

Wy I rite so funnee:

A collection of essays on my poetry and my poetics,
compiled here, June 30, 2008,
(with future editorial changes to be noted as I make them).

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Wy du I rite so funnee?

This question has been asked of me consistently, since I began altering standard spelling and grammar back in the mid 1970's. It has been asked politely and it has been asked with expletives undeleted. Readers and editors have been offended and confused by it, as well as delighted by it. A friendly but critical colleague from the Pittsburgh Poetry Exchange dubbed it "stevespell" many years ago, and that has become my preferred name for it.

Sometimes I feel I am hewing the words out of wood or stone, rough approximations to a deeper, more accurate language. Sometimes I feel like I am taking the "found art" of English, and refining and polishing it. Sometimes the words are like very soft clay in my hands, oozing through my fingers. Sometimes the words are like nuggets of gold discovered as I sift through gravel and fast running water. Stevespell has allowed me to discover new words, new meanings in words, and new relationships between words, and it has become one of the modalities of my creativity. I realize that to many readers, my language appears idiosyncratic, obscure, and nearly impenetrable. Yet, when I am writing, I feel like I am speaking in an "English" that underlays the infinite variations and personal morphologies that are illusorily lumped together into a single language.

People question stevespell, as if “English” were a pre-existing, complete, and unalterable phenomenon in nature, and I am breaking the rules. I am not breaking the rules; I am discovering them; I am extending them.

Here’s the metaphor that I keep coming back to: most people think of words as if they were bricks. They think of words as hard, clearly shaped, baked clay units. They’re made in some factory somewhere – doesn’t matter where or with what clay – to be used to build permanent things. I think of words as soft clay, easily shaped and re-shaped, mostly used to build impermanent things in impermanent and poorly designed ways. It is the rare structure, indeed, that survives these harsh conditions that we build in.

I have two friends in Provincetown, Conrad and Anne, who are among the most beautiful people in the world. One of the tricks Conrad likes to play on the world is to sculpt in brick, in ways that appear to defy gravity. When you see these sculptures, you are forced to wonder: are these “bricks” really styrofoam, or are they real bricks somehow being held up with invisible wires? You bricklayers, when was the last time you made a brick float in air?

Stevespell evolved organically. You can find two relatively early examples of it in the Reading Room on my website <www.shivvetee.com>: the poem In the Harvest ov Nations and the story “A Pilgrimage to Mecca.” Compare those writings to In the Ruwenz ov the Tempel, I Herd...! At least to me, the language in them seems so normal, so unadventurous. To my eyes they also lack a certain sparkle and intensity. And yet, those writings, too, generated questions and controversy not unlike what I hear regarding my most recent work.

My earliest intention was two-fold. First, I wanted to normalize English spelling to spoken English. This seemed easy to accomplish, in my naivete. I soon discovered that I wasn’t the first to try such a project. For example, the Chicago Tribune attempted to partially normalize English, only to be booed into submission. On top of that, normalization presented all kinds of new problems. Conjugational and etymological continuities often had to be stretched or abandoned. And what was I to do with regional and national accents? If a written-spoken normalization had been my only motive, I too would have quit the project. But that is not the case. By the way, if you study the evolution of my spellings you will see that I have progressively moved towards a normalization that reflects my accent.

My second intention with stevespell was more ambitious and radical. I wanted to develop a grammar in which subject and predicate, object and action were merged. I had heard that this was possible in Sanskrit, and it seemed intuitively right to me. Surely, the actor and the action are not two separate things, but aspects of one thing. Later, when I began to learn Hebrew, I saw how root words and the absence of written vowels were used to create dynamic,

interweaving structures of sound, meaning, and perspective. But English, and most European languages, don't have (or don't focus on) these kinds of conceptual tools. Perhaps our language was creating unnatural distinctions between actor and action, or between past, present, and future. So I began to work the clay, and I found that the possibility of merging noun and verb in English was waiting patiently just below the surface. Actually we are doing it all the time! Colloquial usage commonly slurs the "ing" verb form into "in," as in "I'm goin' to the store." Superimpose this on the form that converts a verb into a noun using "-ence" (as in "transcend" to "transcendence"), and, presto, yu ar the transenden ov normel Eenglish!

Critics pointed out to me two other inter-related and important effects of stevespell. First, it forced them to read more slowly. This really annoys a lot of people. We have so much to do, and so much to read, we don't have time to crawl along, actually paying attention to individual words. But just a second. That's precisely what poetry is about! It's about paying attention to each word; hearing them, considering them, going back and reading phrases again and maybe even again, slowly proceeding, and ohmigosh, actually enjoying the sensuality of language. I hope you speed demons don't have sex the way you read, trying to get done as quickly as possible. I much prefer to read slowly, sensuously, seductively engaged with each word.

