

### FORUM III: *Becoming Beauty: How do we become what we behold? What is to become of us?*

#### I.

Good morning to you. And thank you for being here. This is the “conclusion”—if I can call it that— of this series I’ve called *We Become What We Behold* though you might have heard it said that poetry is really never finished, only abandoned.

I’m not sure what it says about these presentations that they can so easily be summarized afterwards, but that’s good news if you haven’t been here for the previous two talks. So, distilled down to a few sentences, what you have missed is essentially poetry-evangelism. Specifically, what we have covered so far is that rhythm is everywhere, inside you and outside you, and that form—even formlessness—is the shape, the vessel, that holds the heart. Form is the body that holds the life of its subject. I have pontificated, also, about the pleasures of poetry; the concerns of it are those of mystery, of question-asking, of sense-making, of truth-seeking, of our being humans in love and grief and doubt and suffering. Poetry gives us some understanding that we are not alone in our predicament and our blessing as mortal souls on earth. I have in these last two sessions argued that poems exist to *move* us — and while scholarly or academic pursuit of poetry is rewarding, for me anyway, scholarship is absolutely not necessary for enjoyment, for the pleasure of being moved even if that feeling is un-nameable and inexplicable. I do not know anything about film-making, for example, or about acting, but I still can enjoy a movie and even learn from it. I do not know about making chocolate, but I enjoy eating it.

I want to say clearly that I think talking about poetry is different from experiencing poetry. Talking about the sacred is different from experiencing the sacred. The name you were given is the name of you, but is not YOU any more than the definition of God is God or the definition of love, love itself. That is really, for me, an essential thing to hold up: knowing *about* poetry is different from experiencing it. If anything, these talks are meant to be a guide for your own experience, especially if poetry feels heavy-going or intimidating.

In my life, art has been, more than I realized or even knew, inextricable from religion. I took the long way to church, as most of you have heard me say before. I was baptized here at Saint Stephens in 2014 so am essentially a two-and-a-half year old with a microphone, a two-and-a-half-year old who happens to know something about poetry and whose own poetry has been concerned with mystery, divinity, and mercy — I was writing Episcopalian poems even before I knew what the word meant, and certainly well before I became one. And so I realize that some of my teaching in this way has

been hard to extricate from my personal life of faith — I don't know if that is productive to hear about or not, but forgive me all the same for what feels a little self-centered. I recognize it but it's hard to divorce myself from myself.

A couple things I have said before but will repeat to re-ground us in this topic:

One is that I mostly agree with Horace, our 65 BC Roman lyricist, when he said the purpose of poetry is to delight and instruct. I am probably a little more interested in delight than I am in instruction—probably true for you, too, I'm guessing— but generally speaking this has been the purpose of poetry for me and the principle that has guided my teaching. At their very core, I think that poems are reminders that we exist, that our existence is an amazement. Good art helps us restore our ability to be amazed and propels us toward discovery. Poems can also exist as prisms, as reflections and as meditations. It has been said that true attentiveness—the kind that poetry invites us into— true attentiveness is the natural prayer of the soul.

Another quick reminder is that the title for this series is *We Become What We Behold*— a little bewildering, a little difficult to penetrate, but a phrase that I have been (maybe neurotically) concerned with trying to get inside of. I don't know that I have succeeded because I don't know that I *can* get to the bottom of it. It seems to me bottomLESS, endless — therefore appropriate, I guess, for contemplating as a theme about God and about poetry—the marriage of those two eternal, bottomless, endless mysteries.

The phrase —*We Become What We Behold*— is a hard one to credit because there seems to be little consensus about who said it first: William Blake, Marshall McLuhan, the Bible (it appears in Corinthians), and then Weston, a few weeks ago, drew my attention to this beautiful Eucharistic prayer sometimes used in Lent— I know that the Society of Saint John the Evangelist in Boston uses it—it goes, “Behold what you are; become what you receive.” It's adapted from a sermon by Saint Augustine (it's Sermon 272) in which he marries the bread itself to the person who *receives* the bread.

Wherever the idea comes from, I owe a lot to it because it truly has been an amulet for my life even when I feel like I cannot get close to it. One thing the phrase has done is open my understanding about poetry, my teaching, my reading, my own writing, into a new realm that includes transformation. In other words, poetry exists to please us — comfort us, delight us, unite us, maybe instruct us— but it is also capable of changing us. This feels like a new concept for me though I must have always somehow known it to be true.

