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The Fourth Friend: Poetry in a Time of Affliction

WHAT, IF ANYTHING, consoles us in a time of affliction? Today we don't need to look very far to see that our own generation is living through such a time, and this is true whether we are living in Europe or in Iraq, in Sudan or the Middle East, in Egypt or in the United States. As far as the West is concerned, we have only to think back to the horrific bombings that took place in the station at Madrid some time ago or to recall the shock and horror of 9/11. But there have been other horrors, other scenes of humiliation and terror, which we have witnessed on our television screens, and most notable of all, of course, the effects of the tsunami. Although these events may have taken place thousands of miles away, they too have seared our imagination. My question, then, is this: In such a time of affliction, of what possible use to us is poetry? Can it be said to help or console us in any way?

After 9/11, there was, as it happens, one remarkable, instinctive response of the people in New York, a response manifest not only in and around Ground Zero, but also in many of the streets of the city. For, on the walls of the city, in the subway, on the sidewalks, there

began to appear lines from famous poems and even entire original poems, written up and pinned to photographs of some of the men and women who had died in the catastrophe. One account from the *New York Times*, written sometime after the collapse of the towers, included the following observation:

In the weeks since the terrorist attacks, people have been consoling themselves—and one another—in an almost unprecedented manner. Almost immediately after the event, improvised memorials often conceived around poems sprang up all over the city, in store windows, at bus stops, in Washington Square Park, Brooklyn Heights and elsewhere. And poems flew through cyberspace across the country in e-mails from friend to friend.¹

The poet laureate of the United States at the time, Billy Collins, found that, after September 11, he was inundated with poems from friends. And he remarked, “It’s interesting that people don’t turn to the novel or say, ‘We should all go out to a movie,’ or ‘Ballet would help us.’ It’s always poetry. What we want to hear is a human voice speaking directly in our ear.”² A human voice, an intimate voice, the voice of a friend. With respect to the title of the present article, one phrase requires explanation. The question needs to be asked, why the *fourth* friend?

In the history of religious literature, and indeed in the history of literature itself, there is one figure—one man—who can be said to represent the afflicted human being. And that is, of course, Job in the Old Testament. Job is the innocent and good man punished by misfortune and sickness. In chapter two of the book of Job we read of how he suffers “with malignant tumors from the sole of his foot to the top of his head” (2:7). Further, we read that “the news of all the disasters that had fallen on Job came to the ears of three of his friends,” and they decided to go to him at once to “offer him sympathy and consolation” (2:11). But Job finds no comfort whatever in

their long, rational, and somewhat boring speeches. He exclaims at one point: “What sorry comforters you are! Is there never an end of airy words? What a plague your need is to have the last word!” (16:2-3).

Job’s three lugubrious friends, far from bringing him “sympathy and consolation,” seem to have brought him, instead, more misery and distress. But then, all of a sudden, a fourth friend, a figure often strangely overlooked by readers and exegetes, arrives on the scene. Victor White, the Oxford Dominican, calls him “something of an intuitive, a poet.”³ Of this fourth arrival, he writes: “Then comes Elihu, the *fourth* friend . . . [who] stresses the vastness and incomprehensibility of God and the limitations of the conscious human standpoint.”⁴ This *fourth friend* is at pains, we are told by White, to silence “the rationalistic and moralistic chatter” of the three other so-called friends, Job’s would-be comforters. Elihu emphasizes that “the ways of God are beyond wordy explanations.”⁵ God, he insists—and here he sounds very much like a poet—communicates not by rational explanations but “by dreams, and visions that come in the night, when slumber comes on mankind, and men are all asleep in bed” (33:15).

Elihu presents himself then, in Victor White’s understanding, as a kind of poet. But what Elihu goes on to say, though a matter of no small interest and importance, is not—given the limitations of this short article—my immediate or principal concern. I introduce the figure of Elihu here for one reason only, and that is to introduce the theme and title of this article. For, in the presence of Job, the archetypal figure of affliction, Elihu stands as a figure or symbol of all those poets or writers who dare to speak in the presence of great affliction. Elihu himself exclaims at one point:

Now I will have my say,
 my turn has come to say what I know.
 For I am filled with words,

choked by the rush of them within me . . .
 Nothing will bring relief but speech. (32:17-18)

But should the poet, in a time of affliction, presume to speak at all? Are words, any words, ever adequate at such a time? Do they not, in some sense, inevitably betray the very reality they are attempting to describe? And how, confronted by the enormous affliction of an individual or of a people, can the words of a poet be said to bring consolation?

