

Poems Read at the Kelly Writers House,
On the Campus of the University of Pennsylvania
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On Wai-ing My Shadow

A few nights ago it was cold in Philadelphia, with only a Moon
for light.

"Wai" is the word for "bow" in the Thai language
And thanks to the poet I know that for a Buddhist,
"When you 'wai' a monk, it is like 'wai-ing' God"

And thanks to the Moon that cold night in Philadelphia,
My faint shadow appeared on the bricks
Of the building I live in.

Without intention (bending to put out a cigarette)
I noticed what I had done.

I had "wai-ed" my shadow.

Facts and Questions towards a Neighbor-to-Neighbor Stratagem

How are we to conduct ourselves
While so many among us
Are so busy becoming
The neighbors about whose
Disappearance they themselves do not inquire?

Just how big is a neighborhood?

John Sifton, the attorney and human rights investigator,
Has cited a report by Human Rights First which
Documents that during the Bush Administration
A hundred people died in U.S. custody,
34 of which the U.S. military acknowledges were homicides.
The report also says that eight prisoners were tortured to
death.

We are commanded to love our neighbors as ourselves.

In our age of instantaneous global telecommunication,
Does a person cease being our neighbor because he lives
Far, far away?

I ask with the utmost urgency, "Should I care any less about
people
Who differ from me than I care about people who are like
me?"

If I love my neighbor as myself and if my neighbors love their
neighbors as
Themselves, and those neighbors do the same, etcetera, etcetera,
isn't all
The world included in the neighborhood of humanity?

Unexpected Semantic Richness

Unexpected semantic richness
Never fails to delight me

And neither does the sheer noumenousness of the signifier.

*The bores who insist on the randomness of things
Are, I think, defeated by a scene set in Jakarta
In which a woman playing a man
Remarks to a man with a Western mindset
That "the unseen is all around us."*

I think that God is hiding from us in the apparent randomness of
things

Because of our sins;

When we participate in our faiths' reconciliation or confession
ritual,

Do things not come to seem more meaningful?

Please notice that the word "faiths'" two lines ago is plural
and possessive.

I *don't* think that it is an accident that the words "absolute"
and "absolution" are so similar.

Do I lapse now into noumenousness myself?

"Live dangerously" is a motto from Nietzsche,
But very interestingly I have also heard it endorsed
By a priest at All Saints Episcopal Church in Beverly Hills,
Where I was told that his colleague the Rector had both her
knees broken

By the Ku Klux Klan because of her participation
In the struggle for civil rights.

To believe that there can be real knowledge
Which comes only from the inner workings of our minds
When linked together in networks

Smoky bars in distant places

And Hans-Georg Gadamer,
Whom I heard speak at Haverford College
In 1983 or 4,
Continues to say to me in my mind
From time to time
As he did that night
So many years ago,
That "God has ultimately to do with mystery."

He concluded his remarks with the phrase, "the conversation that
we are."

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