The other complaint I got, a complaint by another poet, mind you, was that my poetry forced him to read my work aloud if he wanted to understand it. Darn, that annoyed him. Say what?? That too is exactly what poetry is about: hearing the words, speaking the words, creating not a fleeting shadow of a thought as you rush on through a zillion words a minute, but resonating the words through the very bones of your body, from the chest outward. I remember a wicked northeaster on Cape Cod one February. I was living alone in my parent's cottage on the beach. The waves were thundering, battering the seawall mercilessly; the wind was howling furiously and pummeling the walls. The curtains were swaying and the cracks in the walls were whistling, and me, I was reading Blake's *Jerusalem*, screaming it at the top of my lungs, for hours, until the storm faded around dawn. It was one of the most glorious nights of my life. And I swear, Willy B. was right there with me belting it out, the two of us laughing till we could hardly breathe, then reading on.

So, you're not breaking my heart if you have to read slowly, and if you even have to read my poetry aloud to get it. That's what you're supposed to do with poetry.

There is at least one more effect intended by stevespell. Poetic language has ebbed and flowed for thousands of years between the use of heightened, formal language, and the use of colloquial, simplified language. Often, when language is

used to convey a sense of the sacred, it tends towards the formal, and this may easily become awkward or stilted. Nonetheless, I want to separate my poetry from mundane and secular literature. Whether or not I succeed and achieve a sense of the sacred in my poetry is for you to decide, but that, too, is part of my intention.

Stevespell and blogtok

My very good friend, and Shivvete webmaster, Steven Toleikis, had the following brilliant insight. He wrote: "Was reading the paper ystrdy 'bout blogs. (If by some small chance you don't know what they are see: <http://www.blogger.com>). They were going on about how they're changing how people communicate, report on news, yadda, yadda and how they also seem to be leading to an evolution in SPELLING! Bingo - I thought, the perfect arena to use SteveSpell! Whatdoyouthink?"

My response:

Well, blogtalk (blogtok!) has definitely caught on. Both my 19 and 9 year olds are teaching me new "words," acronyms, and abbreviations all the time. Perhaps it will indeed open a door of acceptance for stevespell. In that case, stevespell might take on the status of the (dare I say) priestly and "high" form of the language, while blogtok will be the cockney or bronx dialect (or dialects, assuming the evolution of variants). Or perhaps blogtok, as the organic form that is evolving in a communal arena, will ultimately become the canonical form, while stevespell will be rejected as a contrived and academic aberration.

There are some important similarities in the origins of blogtok and stevespell, that's for sure. I began with the dual impetuses of normalizing English and breaking open its grammar to allow the infusion of new rhythmic and conceptual energy. Blogtok seems to have a similar, tho less articulated dual impetus: to speed up (and maybe also normalize) spelling, and to allow, or promote, an "individualized" voice (or more accurately, a counter-cultural voice, since there's nothing terribly individual about it). Not so different, eh? Blogtok has the virtue of being organic, grass roots, and interactively evolving. Stevespell has the virtue of being more conceptually articulated and purposeful in its evolutions.

I would *like* to say that this proves that popular culture (blogtok) follows art (stevespell). Or more personally, "see, I told you so!" <grin> But given how well-known I am, I think this really suggests something quite different: that popular culture and art are manifestations (and bifurcations) of the same foundational energy. Artists **may** hear it or see it or feel it first, but we **don't** create it. We just try to represent it.

A Docent's Tour of my Poetry

The texts available on my website, shivvete.com, span over 25 years of writing. They document the long evolution of my thinking. I would guess that the earlier pieces are more accessible than the later poetry, since my poetry was visioned step by step, with each succeeding piece built on earlier concepts and explorations.

Ottoman Beachcombing is a prose work, easy to read. It is a travelogue of my live adventures, beginning in the former Yugoslavia, and proceeding around the eastern Mediterranean. Mostly, it describes scenes far from the beaten tourist paths, at a time (the early 1980's) when travel in this region was safe, easy, and cheap. I was in high spirits on this five month trip, and my tales are told with wide eyes and many a grin.

