

Coddiwompling
Quarterly

SOMETHING OF SPRING

The Secret Sublimity of the Precious Imperfect

Volume 1, Issue 3
Fall 2026

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A Note to our Readers

We would like to apologize to our pumpkin-loving readers for the lack of orange gourds in this issue. Due to a severe case of cucurbitophobia in one of our most dedicated readers, we assiduously sought to avoid any visuals of the aforementioned, as well as some of this season's favorite warming spices, out of consideration to this friend of the Quarterly's.
We thank you, as always, for your understanding.

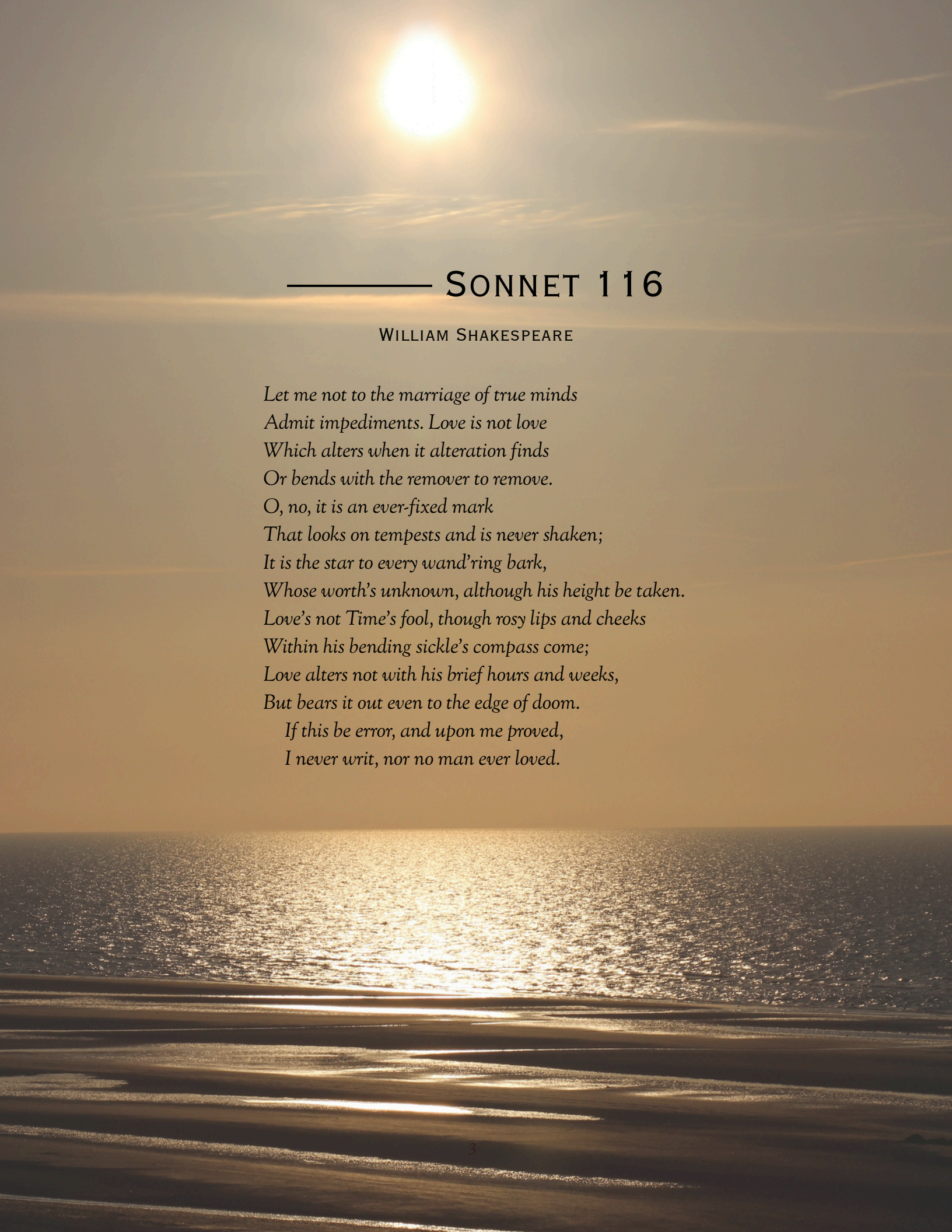
Gratefully,
The Troubadours

Look, I have learned something new!
I can be a poet too!
This, I think, is called a "rhyme"
It belongs where folks tell "time"
Sincerely,
Anonymous



Cover Art: "Autumn" by Frederic Edwin Church, 1875

Translated poetry written by our esteemed colleagues from the Middle Ages can be found at poetryintranslation.com



Sonnet 116

William Shakespeare

Let me not to the marriage of true minds
Admit impediments. Love is not love
Which alters when it alteration finds
Or bends with the remover to remove.
O, no, it is an ever-fixed mark
That looks on tempests and is never shaken;
It is the star to every wand'ring bark,
Whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken.
Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks
Within his bending sickle's compass come;
Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,
But bears it out even to the edge of doom.
If this be error, and upon me proved,
I never writ, nor no man ever loved.

