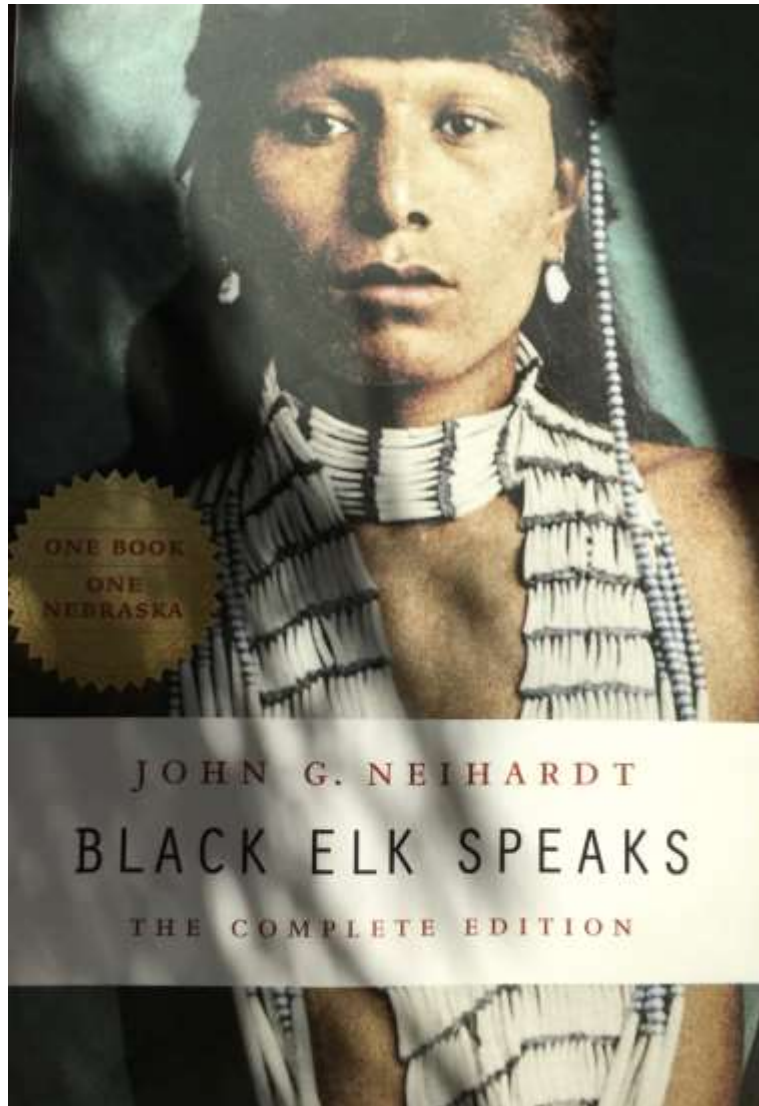


My Family Heritage, Witness Against the Beast, Poor People's Campaign: Black Elk Speaks Today!

By Don Jessup Blake Long
© July 19, 2021



Part I Black Elk Speaks

Dear Friends and Family,

I am feeling the powerful overflow of feelings of family, both oceanic and writ large and intimate and joyous: this may be my utopian and romantic way of being simultaneously in individual sanctuaries and social bands that are the two worlds of humanity interwoven in our life together. These two ways of being in and of two independent and whole beautiful but painful worlds, one intimate, familiar and individual, the other

transcendent, beyond and social is to me my natural embrace of opposing truths in all their various forms, clarion calls and challenging seductions. This is the middle position of being “neither wholly good or wholly bad,” as Niccolò Machiavelli phrased in his “Discourse on Livy,” a magisterial study of the history and nature of republics. It is here that we can try to know, understand and live the germinal power of paradoxical diffuse consciousness and twofold humane being. This embrace of paradox is the very miracle, life, mystery and truth I find distinctive in Christianity, and other similar theologies and faith-based traditions, or rather how I have come to be, know, see, describe and relate within and without it by my conceptual and interpretive framework.

