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“For Me and Me Only”:

The Pleasure of Little-Known Poetry

Kenneth O. ANDERSON

『私のために，私だけのために』

余り世に知られていない詩が与えてくれる楽しみ

ケネス・アンダーソン

この論文は，世に埋もれた状態から救済されて然るべき4編の詩，“Frutta di Mare,” “Boats at Night,” “The Parrots,” “Moonlit Apples”を考察し，検討する。さらにこれらの4人の作者の生涯を調査し，何故これらの詩が忘れ去れたのかを検証する。また，もう少し認められ，注目されて然るべき数編の詩にも言及する。

W.H. Auden ended his essay, “On Reading” (Auden, 1987) with the following words:

Occasionally I come across a book which has been written especially for me and for me only. Like a jealous lover, I don't want anybody else to hear of it. To have a million such readers, unaware of each other's existence, to be read with passion and never talked about, is the day-dream, surely, of every author.

I certainly understand this feeling, as it is satisfying to discover a poem that is new to one personally and that few other people know about. Often the author of such a poem is virtually unknown, or has been all but forgotten. Despite the obscurity of such poems and their authors, the Internet has made it relatively easy to find out more about them, and where to go for further information. In this paper I propose to examine a few obscure poems which deserve more attention.

Key words: obscure, rhyme, meter, frutta di mare, tamarisk, manna, reverie, Morpheus, wool-gathering, synesthesia, Georgian, caesura, wonder, tryst, empathy.

I. Frutta di Mare

I am a sea shell flung
Up from the ancient sea;
Now I lie here, among
Roots of a tamarisk tree;
No one listens to me.

I sing to myself all day
In a husky voice, quite low,
Things the great fishes say
And you must need to know;
All night I sing just so.

But lift me from the ground,
And hearken at my rim;
Only your sorrow's sound
Amazed, perplexed and dim,
Comes coiling to the brim;

For what the wise whales ponder
Awaking out from sleep,
The key to all your wonder,
The answers of the deep,
These to myself I keep.

Geoffrey Scott

I first read this poem in *The Puffin Book of Magic Verse*, chosen and introduced by Charles Causley (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974). I had never heard of Geoffrey Scott. The poem instantly appealed to me both for what it said and how it said it.

The title of the poem, "Frutta di Mare," is Italian for "fruit of the sea," meaning "sea food," as in

frutta di mari recipes. In this poem, of course, the fruit of the sea is a sea shell, but what it has to offer us is tantalizing, forever out of reach. It has been flung up from the ancient sea onto land, as a thought may be flung up from the unconscious, or as a natural wonder may be flung up from where it has lain hidden for ages to mystify human eyes. Where the shell lies—among roots of a tamarisk tree—is almost a disguise, as the shell may be lying among fruit of the tamarisk tree which has fallen. The Oxford English Dictionary tells us that the tamarisk tree grows in sandy places in southern Europe and is also frequently planted by the seashore in southern England, while its fruit, according to the Encyclopedia Britannica, is considered to be a kind of manna, a honeylike material that Bedouins collect, considering it a great delicacy. The shell offers manna of a different kind.

Yet that manna, as we see in reading through the poem, remains undiscovered: “No-one listens to me.” This would seem to be a sad reflection, as it would be coming from a human being; but the reflection comes from a shell which is personified. The poet is imagining what the shell might say if it were able to speak to humans. No human has yet picked up this shell, let alone listened to it: the shell’s words, “But lift me from the ground,” may be understood as “But if you lifted me from the ground.” The implication is that no-one passes this way and never will (for the poem lives in the eternal present), and that the shell is merely imagining what the reaction of a human would be if he or she were, in fact, to pass by. The sorrow would be on the part of the human, not the shell, which sings to itself all day without caring whether anyone listens to it or not, and would not be understood by anyone who did listen. The shell does not conceal its secrets of its own volition: it has been made to do so by its designer, who intends that what the shell knows should remain hidden from human beings. “God moves in a mysterious way/ His wonders to perform,” as William Cowper wrote.

Why has the shell been flung from the sea onto land if no-one will ever listen to it there? That is part of its mystery, as it is a mystery to the protagonist of John Updike’s short story “Pigeon Feathers” why God has lavished such care and attention upon the beautiful feathers of a seemingly worthless pigeon. Undoubtedly there are reasons for both; but humans will never find out what these reasons are.

The shell comes from the deep and it sings in a deep voice. It sings “just so,” i.e. in an exactly particular way of a secret and inscrutable design (reminding one of the creatures who were created “just so” in Rudyard Kipling’s *Just So Stories* for children). It sings of “what you must need to know,” yet humans may not even know that they need to know this knowledge. The knowledge is the knowledge of “great fishes” (perhaps the Biblical Leviathan, for one); it is “what the wise whales ponder/ Awakening out of sleep,” as if the whales receive the knowledge in dreams and ponder the meanings of the dreams when they awake. The knowledge is “the key to all your wonder,/ The answers of the deep”:

all-encompassing, the answers to all that we wonder about—who we are, where we came from, where we are going, why we are here. But we cannot understand the answers: all we hear is our “sorrow’s sound/ Amazed, perplexed and dim” as it “Comes coiling to the brim” of the shell. In other words, in striving to understand, to interpret the sounds which emit from the shell, we only hear the sounds of ourselves: “Know then thyself, presume not God to scan;/ The proper study of mankind is man,” as Alexander Pope wrote. We are sorrowful that we cannot grasp this ultimate knowledge; at the same time, we are thrilled, enchanted, amazed by the intimations of what we do not know.