THE OCEAN OF THE HEART

An Interview with Rosemar Avelyn

Resident Puritan: Just imagine you are in an NPR studio right now... the mic is a little too close for comfort, but this is part of the glamour...

All right! Welcome to this edition of the Coddiwompling... interrogation! In this edition, we're interviewing Rosemar Avelyn.

We have an issue that I think is very important and impacts a wide variety of people this summer. There's not a lot of pundits out talking about it. We really wanted to know your opinion and thoughts and feelings on seaweed?

Rosemar Avelyn: In any form...? Dried...? In the ocean...? Just seaweed in general?

RP: You can take it however you'd like.

RA: If I have to swim with the seaweed I don't like it very much. If it's there on the shore, it's kind of whatever, and if I eat it it's not my favorite thing in the world but supposedly it's very good for you. So there's that. It's situational.

RP: Do you think seaweed has a different connotation than regular weeds? You use the words "that's great weed" at a party, but you don't change the form. You wouldn't say "a wood weed" when it's in the forest. Why do we add "sea" to the weed?

RA: Well, one thing that comes to mind is that dandelions, for instance, are weeds; technically true [here Pilgrim Puddleglum protests, unsuccessfully] and I think there are quite a lot of flowering plants that are considered to be weeds. So I don't know, maybe there's just more variety? Maybe we like to name things however we like and there isn't really a reason?

RP: Do you think putting "sea" in front of random objects - like sea glass, seaweed, etc–gives them a different connotation automatically?

RA: I think that's a little bit like asking me "what is the ocean?"

RP: Can you explain this a little more?

Pilgrim Puddleglum:...or why you think it is an unanswerable question?

[Several minutes of confusion, in which Resident Puritan asks a question and Rosemar Avelyn makes a statement on a subject which is variously heard as being about "ghosts" or "goats."]

RA: You know, there are actual mythical creatures that are half goat and half fish–I'm pretty sure they're called capricorns.

RP: Why is it not called a sea goat? Run that through AI, please.

[*Pilgrim Puddleglum has fact-checked, not using AI. There is in fact a mythological sea-goat called a capricorn. It is half-goat, half-fish, and its name literally means "horned like a goat"–implying, she supposes, that it is not literally a goat.]*

[Rosemar Avelyn nearly dies coughing]

RP: Anyways, back to the ocean... Another question: why "seaside" instead of just "side"?

RA: Why "hillside" instead of just "side"? Or "mountainside"? I feel like that term does have land analogs. Anyway, getting back to the ocean question... I feel like the ocean, because it carries so many connotations with it and so many physical properties with it, that it is something that has always been very rich in the human imagination. And you brought up sea glass–it's a great example because it is actually physiologically different from any other kind of glass because it's gone through the process of being in the ocean: getting pounded into the sand and getting reformed and smoothed out over a long period of time. We don't actually have a land analog to that that's exactly the same. So there's this kind of sense of impact and pressure and time that the ocean carries with it when we're talking about these sorts of objects. Driftwood too. When I see a piece of driftwood or sea glass, one of my perennial thoughts is, where did this originally come from? It could have come from a long ways away. It could have started out on the other side of the world. It's possible! Not likely, but it's possible.

RP: Yeah, this is reminding me of an article I won't remember very well... might be from the Atlantic, which would fit the ocean theme, or from the New Yorker, which doesn't fit the theme... and it was about messages in a bottle. This is a real thing that people do, and these messages arrive at someone. There are people who try to piece together these stories and it's really fascinating. Which brings me to my next question... Why do humans have such a fascination with the sea? It's wet, cold, dark; things mysterious lurk there... and yet we're kind of fascinated by it, I think. But why do humans have such a fascination with the sea, and why do YOU have such a fascination with the sea?

RA: Okay, this is a working theory–

PP: Ooooh...

RA: I think one of the reasons is because it's one of the last places on earth where we (human beings) are not in complete control.

RP: Wouldn't one expect the reverse? Isn't lack of control one of our biggest fears?

RA: Are you fascinated by things that are greater than you?

RP: I'm not the one answering questions today.

PP: You're dodging the question.

RA: This is part of the interview process.

RP: Well, I suppose, but are we fascinated by things which are innately fearful?

RA: Would you be super comfortable if your guardian angel suddenly appeared next to you and went, "Hey, how's it going?" You'd probably be a little terrified.

RP: Yeah, just a little bit.

