

Where the Eyes Fall:
a collection of poems on the ethic of caring
inspired by a guided study
in Ethics in Adult Education

by

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January 5, 2006

The First Question¹

When I began this course of study
I asked the instructor
when will I get to feel I know something?

meaning

when will I know how to sew
lessons into a quilt
to lay over my bed before sleep
and recognize where each patch came from
when I wake

but sounding like

when will I get to lift words
like epistemology
easy as a pot of tea.

I can't remember her reply
or whether she answered at all
but now I have the answer:

when I become a moth
in a winter pond.

¹This poem refers to the first year of my studies in Adult Education, here at UCFV.

The Lyric Poem²

Is made for singing when all the words
that come this way are not connected
as veins leading to the heart and mind.

When music has been taken out of
scales, lab equations, the blackboard
and all that remain are facts,

when economists tell us they invented folk
and the future, when a man values his gun
more than language and a woman

thinks a diamond is the post-modern sonnet
—then the days are fragmented into tones
looking for a melody, and doctrines

are dissonant drums competing
for the final crescendo when the orchestra
isn't in same the room.

²“The lyric poet”, says Jan Zwicky, “does not reject reason, but is driven by ‘intuitions of coherence’ ... an attempt to arrive at an integrated perception...”.

Disclaimer³

the real struggle
is not water and oil
but the threat of humanity
imagining itself
in a new light.

³Inspired by Phyllis Cunningham and Nel Noddings, I seek to argue with many of our society's values (as I perceive them) by engaging my imagination in the evolution of civilization.

The Ethic of Torture⁴

Before I enter the cell
where a man is stripped naked
tied to a chair and the most
tender parts of his body exposed
to electric wires or knives
I must give up that part of myself
that breathes in morning air
that breathes the poignant yellow leaves
that breathes the smiling eyes of strangers.

Before I enter the cell
I cover myself in sharkskin
eat meat raw
smear blood of the carcass
on my hands and say Look
this is real life
sad but true and there it is!

Under a single 100 watt bulb
I give up part of myself
to become an instrument
with a single mission.

If the prisoner gives me what I want
I must believe
there is no other landscape.

⁴I have often wondered what kind of experiences would turn me into a torturer. After reading Rick Salutin's column on "Torture and the New Normal" I felt compelled to reflect on this. Have there been teachers that use torture to get the answers they are looking for? Are some classrooms like the prison cell?

We Come from Different Offices.⁵

The Engineer, the Nurse, and
the Nursery School Teacher
adhere to their profession's code of ethics.

We know how to sit in a room
with our ancestors, our religions, our values
in our veins and memories— filed away
in back-packs or blackberries
readily accessible for that moment
when the theories of engineers and nurses
and teachers converge into an embryonic coil
that hasn't yet learned how to breath
the air it must live in.

We know there is a time to speak, to listen,
to flip through a course-pack somewhere
in our histories— codes we never wrote
some ungoogled guidance from the premature
notion, the word almost thought
fleeting as light passes shadow.

And then when its over our heels click
down the hall to the parking lot
and we drive away singularly
to our offices.

⁵ This was inspired by a meeting with my cohorts in the Guided Study on Ethics in Adult Education.

The Facilitator⁶

Can lay out a banquet, a table of many plates.
Help them name what is there. Let them choose
what and how much they put on their own plate.

Provide the appropriate cutlery and show them
how to capture a piece with fork tines, how to locate
the cutting edge of a knife and move it purposefully
back and forth with just enough pressure to reveal the inside.

Then leave them to chew and chew as the taste
revolves around the mouth, as the juice slips away
from flesh to the tongue bequeathing an indelible
memory – a flavour they'll recognize again.

This is a learning contract between mouth and brain
and stomach—how it separates protein from fibre.

Ask them to define the experience.
Ask them to extend their definitions.
Ask them to narrow their focus: sweet or salty
Ask them back to the banquet to see
what was not taken in the first course.

Arrange a visit with the chef or
venture into the kitchen cautiously—
note where steam arises and where the fridge
hums consistently without notice.
Do not get in the way.

When main course has passed into
the mysterious realm of esophagus
introduce dessert
the light citrus sweet tang of praise
that doesn't compete with meat
but helps digestion.

⁶The idea of the facilitator offering a banquet is not mine. I can't remember where it first came from, but Hiemstra's article "Translating Personal Values and Philosophy into Practical Action" inspired me to work on the metaphor.

