

THE POETRY OF POLITICS: SEARCHING FOR UTOPIA

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Perhaps this is a good time to look at what some poets and writers have felt it is important to say about one's country, government and society when seeking solutions and a source of strength. Poetry of course can be all things to all people and probably should be, but there is also a long tradition and history to its politics - what it has to say about the world around us and our goals in society. So at the risk of verbosity - that is, a lot of words - I present a collection and continuity of this important heritage.

The 20th century Greek poet, C.P. Cavafy, following his forbear's example, wrote this meaningful poem: ITHACA,

When you set out for Ithaca, ask that the journey
Be long, full of adventures, things to learn.

Pray that your journey be long, with many summer
Mornings when, with what joy, what delight, you
Enter harbors you have not seen before.
Have Ithaca always in your mind.
Arriving there is your destination; but do not
Hurry your journey.
Better that you are old when you cast anchor at
That island, rich with all that you have gained
Along the way,
Not expecting that Ithaca will give you wealth;
Ithaca gave you that splendid journey,
Without her you would not have set out.

This poem, with its evocation of Ulysses' travels and tribulations and eventual arrival, has stuck in my mind for years as a symbol of a goal, a dream, a purpose, and thus as a starting point of departure as well as an arrival for poets searching for meaning in man's journey through life toward an ideal society, and for a justification of that search.

Political poetry presents both a positive and negative face, but its importance lies in the constant need to maintain the desire to say something strong and clear about the state of the nation. And in what more striking way than in words that carry a ring and, if not a rhyme, a metaphor and an image? And in what better kind of social environment than a great democracy?

Political poetry thus includes not only the idea of a return to a golden age, to the myths of home, the garden of Eden. The ideal of Utopia, as well as the protest against injustice, inequality, poverty and corruption since the beginnings of literary endeavor, these themes repeat themselves and are evident in ancient and contemporary works.

Examples of political poetry are taken from both English and American sources as well as some from our common heritage - the Bible, Dante and others.

From the Bible, the prophet Amos (4:43-5:24):

I hate, I despise your festivals! Your assemblies
Give me no pleasure. No matter how many your
Sacrifices I will not be appeased. The feelings
You offer to appease Me I will not consider. Take
Away the din of your singers, and the melody of
Your harps. But let justice roll down like
Waters, and righteousness like a mighty stream.

Moving to the 14th century and Dante's Divine Comedy, we find, not a religious tract so much as a political one, where the theme, to quote from the Foreword to Robert Pinsky's translation of the Inferno, is not mercy but justice. The Inferno is a vision of the City of Man in the after life. Hell is the state of the world as seen by an exile whose experience leads him no longer to trust the world's values.

From Canto XII - "But keep your eyes below us, for coming near/Is the river of blood - in which boils everyone/Whose violence hurt others O blind desire/Of covetousness, O anger gone insane - /That goad us on through life, which is so brief/To steep in eternal woe when life is done."

Later we read Shakespeare's Sonnet 66, which I quote in its entirety as it reflects the poet's complete despair with the facts of his political reality and lists a hierarchy of social abuses:

Tired with all these, for restful death I cry,
As, to behold desert a beggar born,
And needy nothing trimmed in jollity,
And purest faith unhappily forsworn,
And gilded honour shamefully misplaced,
And maiden virtue rudely strumpeted,
And right perfection wrongfully disgraced,
And strength by limping away disabled,
And art made tongue-tied by authority,
And folly (doctorlike) controlling skill,
And simple truth miscalled simplicity,

And captive good attending captive ill,
Tired with all these, from these would I be gone,
Save that to die, I leave my love alone.

In the 17th century, Milton and Dryden wrote the two greatest political poems in the English language: Milton's *Paradise Lost* - reflecting his Republicanism and his love of liberty; Dryden's *Absalom and Achitophel*, as a monarchist and *Troy*, where the essential faith is love of order.