RA: I think as human beings we do have a drive and a pull to things that are greater than us, that are mysterious, that are beautiful–and ultimately this draws us back to God, who is infinitely beyond us, and we are constantly pulled towards HIM. The ocean is one of those things which is for human beings unconquerable. And that has a certain amount of constant draw for people I think. But there's a lot of other things too. The ocean is beautiful; it's deep; it's powerful. There's also something very full of life about the ocean. It's teeming with life, right? And I go back to the difference between space and the ocean a lot, because these are the two things that people end up very afraid of–space and the ocean. And the difference between them is this: in space, you can't really leave the ship; there's no other life. It's the isolation that terrifies people. In space the fear is an existential dread–in this place there is only me–extreme isolation face to face with indifferent nothing. [Which if you think about it are really two different fears exacerbated by one another.] In the ocean it's a bit different. In the ocean, there's absolutely something there; you might not know what it is, you might never see it, but you can be sure there is *something* in the ocean with you. It's the fear of being face to face with something that is somehow greater than you. Scientists have recorded noises–noises coming from something very big, something organic, and we have no idea what's making it. There is so much in the ocean that we don't know about. And that's really cool! And really scary.

There's a pull of curiosity, a pull of wonder, a pull of fascination. And all of those things are really cool.

RP: Just to address the second half of the question–what is your personal fascination with the sea? Or is it just a normal human fascination?

RA: Both, I think; it's certainly fair to say I have a normal human fascination with the ocean. I also have a very strong personal connection to the ocean. For me there's something very comforting about it.

PP: Even though you just said that generically there's something uncomfortable about the ocean?

RA: I think they're both true. The rhythm of the ocean is something very soothing, and that rhythmic sound I think is actually...mmm...I'm not sure if it's an actual study, but there's some sort of relation people have drawn

between the heartbeat the child hears in the mother's womb and the sound of the ocean, and there's something very primal that finds that comforting. But I love the ocean because it's beautiful and mysterious and powerful, and I look at all that and think "Wow, that's like me, and that's like God, and it's awesome."

RP: Thank you for sharing! This is a little off script, but I'm thinking of a quote from Augustine: "...men go forth to wonder at the heights of mountains, the huge waves of the sea, the broad flow of the rivers, the extent of the ocean, and the courses of the stars, and omit to wonder at themselves." (Confessions, X:8) And you're describing the waves and the heartbeat that a child might hear, and there's an analogy there of the ocean and the heart. And perhaps even what you described about what's spiritual and unknown about the ocean and the heart, and I'm wondering if you'd comment on that.

RA: I think that's absolutely true–much of my meditation on the ocean has been on putting those things side by side, the heart and the ocean, and how similar they are. You think about how people are entire worlds–entire oceans–unto themselves, with whole histories, secrets, and mysteries you can spend a lifetime getting to know. I sometimes discuss with a friend how sad it would be if you were married to someone and stopped trying to get to know each other. That's absolutely true–in a way particularly true–for marriage, but it's also true for every friendship that you have; there's always something new to explore, to share, to learn from, to give to. It's just this constant beautiful growth that happens.

RP: Yeah, totally...

RA: It's the "Sleeping Beauty principle" that Clarke talks about... that I may or may not be slightly...mmm... invested in.*

**[W. Norris Clarke, S.J., uses the fairy tale of Sleeping Beauty multiple times in his lecture Person and Being to highlight the human being's need for another person to wake himself up to himself (cf. Person and Being, 45, 65). This indispensable need for communio and its unique characteristic as an enlightening force to the human being I {Rosemar Avelyn} call the "Sleeping Beauty principle".]*

RP: That's really beautiful. This also reminds me of... you're at the beach, right? And there's so much you can see or discover...So I'm wondering, do you have a favorite seashell? Please describe in detail. There's so much to see or discover, even in the singular seashell.

RA: I regret to say that (rather boringly) I do not have a favorite seashell. I find seashells cool; I think they're pretty; but I don't go to the ocean for them. I really go to the ocean for the ocean, and the seashells are a nice sort of side accompaniment–but I'm not really a seashell collector.

RP: They belong to the ocean.

RA: Yeah. They're like ephemera. They're like flowers to me. They're really fun to find on the beach, but most of the time I just drop them back in the water and leave them for others to find later. They're ocean flowers.

RP: That's kind of beautiful, because you're letting it be where it is, and not holding onto it.

RA: The one seashell I did keep is the one I tripped over. I was down in Virginia with my family on vacation after a hurricane had gone through, and the ocean was still very rough and dangerous–enormous waves pounding and pounding–and I was running back to shore because the huge waves were coming, and I tripped over something, reached down and grabbed it, and it was this big, beautiful, almost fully intact conch shell. Makes for a fun memory and a good story. I did get sucked under a few times by those waves and that was pretty scary.