In her celebrated poem entitled “Requiem,” the Russian poet Anna Akhmatova recalls the many women—mothers and widows like herself—whose sons and husbands were imprisoned, tortured, and murdered during the years of terror in Communist Russia. The poem is introduced by a short prose passage:

During the terrible years of the Yezhov terror I spent seventeen months in the prison queues in Leningrad. One day someone “identified” me. Then a woman with lips blue with cold who was standing behind me, and of course had never heard of my name, came out of the numbness which affected us all and whispered in my ear—(we all spoke in whispers there): “Could you describe this?” I said “I can!” Then something resembling a smile slipped over what had once been her face.⁶

The poem itself—the entire poem—is remarkable, and not least because it seems to breathe throughout a spirit of forgiveness. (Akhmatova was a devout Orthodox Christian.) But, in this extract, Akhmatova declares that she cannot forget, *will not* forget, the dreadful suffering endured by so many innocent men and women. Her task, as she understands it, is to remember and to pray. She writes,

This woman is sick,
 this woman is alone,

husband in the grave, son in prison,
pray for me.⁷

And again:

I pray not for myself alone,
but for everyone who stood with me
in the cruel cold, in the July heat,
under the blinded, red wall.⁸

Akhmatova is referring here to the long queues of women who waited for hours and hours in the cold outside the prison walls in Leningrad hoping against hope they might be allowed to visit, even once, their sons, husbands, brothers. Here, though brought face-to-face in memory with the inhuman, the unspeakable, Akhmatova dares to speak. She is *compelled* to speak. Remembering the extreme cold and the long wait and the ravished faces of the women standing, hour after hour, outside the prison wall, she continues,

The hour of remembrance has drawn close again.
I see you, hear you, feel you:

the one they could hardly get to the window,
the one who no longer walks on this earth,

the one who shook her beautiful head,
and said: "Coming here is like coming home."

I would like to name them all but they took away
the list and there's no way of finding them.

For them I have woven a wide shroud
from the humble words I heard among them.

I remember them always, everywhere,
I will never forget them, whatever comes.

And if they gag my tormented mouth
with which one hundred million people cry,

then let them also remember me
on the eve of my remembrance day.

If they ever think of building
a memorial to me in this country,

I consent to be so honoured,
only with this condition: not to build it

near the sea where I was born:
my last tie with the sea is broken,

nor in the Tsar's Garden by the hallowed stump
where an inconsolable shadow seeks me,

but here, where I stood three hundred hours
and they never unbolted the door for me.

since even in blessed death I am terrified
that I will forget the thundering of Black Marias,

forget how the hateful door slammed,
how an old woman howled like a wounded beast.

Let the melting snow stream
like tears from my bronze eyelids,

let the prison dove call in the distance
and the boats go quietly on the Neva.⁹

One of the women standing in the queue outside the prison yard had asked Anna Akhmatova, "Could you describe this?" And Akhmatova replied, "I can!" Later, when actually describing the experience in her

poem, “Requiem,” Akhmatova achieved two things: first of all, she *remembered* the details of all that happened, and second—and perhaps most important of all—in the effort to find words to speak the unspeakable, she *named* the experience; she named the unnamable. And that, in itself, was an enormous achievement. Joseph Brodsky, speaking of Akhmatova, writes, “At certain periods of history it is only poetry that is capable of dealing with reality by condensing it into something graspable, something that otherwise couldn’t be retained by the mind.”¹⁰

On the subject of naming, I am reminded here of a humble text—humble from the strictly literary point of view—that was given to me by a woman who had been sexually abused when she was a young child. Needless to say, she had no name to give to the experience that was happening to her. She was four years old. But, years later, when she began slowly to be healed by God’s grace, the child within her whose pain she had repressed for so long began at last to reveal what had happened; she began to remember, and she found courage to speak the unspeakable. This young woman was not, I hasten to add here, a writer or poet of any note or pretension, but she is a remarkable person. It was my privilege to have known her, as a spiritual friend, during the years in which, step-by-step, she came to terms with her wounded history. Now, several years later, I am glad to report that she is as radiant and joyful a person as ever one could hope to meet. The text of hers I want to quote now was written during that demanding and extraordinarily vulnerable but also wonderful time when healing really began to take place. It is titled “The Stone with No Name.”