The only other prose writing in the Reading Room is a slightly more challenging piece. My wife and I spent two months in Turkey in 1977. She was doing groundwork for her graduate degree in Islamic Art History, and I was her mostly-fearless travel guide, and occasional nemesis. In 1977 Turkey was still off the edge of the world for most Western travelers. Like the Bible-belt of the US, the interior of Turkey was, and is, deeply devout, but of course, it is Muslim, not Christian. I had never really come across religious fundamentalism before, so what I found in Turkey was fascinating, but hard to understand. My story, *A Pilgrimage to Mecca* is an attempt to explore the issues of faith, experience, and scepticism, without committing to any position. It is written in a style I would liken to Gerard de Nerval's: lush and personal. I have deeply religious friends who have criticized the piece for falling clearly to the sceptic's side. Other friends, who are rationalists, have criticized it for falling clearly to the religious side. From that I have concluded that I have done my job well. I believe it's a memorable story.

For the fearless, my poetry is meant to take you on a journey that will reshape your world-view. It is not light reading, but I certainly hope it is not oppressive or ponderous either. My early teachers and guides were Shelley, Blake, Milton, Nietzsche, and the Prophetic Writings of the Hebrew Bible. I have learned from, and loved Greek and Sumerian literature, and Dante, as well. Further down the road I found new life and awe in the writings of Chaim Bialik, John Neihardt and Fred Turner. As for Pound and Eliot, may they rot in oblivion.

In the Harvest of Nations is a narrative poem in three books, about a nuclear war and the building of a new society. Book One is named *Old World*; Book Two is *Passij*; and Book Three is *Nu World*. As you can see from these subtitles, I have already embarked on my journey of transforming English. I confess with some happiness, that upon preparing this poem for the Shivvete Reading Room, I reread it for the first time in many years,

and it brought me great pleasure and amazement. I hope it does the same for you.

From 1982 to 1986 I worked on a long mythic poem that remains largely unexcavated from my notebooks. It morphed into The Song ov Elmallahz Kumming, a poem in six books. This is a historical poem, in a manner of speaking. It is the story of a Divine Messenger (Elmallah) who is sent to Ertha to spiritualize her. Each book is a particular historical moment. Book 1 is Elmallah's first impression. Book 2 is a prehistoric panorama. In Book 3 Elmallah takes the form of Dumuzi, of Sumerian myth. He is the husband/worshipper of the goddess Innana. I have rewritten that myth, holding closely to the original narrative, but giving it a new intention. Book 4 is set in Constantinople, as a retelling of the story of Justinian and Theodora, rulers of Byzantium at its pinnacle. From my extended stays in Istanbul I gleaned the detailed backdrops for many of the scenes in this book. In Book 5 I move to medieval France and the remarkable story of Heloise and Abalard. It is a very cinematographic retelling of their history, the penultimate scene in Elmallah's awakening of Ertha. Finally Book 6 is set in the Shoah (the Holocaust). A female "disciple" of Kalonimus Kalman, the great sage and rabbi of the Warsaw Ghetto, escapes from the nazi death grip to carry a Torah scroll to Palestine. This book is still incomplete and must be read in its rough copy version (a formidable task, I daresay). And this brings us to the current state of Elmallah's awakening of the human Soul. This long poem is a richly textured and visual historical-spiritual journey. I have reread it many times, and yet it still astonishes me. I often wonder if I was the author, or merely the stenographer.

With Ammung the Ruwenz ov the Tempel, I Herd... my poetry takes on, not just a Jewish flavor, but a devotedly Jewish voice. It is a collection of gleanings from the corners of fields that have been planted and harvested by my many teachers. In these times, the sages harvest in such abundance, that even gleaners like me come away with visionary wisdom. You will hear the songs and prayers and revelations of a profound Jewish renewal that is reshaping the world, in spite of everything. These poems have no overt narrative connecting them as a single story. The narrative instead stands as backdrop: the Shoah (Holocaust), the restoration of Israel, and the Divine subtext that drives all history.

In 1972 I had a moment of clarity and wrote, "What is spirit to the flesh is flesh to the spirit." I didn't understand that aphorism until ten years later, after watching my perspective move in a slow sweep from the physical and linear towards the spiritual and analogic. Another 25 years later, and now I see that this movement has become the defining feature of my poetic development. My focal point has moved progressively to more rarified levels of consciousness. In the Harvest ov Nations is grounded in a personal and psychological perspective. I wrote The Song ov Elmallahz Kumming over a 15+ year period. I began it more or less on the same plane as Harvest, with a fairly linear and continuous narrative.

But by Book 3, the Innana story, the narrative began to fragment, as the focal point oscillated between the human and transmigrant (a phrase I'm coining here to convey a very literal transpersonal state). That became the dominant mode for the rest of Elmallahz Kumming. With the poem Ammung the Ruwenz ov the Tempel, I Herd... physical reality faded into a metaphor for higher states, including the transmigrant and the Prophetic (in which one approaches the Divine Imperative). In the poem I am currently composing (as of 2005), the dream state is the closest I come to the physical world.