RP: The ocean is a powerful thing. Do you have any final thoughts?

[Rosemar Avelyn once again nearly dies coughing]

PP: Shall we end by sending Rosemar Avelyn to the seaside to recover from her tuberculosis?

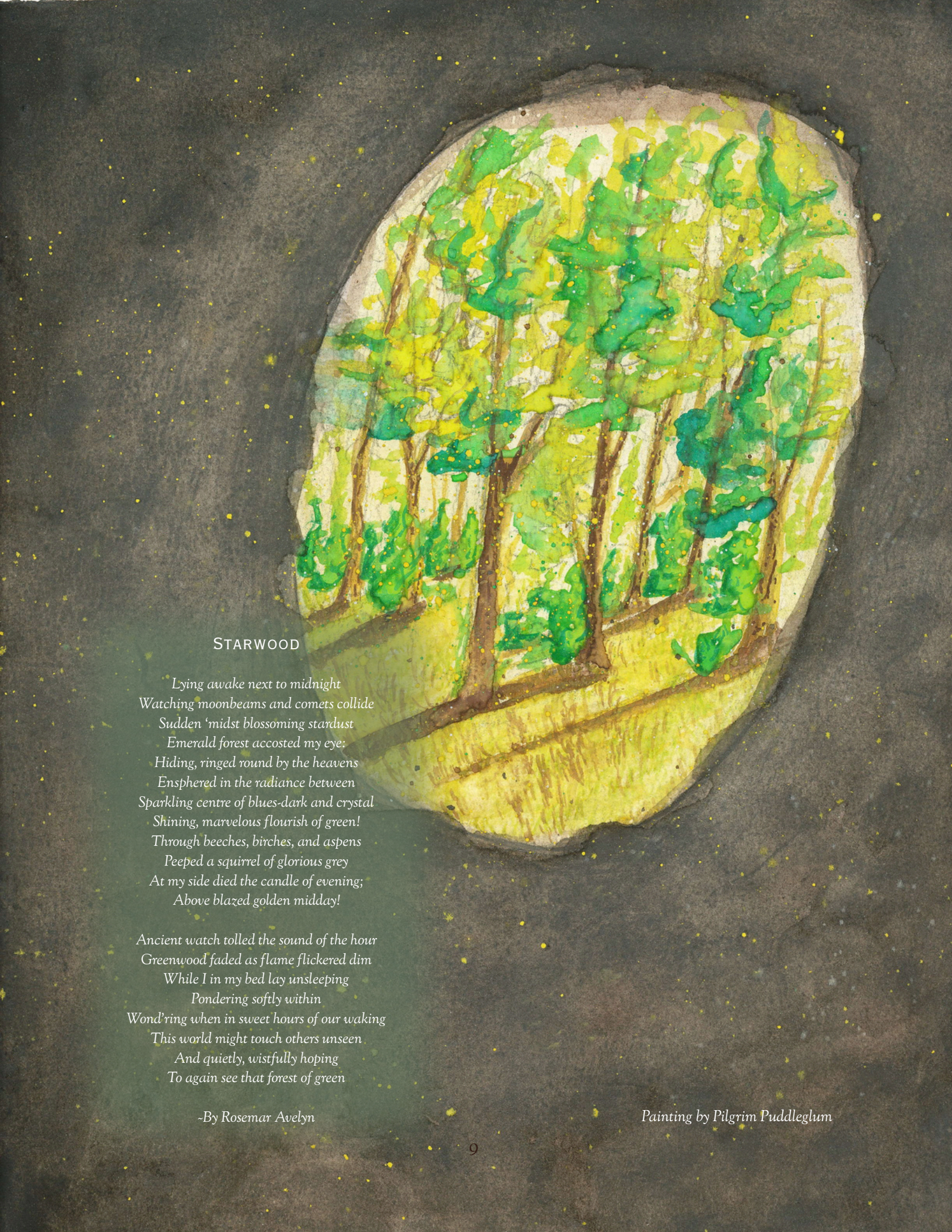
RP: Yes, yes. I think that is a good ending.

[Rosemar Avelyn attempts–perhaps unconvincingly–to protest she is not in fact dying from tuberculosis and is soundly ignored.]

Thank you so much for your time! This has been the Resident Puritan, who, if I had a heart, would have been deeply moved by your discourse, but I am buttoned up too tightly and do not have emotions. This has been another edition of the Coddiwompling whatever else we call this. I am clearly an abysmal host.

RA: You are abysmal like the ocean, in all the best ways.





Starwood

Lying awake next to midnight
Watching moonbeams and comets collide
Sudden 'midst blossoming stardust
Emerald forest accosted my eye:
Hiding, ringed round by the heavens
Ensphered in the radiance between
Sparkling centre of blues-dark and crystal
Shining, marvelous flourish of green!
Through beeches, birches, and aspens
Peeped a squirrel of glorious grey
At my side died the candle of evening;
Above blazed golden midday!

