

A Benediction for the Madison Common Council, March 7, 2017

by Paul Terranova

I. What kind of time is this for poetry?

With excerpts from the introduction to Leaves of Grass

What kind of time is this
for poetry? All the people
quivering with rage.

*This is what you shall do:
Love the earth and
sun and the
animals,*

The lattice of frosted
branches arching over my street
catches me, but can't hold me.
I will see the tracks of our
neighbor rabbit. I will see
the hawk surging down the
off ramp. I will see a child of
God, ravaged, in the median
in the sleet, and keep driving.

*This is what you shall do:
despise riches, give
alms to everyone that asks,*

The little girl was so quiet in
her dirty pink coat, asking
Why? And Please? Her mother
just as quiet and unsmiling.

*This is what you shall do:
Stand up for the stupid and the crazy,
devote your income and labor to others,
hate tyrants, argue not concerning God,*

The Swedish photographer was
arrested. When a Syrian boy said,
"Take me with you," he said,
"Yes."

*This is what you shall do:
have patience and indulgence toward the people,
take off your hat to nothing known or
unknown or to any man or number of
men, go freely with powerful uneducated
persons and with the mothers of families,*

I will come to speak to
you, see titles and
transactions, but will I
feel these trees that lived,
the stones under my feet
older than all of this.

*This is what you shall do:
re-examine all you have been told at
school or church or in any book,
dismiss whatever insults your
own soul, and your very flesh
shall be a great poem*

I would like to make a motion
that you each put on your nameplate
a picture of yourself as a toddler
and see what happens.
This is no time to
be reasonable. This is
no time to be reasonable.

II. Benediction

May we love
relentlessly. May we be
relentless in our loving and
love as relentlessly the gnarled
fencepost of a man leaning in the
street as the baby screaming
blinding light into our ears.
May we never relent from
loving, even in the face of
pleas to be reasonable, to
hurry up, to quiet down.
May we hurry up only to
love loudly and unreasonably
the woman scowling over her
cigarette, the spider rappelling
from the ceiling, our own
hands in the dishwater.
May we relentlessly love
these and all the other
footprints of God.