FORUM II: ***The Extraordinary Ordinary: beholding through listening***

I.

This is part two of a three-part series about how poetry will save your life / the world. It has now been almost three months since I have been on staff here and I continue to be amazed at the health of this parish, the vibrancy of this community which seems to have as its priority care for one another— not just for those among us but for all people. And I especially admire the commitment to education— the range of programs here, the depth and breadth of what is available…It is inspiring.

And it is not lost on me that here we are in a room together, paying attention to something that either already does matter, or to something that we feel like could matter. This is the stuff of the preservation of a culture, people sitting together participating in questions about what it means to be a human being. I do not ever want to *not* be astonished by realizations like that.

One of the things I love as a still-relatively-new church-goer is how much I learn every week — probably one benefit of having not learned the parables, for example, as a child, or not knowing the psalms by heart, is that it is all brand new. It reminds me of that feeling when you have read a good book and you pass it on to someone else so that you might experience their pleasure. Well, I'm the friend you passed it to.

It reminds me of the story of one great poet saying to the other great poet: thank you for your poems; it was like being alive twice.

I do think that because my learning curve is perhaps steeper than some, I am rather shameless in my question-asking and in my googling of things: my internet history ranges from things like "Jesus as a teenager" "what *is* the Anglican Cycle of Prayer" "Is Peter also Simon?" "Why does Jezebel have to be eaten?" "Was Aaron good or bad?" "How do you pronounce 'kuh-PERR-nay-uhm'?"

And these are the relatively easy ones!

But I'm fine with question-asking. And I am okay with mystery. It's all remarkably close to the work of poetry, whose task it is to "imagine the world new," says the critic Helen Vendler. It is true that the issues of human life are not that many. Some people say there are actually only two subjects, ever and always—love and death—and that they span the beginning of time to the end. To speak with you and to be writing to you weekly about poetry is truly one of the great privileges of my life.

If you weren't here for the first presentation I have summed up in five sentences what you missed:

1. Poetry is not hiding anything from you, nor is there a secret meaning, nor a trick, nor a special handshake you have to know in order to enjoy it just as you do not have to know how to cook a meal in order to enjoy food or know the words of a song to enjoy the music of it.
2. There are many rewards that poetry offers, one of which—and perhaps the most essential— is pleasure and the work of poetry is the work of a good life: to be careful, to pay attention, to enter into wonder and awe, to notice not only what is on the page but also what is not.
3. One reason for pleasure is rhythm, which is an inherent part of your existence as a living human being because you operate within a larger rhythm of the earth's movement and your own body— our seasons, your breath, your heartbeat, your speaking— it moves to a cadence that has been with you since you were in the womb.
4. Poetry matters in the way that mystery and pleasure matter; there are certain things that are True with a capital T and that we know with a capital K that we could not say or access any other way but this one.
5. As Jane Hirshfield says, "Lives are hard and art is one way we human beings have found to see in that hardness also the beauty, the largeness."

This series has a (possibly) bewildering title—We Become What We Behold— which I am using as a kind of thesis to hold all of this together, to ground it in what seems to me a rich metaphor for transformation, for becoming, and for contemplation. Behold— to perceive, to regard, to witness, to meditate on— is a word that appears often in the language of the Bible. In sharing some of these notes with Gary he wrote to me to say that one allusion that occurred to him was Ecce Homo— translated as Behold the Man— as Pontius Pilate displays Jesus to the crowd that mocks him.

I've been thinking a lot about that image and am glad Gary mentioned it— it's a popular one in art, Caravaggio's is maybe the most recognizable— and how it might be possible to become what we behold. But consider Jesus— and this would be Jesus bound (Caravaggio has him with a crown of thorns, too) and presented to a hostile crowd. They behold Jesus, they behold this particular kind of suffering, this passion, and while they don't be*come* Jesus simply by looking at him, they may by beholding— by seeing intensely in a way that might be an unfamiliar way of looking, a divine way, maybe— by beholding glory they are transformed by it. We enter into something else, something outside of us— music, art, study—as a way of becoming something *other* than the self we already know.

So the idea that we might become what we behold suggests to me that we might be changed by beauty, that our attention matters and that somehow we might become more like that which we perceive. So if we are able to perceive wonder, we might be wonder-full, full of wonder. To behold beauty might have us become beauty-full.

II.

In part one we spent some time talking about rhythm and if there are clarifying questions about that, I hope you will ask them. One thing I do NOT want to do is overwhelm you. This is supposed to be joyful learning.