American-Rabbinic Poetry

I have come to realize, mostly after the fact, that what I have been doing for many years is attempting to merge the literary consciousness of our Jeffersonian/Thoreau-ian heritage with the Rabbinic literary/spiritual consciousness, and its precursor, our Biblical conscience. This is not such an unusual thing. Indeed, I would consider Jefferson and Thoreau modern Prophets who were very consciously linking this era to its Biblical, Hebraic conscience. My addition of the Rabbinic component is perhaps less common.

But Rabbinic literature is vast and utterly untapped as a source of imagery, imagination, phenomenology, and multiple knowledge-gestalts. It is shockingly modern and evocatively primitive at the same time. It is hypertextual, non-linear, and liltily narrative. I would propose that, thanks to an obsessive fugue of immersion and study by 75 generations of rabbis (1500 years), the Talmud and Midrash have been fused into the Jewish spiritual genetic code. And now, in this era, it is, as if, directly available to those Jews who make an effort to Hear it. Thru their transcendent cult and cultivation, the Rabbis have made it the native flora of our soil. We must but turn the soil over and let the heavens water it, and what grows will provide us a harvest of Rabbinic Knowing.

Consider how pertinent, and how perfectly familiar, these sayings from the first generations:

Reb Khisda said (*BT Brakhot 55a*): "A dream that is not interpreted is like a letter that is not read." In the name of Reb Bana'ah (*BT Brakhot 55a*): "There were 24 interpreters of dreams in Jerusalem. Once I dreamt a dream and went round to all of them and they all gave different interpretations. And all were fulfilled!"

See my poem *Vizhen Karvd in 2 Seels* as an example of this poetics.

Musings on a Non-linear Narrative Poetics

Sometimes I start with the poem's title, and, try as I might, the poem seems to go its own way. What emerges is something very different than what I wanted or expected. For the reader, such a title might seem to be a road marker on the

wrong road! Still, I often keep it, because it was the place from which I thought I was beginning my journey. Therefore, the connection, while not direct or linear, is important.

In a similar manner, we may begin a journey from a place we don't know so well, or perhaps from a place we don't know as well as we thought we knew it. We keep asking, "is this the right road?" Or we keep asking, "how can I find the right road?" All the while we are taking pictures of the landscape and of each other, but it's important to remember our doubts, our lostness, our wonder, even if that's not the essential purpose of our travels. It is as if we thought we were heading north from Caesaria to go to Rome, yet somehow we ended up in Yavneh outside of Jerusalem. We look around startled, and maybe think, "hey, this isn't where I thought I was going, but it's an interesting place to be." Or maybe we're just disgusted that things turned out so poorly. That night, or a decade later, we look at the pictures we took on the road, and remember our remarkable, or pitiful, "Journey to Rome."

A journey, which, don't forget, is really a metaphor for writing poetry.

More on Non-Linear Narratives

So... I'm searching out the overlaps between language, causality (or causalities), randomness, and psychological and religious experience. I am trying to envision a kind of non-linear or branched causality, that might better explain (some) things (like knowledge transmission, or historical connections, or the seeming, or real, disconnect between righteousness (or its opposite) and reward).

I have found that much philosophy, math, and physics lack clarity and explicitness in non-technical language. That causes me to wonder how clear and explicit much of that work really is.

But, alas, that presents a contradiction already to me, since poetry is a technical kind of language, and my poetry particularly seems to be such a bumbite for people! So that binds me in 2 contradictions, one concerning clarity; the other that my edgy linguistic experiments are directly related to, and implicated in finding more branched and non-linear causalities. I guess I'm stuck with that.

To get unstuck, here's something I sketched out while stuck in the San Francisco airport a while back. It's the opening to a stroll thru some causal models and how they've changed over time, beginning with the question, 'what causes malaria?'. But I don't get to that question in this sketch.

Riddel ov the Thred

Thare iz a thred, it is notten, it is koyel,
Like the yung prittee wimmen, it iz hard tu hoeld.
Wen yu lift this thred, this silkee frinj,

It iz lite in yur hand, just a foton a time.

Now peenk az the klowdz at sunrize, now goelden

Az Jerrusullem in the benden shaedz ov dusk;

It iz blu like the jakkarranda blossem,

It chaenjez over time, it fallz frum yur hand*.

* utherz say "sky"

Wut iz this thred that the sajez woud spin?

That the fizzaassist minuetlee stretchez and frayz?

That biyollojists kut intu seekwens ov assid,

Foelden with oxxajjen, and randem evolvz?

Wut iz this thred, that historreyanz drag it

Like a fishermanz net, troling thaer seez?