How can the sound of sorrow be described? The sound of our sorrow seems to be described in this poem: it is said to be “amazed, perplexed and dim.” But this is not really a description of the sound itself: it is a description of how the sound makes us feel. The sound itself is dim (distant and faint, hard to hear) and makes us aware that we are also dim, i.e. unable to understand.

A similar poem to “Frutta di Mare,” James Stephens’ “The Shell” (De la Mare, *Come Hither*, 1923/1973), suggests what the actual, physical sound emanating from the shell might sound like: “the slow, sad murmur of far distant seas...and in the hush of waters was the sound/ Of pebbles rolling round./ For ever rolling with a hollow sound...the frightened croon,/ Smitten to whimpers, of the dreary wind/ And waves that journeyed blind...”. It will be instructive to compare, in due course, both “The Shell” and another poem, “Ecstasy” by Walter J. Turner (*Come Hither*; op. cit.), to “Frutta di Mare,” for their treatment of a common theme: what humans feel or might feel while listening to a sea shell.

“Frutta di Mare” uses poetic technique to great effect to achieve its tone of calmness, timelessness, its feeling of reverie. Alliteration is key: the predominance of “s” sounds (sea shell, ancient sea, listens, sing, myself, husky, things, fishes, just so, sorrow’s sound, perplexed, wise whales, sleep, answers) conjures the southing of the shell and the somnolent mood of the listener. The rough sound of “r” in “roots of a tamarisk tree” suggests the rough feel of the roots of the tamarisk tree (while the repeated “t” of tamarisk and tree is pleasing in itself) compared to the smoothness of the shell. The “r” sound appears again in the third stanza, in ground, hearken, rim, sorrow’s, perplexed, brim. In effect, the “r” sounds suggest the listener coming alert to what is flowing from the shell and reflecting on how s/he feels about it. In the last stanza, the “w” sounds convey the calm slowness of the “wise whales...awaking” and the calm attentiveness preceding a state of “wonder.”

Other words are equally carefully chosen for their sound. “Flung/ Up,” for instance, is wonderfully evocative of how the sea shell has been forcefully thrown out of the depths of the sea onto land (but whether by design or accident is left unspoken). “Flung” being the final word of the first line of the poem followed by a stressed, capitalized “Up” in the second line adds force to the action being

described.

“Now” in the third line of the first stanza contrasts with “No one” in the fifth line of the same stanza. To say “now” is to be conscious of time, but there is “no one” there to be conscious of time, so that the scene remains timeless. Furthermore, “Now” (especially since it is capitalized, the initial word of a line, and stressed) is a word with positive connotations, while “No one” (with “No” also capitalized, an initial word, and stressed) acts as a negative brake on “Now:” there will never be a Now, for No one will ever be there to listen to the shell.

The fact that the shell’s voice is “husky” and “quite low” contributes to the sense that the song is purposely being masked, so that the ear cannot catch it clearly and its import remains unfathomed. “You must need to know” is an interesting expression. Why not merely “need to know”? The must is not there merely to satisfy the requirements of the meter. Must, in this case, signals that the shell is telling the listener something important, even urgent: the shell insists on the importance of its message. Unfortunately, the listener cannot comprehend the message, let alone why it is important, which makes her/him even more anxious to know.

But humans are born to ask why, even if they can’t find the answers to all their questions. As James Stephens says in his poem “The Goat Paths” (*Come Hither*; op. cit.), if it were possible “I would think until I found/ Something I can never find,/ Something lying on the ground,/ In the bottom of my mind.”

Nevertheless, the feeling of this poem is one of enchantment, of wonder. There may be sorrow at discovering the limits of our knowledge, but there is also pleasure in our sense of wonder, at feeling that we may never come to the end of knowledge—or want to. This poem reminds us of how wonderful and mysterious the world around us is, if we have eyes to see (and ears to hear).

“The Shell,” in comparison, is not so comforting. The speaker of this poem feels threatened by the sound of the shell s/he listens to: what he imagines as s/he listens is

...The slow, sad murmur of far distant seas,
Whipped by an icy breeze
Upon a shore
Windswept and desolate.
It was a sunless strand that never bore
The footprint of a man,
Nor felt the weight
Since time began
Of any human quality or stir

Save what the dreary winds and waves incur.

While the listener in “Frutti di Mare” (if there were a listener) would feel enchanted by the sound of the shell under the tamarisk tree (even if it were bound up with sorrow), would feel intrigued and excited at being the discoverer of the shell and perhaps the first person ever to listen to its secrets, the listener in “The Shell” does not feel excited or enchanted. Rather, s/he feels desolate, dreary, overwhelmed by solitude. The sound of the shell is a “hollow” one which calls to mind sea-weeds with “long, cold tentacles of slimy grey.” These sea-weeds are animate, octopus-like, threatening. There is no sense of wonder here, for

There was no day,
Nor ever came a night
Setting the stars alight
To wonder at the moon:
Was twilight only and the frightened croon,
Smitten to whimpers, of the dreary wind
And waves that journeyed blind—
And then I loosed my ear—oh, it was sweet
To hear a cart go jolting down the street!

