Thanks for Noticing

The Interpretation of Desire

Preface

Nam castum esse decet pium poetam
ipsum, versiculos nihil necesse est.
It suits the dutiful poet to be chaste himself;
his verses don't need to be that way at all.
—Catullus 16

IN THE tradition of Shakespeare's 154 sonnets, these poems explore fleshy and spiritual meanings of love and art. Shakespeare's sonnets are of uneven quality, and many of mine fail; but Shakespeare's infatuations and obsessions with a beautiful young man and a mysterious dark lady enlarge us even in his lesser sonnets; just so, my inferior efforts may have some worth.

I have reworked nine sonnets from the seventy in my 1992 collection, *Love Without Desire: Sonnets About Loving Men*. That book explored a theme central to Buddhism: non-attachment. This new book moves toward a Sufi appreciation of appetite, suggested by Ibn Arabi's *Tarjumān al-Ashwāq* (*The Interpreter of Desires).* Arabi was inspired by Nizam, Dante by Beatrice, and Shakespeare, often in a troubled way, by his young friend.

This book's title, *Thanks for Noticing*, suggests the importance of the attention we give each other. The phrase

comes from the sonnet to a friend who asked to sleep with me as a way of working through his heterosexism. ("Sleeping" sometimes means sex, so it may be necessary here to say the request was literal, not euphemistic; until recently, men often slept with men with no thought of sexual behavior.) He had never slept with a guy and was used to his girlfriend in bed with him. He noticed some differences.

Like Coleridge at 17, I was intrigued by the difficulty of the sonnet form. As an undergraduate, I studied with US Poet Laureate Karl Shapiro, and as a doctoral student with the preeminent historian of religions, Mircea Eliade.

In the decades since, my praying has become hundreds of sonnets; this collection is a "medicine bundle" of some of them, and the following INTRODUCTION helps to unwrap them. The sonnet sometimes maneuvers its message in three phases: first naming a concern (the octave), then an insight on the concern (the first four lines of the sestet), then a resolution (the concluding couplet).

In some cases these phases resemble a three-part version of a "hero's journey" theorized by Joseph Campbell, with whom I have had several conversations. These phases can be described as separation, initiation, and reincorporation, based on a "coming of age" pattern described by anthropologist Arnold van Gennep. In the lyric sonnet, the journey is spiritual, not literally geographic. Separation from one's ordinary routine or environment may be by decision or unintentional. The initiation may be an illuminating trial; through suffering one may gain deeper understanding of others and of oneself. Such wisdom may lead to compassion. The reincorporation, the return, from the inner personal experience to the community of which one is a part, is essential to the completion of the journey. In a sense, offering these sonnets, many of which are now humiliating, completes the journey.

What I mean is that too many of these sonnets recount infatuation, limerence, and other forms of indiscretion. As Shakespeare wrote (Sonnet 72), "For I am shamed by that which I bring forth . . . ." I would like to present myself as sober and judicious; but if I have attained any hint of maturity, it is only by working through such embarrassing and petty episodes. Even if I forgive him, I may not like the fool who wrote some of these poems, but at least he is somewhat honest, and noticing bits of the jerk's journey may help others. In sin and sanctity, this book is a confession of my inadequate love of God.

I hope the sonnets speak for themselves. But how to hear them? The INTRODUCTION provides two clues. The first section, § DESIRE, introduces how I think about the spiritual meaning of sexual yearning. The second section is a short course on how § THE SONNET works, in history and in form.

Clues for individual sonnets may include an epigraph to suggest a complementary or ironic context, and notes and glosses at the bottom of the page may help with unusual words and sometimes comment on the verse structure. Just as the printed score is not music but rather a direction to produce the composer's ideas, so poems, and especially sonnets, are meant to be read aloud. It is not the image on the page so much as the melody in the ear that makes the sensible sonnet sound its truth.

Vern Barnet
Kansas City, MO, 2015 April 25,
between
the 450th anniversary of Shakespeare's baptism (1564 April 26)
and the 400th anniversary of his death (1616 April 23).

The epigraph beginning this FOREWORD is from Catullus 16, sometimes called the most obscene poem ever written. Above I translated lines 5 and 6. You can do, or find, the rest. Here is the full 14-line poem:

Pedicabo ego uos et irrumabo,
Aureli pathice et cinaede Furi,
qui me ex uersiculis meis putastis,
quod sunt molliculi, parum pudicum.
Nam castum esse decet pium poetam
ipsum, uersiculos nihil necesse est;
qui tum denique habent salem ac leporem,
si sunt molliculi ac parum pudici,
et quod pruriat incitare possunt,
non dico pueris, sed his pilosis
qui duros nequeunt mouere lumbos.
Uos, quod milia multa basiorum
legistis, male me marem putatis?
pedicabo ego uos et irrumabo.

And from the opening of *Gargantua and Pantagruel* by Rabelais:

Amis lecteurs, qui ce livre lisez,
Despouillez vous de toute affection;
Et, le lisant, ne vous scandalisez:
Il ne contient mal ne infection.
Dear readers, who read these pages,
Purge your prejudice
And then nothing will be outrageous:
Nothing's evil or contagious.

Thanks for Noticing

The Interpretation of Desire

Introduction

I used to be respectable and chaste and stable,
but who can stand in this strong wind
and remember those things?
—Rumi

Shakespeare's sonnets are not
just the easy love sentiments of
"Shall I compare thee to a summer's day."
Many of the poems are bleak cries of emotional torment
and spiritual exhaustion. They tell a story of the struggle
of love and forgiveness against anguish and despair.
It is this tragic portrait of human love
that makes the sonnets immortal.
—Bruce MacEvoy
—http://www.handprint.com/SC/SHK/sonnets.html

Invitation

¶ 1. THESE 154 sonnets present a diorama of desire. The number 154 deliberately invites comparison with Shakespeare's work: Most of Shakespeare's sonnets were addressed to a beautiful young man; others were written to a "dark lady." My sonnets present different faces of the Beloved, whether literal, metaphorical, mystical, or simply illusions of wishful thinking.

Shakespeare's sonnets are of uneven appeal, as you will find mine. As Martial wrote, *Sunt bona, sunt quaedam mediocria, sunt mala plura quae legis hic: aliter non fit . . . liber* — Some [poems] are good, some middling, plenty plain bad; there's no other way to make a book.

¶ 2. THE MASS.— Sonnets from over half a century and sundry situations — how might I arrange this selection? Because they derive from different friends, circumstances, and poetic exercises, a single story-line or chronology would be too contrived. The order of Shakespeare's sonnets is disputed. They do contain allusions to the Bible, creedal and theological disputes of his time, and liturgical (even Eucharistic) references, some of which could, if read uncharitably, border on blasphemy, not to mention his obscene puns, double entendres, and other forms of word-play. (Lynda Sexson in her 1982 *Ordinarily Sacred*, p112, observes that a "pun is a magical device for turning one thing into two, or three into one," which explains why Shakespeare employed paronomasia so frequently.) Some readers may infer narrative in individual sonnets and in the collection, but his and mine are lyrics, not narratives. This is art, not autobiography; poetry, not a profile; myth, not

memoir; more gizmo than *gesta*. I've altered biographical markers because I do not want to imply any suggestion of narrative advancement. The sonnets are numbered only for convenience. Indeed, what I'm writing nowadays is very different from this collection. Two sonnets, the first and the last, were written expressly for this book.

