

His Poetry

Joanna Haymore

When I ponder what Thomas Berry means to me, “joyful and gracious, expressing my feelings using language,” comes to mind. His presence radiates a joyful appreciation for life each time I see him, and he is ever gracious with his willingness to share his enthusiasm for a good conversation or a good meal.

My favorite memories of our visits are when he has shared his poetry. The expression on his face as we watched a DVD of his poem, “An Appalachian Wedding,” with his call and the audience’s response echoing in our ears: “Look up at the Sky; The Heavens so Blue; The Sun so Radiant...Celebration everywhere, wild, riotous; Immense as a monsoon, lifting an ocean of joy.”

I am there in that hall, seeing it, feeling it again, his words conveying the essence of the moment, a space for rapt enchantment with our place in the universal conversation that is uniquely human. His love for the shared moment, speaker and audience joined in communion, moves me.

Thomas’s poem, “Morningside Cathedral,” written after the historic Winter Solstice Celebration with Paul Winter in the Cathedral of St. John the Divine, vibrates these many years later in my soul, as we listened to his words: “Wolf cry from the forest. Whale song from the Deep of the Sea... Drumbeat, Heartbeat of a planet...A single cry, a throat opened wide for the wild sacred sound.”

I am aware I could have been in a dark cave with a shamanic guide, awakening to the meaning of the cycle of seasons and to my own renewal, even as we sat in safe comfortable chairs with all our modern-day accoutrements.

Such is his gift for transcending the span of time, for seeing beyond our present day, guided by his historian’s grasp of how our consciousness is conveyed in meaning with words. In our most recent conversation, this seemed especially important to him, that we should understand the unique power of human language to convey—not only poetry but also understanding of the meaning of things.

Our imagination conveys beyond the word towards the Infinite. Imagination assumes the Infinite, while expressing the diversity. “I’m working on the new humanities for restoring the human experience, the deep emotional experience of the universe,” he told us. His poetry and imagery, his insight and wisdom are guides for our renewal, for awakening into “that vast compassionate curve that brings all things together, in intimate celebration. Celebration that is the universe itself.”

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