

Poetry and Being 1

Doing: action, performance, productivity, rational analysis, IQ...

Being: Intuition, mindfulness, creativity, presence, essence, emotional intelligence

Poetry and Being

An exploration of how engaging deeply with poetry can assist in an understanding of our inner world, of what can support our search for self-understanding, inner harmony and divine guidance.

Michael Griffith 7th September 2022

Introduction



Here are a few key questions that I would like to explore with you over the next three weeks:

*Can the reading and study of poetry open my understanding of what is needed for my Being?

*Can the act of writing of poetry, as we see the process taking place in Judith Wright, T.S. Eliot, William Wordsworth, Thomas Merton and others, take me a step further in this quest?

*Could my own writing of poetry amplify my understanding of what is needed for my Being?

There may be other questions that are uppermost in your minds. You can type these in the chat.

Suggested strategy:

I would like us to attend closely to what is said in the poems I have selected, but also to how it is said. Poetry, like music, like painting, operates on many different levels and it will be good to fine tune our understanding of how poetry enables the poet her/himself and the us/ the reader to see, feel, understand our human experience and the world around us in new ways.

1/Thomas Merton 1915-1968- poetry and art (especially photography) was an important part of his spiritual practice.

From The Song Of The Traveller

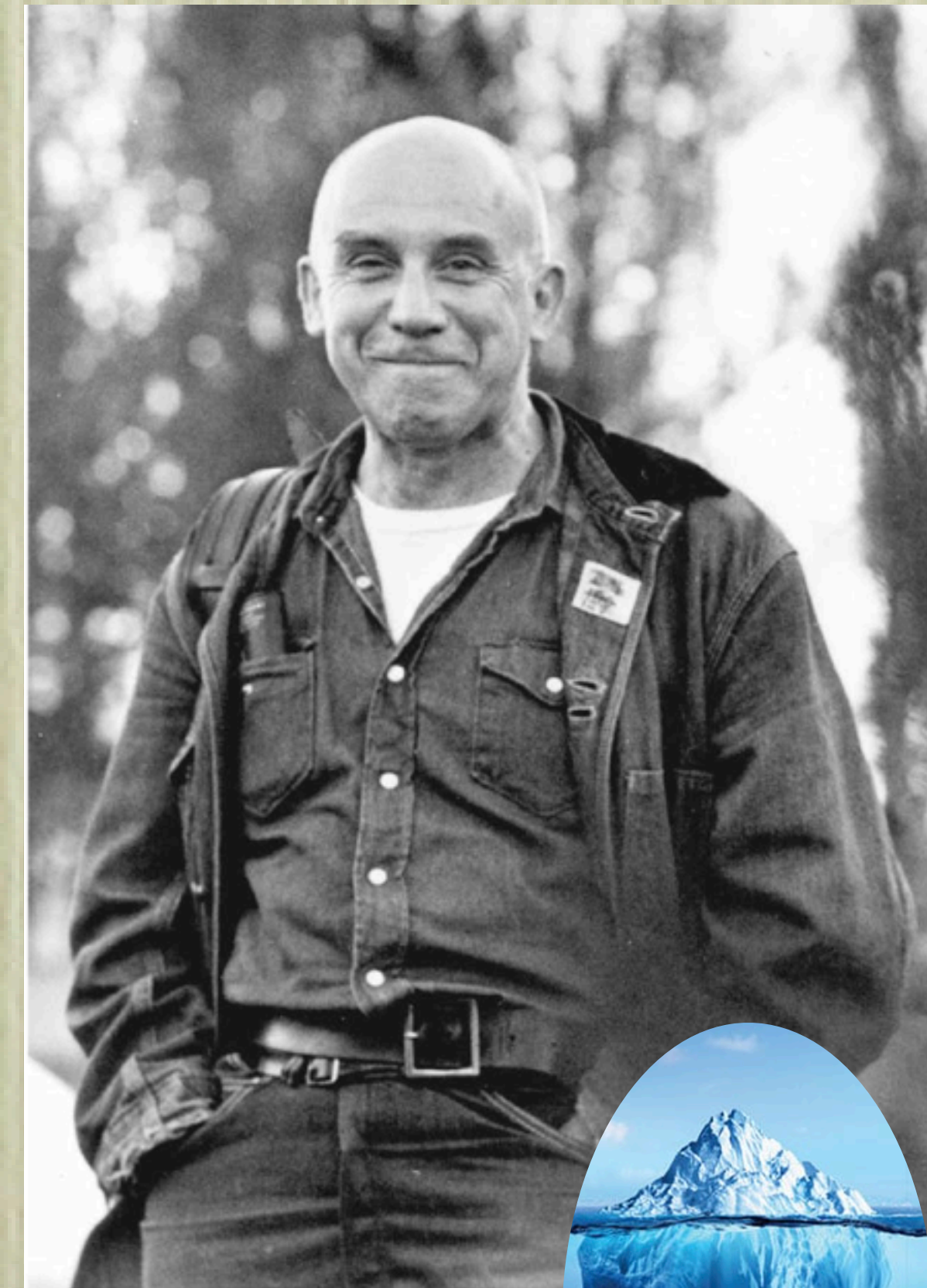
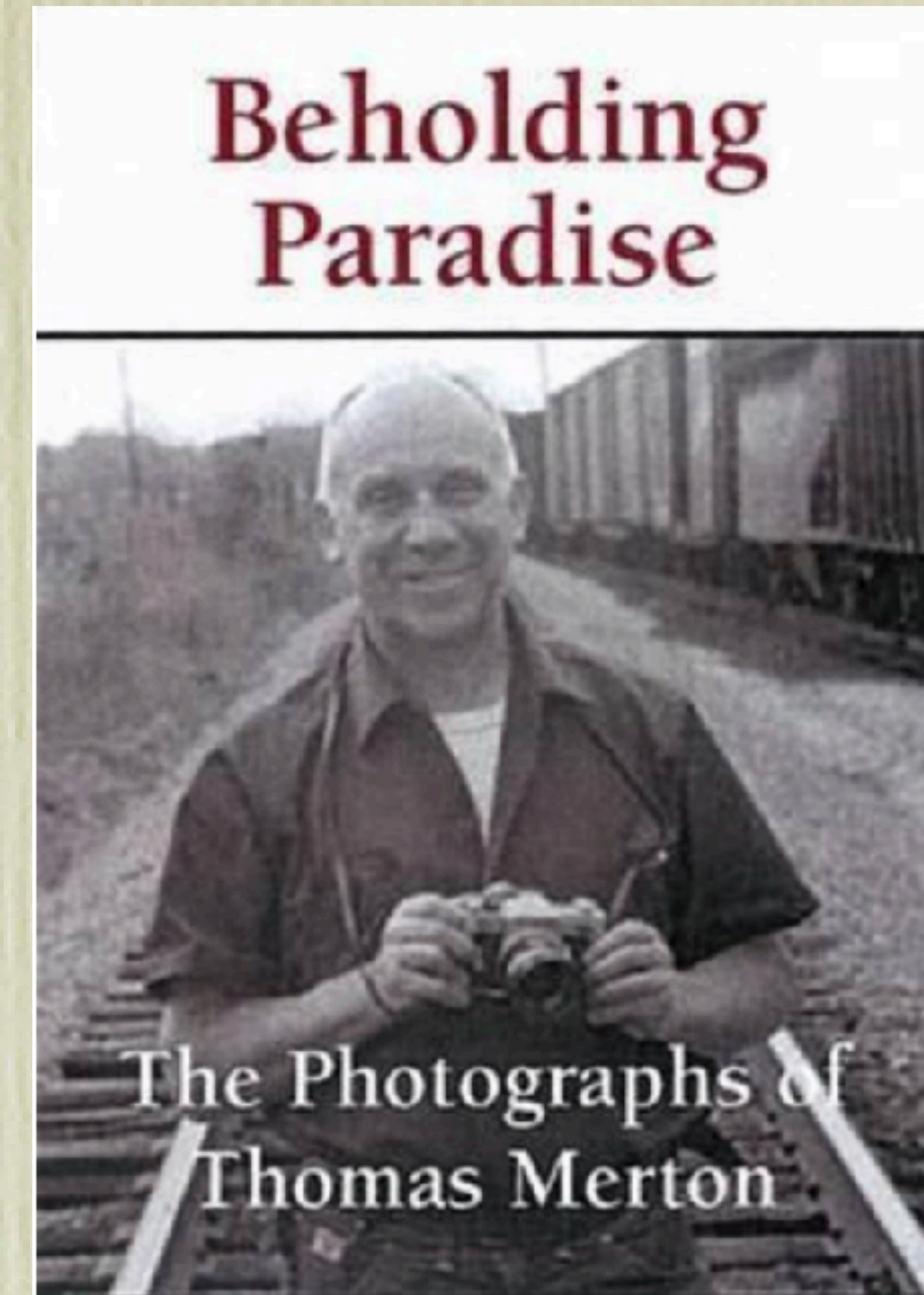
How light the heavy world becomes, when with transparent waters
All the shy elms and wakeful appletrees are dressed!
How the sun shouts, and spins his wheel of flame
And shoots the whole land full of diamonds
Enriching every flower's watery vesture with his praise,
O green spring mornings when we hear creation singing!