In the 18th century, here is Oliver Goldsmith and his lament on "Sweet Auburn", and what modernity and the changing times did to that ideal village:

Sweet Auburn, loveliest village of the plain,
Where health and plenty cheered the labouring
Swain,
Where smiling spring its earliest visit paid,
And parting summer's lingering blooms delayed,
Dear lovely bowers of innocence and ease,
Seats of my youth, when every sport could please.
How often have I loitered o'er thy green.
Where humble happiness endeared every scene!
Sweet smiling village, loveliest of the lawn,
Thy sports are fled, and all thy charms withdrawn.
Far, far away thy children leave the land.
Ill fares the land, to hastening ills a prey,
Where wealth accumulates, and men decay,
Princes and lords may flourish, or may fade;
A breath can make them, as a breath has made;
But a bold peasantry, their country's pride
When once destroyed, can never be supplied.

And what could be more to the point than William Blake's reaction to the poverty and misery of London in his poem of that name:

"In every cry of every man,
In every infant's cry of fear,
In every voice, in every ban,
The mind-forged manacles I hear."

And his Hymn which every English school child learns,

"I shall not cease from mental fight,
Nor shall my sword sleep in my hand,
Till we have built Jerusalem
In England's green and pleasant land."

Wordsworth's poem "London 1802" raises again the spirit of Milton:

Milton! Thou shouldst be living at this hour:
England hath need of thee: she is a fen
Of stagnant waters: altar, sword, and pen,
Fireside, the heroic wealth of hall and bower,
Have forfeited their ancient English dower
Of inward happiness. We are selfish men;
Oh! Raise us up, return to us again;
And give us manners, virtue, freedom, power,
Thy soul was like a star, and dwelt apart;
Thou hadst a voice whose sound was like the sea;
Pure as the naked heavens, majestic, free,
So didst thou travel on life's common way,
In cheerful godliness; and yet thy heart
The lowliest duties on herself did lay.

Shelley adds his bitter regrets over his misguided country in "England in 1819":

An old, mad, blind, despised, and dying king -
Princes, the dregs of their dull race, who flow
Through public scorn - mud from a muddy spring -
Rulers who neither see, nor feel, nor know,
But leech-like to their fainting country cling,
Till they drop, blind in blood, without a blow -
A people starved and stabbed in the untilled field -
An army, which liberticide and prey
Makes as a two-edged sword to all who wield -
Golden and sanguine laws which tempt and slay;
Religion Christless, Godless - a book sealed;
A Senate - Time's worst statute unrepealed -
Are graves, from which a glorious phantom may

Burst, to illumine our tempestuous day.

Pride in country and love of freedom stand out
boldly in the Scottish poets - Robert Burns in "Robert
Bruce's March to Bannockburn":

"Scots, wha'hae wi' Wallace bled,
Scots, wham Bruce has aften led,
Welcome to your gory bed,
Or to Victory!

Wha' for Scotland's king and law
Freedom's sword will strongly draw,
Freeman stand or freeman fa'
Let him follow me!

Lay the proud usurpers low!
Tyrants fall in every foe!"

And again in Sir Walter Scott's "Patriotism":

"Breathes there the man, with soul so dead,
Who never to himself hath said,
This is my own, my native land!
Whose heart hath ne'er within him burned,
As home his footsteps he hath turned."

And, finally, a heroic stand by Thomas Macauley in
"Horatius":

"And how can a man do better
Than facing fearful odds,
For the ashes of his fathers,
And the temples of his gods.
Haul down the bridge, Sir Consul
With all the speed ye may;
I, with two more to help me,
Will hold the foe in play,
In yon straight path a thousand
May well be stopped by three,
Now who will stand on either hand.
And keep the bridge with me?"

We move to the late 19th century with two well-known poems, one a desperate attempt to find solace in an uncertain world - Matthew Arnold's "Dover Beach":

"Ah, love, let us be true
To one another! For the world, which seems
To lie before us like a land of dreams,
So various, so beautiful, so new,
Hath really neither joy, nor love or light,
Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain;
And we are as on a darkling plain
Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,
Where ignorant armies clash by night."

And another - Kipling's "Recessional" - an affirmation of faith in King and Empire and God Himself:

"God of our fathers, known of old,
Lord of our far-flung battle line,
Beneath Whose awful hand we hold
Dominion over palm and pine -
Lord God of Hosts, be with us yet,
Lest we forget - lest we forget!"

