5. Literary Complexity and its Antithesis, Ambiguity

There are many ways to be accurate in thinking and writing. An erudite and compelling 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.

Consider first the 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 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 jenneratenz 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 that 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.

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 resistence, 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.