THE STONE WITH NO NAME

I look at the child
and the child looks at me.
Her eyes are looking into the void,
into the void of her heart.

On her heart
is a heavy stone. . . . a black stone
which doesn't allow her to breathe,
a stone with no name
which was placed there
on a sunlit day
when, all of a sudden, night
fell at midday.

She has a story to tell,
a sad story, a true story and I
believe her.
When she speaks, the stone
becomes lighter.
The stone has a name
now. She has revealed
the name to me.

One day the stone
will become a golden stone,
the precious stone of her
sepulcher.
The stone will be lifted away
by God's grace.

And she will rise
from her sepulcher on that sunlit
day, and I will
sit on the stone, and she
will sit on my lap
and I will embrace her
and she will embrace me.

And we will become one
on that day . . .
we will be able to breathe.¹¹

This young woman (though not a poet in any ordinary sense of the word) found herself instinctively turning to verse or poetry as a form of expression when trying, with all her strength and courage, to live through the most challenging and demanding time of her life. It is, I think, for good reason that Henry Vaughan, the English seventeenth-century poet, could declare in one of his verses: "Afflictions turn our blood to ink."¹² The sustained, unusual affliction endured by the great Jesuit poet Gerard Manley Hopkins during the last years of his life, when he was living and working in Dublin, found expression in what is, in my judgment, the most remarkable poetry of affliction ever composed in the English language. Not surprisingly, the poems themselves are known as "the despair sonnets." Hopkins, in his anguish, finds that the God whom, as a younger man, he had loved and worshipped, and who seemed so immanent to his life and work, has now simply disappeared. All his prayers and laments no longer attain to the object of his love. This stanza from one of the sonnets opens with the light of a new day dawning. But Hopkins wakes up to find himself in an almost total mental and spiritual darkness:

I wake and feel the fell of dark, not day.
 What hours, O what black hours we have spent
 This night! what sights you, heart, saw; ways you went!
 And more must, in yet longer light's delay.
 With witness I speak this. But where I say
 Hours I mean years, mean life. And my lament
 Is cries countless, cries like dead letters sent
 To dearest him that lives alas! away.¹³

I have no doubt that part of what Gerard Manley Hopkins was undergoing in those last terrible years in Dublin was the experience referred to sometimes as "the dark night of the soul." The absence of God, therefore, or what seemed like absence, was in reality an experience of overwhelming grace: God utterly present in the soul and yet utterly hidden. This experience has been described, perhaps

best of all, in the poetry and prose of St. John of the Cross. John's first great poems were written at a time of utter desolation in his life. Attempting, with St. Teresa of Avila, to start a reform of the Carmelite Order, he was imprisoned by some of the unreformed brothers, beaten, tortured, and almost starved to death. But it was there, in that situation of complete affliction, that John found his voice as a poet. And the poems he began to write are considered among the greatest mystical verse ever composed. One of the poems he wrote opens with a cry of spiritual desolation:

My Love, where are you hidden?
 Why have you left me sorrowing alone?
 I followed you unbidden,
 but like a stag you'd flown:
 wounded, I called, but you, my Love, were gone.¹⁴

The one who is speaking is the Bride, the soul, and her lament, her appeal, continues:

This heart you have enraptured—
 why leave it sorely wounded? Why not heal?
 Taken by force and captured,
 Beloved, I appeal—
 why not bear off the prey you swooped to steal?

Quench all my grief! Draw near!
 Your touch alone brings comfort in my plight.
 Light of my eyes, appear!
 You are indeed their light,
 and for your sake alone I guard my sight.

Show me your face, my Lover,
 even though beauty seen unveiled should kill,
 let it be so! Discover
 your presence, if you will,
 at once the cause and cure of all my ill.¹⁵

At this point in the poem, or just after it, there occurs a moment of illumination. John is made suddenly aware that the Beloved is present. And he—or the Bride—stunned by the grace of the moment, begins to sing with quiet ecstasy: the beauty of the Beloved is wonderfully evoked by an identification of his presence with the beauty of nature.

My beloved, the mountains,
 the solitary wooded valleys, the strange
 islands, the resounding rivers,
 the whisper of the amorous breezes,
 the tranquil night.