Briefly, it is quite original in that I proclaim as my central thesis that there are two, not one, inspired breaths of life or pneuma, underlying moral foundations and ultimate outermost containers that define, shape and govern our ontological reality, humane being and dynamic progressions across history as vital, dialectical whole worlds coming to their own realization. These can be described as two orchestral movements in the unfinished eternal symphony that is simultaneously of our eternal God of amazing grace and our illimitable Humanity of endless love. They are both of the same original “creatio ex nihilo” of vital, creative sheer goodness, power and energizing of all of life forces and material in the cosmos, universe, creation and humanity. This is the central core of my conceptual and interpretive framework. I find it quite promising, fruitful and meaningful, as well as supported across a wide panoply of individual, social and universal experiences, histories, cultures and faith traditions, and established hierarchies and emerging frontiers in the sciences, humanities and arts.

Personally, this is a mystic twofold paradoxical way of heightened wisdom, sensibilities and imagination that is deeply embedded, formed and “autonomized” in a certain inspired, evolutionary, biological and dynamic anthropological complex, various and vital “first modern homo sapiens humane being.” As emerging in anthropological studies, scholarship and cross-disciplinary experimental research, this is a first modern social banded humanity or species being that became distinctive among hominids circa 300 bce and evolved over 250 or so thousand years primarily in Africa and across all the differing multitudes of first native communities and knit-together political, cultural societies. It is most notable for its present evolutionary stage of the modern brain as centered on the cerebellum which was then and is still, as rediscovered by neurosciences, the seat of oceanic creativity, insight, imagination, empathy and liminal two-way union with all that is outside of individual personhoods, communities and the world at large as also within.

But this is enough of my peculiar reveries and elemental style of writing, let me turn to the opening first words of Black Elk Speaks, a spoken word poetry that I find both like a hidden river of living waters that runs through all our modernizing abstract world and then oceans that privilege God, art, beauty, love and justice in all directions when simply privileging, trusting, being and rejoicing in God’s privileging and

passionate embrace of us, each and every unique, original and astonishing one of us, like Quaker tender-planted children and mystic good friends among extraordinary peers of equal mystery, truths and insight, individual, social, communal and universal. Black Elk begins in a humble and deep welcoming spirit:

Dear friend, I am going to tell you the story of my life as you wish; and if it were only the story of my life I think I would not tell it; for what is one man that he should make much of his winters even when they bend him like a heavy snow? So many other men have lived and shall live that story, to be grass upon the hills.

It is the story of all life that is holy and is good to tell, and of us two-leggeds sharing it with the four-leggeds and the wings of the air and all green things; for these are children of one mother and their father is one spirit.

For me, these first humane beings I embrace as of a twofold mystic way of being in and of two worlds at the same time e.g. impossibly divine and palpably sensual, separate and independent human societies and mutually-enriching and two-way liminal cousinries with all living creation. They are the archetypal mythic communities and passionate eternal presence of this kind of first fruits and native peoples of the “holy spirit” in Judeo-Christian language or the great spirit in the language of the Lakotas as expressed in the vision and poetry of Black Elk. And so let me end this introductory passage with a brief description of the meaning and significance of Black Elk’s “Great Spirit” (wakha thaka ‘great holy’) of the Lakota people: *“The traditional conception of the totality of all that is sacred, powerful, mysterious; the Lakotas use this word to designate the Christian.”* See James Walker. *Lakota Belief and Ritual*. 1980, University of Nebraska Press. Note that this book, *Black Elk Speaks*, is the work of the distinguished poet, writer and critic, John G. Neihardt who met Nicholas Black Elk in 1930 on the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota. For Neihardt and multitudes who sing of this same spirit, Black Elk’s searing visions of justice, community and peace, the profound strength and hope of the eternal unity of humanity and the good flourishing earth, his melancholy brooding over the “darkness in the eyes” of the Western modernizers and yet delight in children, playfulness and ultimate abiding conviction that the heroic struggle but vanishing of his people is only of this temporary realm and epoch: this speaks of all that we hear today of the same spirit eternal, instinctual, the sacred mysteries, virtues, loves and sheer goodness that are the true triumphal enchantment of humanity and creation together and everlasting faiths and sciences too, ancient mystic and emerging “panmodern” that are “the substance of all things hoped for, and the evidence of things unseen.

This spirit, indigenous and rooted and yet impossibly palpably transcendent, is the essential inspiration of my *“Twofold Epic Theology of Individual Liberation Grandeur and Social Utopian Flourishing.”* You will see that I identify with those who are neither of the Hegelian or Marxist dialectical laws of historical development, nor of dialogic or deconstructive freedoms derivative of these dialectically confined worlds, nor of faiths existential or messianic, liberal/conservative attachments to a revolutionary evolving bio-logos or ground of inner and outer being, nor of identity or difference political cultural

constructs and constant interminable politics of culture as old and recurring as spiritual, religious or Manichean warfare as sublimated total wars and tragic political realism by other and all means and ends of brief authority. All of these are the liberality, liberation and emancipation conflicts, oppositions and crusades of our totalizing modern world.