I could spend days talking about rhythm, especially as I realized last time all the things I wanted to say but didn't. Just this week, in Evensong, I noticed that the Lord's Prayer is mostly in that iambic pattern I told you about, unstressed stressed:

"Our Father who art in Heaven"— do you hear it? — "Thy Kingdom Come Thy Will Be Done" and many of the psalms have this meter, too. It's everywhere: "Go out into the world in peace." It's an almost instinctual pleasure— you don't even realize that it's working on you, the way you don't realize your heart is beating until it is arrhythmic, or racing. Otherwise, you take for granted that this rhythm is constant and within. It is innermost and indwelling. And just because you don't behold it, doesn't mean it doesn't exist.

But I want to move to another element of poetry that is, like rhythm, something you actually know a lot about, but may not know you know it, and that is Form.

To talk about form is to talk about shape. It is the physical structure that holds a poem. Form is the word we use to talk about the length of the lines, rhythm, rhyme and repetition, the shape of a poem on the page. (Technically, form is distinct from structure but that is a lesson for another day.)

Usually when you hear "formal poetry" it is referring to a particular pattern. So, the same way rhythm is always rhythm, always there, always present, there are patterns of rhythm that we Formally Name simply because they *are* identifiable patterns. Iambic pentameter, for example, as we have been hearing, is one formal, named rhythm, but there are other rhythms, too— iambic, for example, has an inverse: trochaic, which means stressed, unstressed, like many of our names: I noticed it is true of nearly the entire staff here (except me, and Claudia, and Melissa, and Deb) — Gary, Penny, Michael, Sarah, Janet, Weston, Eugene, William, Betsy, Becky, Steven, Greta. It's a popular one. Form works similarly; we have patterns of form the way we have patterns of shapes: if you think of shapes, you might name triangle, circle, square. Okay, but Virginia has a shape, too. North America has a shape. So here's the thing to know: just as there are shapes (like Virginia) that do not have formal names by which we call them, they are still shapes that exist. Virginia doesn't NOT exist just because it isn't a legit triangle. The point: Formlessness is also a form.

You might also think of arrangement. You can arrange your hair, your room — chairs in a circle, neat rows with a center aisle, arrange your books on a bookshelf, arrange pillows

on your couch— but even if this room were in disarray, there would still be an arrangement of furniture and people.
Lack of arrangement is its own arrangement. Just as someone without style still has a style.

Are you familiar with John Cage? I associate what I learned about John Cage, the experimental composer, with what I know about form and I am reminded of his masterpiece 4'33'' where he makes the case that even music-less-ness is still music. (Do you know this piece? He sits at the piano, not playing it, for four minutes and 33 seconds and the "music" of the piece is the sound that the audience, that the environment makes, as the piece is "performed." It is a score written for any instrument and any combination of instruments with the only instruction being not to play the instrument.)

So this is an important concept: form, even formlessness, is always form. Negative space, white space, remember, is not BLANK, or EMPTY. Negative space *depends* on form and is part of a larger and meaning-making structure. The poet Jack Gilbert had an incredible influence on my ideas about poetry and in writing about form he was drawn to the very last definition for form in the Oxford English Dictionary, the 62nd definition, which says: form, meaning the hole in which the rabbit sits. More about that rabbit in a minute…

Familiar forms to us might include the sonnet, the limerick, the ballad, haiku, and the one we surely all know—the acrostic: you may remember this exercise from grade school where you probably wrote you name vertically and then you wrote an adjective that begins with the letter and describes you…

But there are many "officially" named forms and they have beautiful names that I may or may not use to name my future children: sestina, villanelle, pantoum, triolet, ghazal, cinquain and they all come with certain rules. One rule of the sonnet, for example, is that it's 14 lines. It's also supposed to have a particular rhyme scheme depending on if it's an English or an Italian sonnet, it should have a regular metrical pattern, it needs to have what is called a volta, or turn, etc. etc. But, as with all rules everywhere, they are meant to be broken. Rules are just, like, suggestions. So then you get thirteen-ers, which call themselves sonnets by all other rules except they are missing a line. You have ghost-sonnets, things that have the feel of a sonnet but are not "technically" a sonnet. (I used to teach a class called "Sonnet-ness" which basically argued that nearly all poetry was a sonnet breaking rules but in *essence* was indeed a sonnet.)

