Peace Poem

I've had an ambivilent relationship with peace poetry. Not that I'm against peace, au contraire. In poetry, at least, I have an aversion to that language which tries to *persuade*. I call that *rhetoric* but much of the contemporary poetry community does not understand the difference and is even hostile to poetry that is not designed to persuade, or at least make a point.

I told an attendee at a recent event honoring the late poetry of Denise Levertov that Jack Spicer said: "The muse is patient with truth and commentary, as long as it doesn't get into the poem." This after the attendee admitted Levertov "wrote some bad poems." (We all have.) *Why are certain poems bad*, I never got to ask her because she said with incredulity: "YOU DON'T BELIEVE THAT DO YOU?!?" No, I'm quoting Spicer just to get a reaction from you. It's more validation for the theory that art (especially literary art) should best be measured on the continuum of OPEN vs. CLOSED.

Is there:

> "a grammar of justice,
> a syntax of mutial aid."

as Denise Levertov once wrote? Can a poem be made of luminous details, or as the Nabokov biographer Brian Boyd said, made by "attending to the individuating details?" There must be a way, as the persuasive or strident language is more likely to stiffen opposition rather than open minds. If details can be *individuating*, this means that the effort is part of a larger project which is to make you, the poet writing, more human.

Denise Levertov and Robert Duncan had a friendship that was largely conducted via letters. It ended badly, with a fierce disagreement over how to respond to the war in Vietnam. Should a poet oppose the war, or

imagine the evil that creates war and write from that awareness? When writing about this argument for my graduate work my friend Sam Hamill advised me not to choose a side.

What aspect of a human being chooses? The ego! What aspect of a human being wants to persuade someone to adopt their point of view? The ego! How does one write a poem with real power? One must go to a place deeper than ego. Spontaneous composition, collage and similar methods attempt to get beyond what Charles Olson called "the lyrical interference of the individual as ego" but how do we know when we're in that state? The first step might be a *desire* to come from a deeper position. The second might be recognizing language that seeks to persuade. Of course the "show don't tell" advice is necessary here, but how to do it, come from a place of clear peace and make a poem that is a "high energy construct?"

A video from the Washington Post: "…Israeli settlers… attack… aid trucks bound for Gaza" has stuck in my mind since I saw it this morning. Not guns bound for Gaza, not ammunition, but food, and this raised the ire of

On May 13, Israeli right-wing activists blocked aid trucks in the West Bank headed for Gaza, throwing food packages on the ground and stomping on them. (Video: Sapir Sluzker Amran/Neta Hamami Tabib via Storyful)

the settlers. That people under siege in Gaza don't deserve to eat or survive.

Your task is to write a peace poem. You could use the story pictured above, linked here: https://wapo.st/3V17g0c You could use just about any story from Gaza, or Ukraine, or the U.S. House of Representatives. The war on female body autonomy is on in Alabama with their <u>recent state Supreme Court ruling</u>, and maybe you can write a peace poem about that. The Nostradamus scholar said World War III is the planet against humans! How do we become a Gaian ally in this war? Ideally, this poem can be part of a multi-decade research project/serial poem. Maybe this starts a series of poems for you about peace. Can you rise above the stance of persuasion, above sentimentality? I don't think this task has ever been more urgent.

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3:43pm
Memorial Day 2024
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WORKS CITED:

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https://www.cnn.com/2024/02/20/us/alabama-embryo-law-ruling-supreme-court/index.html