No! Enough of this one world view and its great confinements. I am and we are in the spirit of Blake and Black Elk, and antinomian radicals flooding across Europe in the 1500s through 1700s, emerging democratic solidarities and worlds unified by an international spirit of peace, egalite, fraternite and Liberté and differing indigenous and world peoples: all of like Mexican public murals of multi-colored luminous tableaus of differing mosaics of culture, history and peoples. We are of the originality of twofold mystics as evident in the first homo sapiens humane beings. They and we are those, on the one hand, seen and presumed as the vanished or disappearing oppressed among the oppressed, the non-being, invisible, impoverished and untouchable in the world's "vegetative eyes" which is what William Blake called the same modernizing moral mind-centered hegemony of the West that was the "darkness in the eyes" in the vision and poetry of Black Elk and Lakota peoples. It is now not only of the West but East, North and South, all tribal communities and world civilizations and canons are engulfed in this thoroughly saturating world view, its infinite abstracting, commodifying, alienating, exploiting, desecrating and depleting of "all that is sacred, powerful and mysterious.

But simultaneous, on the other hand, we are of our own self-evident humane, real and vital being, eternal, sensual, creative, instinctual, imaginative: we are of the radical amazement of mystics, "the rarest of the rare," the richest of the richly divinehumane blessed, inspired, swept up in the whole world come alive of no more tears. We are the endless proclaiming, chanting and marching prophets, poets and citizens of infinite differing beautiful, renaissance democratic worlds. All living generations, past and future, are here and now in this epochal moment, proclaiming new emerging ways of mobilizing and regaining the epic unified grandeur of a "democratic people" determined to act and sustain the course of deep commitment to essential values of creativity, empathy and courage. We are the event that seizes the world in the passionate engagement of God's startling and uncompromising justice, the knocking down from all high horses, stages and screens of all zealots and ideologues of a certain monstrous fountainhead of evangelical authority and oceanic oneness with cosmic truth which is merely the ancient arts of integral yogas of generating optimal feelings of autonomic living systems as associated and manipulated to harmonize with rational, abstract and moral domination systems of the executive mind.

This, dear family and friends, is now to tell my story about my family lineage, our unique living legacy of witness against the beast, and today's Poor People's Campaign of those billions like Abraham Heschel "who pray with their feet" as I wrote about just recently in a blog: all of this is here and more to come of this same unified "great spirit" of Black Elk. This is like a romantic poet's spontaneous overflow of powerful

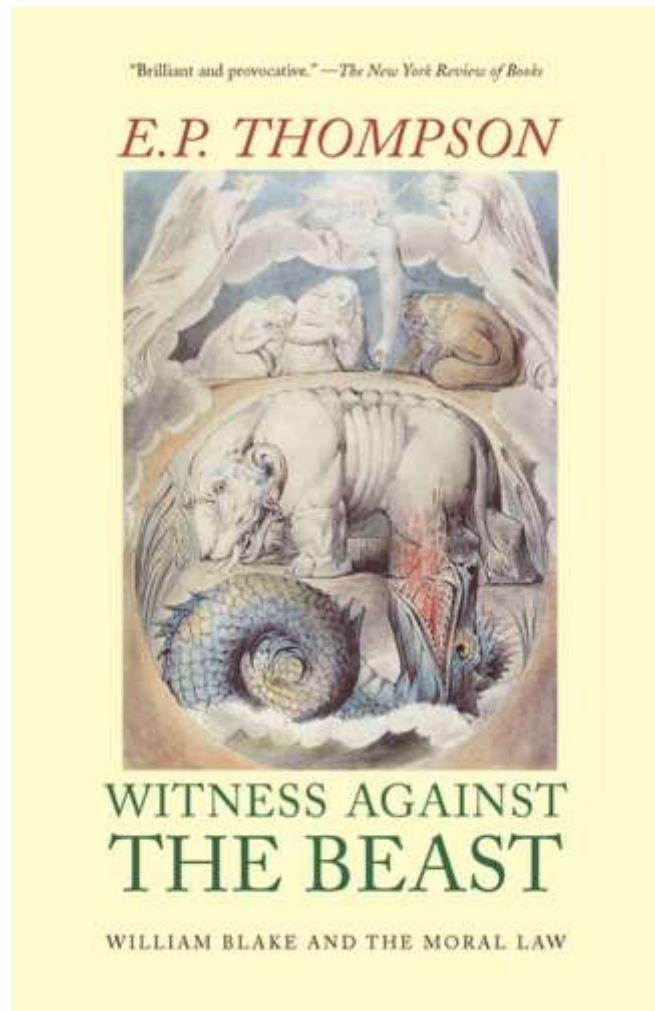
feelings, my own inspiration, insight, gratitude that is the fruitfulness and replenishing of my visit with Chip and MaryAnn several weeks ago on my way to Monhegan Island in their Boston Strong very, very, very fine house and now in their beautiful lakeside home in Rangeley: they are this same spirit I call a twofold mystic one of remarkable paradoxical flourishing gifts, capacities and heightened sensibilities. They led me with easy grace and jubilant presence of rediscovery in their Boston Strong spirit of forever good friends, homes are always of welcoming peace and everyone knows your name: here my emancipation day of celebrating “I am” joys and sorrows too is now joined in the “we are” twofold ethos of insider/outsider life and promise of being in two opposing/enriching worlds at the same time. Each is of its own awe and dedication to helping all others, especially those of needs and desires unmet, as abundantly, powerfully and lovingly as possible.