Another example: The hymn is a poetic form all of us probably know— hymns, psalms, anthems, have a fairly tedious metrical pattern, a syllable count, they are divided into stanzas, many of them with a stringent rhyme scheme. Musicians in the room can probably attest to the form of any score; mathematicians work inside the form of a proof — form is sometimes a little bit like like an obstacle course toward beauty. So, see, you are participating in formal poetic exercise — in prosody, as it is called— whether you know it

or not. Another reason to love church! It's ALL poetry! And you thought you weren't a poetry person!

What you have learned so far is what you inherently already knew to be true: Everything has rhythm; everything has form. A game of chess, or a basketball game, especially if we can watch it from an aerial view, has an incredibly efficient form— there is a revolving of people, a changing of shapes, in order, in sequence, with adjustments— and all in order to accomplish something. But running a play on the basketball court is not the POINT of the game, just as form is not (or, in my opinion it's not, others would argue) the POINT of a poem. But form, like a well-executed drill, moves us toward the thing we desire.

I could spend a year on form—I won't, but I could— form as organizational method, as visual technique, as theory. But it can be tedious and it is as I said in part one of this series: you do not have be able to name elements of a poem in order to enjoy poetry, it's just a cool thing to know because knowledge pleases and rewards us. William Carlos Williams says "the thing I like best about poems is taking them apart to see what makes them work." You might have something similar you "take apart" in order to better appreciate it — whatever your thing is— race cars, recipes, dance, astrology, whatever— something you study in depth because it enriches and deepens and enhances what you already admire. That is what learning is supposed to do— awaken, not burden.

Legend has it that the poet Jack Spicer, part of a group of California poets in the 1950s-ish, opened a poetry course he called his Magic Workshop, by saying, "We're not going to start out trying to define magic. If we do, we'll spend the whole semester theorizing. Instead, we are going to see if we can make it happen by writing poems." Which actually reminds me of something Michael Sweeney said recently in a brilliant story about trying to explain baptism to small children, or trying to explain what God is. He shared what Saint Thomas Aquinas said, "whatever we say about God is more unlike God than saying nothing." Michael said this beautiful thing about how babies should answer questions about baptism and about God except that the reason they can't talk as babies is because they know too much. Similarly, the Tao Te Ching says "those who know, don't talk. Those who talk don't know." So trying to define God, or define magic, might be moving us further away from the very thing we are trying to know.

In my own long way around learning about religion— I was and am interested in knowing God, in reading the Bible, just as I am interested in the way of faith, the way of Christ. But I was not then and am still not particularly *moved* by theory. I think it is interesting, but it doesn't matter in the same way to me as beauty matters. *Talking about* the sacred is different from *experiencing* the sacred. It's one reason poetry is my greatest teacher: Poetry is the art that marries the sacred to the earthly world.

If I think about form as the hole in which the rabbit sits — form as a structure that holds and sustains something alive— the pressure lets up on my having to know everything

about form. Form becomes a way of organizing poetry, but not the way of poetry itself. Jack Gilbert says form might be "the way pentagrams …hold the spirit one conjures up."

III.

So what. Why does form matter, who cares if we name it, notice it, stay IN it, break the rules of it. Well, the "so what" of form goes something like this:
The magic is that form gives us the illusion that our subjects are containable.

Liturgy is form. Formula. Rite. Ritual. Ceremony. This is the form you might just have been inside of for the last hour. But the SUBJECT of Liturgy is God, communion, the mystery of faith. Now, if you think about mystery, or God, you don't necessarily associate with it things like order, pattern, formula, structure, first this, then that. Mystery would not seem to have a sequence. In fact, mystery seems formLESS, shapeLESS, structureLESS.

The subject of mystery would not seem particularly suited to such predictability, such a fixed and even rigid pattern of elements (we confess this, in order to receive that, the celebrant says the thing, we respond with the thing.) So our attempt to contain the vastness of mystery, the depth and breadth of God no less, is actually an attempt to understand what surpasses us.

This is the transformative part of what we are beholding. It's also further proof that you don't have to even KNOW you are beholding in order to be becoming. You did not have to be consciously aware of the form of church in order to delight in it. The subtitle of this presentation is beholding through listening because form— while it may satisfy a visual aim— actually has nothing to do with beholding as LOOKING. It is beholding as experience, as perception. Quite often, we are beholding something invisible anyway.

