Pathos of Passing Time

Kenneth O. Anderson

時の流れにまつわる哀愁

ケネス・O・アンダーソン

詩の主なるテーマの一つとして、現在という時は過ぎ去るという事を知りながらも、この現在を生きたいという望みを擧げる事ができ、そしてこの事が一瞬一瞬に哀愁を与えるのである。もちろん時間を止めたり、それを取り戻す事は不可能な事であるが、私達は過去の経験の再現を詩の中に試みようとする。このようにして詩は、私達が時の経過で失ってしまった現実に代わって仮想現実となるのである。ここでは、この再現がどのようにして成されているのかを、韻律、韻、隠喩等を通して様々な現代詩を検証し、又、失われた時の復元の試みとして、詩人達が行った詩と写真や考古学との比較を引証する。結局、詩は現在が過ぎ去る前に可能な限り完全に現在を経験し、失われようとしている一瞬一瞬を味わい、賞賛する事を私達に促しているのである。

One of the main themes of poetry has always been the problem of wanting to live in the moment while being aware that the moment will pass: The awareness of passing time robs us of our ability to abandon ourselves wholly to the moment, and contributes to the pathos we feel as the moment passes away. One of the most well-known poems that deal with this theme is Andrew Marvell's “To His Coy Mistress,” with its famous lines “Had we but world enough, and time,/ This coyness, lady, were no crime” and its conclusion, “Thus, though we cannot make our sun/ Stand still, yet we will make him run.” We cannot stop the passage of time, but by seizing the day and giving ourselves to the moment, we can make the most of our time, even though it seems to pass even more quickly when we do so.

Shakespeare’s seeming boast was that the moment is not lost if it is captured in a poem: “So long as men can breathe or eyes can see,/ So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.” Yes, a poem can give us consolation, and even moments of happiness; but it cannot restore a person we have lost. In

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commemorating a woman he had known, in his poem “An Epitaph”, De la Mare wrote,

Here lies a most beautiful lady,
Light of step and heart was she,
I think she was the most beautiful lady
That ever was in the West Country.

But beauty vanishes; beauty passes;
However rare--rare it be;
And when I crumble, who will remember
This lady of the West Country?

(De la Mare, 1979)

Nevertheless, we do our best to preserve the memories, in photographs, in poems, in works of art. We cannot bring back the lost moment, but we can create, through art, a virtual reality that reminds us of what we lost, that serves to make us realize the importance of living in the moment.

A poem that perfectly expresses this thought is Louis MacNiece’s “The Sunlight on the Garden” (MacNiece, 1964):

The sunlight on the garden
Hardens and grows cold,
We cannot cage the minute
Within its nets of gold,
When all is told
We cannot beg for pardon.

Our freedom as free lances
Advances toward its end;
The earth compels, upon it
Sonnets and birds descend;
And soon, my friend,
We shall have no time for dances.

The sky was good for flying
Defying the church bells
And every evil iron

Siren and what it tells:
The earth compels,
We are dying, Egypt, dying

And not expecting pardon,
Hardened in heart anew,
But glad to have sat under
Thunder and rain with you,
And grateful too
For sunlight on the garden.

For me, there are few poems to equal this one for mastery of sound as well as sense. It is as beautiful to listen to as it is to read. A poem of irregular meter, it is made up mostly of iambs, trochees and a couple of anapests, and every place where the meter becomes irregular makes perfect sense in its sounds. The words are short and simple: There are only three words of more than two syllables in the poem. The rhyme scheme of each stanza is constant: *abcbba*.

The poem begins with one of those moments of physical and mental happiness that one would like to hold onto, but cannot: basking in the sunlight of a garden. "The sunlight on the garden/ Hardens and grows cold": The first line is iambic trimeter, a hypermetric line, the second line is trochaic trimeter, a catalectic line. The extra unaccented syllable of the first line balances out the missing unaccented syllable of the second line. The iambic stresses of the first line emphasize the sunlight and the garden; in contrast, the stresses of the trochees emphasize "harden" and "cold" in the second line. The pleasure of the moment and its passing away are thus immediately set in opposition to each other. The third line follows the first line in structure, while the fourth is iambic trimeter; the fifth line is iambic dimeter, and the sixth and last line of the first stanza is the same in structure as the third and first.