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The Erickson Key⁷

I begin again
to rebuild a world

not isolated in a red sky
but intimate as a wave
rushing towards the shore
I break into splashes
fly through the air
anonymous

I hang from a pine needle
a tiny globe reflecting landscape
until it bursts with the weight
of its own image
and falls to dark stagnant peat
to generate heat
where

the ground of despair
dissolves into the rooting
will of integrity.

⁷Erickson's Key States quoted in Kasworm's article is, for me, an antidote against despair.

Askesis in Adult Education⁸

To wake the dream
To make the footpath wider
To observe the change in scenery
To walk behind when it's safe
To walk in front when it's not
To hear the lived story
To evoke the contrast
To see the comparison
To note where the eyes fall
How the breath labours
Where the frown cuts
What draws in the mouth
Who knows their kin

To pause on the clear view
Then return to the mists.

⁸I learned from Valerie-Lee Chapman's article about the notion of Askesis (which means spiritual discipline). Reflecting on how often I feel better after I have forced myself (by some ideal I value) beyond my comfort zone, in order to maintain my self-respect, I attempted to apply this to adult education. That is to ask myself, what am I willing to do as an adult educator.

The One-Caring⁹

The skin toughens and she becomes
a jaguar or hippo ironing her territory.
A relaxed resignation to details written
in the lines of his face— that vocabulary
accumulated over years of rearranging
armour. Not the kind made of brass,
but of broken eggshells— their little cuts
in the flesh.

The warrior has instruments but the toolbox
is empty. She doesn't have a map
for the desert but she goes there. He doesn't say you
and he doesn't say I. She is not bound by duty
but is duty-bound. Everything depends on this
but he is not dependant on that.

It is a battle in the delivery room.

⁹This title comes from Nel Noddings. I seek to explore what it means to be the “one-caring”.

The Cared For¹⁰

Luminous for no apparent reason
but in some light not hanging from above
not registered in high traffic areas
not noticed by the busy
they have a glow as though
they come from the centre of the earth
molten lava mixed with air, softened into flesh
as though they are meant to be here
as though their birth happened
when no-one was looking
and no-one really minded
but here they are
natural as shadow and bird-shit
only more so—
haunted by a far-reaching contentment
a worn out running shoe
a smiley sticker resonance

a tender strain suggests
they could cry if they wanted
but what would be the point?

Their power is a gentle rain.

¹⁰ This also comes out of reflecting on Nel Nodding's "one-cared for".

Empathy¹¹

Come into my house. Here the fire will
warm you as long as you don't put yourself
in the flame. Together we'll look out the
window. You can tell me what you see there.

Are there clouds interrupting the blue sky?
Do they form a grey blanket and block out
the sun? Or has the light burned them away?
Do you need sunglasses to look out there?

I am here too even if you can't see
inside these walls because the light out there
is too bright. Contrasts aren't easy to hold
together. This is not a binary

world. There are many pixels in your heart
if you don't mind my saying so. Now let
me be silent in thought and feeling. I can
be a vase or pencil for you

for us.

¹¹On page 30, Noddings writes that in empathy "I receive the other into myself and I see and feel with the other. I become a duality."

Appreciative Inquiry¹²

An organization breathes
with the breather, bruises with the bruised
means as much as meaning in the many eyes
of its seeing, hears itself sighing when
the saying is not included in the script.

The 'is' of realization. The organization
hoping on behalf of hoppers anonymous
inquiring for the next breath—hums
when its plugged in like a refrigerator
but this does not mean they are the same.

Likeness is not the same.

Inquiry is not the same as question.
The question may be looking for an answer
but inquiry may look for the next question.

The organization breathes
and bruises easily, sees and hears from
different places in the room.

It can breathe like this forever.

¹² This title comes from the work and website developed by Gervaise Bushe, who offers the notion of an organization being alive, having a beating heart.

Our Common Future¹³

A lioness caged. Pacing, hungry
she glares in the nightly narrative
of our dreams. Oh she looks fierce
but all she wants is nourishment

our attention. We can't expect her
to survive on scraps, the afterthought.
She needs a white tablecloth, a rose
in a stem vase, silver cutlery and linen

napkin, a glass of Meritage and marbled
filet — organic of course. Raw and bloody
as forgotten history tucked in cabinets
and the stories of those who didn't

get to write the canonized version
but for whom speaking is an act
of love unlocking the cage. The future
wild and free as the appetite's power

to bring us to our knees
in supplication while she walks
toward a rising horizon knowing
no more than we, how sunrise

will show itself in the many skies
of our intentions.

¹³Our Common Future was a report commissioned in 1987. It is also known as the Bruntland Report (The Appreciative Self, p. 4). This poem contains images that are probably nothing like those in the actual report.

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