Ancient watch tolled the sound of the hour
Greenwood faded as flame flickered dim
While I in my bed lay unsleeping
Pondering softly within
Wond'ring when in sweet hours of our waking
This world might touch others unseen
And quietly, wistfully hoping
To again see that forest of green

~By Rosemar Avelyn

Painting by Pilgrim Puddleglum

THE PATTERN AND THE LONGING

by Pilgrim Puddleglum

Hesiod's Theogony, the ancient Greek poem on the origins of the world and the gods, begins not with creation but with the Muses. The nine goddesses of the arts, what the Greeks would collectively group as music, inspire Hesiod to tell his tale of the world. They lead "the fair/ dances arousing longing, with rapid steps;" (Theogony, 7-8) they "walk at night, chanting their fair song," (10) and they appear to Hesiod with words that seem both insulting and confusing:

"Rustic shepherds, evil oafs, nothing but bellies,
We know how to say many lies as if they were true,
And when we want, we know how to speak the truth." (26-28)

There the direct quote ends. That's all Hesiod decides to relate verbatim, assuming he even heard these words verbatim - the Muses, after all, say many lies as if they were true. They do go on to give him both the command and the power "to celebrate what will be and what was...to sing the race of the blessed who always are, but always to sing of themselves first and also last." (32-34)

As a Christian of the 21st century AD, I am no worshipper of the Muses. My admiration, awe, and affection for them and theirs, however, remain. Hesiod has much to say in these few lines about the nature of poetry and the reasons for our vibrantly and intimately human love of it.

Why place the Muses first? The answer lies in the rest of the story. The Greek world, chronologically, begins with Chaos, not the ordered Word and command of God with which the Christian world begins. The primordial reality of the Greeks is anarchic. The story of how the world morphed from Chaos into the power of the gods of Olympus - a tentative power subject to overthrow - is rife with a violence and strangeness detached from and not subject to the moral judgments of humanity. I'd submit that the Greeks, then, were singing of a largely a-moral world in which their particular place involved the arts and ethics. In the chronology of creation, the Muses don't show up until the new gods have already taken power; they are the children of Zeus and Memory. They show us a small and insignificant humanity involved in an attempt to make sense of its inexplicable desire for nobility in a bewildering universe.

" And when we want,

we know how to speak the truth."

Poetry for the ancient Greeks, then, involved humanity confronting the largeness of life with a sense of beauty. I have no time or space to include examples to support this, although I would very much like to in a later and longer project; I would direct the curious and unconvinced to Homer's Iliad and the tragedies of Aeschylus and Sophocles.

When the Muses first show up in the Theogony, they are dancing. And not only do they dance, but their dance inspires longing in others. The spirits of melody, poetry, epic, and so on are explicitly described, then, as an order inspiring an ache.

First, order. Dance, even at its most wild, requires a certain ordering or rhythm of its steps to be anything more than a staggering or stumbling. To describe poetry as a dance is to imply a certain order in it. There is order both in the world and in the poetry itself. The world is an enormous and mysterious place, but we do not always perceive it as such. It is at the moments when we do that poetry springs up, and we catch a glimpse of a pattern, or the lack of a pattern, or what we wish was a pattern. Then we create a pattern of words and imperfectly catch its shadow.

Second, the ache. Order, for the Greeks, is not found in the foundation of the world, and hence the ache of both suffering and questioning is where poetry begins and ends for them. For other cultures and other beliefs, this relationship between the dance and the ache will be different, but the ache is universal in this imperfect human world of ours. For what is the longing inspired? Hesiod does not tell us. I think there is a truth in this. Who knows what the ache is for? We simply know that it is there. I believe it is for God. But I also believe that there is an unknowability to God, at least in this world before the veil is lifted. Poetry always catches the ache when it catches the shadow of a pattern; sometimes it is deeply sad, but sometimes it is deeply glad. A longing can be a delight as well as a misery, if it is for something worth having. It is simply the consequence of our not yet having the good we perceive, and yet refusing to stop perceiving that not-yet-possessed good.

It is worth noting here that the Muses walk at night, not during the day. It would take a whole article to discuss the blindness into which the poet is often plunged - Socrates mentions it in the Apology - but suffice it to say here that the poet does not need to understand, but rather to see, to experience, and to relate.

What about the lines directed to Hesiod - the ones where he's insulted as an evil shepherd who lives by his belly? Well, that's the condition that the Muses come to remedy. Humanity has a tendency to live from moment to moment in the worst way possible. Being mindful of the present moment is a good thing. Refusing to see the meaning in anything beyond the simple fact of it is another. To be self-possessed is good. To be self-restricted or isolated is not so good.

