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 un- 
forgotten momentary encounter. 
Remembered, one revisits and refines 
the moment over and over until in a 
painting or in a poem the often-revis-
ited image becomes, as John Berger 
says, “absolutely momentary.” Beau-
tiful phrase. The absolute and the 
relative join.

Dougherty: Death and loss recur 
in your work. Your poems have ex-
amined also the social and environ-
mental 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 dev-
astating 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 
warmer 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 ascen-
dant 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 di-
rectly 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 ac-
 tion, 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 spec-
ic 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 so-
cial, and the form of it is the form of 
a ritual.

Gibson: Yes, “Radiation,” although 
a poem with social/political con-
tent, 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 spir-
 itual 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.

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 emblazon (small 
calligraphic artwork with a brief poem) were 
exhibited at the Word & Image Gallery at the 
Bright Hill Literary Center.