It is FORM that allows us to know that the invisible is held — the spirit is here not because we can look at it, necessarily, but because we detect the shape of it through liturgy, in one another, in our ritual and ceremony. The form of it is part of the force of it, but the real power— what moves us, or me,— is in realizing that what we are containing is impossible to contain and THAT is the amazement, that the love of God and the depth of God, that the breadth and truth of poetry is not structure-able, and is, another word I made up, un-nail-down-able.

Edna St. Vincent Millay, one of my literary heroes, has a poem, a sonnet, called, "I Will Put Chaos Into Fourteen Lines" — it is a formally flawless sonnet on all counts. In it she personifies chaos as a man who must be contained though he twists and strains until, "he with Order mingles and combines. Past are his hours, the years of our duress, / his arrogance, our awful servitude: I have him. / He is nothing more nor less / than something simple not yet understood." She closes: "I will only make him good."

It is as though if we could but simply get Chaos to get inside his form, to act right and rhyme like he's supposed to, and stay within the lines we have made, then Chaos could be contained, controlled. Of course, if it were possible to contain chaos, it would no longer *be* chaos. The moment it is contained is the very moment it ceases to be. So, on one hand, of course chaos is not in fourteen lines because it can't be.

On the other hand, Millay does exactly that — she does indeed put chaos into fourteen lines because that is what the poem says it does and that is the work of form, and we have a sonnet to prove it.

So there is form, the hole in which the rabbit sits, but another image that might help us think about this is that form is also like a scaffold. We rest upon it and we push against it but it's holding us all in place. The larger tension here has to do with internal and external force. Form is external. Form is the hole, the rabbit is the subject. What is alive is what is INSIDE the poem. Liturgy is an external structure, the way the Book of Common Prayer, or a dictionary, is an external, tangible, ordering of elements. But INSIDE the liturgy is the living thing— all of us, plus God, plus the whole point of it all, the thing Liturgy aims to contain so that we might better understand what we cannot see.

So, internal and external worlds are essential components in understanding not only form but craftsmanship. While the external you has been crafted in such a way that it might inform the internal you, even illuminate the real you, the external form of you is really just there to hold you. The acrostic poem of your name, made of words that describe you, may help us to know you, but it is not actually you. The definition of love is not love itself.

You see how this is the metaphor of our lives. Your inner self versus your external self. The FORM of you, the scaffold that is you, your body and skeleton, your persona, your visible self, the perception others have of you, is only holding the SUBJECT that is you, the living you, the REAL you that is inner, the way the BRAIN is a form that holds the MIND. So: in this analogy, you are the rabbit!

IV.

So does it matter whether you can distinguish between a Shakespearan sonnet and a Petrarchan sonnet? No! Is it impressive if you can? Absolutely!
The pleasure in being able to notice form, to behold the external structure of a poem, the way you can behold the architecture of everything from a church service to a tv show, a skyscraper, the arc of a novel, the movement of dance, the grace of the Dallas Cowboys offense, the point of form is to enhance and enrich the Real Thing it contains. The poet Linda Gregg distinguishes a poem's GARMENTRY from its LIFE BLOOD, saying essentially that garmentry can be attractive, useful, decorative, even beautiful, but that without Life Blood, it doesn't do much to expand our lives. This is a metaphor we know

by heart; it is the difference in private and public worlds, external and internal selves, form and subject. This is the predicament of OUR WHOLE EXISTENCE — our garmentry versus our life blood. And existence is the nature of poetry. Existence is the living subject. In fact, Galway Kinnell says that poetry is nothing if not the human cry of existence. In other words, poetry is the witness for our lives. Jane Hirshfield says it this way: "It is in poetry's words that life calls to life with the same inevitability and gladness that bird calls to bird, whale to whale, frog to frog. Listening across the night or ocean or pond, they recognize one another and are warmed by that knowledge."

Gary reminded me that Jesus' explanation of why he came to us is that we might have life and have it more abundantly, in this way LIFE calls to LIFE; and then he offered a verse from Psalm 42 - "deep calls to deep in the noise of thy cataracts" (a mysterious verse, he says, that seems to speak of the depths of a soul, maybe particularly a lost one, calling to the depths of God or the depth in others…a longing.) So if the work of poetry then, is the work of the soul, the work of mystery, then of course it would delight us to want to know how it all happens. It's why there is some part of us that wants to know how magic works: we want to figure out the trick for the sake of *knowing*, of clarifying the mystery, but another part of us that realizes that having the answers deprives us of a particular pleasure, a pleasure that is only available if we *don't* know.