In this way my emancipation journey is now paired and doubly blessed as still “I am” a power of one and but also the very enchantment of being with all others and equally celebrating “We are.” For those of self-determining liberal liberation are of the same spirit, life and love of those unable or do not prefer to be in just one world that centers on individual-based truths, values and world views. We are in our life together in and of each other’s beautiful creative, courageous and enriching good worlds, as well as the sorrows, struggles and sometimes dark nights: and we in this twofold way have so much to give and receive from one another of deepening our common humanity and differing strengths, joys and loves and also of understanding and overcoming all that darkens, divides and isolates.

Pure things go crazy, don’t they? That is true but all that is sacred, holy and powerful in our vulnerable, anxious and sometimes bewildered humanity is the spirit eternal, the germinal life instinctual, and the poetry indigenous and contemporary when we are Boston Strong, good neighbors and our greatest joy is to love and be loved, to help and be helped and to surrender to the abiding peace, sheer grace and joyous goodness of every day as new creation and the breaking in suddenly, overwhelming, unimaginable of all the stuff our dreams are made of: a time to make timeless in the laughter, honesty and simple pleasures of good friends and welcome strangers.

Part II Family Heritage

But I am writing about this as its own story and separate appreciation, and hope to publish soon. Now I am going to return to sharing of my family heritage by beginning with a letter I wrote to my mother (who passed away in August 2017) and my two sisters.



January 7, 2013

Dear Mom, Claudia and Wendy,

I am giving you each this biography of Frank Thompson as my Christmas gift. [The title is ***A Very English Hero: The Making of Frank Thompson*** by Peter J Conradi. In this [review](#)," the organizing theme is that "Frank Thompson, poet and freedom fighter, was a man too brilliant for his own good." Perhaps but this is not my interpretation and admiration for his spirit as one abroad of international unity, peace and solidarity. This is the passionate engagement for justice that is what mystics experience as the overwhelming event, the palpable presence of our relational God who is deeply involved in history and the present: our interweaving of ecstatic experiences in being the very pleasure, excellence and justice of our eternal God and then the agonies of struggle against overwhelming total hegemonies of cruel exclusionary violence, oppression and our own loss of faith, hope and trust in ourselves to be democratic peoples. Nevertheless, we persevere and imagine and make real inspiring futures, our illimitable humanity freely moving us forward and our intimate God holding us firmly in the balm of Gilead and both sweeping us away into the triumphal future of God's will flourishing and all divinehumane goods, virtues and fruition loves to come realized and being realized in this here and now present and past, the whole world come alive!]