One of the greatest pleasures of rhyme in this poem is the rhyming of the last words in the first and third lines of each stanza with the first words of its second and fourth lines (garden, hardens and minute, within its; lances, advances and upon it, sonnets; flying, defying and iron, siren; pardon, hardened and under, thunder). Unless one is looking carefully it is easy to miss these rhymes, as the poem flows smoothly and the rhymes are submerged in the flow. Discovering them increases one's admiration for the poem: They seem so effortlessly achieved.

The alliteration of the hard c sounds in the second and third lines ("cold," "cannot," cage") drives home the hardness of the truth we keep bumping into in life: We cannot halt time. We cannot make

a prisoner of time in the “nets of gold” of the sunlight around us. No-one can grasp light in his or her hands; it slips away from us as we watch. We may regret what we did or didn’t do while we had the light, but when all things are considered, we cannot retrieve time. Even should we beg to have lost time restored to us, it will not return. The facts are stated calmly and culminate in the force and brevity of the fifth and sixth lines.

The second stanza expresses how our freedom is limited by death: Both the natural makers of song (birds) and the artists (of sonnets, for example) will die, and the end will seem soon, no matter how advanced an age we have reached. The speaker of the poem speaks to “my friend”--a personal friend? a lover? his audience? “My friend” is a nice touch with its inclusivity, used in a way that the Beatles were to use it in their own songs many years later (e.g., in “Can’t Buy Me Love,” “Another Girl,” “You’re Going to Lose that Girl,” etc.). The anapest which begins the last line of this stanza (“We shall have”) means the line must be read faster to include the extra syllable, thus physically expressing the race against time.

The sky in the third stanza symbolizes this freedom, as it is a place for flying, for letting the imagination soar, rather than being earthbound and mortal (church bells toll when someone dies). The siren warns of an air raid, of death brought by enemies: “We are dying, Egypt, dying” is of course what Antony says to Cleopatra just before he dies (*Antony and Cleopatra*, IV, xiii, 18), and the anapest (“We are dying”) emphasizes the haste with which Antony says it, and the stress on dying. Also, of course, MacNiece wrote “The Sunlight on the Garden” in 1938, when World War II was looming.

But time cannot be recovered and one must accept the unforgiving minute (“hardened in heart anew” recalls the pharaoh of Exodus who hardened his heart against Israel, but the speaker of the poem is steeling his heart against the ravages of time). Nevertheless, the speaker is grateful for the time he has shared with his friend, both in thunder and rain and in sunlight: The stress in the fifth line emphasizes “grateful”, and the last line brings the poem full circle to the beginning benison of sunlight on the garden. The poem is an affirmation of the goodness of life despite our losing battle with time.

Another beautiful poem which commemorates a moment of happiness which the poet knows must fade is “This Unimportant Morning” by Lawrence Durrell. Like MacNiece’s poem, it was written in a time of war and, like his, includes an allusion to Shakespeare. Like MacNiece’s poem, Durrell’s is written in irregular meter, and one can very clearly detect its music, especially if one reads the poem aloud:

This unimportant morning
Something goes singing where

The capes turn over on their sides
And the warm Adriatic rides
Her blue and sun washing
At the edge of the world and its brilliant cliffs.

Day rings in the higher airs
Pure with cicadas, and slowing
Like a pulse to smoke from farms,
Extinguished in the exhausted earth,
Unclenching like a fist and going.

Trees fume, cool, pour--and overflowing
Unstretch the feathers of birds and shake
Carpets from windows, brush with dew
The up-and-doing: and young lovers now
Their little resurrections make.

And now lightly to kiss all whom sleep
Stitched up--and wake, my darling, wake.
The impatient Boatman has been waiting
Under the house, his long oars folded up,
Like wings in waiting on the darkling lake.

The poet realizes that the morning he celebrates is an unimportant morning, no more important than any other--conversely, that it is an extraordinary morning, that each and every morning is equally important and to be treasured. Something goes singing in the landscape he describes, but we are not told what it is--a bird, the poet's own inner exultation, the music of the spheres, or something else entirely. It could be any or all of these things. The capes, or headlands, may seem to turn over in the early morning light because of the way they change color, from dark to light; or they may be personifications, waking to the new morning as humans do. The Adriatic is mentioned, and I would guess that the landscape is in Greece, a country where Durrell lived for many years and which he wrote about often and well.