In other words, there is no light, only darkness, blindness, and fear. The moon and stars may give the speaker a positive sense of wonder, but not the oppressive song of the shell. Like the wind, s/he is cowed, and, in escaping from the shell’s sinister seduction (for “loosed” suggests freeing oneself from bonds), delighted to hear another sound: a sound caused by another human being, a sound that the speaker is accustomed to, can understand, and be comforted by. There is no suggestion that the speaker ever wants to listen to the shell again.

In “Ecstasy,” on the other hand, the listeners to the shell feel, as the title suggests, ecstatic. This is closer in feeling to that of “Frutta di Mare.” In “Ecstasy,” however, the speaker of the poem hears the sound of the shell by a sympathetic act of the imagination. He sees a white marble frieze depicting boys who have found a sea shell. One of the boys listens, rapt, to the shell:

One held a shell unto his shell-like ear
And there was music carven in his face,
His eyes half-closed, his lips just breaking open
To catch the lulling mazy, coralline roar
Of numberless caverns filled with singing seas.

Only one person at a time can place a sea shell to his or her ear to listen, yet all the boys in the po-

em, the speaker says,

...were hearkening as to singing
 Of far-off voices thin and delicate,
 Voices too fine for any mortal wind
 To blow into the whorls of mortal ears—
 And yet those sounds flowed from their grave, sweet faces.

In other words, one human (or more) can experience what another one does through an act of the imagination, and in so doing share the experience with others. This is what lyric poems set out to do: convey a personal experience so that the reader (or listener) can imagine, and feel, the experience for her or himself. Moreover, in “Ecstasy,” not only are the boys moved by the experience of the one who listens to the sea shell, the speaker himself is moved by the sight of the boys on the frieze and is able to hear

...that delicate music,
 And I became as grave, as calm, as still
 As those carved boys. I stood upon that shore,
 I felt the cool sea dream around my feet,
 My eyes were staring at the far horizon...

Poets write to recapture experience, “emotion recollected in tranquillity,” as Wordsworth said. In turn they share the experience with the rest of us and remind us to be attuned to experience ourselves, without needing the mediation of a poet. But since “The world is too much with us; late and soon,/ Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers:/ Little we see in Nature that is ours; We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon!” (Wordsworth again), we sometimes need the poet to remind us of what we have lost or may lose if we’re not alert.

When I first read “Frutta di Mare”, I wasn’t able to place it in time. It uses rhymed and meter—but poets of our own time, such as Richard Wilbur and the late Anthony Hecht, often write with rhyme and meter. There are no archaic words, no poetic contractions such as “o’er” to indicate that the poem was written in a bygone era. I felt that the poem could have been written yesterday.

I still feel so. The poem is written with great finesse, but meter yields to the need for naturally spoken English. It is written in iambic trimeter (e.g. “But lift me from the ground”), but there are inversions where necessary—for example, the iambs of the first, second, fourth and fifth lines of the first stanza are inverted to trochees for the purpose of natural intonation (as well as to stress key words). The rhyme scheme for each stanza is a/b/a/b/b so that the last two lines of each stanza form a couplet which makes a conclusive statement. Both the semi-colons and the commas slow the poem and con-

tribute to its calm, stately pace.

Nevertheless, in writing this paper I discovered that the poem was written long ago. Causley says that Geoffrey Scott was born in 1885 and died in 1929, while Margaret Drabble, the editor of *The Oxford Companion to English Literature* (Drabble, ed., 1985), avers that he was born in 1883. Either way, Scott died before his time, in New York, of pneumonia while working on a biography of Boswell.

It is tempting to think that Scott might be better known if he had lived longer, as he was well-known in his own time. According to the above-mentioned *Oxford Companion*, he won the Newdigate Prize for poetry at Oxford University in 1906 and was a friend of the noted art historian and philosopher Bernard Berenson. He “had great conversational talents, which, combined with what the artist William Rothenstein described as his ‘Boticellian’ beauty, made him disastrously attractive to women, not least, it would appear, to Berenson’s wife Mary. Scott’s best-known book is *The Portrait of Zelide* (1925), an elegant and evocative life of Mme de Charriere...which his friend Edith Wharton described as a ‘wellnigh perfect book...In the same year appeared *Four Tales* by Zelide, translated by Scott’s wife Lady Sybil (*nee* Cutting).” Scott’s *The Portrait of Zelide* and another of his books, *The Architecture of Humanism: A Study in the History of Taste*, are still in print and can be found at Amazon.co.uk. Also listed at Amazon.co.uk is a biography of Scott by Richard M. Dunn, *Geoffrey Scott and the Berenson Circle: Literary and Aesthetic Life in the Early 20th Century* (Edwin Mellen Press, 1998). The description of the book at Amazon.co.uk mentions that Scott was acquainted with John Maynard Keynes as well as Berenson and also “had a tempestuous affair with Vita Sackville-West...This biography focuses particularly on his letters, found in Berenson’s villa outside Florence, and until now [i.e. until 1998] largely unpublished.”