At the time
 of the rising of the dawn, the silent music,
 the sounding solitude,
 the supper that refreshes and deepens love.¹⁶

Even in translation, these lines are memorable. It is no wonder that St. John believed some of his poems were, on occasion, directly inspired by God, and John never made this claim concerning his prose.

That the poems survived at all to see the light of day is, itself, a kind of miracle. When John finally escaped from prison—by tying together the blankets from his bed, and making a great leap—the only thing he brought with him were his poems. It was very early in the morning, and John made his way to a small convent of enclosed contemplatives—a group of Carmelite nuns who had remained faithful to Teresa's reform. They welcomed him at once and brought him straight into the cloister to hide him, although of course, this was completely against canon law. (The splendid excuse they evoked was that one of the sick sisters, who was bedridden, needed to go to confession!) John was so exhausted he could hardly stand and could barely speak. He was the image of death. The nuns fed him pears stewed in cinnamon, the only food he could digest. Then, sudden-

ly, a group of the unreformed friars arrived with some constables, *alguaciles*, searching for him. But, of course, they didn't dare violate the cloister. As soon as they had gone, the sisters led John into the chapel. But in the chapel something unusual happened. Although John could speak only in a whisper and could barely stand, he recited there and then for the nuns some of the poems he had composed in prison, a clear indication of how much he valued them.

Some time later, it was decided that John should be sent to a remote priory in Spain where he could escape from the clutches of his enemies. On the way there, he made an extended visit to another convent of the sisters loyal to Teresa, the convent of Beas de Segura. One day, during his visit, when John was sitting with the contemplative nuns in the parlor—it was the time of recreation—the superior asked one of the younger sisters to sing a few verses of a song. She began:

The one who knows nothing of pains
in this valley of sorrows
knows nothing of good things
nor has tasted of love
since pains are the garments of lovers.¹⁷

Hearing this song, John was at once overcome with emotion. He signaled for the sister to cease, and stood, gripping with both hands the bars of the grill. Tears, we are told, poured down his cheeks. For an hour, John remained there, standing against the grill, unable to speak or to move. Later, recovering himself, he told the sisters that although, when he was in prison, God had made clear to him the great value of suffering, he had been able to offer only a small part of what he had endured to God.

In the Hebrew Bible, there is one particular psalm with which a prisoner in St. John's situation, or indeed any innocent prisoner, would at once identify. It is Psalm 137. The psalm begins with the famous lament of the Jewish prisoners in Babylon:

By the waters of Babylon
 we sat down and wept, remembering Zion.
 On the poplars that grew there
 we hung up our harps . . .
 For how could we sing
 the song of the Lord on alien soil? (137: 1-2, 4)

During the months when John found himself on the “alien soil” of his own imprisonment, he wrote a version of this psalm in Spanish, a sort of ballad. Here are the first two verses of John’s version, translated of course into English:

Beside the flowing river
 That in Babylon I found
 I sat and there with weeping
 Watered foreign ground.

Recalling thee, O Zion,
 Beloved by me so well;
 The sweetness of thy memory
 Increased the tears that fell.¹⁸

Like many people in extreme situations, John of the Cross found himself turning instinctively to poems or songs or stories that he remembered from the past. We might think here of how the famous modern prisoner, the Dutch woman Etty Hillesum, wrote in the last entry of her diary before being taken finally to the concentration camp about the surprising encouragement she received, in that dark time, from reading the poems of the German poet, Rainer Maria Rilke. “I always return to Rilke,”¹⁹ she wrote. Far too easily we “shrug off,” she declared, “the spiritual heritage” of poets and artists such as Rilke, saying to ourselves, “What use is that sort of thing to us now?” But, in fact, she asserted, “in turbulent and debilitating times,” we can and should turn to the poets for “support and a ready response to

[our] bewildered questions."²⁰ The nature of that "response" to our questions is, of course, something mysterious. What the poets offer us is, clearly, not a book of answers nor a *vadecum* of fixed, rational explanations.