The lines about the Adriatic, which is personified as a "she," as if it were an ancient sea goddess,

are interesting in their ambiguity. If one were to add a comma after “rides”, “washing” could be a verb and the Adriatic’s blue (color) and sun (reflections) described as washing up against the land and “against” the far-off horizon, which--in the time of the ancients--would literally have been seen as the edge of the world from which one might easily fall. (The horizon could also literally be the edge of the small, self-contained world of the speaker of the poem). Or is it (without the comma after “rides”) that the Adriatic bestrides and rides the sea as a goddess, and that the sea she rides is described as “washing” in the sense of a ceremonial or religious ablution which cleanses the world? The ambiguity lets us play with the words to see what varied meanings we can find.

The meter of the first line of the poem, “This unimportant morning,” has exactly the same meter as the first line of “The Sunlight on the Garden”: iambic trimeter with an extra syllable. The next line is dactylic dimeter, giving it the triple time of a waltz--ONE-two-three, ONE-two-three. The next two lines are in iambic tetrameter and have end rhymes. The penultimate line begins with two iambs, then inverts to a trochee, while the last line has three anapests followed by an iamb. The music of the lines becomes very clear, as I have said, when the lines are read aloud: The slow, stately cadence of the first lines builds to the rushed feeling of the last line, capturing the feeling of the rush of light in the morning as the sun ascends rapidly over the sea. I won't bother going through the meter and rhymes of the other stanzas, but they are well worth exploring on one’s own for the beauty of their sounds.

In the second stanza, “day rings in the higher airs”: Is day itself a bell, ringing in the day? Are the various sounds which we hear in the morning--birdsong, the high-pitched screech of cicadas--the higher airs we hear? Perhaps the higher airs are the literal airs of high places, pure because of being high up and therefore as yet unpolluted by people, or because of the purity (in the sense of being completely natural and unpremeditated) of the sounds of birds and cicadas. The higher airs could also include the higher arts such as poetry which the poet, arising early, makes to celebrate the day. Whatever this music of the morning is, it begins at a pitch of excitement--the exciting promise of a new morning--which slows “like a pulse” as the excitement of beginnings fades to smoke (smoke is a verb here) from farms--as if the smoke were from an extinguished fire, which in turn is likened to the unclenching fist of a dying person. Natural resources are exhausted; so are people. When day (life) is finished, the light of the sun is extinguished in the exhausted earth of the body; we release our hold on this world and our spirits depart.

A very dark tone to be introduced into a poem which celebrates life--yet, as Gordon Bowker remarked in his book on Durrell, *Through the Dark Labyrinth* (Ross, 1997), Durrell was “a celebrant of life over death.” The ever-present possibility of death is all the more reason for celebrating the mo-

ment as best one can.

Thus, in the third stanza, although the hardening and cooling of the world continues apace from the moment the sun rises, lovers rise and defy the fleeing moment with their joy. The images Durrell uses to express all this are beautiful: Trees "fume, cool, pour", their spreading limbs seem to "overflow" with green leafiness (as people stretch their limbs in luxurious yawns when waking up in the morning), and --curiously--"unstretch the feathers of birds." What does it mean to "unstretch the feathers of birds"? Perhaps it means that the trees offer cool places for birds to cease flying and fold their wings in shelter from the heat of the sun. Next, trees "shake carpets from windows"-- a wonderfully apt image for anyone who has seen a big, leafy tree swayed by the wind brush its branches against the eaves of a house. The trees also brush their morning dew against the heads and shoulders of early risers who walk beneath them on their morning promenades. And finally, "young lovers now/ Their little resurrections make." Each morning is a new life, as it were, a new escape from "sleep, the brother of death", as Homer said in the *Iliad* (XIV, 231 and XVI, 672). Lovers renew their vows to each other each day, and renew their beauty each morning to please each other.

The last stanza begins "And now lightly to kiss all whom sleep/ Stitched up." It may be the sun kissing each sleeper as his light steals through the window in the morning; it may be the poet blessing each sentient being in the world, through the words of his poem, out of his own happiness. It is in these lines that we find the allusion to Shakespeare: "Sleep that knits up the ravel'd sleeve of care,/ The death of each day's life, sore labor's bath,/ Balm of hurt minds, great nature's second course,/ Chief nourisher in life's feast" (*Macbeth*, Act II, scene 2, line 36). And the pace of the poem becomes even more urgent--"wake, my darling, wake"--for the poet knows that the impatient Boatman (perhaps the literal boatman they have hired to take them out on the lake, but also surely Charon, the ferryman who conveys the dead in his boat across the Styx to Hades--thus the portentous capitalization of the letter B) is waiting to take them away, so they, too, must be up-and-doing. The fact that the Boatman waits "under" the house where they have slept emphasizes his underworldliness, while the long oars "folded up/ Like wings in waiting" also hint at the eventual flight of the soul from the body. Furthermore, the lake is "darkling"--an archaic word, indicating that the lake--like death, like fate, like time--is deep, unfathomable.