It is good to know that more can be found out about Scott. One only wishes that more of his poems were available too.

II. Boats at Night

How lovely is the sound of oars at night
And unknown voices, borne through windless air,
From shadowy voices floating out of sight
Beyond the harbour lantern’s broken glare
To those piled rocks that make on the dark wave
Only a darker stain. The splashing oars
Slide softly on as in an echoing cave

And with the whisper of the unseen shores
Mingle their music, till the bell of night
Murmurs reverberations low and deep
That droop towards the land in swooning flight
Like whispers from the lazy lips of sleep.
The oars grow faint. Below the cloud-dim hill
The shadows fade and now the bay is still.

Edward Shanks

I first discovered this poem in *Come Hither*. It is, of course, a Shakespearean sonnet, a 14-line poem written in iambic pentameter with a rhyme scheme of abab cdcd efef gg, the last two lines being a couplet. The poem progresses from a description of the sounds heard in a harbour at night to the cessation of all sound in the couplet, so that art imitates life by coming to a close and ending in silence.

What immediately attracted me to the poem was that it reminded me of the passage in Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (Twain, 1885/1958) in which Huckleberry Finn, floating on his raft, talks about how lovely the sounds of boats and unknown voices heard across water are, and how they fade away:

The sky looks ever so deep when you lay down on your back in the moonshine; I never knowed it before. And how far a body can hear on the water such nights! I heard people talking on the ferry landing. Heard what they said, too, every word of it...I heard one man say it was nearly three o'clock, and he hoped daylight wouldn't wait more than about a week longer. After that, the talk got further and further away, and I couldn't make out the words any more, but I could hear the mumble; and now and then a laugh, too, but it seemed a long ways off. (Chapter 7)

Both the Twain passage and the Edward Shanks poem convey the idea of new experience: of coming to an awareness of something new and beautiful, and being elated by it. In both poems, the experience comes out of solitude, and because both speakers are in a state of suspension, in the dream-like state we call "wool-gathering." It is only in such a state, when one is receptive, calm and relaxed, when one has temporarily forgotten time (or hangs suspended out of time), that such a revelation can appear, bringing in its wake a sense of well-being. Such experiences are crucial to our happiness, crucial for maintaining a sense of equanimity. We need to make time for them, no matter how busy.

As in "Frutta di Mare," the "s" sounds (sound, voices, windless, shadowy, vessels, sight, stain,

splashing, slide, softly, whisper, unseen, shores, music, murmurs, swooning, lips, sleep, still) induce a quiet mood. The “m” sounds suggest low, unclear music (mingle, music, murmurs) while the “l” sounds suggest the smooth, liquid quality of water in motion and the sounds that carry over the water (splashing, softly, low, lazy lips). The vowel sounds give the poem an airy quality, a feeling of space and expansion (lovely, sound, oars, unknown, borne through, floating, out of sight, beyond, low, droop, cloud). The quiet night is punctuated only by the soft sounds of oars splashing and waves whispering. As in the Twain passage, the voices of those who speak are unknown: they are disembodied. The passing vessels are “shadowy” and “out of sight.” The harbour light is not seen directly: it is the reflection of the light that is seen, broken by the moving waves. Similarly, the piled rocks of the jetty are not seen directly; their shadow, on the waves, is what can be observed, and then only because the shadow is darker than the waves. The shores are also unseen and can only be guessed at.

In the Twain passage, the sky is high and clear, and more can be seen due to the moonlight. In Shanks’ poem, conversely, the night sky is also high, but its darkness is emphasized. The night is compared to a bell suspended over the harbour which darkens everything and which reverberates to the sounds of the harbour, which itself is compared to an “echoing cave.” The reverberations are likened in their turn to “whispers from the lazy lips of sleep:” metaphor within metaphor within metaphor.

This reminds us that sleep has been personified before, as Somnus, the Greek god of sleep (from which we derive such words as “somnolent,” “somnambulist,” etc.) The sons of Somnus include Morpheus (from which the word “morphine”), Phobetor, and Phantasus (from which “phantasm,” etc., derives). The sons are all gods of dreams: Morpheus “calls up human shapes, while his brothers Phobetor and Phantasus assume the forms of all kinds of animals and inanimate things” (from the Encyclopedia Britannica entry on Morpheus). One is also reminded of the passage about Night, the messenger of Morpheus who brings sleep to human beings, visiting Morpheus in the first book of Edmund Spenser’s *The Fairie Queene*, the legend of the Knight of the Red Cross, in Canto I:

...And vnto *Morpheus* comes, whom drowned deepe
In drowsie fit he findes...

And more, to lulle him in his slumber soft,
A trickling streame from high rocke tumbling downe
And euer-drizling raine vpon the loft,
Mixt with a murmuring winde, much like the sowne
Of swarming Bees, did cast him in a swowne:

No other noyse, nor peoples troublous cryes,
 As still are wont t'annoy the walled towne,
 Might there be heard: but carelesse Quiet lyes,
 Wrapt in eternall silence farre from enemyes.