And counterbalancing this rugged patriotism are two poems of Civil disorder and war. First. Yeats' "Easter 1916":

"I have met them at close of day
Coming with vivid faces
From counter or desk among grey
Eighteenth century houses.
I have passed with a nod of the head
Or polite meaningless words,
And thought before I had done
Of a mocking tale or a gibe
To please a companion
Around the fire at the club,
Being certain they and I

But lived where motley is worn:
 All changed, changed utterly:
 A terrible beauty is born,"

And Wilfred Owens' anti-war "Dulce et Decorum
 Est":

"If in smothering dreams, you too could pace
 Behind the wagon we flung him in,
 And watch the white eyes writhing in his face,
 His hanging face, like a devil's sick of sin;
 If you could hear, at every jolt, the blood
 Come gargling from the froth-corrupted lungs.
 Bitter as the cud
 Of vile, incurable sores on innocent tongues -
 My friend, you would not tell with such high zest
 To children ardent for some desperate glory,
 The old lie: Dulce et decorum est
 Pro patria mori."

Not all this poetry is tragic, declamatory or
 super-patriotic. There is also in English and American
 political poetry traditions of humor and irony,
 burlesque and cynicism. We look to Gilbert and
 Sullivan for some of the most amusing - and always in
 good taste of course - for take-offs on power and
 royalty.

For example, from "The Gondoliers":

"Oh, 'tis a glorious thing, I ween,
 To be a regular Royal Queen!
 No half-and-half affair, I mean,
 But a right-down regular Royal Queen!
 And noble lords will scrape and bow,
 And double themselves in two,
 And open their eyes
 In blank surprise
 At whatever she likes to do,
 And everybody will roundly vow
 She's fair as flowers in May,
 And say "How clever!"

At whatsoever
She condescends to say!"

And on the other hand -

"For everyone who feels inclined
Some post we undertake to find
Congenial with his frame of mind -
And all shall equal be,
The Chancellor in his peruke -
The Earl, the Marquis, and the Dook,
The Groom, the Butler, and the Cook -
They all shall equal be."

And from "The Pirates of Penzance" -

"To Queen Victoria's name we bow
As true-born Britons should
We can resist no longer now
And would not if we could
The man who dares to disregard
A summons to that name
We look on as a wretch ill-starred
And lost to sense of shame.

How doubly blest that glorious land
Where rank and brains go hand in hand,
Where wisdom pure and virtue hale
Obey the law of strict entail,
No harm can touch a country when
It's ruled by Britain noblemen."

Let's hear it from "The Mikado":

"From every kind of man
Obedience I expect;
I'm the Emperor of Japan -
In a fatherly kind of way
I govern each tribe and sect. And cheerfully own
My sway -
My nature is love and light -
My freedom from all defect -

Amore humane Mikado never
 Did in Japan exist,
 To nobody second.
 I'm certainly revckoned
 A true philanthropist.
 It is my very humane endeavor
 To make, to some extent,
 Each evil liver
 A running river
 Of harmless merriment.
 My object all sublime
 I shall achieve in time -"

And finally, with utter snottiness, from
 "Iolanthe":

"As upon its lordly way
 This unique procession passes,
 Bow, bow, ye lower middle classes!
 Bow, bow, ye tradesmen, bow, ye masses,
 Blow the trumpets, bang the brasses!
 We are peers of highest station,
 Paragons of legislation."

And,

"Britain really ruled the waves
 (In good Queen Bess's time)
 The House of Peers made no pretence
 To intellectual eminence,
 Or scholarship sublime;
 Yet Britain won her proudest days
 In good Queen Bess's glorious days!"

Hilaire Belloc adds his ha'penny in "On a General
 Election":

"The accursed power that stands on Privilege
 (And goes with Women, and Champagne and Bridge)
 Broke - and Democracy resumed her reign:
 (Which goes with Bridge and Women and Champagne.)"