Yet for all the dark undertones of this poem it strikes one as actually happy in tone, even euphoric. It sings to its conclusion, and I for one find myself feeling renewed each time I re-read it. That, for me, is the power of poetry, its tonic and its blessing.

Two extremely short poems which capture a moment of heightened intensity are Ezra Pound's famous "In a Station of the Metro" (Pound, 1957) and James Reeves' "In Less Than Seconds" (Reeves,

1972). I have used these two poems in tandem in poetry classes, as not only are they similar in various ways, they also offer an excellent introduction to how poetry works for students coming to poetry for the first time. Both are two lines long; both are written in irregular meter; in both, the first line sets the scene and the second line allows the speaker of the poem to comment on the significance of that scene. Both poems use a central metaphor to express the evanescence of time.

The title of Pound's poem helps the reader place the setting of the poem specifically: i.e., in a station of the Paris Metro, the subway system. Once this is understood, what the metaphor of the poem is intended to describe becomes much clearer to the reader. There is only one word longer than two syllables in the poem, "apparition," but it is of course the right word and cannot be replaced. Here is the poem in full:

The apparition of these faces in the crowd;
Petals on a wet, black bough.

The speaker of the poem, who is either standing on the platform waiting for the next train with the rest of the crowd or else on the incoming train, peering out of the window at the passengers waiting on the platform, likens the faces of the people he sees to petals on the bough of a tree. His thought is instantaneous; working the thought into a carefully crafted poem will come later (there are not many poets like Coleridge who receive--or claim to receive-- a poetic vision such as that of "Kubla Khan" instantly and whole, with no need for Wordsworth's "emotion recollected in tranquillity" and no need to revise). The petals (the central metaphor of the poem) are obviously light-colored, contrasting against the darkness of the wet, black bough. The bough is wet, no doubt, because it has been raining. Knowing Pound's predilection for Asian poetry, one can surmise that these boughs are probably cherry blossoms in spring.

The moment will instantly change, of course; these faces will immediately vanish and be replaced by new ones. They are indeed like apparitions: ghosts who appear briefly to the human eye and then disappear. And in this they represent the brevity of human life: "As for a human person--his days are like grass, he blooms like the wild flowers; as soon as the wind blows he is gone, never to be seen there again," Psalms 103:15,16, *The New Jerusalem Bible*). Nevertheless, they are beautiful and should be captured, if possible, in a poem, as a reminder to us of the importance of appreciating the beauty around us while we can.

The apparition is also the poet's: his apparition of the moment and what it means, in an instant. He likens the faces to cherry blossoms because cherry blossoms are especially celebrated for the briefness of their beauty, so that samurai who fell before their time were often compared to them. What seemed to be hard and invincible was actually soft and easily destroyed.

The lines of the poem, as Pound intended, are musical: The first line swells rhythmically with the stresses placed on the first and third syllables of “apparition,” the first syllable of “faces,” and on “crowd.” Then there is a pause, followed by the explosion of the stress on the first syllables of “petals” and the subsequent stresses on “wet,” “black,” and “bough.” The vowel sounds of “bough” cause the poem to end with a sigh. A beautiful little performance.

Reeves describes “In Less Than Seconds” as a bagatelle, which can mean either a trifle, a thing of no value or importance, or a piece of verse or music in a light style. The implication, of course, is that no moment is valueless or unimportant; none should be taken for granted. Here is the poem:

I look into their beautiful passing faces.

In less than seconds worlds have swum apart.

The fact that the narrator of Reeves’ poem begins the poem with “I” brings him into sharper focus than the speaker of Pound’s poem. It brings him and his feelings into the poem as Pound’s poem does not. Pound’s persona is an observer, but a detached one; he does not seem to desire a stronger connection with the other people he sees. Reeves’ narrator, however, though distant from the other people, would like to connect with them, but does not. That is part of the poignance of the moment he portrays; the desire for contact with others, but failure to achieve that contact.

