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Parallel Poetics and the Energy of Metaphor

From a workshop conducted by Dennis Patrick Slattery, Ph. D.
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I want to read a piece to you. Then I have two poems: one by Rita Dove and one by Wallace Stevens; both, as you know, magnificent poets. Part of what I'm going to share with you is what I'm calling "evoked." Then I want to share with you a part of a poem by Galway Kinnell that I am responding to poetically. And I'm going to use that as a little model to illustrate to you what I'd like you to attempt, if you're willing, with the two poems by Dove and Stevens. I'm calling it "evoked poetry" because I can't think of anything else to call it.

The experience I'm about to relate has happened to me many times. It's only been in the last year and a half that I've become conscious of this process. I think it has been going on most of the 36 years I've been in the classroom, but I'm a little slow on the uptake. So I've finally started to pay attention to it vis-à-vis mythology.

Anecdotally to set the stage, my teaching schedule at Pacifica Graduate Institute this past spring quarter called for me to teach an entire quarter's course in three 8-hour classroom days. The subject matter was "Literary Genres and the Landscape of Culture." So I had second year depth psychology students who went eight hours Monday, eight hours Tuesday, eight hours Wednesday, and into recovery institutions on Thursday (laughter). In this course, we spent one

full day on Sophocles' Theban trilogy: *Oedipus Rex*, *Colonus*, and *Antigone*. We read the play by the Nigerian poet, Wole Soyinka: "*Death and the King's Horseman*." And I know many if not most of you know these works. We read the short story by Flannery O'Connor entitled "*Revelation*." We read Shakespeare's "*Midsummer Night's Dream*." We watched the film of the Pulitzer Prize winning play, "*Wit*" written originally by Margaret Edson and starring Emma Thompson. (I don't want to say anything more about it, because then I'll spend the whole time talking about it.) We read essays by Jung on poetry, and then spent a good part of the last day with Toni Morrison's "*Beloved*." So it was an ambitious three days.

None of us could do any more than eat and sleep inside what I want to call this "poetic force field" for three days. The level of exhaustion in such a sustained teaching and learning was high for both the students and me. Conversation was intense, but it was not without a ring of joy circling its edges. As I drove home each evening I felt that the world had altered.

Now, you've all had an experience like this or an experience closer and almost exact to this. I felt that the world had altered more and more each day. Lines from the various poems we had read penetrated fairly deeply, and kept appearing and disappearing unbidden, yet welcome, continually. The poems became like strange attractors setting off original lines of poetry in me.

On the third day I asked the students if they had experienced the same phenomenon. There were lines of verse simply bubbling up out of them, and some had begun writing them down. Images from the works themselves haunted every waking thought. The highways, the trees, the familiar terrain of my neighborhood were perceptually different. I don't have the language for it; that's the hard part right here. The students were all, however, altered in some fundamental way for which it is difficult to find words.

I began to feel like one possessed by presences in the world that had been imaginally rendered through the poetry. These forces of perception were always there. I'm not sure why, but I want to talk about it in terms of energy field made visible through a torqued, imaginal involvement. For me, the experience was unordinary...actually, it was extraordinary. Moreover, after a day or so, these students, whom I had never seen before had become intimates known, in some cases, better than family members, and certainly better than the neighbors, but we won't go there. It was as if I had known them personally and closely my entire life. Each one of them revealed something deeply stirring about themselves through the work. No chit-chat that attends nothing. Rather, revelations of their truest nature had bobbed to the surface through the poetry and their presence to these geographic phantasms.

In a contrary way, when the imaginal or poetic impulse to see and be seen differently evaporates, is it any wonder that in this failed vision a ferocious rush to literalism tends to fill the vacuum in the soul? Now, I can't prove any of this, which is why I'm so liberated from trying to prove anything anymore. So, take it in...work it...kick it out.

About six years ago, my wife and I drove down to UCLA to listen to the Dalai Lama speak. He had an intimate group in the UCLA basketball stadium. There were 12,500 of us. But it was like he was talking to each of us. He gave his vision for the 21st century. If you've heard him, you know that it's just a magnificent experience. He gets all excited when he's speaking in English,

and then he drops into his own language. He kind of knocks the translator on the head to hurry up because he's "in it." When he finished he said, "You know, if any of this makes sense to you, take it with you. If none of this makes sense to you, let it go." Every teacher ought to have that tattooed on his or her forehead. "Just let it go." But if it works, and evokes something in you, then work it. That's how I feel about what I'm doing here with you. I'm going to ask you in a couple of minutes to participate directly.

