

Maxine Anderson so eloquently calls us back to our “quiet inner authority.” Holding, as we absolutely must, a watchful eye on the hypnotic and pre-thinking realm of consciousness—or unconsciousness, I offer my reflections, from a depth psychological perspective, on the poetics of violence. The rascal poet, Billy Collins, offers us a view into how we might use the imagination to kindly coax ourselves from our base instincts toward the higher rungs of our evolutionary possibilities.

Another Reason Why I Don't Keep A Gun In The House

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The neighbors' dog will not stop barking.
He is barking the same high, rhythmic bark
that he barks every time they leave the house.
They must switch him on on their way out.

The neighbors' dog will not stop barking.
I close all the windows in the house and
put on a Beethoven symphony full blast
but I can still hear him muffled under the music,
barking, barking, barking,

and now I can see him sitting in the orchestra,
his head raised confidently
as if Beethoven had included a part for barking dog.

When the record finally ends he is still barking,
sitting there in the oboe section barking,
his eyes fixed on the conductor who is entreating him with his baton
while the other musicians listen in respectful silence
to the famous barking dog solo,
that endless coda that first established Beethoven as an innovative genius.
-Billy Collins

Like Billy Collins, we invoke the language of poetic discourse and step out to meet the forces of violence with the sword of imagination...

We tend to think of violence as an overt act – as though our violent history did not speak to us every day. We live not only with the violence that fills our newspapers and our television screens in the present. We live every day with the silent accumulated effects of 513 years of terror on our own homeland and the devastation by American design beyond our borders. Violence is always local. Here in the Pacific Northwest, we walk on the bones of the massacred native peoples of this land every day: baby girl bones and 10 year-old boy bones, mother and father bones, grandmother bones. The pavement between those bones and the bones of our own feet provides a kind of forgetfulness, a

false security against the visceral truth of our collective sins. In a version of the 1854 treaty, Chief Seattle is known to have said:

And when the last Red Man shall have perished, and the memory of my tribe shall have become a myth among the White Men, these shores will swarm with the invisible dead of my tribe, and when your children's children think themselves alone in the field, the store, the shop, upon the highway, or in the silence of the pathless woods, they will not be alone....At night when the streets of your cities and villages are silent and you think them deserted, they will throng with the returning hosts that once filled them and still love this beautiful land. The White Man will never be alone.

I look northward from Seattle, and include among these spectral figures the shades of the radical Wobblies, who sailed from the port of Seattle to the docks of Everett to defend the rights of shingle workers. Their blood was spent in what came to be known as Bloody Sunday, or the Everett massacre of 1916. What makes us think that the violence of these slaughters, born of greed and executed with intention, would be diminished by the passage of time? Communal atonement has not been made. No sacrifice offered.

I face southward now and imagine the ghostly structures of Puyallup's Camp Harmony, a mere 35 miles from Seattle, where thousands of ordinary Japanese American citizens—elders, children, women and men, farmers and shopkeepers, tailors, lawyers, teachers, doctors and laborers— were wrenched from their lives and their liberties and taken into a devastating captivity because they made other ordinary American citizens nervous. This is our land. This is our story. This is our legacy.

We are formed from the dust of our history and re-formed from the raw material of our time. One of the realities that still fires our horror of the holocaust is the systematic strategy, the extraordinary mechanics of the endeavor, the impeccable foresight and timing—the enormous organization put into place to accomplish this unfathomable task. Consider the millions of decisions, deeds and gestures – the order and discipline - required to move a machine of that magnitude. The cartography of this demonic endeavor had to be carefully emblazoned in the collective imagination, and its effects delivered on the wings of ideological fervor. I invoke the memory of the flawless mechanics of the holocaust as a way of situating the origin of violence in the mind. This guileful and intangible oppression we feel in our current context but cannot touch with our inner or outer senses, is the beginning of violence.