So rather than devise a "frame story" like the *Arabian Nights, Canterbury Tales,* or the *Vita nuova,* I tried grouping my sonnets according to a ritual formula. The Mass suggests different modes of attention, or, to use a mathematical metaphor from chaos theory: x-dimensional phase spaces with God as the Attractor, though I do not imply progressive spiritual attainment. Throughout history and in various churches and in musical settings from early Christianity to the present, elements of the Mass have been employed and arranged in different ways. I retain a common musical sequence even though some may find the sonnets in the CREDO section to be an interruption to the flow of the book; but I think the CREDO better prepares the reader for the "scandal" of the SANCTUS.

Here's how I adapt the Mass sequence. The INTROIT suggests some themes of the sonnets. The KYRIE asks for mercy. The GLORIA praises the gift of love; it is paced with six *troparia*, a term whose many meanings include "turn" or "things repeated in a certain manner"; the related term, *troubadour,* seems to be a later formation from the Greek root, perhaps also by phonological coincidence with an Arabic term from Al-Andalus. Leonard Bernstein used *tropes* in his *Mass.* My troparia could be understood as tangents. The CREDO group may seem more explicitly theological than some of the other sonnets. Like Bernstein, I include a CONFITEOR section which offers various moods of confession.

The SANCTUS gathers together most, but not all, of the explicit and sometimes graphic sexual sonnets. Whether the Beloved is man or woman — or God — is sometimes obvious, sometimes not. In Christ, St Paul says, there is neither male nor female (Galatians 3:28), paralleling the Buddha's comment in the Vimalakirti Sutra, "In all things, there is neither male nor female."

As a pastor in an age which secularizes everything, I certainly have heard accounts of sex I thought demonic, and the news is full of abhorrent stories. Sexuality used to violate another is a grievous and frequent sin, but sexual pleasure itself is no sin; it is a gift. These sonnets display floundering efforts to pry out this truth. As Sam Keen and many others have observed, "spirit and flesh are indivisible," and the degradation of one is the degradation of the other, and the hallowing of one is the hallowing of the other.

Thus with profound respect, I have employed religious terms and allusions from many traditions. What could be more graphic than the multiple forms of voluptuously explicit sexual play on the temples at Khajuraho? Who, afflicted by Western prudery, does not blush at the penetration so clearly indicated by Bernini's orgasmic *Ecstasy of Saint Teresa* in the Cornaro Chapel of Santa Maria della Vittoria in Rome? How can you read Holy Sonnet 14 by John Donne, Dean of St Paul's Cathedral in London, without gasping at his request that God become his rapist, or in his poem, "The Canonization," that for their love-making, he and his beloved should be regarded as saints? If you are challenged by comparing a penis to a minaret or a rectum to a cathedral nave, consider whether the Western tradition of "nasty parts" deserves your loyalty, or whether God made the body his temple for indwelling ("your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit" — 1 Corinthians 6:19). How can one view life whole, holistically, holy, if sex and spirituality are

separate realms? My aim, like mystics in many faiths, is to transform and refresh secular, sacred, and even vulgar language into the lexicon of holy love. Rumi says, "Blasphemy even may be wisdom in the Creator's sight."

The AGNUS DEI may be a somber chapter, often dealing with aging. The DISMISSAL presents concluding observations and wishes.

¶ 3. HOW do you read these sonnets? Some folks begin with the notes, to familiarize themselves with a sonnet's terms and allusions. Others want the sonnets to speak first. Still others have asked me to set the "stage" from which the voice of each sonnet projects. This § INTRODUCTION is the stage. The ‡ *Desire* section presents the characters, that is to say, how I think about sexual yearning and spiritual evolution. Then ‡ *The Sonnet* section shows the "props," a short course on how poetry works, in history and form.

Each sonnet is an episode unto itself. Their individual characters are more immediate than their order of appearance, though resonances among them reach beyond their scenes and chapters; and some, especially those in the SANCTUS, are valorized best within the context of the entire collection. The play is transformed into a liturgy, interpreting desire in error and in love.

As a prosimetrum, this book is not a quick read. I've suggested different paces on page 48, from three weeks to a year; a tip appears on page 50. The APPENDIX, pages 220-221, offers additional help on how to read a sonnet.

Desire

¶ 4. A MUSLIM *hadith* (authoritative tradition) gives these words to God: "I was a hidden treasure and I yearned to be known. Then I created creatures in order to be known by them." Perhaps we all have this same urge, to know and be known in our fullness. This yearning is fulfilled through love because what can be called God is present in each person; and when we *behold* another, our devotion simply takes over our bodies, and we are given a manifestation of the divine. The yearning we call love is thus God's way to be noticed.

Similarly, the Rig Veda 10.129:4 asserts that from *kama,* procreative desire, the One created consciousness and the cosmos, an idea resonating in the subsequent development of Hinduism and Buddhism, with a Taoist parallel. Parmenides 13 says *Eros* was the first god, and Hesiod's Theogony 116-138 portrays *Eros* as forming the world.

In his *Sonnets*, Shakespeare's desires are manifest and obscure, direct and ironic, often simultaneously. Some say he, deluded by his infatuation, was used; and, by excusing his friend's faults and mistreatment, he suffered from what codependency. Others see Shakespeare's with his generous imagination loving without "impediments" (Sonnet 116), assigning failures in the relationship to himself rather than blaming the beloved, with reality recognized only by Sonnet 126 and the relationship resolved. Largely unexplored is how Shakespeare's distorted perceptions of his "lovely boy" are like our self-deceptions in desiring God.

¶ 5. GOD.— If we translate Shakespeare's relationship to a theological context with God as the friend, and understand God not as a Supreme Being separate from the rest of real-

ity, but rather as all of Reality itself, then surely it makes little sense to waste time with the ugly and unproductive practice of blaming Reality for what cannot be otherwise. "God" and "god" are used in many ways, and in these sonnets a certain ambiguity is prized. For example, although many consider it blasphemous, it is not a new idea to say that humans create God; in the language of literary analysis, God is the "personification" of Reality, just as the Greek god Poseidon personifies the ocean and Ares war. The poetic isomorphism is the apostrophe, such as when Shelley calls out "O Wild West Wind, thou breath of Autumn's being . . . ." But rather than say God creates the world or humans create God, since humans are part of Reality, it may be better to talk of an ongoing co-creation.

Perhaps this is a hint of what the mystics of many faiths realized. The Iranian Yahya Suhrawardi (1155-1191), for example, perhaps like the English William Blake (1757–1827), seemed to teach that God-Reality could be created or refined by the power of Imagination, to *conceive* what does not yet exist. To make my theme explicit: *Desire is another word for Imagination.*

As a language with Indo-European roots, English structures our thinking about God into a noun, a Supreme *Being.* But other traditions understand Ultimate Reality more as an unfolding creative process or relationship. Evolutionary theologians discern God as energy acting in the minute "spin" of a quark, through atom, molecule, cell, organ, creature, and society, toward cosmic awareness. Under certain conditions matter arranges itself so as to replicate, from salt crystals to DNA to an exuberance of thirty million surviving species. A clump of matter can make a copy of itself from materials in the environment, and with increasing complexity of the clumps is the possibility not only of interaction with the environment but also of self-awareness, and

perhaps even a glimmer of understanding of this evolutionary Process itself.