Now, in what I'm calling this "ferocious rush to literalism," double vision collapses into a cyclopean worldview wherein only one eye in a rather despotic way tends to rule. You know that wonderful figure of Polyphemus in the *Odyssey*? What happens when we cover one eye? We lose depth of field. That's literalism, the "polyphemic" mode of perception. Polyphemus, not polytropy, fills the void. In this slide into ocular-centricity is love's absence.

Eva Brann, who teaches the Classics at Santa Fe, in her fabulous six or seven hundred-page book called *The World of Imagination* says, "Love transforms the merely real into the vividly actual." This is the essential task of the imaginative eye. Parenthetically, I think this is the major thrust of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, showing us how love transforms vision. It's also the whole action of the hundred cantos of Dante's *Commedia*. The routine of seeing is laced with the fine gossamer of ritual so as to deepen understanding.

"What is this experience," I ask myself, "wherein complete strangers can come together around these magnificent poems and create such a powerful communal field?" It is a field that gets created. On the third day, I began feeling a deep nostalgia for these people knowing that this space,...this energy field of poetic musing,...would evaporate in the room almost immediately after we departed.

What was called for was a ritual. I proposed to them that we take ten minutes at the end of the third day and go outside onto the lawn at the end of the class and engage in a short ritual of uncoupling...of decompression...to let the psyche's poetic and emotional life down easy such that each of us could enter the, by now, unreal moments of our daily lives. So, we gathered on the lawn, outside the classroom, moved our bodies, shook our booties. (Oh, that word "booty" has gotten some good use.) We engaged in several ritual gestures followed by each member voicing a word or two of the three day experience. All of us felt the energy level begin to shift as each of us pulled a bit back into ourselves wherein the communal bond between us and the poems began to break up...splinter, even.

The experience lingered, at least for me, and from the e-mails I received, for many of the students, for days to come. Like aesthetic aftershocks following a temblor in Southern California, the poetic experience does not end. It simply takes another energy form below the crust of our waking consciousness. It continued to move and shape waking perceptions. Clearly, I believe, we had entered an energy field of aesthetic power and persuasive force. We had done so primarily but not exclusively through language, working on our imaginations to create worlds that were not only believable, but had at least for a time trumped the ordinary reality of our lives. Perhaps the speech by King Theseus just before he and his entourage witnesses the play performed by those blue-collar laborers in "*A Midsummer Night's Dream*" offers a corridor into this mystery. Here's what King Theseus says at the beginning of Act V:

The poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling,
Doth glance from heaven to earth, earth to heaven;
And, as imagination bodies forth
The forms of things unseen, the poet's pen
Turns them to shape, and gives to airy nothing
A local habitation and a name.

That's magnificent stuff. See, I think he's onto it, because *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is a play about the force and power of fiction, of poetry, of drama. Theseus' little speech opens us to ask some fundamental questions about the nature of poetry's reality and its corresponding effects on us. I've got six of them, and I'm using myself and you all as little test cases to see what else comes up here.

- 1.) What is activated in the imagination when reading poetry? (Now, you artists, sculptors, and musicians in the room have experienced other analogies. Right now I'm in this language world.) What is activated in reading poetry that could be called mythic evocation?
- 2.) What areas of *psyche/soma* does poetry awaken from slumber to allow a unique and an original gnosis?
- 3.) Does poetry have in it an instinctive tendency to beget other poems?
- 4.) How are images or an action, a narrative incited or provoked in us through a poem? (Now we're getting close to where I think your personal mythology resides.)
- 5.) How is that, then, created in *poesis* (poetic inspiration)?
- 6.) What sensibility is cultivated, shaped, nurtured in reading and in writing poetry?

