inasmuch as you attain to the numinous experience you are released from the curse of pathology. Even the very disease takes on a numinous character.

- Carl Jung

Until you make the unconscious conscious, it will direct your life and you will call it fate.

- Carl Jung

When the inner and the outer are wedded, revelation occurs.

- Hildegard of Bingen

...the actual task is to integrate the two threads of one's life...the within and the without.

- Pierre Teilhard de Chardin

any open

 space may be
 a threshold, an arch
of entering and leaving.
 Crossing a field, wading
 through nothing
 but timothy grass,
imagine yourself passing from
 and into. Passing through
 doorway after
 doorway after doorway.

(From : Threshold, by Maggie Smith)

A threshold is a place or moment where transformational work, learning or integration occurs. A gate is a place of initiation or entryway; it is the protecting and testing that must occur before entry is permitted.

- Angeles Arrian

The threshold is the limit, the boundary, the frontier that distinguishes and opposes two worlds – and at the same time, is the paradoxical place where those worlds communicate, where passage from the profane to the sacred world becomes possible.

- Mircea Eliade

I think that we're beginning to remember that the first poets didn't come out of a classroom, that poetry began when somebody walked off of a savanna or out of a cave and looked up at the sky with wonder and said, "Ahhh." That was the first poem.

- Lucille Clifton

Sometimes you hear a voice through
the door calling you, as fish out of
water hear the waves or a hunting
falcon hears the drum's come back.

- Rumi

Hidden Self

- Rumi

You are sitting here with us,
but you are also out walking in a field at dawn.

You are yourself the animal we hunt
when you come with us on the hunt.

You are in your body
like a plant is solid in the ground,
yet you are wind.

You are the diver's clothes

lying empty on the beach.
You are the fish.

In the ocean are many bright strands
and many dark strands like veins that are seen
when a wing is lifted up.

Your hidden self is blood in those,
those veins that are lute strings
that make ocean music,
not the sad edge of surf,
but the sound of no shore.

The Fish

- Jane Hirshfield

There is a fish
that stitches
the inner water
and the outer water together.

Bastes them
with its gold body's flowing.

A heavy thread
follows that transparent river,
secures it—
the broad world we make daily,
daily give ourselves to.

Neither imagined
nor unimagined,
neither winged nor finned,
we walk the luminous seam.
Knot it.
Flow back into the open gills.

These Days

- Charles Olson

whatever you have to say, leave
the roots on, let them
dangle

And the dirt

Just to make clear
where they come from

"Along with the Moths Tonight"

IMANTS ZIEDONIS

From EPIPHANIES

Translated by Bitite Vinklers

Along with the moths tonight, love runs into the windowpane.

("Turn off the light or we'll have no peace.")

No, not love, a mere inkling; love itself is beyond reach. Far away, deep in the river fish
lie

sleeping tonight. Across the river the waves run the opposite way.

We are far from each other. Like north and south branches of a birch. What wind must
come to bring us together?

We are the doors at the opposite ends of a barn. And through the barn a draft courses.

Love lies unreachable beneath your house. To reach it, the whole house must be razed.

Will you leave this to others or do it yourself?

It seemed simple: along with the moths, love at the window. Simple and near. As if we
were birds and sang in the treetops.

But love is in roots, and deep in the river where fish lie sleeping.

Like an inkling a petal flies past.

King of the River

- Stanley Kunitz

If the water were clear enough,
if the water were still,
but the water is not clear,
the water is not still,
you would see yourself,
slipped out of your skin,
nosing upstream,
slapping, thrashing,
tumbling
over the rocks
till you paint them
with your belly's blood:
Finned Ego,
yard of muscle that coils,
uncoils.

If the knowledge were given you,
but it is not given,
for the membrane is clouded
with self-deceptions
and the iridescent image swims
through a mirror that flows,
you would surprise yourself
in that other flesh
heavy with milt,
bruised, battering toward the dam
that lips the orgiastic pool.
Come. Bathe in these waters.
Increase and die.