Pollattishenz pull it with all thaer mite;

Thay kare not wether it brake or hoeld.

Mathmattishenz woud rezolv its repeeting orderz,

This hapless tangel, theze numbel handz.

Wut iz this thred? Yes, wut iz this thred?

More on "My" Language

If you have come this far, you know that language is not fixed, it is not complete; indeed it is merely (dare I say "merely?") an approximation to reality, our personal realities and our shared ones. In this light I would assert that language is one, but only one of the "connective tissues" that help build interpersonal realities.

I have tried to show, without the clutter and excess baggage of theory, but rather existentially, that words need not be thought of as bricks to build with, but clay to sculpt with. And a truly wonderful clay! It is soft and malleable to those who think it so. It is stiff and resistant if so imagined, for those whose "hands" are weak or untrained.

Perhaps it would be well to acknowledge my own errors and failures, instead of casting aspirins. When I compose, and until I'm compelled to produce a fair copy so others can have some hope of following my threads, my drafts are filled with innumerable alternative words, phrases, and images. Reducing this multi-layered mosaic into readable images is necessary, but inevitably diminishes the depth of those images. That is because in some cases there are no right words (at least that I am privy to), or there are many partly right words. So my poems suffer from inaccuracy and incompleteness.

When I am being more or less successful, each word is a vertex (or is it a vortex?) connecting

vectors from multiple layers of reality. Their purpose is to expose, not conceal, those layers. This makes reading me slow going, but if one desires to truly understand reality, and not simply get by with the minimum amount of necessary awareness, every moment, every thought, every feeling, every word, quite obviously, is connected to a vast network of related "nodes."

Too often I have not made those connections, or I've only made a few when many were possible. More problematic is when I have been inaccurate. I have distorted or muddied reality, rather than clarifying it. Therefore, I can only rely on you to correct me or expand upon the narrow apertures I've tried to open.

One final note about "reality." It is important to distinguish between the complex, incomplete, and often discontinuous images that expose reality (ie the contents of consciousness), on the one hand, and the spectrum of common and accessible conventions that are used to distort the forms of most modern "art," on the other. Modern art, on the one extreme, creates self-contained narratives that hide or deny discontinuities and contradictions. It is really a form of illusionism and unreality. Popular novels and films do this to great financial success. At the other extreme, we find self-absorbed experimentalism, in which reality, and conscience especially, have become insignificant determinants, or inconvenient obstructions. While both extremes of art, literature, and music can entertain or delight the senses, they cannot be taken as serious. The definitive function of true art is its imperative to inspire moral clarity, ethical action, and spiritual awakening.

RE: my poem: Guerden ov Addomz

Reb Rick Kool wrote to me, asking:

“So what is it that is written in our cells that we drag up the hill? The search for the peaceful place, the search for the garden with food (all kinds of foods for mind and body), or is it that our cells tell us to stir up dust?”

In answering him, I thought maybe it would be of interest to all of you, so here it is:

I guess I would have to answer that, on the first level, the poem attempts to unlock these kind of questions, rather than provide answers. But then again, I hate writers that spew out the copped-out, bullshit company line that "art and literature have no meaning except what each reader/viewer gives it." That's just so much hogwash in a bucket.

So I am glad if this poem inspires questions, but if that's all it does, it's a failure. If art/literature is to be more than decoration or entertainment, if it is to take leadership responsibility for making this world a better place, the author must be able to clearly convey intentions (in-tensions) and meanings, and not merely create questions, ambiguities, and bizarreties.

Technically, I am merging/superimposing into a single picture a few worlds: 1) this, the one we see with our eyes; 2) the after-death state which we cannot see at all with any certainty; 3) the Biblical-spiritual world that provides us with images of some kind of original (or pre-world) paradise, that may also be, 4) a Divine state of peace and perfection that is immanent but hidden.

We are the tillers of this soil, this world, but yet we hardly know what fruit it is we grow or harvest. Indeed, we are so busy, so overwhelmed even, with the details, that we hardly have the time, much less the vision, to contemplate what, if any, are the enduring impacts of our presence and our work here. We have hardly the time or the vision to consider that, as many believe, we stand in the Presence of the Divine, and yet, grievously, we see with our eyes how shameless our behavior can be. Many also believe the Messiah has come, and yet, grievously, we see with our eyes that these are not Messianic times, at least by any definition *I* can understand.

Perhaps with these kinds of meditations we can begin to remove the veil from our eyes, a curtain upon which is projected this obvious world, but which separates us from higher states of knowing and being. Many say, "no, there is only this world, and it is not (but) a veil." They say there is nothing deeper, nothing Divine, nothing Messianic to see or to know.