(Now, if this stuff interests you at all, let me recommend a book that I have been reading for the last six months that has had a huge impact on me. It is called *Six Walks in the Fictional Woods* by the Italian, semiotician, novelist Umberto Eco. (You know him from *The Name of the Rose* and *Foucault's Pendulum*.) I find Umberto Eco an absolute delight, without jargon, clear. He's speaking from both sides of the fence, first as a successful fiction writer and then as a good reader of fiction. He's a semiotician dealing with the signs of what language does, what words do. In 1997 or '98 he gave six Norton lectures at Harvard, each one dealing with a different facet of what happens to us when we enter the fictional woods of a short story, of a poem, of a novel. What signs are we given on how to read and how to respond? How is the poem, in effect, able to create us as we 'paint it in' so that it really is a mutual creation?)

The poetic imagination then, as I understand it, moves us into a sphere...into a field of flamingos...I don't know where that came from, but it felt like it might be good to say that today...also, to see if you're listening. Now we should be willing to abdicate. This is the other piece of Eco's reading that I like. We must...and I've known this, but he gave me language...we must be willing to abdicate something of ourselves in order to enter the woods of the poem.

Now, I'm prepping you because I'm going to ask you to enter the woods here in just a couple of minutes...the forest of the fiction...and, as Eco writes of this experience "to be at home there even when no paths open to us." We get a lead from James Hillman's new book *A Terrible Love of War* when early on he cites the enormous contribution of the 18th century Italian scientist and philosopher, Giambattista Vico, whose major work *A New Science*, was published in 1725.

Here's Hillman on Vico:

"Vico thinks like a depth psychologist. Like Freud, he seeks to get below conventional constructs into hidden layers and distant happenings. 'Causal reasoning comes late on the stage,' says Vico. 'The basic layer of the mind is poetic,'...I love that and I want to repeat it... 'The basic layer of the mind is poetic, mythic, expressed by *universali fantastici*,' which I (James Hillman) translate as archetypal patterns of imagination."

So just hold on to that Vico observation. The fundamental basis of the mind or the layer of the mind is poetic and mythic.

I think these great works of literature or fiction help guide us down into that place. Like the poets, Vico's interest is in, according to Hillman, "Thematics,...the recurring themes, the everlasting, ubiquitous, emotional, unavoidable patterns and forces that play through any human life and human society, the forces we must bow to and are best generalized as archetypal." (page 8, *A Terrible Love of War*). My sense is that Vico grasped this mysterious parlaying of poetic knowing through an archaeology of the poetic basis of mind and the source of all analogy.

Now, come up to the 20th century and notice Jung's dependent clause in *Aion: Researches into the Phenomenology of the Self*, vol. 9.ii, paragraph 414. This is the beginning of that paragraph. I want to make the bold proposal at the end of this conference that this adverbial dependent clause carries the very nugget of what depth psychology is. Here's what Jung writes:

"Since analogy formation is a law which to a large extent governs the life of the psyche..."

For me, this adverbial clause contains the heartbeat, the life's blood of the imaginal realm of poetic knowing. This is where I think depth psychology and *poesis* really do marry.

Now, myth is in this mix in ways for which I have yet to find the language. For Jung's insight suggests that within the law of analogy (and I love it that he calls it a law of the psyche...now we could argue with him, we don't have to just accept it...but at least entertain it) that within the law of analogy, the psyche is fundamentally symbolic and metaphoric.

Enter Joe Campbell who would subscribe to this whole cloth. The psyche delights in the world of "as if." To enter that fictional woods is to buy into the "as-if-ness" of that world and "it's like" and "that reminds me of" or "it's the same as." Add to the recipe for poetic evocation Joseph Campbell's repeatedly saying that you know "...metaphor is the native tongue of myth." (*Thou Art That*, page 116) If you're looking for something to enter into Campbell's world, you could not go wrong with *Thou Art That*. I think it's one of the strongest things he's written, very accessible whether you've read much of him or none of him.

Now, if what Campbell says is true, that metaphor is the native tongue of myth, then, perhaps psyche is not only poetic at Bottom, (and I capitalize Bottom to make a little point on Bottom in *Midsummer*) but mythic or poetic by design. This is my working definition of mythopoesis. By this term I mean the capacity or the ability of the act of making (which is what *poesis* means) that Aristotle outlined in *The Poetics* fifth century BCE as a making or shaping of a mythos. That's what *poesis* is about.