The American were not to be undone though one must admit there is little of a classical education in the following:

Edgar Allan Poe (from Political Plumlines, by Felicia Lamport)

"Once upon a looming crisis
 Brought about by zooming prices,
 Expectational inflation seeping slowly through the
 Floor,
 Came the budgets, proceeding,
 Expeditiously, unheeding
 Any special-interest pleading - save about El
 Salvador.
 When implored to reconsider, reevaluate, restore,
 Quoth the Reagan, "Nevermore!"

Also by Lamport, "Mal de Mayor", a Bostonism:

"Can it be Mayor White, a Bostonian said,
 That you've been in office too long?
 Malarkey, said White, with a toss of his head,
 In my fourth term I'm still going strong.
 You started off strong, Sir, his critic replied,
 In the midst of the Hub's hurly-burly,
 And all our best citizens viewed you with pride -
 Til your hair grew suspiciously Curley.
 In my youth, answered White with a smile, I
 Concede,
 That to many I seemed a Disraeli,
 But I thought it more prudent to follow the lead
 Of Chicago's late great Richard Daley.
 - The critic persisted: Of late, Mr. Mayor,
 You've been clear out of reach, out of sight.
 Have you gone glimmering off on a tear
 To some distant remote Isle of White?
 Quoth the Mayor, it's clear that you don't
 Comprehend
 Municipal tangles and snarls,
 I trust that you'll promptly oblige me, my friend,
 By taking a leap in the Charles."

And quoted from Scorpion Tongues by Gail Collins:

Andrew Jackson and His Affairs

"Andy, Andy,
How many men have you hanged in your life?
How many weddings make a wife?"

Cleveland

"Ma, Ma, where's my Pa?
Gone to the White House, Ha, Ha, Ha!"

Jim Folsom

"She was poor
But she was honest
Victim of a rich man's whim
When she met that country guvner
Big Jim Folsom
And she had a child by him
Now he sits in the legislature
Making laws for all mankind
While she walks the streets
Of Cullman Alabama
Selling grapes -
From her grapevine."

William M. Kunstler adds his two bits in "Hints
and Allegations":

The Senate Judiciary Committee

"Joe Biden reigned, the gavel in his hand,
And saw that all obtained their time to shine,
While Thurmond used his accent to demand
That his once-Georgia block complete the Nine.
The Hatch relied upon "The Exorcist"
As DeConcini played a neutral role,
And Simpson pointed to a hidden list
To prove that Hill was never pure of soul.
Our Teddy was a prisoner of his past
And Specter took the prosecutor's road,
While Metzenbaum was far too mild to blast
His colleagues for the shameful row they hoed.
Each of the rest sat on his trousered male behind

And swore that woman's rights were always on his Mind."

A word on three of our greatest 20th century poets - Yeats, Eliot, Pound - and their politics, from study by Michel North, Cambridge University Press:

The politics of these poets have long been a scandal - Yeats's Authoritarianism, Eliot's prejudice, Pound's anti-semitism and treason. Yeats railed against England's politics, economic system, lack of historic values; the cultural nationalism for which he spoke was supposed to counteract English influence. Eliot hoped to achieve a common world culture. Pound was the most extreme: Fascism offered total reconciliation of the contradictions of modern society.

When Pound was being a poet - and he was a great one - and paying attention to his craft rather than his economic theories, he could write some lovely things such as this brief example of his human side, "An Immorality":

"Sing we for love and idleness,
Naught else is worth the having.
Though I have been in many a land,
There is naught else in living.
And I would rather have my sweet,
Though rose leaves die of grieving,
Though do high deeds in Hungary
To pass all men's believing."

Eliot went back to his English roots and opted for a conservative and religious order, as per this passage from "Little Gidding":

"And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.
And all shall be well and
All manner of thing shall be well
When the tongues of flame are in folded

Into the crowned knot of fire
And the fire and the rose are one."

Yeats' famous poem, "The Second Coming", sums up the fear of a collapse of our civilization:

"Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart, the center cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.

Surely some revelation is at hand;
Surely the Second Coming is at hand.
The Second Coming! Hardly are those words out
When a vast image out of Spiritus Mundi
Troubles my sight; somewhere in the sands of the
Desert
A shape, with lion body and the head of a man,
A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun,
Is moving its slow thighs, while all about it
Reel shadows of the indignant desert birds,
The darkness drops again; but now I know
That twenty centuries of stony sleep
Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle,
And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,
Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?"