(You can read the rest of the poem here: <https://allpoetry.com/The-Song-Of-The-Traveller>)

QUESTION

Can we ask, how did the shaping of words, images, rhythms help Merton (*Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*) to connect with what he spoke of as “the centre of our **being**”:

“At the center of our **being** is a point of nothingness that is untouched by sin and by illusion, a point of pure truth, a point or spark which belongs entirely to God, which is never at our disposal, from which God disposes our lives, which is inaccessible to the fantasies of our mind or the brutalities of our own will. . . . **It is like a pure diamond, blazing with the invisible light of heaven.** It is in everybody, and if we could see it we would see these billions of points of light coming together in the face and blaze of a sun that would make all the darkness and cruelty of life vanish completely.”



**Judith Wright- born 1915
(Armidale) “into a pioneering
bush family and managed to
become the conscience of
Australia” on Aboriginal rights
and the Environment (*The
Guardian*).**

**Moved to Braidwood to the
famous bush retreat *EDGE* in
the last 3 decades of her life.
She died in June 2000.**





• *Judith Wright “The Wattle Tree”*

2/ Judith Wright (1915-2000) “The Wattle Tree”



Questions

- *What is the deepest yearning of Judith Wright’s heart as expressed in this poem?
- *Is it a spiritual yearning?
- How is this yearning realised in the imagery, sound and shape of the poem?
- *Does the poem provoke an imitation of this yearning?

*The tree knows four truths-
earth, water, air, and the fire of the sun.
The tree holds four truths in one.
Root, limb and leaf unfold
out of the seed, and these rejoice
till the tree dreams it has a voice
to join four truths in one great word of gold.*

*-Oh, that I knew that word!
I should cry loud, louder than any bird.
O let me live for ever, I would cry.
For that word makes immortal what would wordless die;
and perfectly, and passionately,
welds love and time into the seed,
till tree renews itself and is for ever tree-*

*Then upward from the earth
and from the water,
then inward from the air
and the cascading light
poured gold, till the tree trembled with its flood.*

*Now from the world’s four elements I make
my immortality; it shapes within the bud.
Yes, now I bud, and now at last I break
into the truth I had no voice to speak:
into a million images of the Sun, my God.*



3/ Max Reif (1948-) “Poetry”

Poetry is
judge and jury

as we summon words
from their flights or roosts
in forests within

and find that those alone
will come, which match
what it is in us
that authentically calls,

weighing us,
stamping the coin
of a page to evoke
our true inner state,
not a whit more or less.