As a depth psychologist, it is my vocational imperative to tend the soul of the world. At its very core, depth psychology is a subversive endeavor. From this perspective, dark pathologies that roam the landscape of the individual psyche and the psyche of a culture are not to be eliminated. They are to be illuminated. A personal or societal rupture is an aperture through which we may gaze into the disturbing and

archetypal domain of the human and ecological condition. The Spanish poet, Antonio Machado may have been hinting at this when he wrote:

Last night, as I was sleeping,
 I dreamt—marvelous error!—
 That I had a beehive
 Here inside my heart.
 And the golden bees were making white combs
 and sweet honey
 from my old failures

When we turn our faces from our old failures we forget how to listen to the lament of the fish and sea mammals as their kin are dying and washing to shore. We forget how to mourn the loss of the most sacred agricultural knowledges and practices of our own and other cultures. We can no longer imagine the grief of the bombed out land for its fertility, the agony of the village that lost its homes and shops, its inhabitants—humans, mammals, insects, birds – and the rhythms of a community that give village and city its song, and hence, its meaning. When we forsake our failings, we cannot hear the howling and keening of a mother for her lost children, the cries of hundreds of orphaned children for their mothers and fathers, sisters and brothers, neighbors and friends. A culture of life is only a utopian concept if we cannot confess the violence we have done, the violence we do and the violence we intend to do. We sustain a culture of violence when we live as though the atrocities done to others are not done to us – as though the violators were not ourselves. When this is the case, we are living at a distance from our own living. We are living in the absence of poetic consciousness. American poet and activist, Wendell Berry asks in the context of his poem entitled *The Design of a House*.

What do you intend?
Drink blood
 and speak, old ghosts. I don't
 hear you. What has it amounted to
 --the unnegotiable accumulation
 of your tears? Your expenditure
 has purchased no reprieve. Your
 failed wisdom, shards among the
 down-going atoms of the moment.

History goes blind and in darkness,
 neither sees nor is seen, nor is
 known except as a carrion
 marked with unintelligible wounds;
 dragging its dead body, living,
 yet to be born, it moves heavily
 to its glories. It tramples
 the little towns, forgets their names.

Because the landscape of human experience seems to be flooded with so much human suffering, it takes intention and will to tune our souls to the soul of the world. Toward this end we can each hone our imaginal practices in the context of our own unique phenomenological underpinnings. I sometimes imagine my own city, Seattle, decimated—left dark and cold—made unfamiliar by the ravages of others. Excruciating as it is, I strain to imagine my children without their limbs...my friends gone, wandering as refugees—starving, wounded or dead. I find myself envisioning the pages of my family albums, my poetry books, love letters and journals blasted and floating in tiny shreds in the air. I ask not to be rescued from these dark dreams, for they are the fragile threads that tie me to those I will never know. By way of imagination we seek to embody the suffering of others and so to re-awaken to our humanity in its darkness and its luminosity. Sometimes, when I pour a cup of tea, or pick up my knitting, or a novel, I wonder what it would be like to be separated from the simple, familiar rhythms and gestures of a life—not to hear music playing in the background, the smells of the evening meal wafting from the kitchen, a bouquet of white peony, a candle flickering on my table. It seems to me that the soul loves this kind of particularity.

How might we begin to regard violence with soulful and poetic attention? The poet is known for her long and lingering gaze. She hovers over the crevices, lingers in the nuances, rides on the aura of the most minute gesture. This is the watchfulness that oppressive governments and their media minions are most fearful of. It is why artists go underground in despotic regimes. Our government, for its political purposes, censors the images we are allowed to see, the stories we are allowed to hear. Propaganda is psychic violence because its purpose is to establish a single unmovable voice. It sacrifices the sonorous nature of our human endeavor for a monotonous and redundant note; and in the process it eliminates a host of symphonic possibilities. Might it then be our poetic duty to our humanity to practice with one another the invocation of our imaginal memory. In the interior tribune of our living imagination, *we* know what occupied body bags look like. *We* see lines of flag-draped coffins, children weeping, shattered soldiers returning home. And our hearts are stirred.

In the context of the propaganda model, we are moved from headline to headline...from crisis to scandal. We are given massive amounts of information, laden with subliminal corporate values—and we are offered no invitation to reflect upon the voice of the speaker or writer. We are expected to hear data as the voice of truth. If we follow this insidious media-driven trajectory we will never catch our breath. In Hebrew, the word *rouach* carries the double meaning of breath and inspiration/*spiritus*. If we follow this trajectory we will never catch our spirit or gain a footing on our true terrestrial homeland. And most deadly of all we will become disenfranchised from our own imagination, wandering in a baron land of information. *Informed by whom?* Disassociation, addiction, distraction, fundamentalism, and consumerism with its various forms of materialism are among the many ways psyche can maneuver to keep us wandering outside the periphery of a suffering world. It is for this reason that in times of devastation and war we have an urgent need for our poets, our fiction writers,

playwrights, screenwriters and mythmakers, our artists and filmmakers and musicians, choreographers, dancers and puppeteers.