The "belly" is directly referring to the appetites, but I'd argue you could extend that to the emotions - whatever is happening inside of you, on any level, at the moment, disconnected from both anything coming before or after and disconnected from everything else around you.

The Muses come to Hesiod to free him from this slavery. They tell him to speak of the past and the future - not his own individual past and future, the unreal spaces we tend to fill with present regrets and fears, but the past and future of the world which we inhabit. "The world is larger than you, but you are the one who perceives it," the Muses tell Hesiod and us through him.

Last but by no means least, what are we to make of the odd claim that the Muses do not always tell the truth? As one of my 14 year old students astutely pointed out, the Muses can't seem to present anything as a lie. Even the lies are presented as if they were true. What makes things look true? That's a question for the reader, but I see two possibilities:

1. These non-realities are also deeply felt personal experiences, and thus are subjectively true, although they may reflect a distortion of objective reality.
2. They are beautiful, and so we wish they were true and feel that, on some level at least, they must be.



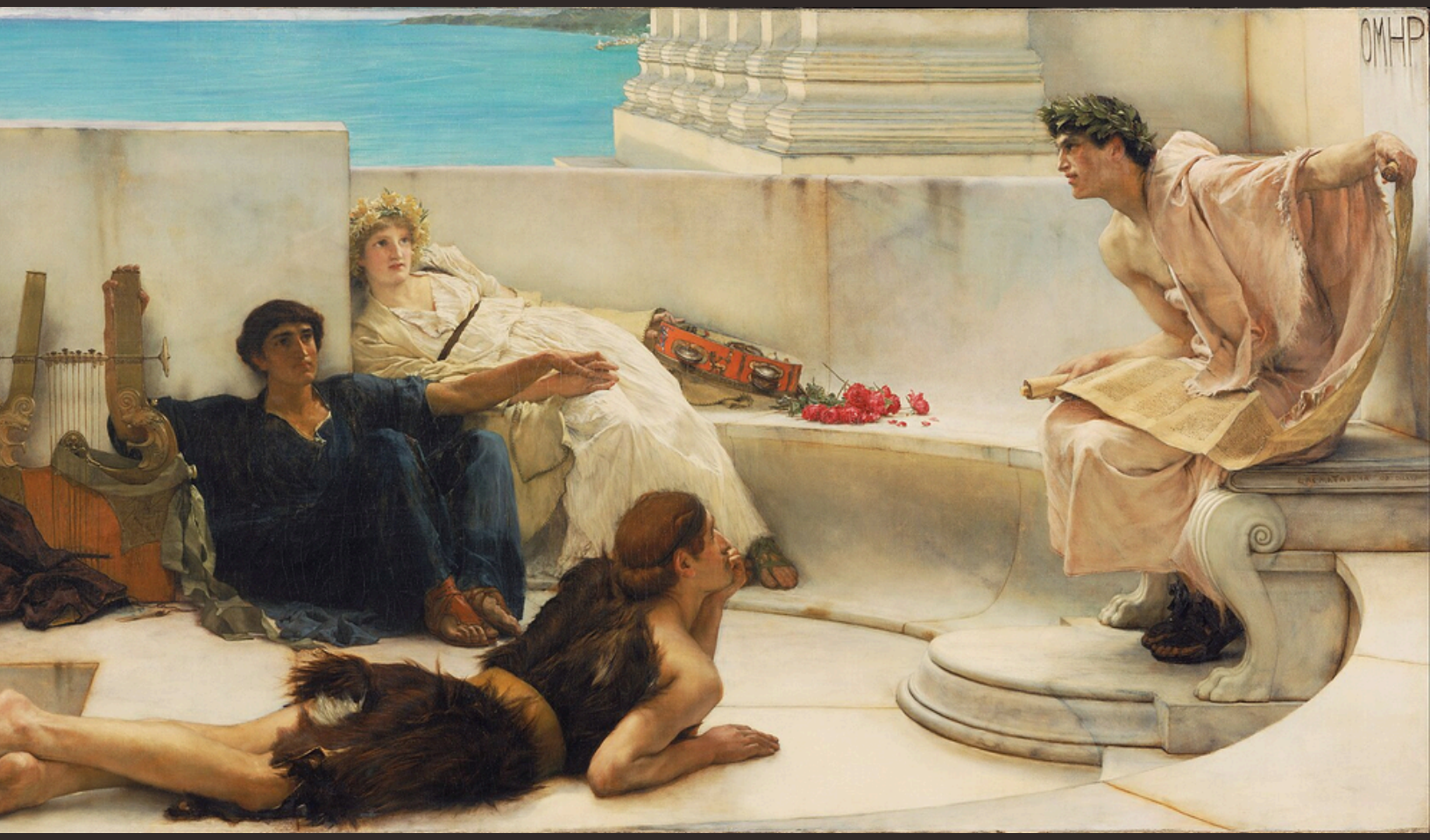
...poetry is a net to catch

the shadow of a pattern

and a longing

Poetry often includes one or both of these things. But we must remember that poetry is a net to catch the shadow of a pattern and a longing. There are always realities, always truths, behind the patterns and longings captured by poetry in all its forms. Large cultural poems, like the epics of the ancient Greeks, catch the shadow of what that people thought and wished of the world. Dynamic tragic or comic poems catch the shadow of what people felt and experienced of the world, as individuals and as part of a whole. Small lyric poems catch the shadow of what one person sees of the world. But all contain a deep awareness of a Truth which eludes humanity's full understanding and which still commands its full devotion.

Poetry, then, even in its blindness, always calls us to love.



A Reading from Homer

Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadera (detail)

Sources:

Hesiod, trans. Caldwell, *Theogony*. Hackett Publishing Company, 2009

The Taxonomy of Poetry and Prose, as to their Genus

By Cascadian M. Bugspatter

Words, for alas my trade is words, a barren burst of rhyme [1]

If you are asked whether a sonnet of Shakespeare is a poem, or if the Iliad is a poem, or a Haiku by Basho, most likely you will answer with an easy and unqualified affirmative. If next you read a piece of free verse, your answer will most likely remain the same, with only a few holdouts denying it. What then about the lyrics of a pop song? Or a notable speech, full of figure and metrical intonations? A chapter of Aristotle? A car manual? A list of groceries?