But is this Process defective? Are we assured of the outcome? Of all species once upon this planet, 99.99 per cent are now extinct. Would a God of foresight and good will require the unimaginable quantity and death-intense suffering often involved in the food chain? Why could not an all-powerful, all-good, all-knowing creator simply provide necessary nutrients in ground water? Human civilizations and individuals die. Floods, wars, crime, and disease may appear as mistakes the Universe makes as it struggles, experiments, creates itself, yearns to be known. Even love itself can be difficult, often tragic. "God is love," 1 John 4:8 declares, and if so, God blesses loving sex; but that begins, not ends, the complications.

¶ 6. SEX AND SEXUALITY.— Sex is biological and sexuality is cultural; therefore, our present views of sexuality may be encumbered by cultural values that arose under particular conditions. In his 1995 *Sexuality and Catholicism* (p249-250), Thomas C Fox describes an insight Franciscan priest Richard Rohr gained in the Philippines about how sexuality is understood by different cultures. A young Franciscan told him, "when a young Filipino boy can first get the seed there's no shame associated with that. That first masturbation is a moment of glory and breakthrough. I . . . came running into the school-yard with the seed in my hand. All my classmates came crowding around me, and I exclaimed, 'I got the seed, I got the seed.' All the little guys were looking at it, and this meant that I was a man. Now why would that be bad or displeasing to God? . . . Then this old Franciscan walks up and says, 'What's that in your hand?' So I told him it's my first seed, and he said, 'Go wash your hand and don't come back.' And I could not understand. Why would

that be displeasing? Why would the seed God put in our body be something I should be ashamed of?" Mel White begins his classic 1994/1995 *Stranger at the Gate,* (p11-12), by telling of a recent seminary graduate who told him (at age 12) and other youngsters at summer camp, "Masturbation is a gift from God. . . . it is a natural bodily function that God has given us to relieve sexual pressures when we have no other healthy sexual outlet." Such utterances have been extraordinarily rare from clergy in our culture, and the graduate was dismissed from the camp.

Recall that, in cultures that treated women as possessions, knowing paternity was demanded; this sometimes meant that a woman who "lost her virginity" before marriage was stoned to death. Another example: most cultures have at least permitted, many prizing, same-sex relationships, but in some of them women were inferior to men because they could be penetrated by men; so males who took pleasure in being penetrated were considered woman-like, inferior, and shamed; so slaves or boys, not yet men, were encouraged to give men such pleasure, but often they were not supposed to take pleasure themselves. Even today in some Latin cultures, a man who penetrates other men is completely normal, not considered "gay"; in fact, his bragging rights about his prowess is enhanced exactly as if he seduces many women; straight/gay is not the operative distinction but rather *activo/pasivo* or *machista/cochon.* Of course such distinctions in practice make no sense to many same-sex partners. To repeat: Sex is biological but sexuality is culturally constructed. Desires arise from so many needs and take so many different forms that cultures valuing roles split, constrain, repress, oppress, and deny their rich and unpredictable variety; and what remains are put into categories for commendation or condemnation.

Further, other religious traditions have prohibited exclu-

sivity and attachment by requiring multiple male-female pairings in the spiritual discipline of beholding the divine in each and every partner; such practices have been part of Indian tantra sexual routines and of Christianity, as in the 19th Century New York Oneida Community's complex marriage, where every woman was the wife of every man, and every man was the husband of every woman. Marriage itself has had many forms and meanings. Consider Jacob with his four wives and Solomon with his 700 wives and 300 concubines. Are we talking political alliances, procreation, property rights, honored servants, companionship, sexual opportunities — or love?

Celibacy has been condemned by Jews and praised by Christians; some traditions have supported both male and female sacred prostitution; others have condemned any sexual acts outside of marriage. The Christian Church, sometimes following early Hebrew views, has often held that the only legitimate purpose for sex was procreation; after God killed Onan's brother, Onan's father required him to mate with his brother's widow, but he "spilled his seed on the ground" because he did not want to have children by her, and God, knowing this, killed Onan. Because masturbation cannot produce children (except when a god masturbates), some medieval theologians considered masturbation worse than rape because rape at least presents the possibility of reproduction. As I write this, contraception is still prohibited by the Roman Catholic Church, same-sex desires are regarded as "objectively disordered," celibacy is required of most priests, and women cannot be priests.

These few examples show how different cultures and religions have construed sexuality in extraordinarily different ways, seldom recognizing the Infinite.

¶ 7. SEX AND SPIRITUALITY.— The ideal of romantic ("soul-mate") love may be derived in part from Arabs such as Ibn Hazm, 994-1064, briefly vizier of Córdoba, whose *The Ring of the Dove* observes love's variety, wrote that sex is necessary to make love spiritually complete. A monogamous, life-long loving marriage growing from an ever-deepening relationship may still be the American ideal, for both same-sex and heterosexual couples, even if the facts of divorce present a different reality. And other spiritual ideals are possible. Even the "one-night stand" of responsible, consenting adults can celebrate the sheer physical joy of incarnation, *eros* as a blessing; those who find in such an experience a vision of the divine in each partner may discover within the physical ecstasy a taste of transcendence.

On one hand, soul-mate romantic love elevates sexual exclusivity and enhances the relationship. On the other hand, some say that the physical pleasure of sexual activity needs no further justification; youthful "learning how the plumbing works" or a mature partner's death or other circumstances may make romantic love impossible. For any pleasure, from the healing touch of a massage, the taste of single malt scotch, the smell of a rose, the warmth of a blanket on a chill night, the sight of an extraordinary sunset, or the sound of a cherished pet, one may give thanks, even praise to the Almighty, for these sensations in themselves. Why should sexual arousal and satisfaction in themselves be insufficient to kindle profound thanksgiving?

¶ 8. SEX AND SECULARISM.— Further, there are many forms of profound love that involve no sexual activity at all, some of which these sonnets present. The important concern need not be the particular bodily configuration of love, but rather whether the love is secular — a term by which I mean detached, disconnected — from one's inmost ener-

gies in a way that profanes oneself or one's partner as an unrelated object. Indeed, our culture and our religious institutions themselves often separate sex from the sacred, as it separates work, medicine, education, technology, farming, art, law, business, government, and every other aspect of civilization from the sacred, whereas all areas were formerly infused with a sense of the holy. Even the magisterial and comprehensive Book of Common Prayer, which includes prayers for occasions related to agriculture, justice, traveling, and such, contains no prayer for lovers to offer together as they begin or conclude love-making. Our so-called Christian culture sometimes appears to sever our sexual joys from the spirit, making Incarnation an abstract theological category instead of revealing the reality of God.