A man I knew in Dublin, a few years ago, suffered enormous distress after the death from meningitis of his beautiful young daughter, Eva, his only child. I had occasion to meet him over a number of weeks and, at one point, lent him a book of poems by a Polish sixteenth-century author who had himself been devastated by the death of his own youngest child. The book was called *Laments*, and the author's name, Jan Kochanowski. I cannot say for sure that reading these poems consoled my friend, but it gave him a support of a kind he found almost nowhere else. Kochanowski is regarded as, by far, the greatest Slavic poet of the beginning of the nineteenth century, and *Laments* is his most accomplished work. Here is one of the poems, in a fine translation by the Irish poet Seamus Heaney:

LAMENT 8

The void that fills my house is so immense
 Now that my girl is gone. It baffles sense:
 We all are here, yet no one is, I feel;
 The flight of one small soul has tipped the scale.
 You talked for all of us, you sang for all,
 You played in every nook and cubbyhole.
 You never would have made your mother brood
 Nor father think too much for his own good;
 The house was carefree. Everybody laughed.
 You held us in your arms: our hearts would lift.
 Now emptiness reigns here; the house is still;
 Nobody ever laughs nor ever will.
 All your old haunts have turned to haunts of pain,
 And every heart is hankering in vain.²¹

Speaking to a group of writers on one occasion, Pope John XXIII remarked, “what characterizes you above all else in the eyes of the general public is your means of expression, your language. The language of the poet, the man of letters and the musician is particularly apt for laying bare the secret places of the soul, for interpreting its suffering and consoling its suffering.”²² It is worth noting that Pope John speaks here not only of the language of the poet, and of its power to console, but also of the language of the musician. So far, in this article, I have given attention only to the potential gift of poetry in a time of affliction. But that is not to deny for a moment the mysterious blessing that music, when it is played or sung, can on occasion bring to the troubled mind or to the wounded heart.

There is one instance that comes to mind of the way music can interpret our suffering and even bring us consolation. A friend of Beethoven’s, Dorothea von Ertmann, lost first one of her children, then another and then another, until all her small children were dead. Not long afterwards, Beethoven invited Dorothea to come to his house, and what happened then she described later to the composer Felix Mendelssohn. Fortunately, Mendelssohn remembered what she said and wrote about the incident in a letter, which he sent to the composer Haydn, in the summer of 1831.

She [Dorothea] told me that when she lost her last child, Beethoven was at first unable to come to her house any more. Finally, he invited her to come to him, and when she came he sat at the piano and merely said: “We will now converse in music,” and played for over an hour and, as she expressed it, “He said everything to me, and also finally gave me consolation.”²³

No small part of that “consolation” is, I would say, that the experience of loss, for the space of an hour, was acknowledged and somehow evoked by the music, by that unique swelling of sound that is itself *a kind of inarticulate, unfathomable speech*. The affliction was named; it was given a voice. But with respect, in general, to the communica-

tion of poetry or music at this level, there is obviously something more than a mere naming involved. For, confronted with an individual person suffering enormous grief, for example, a listener such as a gifted psychologist or even a journalist can in some measure *name* the experience. But a work of art, when it takes the form of music or of painting or of poetry, does something else as well, something different, something more. And that “something more” is what explains, in great measure, the consolation that it brings.

But how to describe this phenomenon? The best word, the simplest word—the word that points to the distinctive nature of art, and to the wondrous power it has over us—is, of course, the word “beauty.” I cited a few moments ago the lament by Jan Kochanowski for his young daughter, Orszula, a short poem, but one that was able to describe with great vividness the experience of grief and loss. Reading over this poem, it soon becomes apparent that the work not only *speaks* about the experience of grief and loss, it not only *names* the experience for the reader, it also somehow *sings*. Encountering a work of art of this kind, we are made aware of two things: on the one hand, the anguish of the man who has suffered and is still suffering, and on the other hand, the sense of an almost serene detachment in the work itself. Yes, the experience described is unspeakably sad, but the form of the poem, its incantation, its music—while in no way denying the sadness, the heartbreak—is somehow able, for the space of the poem, to lift the heart with its beauty and bring a kind of peace.

But there is a mystery here. For, however often we hear that redemptive music in a work of art, in Mozart’s “Requiem” for example, or in the “Requiem” by Anna Akhmatova, or in the tiny “Lament” by Jan Kochanowski, we seem always unable to understand how it has been achieved. Somehow the great artist can contemplate the lineaments of sorrow in a world of chaos and suffering and yet still create out of this material a thing of matchless beauty. Even in the poetry of the most profound sorrow and lament, if the work is of the highest

order, there is always somewhere—if you look for it—a lift in the words, an element of praise, a singing line. This truth is one that found expression once in a short poem by Rainer Maria Rilke. It occurs to me now that the poem in question may well have been one of the verses by Rilke that helped sustain Etty Hillesum at the end.

