

# THREE VISIONS OF LIFE

## ACT I

### A columnist interviewing a famous poet

An older man enters the room, each line of his creased and wrinkled face tells a story. He reclines on a flower decorated lounge chair, choosing a cup from the brown coffee table before him and pours himself his morning cup of Java. Across from him sits a columnist. The columnist opens his writing pad, turning over its cardboard cover exposing lines and lines of empty white paper. The columnist clears his throat and starts the interview,

“I guess I should begin by asking you what first interested you in poetry.”

A grin appears on the face of the older man,

“What can I say, what first interested you in breathing. It’s just natural. It happens, thoughts and emotions flow without one even thinking about them.”

The columnist pauses pondering what had just been said,

“Then how do you create the words and phrases to write down these thoughts and emotions?”

The older man leans forward in his chair, peers down towards the floor stroking his silver-gray head, and returns his attention back to the columnist,

“So many words just go into the air unwritten, unknown by most and unremembered by the rest. What volumes could be written from these.”

The older man pauses to take a deep breath and continues,

“I simply write down the life that happens in my heart and my head. The myriad

of visions that pass before me each day. In this sense my poetry is captured not created.”

The columnist delves further,

“How do you think your life experience has shaped your poetry?”

The older man begins,

“It is often said that art imitates life, the true relationship between the two is complex and inexact. I see the world through windows tinted by time. And so my life and poetry are inseparable. But art starts with life and then goes beyond it, making connections where none existed before. Poetry is more than just a commentary on life.”

Grasping the cup from the coffee table, the older man raises it to his lips drinking a portion. Then returning it with an almost subconscious clank of porcelain against wood.

The columnist continues,

“Do you feel that notoriety is in any sense a measure of one’s success as a poet?”

The old man replies,

“We are all just like so many specks of sand on the beach. Fame is just an illusion. If a tree falls in the forest and no one is there does it make a sound? It is the same for a poem that no one reads. However in this case there is no debate, it is the same poem. To be read is only an extra bonus, the true heart of the matter is the poetry itself. To observe such aesthetic beauty come from your own hands is uniquely special. It is similar to an artisan carving, bringing out a creation from a block of wood.”

The columnist responds,

“You make it sound as if you are a mere spectator, watching as your pen is being used as a channel to . . .”

The old man interrupts,

“Oh but no, my role is better compared to that of an actor in a play. The actor does not write the script himself, however he is none the less an integral participant in the endeavor. The actor brings a script to life, setting it in the micro-cosmos that is the stage. In the same way a poet brings to life scenes, thoughts and emotions sitting them in the stage of the heart and mind.”

The columnist continues his line of questioning,

“Many of history’s most creative people have lived strangely tragic lives. Do you believe tragedy in any sense hones one’s artistic talents?”

The old man peers into the empty space separating himself and the columnist resounding the question in his psyche and opens,

“Life comes to us in a multitude of diverse situations. One can liken it to a great novel or in its brevity a great cinema-graphic production. Each event, each passing moment is of importance if one can see it, savor it. To a large extent this is the gift of the artist, being able to see it. Its when you can no longer see it, that’s when it is over.”

He pauses from his discourse only momentarily to take another sip from his cup.

“Half the world perhaps even three quarters walk around everyday blind. They don’t see it, the symbolism, the timing, the appreciation for the aesthetic, the day to day unfolding of the great work of art that is this life.”

The older man’s voice deepens in its intensity,

“Any artist that in any sense deserves to be called as such must be able to see. I am reminded of the 18<sup>th</sup> century Japanese poet Basho, who seeing bright red cherry blossoms move in the passing wind would contemplate, what is life’s end. He saw the drama of life unfold. Life hones one’s talent by bringing the mind and sentiments from the theoretical to taste of the experience, from empathizing to knowing.”

The columnist opens a new line of investigation,

“After so many years of devoting yourself to poetry what drew you to prose?”

With an impish grin, the old man replies,

“The same thing that draws the moth to the flame, the flickering light, the twinkling in and out of reality. Prose just as poetry has its own rhyme, its own meter of scenes. Each scene, and drama foreshadowing the next. However not in an oversimplified predictability but rather as when listening to a seasoned blues guitarist. Listening to one note so perfectly and fittingly placed after another one slowly says to one’s self, ‘Yes, yes of course.’ ”

The columnist interjects,

“From what you say one would think it to be nothing more than a game of chess. Do you feel there is any deeper significance in Man’s creation of art, particularly literary art?”