The vivid use of images and the euphonious list of sounds mixed together to induce peaceful sleep in the house of Morpheus--the sounds of the trickling stream, the drizzling rain, the murmuring wind which sounds like a swarm of bees—make this passage very appealing. In the alliteration and the tone of “Boats at Night,” as well as its use of iambic pentameter, we see can clearly Shanks' connection to Spenser and the continuity of lyric poetry throughout the ages.

Walter de la Mare also personified Sleep in his poem “No Bed” (De la Mare, *Collected Rhymes and Verses* 1944/1978): “O Sleep, at last to slide/ Into eyes made drunk with light:/ Call in thy footsore boys to harmless/ Night!” Where Shanks imagines the sounds of the harbour at night as being the whispers of Sleep, de la Mare depicts Sleep as “calling” boys to sleep (boys drunk with the light of day and therefore reluctant to go to bed) by sliding into their eyes, a strange and arresting image when one thinks about it. It is as if Sleep is both a person (since de la Mare addresses Sleep as if addressing another person) and a strange sort of narcotic (perhaps the magical, sleep-inducing sand of the Sandman).

Morpheus can also be found in recent literature, notably in Steven Millhauser's *From the Realm of Morpheus* (New York: William Morrow and Co., 1986), in which Carl Hausman, the protagonist of the novel, “enters a magical landscape in search of a lost baseball and descends into the fabulous kingdom of Morpheus” (from a *Publisher's Weekly* review listed at Amazon.com). Morpheus also appears in the recent series of *Matrix* films, about which are many web sites dealing with the significance and symbolism of Morpheus in the films.

The *Huckleberry Finn* passage and the poems mentioned above capture dream-like moments of life when time is suspended: as the old nursery song has it, “life is but a dream:”

Row, row, row your boat,
 Gently down the stream,
 Merrily, merrily, merrily, merrily,
 Life is but a dream.

Lewis Carroll echoes this in his poem for Alice Pleasance Liddell, the girl who inspired his Alice books, recalling how he first told the stories to Alice and her sisters when they were boating together, and how

Still she haunts me, phantomwise,
Alice moving under skies
Never seen by waking eyes...
Ever drifting down the stream--
Lingering in the golden gleam--
Life, what is it but a dream?

Carroll's poem remembers a pleasant afternoon, but is haunted by loss. Huckleberry Finn's description of the Mississippi River at night, Edward Shanks' description of the harbour, de la Mare's narrative of boys called to sleep after the pleasures of the day, also reflect moments when life seems like a dream, but a pleasant one, a reverie in which we become aware of the loveliness of the world and our place in it, and are freed from time. This is one of the great gifts of lyric poetry, vital in a world in which we are increasingly pressed for time and not given enough time to pause, reflect, connect. A lyric poem can be a key to connect us to a forgotten moment, an epiphany that gives meaning to our existence, renews us and keeps us going.

Of all the poets mentioned in this paper, Edward Shanks (1892-1953) (www.bartleby.com) has been the most elusive. His works (which include novels, essays, and studies of Edgar Allen Poe, Rudyard Kipling, and George Bernard Shaw, as well as poetry) are listed at various web sites, including the on-line COPAC catalogue (COPAC is the merged on-line catalogue of 24 major libraries in the UK and Ireland, plus the British Library, the National Library of Scotland and the National Library of Wales (Llyfrgell Genedlaethol Cymra)). Information about the writer's life, however, is virtually non-existent. One hopes that such information, if it does in fact exist, will be made available on the Internet in the future.

III. The Parrots

Somewhere somewhen I've seen,
But where or when I'll never know,
Parrots of shrilly green
With crests of shriller scarlet flying
Out of black cedars as the sun was dying
Against cold peaks of snow.

From what forgotten life
Of other worlds I cannot tell
Flashes that screeching strife:
Yet the shrill colour and shrill crying
Sing through my blood and set my heart replying
And jangling like a bell.

Wilfrid Gibson

I discovered this poem in *Come Hither*. What appealed to me immediately was both the mystery of the poem and its language. The speaker of the poem is experiencing *déjà vu*, but of an experience in a past life, in a place far removed from his or her present one. S/he has no idea where that place is, or what kind of life s/he lived there, yet feels an overwhelming desire for that place.

The idea of being so attracted to a place and time far removed from the present has been explored by other poets as well: by Samuel Taylor Coleridge in “Kubla Khan,” Walter J. Turner in “Romance” and Walter de la Mare in “Araby” and “Tartary,” to name a few. In these poems, however, the places are known, while the mystery of the identity of the place in “Parrots” piques the speaker’s desire to know. The fact that s/he will “never know” where the place is or in what time it lies strengthens the desire.

