

A Poet's Voice

Rod Farmer

Rod Farmer's first published poem, "Universal Essence," was published in this journal (then titled Humanist In Canada) in the winter 1984-85 issue. This publication gave him the courage to continue writing humanist poetry. His most recent collection is titled *Fingers Pointing at the Moon* from Finishing Line Press. He lives in Maine, the most "Canadian" of all the US states, and visits Canada every year.

Author's Statement Walt Whitman is the poet who has had the most influence on me. Like Whitman, I see poetry as a means whereby I can engage in philosophic discussion. When I read poetry, I want to come across interesting ideas and perspectives. How one writes poetry is probably influenced by why one writes poetry. I define poetry as a language art free of some, but not all, prose constraints. Poetry, when it works, is good words in good order to connect heart and mind.

Introspection

I am convinced
poems are important
not the poets,
philosophies are important
not the philosophers,
celebrities should not
be celebrated
but most of my fellow
citizens package most
things in personalities,
even their concept of
the ultimate essence is
a god with a particularly
harsh personality;
I need essences,
the existential,
not personalities, which
can be so false, so cruel.

More Abstract

I am suspicious that the ultimate
source of all is something more
abstract than a god since gods
typically have distinct
personalities, they have
particular likes and dislikes,
jealousies, specific values,
favorites, and fits of revenge;
surely the universal essence
must be greater than
these personality profiles.
The essence of infinite
existence may be too
abstract for the human mind
to fully comprehend,
humility may be
our best hope for
an honest metaphysics.

Questions

Some believe both time
and space have neither
a beginning nor an ending,
both are infinite and eternal,
both are characteristics of
an ultimate universal essence,
an inexhaustible source
and substance of all
beyond our comprehension.
If true, if there was no
original creation or creator,
how did we get caught up in
this quagmire of all the gods
and goddesses we have
believed in, died for,
killed for, throughout
our history?
Is it our mortality
and fragility that presses
us to birth gods?
Does that part of our brain
that spins dreams also
spin deities?
Our imperfect minds
inevitably create dreams,
are deities inevitable?

Growing Back

I remember a day resting in
the breath of a recently cut
hay field where I did solid work
lifting bales onto wagon to be
unloaded into barn, hay to be
fed, in winter, to cattle
and our one horse.
Chickens were clucking
their perpetual chat and gossip;
I had earlier fed and watered
our twenty or so hens
and one rooster, gathered
eggs, all the while assuming
I needed to grow away from
this place, and I did do that.
Today, decades later, dad
is dead, farm sold;
I want to grow back to
land, chickens
and the breath of
recently cut hay.

Old Journals

Reading in my personal journal
entries from over thirty years ago,
my old plans for my future,
they read as if someone else
planned my life and got it wrong,
that person did not understand
this person of now.
I am amazed at how naïve
and foolish this early writer was.
Can I forgive him?
He was so often wrong; however
if I do not forgive him his errors,
no one else can.
He does not deserve capital
punishment, I will grant him
a pardon, let him live on in me
and I will keep
these old journals.

To Shake a Hand

I look up and
a wedge of wild geese flies
under the hand of fall,
a hand I need to shake
to greet the inevitable change,
but I'm uncomfortable
about reaching out and up
to shake any season's hand,
any of nature's hands
when other people are around.
Some greetings are best done
when walking, alone
then I can meet the motion
everything is made of:
 the Chinese Tao
 the universal essence
 the Itness itself,
I shake its hand
That is my own hand.

Goose

The Canadian geese fly over
this part of Maine every April
on their way to Canada, great
flocks high in the sky,
their chorus of constant honking
delightful spring music
above this country road.
This morning a great flock
went over, followed an hour later
by one lone goose flying much
lower, maybe less than a hundred
feet above ground, and flying
faster than I have ever seen
a goose fly, his wings like an
electric fan on High, his honking,
in my heart's mind, contained
a hint of desperation,
maybe fear,
he was flying too low
too late too far behind
and I identified with him.