See what I have done here? Poetry is not only God, poetry is also magic.
Who can say this is anything but joyful knowledge! And it's not just available to "specialists" or to scholars. Poetry is available always and does not have to be something difficult or academic. Hirshfield says, "Poems are one way we make ourselves more transparent to the fullness of our existence." She also argues that as long as poems "are read at weddings and at funerals, and exchanged between lovers, and given to people in their time of need and suffering, poetry is doing its work. All the rest is a scaffold to support the endeavor, so that it is there at the very moment it is needed."

V.

I know this seems maybe premature to be talking up Jane's visit here— she comes in March—but it is such a huge deal. To give you a sense of her big deal-ness, Jane, in fall 2004, was awarded the 70th Academy Fellowship for distinguished poetic achievement by The Academy of American Poets, an honor formerly held by such poets as Robert Frost, Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams, and Elizabeth Bishop. You can't miss this. In 2012, she was elected a Chancellor of the Academy of American Poets.

I mentioned last time that Jane is a practicing Zen Buddhist and I hope she will speak about her monastic experience, particularly her years of silence. After we first invited her, I told Gary she would be worth every cent just to sit at her feet and listen. She was in

formal Zen training for 8 years and she transitioned back into lay practice life after three years in the monastery.

As you might imagine, Jane's religion is a rich subject for interviewers — they are certainly the questions I would ask of her— what is the difference between or the influence on Jane Hirshfield, the poet, and Jane Hirshfield, the Buddhist. But I really admire her way of drawing attention not to the differences between those two identities, and even pivots away from personal revelation and autobiography. She is far more interested in the SAMENESS of practice. She says, "It's not so much that poetry and zen influence *each other*…[rather] they [a]re both ways of trying to do the same thing, to know the world and my own experience, to feel and think more deeply, with greater saturation. You develop a craft and a practice in order to make a vessel of yourself…"

And this goes back to something I claimed in part one, which is that the point of poetry is listening— yes, to the rhythm, to words,— but listening to and for the sacred, the mysterious, the pleasurable. Jane says listening is the most important part of reading poetry: "Give yourself over…" she says, "the way you give yourself over to your own night dreaming, or to a beloved's tales of the day. And then, try to listen first to a poem the way you might listen to a piece of music — the meaning of music isn't some note by note analysis or paraphrase, it's to find yourself moved."

I recalled last time how many of us have *lost* a joy or an interest in poetry that we once had and I think I might be oversimplifying things but I think it's true that the older we get, the more resistant we become to imaginative thinking. It is as though the longer we are in this world, the harder it becomes for us to be amazed by it. As we grow older, we might get away, travel the world to see beauty, to see the magnificent. As children, we are content in our own backyards, playing with dirt. I mentioned to you last time the inherent pleasure most of us have as children, the rhythm of being rocked, of nursery rhymes and lullabies.

Writing this, I was reminded of a conversation my friend Jennifer and I had had about the oddness of fairy tales; Grimm's fairy tales are indeed grim! There is the touch of the sinister in many children's stories — Doctor Seuss, for example— but we are so enraptured by the *pleasure* in being read to, or in reading ourselves, that we don't mind or even realize how spooky the world is. Here's an example: so lulled are we by lullabies, and so entranced are we by rhythm, by melody, so seduced that we gloss right over the words — talk about listening without the burden of analysis! "Rub a dub dub / Three men in a tub." Hm.

And another:

"There was an old woman who lived in a shoe.
She had so many children, she didn't know what to do.
She gave them some broth without any bread;
And whipped them all soundly and put them to bed."

See what I mean? Our mothers sing to us and we sing right into the innocent faces of our children so pleasingly that we do not realize the terror:
"Rock-a-bye baby / in the tree tops, / When the wind blows / The cradle will rock. / When the bough breaks, / The cradle will fall, / And down will fall baby / Cradle and all." Okay, nighty-night! I guess even as children we are learning that suffering is inevitable. It's not IF the wind blows, it's WHEN.

VI.

The poem I have handed to you is from *The Beauty* and is called "Anywhere You Look." It is a small poem; I'll read it to you:

in the corner of a high rain gutter
under the roof tiles
new grasses' delicate seed heads

what war, they say

Now, remembering that poetry is an offering (Jane says poetry is not force-fed sustenance) and remembering that the aim of poetry it to open rather than narrow, to make clear without making simple, and to ask questions rather than answer them, let us behold what the poem holds before us—a singular image: grass growing in a gutter.