Once again the scene is set in the first line and an observation made about the setting in the second line. The first line is irregular iambic pentameter, the second line regular iambic pentameter. In the first line the last two syllables of “beautiful” must be said quickly to fit them into the rhythm of the line, emphasizing the fleetingness of the faces as they pass by, and the fleetingness of beauty itself. The speaker doesn’t merely look at the passing faces; his is not just a casual look. He looks into their faces, as if drinking them in, as if looking into their souls as well as seeing their bodies. The first line ends with a complete pause, as if indicating that there is a chance to communicate, however fleeting it is. The speaker can choose to approach the other people, can attempt to speak to them. But in less than the few seconds it takes for those beautiful faces to pass him by, he hesitates and is lost. The immensity of this loss is suggested by the word “worlds”: It is not just faces (the central metaphor of Reeves’ poem) that have swum by, it is whole worlds, the worlds of separate individual lives, with all their personal histories, their unique qualities and their secret dreams. They swim by, which suggests both the fluidity of time and also the immensity of the sea of isolation in which the speaker struggles to connect to another.

Perhaps the speaker of the poem does not hesitate to approach the others; perhaps he chooses not to. Perhaps he prefers and needs the distance from others that Pound’s speaker prefers, a distance a poet needs if he or she is to write well and truly. Nevertheless, one feels that the speaker of

Reeves' poem would like to connect, in some way or other, with others, if it were possible. Perhaps Reeves is suggesting to us that complete connection with another is not possible, that all of us are ultimately alone. This is both our blessing and our curse, our solace and our distress. It is wonderful to be alone at times, letting the imagination soar freely, unfettered by others. But aloneness can be a burden, too, and sometimes one accepts gratefully the welcome presence of another into one's own loneliness.

For Delmore Schwartz, part of the pathos of passing time is our awareness of our own ignorance and our fight against time in our search for knowledge and wisdom. He said, "Every point of view, every kind of knowledge and every kind of experience is limited and ignorant" (Schwartz, 1967), and his poems are obsessed with the struggle against time: "Time is the school in which we learn,/ Time is the fire in which we burn" (from "Calmly We Walk Through This April's Day"). What can save us from misery and give us joy, according to Schwartz, is not knowledge, but love for each other: "...night comes soon,/ With its cold mountains, with desolation,/ unless Love builds its city" ("In the Slight Ripple, The Mind Perceives the Heart"). In "Time's Dedication," the speaker of Schwartz's poem says to his lover, echoing Marvell, that "We cannot stand still: time is dying,/ We are dying: Time is farewell!", but that they can face this with equanimity, even with happiness, with their love for each other:

> ...Stay then, stay! Wait now for me,
> Deliberately, with care and circumspection,
> Deliberately
> Stop.
> When we are in step, running together,
> Our pace equal, our motion one,
> Then we will be well, parallel and equal,
> Running together down the macadam road,
> Walking together,
> Controlling our pace before we get old,
> Walking together on the receding road,
> Like Chaplin and his orphan sister,
> Moving together through time to all good.

Yet what if love itself fails one? Then where does one turn? This is the problem that many of Auden's poems address. In one of his greatest poems, the ballad-like "As I Walked Out One Evening" (Auden, 1976), the speaker of the poem overhears a declaration of undying love from one lover to an-

other, after which he hears “all the clocks of the city” contradict the lover, asserting that love will die and depicting a grim picture of the future:

’O plunge your hands in water,
Plunge them in up to the wrist;
Stare, stare in the basin
And wonder what you’ve missed...

’O look, look in the mirror,
O look in your distress;
Life remains a blessing
Although you cannot bless.

’O stand, stand at the window
As the tears scald and start,
You shall love your crooked neighbour
With your crooked heart.’

At the end of the poem the lovers, deaf to the message of the clocks, are gone, and the speaker of the poem is left alone with his terrible knowledge: “The clocks had ceased their chiming,/ And the deep river ran on.” Time runs out for us, but the natural world continues its course, oblivious to our misery. As Auden said of robins singing in his garden,

...Not one of them was capable of lying.
There was not one which knew that it was dying
Or could have with a rhythm or a rhyme
Assumed responsibility for time.