Widespread pornography is usually understood as a guilty and demeaning pleasure. However, erotic appearances in pixels, as in the flesh actually present, or in painting, sculpture, and photography, can become a revelation through which one is engaged in visionary encounter with beauty, fascination, and power as a holy gift; but our society's secular squinting usually defeats holy beholding. Indeed, Eliade has written repeatedly of various modes (ritual, mystical, and such) in many faiths of "the experience of a sanctified sexual life" that "is no longer accessible in a desacralized society" *(The Sacred and the Profane,* p173).

Rumi writes, "The way you make love is the way God will be with you." Secularism is in part a denial of both intimacy and transcendence, yet most people have moments when the usual to-do list suddenly appears trivial, and life is given an unexpected depth and intensity of meaning, a closeness, a fit within what is far beyond one's ordinary, limited self. If secularism is a denial of intimacy and transcendence, then consider Georges Bataille who finds "the search for lost intimacy" to be the "essence" of religion.

¶ 9. SEXUAL INTIMACY.— Sexuality has strongly propelled evolution through unfolding multiplicity and diversity. In humans sex is more than mere reproduction. Sexual yearning can bring people together in exquisitely personal knowledge. A Hebrew idiom often translated "know," as in Gen. 4:1 ("Now Adam *knew* Eve his wife, and she conceived"), underscores the meaning of personal knowledge. But classical Christian theology, the "work ethic," and scientism suggest that the purpose of sexuality is offspring, whereas the greater truth may be that the purpose of reproduction is to multiply the knowledge of sexual delight. (Unusual among mammals, human sexuality is freed of the estrus cycle.) Sexual yearning is an instance of, and a metaphor for, God's "coming out of hiding." Making love is how the universe best learns. Making love is how God plays. How can we not give thanks for noticing?

Tradition says we are never more ourselves, never more intimate, than when we imaginatively *play*. But if sex manifests as unacknowledged need, it is more like addictive *work*. Unacknowledged, obscured agenda distorts perception of the beloved. Intimacy is ersatz, fake.

In genuine intimacy, partners learn not only about each other but also about how the world works, and what must be done to embrace and uplift all people from the oppressions which slow the evolutionary unfolding of God's full nature. Kabbalists, Jewish mystics, believe sex is most appropriate on the sabbath. Martin Luther, the Christian Reformer, said that the best place for Christ's Second Coming is to be united in the act of making love. Ibn Arabi, the Muslim mystic, presents making love as the supreme form of contemplation. In Hindu tantrism, the copulation of Shiva with Shakti gives rise to the universe. In Vajrayana Buddhism, the sexual embrace leads to the key virtue, *karuna,* compassion, and thus Enlightenment.

Love transforms sexuality from the desire for self-satisfaction to the desire merely to attend, which in spontaneous passion is an intimate participation with the other — the fusion of goal and process into identity. A climax becomes not merely a physiological spasm but an intense knowing, a rapturous attention, a noticing more penetrating than Sherlock Holmes could muster, a *beholding* so profound that we lose our ordinary sense of self. As we are immersed in the wonder of love-making, we may find ourselves making the spontaneous exclamation: "God!"

On the other hand, if we are conditioned to a particular feeling or pattern and insist upon a particular outcome, we may be striving more for power than knowledge. The desire, the concupiscence, for what isn't present may mean we are unable to notice what is present; our ordinary, purposeful self will not yield to the self-emptying which makes union with another real. This is profanity instead of gratitude.

Whether we are addicted to a drug, to buying things, to violent entertainment, to a relationship, to sex, or to religion, the addiction may be a way of suppressing feelings we don't want to feel, with a temporary "high" that blots out loneliness, pain, uncertainty, and anxiety. But being able to love even when we feel what we don't want to feel, when we are not getting what we want — this is freedom.

How do we cleanse ourselves of conditioning and reclaim this freedom? Decide and practice.

When we are born, we are noticed, *beheld*. But soon that holding in sacred, loving attention is replaced with conditional regard and approval. The question, "Is it a boy or a girl?" begins the conditioning; how others relate to us, what they say, even so early, depends on our genitals. But we ourselves begin life by *beholding* the world; and, alas, we

soon learn limits to our permitted wonder; our attention is often shaped and directed with prejudice, cissions,segregations, fragmentations, self-deceptions, depersonalizations, sentimentalisms — all of these are idolatry, the trance of secularism.

It is our birthright to embrace everyone and everything. Love is natural and universal. Conditioning limits our connection by *distorting desire* into modes of addiction, compulsion, repulsion, or inhibition. Simply *beholding,* without agenda, is the only way we can truly see another person. Otherwise what we see is shaped by what we want or fear.

Love is a free decision, not a response to hormones, though hormones can rouse us to behold. To love with sheer attention is to notice all before me in my friend. When I want something from a friend, it is hard for me to give my friend unconditional focus; what I want shapes the encounter. But to the degree I can set aside my agenda and behold my friend just as my friend is — apart from my need for my friend to handle my distress or to satisfy my craving, my concupiscence, or even give me attention, without requiring anything in return from my friend — to that extent I can *know* my friend from my own loving nature.

The decision to love is a direction to practice, seldom an achievement.

Attention — enabling us to see where we are — paradoxically frees us to move forward. And when I am blessed to receive such attention, I want to say *Thanks for Noticing*.

¶ 10. YEARNING.— As the *hadith* suggests, the deepest, most creative yearning is to know and be known, out of hiding, to notice who we are.

Yearning is not in itself an addiction, any more than a need is an indulgence. Yearning is a divine energy of spiritual evolution. Seeking to quiet the yearnings in addictive ways abuses these gifts of God. Religious poets like Rumi find God in the yearning. Ignoring or suppressing the yearning can kill the spirit and create an unseen imbalance. Burying the energy gets one stuck; denying it spins one off course. Attempts to appease the yearning, rather than to fully experience it, can distort the energy. This yearning is sacred and natural; it propels us through pain and joy, through disaster and consummation, through ignorance and wisdom. Living with desire without being manipulated by desire is to be fully alive, paradoxically the only genuine continuing fulfillment. Yearning is the wind that blows the sail of the soul's boat, in calm and storm, through the ocean of existence.

How does one live with imagination and desire without being thrown off course by it? By constantly recognizing its energy is from God (or, as the Buddhists might say, the Void) and yielding it back to the Source, where there is no distinction between desire and desirelessness. Rather than mounting a counterforce against yearning, to dominate, deny, suppress, or ignore it, one uses the energy to tack forward. The yearning is thus clarified, purified, sanctified. One must become the bush Moses saw, a bush burning without being consumed. But first one must say, "Let me turn aside and see this great sight" (Exodus 3:3).

This burning without being consumed is the core of Aristotle's "friendship without qualification," the "action without attachment" in the *Bhagavad Gita,* Buddhist com-

passion, Gandhi's *satyagraha,* a profound interpretation of the Christian message of unconditional love, and a marker on the path to liberation in every tradition.

This is where Augustine gets confused. He praises artful farting over coitus because orgasm is not rational and such control of one's bowels is. *(De civitate dei,* XIV, xxiv: *Nonnulli ab imo sine paedore ullo ita numerosos pro arbitrio sonitus edunt, ut ex illa etiam parte cantare uideantur* — "Some have such command of their bowels that they can fart continuously at will, so as to produce the effect of singing.") While irrational love can lead to distress like infatuation, and worse, to horrors from codependence to violent rape, the love that yields one's will in union with the other can be a metaphor for, or a realization of, divine ecstatic rapture. Augustine is right to condemn concupiscence as a selfish interest, but wrong to think that being "turned on" is necessarily a more likely path to perdition than a cost-benefit analysis of who one's mate should be. As Rumi writes, "The throbbing vein will take you further than any thinking."