But I have seen the veil pulled back, and I am trying to address that experience and convey it, both for those who don't believe there is anything beyond this world, and for those who have seen beyond, and want to see more. The problem is, visionary experiences transcend our rationality, and thus can't be conveyed in simple, or literal, or rationalistic modalities. I'm not interested in telling about the experience. Plenty of others have done that. I want to generate a reality transcending experience in the reader! My response is to construct linguistic forms that stretch, or tear, the fabric of language, and that superimpose multiple states and places. By partially emulating the "visionary" experience, perhaps I can literarily (and literally) activate or stimulate it. I don't know what else to do, to try to help people see thru, or beyond, that which appears so opaque, so impenetrable, so insurmountable.

But to attempt to achieve such results in one way or another is absolutely necessary. Whether *I* succeed or fail is another issue entirely. How else are we to be inspired to change, to do better, if we cannot begin to glimpse the Divine Presence beyond the veil?

Literary Complexity and its Antithesis, Ambiguity

This relatively short essay is part of an on-going series of musings concerning language in the service of clearer and more insightful modes of thought. The interested reader who is, as yet, unfamiliar with my poetry and my

program to restructure English, might want to read the following, to put this essay in context. I would suggest beginning with:

Why I Rite So Funnee

[http://www.shivvetee.com/round_table/comments/why.html]. This is on my website, which contains a number of book-length poems, plus some of my art and manuscripts. Then I would search my blog [<http://shivvetee.blogspot.com>] for the following posts:

A docent's tour of my poetry, Part 1. [July 10, 2006]

Part 2 of a Docent's tour of my poetry. [July 10, 2006]

The definitive function of true art. [August 29, 2006]

Musings on a Non-linear Narrative Poetics. [July 20, 2006]

RE: the poem: Guerden ov Addomz (see 10/26/06) [November 10, 2006]

So...

There are many ways to be accurate in thinking and writing. A marvelous statement on "traditional" understandings about literary accuracy can be found in Richard Moore's essay, *Seven Types of Accuracy* in his book The Rule that Liberates. However, we have made enormous gains in science that are not reflected in our arts, and especially in poetry. Our language and our use of language have not kept pace with our ability to See. We still measure the accuracy of language by our ability to say one thing clearly, unambiguously.

Sadly for the traditionalists, we have passed beyond a world of one dimension. We realize (or must realize) now that we live in a highly superimposed world. There are many ways of seeing, many ways of feeling, many ways of knowing, all coexisting, each with its own particular value. There are many competing, and often co-equal truths, that point to a higher truth or truths. An educated, and more importantly, an ethical individual must become aware of them all. This is the job of literature in this era. We must implement these ways of thinking, and not merely theorize about them.

To this end, in my poetry I sacrifice accuracy in one dimension (one level of meaning) to gain accuracy in multiple dimensions (multiple levels of meaning). For some people it makes my writing too difficult to penetrate. I truly regret this, but I will persist in my vision. Perhaps if I explain how it works (how I think and compose), I might be able to make my poetry a bit more approachable. What follows are two common examples of superimposed meanings that can be found in my writing. The first involves modifications of spelling. The second involves modifications of grammar and verb tense, as well as spelling.

On September 25, 2006, you can find a poem entitled *Kinder, Prepare Yurselz*. We will go no further than the title, which contains two variant spellings representing superimposed ideas. The first is the word "*Kinder*," which is intended to have two meanings: 1) "to be more compassionate," which, if I didn't intend a

second meaning, I would have spelled “kiender” to indicate the long “i” in pronunciation, and 2) “children,” from the German and Yiddish. The second variant in spelling that signals multiple meanings is “Yurselz.” The word refers directly to the word “yourselves,” but I have substituted “-selz” for “-selves” to show that this is not simply a psychological process related to the self, but a process that must penetrate all the way into our bodies, into our cells. We children must prepare ourselves profoundly, physically and mentally. And we must prepare ourselves to be kinder, more compassionate. I could delve further into the implications, but I hope that gives a sufficient taste.

The second example can be found on November 2, 2006, in the poem *Plowmen with Taelz*. In the second stanza I write:

"I meet a plowman a reternen frum feelz.

"He will say, 'For jennerratenz I am plow this expanz.

'My lingz ar groen frum its oxxide dust.