I have also been reading lately Edward's exploration of William Blake, *Witness to the Beast*, and found myself as fascinated and uplifted as Edward by his history of the Christian Antinomian tradition and his placing of Blake in that tradition. (We could even perhaps place Admiral Robert Blake in this tradition, given his service to Cromwell.) Edward clearly identified with Blake's passionate faith in the liberation of human nature and its vast potential, and Blake's heroic refusal to compromise his original voice and vision to the beast of the "moral law," which for Blake was the tyranny of the laws and judgments of Church, State and Commerce. We are still ruled by this unholy trinity. I am truly moved by Edward's rush at the end of his life to complete this work and other writing projects when his body was in ruin. I imagine that he was inspired with a spirit as magnificent and eternal as that which inspired Blake. And of course he devoted his life to protesting the beast, especially with his commitment to *Protest and Survive* and CND (Coalition for Nuclear Disarmament), and perhaps we can view that he was engaged and triumphant in one of the greatest victories of history, keeping the world safe from the utter and complete destruction of nuclear war.

I find this spirit rich in our family lineage and history. I see this in Frank's spirit of internationalism and his sudden conviction to fight the fascists during World War II, leaving Oxford, literature and writing behind. It was a conviction that frightened his father and mother, grieving them deeply yet humbling them with deep love and admiration for their son, his great sacrifice in foregoing the promise of a great career he had impressively begun at Oxford. I see it also in Frank and Edward's father, Edward John, a Christian minister and missionary in India, passionately devoted to the fight for independence of India. A friend of Nehru and Gandhi, he later became a professor in Bengali, author and translator, with as much a love of Indian literature as that of his beloved England. When this Edward was dying of a broken heart in 1946, bereft due to the loss of his son, who was captured and executed by the Nazis as a resistance fighter in Bulgaria, he suffered profound disillusionment with his dream of his liberal, high-minded England and its corruption from empire. Edward his son devoted himself to getting Nehru to send him a letter of encouragement, which he did. After reading this letter, Edward John Thompson died peacefully, certainly comforted by the love of his son as much as that of his friend, praying to God to accept "this humble servant."

Edward Palmer once, only partly in jest, referred to himself as a "Muggletonian Marxist," perhaps a union of Christian faith and its antinomian stance with a Marxist understanding of history. I also know that somewhere in his writings I read he would have been happy as a Christian minister and missionary, as an alternative life. Certainly, the essence of his humane spirit was to bring comfort, peace and healing to the world. And though suffering intensely the tragedies of our time, he also rejoiced in the abundant promise of life in the here and now, in a radical individualism in which we have the possibility through true freedom to remake our own human nature and the radical vision of community to remake the world in the image of what Blake saw as the "New Jerusalem." He acted on this vision within himself and radiating outward.

I rejoice that I was born into this family heritage. I rejoice that each of you has lived it and is living it in your own unique and inspired ways. I am very grateful to you for all that you have given me. And this is offered in response to the fullness of our relationship and lives, the joys and sorrows, the shared glimpses and experiences of truth and beauty as well as our failings and flaws painfully encountered with each other, the pleasure and comfort of love and understanding as well as the suffering and anger that comes from lack of connection and understanding.

So, with pride and humility, I send you my gratitude and love,
Donny/ Don

MORAL MONDAY
WOMEN'S MORAL MARCH ON WASHINGTON
JULY 19th

Rev. Dr. William J. Barber II, Co-Chair
Rev. Dr. Liz Theoharis, Co-Chair

On the anniversary of the Seneca Falls Convention, and as part of the PPC Season of Nonviolent Moral Direct Action, women from across the nation will march on the US Senate to protest the filibuster and demand voting rights and a \$15 min wage.

WATCH LIVE
11:00 am ET
OUTSIDE US Supreme Court

FORWARD TOGETHER!

#MORALMONDAY POORPEOPLESCAMPAIGN.ORG/LIVESTREAM #POORPEOPLESCAMPAIGN

Part III Poor People's Campaign and Moral Monday March on Washington

I find Black Elk Speaking and his eternal "Great Spirit" on fire in today's Poor People's Campaign as a "we are" clarion call to be Renaissance makers of good works, homes, communities and worlds "as beautiful as possible." Please join, come and/or spread the world!! While it may be too late for this event below, this is a thundering social revolutionary movement of over three years of gathering momentum, and this good trouble is the very passionate engagement in justice that is of doubling amazing grace of our eternal God and endless love of our illimitable humanity. This is what I mean by the Jeffersonian permanent revolutionary spirit of radical democracy as "something new under the sun."