So, in genuine love, arousal and interest lead to opening and surrendering. As Sufi mystics testify, this surrender or (in Arabic) *'fana,* annihilation, paradoxically leads to *baqa,* revival, even union with Ultimate Reality. Our spirituality is our participation in the eternal, evolving universe. In loving, adoring, worshipping, we discover, we co-create the Source of meaning in ecstatic, sacred, recursive encounter.

Far from madness or pathology, or the secret sensibility suggested by those like Andreas Capellanus *(De Amore)* in the late 12th Century and ever since, falling in such love frees the spirit from the social trance that blinds us to the delight of being alive. This is why, to use Heinlein's term in *Stranger in a Strange Land*, lovers "grok" each other, be-

hold a bluer sky, sense their belonging in the world, relate to others with greater understanding, and — through profound at-home-ness in their bodies — often feel overwhelming creative urges. The mystic sensibility is even more intense: the lover and the beloved are one; the lovers are united with God; and all there is, is God.

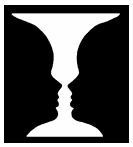
Such encounters with God lead to gratitude, and gratitude matures into service. Knowing another person intimately is a sharing of joy and suffering, and knowing what makes one's beloved suffer leads one to work to redeem the world, which is the holy work God has given us to do. The real mystics are not isolates; they are social activists with passion.

The Sonnet

¶ 11. A SIGN of the sacrality of the sexual experience is that, like love, it can be described only metaphorically, for the sacred is ineffable. Thus we resort to myth, ritual, poetry, and other art.

The poetic form does not merely contain a sentiment as a glass contains water. Rather speak of the grail containing wine; the meaning of each is intensified by the other. In poetry the form and the sentiment are as intimately related as the body and the soul.

In the famous Rubin gestalt illustration of figure-ground reversal, one may perceive the goblet or the two faces; but they create each other, as yearning and fulfillment, body



and soul, the form and the meaning, create each other, as God and the Creation find each other to know and be known, and, transcending these categories, are propelled toward the Infinite. Poetry should do this.

As mentioned ¶ 5, William Blake (and, as my teacher, Mircea Eliade, has shown, Zarathustra and Suhrawardi, among others) understood that Vision and Creative Imagination gives us access to the Reality we co-create. Love transforms the mundane and flawed presence we offer each other into holy images of how to be with one another. Just as, for Ibn Arabi, God is pronounced by the gift of Imagination, so Poetry spells, entrances, and spills forth the higher Reality implicit in the appearance each creates of oneself and of the Friend. Christians say Christ is the Word made flesh.

The words we choose create or mask Reality, and when humans speak to each other sensuously, their *creative interchange transforms them as they cannot transform themselves* — which is how my teacher, Henry Nelson Wieman, described God, the Creative Event. Giving these sonnets to the reader is my oblation.

¶ 12. THE FORM.— Strict, riming verse is sometimes resented as unnatural, not suited to our age. To me such form is beautiful. Traditional form may use surprising, archaic, technical, slang, and vulgar language, and strained and ambiguous phrasing, for an effect that cannot be achieved in conversational verse. W H Auden insists that "A poem is a rite; hence its formal and ritualistic character. Its use of language is deliberately and ostentatiously different from talk."

In "An Essay on Criticism," Alexander Pope wrote that

"True Ease in Writing comes from Art, not Chance, / As those move easiest who have learn'd to dance"; in "Natur und Kunst," Goethe writes, *In der Beschränkung zeigt sich erst der Meister, / Und das Gesetz nur kann uns Freiheit geben* — "A master reveals himself through restraint, / and only law can provide freedom."

Freedom is not the absence of form, but the mastery of form. Humans thrive not by abandoning or rejecting structure, but by fulfilling it in such a way as to transcend it. Similarly, genuine love is not desire whose origins are formless; rather love is the urge to behold and in some sense to unite with the Beloved, an ardor which can mature into a decision to surrender control to a Larger Process. The purpose becomes purposelessness, sheer delight, ataraxia, bliss. Perhaps one reason the love sonnet has endured for over five hundred years is that its asymmetrical balance expresses this mystery: that mastery and surrender are one.

While I hope readers both familiar and unfamiliar with the sonnet form will *hear its sounds,* what the sonnet says, knowing the mold's history, how the structure is used, and how some of the technical devices are employed, can enhance its meaning. Hence this propaedeutic.

- The sonnet is often used dramatically. The poet addresses a particular person in a particular situation.

- Through the sonnet's characteristic logical, even forensic, examination, an underlying emotion is discovered and explored.

- A theme of early sonnet sequences was the revelation, through physical beauty, of spiritual love, with affection for friends of the same sex often expressed incidentally. Many of Shakespeare's sonnets seem to be as much about art, and particularly poetry, as they are about his relationships.

¶ 13. EARLY HISTORY.— By 1290 the sonnet ("little sound") may have become independent from its form as a song, exploring the many emotions and conditions of sex and love. Its development in Italy in the Thirteenth Century was perfected by Petrarch in the Fourteenth. It was the first poetic form prepared for the printed page.

The English adopted it in the Sixteenth Century. William Shakespeare (1564-1616) transformed the sonnet from what had become worn convention and tralatitious sentiment to reveal its secret powers afresh.

While subsequent English poets have used the sonnet to write about many subjects and often used the Italian style (Milton, Wordsworth, Keats, Browning, etc) still *love,* for which the sonnet is the sublime vehicle, is the single topic most often associated with this poetic form.

Sir Philip Sidney (1544-1586) could write a sonnet like a torso of earned muscles, posing. Here is one ironic to my theme:

Thou blind man's mark, thou fool's self-chosen snare,
Fond fancy's scum, and dregs of scattered thought;
Band of all evils, cradle of causeless care;
Thou web of will, whose end is never wrought;
Desire! Desire! I have too dearly bought,
With price of mangled mind, thy worthless ware;
Too long, too long, asleep thou hast me brought,
Who should my mind to higher things prepare.

But yet in vain thou hast my ruin sought;
In vain thou madest me to vain things aspire;
In vain thou kindlest all thy smoky fire;
For virtue hath this better lesson taught,–
Within myself to seek my only hire,
Desiring naught but how to kill desire.

¶ 14. ENGLISH AND ITALIAN SONNETS.— The scaffolding of the Shakespearean sonnet is simple (but not easy): a poem of fourteen lines of iambic pentameter, with a rime scheme of *abab-cdcd—efef.gg,* sometimes interpreted as three quatrains (four-line stanzas) and a couplet (two-line stanza); sometimes as an octave (eight-line stanza), a quatrain, and a couplet. One of Shakespeare's sonnets, 99, is fifteen lines, another is twelve lines, Sonnet 126 uses riming couplets only; and his rime and rhythm patterns are not rigid throughout the corpus. An iamb is a group of two syllables, the first unaccented, the second stressed, as in the word *desire.* A line of five groups of syllables, or "feet," is called pentameter. The concluding couplet often provides an epigrammatic whiplash to the Shakespearean sonnet.