There's a lot going on here! We have the clashing present tense of “meet” with the future tense of “will say.” I did this for a number of reasons. The simplest is that often our experiences are not understood until much later, so that what we hear now, we will re-hear differently in the future. Secondly, time is purely a function of consciousness. I have come to believe that past, present, and future all coexist, but our experience is limited, as Blake says, “*by our senses five... which are the inlets to the Soul in this age.*” “*For jennerratenz I am plow*” suggests another aspect of the time-consciousness unity. The moment of consciousness in this statement spans generations. Such a claim has important implications, both for the definition of “self,” and for our understanding of how experience and belief are culturally transmitted. Finally, “*lingz ar groen*” is fraught with meaning. “*Lingz*” are both “lungs” and “languages” and “*groen*” is both “grown” and “groan.” And all the possible combinations of meanings coexist and amplify each other.

Understanding how I write may not make reading my poetry any easier, but perhaps you may be comforted to know that there's reason, purpose, and intention in it. Perhaps it is only cold comfort.

However, I think it is very important to make this distinction: what I'm trying to do is the opposite of what I see as an overwhelming tendency in modern poetry, that is, the creating of **intentional** ambiguity, the purpose of which is to create the **illusion** of deeper meaning(s) without the author's intentionality of what that meaning is. We know this kind of ambiguity creates merely an illusion of depth, because a byword of modern poetics is that “the reader must create the meaning,” thus absolving the author of that responsibility. I reject this perspective entirely. It is the **author's** job to create meaning, and to convey it clearly.

Now, the search for multi-dimensional accuracy is not a matter of (mere) rationalism and logic. Often the choices one makes are intuitive, or based on

feeling and sensuality. Depending on the author's success, the accuracy and richness of the language may be deteriorated or amplified. The author is guided, to one degree or another, by personal, transpersonal, and/or transcendent (dare I say Divine) knowledge, and the literary outcome is dependent on the quality, authority, and genuineness of that knowledge.

In pursuit of the scientific method, modern language has evolved to strip ambiguity, at the cost of reduction in levels of meaning. English has been the leader in this enterprise, thereby becoming enormously powerful (and by the way, a highly intimidating carrier of dangerous culture to those who resist this process). I have tried to break the mold of English, not as an act of resistance, but in an effort to regain complexity of knowledge and efficiency of expression, while holding onto accuracy of language. This is not a strange or unique or aberrant goal. Mathematical notation epitomizes this process. One need only read a modern physics text (say Feynman, who speaks to expert and layman alike) to experience the efficient complexity of thought embedded in mathematical language.

In sum, our art and language have the ability to evolve, and to evolve us, into higher levels of consciousness, but that requires new kinds of language and language tools. Failing that, our art will remain mired in Aristotelian one-dimensionality, and we will, with impotent romanticism, look back on the literature of "ancient" languages, such as Hebrew/Arabic and Sanskrit, as the last bastions of holy ambiguity.

Further literary notes

Layering:

Like a painting my poems are built up from a ground layer with a series of overlays. In this process, as I employ it, the overlays each represent a new perspective, point of view, or psychological state. The challenge is to maintain the clarity of image and "color" while superposing new overlays. Poorly done, this muddies the color or creates poor registration (as in the printing sense). As ever, ambiguity and lack of sharpness are the results of poor workmanship.

Ambiguity:

It has been said to me that some situations can be inherently ambiguous, and therefore, the writer's job is to express that ambiguity. I say, "No!" The writer's job is to accurately tell and show what is known or observed or felt or imagined. As ever, accuracy is essential. Done properly and well, the inherent ambiguity will be discerned and expressed thru the clarity of image and relationship. But the descriptive foundation itself will not be ambiguous, muddy, distorted, or incomplete, as if such sloppiness is a means for conveying the unknown, or the limitations of our knowing (which is the source of ambiguity).

A Memorable Fancy

From The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, Blake writes, "*The Prophets Isaiah and Ezekiel dined with me, and I asked them how they dared so roundly to assert that God spoke to them;... Isaiah answer'd, 'I saw no God nor heard any, in a finite organical perception;...'*"

Prophetic hearing is very difficult, and requires much effort and struggle. It is the ability to distinguish the Divine melodiousness in the cacophony of Mind. Mind overflows with multiple streams of thought, sensations in all their internal and external downpourings, the non-sensual communications and interactions between people, and how much more? Merged into all of this is what I call the Divine melodiousness. But do not imagine this is a separate thing, and that all that is required to hear it is to tune out all the rest. This is a common error, called "false prophecy" in the Bible. Isaiah did not hear God's voice. Isaiah, discerning melodiousness in the cacophony, extracted, superposed, wrestled with, and haltingly translated a human message out of the totality of his experience. He did not tune out and close off. Just the opposite. He opened the floodgates as wide as he dared, often at the edge of drowning.

If you think you can "hear" God's voice, you are already lost and deluded! The god that talks in a human voice, who tells people to "declare to the world my word," is more accurately known as "ego," and usually an arrogant ego claiming an authority it doesn't have.

