

# Propositions

By Stephen Dunn

Anyone who begins a sentence with, "In all honesty ..."  
is about to tell a lie. Anyone who says, "This is how I feel"  
had better love form more than disclosure. Same for anyone  
who thinks he thinks well because he had a thought.

If you say, "You're ugly" to an ugly person — no credit  
for honesty, which must always be a discovery, an act  
that qualifies as an achievement. If you persist  
you're just a cruel bastard, a pig without a mirror,

somebody who hasn't examined himself enough.  
A hesitation hints at an attempt to be honest, suggests  
a difficulty is present. A good sentence needs  
a clause or two, interruptions, set off by commas,

evidence of a slowing down, a rethinking.  
Before I asked my wife to marry me, I told her  
I'd never be fully honest. No one, she said,  
had ever said that to her. I was trying

to be radically honest, I said, but in fact  
had another motive. A claim without a "but" in it  
is, at best, only half true. In all honesty,  
I was asking in advance to be forgiven.



Stephen Dunn came into national prominence when his eleventh book, *Different Hours*, won the 2001 Pulitzer Prize. Born in Forest Hills, New York, Dunn took a degree from Hofstra University in History and English in 1962 and was a key player on the school's greatest-ever basketball team; he later earned a MA in Creative Writing from Syracuse University. His accessible work conveys its insights through quiet reflections on everyday events and central human dilemmas.

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