Tell us, poet, what is your task?

I praise.

But the murderous things, the monstrous things,
how do you endure them, how can you bear them?

I praise.

But the mysteries which are anonymous and nameless,
how, poet, can you still invoke them?

I praise.

By what right can you presume, in all your disguises,
and in every kind of mask, to remain true?

I praise.

And how is it that both stillness and turbulence
know you like star and storm?

Because I praise.²⁴

I began this article concerning poetry in a time of affliction by speaking about Job. And I suggested that Elihu, the fourth friend, might be considered a sort of poet and could, therefore, be made to stand as a figure or symbol of all the poets and artists who have dared to speak in the presence of affliction. But, of course, the real poet, and the one who speaks about affliction like almost no one else in the history of religious literature, is the anonymous Hebrew author who composed the book of Job itself. Robert Alter, in his introduction to *The Literary Guide to the Bible*, suggests that “the very pinnacle of ancient Hebrew poetry was reached in Job.”²⁵ That is, I think, a wise judgment, and it is one well worth remembering when we consider that the Author behind the author, the Poet behind the poet of the book of Job, is none other than God himself.

In a time of affliction, we instinctively look to the word of God for answers, for explanations. But often the kind of answers we want, the explanations we expect, are not forthcoming. There are, of course, great and saving statements given to us and messages of enormous import. But, for some reason, instead of communicating his word to us with the clear and distinct ideas of a scholastic treatise, God prefers—very often, it would appear—to speak through short stories, parables, and poems. No wonder the South American writer Jorge Louis Borges could exclaim, “Jesus, the man of Nazareth never uses arguments. He uses metaphor.” Now, Borges may be exaggerating here, for there is an unmistakable body of teaching in all the four Gospels. Nevertheless, it has to be said that in the Gospels, as in many other of the books of the Bible (in the Psalms for example, and in the book of Job itself), God is doing far more than merely handing down to us a moral and doctrinal message. And this is especially true with regard to the question of affliction. For, in this matter, God speaks to us more like a poet than a scientific theologian. And so, just as with a number of the poems we have been considering here, so also in these books of the Bible, in these saving parables and poems and stories, we find that our affliction is *named*. And that, in itself, marks the beginning of our souls’ healing, and the beginning also, I would say, of our inner conversion.

In the book of Job, God doesn’t give us answers to the mystery of affliction any more than Beethoven gave answers to his grieving friend Dorothea von Ertmann. But by naming, through poems and stories, the black stone of affliction—the stone that had no name, perhaps, but that weighed heavily on our hearts—the weight of the stone is somehow lifted. We are touched by God’s grace, and healing begins. God is our teacher—that goes without saying. He is Truth itself, and he is Goodness. But he is also Beauty, “beauty’s self and beauty’s giver,”²⁶ as Hopkins puts it. And that means, in the book of his living word, in the Bible, as well as teaching us truth and goodness, he is also trying to heal and awaken us in much the same

way as a work of art or a piece of music will sometimes pierce us with its beauty. On one occasion, Simone Weil remarked, “The soul’s natural inclination to love beauty is the trap God most frequently uses in order to win it and open it to the breath from high.”²⁷

There comes to mind here a phrase from the writings of Fyodor Dostoyevsky, a phrase or statement that has been acknowledged by many people, over the years, as a wondrous, necessary phrase. Dostoyevsky, we know, found himself, at certain times in his life as a man and an author, forced to confront scenes of unspeakable sadness and horror, scenes comparable to those we ourselves witness today. And yet, he declared in his writings—and in the teeth, it seemed, of all the evidence—“Beauty will save the world.”²⁸ Now that is an extraordinary claim. God, it is true, often comes to us, in his word, like a teacher, and comes to us with a word of challenge. But when we find ourselves in affliction, is it not the case that he comes to us in a more humble way, the way Ludwig van Beethoven came to his grieving friend Dorothea von Ertmann? Is it not the case that, in and through his word, he sits down with us, as it were, and through his own poems and parables and stories, speaks to our heart? Let us note, then, once again, by way of conclusion to this article, the short, remarkable extract from Mendelssohn’s letter concerning Beethoven:

Finally, he invited her to come to him, and when she came he sat at the piano and merely said: “We will now converse in music,” and played for over an hour and, as she expressed it, “He said everything to me, and also finally gave me consolation.”²⁹

Notes

1. Dinitia Smith, “In Shelly or Auden, in the Sonnet or Free Verse, The Eerily Intimate Power of Poetry to Console,” *The New York Times*, October 1, 2001.
2. *Ibid.*
3. Victor White, “Jung on Job,” *Blackfriars*, vol. 36 (1955): 53.
4. *Ibid.*

5. Ibid. See also Job, 33:13.
6. Anna Akhmatova, "Instead of a Forward," *Requiem: Poems 1935–1940*, in *Anna Akhmatova: Selected Poems*, trans. R. McKane (Bloodaxe Books: Newcastle upon Tyne, 1989), 281.
7. Ibid., 283.
8. Ibid., 287.
9. Ibid., 287–88.
10. Joseph Brodsky, "Introduction," in *Anna Akhmatova: Poems*, trans. L. Coffin (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1983), xxx.
11. Used by permission of the author.
12. Henry Vaughan, "On Sir Thomas Bodley's Library; the Author Being Then in Oxford," *The Complete Poems*, ed. A. Rudrum (Harmondsworth, London: Penguin UK, 1976), 336.
13. Gerard Manley Hopkins, "I Wake and Feel the Fell of Dark, Not Day," in *A Selection of His Poems and Prose*, ed. W. H. Gardner (Harmondsworth, London: Penguin UK, 1963), 62.
14. St. John of the Cross, "The Spiritual Canticle," trans. M. Flower (New South Wales: The Carmelite Nuns, 1983), 11.
15. Ibid., 12.
16. This is a (slightly) revised version of the lines as they appear in the translation by E. Allison Peers, *The Complete Works of Saint John of the Cross*, vol. 1 (Wheathampstead, Britain: A. Clarke, 1974), 181.
17. This is a (slightly) revised version of the translation that appears in Gerald Brennan's *St. John of the Cross: His Life and Poetry* (Cambridge: University Press, 1973), 41.
18. St. John of the Cross, "Ballad on the Psalm 'By the Waters of Babylon,'" trans. L. Nicholson, in Gerald Brennan, *St. John of the Cross: His Life and Poetry* (Cambridge: University Press, 1973), 183.
19. Etty Hillesum, *Etty: A Diary 1941–43*, trans. A. J. Pomerans (London: J. Cape, 1983), 196.
20. Ibid.
21. Jan Kochanowski, *Laments*, trans. S. Heaney and S. Barańczak (London: Faber and Faber, 1995), 17.
22. Pope John XXIII, "Extract from an address to the International Confederation of Societies of Authors and Composers," in *Catholics on Literature*, ed. J. C. Whitehouse (Dublin, Four Courts Press, 1997), 177. The address was published originally in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 3 (1962):518–20.
23. See Letter of Mendelssohn to Haydn, July 14, 1831, in *Beethoven* by H. C. Robbins Landon (London: Thames & Hudson, 1970), 196.
24. Rainer Maria Rilke, "O sag, Dicher, was du tust?," trans. Jurg Schmid and Paul Murray.
25. *The Literary Guide to the Bible*, ed. R. Alter and F. Kermode (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1987), 15. The greatest passages of poetry in the book of Job are not those

delivered by Yahweh or those addressed to Job by the young “intuitive” Elihu. They are the remarkable speeches voiced for Job himself. Although Elihu, the fourth friend, may perhaps be considered “a kind of poet,” he is not of the same order as Job. His speeches contain, it has to be admitted, almost as many “airy words” as those of the first three comforters.

26. Hopkins, “The Leaden Echo and the Golden Echo,” in *A Selection of His Poems and Prose*, 54.
27. Simone Weil, *Waiting on God*, trans. E. Craufurd (Glasgow: Collins, 1950), 118. It is no accident that Augustine uses the word “beauty” rather than any other word in his famous cry: “Late, late, have I loved you, O Beauty ever ancient and ever new!” *Confessions*, X, 27.
28. Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *The Idiot*, part 3, chap. 5.
29. See Letter of Mendelssohn to Haydn, July 14, 1831, in Robbins, *Beethoven*, 196.