And as you've been hearing, one poet who has been instrumental in my thinking and in my own becoming is Jane Hirshfield, one of the most famous living contemporary poets who has agreed to come here in March. Aside from her poetry— she has several exquisite collections of her own work— she's also a prolific translator, (specifically of ancient Japanese writers, classical Chinese poets and even the lesser known Eskimo poets) and a beautiful essayist. Her essays about Zen, about monastic life, about poetry as empathetic and sympathetic exercise have been hugely influential not only for me but for the world of letters. While I knew that poetry was life-affirming, I did not always think it was life-*changing*. And whether this was because of my own skepticism about the role of the arts in American culture, the value that society assigns—or does not assign—to poetry (I can name *maybe* five poets who make a living writing poetry, Jane Hirshfield is one of them), it is easy to think this is but a cheerful idealism that poetry can save the world.

Then again, it might be exactly what it's doing. So the focus of this particular presentation is poetry as a transformative art.

While the first two parts of this series might have been concentrating on “beholding” poetry — the reading of it, the listening to it, the delighting in it, the attention to it — this morning will center on becoming. How do we become what we behold and what is to become of us?

## II.

I think that one of the hardest parts of life is simply figuring out what you need. But in order to know what you need you have to know what you have. It's like having to go shopping — it's hard to know what to get if you don't know what's already there in the pantry. And knowing what we have might be one way of saying that we “know ourself,” that we are comfortable in our own skin, that we are able to inhabit our own experiences, our own life. Knowing what we have might be akin to having done the reflective work of the inner life. Some of us are probably really good at that, at thinking about ourselves. Others of us would rather not— sometimes, self-reflection is dangerous territory. To not think, to repress even, is a way of coping. Many of us try to *avoid* spending time alone, *avoid* thinking because it only causes us trouble; it ends up just being a reminder that life is not for the weak, that things are complicated and massive and without answer and we're all going to die. It is no wonder sometimes all I want to do is watch Andy Griffith and work a crossword puzzle.

That is to say that figuring out what we *have* could actually be just as hard as figuring out what we *need*. And sometimes to spend all this time thinking about the self is a little

uncomfortable, maybe even unproductive. Being alive can be really complicated if you're going to be alive and THINK about being alive. It could be, *I think*, that part of the real work we are given to do is the work of discovery; it could be that our task on earth is to live fully into our own lives, if not live FEARLESSLY into our own lives. Which is to say that part of the work of a life is navigating the space—and it is sometimes a mess of a space— between what you have and what you need. This could be as difficult as having to determine the difference in need and want.

And it is in this space— the space between— where, to my mind, poetry enters. Where God enters. Where togetherness and joy and praise and jokes and beauty comes in, where The Point is. Where amazement and question-asking and miracles and music and wonder enter. The poet Muriel Rukeyser is noted for saying: "If there were no poetry on any day in the world, poetry would be invented that day. For there would be an intolerable hunger." And I think the hunger is sometimes for MORE LIFE, MORE of the very thing that causes us distress. "Why ask art into a life at all, " Jane Hirshfield says, "if not to be transformed and enlarged by its presence...? Some hunger for MORE is in us — more range, more depth, more feeling, more associative freedom, more beauty. More perplexity and more friction of interest. More prismatic grief and unstinted delight...", she says. It's like, if we're going to be alive, we might as well be REALLY alive. We're all going to die— it's a fact— but in the meantime, why NOT revel in this world. One thing Jane says she learned from Zen is that what IS is enough— there is no need for what she calls "conceptual somersaults" to appreciate beauty, to respect others, to feel awe, to pay attention, to enjoy poetry and music, to listen well. That is, that MORE we desire is actually already HERE.

You see how poetry and religion— any spiritual ritual—are linked. They are each an attempt to expand our vision and feed the soul. To acknowledge the fullness of things. To make meaning. An attempt to BECOME a more awake human being or, more specifically, to become what Hirshfield calls a person capable of "behaving better, of acting out of richness and generosity rather than [out of] ...grasping, and fear."

Here is the equation then, the case for poetry saving the world. I read this to you last time and I'm saying it again. I am going to quote Jane here: "[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. [Poetry teaches us] empathy with not only people but ants and trees and mountains; ... — sometimes the dismantling of rational response is the most needed thing." I am going to spend the rest of this talk trying to explain HOW that can be.