The Petrarchan sonnet, on the other hand, opens with an octave with a rime scheme of *abbaabba* and concludes with a sestet (six lines), often either *cdecde* or *cdcdcd.* This form swells and ebbs, avoiding the Shakespearean climax. Another way of viewing some Petrarchan sonnets is two quatrains followed by two tercets (three-line stanzas).

Spenser developed a hybrid: *ababbcbccdcdee.* Other poets have tried many variations and irregularities.

Since English has fewer riming words than Italian, the seven riming sounds in the English sonnet may conform more to the nature of the language, and thus seem more natural, than repeating four or five riming sounds in the Italian pattern, though Milton, Wordsworth, Keats, Hopkins, Frost, cummings, among many others, have done it. I hope it is interesting when I try.

The sonnet often has a *volta*, a turn of thought, often initiated with "But" or "Yet." In the Italian sonnet, the volta, marked by the onset of new end rimes, occurs between the octave and the sestet; in the English sonnet it may occur

there (as in Sidney, quoted above, Shakespeare's 29 below, Donne's below, and mine below) or as late as the concluding couplet (as in Shakespeare's 130), or even the very last line (as in Shakespeare's 66). Most of the sonnets in this book use Shakespearean scaffolding.

¶ 15. INTERIOR PATTERNS.— The sonnet interior principle varies. One order consists of three quatrains, each presenting the sonnet's theme in a different metaphor, and a concluding couplet. A perfect example, embodying my concerns with youth, age, death, and love, is Shakespeare's 73:

That time of year thou mayst in me behold
When yellow leaves, or none, or few, do hang
Upon those boughs which shake against the cold,
Bare ruined choirs where late the sweet birds sang.

In me thou see'st the twilight of such day
As after sunset fadeth in the west,
Which by and by black night doth take away,
Death's second self, that seals up all in rest.

In me thou see'st the glowing of such fire
That on the ashes of his youth doth lie,
As the death-bed whereon it must expire,
Consumed with that which it is nourished by.

This thou perceivest, which makes thy love more strong,
To love that well which thou must leave ere long.

A second pattern sets forth a theme in the octet, summarizes it in the next quatrain, and encapsulates it in the couplet: eight lines condensed to four, and then condensed again into two, as in Shakespeare's 55 (see also 33 and 87):

Not marble nor the gilded monuments
Of princes shall outlive this powerful rime;
But you shall shine more bright in these contents
Than unswept stone besmeared with sluttish time.
When wasteful war shall statues overturn,
And broils root out the work of masonry,
Nor Mars his sword nor war's quick fire shall burn
The living record of your memory.

'Gainst death and all-oblivious enmity
Shall you pace forth; your praise shall still find room
Even in the eyes of all posterity
That wear this world out to the ending doom.

So, till the judgment that yourself arise,
You live in this, and dwell in lover's eyes.

Thirdly, perhaps the most distinctive interior consists of an octave presenting one mood or view and, with the *volta,* a contrasting or resolving sestet, as Shakespeare's 29 (see also 2, 18, and 106):

When in disgrace with Fortune and men's eyes
I all alone beweep my outcast state
And trouble dead heaven with my bootless cries
And look upon myself and curse my fate,
Wishing me like to one more rich in hope,
Featured like him, like him with friends possessed,
Desiring this man's art and that man's scope,
With what I most enjoy contented least;

Yet in these thoughts myself almost despising,
Haply I think on thee, and then my state,
Like to a lark at break of day arising
From sullen earth, sings hymns at heaven's gate;
For thy sweet love remembered such wealth brings
That then I scorn to change my state with kings.

A fourth interior principle is meandering, with no particular separation of thought within the external edifice. Sometimes the progression of the thought works against, or ignores, the scaffolding. Some of Milton's best sonnets gain power by enjambment, the spilling over of sense from one line to the next.

Each inner structure within the external form has its own effect, and gives the poet a way of conveying the message beyond the words, the sounds, the images; the inner structure is like the tone of voice or the posture we use when we speak. The form itself can become the body language of the meaning. Art is the body language of the soul.

¶ 16. DONNE AND HOPKINS.— In addition to Shakespeare, two other sonnet writers may introduce my own efforts because they are especially concerned with spiritual themes.

"Metaphysical" poet John Donne (1573-1631), Dean of St Paul's Cathedral, often used sexual metaphors in his poems of faith, sometimes almost blasphemously, and made *religion* as important a topic for the sonnet as *love.* Another cleric-poet, Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844-1889, published in 1918), also wrote sonnets with an explosive power displaying the spirit in sensual celebration. Both employ forms in nature as the images of the spirit. Donne uses the vocabulary of science and Hopkins glories in the outdoors.

No poet more effectively than Donne uses the device of paradox. Akin is the "conceit," an elaborate, exaggerated comparison. The ingenuity and intellectual challenge of the conceit make us think afresh to feel deeply. The conceit finds the edges of reality around deep, otherwise formless, sentiment.

Observe the conceits in one of Donne's "Holy Sonnets,"

14, its torment typical. God is Trinity, blacksmith, glass-blower, battle chief, rapist. Donne, in the octave, is a city under siege (twisting a Petrarchan convention of the be-loved's heart as a fortress); in the sestet (beginning with "Yet") he is a sexual partner desiring a different lover. The final tercet (which ends with a couplet) unites the two metaphors and brings the conceits to a climax all the more shocking because it seems sacrilegious, but irresistible and unassailable.

Batter my heart, three-personed God; for You
As yet but knock, breathe, shine, and seek to mend;
That I may rise and stand, o'erthrow me, and bend
Your force to break, blow, burn, and make me new.
I, like an usurped town, to another due,
Labor to admit You, but O, to no end;
Reason, Your viceroy in me, me should defend,
But is captived, and proves weak or untrue.

Yet dearly I love You, and would be loved fain,
But I am betrothed unto Your enemy.
Divorce me, untie or break that knot again;
Take me to You, imprison me, for I,
Except You enthrall me, never shall be free,
Nor ever chaste, except You ravish me.

While I tend to keep my lines to ten syllables (stricter than Donne, and certainly stricter than Hopkins who might in one line run sixteen syllables in his "Sprung Rhythm"), those who know Hopkins may see his influence where I use archaic forms of words and terms in their original senses, in concentrated alliteration and assonance, in internal rimes, puns and energy-twisted syntax. If my meter hides any influence from the sprawl of American Walt Whitman (1819-1892), surely the celebration of varied expressions of sexuality here is owing to his courage. Although most poets

vary meter from the expected pattern to enhance the meaning, my pacing is sometimes particularly indebted to Hopkins, even though I usually count syllables rather than stresses. Here is "The Windhover: To Christ Our Lord," a much anthologized example of the Hopkins sonnet:

I caught this morning morning's minion, king-
dom of daylight's dauphin, dapple-dawn-drawn Falcon in his riding
Of the rolling level underneath him steady air, and striding
High there, how he rung upon the rein of a wimpling wing
In his ecstasy! then off, off forth on swing,
As a skate's heel sweeps smooth on a bow-bend: the hurl and gliding
Rebuffed the big wind. My heart in hiding
Stirred for a bird,–the achieve of, the mastery of the thing!