The poet begins,

“The sage sits on the hill and contemplates the falling of a solitary raindrop into a quiet lake, to attach some meaning to it, some lesson to be learned. And in that tiny moment, that fleeting instant, to realize the essence of life. He, as we all do, navigates his way through the labyrinth of images he sees in this life. As a child

first learning their native tongue, attaching meaning and significance to an eclectic stream of sounds. This is the struggle of humanity. The raindrop falls as a message from God, reminding us that we are but dust. An evolving family of ripples moving away from the raindrops “death” serve as a monument to it’s existence.”

The columnist, wishing to draw out a further explanation, questions, “Is the human race’s expression of creativity in art a monument against it’s own death, against the fizzling out of the light?”

The old man replies,

“No, it’s just a placebo, a parachute slowing down the fall. But we are irresistibly drawn to justifying our existence. To go out like a flash, like an instance of lightening after all the trials of life, to end, to end the tale that you were about to tell before you were interrupted. This strikes us as unfitting, even lightning has thunder. Staring through the thin glass pane into the world outside one cannot help but wonder, I mean wonder at it all. God’s play, His poetry unfolding.”

The columnist replies,

“Then what is the place of the artist in all of this?”

The old man,

“Reality mocks mankind. Our greatest accomplishments, feats, and effigies are but mist and dust. Remembered in history books out of sheer vanity alone. We continue because we are made in the image of our Creator, and hence creators ourselves. We are naturally driven by our creative impulses. I would compare it to one’s breathing after taking a long run. After a long run when I am hyperventilating each breath seems to be just short of satisfying, and so I gasp again for oxygen. So is the creative experience of the artist. I once saw a father with his young child walking along the

beach holding his hand and pointing to the waves crashing along the shore. Right then my mind began to race and I spoke to myself, 'If I could open my eyes for another to see the vision before me, if another could use my ears to hear or my hands to touch, and know so perfectly the world I perceive, that would be art. If they could see by my mind's eye.' But as it is I observe such beauty, such splendor, a play on irony and similes but in hind-sight the artistic rendering is but a mist, empty, tasteless. The curse of the artist is to perceive so much and express so little, little not in quality but in splendor."

A black line turns gray and disappears as the columnist's pen runs out of ink. The columnist and the old poet continue their interview. Exploring the dark corners of a poet's mind and the curiosity of a columnist.

**ACT II**

A psychiatrist with a patient

And so it begins  
Or rather it continues  
The parade of scenes  
The kaleidoscope of views  
So much confusion  
There is no resolution  
A stairway of silence  
And now he descends it  
Ideas wondering within  
On a ferris wheel they spin

The clouds overhead  
Are darker than the night  
And the night never ends  
Even when comes the daylight  
A myriad of stars  
Somewhere out beyond the horizon  
He shuts his eyes and dreams  
Perchance to spy one

Then as the muses muse  
They pauses to write the script  
To tell the woeful tale  
Of life within a crypt  
Of senses that are dulled  
Of a life marred with pain  
Of a mind that has become a grave  
Of the life of the insane

Excerpts from a series of psychiatric sessions with a schitzo-affective bipolar patient:

May 9

The psychiatrist begins the session,

“Hello . . .”,

the patient stares at the figure across from him as the intensity of the image grows to a crescendo in his mind and the uttered words are lost in the space between them.

“...the week went?”

asks the psychiatrist. The patient replies,

“Hmmm, Hmmm, well it was OK. I still feel down a lot.”

The psychiatrist questions,

“What do you mean?”

He replies,

“I don’t know just down. I get this pain in my head, the more it grows, the more the outside world dwindles from my reality. I’m closed in, in the endless fields of my mind.”

The psychiatrist,

“Have you been taking your medication regularly?”

The patient

“Yeah, its pretty easy for me to keep track of taking it these days. I have been a lot better with that. I can notice some improvement, but I still don’t see the light at the end of the tunnel.”

### May 16

The psychiatrist begins the session,

“How was this week?”

The patient describes his week,

“Walking through downtown I felt a rush of energy, a euphoria. So many people passing this way and that, it almost seemed like a festival. I tilted my head to see the dark blue night sky. All the buildings seemed like towers and the lights like flames. The whole scene was medieval. I don’t know how much reality there is left for me, everything is a dream, a fantasy; nightmarish or euphoric but not real. I

feel like I cannot wake up, can't open my eyes to see."

The psychiatrist comments,

"With work we'll get you back to normal."

Solemnly the patient replies,

"I don't know what normal is anymore. It's been so long. I live my life in my mind, only once in a while peeking outside. Words lose their meaning, and conversations are interpreted to fit my train of thought at the time, inserting and deleting words as necessary."

### May 23

They start their discussion as the psychiatrist asks,

"Have you been depressed this week?"

The patient responds,

"I don't know. I've been thinking about things a lot."

Prompting him to explain the psychiatrist asks,

"What things?"