Let them leave language to their lonely betters
Who count some days and long for certain letters;
We, too, make noises when we laugh or weep:
Words are for those with promises to keep.

(“Their Lonely Betters”)

Auden’s solution to the dilemma of broken vows and broken hearts is a Christian one: to remain steadfast in love whatever the cost. “Love is always patient and kind; love is never jealous; love is not boastful or conceited, it is never rude and never seeks its own advantage, it does not take offence

or store up grievances. Love does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but finds its joy in the truth. It is always ready to make allowances, to trust, to hope and endure whatever comes. Love never comes to an end" (I Corinthians 13: 4-8). Auden puts it this way: "If equal affection cannot be,/ Let the more loving one be me" ("The More Loving One"). To go even further and love one's enemies, as Christ advised, could be the saving of the world.

Our awareness of the pathos of passing time is also due to our knowledge of those who have gone before us and those who will follow after: those we would like to know better but never will. We trace our ancestors, get in touch with lost friends, leave mementoes of ourselves for those left behind in a desire for continuity, in the hope that some part of us will remain on earth, that we will not be totally obliterated. For this reason we are often moved by photographs of those we do not even know: We know that the people in the photographs mattered to somebody, at some point in time, and hoped to preserve their memory through the photographs that were taken. How much more poignant, then, is the photograph of someone we knew and cared about.

Elaine Feinstein deals with this aspect of the passing of time in her poem "Snowdonia" (Feinstein, 2000), in which she looks at a photograph of herself at age three with her father and other people, posed before Snowdon, the highest mountain in Wales. For the poet, the photo is "a piece of my lost history" and she questions the memories the photo evokes: "Do I remember, or is it a dream/ that the group of relations, resting/ on stones, are exhausted to mutiny,/ while my father continues to urge us upward?" She lets her imagination work on the memories, so that

> For a moment I imagine his voice.
> 'The air, taste the air.' And my throat
> tightens, searching the square
> of a black and white photo,
> a band of ghosts, and a
> mountain's majestic glare.

Her throat tightens not only in an imagined attempt to taste the long-ago air of Snowdon, but also because she becomes choked with emotion, the emotion of knowing that all the people in the photo except her are now ghosts (and appear ghost-like in the black-and-white photo), and that indeed her own self at three is also, in a sense, a ghost. The air she imagines tasting is all that's left of the past experience, air that she then, to console herself in her isolation, fashions into the air (as in melody or song) of the poem, air which we in turn experience, and literally breathe in and out, when we read the poem.

David Sutton is another poet who deals with the pathos of lost time in his poems. In "The Strange-

ness” (Sutton, 1982), he considers the strangeness of how we shall appear to later generations when we are “gone/ With steam and gaslight and the Inca cities...to live in photographs,/ The crackle of old tapes, And bundled letters,/ And in our children's minds...” and asks,

Those, our inheritors,
What will they say of us?
How far our world, what strangeness.

How quickly, too, that distance
Will grow, till time’s horizon
Cuts us off.　Here then

A minor celebration
Made in time’s despite,
Of lost things, and the daylight

Of common afternoons,
Though none, beloved strangeness,
Remember or believe us.

We must celebrate our time as it unfolds before us, for its meaning will be lost to those who come after us, just as the experience of the lives of our forebears has been lost to us.　Only through the imaginative recreation (re-creation) of the past can we approach understanding of the lives of our predecessors.

Sutton attempts such a re-creation in his poem, “Student's Window, Bath University” (Sutton, 1982):

Who, on some evening of spring, looks from his window
Or late at night curtains the loneliness
Of lit anonymous towns on dark horizons?
An answer: painted white upon one pane
In the round hand of almost childishness
‘Anne’s Window.’　So it’s you, my absent Anne,
Whose small room, high and barren, like a cell,
I use this night or two, and whose young head
My own replaces on this narrow bed.

I do not know you, Anne; we shall not meet,
And yet I ache with this frail almost knowing
That makes me see you over there, alone,
Caught in some moment far from common ground,
Poised in a soft uncertainty of growing,
Childhood behind, ahead the not yet found.
I see the tongue-tip, see the secret smile
As you begin to leave upon the view
That small affirmative, something of you.

Except for the first line, which is irregular, this poem is written entirely in regular iambic pentameter, divided into two nine-line stanzas, with a rhyme scheme of *abcdbdeff* for each stanza, each ending in a couplet. Yet the natural grace of the lines masks the skill which went into their making.