Brute beauty and valour and act, oh, air, pride, plume, here
Buckle! AND the fire that breaks from thee then, a billion
Times told lovelier, more dangerous, O my chevalier!

No wonder of it; sheer plod makes plough down sillion
Shine, and blue-bleak embers, ah my dear,
Fall, gall themselves, and gash gold-vermilion.

The ministry in the sonnets of Donne and Hopkins points to directions for a spiritual healing of today's fragmented secularity. By polluting the environment, we are divorced from nature. By compartmentalizing our lives, we split body from spirit. By tolerating greed in the political community, we abuse each other for ends broken off from the covenant with the Infinite.

¶ 17. MUSIC IN VERSE.— Poetry may be as much music as idea: poems must be heard, not just read with the eye. ("Voi ch'ascoltate in rime sparse il suono, . . " wrote Petrarch in *The Canzoniere,* "You who hear the sound in scattered rimes, . ." not "you who *read* . . . ." The very term "sonnet" derives from the same linguistic root as "sonic," "sonata," "resonate," and the word "sound" itself. Most sonnets need repeated hearings. Even one that may seem obvious the first time through can become a calamity if the music is any good.

Here is my «Ad Astra», the first of a pair sonnets, varying the theme of Shakespeare's 55, to illustrate common ways of talking about the music from the flow and repetition of sound:

In my frail frame immortal love doth dwell;
and in these lines with borrowed breath you live.
No skill can keep my body from death's spell;
what skill I have doth life forever give
to you and me conjoined in sounds that they
shall speak who never knew us, though they gaze
long through the window of this page, and say
with wonder how we loved, in our brute age.

And yet no words I write can e'er be true;
they all fumble, flunk, fall, deform, and fail
the infinite mystery that is you
and me, like calling minnow what is whale.

No lay can list to others what is ours
though yet these rimes might reach as far as stars.

Here are some of the technical devices the sonnet employs. Many of them may be found in other forms of poetry.

● cadence or rhythm (including pause and pacing as well as stress or length of sound, and variation of the meter): “infinite mystery,” “fumble, flunk, fall, deform”

● alliteration (repetition of consonantal sounds at the beginning of words): “borrowed breath . . . body,” “what . . . whale”

● consonance (repetition of consonantal sounds at the end or within words): “frame immortal,” “have . . . forever give”

● dissonance or half-rime (repetition of consonantal sounds around a changed vowel, usually in a stressed syllable): “fall . . . fail,” “window . . . wonder”

● assonance or vowel rime (repetition of vowel sounds with different consonantal sounds before and after the vowel, usually in a stressed syllable): “death’s spell,” “gaze . . . age”

● rimes: ►end rimes (at the end of lines): “true . . . you” ►leonine rimes (one word ending a pause within a line with a word ending a line): “page . . . age” ►internal (rimes elsewhere): “all . . . fall,” “you . . . knew”

End rimes may or may not be important. The end of the line may make a natural break in the thought, or internal rimes or other effects may be more important and the end rimes will be “hidden” to the ear as the poem is read.

● the stanza (described by my teacher, Karl Shapiro, as “a kind of larger rhythm” within the body of a poem, like a paragraph in prose); in the sonnet, a stanza can be a quatrain, the octave, the sestet, the couplet, even a tercet.

● the sequence (a series of related poems). This book is a sequence of sonnet sequences. The poem above is the first of a pair, and part of the larger sequence. The reader will

discover references and resonances by comparing the individual poems, even separated by chapters, though I have been able to place closely several poems which reflect on each other. This book is not a corona, an ingenious sequence with linked rimes as well as content.

¶ 18. THE CHOREOGRAPHY OF THOUGHT.— A good poem's sounds and images are riveted into thought. A context thus evoked is like a temple where the holy can be manifested. Symbols, sonance, smells, movement, and immersion in space can conjure unexpected meaning.

As an example, examine «Campfire». The last word is "dreams." Are these the dreams my friend and I each had, or are they visions for our lives? What does the bird mean? What is its role in waking us? How does this relate to the problem of being close? How does fire bring us close? Why are the stones which ring the fire called a "chalice"? Why are the flames "wordless tongues," where else does the image of tongues of fire appear, and why is it noticed that they arise from tree wood (no longer alive)? How is night, mythic, non-historical time, dream time, related to ordinary daylight, reality? What does this have to do with his being nineteen and my being forty-nine? Is there a point to the sequence of the "fire goes out," the bird "wakes us," and then "we ignite"? What is the answer to my question, "Who are you, Nineteen?" The title is «Campfire». Where is the campfire, really? And how does sound clarify or deepen or expand the meaning? (Example: the line, "around the chal-ice of stones on the ground," begins and ends with words that rime, in changed rhythm, perhaps enacting the "ring, spin . . . dance" of the previous line.)

With the strict limits of the sonnet, every word counts, sometimes with several meanings, as a beam or pillar may

be both decorative and structural.

While onomatopoeia is an elementary way of making the sounds of words imitate that to which they point, a more subtle and difficult form of mimesis is the performatory use of language, where the words enact the thing itself. For example, when I as a clergyman pronounce to a couple, "you are now husband and wife," or "you are now united in marriage," the very words effect the thing spoken. Similarly, a person is not "guilty" in law until the jury announces its finding. When I apologize for an error, the very words, "I apologize . . . ," constitute the act. {I welcome you . . . I advise you . . . I baptize you . . . I curse you . . . I warn you . . . I order you . . . I promise you that . . .} are examples where the utterance is the action itself. In the most extended sense, all of Virgil's *Aeneid* is performatory, for all follows his opening: *Cano, arma que virum* . . . . I sing of arms and of the man . . . .

Much of the Mass employs performatory language. For example, in "Holy Eucharist Rite II Eucharistic Prayer B" of The [1979] Book of Common Prayer, p371, the priest says, "Remembering now his [Christ's] work of redemption, and offering to you [God] this sacrifice of thanksgiving," which the people continue, "we celebrate his death and resurrection, as we await the day of his coming." The speech effects or performs the event itself.

Shakespeare comes close to performatory magic in his Sonnet 55, when he demonstrates with his words — spoken by today's reader — the persistence of the memory of his young friend: "You live in this [sonnet], and dwell in lovers' eyes." It is by the readers' reading the sonnet that the content of the words are enacted. While my «Ad Astra» is obviously inferior, its octave reaches toward a similar effect. The poem is, in part, self-referential, about the recitation of the words being recited.

The notion of performatory language is not well known, though J L Austin and others have discussed it; I mention it because it is a curious function in Shakespeare's sonnets (as Helen Vendler demonstrates), and I employ it. Perhaps the reader may find pleasure in being aware of it. In fact, in his "Ars Poetica," Archibald MacLeish suggests all poems should be performatory in the sense that "A poem should not mean / but be." In "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven," Wallace Stevens writes that "The poem is the cry of its occasion, / Part of the *res* itself and not about it." And Robert Lowell wrote, "Poetry is not the record of an event: it is an event." Of dance performance, Isadora Duncan said, "If I could tell you what it meant, there would be no point in dancing it."