## III.

And I'd like to dive right in to a poem called "My Life Was the Size of My Life" from *The Beauty* as a way of making a case for becoming what we behold, for transforming, for saving souls.

My life was the size of my life.  
 Its rooms were room-sized,  
 its soul was the size of a soul.  
 In its background, mitochondria hummed,  
 above it sun, clouds, snow,  
 the transit of stars and planets.  
 It rode elevators, bullet trains,  
 various airplanes, a donkey.  
 It wore socks, shirts, its own ears and nose.  
 It ate, it slept, it opened  
 and closed its hands, its windows.  
 Others, I know, had lives larger.  
 Others, I know, had lives shorter.  
 The depth of lives, too, is different.  
 There were times my life and I made jokes together.  
 There were times we made bread.  
 Once, I grew moody and distant.  
 I told my life I would like some time,  
 I would like to try seeing others.  
 In a week, my empty suitcase and I returned.  
 I was hungry, then, and my life,  
 my life, too, was hungry, we could not keep  
 our hands off        our clothes on  
 our tongues from

Now, who hasn't at some point wanted to break up with their life? I have certainly wished sometimes I could break up with myself — I just need some space! I would like to see other people! I mean, almost literally—they call this the geographical cure—I have TRIED to break up with my life by moving to new cities trying to escape and ask for a do-over.

I want to walk us through a couple things with this poem, again, as a way of making a point about becoming, about transformation:

This is a poem of personification— the abstract Life *becomes* a new thing with human attributes, a thing that can travel, that wears socks, that has a face and hands, that eats and sleeps, that is capable of embracing. This is the beauty of figurative language, the point of which is to make knowable something abstract — this is a technique you know all about even if you didn't know the name. We are always assigning concrete imagery to abstract thought; it's how we get Love is a Battlefield; Happiness is a Warm Gun, My love is like a red, red rose— and we speak in metaphor all the time (white as snow, good as gold, right as rain, she's a bad egg, hot as hell, life's a beach...we are built for poetry.) Anyway, in this case, abstract life becomes a human being. Life is a lover. And that makes total sense! At times our life feels at once separate from us, unknowable as another person, and at the same time stuck with us. This is a poem about a human's self-examination, a human accounting of the things of a life even while life is considered as though it were divorced from the person living it. As though it were possible to live a life without a life. That gets my brain in knots.

But, if you are at all like me what we're really drawn to, what we really care about the most in the poem, is the ending of it— at the end, the speaker comes back with her empty suitcase (interesting that it's empty— was there ever anything in there?) And isn't this an incredible image? Here is the alive person—the liver of life— coming back to embrace her life like a lost lover. It's a seductive moment. The human and the human life hungry for one another, having returned “we could not keep / our hands off our clothes on our tongues from.” It's downright erotic — see? poetry is so racy.

You notice there is no punctuation, there's that gap of white space, and the effect is this sort of urgency, breathlessness, a tension between what is there and what is *not* there, the coming together in this physical, primal embrace. There is also NOT a period to end this poem and so the conclusion is really not a conclusion at all. One can make the case that if there is no period, there is no end, the poem goes on to infinity and in a poem about embracing life, that is a hopeful gesture. The poet Heather McHugh would say this is an example of the perfect ending: “one that feels inevitable while at the same time opening up into a universe of potential.”

Understand that this may or may not be the story of Jane Hirshfield — instead it is the story of A Speaker, one particular human being feeling exiled from her own life and then returning to herself. And so it becomes the poem of ME and my life, of you and your life, of all humans and their human lives. We have a lot in common. If you think about it, one thing we have in common is that human existence is existence in EXILE one way or another — we were expelled from paradise, whether that is the Garden, or our mother's womb— suddenly we are in the Real World where there are things like

poverty and abuse and sickness and hunger and sadness and breakups and politicians and the Kardashians. This is an inexhaustible narrative, the story of exile—I was talking about this with a friend just a few days ago—Annie Ward Love, from whom I am learning a great deal. One thing we have talked about is that our lives are lives of separation between our self and our mother, ourself and God, ourself from our self — It reminds me of what Rumi says, "I wonder: from these thousands of me's, which one am I?"