American poetry follows similar developments as does the English, from proud patriotism to despair to rebellion, for example:

Longfellow, "The Building of the Ship":

Sail on. O Ship of State!
Sail on O Union, strong and great!
Humanity with all its fears,
With all the hopes of future years,
Is hanging breathless on thy fate!

Our hearts, our hopes, are all with thee,
 Our hearts, our hopes, our prayers, our tears
 Our faith triumphant o'er our fears,
 Are all with thee - are all with thee!

Julia Ward Howe - "The Battle Hymn of the
 Republic"

Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the
 Lord:
 He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes
 Of wrath are stored;
 He hath loosed the fatal lightning of His terrible
 Swift sword:
 His truth is marching on.

Walt Whitman - "The Secret of a Thing"

I am the poet of reality
 I say the earth is not an echo
 Nor man an apparition
 But that all the things seen are real
 The witness and albic dawn of things equally real.
 I have split the earth and the hard coal and rocks
 And the solid bed of the sea
 And went down to reconnoiter there a long time,
 And bring back a report,
 And I understand that those are positive and dense
 Everyone
 And what they seem to the child they are
 And that the world is not a joke,
 Nor any part of it a sham."

Robert Frost - "The Gift Outright"

"The land was ours before we were the land's.
 She was our land more than a hundred years
 Before we were her people. She was ours
 In Massachusetts, in Virginia,
 But we were England's, still colonials,
 Possessing what we still were unpossessed by.

Possessed by what we now no more possessed.
 Something we were withholding made us weak
 Until we found out it was ourselves
 We were withholding from our land of living,
 And forthwith found our salvation in surrender.
 Such as we were we gave ourselves outright
 (The deed of gift was many deeds of war)
 To the land vaguely realizing westward,
 But still unstoried, artless, unenhanced,
 Such as she was, such as she would become."

Carl Sandburg, from "The People. Yes"

"The people will live on.
 The learning and blundering people will live on.
 They will be tricked and sold and again sold
 And go back to the nourishing earth for footholds,
 The people so peculiar in renewal and comeback,
 You can't laugh off their capacity to take it.
 The mammoth rests between his cyclonic dreams."

Vachel Lindsay, "Abraham Lincoln Walks at
 Midnight"

"He cannot rest until a spirit-dawn
 Shall come - the shining hope of Europe free:
 The league of sober folk, the Workers' earth,
 Bringing long peace to cornland, Alp and sea,
 It breaks his heart that kings must murder still,
 That all his hours of travail for men
 Seem yet in vain. And who will bring whitenpeace
 That he may sleep upon his hill again?"

Robinson Jeffers, from "Rock and Hawk"

"Here is a symbol in which
 Many high tragic thoughts
 Watch their own eyes,
 This grey rock, standing tall
 On the headland, where the seawind
 Lets no tree grow,
 Earthquake-proved, and signatored

By ages of storms: on its peak
 A falcon has perched.
 I think, here is your emblem
 To hang in the future sky;
 Not the cross, not the hive,
 But this; bright power, dark peace;
 Fierce consciousness joined with final
 Disinterestedness;
 Life with calm death; the falcon's
 Realist eyes and act
 Married to the massive
 Mysticism of stone,
 Which failure cannot cast down
 Nor success make proud."

Archibald MacLeish, from "Brave New World"

There was a time, Tom Jefferson,
 When freedom made free men,
 The new found earth and the new freed mind
 Were brothers then.
 There was a time when tyrants feared
 The new world of the free,
 Now freedom is afraid and shrieks
 At tyranny,
 Words have not changed their sense so soon
 Nor tyranny grown new.
 The truths you held, Tom Jefferson,
 Will still hold true."