By the last of these, only the most radical of theorists will declare it poetry, and then more in the reception or re-presentation as a found text. It is doubtful perhaps that it even rises to being prose. The common opinion, whether we speak of the many or the wise, will distinguish between poetry and prose. What is wanted is a precise knowledge of the specific difference; but first, we must understand the nature of their common genus.

This genus is the productive art that uses language to communicate concept. As Plato says, every productive art communicates concept in a way: a form, belonging to the art and dwelling in the mind of the artist, is expressed in the material of the craft. But the goal or endpoint of language is to transmit the form to another mind, and the medium is words; it is not to be confused with generation (as fire producing fire or life another life) because it does not generate mind but a concept belonging to mind. The distinction matters because it is a distinction which does not hold quite universally: the Divine Word is at once like concept and like the form of the Author. But this is the exception that, so to speak, proves the rule. Every spoken word is removed from this Divine Word by a series of imperfections and limitations. Thus, when God speaks creatures into being through the Word, these creatures are indeed expressions of Divine concept: but they are partial in extent and imperfect in clarity, like the stained and shattered glass of a Gothic window. And these “obsclear” creatures are the primary referents of our own mental concepts or inner words (St. Augustine). Our language then expresses in the external word these concepts, yet another layer of “obsclarity.” In short, that by which the concept is communicated is in every instance (outside the Divine Mystery) imperfectly adequate. The like is communicated by the unlike. Light diffused.

Just as, then, each creature or being has an irreducible element of the univocal and the equivocal in relationship to its Author – the which we call the analogy of being – so too does every symbol of human language. And thus, all our communications by language must deal with both elements or poles of "obsclarity." Unless concept is conveyed from mind to mind, language fails; but it lies in the very nature of the symbols to eclipse as well as reflect. This belongs to the symbol because of what it is, as it were, in its own mode of existence: just as with creatures in the primary sense. We may attend to creatures as they are and develop a science of them; we may do so likewise for the expressions of our language. Words have a kind of life in themselves, a vivacity without which they would be no sign at all.