There's more to say about this poem—especially now that many of you have heard my lecture on meter and form—but I want to use this piece not to talk about poetic devices but to talk about poetic possibility. And it starts with a question of empathy. I think that you all probably know this already but the difference in sympathy and empathy is not a particularly drastic one, though it is an important one. We tend to use them almost synonymously and the dictionary uses one to define the other — not always a helpful strategy. But, simply put, sympathy connotes pity — you buy greeting cards that offer sympathy to express your sorrow for someone else's misfortune. (Here's a discussion question or a riddle: Why are there no empathy cards?)

And here is your vocabulary lesson: SYM, the prefix,—as in sympathy— means WITH. And Pathy, from the Greek, from pathos, means passion and/or suffering. And so sympathy is a suffering with. (As a side note, I think we are actually good at sympathy and maybe even sometimes good at empathy but I am aware of the tendency to sympathize through self-referencing... if you start telling me about how your dog died I will probably start telling you about how mine did. You're getting over the flu? Oh I was so sick; one time I had the flu. Your grandmother is sick? I remember when my grandmother was sick. You are having trouble in your relationship? Well let me tell you about my experience. Now, I don't know that this is bad but I do notice that it is only sometimes helpful to have our response be anchored in talking about our own experiences. I also think sometimes we are mostly well-intentioned but get really screwed up: someone is grieving the loss of a loved one and we compare it to the death of our pet and we are in some tricky territory. That happens; we're human and language fails.)

The word empathy is different. Empathy is a closer synonym to compassion than to sympathy. Here is the subtle difference: *em-* derives from the Greek *en-* meaning "within, in." So the difference in sympathy and empathy is the difference in WITH and WITHIN. To be within another's suffering is different from being WITH it.

We were talking about this in my confirmation group a couple weeks ago—we are reading the Book of Mark—and it was in the context of Jesus healing the leper. One of

our discussion questions has to do with the difference not only in SYM and EM but the difference in empathy and compassion, the difference in feeling and acting. It reads, "Sympathy says 'I feel bad that you're hungry.' Empathy says, 'I know something about how you feel; I was hungry once myself.' But compassion says, 'Friend, let's go get something to eat.' ..." it goes on to say that "[it is] compassion that cause[s] us to touch, lift, feed..."

#### IV.

What does this have to do with poetry? Okay:

Well, I will read you what Hirshfield says— this comes from an interview just this past summer on NPR's All Things Considered:

She says, "Reading good poems, you feel yourself singular and also part of a common existence. I think compassion... is one of the most important things poems do ... They allow us to feel how shared our fates are. If a person reads [a particular] poem when they're inside their own most immediate loss, they — I hope — feel themselves accompanied. *Someone else has been here. Someone else has felt what I felt.* ... We know this in our minds, but that's very different from being accompanied by the words of a poem... Poetry's engine is empathy: the ability to feel what others feel..."

And dating a little further back, in an interview published in a magazine called Rattle: She says, "Poetry is a concentration of language that *permits* transformation." That's an interesting verb to me: permits. "Poems *enable* you to do or know something you couldn't have done or known in the same way without them. In contemporary American culture, all the arts, and particularly poetry, have as a central task the work of paying attention to whatever the mainstream culture ignores or dismisses... Art's example reminds us that it is possible to develop an awakened and courageous soul in the face of a world that mostly asks us to be obedient sheep... Poems are one way we make ourselves more transparent to the fullness of existence."

And, in her book of essays *Ten Windows*, — that one's for sale, too, the full title is *Ten Windows: How Great Poems Transform the World*— she writes, "The desire of monks and mystics is not unlike that of artists: to perceive the extraordinary within the ordinary by changing NOT the world but the eyes that look... A good poem is a solvent, a kind of WD-40 for the soul."

So I think what you're hearing is a sincere optimism, a true faith, in the possibilities of poetry, of art, of goodness. And I hope that what is becoming clear, too, is that this is not



just the work of reading and writing but the work of living. It is not just the *pleasure* of reading and writing, but the *pleasure* of living. Compassion and empathy really could not care less if you are able to identify iambic meter or distinguish an English sonnet from an Italian one or know when a haiku is breaking the rules of itself. The real task is as simple and as difficult as recognition, as feeling that your human fate and my human fate and yours and yours are shared ones.