One feels that the exotic quality of the colours and the voices, their vibrancy, are other factors in the stoking of desire. The speaker, living a drab, monotonous life, predictable and wearying, yearns for something exciting and unknown to pull him/her out of the slough of despond. Like Edwin Arlington Robinson’s Miniver Cheevy, s/he wishes to protest to an unheeding world that the life s/he is trapped in is not the one s/he is meant for, that there must be a better world to inhabit if s/he only knew how to get to it. S/he is isolated, alone; like the speaker of Wallace Stevens’ “Disillusionment of Ten O’Clock,” s/he feels that no one else shares his/her feelings of emptiness and boredom, the desire to escape to a more colourful world. The poem is despairing: s/he will never know this other world. The “shrill crying” of the parrots is, in effect, his/her own *cri de coeur*:

Gibson uses synesthesia to heighten the strangeness of the speaker’s vision: “shrill” usually describes a sound, but in “Parrots” is also applied to the bright colours of the parrots (just as a person can be said to be wearing a “loud” shirt). Furthermore, the word “shrilly,” usually an adverb, is here used as an adjective: “shrilly green.” The repetitions of variations of “shrill” intensify the speaker’s experience, as if the colours get brighter and the cries of the parrots rise in stridency as the poem

unfolds: “shrilly green,” “shriller scarlet,” “shrill colour and shrill crying,” not to mention “that screeching strife” and the way that the colours and crying “sing through my blood and set my heart replying/ And jangling like a bell.” The poem rings, clangs, and reverberates.

The poem is written in a combination of iambic meters—iambic trimeter in the first, third, and sixth lines of each stanza, iambic tetrameter in the fourth lines, and iambic pentameter in the fifth lines—yet with variations necessitated by the demands of natural intonation. For example, the initial iambs of the third lines are changed to trochees, and this also has the effect of suggesting speed and suddenness: the sudden, startling appearance of the parrots in the first stanza, the startling flight of the parrots and the suddenness of their screams in the second. The feminine endings of the hyper-metric fourth and fifth lines of both stanzas suggest the disappearance of the birds as they fly away; the setting of the sun; the dying away of the birds’ cries as the parrots disappear; the fading echoes in the speaker’s heart in response to the cries and colours of the parrots.

The fifth line in the first stanza and the fourth and fifth lines in the second stanza in particular depart from regular meter to heighten the dramatic effect of the poem. The fifth line of the first stanza: “OUT of black CEDars as the SUN was DYing.” The stress on “out” emphasizes the startling and sudden appearance of the parrots from the cedar forest; the emphasis on the first syllable of cedars underlines the dramatic size and sight of the towering trees; the stress on “sun” and “dying” heightens the sense of loss that the speaker feels both at the setting of the sun and at the disappearance of the parrots, a permanent sense of loss. The fourth line of the second stanza: “Yet the SHRILL COLOUR and SHRILL CRyING.” The placement of the stress reflects the insistence of the colours and the crying, as if they are demanding to be recognized. The fifth line of the second stanza: “SING through my BLOOD and SET my HEART rePLYING.” The blood thrills to the sensation of the colours and cries and races faster; the heart beats faster as well, in response to the parrots. The sibilance of the line has a singing effect, and the repetition of the r in “replying” after its appearance in “heart” is itself an echo. The soft “s” hardens into the “j” of jangling in the last line as the poem reaches its crescendo.

Other examples of the artful use of sounds in the poem are the hard “c” of “cold peaks of snow” in the sixth line of the first stanza, echoed by the “k” of peaks, suggesting the unrelenting hardness, the coldness of the snow-capped mountains towering over the scene—as the speaker’s own circumstances loom over her/him. There are also the “f” sounds in the second stanza: “from,” “forgotten,” “flashing,” “strife:” sounds both soft and frictive, suggesting, perhaps, the conflicting emotions of the speaker: excitement at the vision of the parrots, despair of following them, anger and frustration at her/his own inability to escape. Altogether “Parrots” is a beautiful and satisfying performance.

An excellent book about Wilfrid Gibson and other Georgian poets, *The Georgian Poets: Abercrom-*

bie, Brooke, Drinkwater, Gibson and Thomas (Parker, 1999) was published recently which includes photographs of the poets and gives an attractive picture of Gibson. He never went to university, but

...was, however, a sociable character; and his mild, clerkly demeanor went hand in hand with a genius for friendship and an open, good-humoured manner. People were drawn to him, and he was a generous and often hilarious correspondent...His career as a poet was assisted greatly by the inspiration provided by his wife Geraldine Audrey Townshend, whom he married in 1913...Gibson was besotted—any poem with the dedication 'For G.' or 'To G.' invariably means Geraldine. [H]is work was concerned with the problems of other people rather than his own temperament—and unlike [Rupert] Brooke he was not interested in cruelly satirizing his subjects. He therefore reads as a compassionate and humane writer, a condition of his art which acted to his advantage as a writer of war verse who did not serve in France. He achieved his grasp of other characters by a Keatsian 'negative capability', identifying with what he heard and saw outside himself, but without participating directly in the events he describes. Gibson was realistic and often self-deprecating about his literary talent, and he left no indications that he was a tortured artist. He was as much of a 'writing animal' as Edward Thomas, dependent on an income from literary work, but his character seems to have been naturally sunny and optimistic beneath the domesticated exterior...In short, his unpretentious lyrics and narratives stemmed from a personality which did not affect artistic superiority or special knowledge. This is one reason why writers and critics of all types found him an endearing man (The Georgian Poets, pp. 22, 25-26).