If the power were granted you
to break out of your cells,
but the imagination fails
and the doors of the senses close
on the child within,
you would dare to be changed,
as you are changing now,

into the shape you dread
beyond the merely human.
A dry fire eats you.
Fat drips from your bones.
The flutes of your gills discolor.
You have become a ship for parasites.
The great clock of your life
is slowing down,
and the small clocks run wild.
For this you were born.
You have cried to the wind
and heard the wind's reply:
"I did not choose the way,
the way chose me."
You have tasted the fire on your tongue
till it is swollen black
with a prophetic joy:
"Burn with me!
The only music is time,
the only dance is love."

If the heart were pure enough,
but it is not pure,
you would admit
that nothing compels you
any more, nothing
at all abides,
but nostalgia and desire,
the two-way ladder
between heaven and hell.
On the threshold
of the last mystery,
at the brute absolute hour,
you have looked into the eyes
of your creature self,
which are glazed with madness,
and you say
he is not broken but endures,
limber and firm
in the state of his shining,

forever inheriting his salt kingdom,
from which he is banished
forever.

The Fish

- Elizabeth Bishop

I caught a tremendous fish
and held him beside the boat
half out of water, with my hook
fast in a corner of his mouth.
He didn't fight.
He hadn't fought at all.
He hung a grunting weight,
battered and venerable
and homely. Here and there
his brown skin hung in strips
like ancient wallpaper,
and its pattern of darker brown
was like wallpaper:
shapes like full-blown roses
stained and lost through age.
He was speckled with barnacles,
fine rosettes of lime,
and infested
with tiny white sea-lice,
and underneath two or three
rags of green weed hung down.
While his gills were breathing in
the terrible oxygen
—the frightening gills,
fresh and crisp with blood,
that can cut so badly—
I thought of the coarse white flesh
packed in like feathers,
the big bones and the little bones,
the dramatic reds and blacks
of his shiny entrails,

and the pink swim-bladder
like a big peony.
I looked into his eyes
which were far larger than mine
but shallower, and yellowed,
the irises backed and packed
with tarnished tinfoil
seen through the lenses
of old scratched isinglass.
They shifted a little, but not
to return my stare.
—It was more like the tipping
of an object toward the light.
I admired his sullen face,
the mechanism of his jaw,
and then I saw
that from his lower lip
—if you could call it a lip
grim, wet, and weaponlike,
hung five old pieces of fish-line,
or four and a wire leader
with the swivel still attached,
with all their five big hooks
grown firmly in his mouth.
A green line, frayed at the end
where he broke it, two heavier lines,
and a fine black thread
still crimped from the strain and snap
when it broke and he got away.
Like medals with their ribbons
frayed and wavering,
a five-haired beard of wisdom
trailing from his aching jaw.
I stared and stared
and victory filled up
the little rented boat,
from the pool of bilge
where oil had spread a rainbow
around the rusted engine
to the bailer rusted orange,

the sun-cracked thwarts,
the oarlocks on their strings,
the gunnels—until everything
was rainbow, rainbow, rainbow!
And I let the fish go.

Interview with Li-Young Lee :

LYL : I mean, I don't know if the writer of the Bhagavad Gita is sitting on the other side of eternity going, "But I wrote that." I don't know. I'm assuming that that consciousness is gone. The consciousness came through him or her. The person is just the vessel. Totally disposable.

Interviewer : If the person is a vessel then what would poetry be?

LYL : The mind of God. I think poetry is the mind of God. All the great poems that I love seem to me to all have that little ingredient. You feel like you're in the presence of the mind of God. You can't even account for the level of wisdom in certain poems. Take Rilke, I mean, you can't just live and come to the conclusions he came to. I think his mission was to learn to get out of the way so that something bigger could speak through him.

Emily Dickinson, my God, she's full of the mind of God. You can just feel God shining through those poems, darkly. So it was her, but it wasn't. It's unaccountable. In other words, if you wanted to be Emily Dickinson you couldn't just have been born on the East coast done the things she did. That wouldn't guarantee that you could write anything. There's something unaccountable that happened to her.

And it's that unaccountable thing that I love.