Mythopoeics, then is an act of the imagination by which a living, organic myth is given new clothing, wrapped in contemporary cloth, or, in the favorite verb of Joseph Campbell, "inflected" in a local, temporal place and time. Campbell accepted the mono-myth notion from Joyce, and people criticized him for it. Part of it is, I don't think they finished the idea, because Joe did not want to democratize world mythologies. He did believe there is such a thing as a grand narrative, and we can argue with him about that. But the second part is equally as important, in that grand narrative that's inflected (like in Theseus' speech about the place of the imagination...the poetic imagination) gets inflected in difference and yet participates in sameness. It is both sides of the equation. I feel sometimes he gets beat up a little bit because that second piece isn't...okay.

Metaphor, then, is the vehicle of choice by which the transportation from one realm to another is made possible and feasible. Can I lean on that metaphor for just one more sentence? The fuel for such a vehicle I think is the imagination itself. Now, listen to what Campbell says about metaphor. This whole idea of repeating the same thing to deepen is more and more valuable to me, and maybe to you. Metaphor, according to Campbell, "is derived from two Greek words: *meta* equals to pass over, to go from one place to another and *pherein*, to move or to carry." Metaphors, therefore, carry us from one place to another. They allow us, if I can extrapolate a little bit, or offer the capacity to cross boundaries otherwise impossible to traverse. In other words, I do believe that a metaphor is a particularly unique kind of vehicle that only riding in it can we cross certain boundaries. Metaphors open a world by analogy in order to allow us to move closer into a greater intimacy with ontology of which our own 'being'-ness (lower-case b) is part of a larger ontic splendor (big B.) This last comparison is not without close relation to Campbell's recognition that there does indeed exist a grand mono-myth. This suggests a universal narrative, but which narrative is inflected locally, specifically and historically in the same manner, I think, if an archetype is then inflected in a particular archetypal image. I believe Campbell captures a perfect marriage between sameness and difference.

Myth, then, if you're with me, is the word or the story of that conveyance. By means of myth, we can be transported to that *metaxis*, what the Greeks call that "in between" place, the betwixt place, where the known and the unknown find their boundary and hold hands for just a moment in time. Was that good? Yea, I'm working hard here and you're with me! Thank you! Myth, then, is the word or the story of this conveyance. By means of myth, we can be transported.

It's interesting to think of metaphor as taking us from one region of being to another. It's also interesting to think about how metaphors can carry us right into that gap "in between." We're showing a tension between two worlds. I mean, both are...it's not either, or...it's both. So we can be transported to that *metaxis* where the known and the unknown find their boundary and hold hands for a moment in time. And at that instant is an opportunity for your personal mythology to become conscious. That's where I am.

Around July of 1955, Campbell had been out of the country for 10 months or so. He writes in his journals, "Start getting the syllabi ready for Sarah Lawrence College," because now he starts cranking up to go back to New York and enter the teaching world. Then in parentheses he says to himself, "Start using the wireless...the wire recorder for all courses."

When I read that (it's towards the end of *Sake and Satori*,) I thought, "Brilliant! That's how he got 28 books out." Because he understood. This is what's come to me in writing this paper and working the journal thing up for yesterday. He understood as a teacher of 38 years at Sarah Lawrence that...and you all know this as students and as teachers and as therapists and whatever else you're doing...that so much stuff comes to you like you're a conduit. The students may copy it down, but at the end of the day it's evaporated. So Campbell just started taping. Since January 1 of this year, I tape every one of my courses because, if you're a teacher, that really is the secret to writing books. He caught on to it, and that's when volumes of his writings just accelerated.

What is all this leading to? That to know mythically is to know by means of analogy. I want to propose this to you: analogy formation then is at the heart of mythology, poetry, depth psychology. It is the way into depth and the way into the transcendent. I use that last word carefully, stealing it, borrowing it from Joe. Let me give him credit here. Campbell refers to this slippery word "transcendent" as "that which is beyond all conceptualization." You're transported up over all of that. In *Thou Art That* page 92 he says, "It is beyond all names, all forms."