When the shock of Abu Graeb hit the papers, it was immediately followed by the questions “Whose to blame?” and “What are the facts?” “The facts,” says the endungeoned Don Miguel de Cerventes, in *The Man of La Mancha*, “are enemy to the truth.” The poet stares into the face of a soldier making a pyramid of naked human beings. She allows this horrifying image to penetrate her body and soul. She might then wander into the hazy eyes of that woeful soldier, looking for the first pyramid he/she ever built. We might imagine that, unencumbered by fact or time, the poet sees a four year old—the nascent soldier—and tenderly observes the folding of chubby little fingers around one square block, and then another—the mystery of balance revealed, the wonder of construction, the childhood excitement in the miracle of the making of a pyramid. The poet reaches even further, traveling backward through the tunnel of human history. She remembers the first pyramid imprint made for American currency. The Illuminati’s radiant symbol of manifestation impressed on the one dollar bill was framed above the pyramid image with the Latin words *annuit coeptis*, translated “God has favored our undertaking” and below, *novus ordo seclorum*, “A new order has begun.” And moving further back through time, the poet might well imagine the ancient Egyptian designers and builders perfecting the pyramid form in that indomitable communal creation which marked a brilliant era of civilization.

The depth psychologist, who also bears the burden of the poetic soul, enters the story at that dark moment when the scene changes – taking all of us down from the ecstasy of creation to the sinister thrill of cruelty. Both poet and psychologist linger at the flinch, that moment when the thread breaks and the delicate connection between one human being and another is betrayed. From the standpoint of *poesis*, we hover here at Abu Graeb, as we have at other grim moments of our personal and communal history, to simply be in our bewilderment and grief, and stare down the long, dark, and twisted corridor of our own flawed humanity. Meanwhile the military investigates. The media collects its data and cries “scanadle!” “Outrage” and “disgusting” says the administration—and then it does whatever it does behind the scenes. The dominant cultural/political forces engage in violence by dulling our senses, distancing us from our own experience, luring us into a state of forgetfulness by way of the materialistic accumulation of information. The poet revives our archetypal memory and brings us back to our senses.

I originally prepared this paper as part of a joint presentation entitled Human Violence: Origins, Emergence and Rescue. Since I helped create the title for the event, I had to wonder about this word “rescue” we had chosen—or, might I suggest, the word that had chosen us. The word “rescue” is derived from the Latin, *reexcitere*: to drive away; shake off. And so in the *common* sense of this word, I do ask *not* to be rescued. Yet its synonyms are: deliver, ransom, redeem, save, emancipate, loose. I followed this word around the dictionary and found myself most affiliated with its twin sister, “redemption.” The word “redeem” rises out of the Latin *redemere*, to take or buy back. I fell upon this word because it suggests that there is something that belongs to us that needs to be stolen

back in the way that one might engage in a risky maneuver to kidnap a captured soldier or comrade. I like to imagine that all over the world people are entertaining these ideas as a way of designing a kidnapping strategy for our own souls and the soul of our nation? Someday, I fantasize, we will meet in a forum like the United Nations—and we will call our gathering *A Convivium of Thieves*. Now that's a radical idea!

*And what rough beast, its hour come round at last
Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?*
(W.B. Yates, *The Second Coming*)

Now, if we are to become psychic jewel thieves, what soulful gems must we retrieve? I would suggest four potent possibilities for your roguish consideration: imagination, language, memory, and will.

The dominant patriarchal paradigm will gladly relieve us of our innate knowing and our subjective experience, seating us in the bleachers as cool spectators of our global blood sport. The poet, on the other hand, will show no mercy, throwing us into the center of the human arena to be ripped apart with the others. In the hands of the poet we cannot forget our common corporality. Neither poet nor propagandist turns his face from violence. The propagandist reports it from a remote location. The poet embodies it and thus imagines it in all its intricate detail.