The patient explains,

"Somewhere down the line, some wire got crossed or some circuit shorted or something. And I fell into this sprawling dream that I can't awake or escape from. It's scary to have your eyes opened to the horror of life, the nightmare of the human state. All I can see is despair. I'm an anomaly, and just as it seems fitting to wipe a stain from a wall, to cease to exist seems the most logical end. Yet I cannot."

### May 30

The psychiatrist begins the sessions,

“How did the week go?”

The patient answers,

“I had a dream the other day. I was trapped in a deep well with thin wooden planks for a bottom. Each time I tried to jump up and out of the well, I would land too hard on the planks breaking them. Falling through to another set of planks forming a new bottom. Again and again I would repeat this process. And at each step a growing awareness was forming. The awareness that I was coming closer and closer to the last bottom, the last set of planks. After which I would simply fall and fall with nothing to hold me up.”

#### June 6

The psychiatrist continues,

“...Do you feel hopeful now that you are doing better?”

The patient explains,

“When I’m doing better, now that I’m starting to do better, I am struck with amazement not at my situation or the passing days but the degree to which I am ill, mentally ill. The other day I was at a small bakery having a snack for breakfast doodling a drawing on a small sketch pad. Then as I sat there scribbling I became fixated with my pen. And I saw angels dancing on the tip of my pen, holding hands and dancing in circles. Glistening, sparkling like a diamond in the lights, round and round they went. And I felt as if I was floating. Yet I was completely still, motionless. I felt like I was wandering elsewhere. Everyone thought I was still there but I was elsewhere. And all that was taking place around me was some kind of distant play, lifeless for me, silent.”

The psychiatrist comments,

“How long did the visions of the angels last?”

The patient responds,

“Not long, once I started feeling the floating sensation they went away.”

June 13

The patient continues to pour out his feelings,

“...Then after day after day, month after month of seeing yourself and the world from without yourself. You become acquainted with the daydream that is. The surrealistic portrait that is being painted everyday. It is startling to see the twisted and contorted scenery of life in your own eyes. Yet never being able to escape from it. You can do all the running in the world yet their you are with yourself.”

June 20

The psychiatrist asks,

“How have you been doing this week?”

The patient,

“Better, I can feel myself getting better. It’s like I’m slowly coming out. I remember when I was a little boy sometimes in the early morning when it was just time for me to get up from sleep, I would try so hard to wake up from the dream I was dreaming. I would strain and strain mustering up all the strength I could, until just then my eyes would open and I would be awake. Perhaps now I’m waking up. Loosing touch with reality I felt as if I were dissolving away. But now it feels like I’m coming together again.”

June 27

The psychiatrist begins,

“Was this week any better than last week, how did you feel?”

The patient somewhat discouraged responds,

“Bad, the week didn’t go well. I may never be truly well, I realize that now. But its alright. I know that there is some grand purposes, some Divine calling to all of this. I can see it so clearly now. Some great work that fits as a thread in the fabric of God’s eternal plan. But perhaps this too is just a delusion. Some day when I die and stand before God face to face I will know the truth. I guess it won’t really matter by then though.”

The patient becomes less cognitive as the voice of the psychiatrist blends with the voices in his head. He hears a faint voice speaking to him within his psyche,  
“...Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth...”

The psychiatrist interjects into the patients delusions,

“It may take sometime but you’ll get better just be patient.”

The voices superimposed on the voice of the psychiatrist sound out louder and louder,

“...had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming...”

The psychiatrist continues,

“Have you had any hallucinations...”

The voices without intermittence continue,

“...down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride...”

The psychiatrist’s voice moves to the background,

“...since you saw the angels at the bakery?”

Fluidly the voices are heard in his mind,

“...beautifully dressed for her husband. And...”

The patient replies,

“No, not really. Not that vivid.”

The voices continue in a graceful harmony,

“...I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Now the dwelling of God is with men and He will dwell with...’”

The psychiatrist asks,

“Do you think you are getting a stronger grasp on reality now.”

Straining to hear, the patient questions,

“What was that?”

Yet all along he hears the voices,

“...them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their...”

The psychiatrist repeats his question,

“Are you getting a better grasp on reality now?”

As the patient hears this whisper the graceful harmonies continue,

“...eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away...”

The patient replies,

“No, not really.”

From the harmonies is heard one note,

“...he who was seated on the throne said, ‘I am making all things new!’ Then he said, ‘Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.’”

**ACT III**

A missionary speaking to young woman

Sitting there on the smooth gray stone gazing below at a small yellow flower she reflected on the last five years of her life. A stream of scenes and sentiments flowed as a river from her soul to the soil beneath. She would be leaving a small piece of herself there. The next day she would see that same soil from the window seat of an airplane.