American hopefulnes and confidence have rung bold
 and true for much of our history:

Thus, the Utopian idea keeps alive the possibility
 of a world qualitatively distinct from this one. Since
 Edward Everett Hale's "Sybaris" in 1869 and Edward
 Bellamy's "Looking Backward" in 1888, 119 Utopias were
 published by 1917, reflecting general and widespread
 discontent, and advocating about every reform advanced
 during that time. Generally, there was optimistic
 belief in progress. We can assume poetry took the same
 general stance with a mixture of protest, despair and

demand for change. But the hope for and promise of a better world remained. Thus, from poet William Bronk:

"We see these Edens in the world, believe in them.
Was the first garden such as Adam could leave,
Eve leave, and be really elsewhere, apart
From the presence whose metaphor the garden was,
Feeling the absence? Landscape is a metaphor
And only metaphor. But, Oh, I have loved it so."

Robert Duncan returns to the poet's prophetic role - utopian in matters of creativity and tradition, and immediate political concerns, and insistence on infinite human potential; from "Orders' Passages 24":

"There is no
Good a man has in his own things except
It be in the community of everything;
No Nature he has
But in his nature hidden in the heart of the
Living
In the great household."

Duncan, in "The Truth and Life of Myth", says,

"Myth. For Dante, for Shakespeare, for Milton, was the port-lore handed down in the tradition from poet to poet. It was the very matter of poetry, the nature of the divine world as poets had testified to it; the poetic piety of each poet."

Postwar American poetry alternates between exhaustion and revitalization, conflict and compromise. After a generation of conflict and doubt, a poetry of accommodation rather than opposition, content to settle for idle conversation; the sense of person constructed around self-confident self-pity; utterly marginal poetry. Thus, John Ashbery and Frank O'Hara play off against a dominant language of surfaces.

In Ashbery and O'Hara, there is no idealizing impulse, no clash of opposing values; meretricious

mixes with the meritorious. They have not altogether rejected the high idealism of the Romantic lyric but doubt its power of assertion; so their poetry shows vacillation and the play of extremes. They often attempt to recover a lost balance between the immediacy of exterior events and the interior world of personal values.

Ashbery's "Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror" talks incessantly to and about themselves, a long exercise in solipsism. O'Hara is quintessentially a poet of the domestic and quotidian. Ashbery's world is not one so much of alienation as of soullessness.

Some critics feel that poetry today is little more than a self-indulgent and trivializing expression of the individual paralysis.

The San Francisco Renaissance - Duncan, Olson, Ginsberg - is the return of the poet to the prophetic role.

Following are a few examples of poetry from the postwar period representing the female involvement in public affairs as well as the Beat Movement of anti-Vietnam War activity:

Muriel Rukeyser:

Except for Emily Dickinson and Gertrude Stein women poets of the generations before Rukeyser wrote in a very narrow romantic lyric mode. Her powerful loud "unromantic" work was a blast of new and unfamiliar air. "I write from the body, a female body." Her primary theme was to represent poetically the possibility that humans might live more satisfactorily in full response to the earth, to each other, and to ourselves.

"The Place in the Ways"

"Having come to this place

I set out once again
On the dark and marvelous way
From where I began:
Belief in the love of the world,
Woman, spirit and man.

Having failed in all things
I enter a new age

Seeing the old ways as toys,
The houses of a stage
Painted and long forgot;
And I find love and rage.

Rage for the world as it is
But for what it may be
More love now than last year
And always less self-pity
Since I know in a clearer light
The strength of the mystery.

And at this place in the ways
I wait for song.
My poem-hand still, on the paper,
All night long.
Poems in throat and hand, asleep,
And my storm beating strong!"

Adrienne Rich - "I was groping for a sense of vocation, what it means to live as a poet. I took as a guide a poet of extreme division - Wallace Stevens, "The Idea of Order at Key West", the conception of a woman-maker, creating her own music, bestowing her own order on the meaningless landscape; a woman's life, a poet's work, should amount to more than the measured quantities I saw around me."

"Why do so many poets full of liberal or radical hope and outrage fail to lift off the ground, for which 'politics' is blamed, rather than a failure of poetic nerve?"

"Poetry is not a resting on the given, but a questing toward what might otherwise be."

From "Dreams Before Waking":

"What would it mean to live
in a city whose people were changing
each other's despair into hope?
You yourself must change it -
What would it feel like to know
Your country was changing? -
You yourself must change it. -
Though your life felt arduous
New and unmapped and strange
What would it mean to stand on the first
Page of the end of despair?"