Then when asked how one even begins to move towards this mysterious realm, Campbell further offers this mode of transportation: "For a start, I would say study poetry. Learn how to read a poem. You need not have the experience to get the message or, at least, some indication of the message. It may come gradually." Isn't that wonderful? He knew. He said, "Read the poet. That will open it up for you." I love this last observation: "It may come gradually." You just have to come back at it, come back at it, come back at it and trust the poet. It'll open up. It comes through some authentic contact between our own personal mythology and the mythopoetic quality or energy inherent in the poem.

One of the greatest writers of the imagination and, more pointedly, the poetic imagination in the past century is the French philosopher of science, Gaston Bachelard. He insists often in his writing that "the psyche is animated by a veritable hunger for images." That's from page 67 of *On Poetic Imagination and Reverie* which is just a superb little compilation of pieces from Bachelard's voluminous numbers of books. He goes on to affirm that there exists in this encounter with the poem especially a meeting with "that imaginative energy that is the very mark of the active psyche."

On page 774 of her fine and exquisitely tuned study *The World of Imagination*, Eva Brann writes in her conclusion, "Our most specifically human mission: to remake the world imaginatively." That's from her huge work where she tracks the history of the imagination in the West. Her thought is that there is such a thing as a "world revising, world amending imagination" which has the capacity "to project an inner world onto the external and elicits a second appearance from the visible world." I think that's what happens when really entering and reading the poetry imaginally.

I like her conclusion about this reality that I've been trying, however, imperfectly to give form to in this essay. These are her words: "This imaginative world is neither so interior as to lack visibility nor so external as to be devoid of soul." So is that it? The poetic imagination, then, has the power to elicit a soul-sense of the world...an experience in which the world's soul slowly begins to shine forth through the poetic rendering of an imaginal world...one in which a king discovers that he has created four children with the queen, his mother, or that lovers can begin to love others than their beloved if their vision is shifted by a magic potion (*Midsummer*), or that a self-righteous Christian woman can be hit over her left eye with a book entitled *Human Development* and suddenly see for the first time in her life her own arrogant and small soul disposition (Ruby Turpin in Flannery O'Connor's *Revelation*). Yes to all of these observations. As Puck observes in the final words of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, as he steps on the stage alone and observes what has just happened within the imaginal field of the play:

If we shadows have offended,
Think but this, and all is mended:
That you have but slumb'ed here,
While these visions did appear.

...
Gentles, do not reprehend:
If you pardon, we will mend.

I think it's one of the great endings of all of Shakespeare's plays.

I'm going to read the lines of Galway Kinnell's poem and then I'm going to read my poetic response to those lines, four little stanzas. And then I'm going to invite you to do the same with the two poems that I'm going to hand out to you, okay? So that's the plan and the clock's now the big enemy. So, this is Galway Kinnell's poem "*Flower Herding on Mount Monadnock*." These are his lines from second stanza:

2

The air is so still
That as they go off through the trees
The love songs of birds do not get any fainter.

3

The last memory I have
Is of a flower that cannot be touched,
Through the bloom of which, all day
Fly crazed, missing bees.

4

As I climb sweat gets up my nostrils,
For an instant I think I am at the sea,

One summer off Cape Ferrat we watched a black seagull
Straining for the dawn, we stood in the surf,...

I let these words work on me and move through me. In so doing, the following words surfaced of their own accord. I felt more like a scribe than a creator as I wrote them out along the white, bright margin of his poem:

When in the marigold of memory
No cattle move, no rheumy noses run;
Windsong takes on a purple hue
And dangles from the web
of a spider so still, its odor
Is palpable.

That's Slattery...now, Kinnell. Stanza 5:

5

But at last in the thousand elegies
The dead rise in our hearts,
On the brink of our happiness, we stop
Like someone on a drunk starting to weep.

Slattery:

I sense the call of spirit begin
In my legs inebriate and course
Upward pulled by the
Gravity of heaven.

Kinnell:

6

I kneel at a pool
I look through my face
At the bacteria I think
I see crawling through the moss.
My face sees me.
The water stirs, the face,
Looking preoccupied,
Gets knocked from its bones.

Slattery:

Narcissus reflects his fleshy image
Off the sheen, the slick shine of my bones.
His gaze hides in my mirror.

Kinnell:

7

I weighed eleven pounds
At birth, having stayed on

Slattery, waited patiently...pen ready and wrote in the margin:

Who would not hide from the
World if the cooler — red, white and
So wanting to be noticed — were not
Stocked and iced down with the
Right stuff?