Written in a tiny room,
a marketplace,
a temple or shrine,
it does not matter,

the verdict
of conscience appears
for all or no one
to see,

calibrated
finer than a feather
upon the scales of truth

Questions

Max Reif's poem is a poem about poetic authenticity.

*Does this help to shed light on what we should expect from a poem?

*Does it help us to appreciate the authenticity or otherwise of Judith Wright's poem?

*Can it help to shed light on what we might need to bring to writing our own poetry?



4/ R.S. Thomas (1913-2000)



Questions

- *What is it about this poem that strikes a chord in the contemplative mind?
- *How does the language in this poem work to still and engage our responses?
- *When does poetry come close to being like a Mantra?

“But, the silence in the mind”

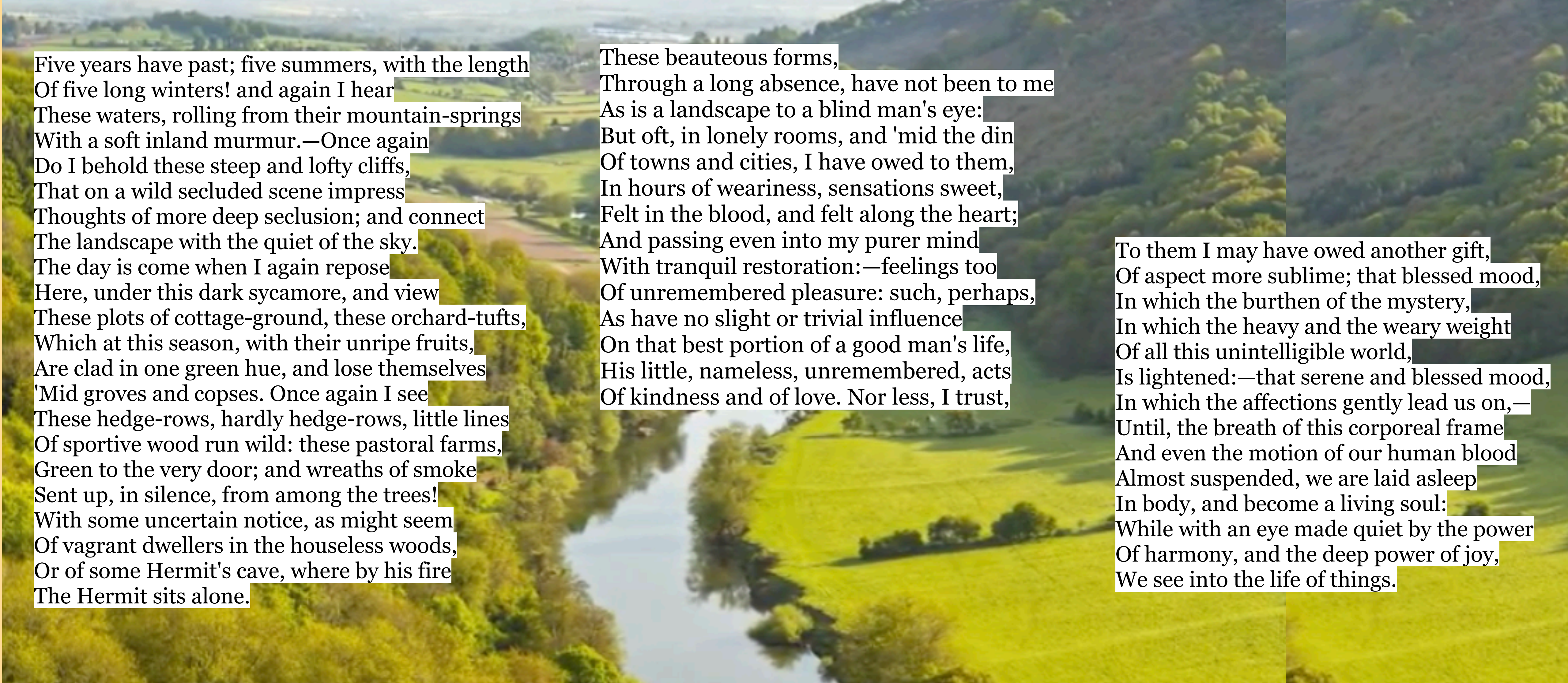
But the silence in the mind is when we live best, within listening distance of the silence we call God. This is the deep calling to deep of the psalm-writer, the bottomless ocean. We launch the armada of our thoughts on, never arriving.