And from the Beat Movement of the 50's and 60's,
Allen Ginsberg:

From "Howl":

I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by
Madness,
Starving hysterical naked. . .
Who passed through universities with radiant cool
Eyes hallucinating
Arkansas and Blake-like tragedy among the scholars
Of war. . .
Yaketayakking screaming vomiting whispering facts
And memories
And anecdotes and eyeball kicks and shocks of
Hospitals and jails
And wars. . .
Who dreamt and made incarnate gaps in Time & Space
Through images
Juxtaposed, and
Trapped the archangel of the soul between two
Visual images and joined
The elemental Verbs and set the noun and dash of
Consciousness together
Jumping with sensation of

Pater Omnipotens Aeterna Deus. . .

And from "Capitol Air":

In American it's Attica in Russian it's Lubyanka
Wall
In China if you disappear you wouldn't know
Yourself at all
Arise Arise you citizens of the world use your
Lungs
Talk back to the tyrants all they're afraid of is
Your tongues."

In summing up, here is a passage from a poem by
William Carlos Williams which says it all:

"My heart rouses
Thinking of bringing you news of something
That concerns you
And concerns many men. Look at what passes for
The new
You will not find it there but in despised poems.
It is difficult
To get the news from poems
Yet men die miserably every day for lack
Of what is found there."

And a few words from two of the world's most
famous poets, both Nobel Prize Winners:

Czestaw Milosz:

"With what word to reach into the future,
With what word to defend human happiness -
It has the smell of freshly baked bread -
If the language of poets cannot search out
Standards of use to later generations?
We have not been taught. We do not know at all
How to unite freedom and necessity."

Seamus Heaney, from "The Curse of Troy":

"Human beings suffer.
 They torture one another,
 They hurt and get hard.
 No poem or play or song
 Can fully right a wrong
 Inflicted and endured.

The innocent in gaols
 Beat on their bars together.
 A hunger-striker's father
 Stands in the graveyard dumb
 The police widow in veils
 Faints at the funeral home.

History says, Don't hope
 On this side of the grave.
 But then, once in a lifetime
 The longed for tidal wave
 Of justice can rise up."

In conclusion, I quote from Arthur Schlesinger Jr.'s autobiography. "A Life in the Twentieth Century". No poet, but a first-rate historian, Schlesinger makes the case for freedom and democracy:

"If free society is to survive and prosper, Freedom must become, in Holmes' phrase. A 'Fighting faith'. What Walt Whitman called 'the Exercise of Democracy' may yet save us. Whitman, the grand poet of democracy, grew Obsessed in his later years with the moral Indolence of the citizenry. . .The hope for free Society lies in the last resort in the People it Creates. 'Tyranny may always enter,' said Whitman, 'there is no charm, no bar against it - The only bar against it is a large resolute breed Of men.'

We required then, and I believe we require today, Exactly such a rededication to concrete democratic Ends, so that the exercise of democracy can bring About a revival of democratic élan and a Resurgence of faith

in government by the people. The best, and not the worst, must be full of Passionate intensity if that rough beast is to be Stopped before Bethlehem."

Let me finish with a democratic affirmation by two of our most American Poets:

Whitman, from "One's Self I Sing":

One's-Self I sing, a simple separate person,
 Yet utter the word Democratic, the word En-Masse.
 Of physiology from top to toe I sing,
 Not physiognomy alone not brain alone is worthy
 For the Muse,
 I say the Form complete is worthier far,
 The Female equally with the Male I sing
 Of Life immense in passion, pulse, and power.
 Cheerful, for freest actionnform'd under the laws
 Divine.
 The Modern Man I sing."

Robinson Jeffers, from "Shine, Republic":

"But you, America, that passion made you. You
 Were not born to prosperity, you were born to love
 Freedom. You do not say 'en masse', you said
 'Independence' But we cannot have all the
 Luxuries and freedom also. Freedom is poor and
 Laborious, that torch is not safe but hungry, and
 Often requires blood for its fuel."