Gibson was friends with Rupert Brooke, Robert Frost and, later on, W.H. Auden. Of his friendship with Auden, Parker says, "The Georgian who was out of sympathy with later twentieth-century styles had little difficulty in communicating with one of the most strident heralds of modernism" (p. 26).

So much for Gibson the man, a poet whom one would actually like to have met—something which unfortunately cannot be said of very many poets. But what of the quality of his poetry? Parker's assessment is that

Gibson's personal modesty and his tendency to live a suburban life after 1919 militates against his image as a poet. There is a tendency for readers and critics, accustomed to the cult of biography, to regard artists as people with extraordinary private lives or adventurous dispositions which somehow inform their creative works...Gibson is resistant to all forms of image making and publicity, with his early high reputation based on the solid foundations of a great deal of work (pp. 34-35).

Gibson was one of the Georgian poets (poets whose work were included in the *Georgian Poetry* collections between 1912 and 1922 and who were based in two centers: at Harold Monro's Poetry Bookshop in London and in the Gloucester village of Dymock, where Gibson, Abercrombie, Edward Thomas and Robert Frost lived before World War I and visited by Rupert Brooke, W.H. Davies, John Drinkwater and Edward Marsh. The Literary Encyclopedia (www.litencyc.com) comments on the literary reputation of the Georgian poets:

The image of the Georgian poet as a facile writer of bland, throwaway anthology lyrics stands in need of revision. Much Georgian material is in fact marked by a haunting, elegiac quality, a sombre awareness of a changing England and a firm connection with social realities such as poverty, ugliness and unrest. Furthermore, the Georgians conducted a brave effort to reanimate the verse drama, and in this sense, Abercrombie, [Gordon] Bottomley, Brooke, Drinkwater and Gibson were playwrights as well as poets. Some were also exponents of the narrative poem. Many were consummate reviewers, anthologists and prose writers, and their books on literary, cultural and personal matters can provide wider perspectives in which to view their poetry...To this day, [the Georgian poets] are yet to benefit from any widespread revision, although there have been instances of recuperative scholarship. While it is true that Georgian poetry lacks the intellectual scale and complexity of Modernism, it is, nevertheless, not without merit, and deserves more than automatic dismissal.

Too often poets are categorized as major or minor. But one can take pleasure in many different kinds of poems without having to denigrate one at the expense of another. Gibson is a poet who both deserves and rewards more attention.

IV. Moonlit Apples

At the top of the house the apples are laid in rows,
And the skylight lets the moonlight in, and those
Apples are deep-sea apples of green. There goes
A cloud on the moon in the autumn night.

A mouse in the wainscot scratches, and scratches, and then
There is no sound at the top of the house of men
Or mice; and the cloud is blown, and the moon again
Dapples the apples with deep-sea light.

They are lying in rows there, under the gloomy beams,
On the sagging floor; they gather the silver streams
Out of the moon, these moonlit apples of dreams,
 And quiet is the steep stair under.

In the corridors under there is nothing but sleep,
And stiller than ever on orchard boughs they keep
Trust with the moon, and deep is the silence, deep
 On moon-washed apples of wonder.

John Drinkwater

I remember reading this poem in some anthology or other as a child, but then it disappeared from my life, and I wasn't able to find it again until I happily re-discovered it in *A Picnic of Poetry* (Harvey, ed., 1990). The secrecy and stillness of the poem appealed to me as a child, since I was wont to seclude myself from prying eyes and escape from the world through books. In addition, "Moonlit Apples" was one of those poems which taught me that the best antidote for boredom was to concentrate on the still, small and seemingly insignificant things around me: one soon realized that even the small and insignificant are weighted with mystery. Poetry brought things alive, sharpened one's senses, even as it was effecting an escape from daily miseries and humiliations.

"Moonlit Apples" is an interesting combination of meters and caesurae which alternately speed up and slow down the movements in the poem. The first line, for example, begins with two anapests followed by a caesura, after which come three iambs: "At the TOP of the HOUSE | | the APples are LAID in ROWS" (the first iamb, "the apples," has an extra syllable). The effect is to fly us swiftly to the top of the house, as if by magic, then pause to see the apples lying there quietly, unmoving. The second line also begins with two anapests, but each anapest has an extra syllable, and the word "in" comes before the caesura: "And the SKYlight lets the MOONlight in". The anapests give the effect of the swiftness with which the moonlight streams through the skylight, with the extra syllable of both anapests, "light" in each case, being, as it were, the afterglow of the passing light. The line also cleverly lets us contrast the skylight which is a window from the skylight which is a planet. The second line ends in an enjambment which leads directly to the apples again, in the third line, showing how the light has instantaneously and magically transformed the apples: they are ordinary, earthly apples no longer, but instead apples from a deep sea realm. The third line begins with a trochee—APples—

which spotlights the apples, focuses attention on them and their transformation. The poem does not tell us whether the color of the apples has greatly changed—perhaps the apples were green to begin with—but sea-green is not the green of earthly apples. Again, as in the first and second lines, there is a caesura and an enjambment, and attention is focused by the fourth line's initial iamb on "a CLOUD".