Moral Monday Women's March is only one event in a series of this revelatory, inspired mobilizing and unifying movement across the entire political, cultural and economic spectrum and the very generosity of spirit that underlies and advances our liberal, liberation and emancipation social movements of "We the People." The campaign is mobilizing this summer with a vision for intensified civil disobedience to demand full voting rights and a \$15per hour federal minimum wage. Almost 170 years after Frederick Douglass gave his monumental speech, *What to the Slave is the 4th of July?*, his words still apply: "It is not light that is

needed but fire; it is not the gentle shower, but thunder.” We recognize that no one is free until we are all free.

*On the anniversary of the Women’s Convention at Seneca Falls, **we invite you to join us on Monday, July 19, for a Women’s Moral Monday March on Washington.** Together, we will call out the immoral obstructionism of Congress and demand the US Senate: 1) End the filibuster; 2) Pass all provisions of the For the People Act; 3) Fully restore the 1965 Voting Rights Act; 4) Raise the federal minimum wage to \$15/hr.*

[RSVP here](#) to join in-person

During the Seneca Falls Convention on July 19, 1848, participants discussed the social, civil and religious condition of women, their right to participate in democracy and the substantive rights that true democracy grants. They also issued a Declaration of Sentiments, signed by 100 participants, to reclaim these rights.

173 years later, we are witnessing an historic crisis of democracy that threatens our ability to realize the great promise of this country. Over 140 million people are poor or one emergency away from economic ruin, including more than 70 million women of all races, gender and sexual orientations and faith traditions. Voting rights are under attack in every region of the country. Poor women, especially poor women of color and LGBTQ+ women, are disproportionately bearing the brunt of low-wage and precarious work, heightened care responsibilities, the climate crisis, forever wars and the continued denial of our basic rights.

To continue with my own theology, this privileging of God as the overflowing spontaneity and oceanic creativity within our own imagination, mind, heart and all that sets our soul on fire is simultaneously to be in solidarity in the righteous Christ who is alive in the poor, prisoners, hungry and oppressed. This Christ is unlike Jesus who turns over tables as metaphor of reversing the world’s assumptions and hierarchies of power and knowledge: this Christ is the whole reality that is before, after, beyond and hidden within all this is blessed, proclaimed, beatified, sanctified and completed by the historical Jesus of liberation. This final transcendent Christ of the disenchanting is now the realized utopian palpable presence and he knocks off all those on high horses and any who are of any slightest condescendence, injustice and barbarism of exclusionary persecuting, stigmatizing and desacralizing violence to any personhood, all living humanity and any creature, all living creation. This is the worst abomination and apostasy of privileged leaders, servants and makers of such self-serving hegemonies of power, wealth and authority that is filicidal, eugenic and genocidal as the madness of civilization that makes a moral imperative growth by all means and ends possible: thus the fountainhead of all modern disorders of egoism, elitism, nativism, ableism and racism.

Christ is both witness to these “Beasts” that oppress, repress and impoverish not just the “poor and those below” but the entire world as made by humanity, and not God; Christ is simultaneously the triumphal transcendent impossible but present realization of “utopias” in the fellowship of all living generations—past, present and future—that are like empty containers of all not nows or no wheres or non-being as experienced in history. And these we can see as false, cruel and abomination to God when looking back with Christ’s

present understanding and forward with astonishing new authority: for this is the ancient to post-modern eternal prophetic mystic tradition that is this Christ, and come alive within all peoples who are witnesses to these beasts, and now unified and mobilized as prophets, poets and citizens of democratic solidarities and international whole worlds inspired by this same spirit.

Farewell in the “great spirit” indigenous and art spirit within every humane being



To me this is like looking at a beautiful sunset and then sunrise at the same time, a participant observer of two horizons in an impossible spontaneity, immediacy and overwhelming transcendence that affirms our individuality as in an epic grandeur sheer sublime and wordless and this resonating symphony soul stirring within every particle, wave, tissue and music within us. We are ascending and descending with the sun in one, we are dreaming backward and forward in the dark nights of the other that replenish mind, heart, body and imagination when brightest sunshine comes right on time at noon. And thus, the rhythms of nature, instinctual, eternal, the art spirit of artists like those on Monhegan Island who know the sound of a good painting of when just right in three perfect proportions of low, mid and high tones of light. For me as an educator and fierce advocate of democracy as the living, sharing and enriching of essential values of imagination, empathy, courage, creativity, integrity and justice, this is the substance of all good societies hoped for where no children die at an early age and the darkness that comes at noon is no more.