Shakespeare may structure his argument, sometimes unresolved except rhetorically, by contrast or contradiction or contradistinction, or by similarity or time or analogy or rank or intensity, by foreground or background, by parody, by chiasm (crossing of what would otherwise be parallel expressions), prolepsis (responding to an anticipated argument) or palinode (retracting an earlier statement) or by any number of modes. His metaphors come from a variety of cultural forms and scientific disciplines and freely employs catachresis (an intentional error in word choice, sometimes creating a mixed metaphor). The language itself intensifies and deepens the experience by requiring the reader to notice archaic terms and etymological hints (he contrasts words derived from Anglo-Saxon with Latinate constructions). With sonic, sense, syntactical, or logical juxtapositions like hysteron proteron (cart before the horse), old words and themes are made afresh. If attention is a prerequisite for love, noticing how Shakespeare works his wordy wonders heightens the thrill, and makes even despair a melody of ironic praise. This is possible because in Shakespeare, as in

the succeeding 17th Century "metaphysical poets," thought and feeling are the same.

Asking questions about the selection of words, the sequence of images, and the flow of the sound is like scaling an edifice to view the uniqueness of each poem and the individual way it must be read.

Sometimes a poem says several things, perhaps even contradictions, at once. Reading the whole compass of feelings leads to that inscrutable Process which enriches the experience of love, and which love serves.

For example, the last line of the «Ad Astra» companion sonnet, «Acropolis Canon», reads: "In death I lie for love without desire." How does one read "lie"? Consider at least these three possibilities: [1] when I am dead (or, in the convention associating death with completed sexuality, after orgasm), when I will no longer feel desire, [2] even in death this sonnet perpetuates the lie that I loved without desire, and [3] when my ego is extinguished, I am capable of the surrender I call love without desire.

¶ 19. THE CONTEXT.— Poetry, like life, is trouble. A poem can be a virus and upset your life. I believe it was Housman who made it a rule never to think of poetry while he was shaving because when he did, he cut himself.

In his 1956 inaugural lecture as Chair of Poetry at Oxford University, "Making, Knowing, and Judging" *[The Dyer's Hand,* p50-51], W H Auden writes:

> The questions which interest me most when reading a poem are two. The first is technical: "Here is a verbal contraption. How does it work?" The second is, in the broadest sense, moral: "What kind of guy [sexism noted] inhabits this poem? What is his notion of the good life or the good place? His no-

tion of the Evil One? What does he conceal from the reader? What does he conceal even from himself?"

Concerning his first question: It can be a bother just trying to "get" a poem. I hope that the images and sounds will make these poems worthwhile without complete intellectual accouterments, and invite rereading the sonnets aloud until the sense appears. Yet many readers will sometimes find scientific, literary, and religious allusions in these sonnets unfamiliar. Although the glosses are meant to help, they also become part of this book's texture as a prosimetrum.

The Biblical book of Jeremiah contains both poetry and prose, as does *The Mahabharata,* Boethius's *De consolatione philosophiae, The Tale of Genji, One Thousand and One Nights (The Arabian Nights), Aucassin et Nicolette, La vie de Gargantua et de Pantagruel*, and Nabokov's *Pale Fire*. As Edward C Upton's 2010 PhD dissertation at the University of Chicago Divinity School on T S Eliot's "The Waste Land" argues, the appended notes become an "expansion of the poem proper." Dante's the *Vita nuova,* the *New Life*, a prosimetrum with 25 sonnets and other poems, grows out of the troubadour tradition of courtly love and transforms it into expressions of sacred love, with desire for beauty valorized as the epiphany of the divine. Dante's comments include notes on the structure of the poems themselves. My earlier collection, *Love Without Desire,* placed notes in the back of the book. With this book the notes and glosses are with the poems, on the same page. Thus *Thanks for Note-icing* becomes an unintended prosimetrum by which the contraption may be got.

Even with these aids, it is better to encounter a poem as a sound video, not a block of print. What is in print is not the poem; the page markings can be compared to a musical score which gives directions for sound moving through time. A good poem's sound is more than make-up on a

corpse; it is the breath that delivers life. Insofar as a poem can be paraphrased, it is an autopsy, not a poem.

Concerning Auden's second question, my answer is inadequate; but I can say that writing these sonnets has been like praying, a way of discovering the shape of yearning, from petty selfishness to a vision of larger love, offering my longings, perplexities, and rejoicings to the Larger Context, and realizing where I am resisting or yielding to the Flow. No single sonnet signs success, nor does the scope and sum of them spell anything more than sustained struggle.

This book fits within a larger pattern of world religions. That pattern is revealed by asking of each tradition, "What is sacred?" The answers come from the realms of nature, personhood, and society. A summary in the APPENDICES charts this theory. In brief, this collection of sonnets explores questions of personal identity in various contexts toward a realization that attachments and aversions can be snares, but that genuine love is freedom, that desire rightly noticed and interpreted can be the most gracious response to the wonder of being. Although the sonnet is usually a form of personal expression, I hope this collection in some way propels the reader to notice more deeply, to behold the overlapping realms of the environment, of oneself, and of community. Perhaps the particular valorization of sex as an arena of the holy will suggest that other areas of our culture — from eating to economics to the environment — may also reveal the holy if we will but notice.

But this collection fails if it is noticed simply for a moral purpose. Summarizing the message of a poem is like watching someone walk across the room; but the poem itself is like the same space explored by a dancer; the summary movement is, well, pedestrian; the second, art. If one is only interested in traversing the room, the art is an annoying obstruction to one's goal. But if one abandons the goal, one

can notice — behold — sacred play. More than as theological texts, I hope these sonnets will be noticed as art; for art, by directing attention to itself — what kind of "contraption" it is and how it works — paradoxically throws us beyond itself into the heart of who we really are and what we must do.

In art and life, forms of desire (such as imagination, appetite, interest, curiosity, fascination, and yearning) bring us to encounter ourselves (personhood), others (community), and the world (nature).

In art and life, desire (such as imagination, appetite, interest, curiosity, fascination, and yearning) bring us to encounter ourselves, others, and the world — personhood, community, nature. If we honor desire by *noticing* it and then abandoning its agenda and our attachment to roles, we may be so emptied that the divine may overflow in us. Such noticing is my interpretation of desire.

Living religiously means *noticing* the glory and the horror of existence, and especially noticing what at first seems, in secular sight, ordinary.

You can read all the sonnets in **ONE YEAR**, 3 per week, say 1 each MWF. Or in **THREE MONTHS**, 2 each day, MTWThFSa. Or in **ONE MONTH**, 8 each day, MTWThF. — Or **RUSH PLAN**, **THREE WEEKS, 21 DAYS**, shown here:

1. Foreword	8. 41-49	15. 103-110
2. Introduction	9. 50-60	16. 111-120
3. Sonnets 1-6	10. 61-72	17. 121-128
4. 7-12	11. 73-77	18. 129-138
5. 13-21	12. 78-86	19. 139-150
6. 22-28	13. 87-94	20. 151-154
7. 29-40	14. 95-102	21. Appendices, pages 206-210 and 220-221