Let us be more careful, and not let our imagination run away with us. Listen closely. To experience, in its most basic form, the Divine melodiousness is **not** so hard. It is what we know as the "spiritual experience." There are so many faces to this experience: peace, wholeness, bliss, eternity, infinity, healing, atonement, grace, thanksgiving. The more difficult work begins when we want to understand and transmit this experience. Over the millenia, it has been translated into many different languages and many different/similar religions, but often with a sense of literalness that can make this literature misleading. Let us translate with care, with whatever accuracy we can muster, and with at least a little humbleness. **We live in a world that is only approximately true**, and we can only approximately discern Divine intention. So let us try to translate, knowing that our words, too, are only an approximation.

Nite, completed

What follows is a completed version of the poem *Nite*, the first part of which I published on my blog [<http://shivvetee.blogspot.com>] on 3/24/08. The poem is part of a series entitled *Lanskaeps in Aengziyettee* (see 12/30/07) which is itself embedded in a book-length work in progress entitled The Pardaes Dokkumen.

The idea around which the poem is built is described briefly in my posting on 3/24. To follow up on that explanation, each line in *Nite* is refrained with an echoing line that was composed based on similarity of sound. So for example, the poem begins, “*Yu will see Messiya kum.*” This line is echoed in the following, refraining line, “*Yu see, deziyer kumz.*” The whole poem is structured that way (with the exception of the voice of Rabbi Akiva just before the end). So, you can see that there are really two poems here, conjoined not by theme, or image, or even style, but by a common “ur-sound.” It is as if I sat with my ear to a wall trying to hear a conversation in the adjoining room. Following the poem are some further notes on the process of its composition, and how it reflects my understanding of the nature of consciousness.

Nite, in 2 Howzez

(3rd layering, completed 4/15/08 // 9 Nisan 5768)

Yu will see Messiya kum

Yu see, deziyer kumz

An hiz armee, chieldlike,

All disarmen, all mielldike

Tu be slotter on the plaenz

Plotting withowt planz

But all thaer hope iz still undeferd.

And all yur hoeps so still, inferd.

Nite iz kum with its kaerz all brooden.

Wut mite kum frum such a kaerless moodenz?

The perpel figz ar skatterz on the pathez

Perpel fewgz, skawlding, empathek

Over-ripe. The waggen weelz krush them

Over-rot with aggonee and blushez.

And he hu iz keeper the orcherd

The seekerz ov luv torcherd

Iz looz pride and proffet allike:

With lawz and liez and powetree, allike.

Taengellen branchen in wont ov hevvee pruningz.

Taengeld embrasez with a hevvenlee prommis.

Moist wallz ov shale so lustrus az kwortz,

Immerst, waren shawlz in selesteyel korts,

Theze long an eregguler hallz ov Pardaes.

The long enrapcherren kallz ov Pardaes.
Beyond the sferen ov moon and sun;
Bownd tu the serf, its moodee song;
Beyond this ribben ov mezher an set;
Bownd by a ribbeld an mezmarek kwest;
Beyond the sensen ov konsents and thot.
Bownd in the tenshen ov kawshes and swov.
Limmitless nuthinglee shaepless nite.
Subliminnel utterlee eskaepless life.

Akeva taeks hart. "This iz the forres
"Ware the trael tu messiya muss be fownd.
"I will not sees till I breeng Hem tu don,
"And leed the pepel tu a Pardaes beyon."

Messiya weeps at the length ov nite.
Deziyer streekt with the angst ov life.

To compose a poem like this is particularly slow going. It is like solving a set of simultaneous equations without calculus. One must substitute one value after another for each variable until an approximate and acceptable solution is found. In this case the variables are the "ur-sounds" and the values are words. You can therefore read the poem two ways. You can read the left-justified lines as a single entity, and then read the indented, refraining lines as a second, distinct poem. Or you can read a line and its refrain, with the purpose of capturing the phonetic interconnections between them.

In my comments before the poem I said, "It is as if I sat with my ear to a wall..." With this image I am simply expressing the commonly held view that language emerges from a deeper, universal knowing. Indeed, this is precisely what our consciousness does: dimly hears and translates a transcendental Voice. When I say "transcendental," what I mean is, "of a higher dimensionality," or in 19th century language, "eternal and infinite." And if this is the essence of consciousness, as I believe it is, *our* being is purely an echo of *that* Being.

In sum, the poem attempts to express two things. Most obviously, it tells two concurrent narratives that are phonetically intertwined. However, it also emulates the process by which our consciousness emerges from the liminal threshold of the Divine.