I was intrigued when I began to consider that both poet and propagandist are devoted to the careful and intentional use of language, and the utilization of cadence and rhythm. Poetry distills the action and stirs the imagination. The poet can call forth the animate quality in matter. The propagandist defines the meaning in an event, labels it in the context of his own value or dogma, extracts the imagination, and approaches matter—even human matter—as lifeless. *Nothing matters* outside of the machine and its purposes. Propaganda and fundamentalism privilege nouns while poetic reverie revels in adjectives, adverbs and verbs. The view of matter as dead object and the consequent and deliberate depletion of language is, I submit, the primal genesis of violence. Even the word “violence” has been victimized by this kind of reductionism. The word violence, like the words depression, abuse and disfunction, when confined to the cubical of the noun, loses its particularity and becomes bland and meaningless—covering a range from *rude gesture* to *murder* or *rape*. When we hear words like “violence” and “terror” with a politicized or clinical ear, we are not moved. Like Orwellian Newspeak, words and phrases that serve as generic manila envelopes, conceal vast volumes of voluptuous correspondence. Violence lives in our language, in its absences, distortions, and generalities. It originates in the mind as a kind of hollow vernacular. The primary intention of this ghostly oppression is severance. Divided from our own deeper instincts, from one another, and from the world soul, we begin to experience ourselves as powerless. Seattle poet, Elizabeth Austen speaks to this condition in her poem, *The Permanent Fragility of Meaning*.

Why persist, scratching across the white field
 row after row? Why repeat the ritual
 every morning, emptying my hands,
 asking for a new prayer to fold
 and unfold?

Nothing changes, no one is saved.

I walk into the day, hands still
 empty, and beg
 to be of use to someone. I lie down
 in the dark and beg to believe
 when the voice comes again with its commands,
 with its promises—
 unfold your hands. Revelation
 is not a fruit you pluck from trees. This is the work,
 cultivating the smallest shoot, readying your tongue
 to shape the sacred names, your mouth already filling—

I lie down in the dark.

I rise up and begin again.

Although we may prefer to identify with the poet, let us be warned that identification is the first sign of the fading of a poetic disposition. It is not our purpose to widen the gap between Other and self, but to gaze with the eyes of the imagination on both archetypes, as they make their rounds in the individual, cultural, and global psyche. Let us not romanticize the task of *poesis* or lose sight of our own fundamentalist proclivities. Time and time again we must drag ourselves and each other out of the cultural trance toward a state of aesthetic wakefulness.

I leave you with the vibrations of a great poetic soul, who threw himself time and time again into the darkest recesses of the human condition and came to know the meaning of the word *redemption*. This is Allen Ginsberg, and here is his Footnote to Howl.

Holy! Holy! Holy! Holy! Holy! Holy! Holy! Holy! Holy!
 Holy! Holy! Holy! Holy! Holy! Holy!
 The world is holy! The soul is holy! The skin is holy!
 The nose is holy! The tongue and cock and hand
 and asshole holy!
 Everything is holy! everybody's holy! everywhere is
 holy! everyday is in eternity! Everyman's an
 angel!
 The bum's as holy as the seraphim! the madman is
 holy as you my soul are holy!

The typewriter is holy the poem is holy the voice is
 holy the hearers are holy the ecstasy is holy!
 Holy Peter holy Allen holy Solomon holy Lucien holy
 Kerouac holy Huncke holy Burroughs holy Cas-
 sady holy the unknown buggered and suffering
 beggars holy the hideous human angels!
 Holy my mother in the insane asylum! Holy the cocks
 of the grandfathers of Kansas!
 Holy the groaning saxophone! Holy the bop
 apocalypse! Holy the jazzbands marijuana
 hipsters peace & junk & drums!
 Holy the solitudes of skyscrapers and pavements! Holy
 the cafeterias filled with the millions! Holy the
 mysterious rivers of tears under the streets!
 Holy the lone juggernaut! Holy the vast lamb of the
 middle class! Holy the crazy shepherds of
 rebellion! Who digs Los Angeles IS Los Angeles!
 Holy New York Holy San Francisco Holy Peoria &
 Seattle Holy Paris Holy Tangiers Holy Moscow
 Holy Istanbul!
 Holy time in eternity holy eternity in time holy the
 clocks in space holy the fourth dimension holy
 the fifth International holy the Angel in Moloch!
 Holy the sea holy the desert holy the railroad holy the
 locomotive holy the visions holy the
 hallucinations holy the miracles holy the eyeball holy the
 abyss!
 Holy forgiveness! mercy! charity! faith! Holy! Ours!
 bodies! suffering! magnanimity!
 Holy the supernatural extra brilliant intelligent
 kindness of the soul!