This is very different than saying that we must be uniform, or that we all must BE poets, or that we should or even can have everything in common— there is still an expanse of world to live in that is able to hold our differences, our oddness and our personality and our disagreements and our questions and certainly our races, our religions, our cultures. But the essence of us and the fate of us is a common experience and is, by nature, a compassionate and empathetic experience. What art does is invite this kind of complexity, allow for questions, encourage wonder by recognizing that the issues of our lives are not always solvable and that the feelings we feel are not always expressible or translatable. Poetry does not pretend to have solutions and answers and if anything is a counter to the rhetoric in our world that is overly certain. Poetry is a counter to quickness and to falseness, especially false solutions and false certainty. Poetry recognizes that sometimes the answer is not only a slow one but sometimes the answer is that there is no answer and we find a way forward from there.

William Faulkner said in his acceptance speech for the Nobel Prize that the subject of good writing is the heart in conflict with itself. And I do think it is the enterprise of the heart, of the soul, of the spirit that links us one to another, that enables us to be transformed, that allows us to fully inhabit our own lives but also the lives of others—that is the transformative power of poetry and that is how compassion works.

My voice cannot do Faulkner's justice but the passage that is enough to make me weep goes like this: "Man is immortal, not because he alone among creatures has an inexhaustible voice, but because he has a soul, a spirit capable of compassion and sacrifice and endurance. The poet's duty is to write about these things. It is his privilege to help man endure by lifting his heart, by reminding him of the courage and honor and hope and pride and compassion and pity and sacrifice which have been the glory of his past." And listen to this: "The poet's voice need not merely be the record of man, it can be one of the props, the pillars to help him endure and prevail."

V.

This is all pretty hopeful stuff. Optimism at its finest. And it's the kind of optimism that can not hurt you. I suppose the danger of optimism sometimes is that you'll be proved

wrong and the world will be as terrible as everyone said it was and life is unfair and people are cruel. Okay, but if we already know that that the world is mean and we're all going to die, what could possibly be the harm in TRYING this kind of idealism? Why NOT consider that art can transform the world. Why NOT move through life a little more carefully, a little more attentively, a little more sensitive to subtlety, a little more open to mystery and beauty. Why not see what can happen if you open the mind to poetry, invite it in. I remember reading once that the muse can stay silent a lifetime. And so it is our responsibility to be present when she calls. I also love this beautiful thing Andre Gide says— he was a french writer, who won the Nobel Prize in 1947. He says, "In order to discover new lands one must leave the shore for a very long time."

This is also a case for sad poetry being hopeful poetry. I have heard it for years, especially from my students: "why does poetry have to be so sad?" And it's a good question. It often *is* sad. Like any art form, there are possibilities for the gruesome, the obscene, the violent, the unsettling. When my students say, "why do we read all this depressing stuff, why are there no happy poems" I say to them that there ARE happy poems— just as there are happy songs, and happy movies, and happy books with happy endings. But that the problem with this kind of "happiness" is that we don't necessarily learn that much and we don't always trust it simply because it isn't always trustworthy. Of course we want the good guy to win and the couple we're rooting for to end up together and we want justice to be served and we want to know what happens ten years later and we want there to be a sequel— we like happiness. But we also know better. We know that the *truer* story is more complicated, that happiness often comes with a cost, that bad things happen to good people, the hero sometimes loses, and we aren't able to see the future. But happiness *does matter* — the Dalai Lama himself says so. "If you want others to be happy," he says, "practice compassion. If *you* want to be happy, practice compassion." Optimism feels better and happiness is a virtue, though it isn't always easy or even that interesting.

One of my favorite contemporary poets, Christine Garren, is one of the most, to my mind, under-appreciated writers of contemporary letters. She is also one of the absolute saddest. The biggest criticism of her work is that it is hopeless. I actually wrote an essay about this very subject, the thesis of which is that even the bleakest of poems is never completely bleak. It is an *impossibility* for a poem to be totally and entirely bleak. It's oxymoronic. Because bleakness in poetry, because it is poetry, is thusly a beacon: even the saddest poems, by their nature, BECAUSE they exist as poems, ARE hopeful. Art made in response to crisis or suffering, is a sign of survival since the work itself is the tangible form of grief transferred, order diced from chaos. I have said before there really aren't many subjects in art to work with. The issues of our lives are not that many, especially the sad issues: loneliness, isolation, abandonment, fear, not-knowing, exile,

the inevitability of death, error, and human frailty. There are many who believe there are two subjects only: love and death.