Some of you may be familiar with haiku. The essential definition is that it's a Japanese poem of seventeen syllables, in three lines. Five syllables, seven syllables, five syllables. Traditionally, haiku evokes images of the natural world. There are, as with any form, variations of the rules and one thing I have learned in my study of Jane Hirshfield that her work as a translator, largely of Japanese 9th and 11th century haiku, is that, as is always the case, some things are un-translatable. For example, there are words in Japanese that either can't be translated, or that when translated break the rules of syllabic count. None of this matters, really, except that I am saying this poem, while not a technical haiku, is essentially haiku.

It's syllable count is nine, five, eight and with an extra line so if you're just looking at rules of form, this is not haiku. But if we can think of the form has holding something alive, the rabbit, then the *essence* of the poem echoes the function of haiku: a small poem that generates a large question. In this case, the poem asks a question for us: what war.

It is this last line, "what war, they say" — the very line that underscores the poem's rule-breaking— that seems to get to the heart of the matter. This is a poem of smallness and expansion— consider the expanse of negative space around its smallness, that is, consider all that the poem communicates by *not* saying anything. What war? The grasses' delicate seed heads are the ones asking the question. Let this work on you:

Literally, this is impossible. Grass doesn't talk. Grass also doesn't know about war. FIGURATIVELY, here is an image of neglect — grass in the gutter under the roof tiles — and it might be an image of miracles, too, that the poet would be attentive to the otherwise neglected, and give voice to the impossible. This is why poetry makes us smarter: Hirshfield herself says, "[Poetry] makes us more permeable, more compassionate, more rigorous, and, in needed ways, smarter…more awake and alert to subtlety and connection, more open to new feelings and new understandings. Empathy with not only people but ants and trees and mountains; … — sometimes the dismantling of rational response is the most needed thing."

What I admire about this poem, however miniature, is that it moves outward, from the specific to the universal, which, to my mind, is the mark of excellence— that the poet invokes the particular in order to transcend it. This is a poem, too, without commentary, or judgment: it is an acknowledgement of the supreme indifference of nature. Nietzsche says this is one reason nature is tragic: "Strong and weak will both perish at random and nature is oblivious to the outcome…" New grass life cares nothing for our suffering, has no obligation to human toil.

One of the four haiku masters in Japan, Kobayashi Issa, was writing in the late 1700s and early 1800s and I learned of his poem in a recent interview with Jane earlier this year. The poem goes: "On a branch / floating downriver / a cricket, singing."

This is another misbehaving haiku — it is 3 syllables, 5, 5, and while it *is* 17 syllables in its original Japanese language, it obviously is not here. Still, what a perfect portrait, a perfect little metaphor for life: you are going to perish, little cricket, but in the meantime you might as well sing. That's old advice, but we've never heard it this way. That is the work of poetry.

Remembering, too, what we have already said about form, which is that it gives us the illusion of containing what cannot be contained, and that form is a *vehicle* by which we are delivered the real and living subject, you can see that the function of form, the poem's garmentry, is inextricable from its contents. Millay's sonnet about chaos, were it NOT a sonnet, would be an entirely different subject, an entirely different poem. Hirshfield's poems about seedhead's questioning war, were it not echoing haiku, were it delivered in a way that was more elaborate, longer, more decorative, then something is lost— whether it

is pleasure, whether it is the satisfaction of having something perfect be delivered perfectly…

In this same interview, Jane discloses what's on her refrigerator, another haiku: "Barn's burnt down, now I can see the moon."

VII.

I have to restrain myself, fight against the urge to say every single thing I know and believe to be true about poetry and Life Itself and trust that my work here is but an offering. I remember too that a lot of what is True about us is what cannot be spoken. Try all you want, your entire life, the pen hand will never know the soul. But it is the work I measure my life against.

I want to close with, simply, a suggestion, a wish, a reminder, that the work of this— whether it feels joyful or difficult or both— is work that, I think, bonds us to the world and to our own being, in a way that is towards growth, towards a softening, maybe, of whatever walls you put up to keep mystery out, to keep questions at bay, to avoid vulnerability, maybe. But this is the work of the soul— yes, poetry is sometimes paradoxical or bewildering or even impenetrable…it's also in many respects completely impractical— but the beauty of this work is that it increases in us notions of the possible, the multiple. Poetry offers us a different level of life. "So much of the illness of the contemporary world, Hirshfield says, "comes from living in silo-mind… Good poems take down the silos. They are windows flung open." Form, essentially, is the vessel by which the news of the spirit is delivered.