
Words are breath we've shaped with sound.
So the return to bare breath is a return
to the formless from the world of form.
Writing poems, one stays with the word and its
web of associations and roots, but the words
may have the shimmer of silence around them.

Metaphor closes the distance, erases boundaries.

Each image is the result of an unforgotten momentary encounter. Remembered, one revisits and refines the moment over and over until in a painting or in a poem the often-revisited image becomes, as John Berger says, "absolutely momentary." Beautiful phrase. The absolute and the relative join.

Dougherty: Death and loss recur in your work. Your poems have examined also the social and environmental brokenness of our world. The new collections seems to take these on indirectly by addressing fear. How does meditation help you engage with that?

Gibson: The brokenness of our world—you ask that question now? I don't think that my new collection takes on that brokenness directly. It's a collection that focuses on the struggle of living alone after a devastating personal loss. And fear is definitely an intimate challenge. Your question, however, is so timely. Aleppo is in ruins. A young man has been sentenced to death for shooting men and women at prayer in a church in Charleston—because they were African American. The polar ice isn't forming as readily this winter after the warmest climate year on record. Species are disappearing, wealth is being concentrated in the pockets of a few, too many are suffering from poor education and job loss and perhaps

loss of health care—on and on. We have a new President, and the ascendant mentality seems to embrace might-as-right, money-as-power, a grab-and-go which values force and success more than using language honestly. No resonant communion here—it appears to be a wrecking ball of a Cabinet. And there's the real fear of nuclear weapons once again. So much is threatened.

How does meditation help us with the stirrings of fear, facing such a world? Meditation helps us stay directly and clearly in the moment. If there is fear, we name it, claim it. If there is anger, we can witness it and make choices how to use that energy creatively. If there's a reinvigorated commitment to compassion in action, so much the better. Whatever is in us has to be seen and known for what it is. We become dangerous to ourselves and to others when we fall in love with our ideas, egos, powers, fears. Meditation helps us each find common ground—our humanity!

Dougherty: Let me give you a specific poem to comment on so you can go a little further with these ideas. Your poem "Radiation" appeared in John Bradley's anthology *Atomic Ghost* and now I think it brings together many things we've discussed. It's very social, and the form of it is the form of a ritual.

Gibson: Yes, "Radiation," although a poem with social/political content, uses the structure of a worship

service: Call to Worship, Responses, Confession, An Ancient Text, Private Meditation, Common Prayer. Aside from the sermon, which thankfully gets left out, it's pieced together from those lyric moments in the service when poetry is allowed to emerge, prayer is enlivened, or confession made possible.

Stand in the sun long enough to remember
that nothing is made without light
spoken so firmly
our flesh is its imprint.

Dougherty: Those are the exact lines I was going to give you!

Gibson: They suggest a lot of what we've been talking about.

Dougherty: How so?

Gibson: There's the meditative standing, the necessity to remember—and we're not talking about historical remembering. We're talking about deep, deep, deep body or spiritual remembering that "nothing is made without light." And I love "spoken so firmly." It could have been "spoken so meditatively" but (laughs) that doesn't scan.

Spoken so firmly, "our flesh is its imprint..." trying, trying always to get back to the source, to accept what is impermanent, and to live in terms of that, but also with an awareness that there's something that moves through us that is absolute. Light becomes the image of... Quakers use Light as an image for God or the Holy. The Essential Energy.

Dougherty: No one?

Gibson: No one.

AWP

Edward Dougherty's fourth collection of poems *Grace Street* is available from Cayuga Lake Books. In 2015, he published *Everyday Objects (Plain View)* and his fifth chapbook, *House of Green Water (FootHills Publishing)*, and in May 2015, his emblems (small calligraphic artwork with a brief poem) were exhibited at the *Word & Image Gallery* at the *Bright Hill Literary Center*.