The answer to the question the speaker of the poem poses in the first three lines is, first of all, himself. He is talking to himself in his loneliness, but realizes that the second answer to his question is a person who was there before him, who perhaps felt some of the same feelings he does when looking out onto the dark and anonymous city landscape. His writing of the poem is an attempt to connect imaginatively to the person who was there before him. It is not a complete connection, which is why he says "I ache with this frail almost knowing." He longs to escape anonymity and the physical barriers both of lost time and the prison-like room he is in: the "small room, high and barren, like a cell" and his "narrow bed." He senses that the long-gone Anne also wanted to escape the solitude of her "moment far from common ground" and to affirm her existence by leaving some trace of herself in the room for a later person to discover. Part of her loneliness stemmed from her passage from childhood to adulthood, a passage which is difficult and lonely for everyone. If we cannot navigate such passages easily, we can at least give comfort both to ourselves and to others through expressing, or attempting to express, the meaning of such passages.

Sutton compares the craft of poetry and its effort to record the pathos of passing time to photography in "On a Book of Nature Photography" (Sutton, 1986). For both the photographer whose book he is perusing and himself, their art is one in which

...No theory you preach but practice, practice.
Beside the images laconic notes
Record a focussed being: angle, stance,
Precision of the lens, the time of light.

The notes are laconic because, in both poetry and photography, the images must speak for themselves, even though they may speak differently to different people. Such art can only be learned through practice, can only be achieved if the artist is completely focussed on the task at hand, constantly aware of his or her own beliefs, movements, precision, and the surrounding world.

Sutton also compares the writing of poetry to archaeology in "Finders Keepers" (Sutton, 1986): "All was to be revealed,/ Labelled and exact,/ As on some site lies peeled/ Each layered artifact." However, he says, writing a poem is far more hit-and-miss than archaeology: "The flashing random spade/ Ungovernably delves./ Who thought to see displayed/ Such debris of lost selves?" Hopefully, the speaker of this poem says, the debris will turn out to be more than debris, to be treasure for those who come after: "Some relic, then receive,/ If lost indeed be found,/ The right of trove I leave/ To this my troubled ground."

This poem is written in slightly irregular iambic trimeter, with some trochees thrown in--for example, in the first stanza, the first line is regular iambic trimeter, the second line is trochaic trimeter and catalectic, the third and fourth lines are regular iambic trimeter. The rhyme scheme is *abab*. Part of the appeal of David Sutton's poetry is that he so often uses strict or fairly strict meter. It is a pleasure to see a contemporary poet set himself such metrical challenges and to overcome them so successfully, so that the poems flow as smoothly as rushing water and sound as pleasantly to the ear.

Sutton also celebrates the poetry of place-names in England that retrieve the past for us: "Bless the namers, men/ Of pen or plough./ History, receive/ Another now./ Poet, labourer,/ They do not pass./ We scent them on the map/ Like new-mown grass" (Sutton, 1991). Yet he admits, in "Vocabularies" (Sutton, 1991), that "The matchless universe [is] beyond our words" to express, though one does one's best.

Many of Sutton's poems celebrate nature, and he hopes that the natural landscapes he loves will be there for others when he is gone: "...let others come/ As we have come, each year, to these innocent edges/ Where the bruised heart is healed by apple-dreams" (Sutton, 2000). "Apple-dreams" suggests the fabled apples of Eden, where the original human inhabitants did not at first know death, did not realize that they would have to leave their garden to others. In the end, Sutton says, one can only be grateful for what we have while we have it, and appreciate it while we can:

> ...one can only be grateful
> For the rare conjunctions, for the accidentals
> And grace-notes of existence; can only listen
> For the once heard, though never-heard again.
>
> (Sutton, 2000)

This is the song of many poets. Auden says, “In the deserts of the heart/ Let the healing fountain start,/ In the prison of his days/ Teach the free man how to praise.” De la Mare, who loved the natural settings of England as Sutton does and also wrote often of them, gave in his poem “Fare Well” (De la Mare, 1979) good advice regarding the pathos of passing time, and good words with which to end:

Look thy last on all things lovely,
Every hour. Let no light
Seal thy sense in deathly slumber
    Till to delight
Thou hast paid thy utmost blessing;
Since that all things thou wouldst praise
Beauty took from those who loved them
    In other days.

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