It is a presence, then, whose margins are our margins; that calls us out over our own fathoms. What to do but draw a little nearer to such ubiquity by remaining still?

William Wordsworth (1770-1850)

**“Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey, On Revisiting the Banks of the Wye during a Tour.
July 13, 1798”**





Five years have past; five summers, with the length
Of five long winters! and again I hear
These waters, rolling from their mountain-springs
With a soft inland murmur.—Once again
Do I behold these steep and lofty cliffs,
That on a wild secluded scene impress
Thoughts of more deep seclusion; and connect
The landscape with the quiet of the sky.
The day is come when I again repose
Here, under this dark sycamore, and view
These plots of cottage-ground, these orchard-tufts,
Which at this season, with their unripe fruits,
Are clad in one green hue, and lose themselves
'Mid groves and copses. Once again I see
These hedge-rows, hardly hedge-rows, little lines
Of sportive wood run wild: these pastoral farms,
Green to the very door; and wreaths of smoke
Sent up, in silence, from among the trees!
With some uncertain notice, as might seem
Of vagrant dwellers in the houseless woods,
Or of some Hermit's cave, where by his fire
The Hermit sits alone.

These beautiful forms,
Through a long absence, have not been to me
As is a landscape to a blind man's eye:
But oft, in lonely rooms, and 'mid the din
Of towns and cities, I have owed to them,
In hours of weariness, sensations sweet,
Felt in the blood, and felt along the heart;
And passing even into my purer mind
With tranquil restoration:—feelings too
Of unremembered pleasure: such, perhaps,
As have no slight or trivial influence
On that best portion of a good man's life,
His little, nameless, unremembered, acts
Of kindness and of love. Nor less, I trust,

To them I may have owed another gift,
Of aspect more sublime; that blessed mood,
In which the burthen of the mystery,
In which the heavy and the weary weight
Of all this unintelligible world,
Is lightened:—that serene and blessed mood,
In which the affections gently lead us on,—
Until, the breath of this corporeal frame
And even the motion of our human blood
Almost suspended, we are laid asleep
In body, and become a living soul:
While with an eye made quiet by the power
Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,
We see into the life of things.

Questions

- *How powerful is this depiction of transformed state of mind?
- *Can the depiction deepen our understanding of what might be necessary for contemplative practice- (if indeed we do feel it as necessary)?
- *Does such a poem embody or enact such a practice?
- *Is it like listening to music and being deeply stilled?
- *What is it in the language, in the imagery, rhythm and music of the words that brings these opening stanzas of the poem to such a rich conclusion?

Fine Week 1....

George Herbert (1593-1633) "The Altar"



'The Altar'

A broken ALTAR, Lord, thy servant reares,
Made of a heart, and cemented with teares:
Whose parts are as thy hand did frame;
No workmans tool hath touch'd the same.

A HEART alone
Is such a stone,
As nothing but
Thy pow'r doth cut.
Wherefore each part
Of my hard heart
Meets in this frame*,
To praise thy Name;

That, if I chance to hold my peace,
These stones to praise thee may not cease.
O let thy blessed SACRIFICE be mine,
And sanctifie this ALTAR to be thine.