She looked down into her hand at a plane ticket for Amsterdam, Holland, and thought to herself, "What will my new home be like, what new people will I meet, what will my new life be?" She started feeling that uneasy feeling in her stomach she had always felt when embarking into the unknown. Right then she heard the announcement of her flight. It brought her back from her thoughts. As she boarded the plane the impact of her leaving reached its full fruition. She turned and took one last glance behind her.

As she walked with the family with which she would stay, she thought silently within herself, "Well, I'm here now." She arrived at the home and put all her belongings in the room that had been prepared for her. Feeling restless, she decided to take a walk around before dinner time.

Taking a stroll through the city she spots a young woman laughing. Though the young woman seems very content, the older woman feels some sort of compassion for her. Strangely enough she senses a connection with this total stranger. She walks over to the young woman and begins a conversation, "Hello, I couldn't help but notice you standing here with your friends. I am new in Amsterdam this is

my first day.” The young woman, somewhat put aside by the familiarity of this stranger, hesitantly responds, “We’re waiting for the bus.”

The older woman introduces herself and asks the young woman’s name. She replies, “My name is Alice.” The young woman begins to sense herself drawn to this passer by, she asks, “What brings you to Amsterdam?” The older woman replies, “I am a missionary here to help out with the work.” The missionary continues the conversation, “Are you originally from Amsterdam?” Alice answers, “Yes, I was born here. I have lived here all my life. I have never traveled much.”

The missionary comments, “I seem always to be traveling. Every so often I pick up and go. I’ve seen so many people in my life, so many faces. Sometimes I can close my eyes and see them, all the faces. It’s like a big carnival. Did your mother and father take you to carnivals when you were a young girl?” Alice replies, “No, we didn’t have too many carnivals where I lived. I guess we didn’t have any.” The missionary continues, “Well, they always seemed to be one passing through all the towns my family stayed at when I was little. The one thing that sticks in my memory is seeing so many people, so close together, passing this way and that way. All those faces. I remember wondering what they were like at home, did they have dogs, did they have a little boy or girl, if they were like me.”

Alice suddenly opens up to the missionary, “At times the whole world seems so decayed. Every poet is on the verge of babble, every genius just this side of insanity, and looking at beauty I quickly close my eyes for fear of seeing horror. I close my eyes because in my memory nothing ever fades but rather retains its original glory.” As they are talking the bus passes by. Alice quickly looks up, “That was my bus.” The missionary concerned replies, “Do they come often?” Alice answers, “Every 10

minutes. There will be another one in a little while.”

Alice continues, “It always seems that the thing you want the most is the thing that can never be satisfied. Nothing fulfills it. And the taste of what you desire most, only makes you more hungry. Then pleasure turns to pain and you are tormented by your own desires.” The missionary straining to explain her thoughts, for Alice to glimpse at what she herself sees, responds, “The problem is not with our humanity but rather our sin, our disconnection from our origin which is God. Our humanity is perfect. It’s complete within the limits in which it was designed to function. However it was never meant to achieve its end in a vacuum, in the absence of our Creator, God. The impetus for humanity is the Divine. Our humanity is designed to function as God moves in it to function. Separated from this unction our humanity is impotent. It searches but never finds, grasps but never holds, able to conceive the thought but not able to bring about the end. It is in this conception of an end that we cannot deny God, but in the impotence of our disconnection from Him that we do deny God. This is the paradox of sin, the slow deterioration, the contradiction that comes from our separation from our origin which is God.” Alice, with disinterest, remarks, “I don’t know if I even believe there is a god. How old were you when you became a missionary?” The missionary answers, “Oh about 22. I sort of stumbled into it I wanted my life to have some eternal significance. My parents use to help missionaries. They use to teach children in little schools that the missionaries built. When I was still a young girl I decided to have a life like that. A life that would still have significance after I’m gone. And so here I am.”

Alice begins, “I never really wanted so much out of life, just a simple quite one. A little happiness and a little beauty in my days. I don’t believe that there is some

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sort of great divine purpose to life, some sort of cosmic design. I wonder if it is just that in perceiving life we impose our own structure on it, our own design. Then we're just looking at ourselves in a mirror thinking that we are seeing the whole world."

They pause from their conversation as another bus approaches. Their short encounter is coming to an end. Alice and the missionary embrace and say their goodbyes. Alice boards the bus and looks back. The missionary looking at her as the bus leaves, Alice presses her open palm against the bus's window trying to hold on to these last moments.

And the violins played,

Da Da Diddy Da Da ...

Time stopped momentarily, two glances frozen in their own little eternity. They part.

THE END