Oh you like that? You did like that! And then the last lines of Kinnell, stanza 9...and from the same poem of Kinnell, too...I just felt like I needed to say that:

9

From a rock
A waterfall.
A single trickle, like a strand of wire
Breaks into beads halfway down.
I know the birds fly off
But the hug of the earth wraps
With moss their graves and the giant boulders.

Slattery:

I feel the spongy barks of redwoods with
A fibrous face as stringy as the guts
Of a pumpkin, a web of life
As wound and complex as a
Double helix on a chain of dripping
DNA.

Now, I'd like you to try to let yourself just get daring with this. Right? All right, here we go. And if it turns out that folks have to share a little bit, you can still write in your own place. So let me just get these started. And let's look at these...let's look at them together...quickly. And I'll be quiet. We'll see if we just have a couple of minutes of just your letting what is evoked come up.

Don't censor it. Don't step on it. Don't limit it. Just write. And not a lot. Maybe one line is all that comes up. Length is irrelevant.

I chose two very different poems because they shouldn't be alike. They should have some latitude. We're going to look at them quickly. They're not long poems. I purposely chose short poems that you could go back and meditate on. I don't know if you listened to Jean Shinoda Bolen do that beautiful reading of Demeter. I wanted to give her a copy of Rita Dove's poem, not knowing if she knew this Demeter poem. Let's look at Rita Dove's first:

Demeter Waiting:

No, who can bear it? Only someone
who hates herself, who believes
to pull a hand back from a daughter's cheek
is to put love into her pocket — like one of those ashen Christian
philosophers, or a war-bound soldier.
She is gone again and I will not bear
it, I will drag my grief through a winter
of my own making and refuse
any meadow that recycles itself into
hope. Shit on the cicadas, dry meteor
flash, finicky butterflies! I will wail and thrash
until the whole goddamned golden panorama freezes
over. Then I will sit down to wait for her. Yes.

Wallace Stevens' poem is very different. Tone, atmosphere, language...

Of Mere Being:

The palm at the end of the mind
Beyond the last thought, rises
In the bronze décor

A gold-feathered bird
Sings in the palm, without human meaning,
Without human feeling, a foreign song.

You know then that it is not the reason
That makes us happy or unhappy.
The bird sings. Its feathers shine.

The palm stands on the edge of space.
The wind moves slowly in the branches.
The bird's fire-fangled feathers dangle down.

Now, write on the page, go back to it. I'm going to be quiet and I'll just watch how you're writing. I just don't want to run out of time and not have as many of you who would like to let us hear you. Perhaps, for those of you who would like to, I don't think you need to read the original

poem, but tell us...just let us know what it is that you're responding to, because we all have copies we can look at. Show us where the evocation had its genesis. Okay? So let's do a few.

Audience Member 1: Okay, this is in response to *Demeter Waiting*, and I'm calling it

The Cage.

Yes, oh yes,
Who believes love can be faked
Or tucked away like some dry fig
So the small girl said,
"If I cut open my chest God will pop out."
Demeter don't!
The knife clattered to kitchen floor.
God soared between her ribs.

Slattery: Oh, wonderful.

Audience Member 2:

I will not go with them,
Even if they pull my body
Dragging on the sharp edged rocks,
Even if they hang me on the cross
They can take my body
But they can't take my soul.
I hold it close and put it in a velvet-lined box
And there it will be for the soul to rest
On its way to eternity
No, I will not go with them.

Slattery: Great.

Audience Member 3: This is also from *Demeter Waiting* and I titled it *The Money's Gone*. I lost quite a bit with the high tech bubble burst and then the other part of it was this huge raise in deficit that is being felt.

The money's gone
The money's gone
And only someone who hates himself
Would refuse to start over and lend a hand
Find a need
And apply himself
Like a jaded politician
Who gives to the rich
Robs from the poor
And wages wars to keep us afraid

The money's gone
The money's gone
And I can't stand it
I will wear my anger like a shield
And refuse to carry abundance
That gives me a sense of value
Screw the fundamentalists
The ones who scream for freedom
And tyrannize others
I will be bitter and spiteful
And be a witness for everyone who suffers
Then I can say, "I told you so."