Here the meter changes. The first three lines are pentametric, but the fourth line is tetrametric: "A CLOUD on the MOON in the AUTumn NIGHT": an iamb followed by two anapests and another iamb. Once again the anapests suggest the swiftness of the cloud as it shades the moon, while the final stress in the last iamb makes for a pause to consider the stillness, the darkness, the immensity of night.

The second, third and fourth stanzas more or less follow the pattern of the first stanza of quick movements alternating with pauses. It is a pattern analogous to thought and action—pause, rest; return of energy, burst of a new thought or action. It is how a poem is written: pause, reflection; surge of creativity; pause again; renewed thought, renewed creativity.

The skill of the rhyme scheme is also pleasing: aaab/cccb/ddde/fffe. The rhymes are exact and unobtrusive and contribute to the euphony of the poem.

As a child encountering this poem for the first time, I would have been pleased by the unfamiliarity of the word "wainscot"—"panelling of oak or other wood lining esp. the lower part of a room wall; an area of such panelling," according to the Oxford English Dictionary--a word used in Britain more than in the United States. The attraction of such an unfamiliar word, and its sound, played no small part, I am sure, in the burgeoning of my desire to finally be able to travel to Britain myself to see such things as wainscots, waistcoats and wickets. And a love of words for the sounds themselves, whatever their meanings might be, led naturally to a taste for poetry.

There must also have been an unconscious identification with the mouse in the poem: small, unnoticed, working away in a seemingly insignificant but eventually fruitful manner, as a child does in growing up. And part of the pleasure of the poem, then and now, is the pleasure of noticing something beautiful that no-one else has noticed, and noticing it late at night, when everyone else has gone to bed, when the moon is working its magic. Children hate to go to bed, regardless of how depressing it may be for adults to pace the floor at night with insomnia when they know they've got to go to work the next morning. Being young, innocent and eager, children are afraid they might miss something, especially when they see adults allowed to stay up later than they are. The successful escape of children from parental supervision to go out and enjoy the wonders of night has been the subject of many poems, including the nursery rhyme "Boys and Girls, Come Out to Play," Robert Louis Stevenson's "Escape at Bedtime," and Walter de la Mare's "No Bed!"

The apples in the poem may remind one of the fabled apples of Eden; the golden apples of the Hesperides; the opening lines of Robert Louis Stevenson's "Travel": "I should like to rise and go/ where the golden apples grow"; W. B. Yeats' lines from "The Song of Wandering Aengus": "The silver apples of the moon,/ The golden apples of the sun"; and so on. But such echoes or resonances are not necessary to the feeling of wonder expressed in the poem: the wonder arises out of the apples themselves, as any natural object stirs wonder at its mystery and the realization of how much is unknown. There is wonder, too, at the underlying connections between all things; in the case of these apples (how do you like these apples?), how they capture the moonlight and seem like apples in a dream, how this relation of the apples to the moon is like a tryst: secret, unknown to others. The silence of the apples in the moonlight is deep not only due to the intensity of the silence, but also because all we want to know about apples, moonlight and their connections is not revealed.

According to Parker, John Drinkwater's

formal education ended when he left Oxford High School, meaning that he was self-educated beyond the age of 15...[He started from] a position of financial insecurity, the sort which caused Drinkwater senior to encourage his son into the insurance industry in an effort to provide a prosperous future for the young John. As a result, Drinkwater spent many years in an uncongenial office environment, hoping to cross over from this unpromising start to the artistic life he had desired all along. His literary/theatrical life was achieved against great odds and it was sustained because Drinkwater, more than most other poets, was able to write for a popular market with little sense of compromise. When he abandoned poetic drama for prose drama between 1917 and 1921, it was because he sensibly recognized its theatrical failure in the long term—and his income was related to the economics of supply and demand in the theatre in a way that other Georgians' income was not (Parker, p. 49).

This state of affairs partly accounts for the uneven quality of Drinkwater's poetry and for the fact that so few of his poems are known any more. Anyone who has ever, like Drinkwater, been forced by economic circumstances to work in the kind of "uncongenial office environment" so well satirized by Scott Adams in his Dilbert cartoon series or in the recent British television comedy series *The Office* should be able to empathize with Drinkwater in not being able to reach the creative heights he had hoped for. Nevertheless, poems like "Moonlit Apples" have survived because they are in fact, poems of great skill and appeal, and it would be good to bring them to the attention of new readers.

V. Conclusion

There are other poets besides the ones mentioned in this article who languish in obscurity even though a few of their poems still find their way into anthologies and the poets themselves are mentioned in such readers' guides as *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*: Lascelles Abercrombie, James Elroy Flecker, Ralph Edwin Hodgson, Frances Cornford, to name a few (as well as other poems by Gibson and Drinkwater). In the future I hope to review some of their poems as well and find out more about the poets, for my own pleasure if for no-one else's. As Auden noted, so often the pleasure of reading a poem—as with the pleasure of strolling a garden—is that it is private.

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