The critic Helen Vendler says in her lectures that poetry is proof that the mind continues to understand what the heart cannot endure. And so just because the unknowable and inexplicable and bleak exist in the world is no reason to exclude it from poetry. There is a lot to learn. This is why we turn to art in the first place—we aim to make sense of the unknown through use of the known. Now we are back to form and containment — we put things in a form in order to understand what surpasses us. Poetry, even sad poetry, is always evidence of hope.

VI.

Finally, do you want to read a sad poem so that I can try to show you how sadness is not sadness? It's called "Two Linen Handkerchiefs" and it's eleven words long:

**How can you have been dead twelve years  
and these still**

And do you want to hear an excerpt of the commentary for this poem? Also sad? Hirshfield says:

"The poem is broken off in exactly the way a life is broken off, in exactly the way grief breaks off, takes us beyond any possible capacity for words to speak. And yet it also, short as it is, holds all of our bewilderment in the face of death. How is it that these inanimate handkerchiefs — which did belong to my father and are still in a drawer of mine, and which I did accidentally come across — how can they still be so pristinely ironed and clean and existent when the person who chose them and used them and wore them is gone?"

If anything, it's another example about negative space being not-empty space. Now, someone might be saying — this poem is sad and I read to feel better not worse. Fair enough. Me too. It's why I don't watch scary movies — I don't need to feel terrified on purpose any more than I need to feel sad on purpose. On one hand, you might say, it's needlessly sad. BUT remembering that we have chosen to be optimists, and luckily I have TWO hands, on the other hand, and this might take more work for me even if it is ultimately rewarding, but the poem—because it exists, because we can read it, hold it, give a voice to it, say it to ourselves, say it to another, be brought together in silence and even in sadness — it's very existence IS the hope.

Now, luckily, my dad is alive and well and I aim to force him to promise me that he will actually live forever and fix death. I am back to the idea of empathy. I do not have the exact experience of the poet, or of anyone who has lost their father. BUT, I do have the experience of missing, of losing, of helplessness. And I know what it is like to place value on a material thing because it is a symbol of something bigger — it's why we use my grandmother's dishes at Thanksgiving— they are artifacts, symbols, a way to regain what feels impossibly lost to us. The item that is the handkerchief is not sad — there is nothing emotional about fabric; the sadness is in an object's relationship to a human being, in this case a human being for whom these handkerchiefs are now useless. And so finding them is but a reminder of mortality.

I am going to assume that everyone here has cried if not reading a book than watching a movie. Or maybe you didn't full out cry, but you have *felt something*. Watching a movie — even when we know it is fiction— and we know that whoever the actor is that we are watching does not ACTUALLY die in this scene and that Scarlett O'Hara and Rhett Butler are NOT married in real life and it's going to be okay and that Old Yeller doesn't really die like that and Leonardo DiCaprio is not actually dead in the ocean as the Titanic sinks, Meryl Streep does not actually have to choose between her children, Bambi's mother is alive as soon as you start the movie over. You get the point. Our logical brains KNOW this— we know better— and yet there is something about beholding something other than our selves that actually TRANSFORMS us. Think about this: by seemingly forgetting your own life while you are engrossed in a movie, your crying because they broke up, or died, or left, or made the wrong choice is actually of course ALL ABOUT YOUR OWN LIFE. We allow what will happen to happen, it's part of the agreement of your role in the audience but *that* is the moment of transformation— even if it is immeasurable and fleeting. This is one of the clearest examples I have of empathetic exercise. We are WITHIN another even when it is impossible, if not illogical. Jane Hirshfield, in an interview, talks about the deceptive uselessness of art. She says, "You can't eat a painting. You can't do anything except stand before it, know the world differently, and be changed... It is how the inner world grows continually new."

I am saying this is how we counter what she calls "silo mind", this is the role of art, of good art, especially if after having read it you find yourself moved from one emotional room to another emotional room. If you are more awake, if you feel liberated, and EVEN if you feel sad! It ultimately doesn't matter how you NAME the change, what matters is the change, the movement toward it that is expansive, that is an opening up.

Art's role is distinct: art cannot bring food to the hungry, cannot give shelter to the homeless, cannot bandage the bleeding. I am certainly not claiming that. What I am

claiming and what I stand by unflaggingly is that art's role is necessary for a different kind of life, and can, in different ways, save lives, repair what is broken, can change us, make us softer and gentler, can comfort us, provide company for the journey and expression where there was silence and nothing. You have only to behold what is already here.