Slattery: Boy, the energy in these is just so wonderful. Some more:

Audience Member 4: This is actually from *Of Mere Being*. I've been looking at the new photos from the Hubble telescope, responding to those and how beautiful they are.

The new place at the end of the mind
Beyond the last thought
Comes clearer
A jewel-like bird sings there
Full of mercy
With great human feeling
And deep love
A familiar song
Whether or not I am happy
The bird sings
Its feathers shine
This new place calls to me
A soft wind beckons
The beautiful bird sings through the night.

Slattery: Great! Please.

Audience Member 5: A much different response to *Of Mere Being*. This was evoked by a palm at the end of the mile.

In the golden palm the bird is silent
His song is gone
And so is mine
I am so far from that
That sore, that song
And hold it only in my memory

A feather retrieved from the cold ground
Is all that tells I made the journey.

Slattery: Oh, beautiful, beautiful! Over here?

Audience Member 6:

Yes, at last
My wife returns
Golden with the days upon the earth
Filled with the grain of the mother
All these long nights since I have waited
All summer
Lonely turning in my bed
Holding only her cold pillow
Her scent growing faint with my tears
Persephone, I long to hold you again in my arms
Kiss your breasts and run my dark tongue along your white neck
Who cares if winter comes upon the earth
With your mother's grief
We will be heat enough.

Slattery: Whoa! I'm yours, I'm yours! (laughter) Beautiful. If we're not learning anything else, we're learning that you've got to hear poetry. You can't see it! You've got to hear it! All of your readings are just marvelous. Please.

Audience Member 7: Because my brain doesn't differentiate things really well, this actually comes from both. This came to me, again, with the image of the outstretched palm. But it has more to do with the content of *Demeter Waiting*.

At river's edge
My toes hug your sunrise
Your boat opens my hand
And demands to be delivered to the current
Tall sails snap and echo my knees that crack like ice
My hand is sunset trying to hold on.

Slattery: Very nice...beautiful. Please.

Audience Member 8:

The Battle of Soul

The battle grows long
The armor hangs heavy
The quickness of sword lead the weary on

Sharpness of mind, gone
Death, sweetness, rest.

Slattery: Beautiful, thank you. Please.

Audience Member 9:

My heart froze
And for seventeen years I started to shiver
Until the sound of my rattling bones became my timbre
Until the very vibration of that rhythm
Began to synchronize into a harmonious song
To split the ice of my winter shell
That I had created myself.

Slattery: These are great images that you're working. Please.

Audience Member 10: This is (in response to) *Mothers and Daughters*.

So then I will sit down to wait for her, yes.
But she will not return.
She has had to choose between two freedoms:
The one in her mirror,
And the one she has turned to
Seeking in a cavern that will lead to her forgetfulness.

Slattery: Ahh, nice. Please.

Audience Member 11: This is to my daughter when she was little.

Bound and brazen
Leaden, heavy and lost inside my cold, grey walls of stone.
Too isolate to be objective
Too far away to see you dance in the sun
Chasing the yellow butterfly in the tall spring grass.

Slattery: Beautiful, thank you.

Audience Member 12: This is a response to a mirror being, and my sense of what the golden-feathered bird might mean to our broken and divided world.

The birthplace of the heart is the
Luminous country I have rejected
My fear, like a great oaken door
Closing off dimension that will not let me forget it
That torments me in the dark nights of my denial

Until the magnificent strength of my cowardice
Is worn down by time and suffering
Until, my cowardice expended,
I remove my dead, and the door springs open
I am born into the land I know now
Has always been my own.

Slattery: I just can't express my appreciation enough for those of you who read and also for those who wrote, but maybe didn't have a chance to read. It's been magnificent.

The thing I love about doing this experiment with a group that comes together possessing shared interests is that moves poetry one millimeter out of the academy and back into the voice of the people, which is where it was initially before it got kidnapped. We're taking it back. Conferences like this are so great. You together. You may have three volumes of poetry out. You may have never written two lines of verse and it doesn't matter. That's the beauty of it.

I'd love to hear from you if you cared to respond to what we've done today. Thank all of you. You're wonderful.

You can read more about Dr. Dennis Patrick Slattery at: www.pacifica.edu.

en remember what we came to ask.