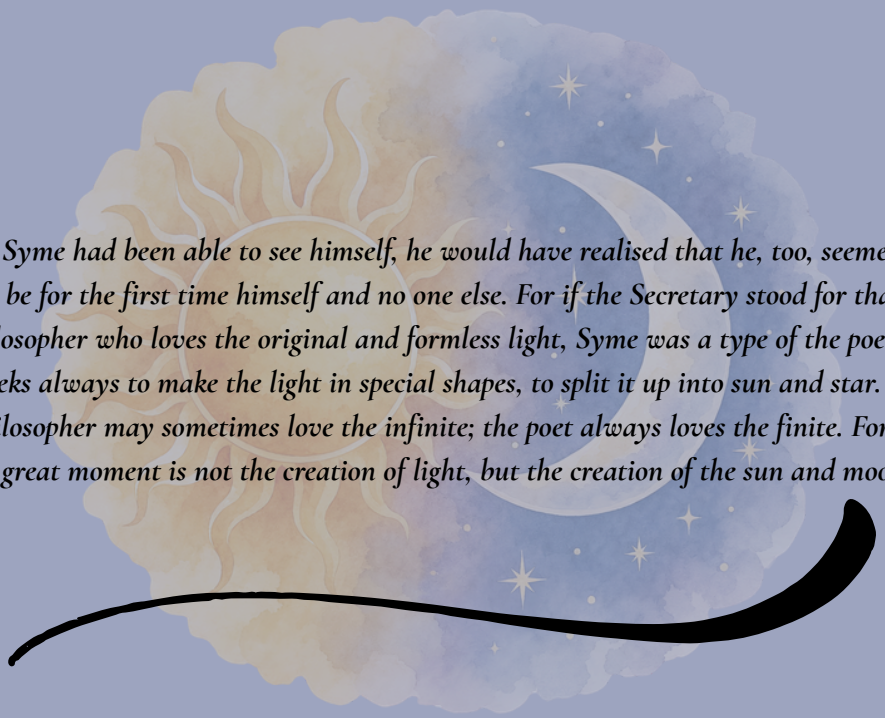
I propose then that prose and poetry are, as to their fundamental difference, related to this fundamental duality of the symbol. I do not say that prose is without attention to the life of words taken in themselves, or poetry without the desire to transparently transmit the concepts: this is impossible, given every communication has both because it uses symbols. Nor do I argue that these elements are ultimately opposed perfections: for again, the divided perfections of a lower order are in reference to an undivided perfection of a higher order (in God, the Word is not less but more a distinct Person than are creatures). But, as necessarily entwined as they are, that words convey something else and that they are things in themselves are principles near as distinct as form and matter. Prose then seems to be the element of language more purely concerned to convey the concept. Prose employs the imperfection of language itself as a tool for more precise meaning: sometimes a twist phrase is "just right" to convey the nuance of an idea. Poetry on the other hand is concerned with the solidity of the symbol. Poetry must be concerned with means. Only by drawing attention to the obsclarity of language can poetry distinguish itself from prose; that this attention has as many modes as there are things which symbol obscures explains the great multitude of conflicting opinions regarding poetry. For instance, it seems that poetry makes use of music and image (that is, of other, unwordly communicating arts): the former through meter or in the genre of lyric poetry; the latter by lavish description or by being itself shape, as in a shape-poem. Prose indeed may make use of these, but not in order to distinguish itself, but as a measure against obscurity. We wish for prose to be fluent and legible lest these elements of symbol disrupt us; in poetry we wish them to "disrupt" us as a primary point of pleasure.

Or again, take the nature of the author: for language lies between us and the author's mind. Prose we praise for proceeding from the author's clarity of thought, or of producing a clarity of thought in us. Often we write an essay in order to clear and order thought which is yet obscure. But poetry, as in the Ion, need not be understood by its author; the poet is the vehicle by which the concept speaks. Sometimes this means the inspiration of God; sometimes a creature is the muse, being spoken by God, yet affecting the heart without reduction to concept. We also admit poetry strikes the heart of the reader without appealing tothe reader's intellect.

I do not mean to say that prose does not stir passion, albeit the rhetorical has much in common with the poetic (the rhetor is half a poet in the sense of an image-maker). But even the activity of the mind itself has a kind of passion of reason in it. Anyone who has spent an evening with wine and an equal and interested mind knows what the passion of thought is: a burning fire wherein one seems to forget the words themselves, where words are conflagrated to release the immaterial mind.

I think it is not so far off to think of the perfection of prose as the type of the mystic's union with God in which no creature intervenes, while poetry is the type of the mystic's vision in which every common weed burns with the Divine presence. But I am now risking losing the thread of directness in the sea of instances.

Furnish for yourself what examples you like. This distinction, if we accept it, should account for everything poetic in some way or another. But, although it is broad, I do not think it unhelpfully so: these distinctions also serve the critical purpose of stating how something fails to be poetic. Thus, instead of arguing that free verse is not poetry at all, one merely notes that the abandonment of meter is the abandonment of one poetic element: that no music has insisted on itself (this absence can become itself a sign, notes the defender of the poem). I hope I have said nothing new here: only that, even if poorly, I have said it anew. I thank you, reader, for your patience; I appeal in the end to one last analogy, by a far greater savourer of words:



If Syme had been able to see himself, he would have realised that he, too, seemed to be for the first time himself and no one else. For if the Secretary stood for that philosopher who loves the original and formless light, Syme was a type of the poet who seeks always to make the light in special shapes, to split it up into sun and star. The philosopher may sometimes love the infinite; the poet always loves the finite. For him the great moment is not the creation of light, but the creation of the sun and moon. [2]

1 G.K. Chesterton, "To M.E.W."
2 G.K. Chesterton, *The Man Who Was Thursday*

Love III

George Herbert

Love bade me welcome. Yet my soul drew back
Guilty of dust and sin.
But quick-eyed Love, observing me grow slack
From my first entrance in,
Drew nearer to me, sweetly questioning,
If I lacked anything

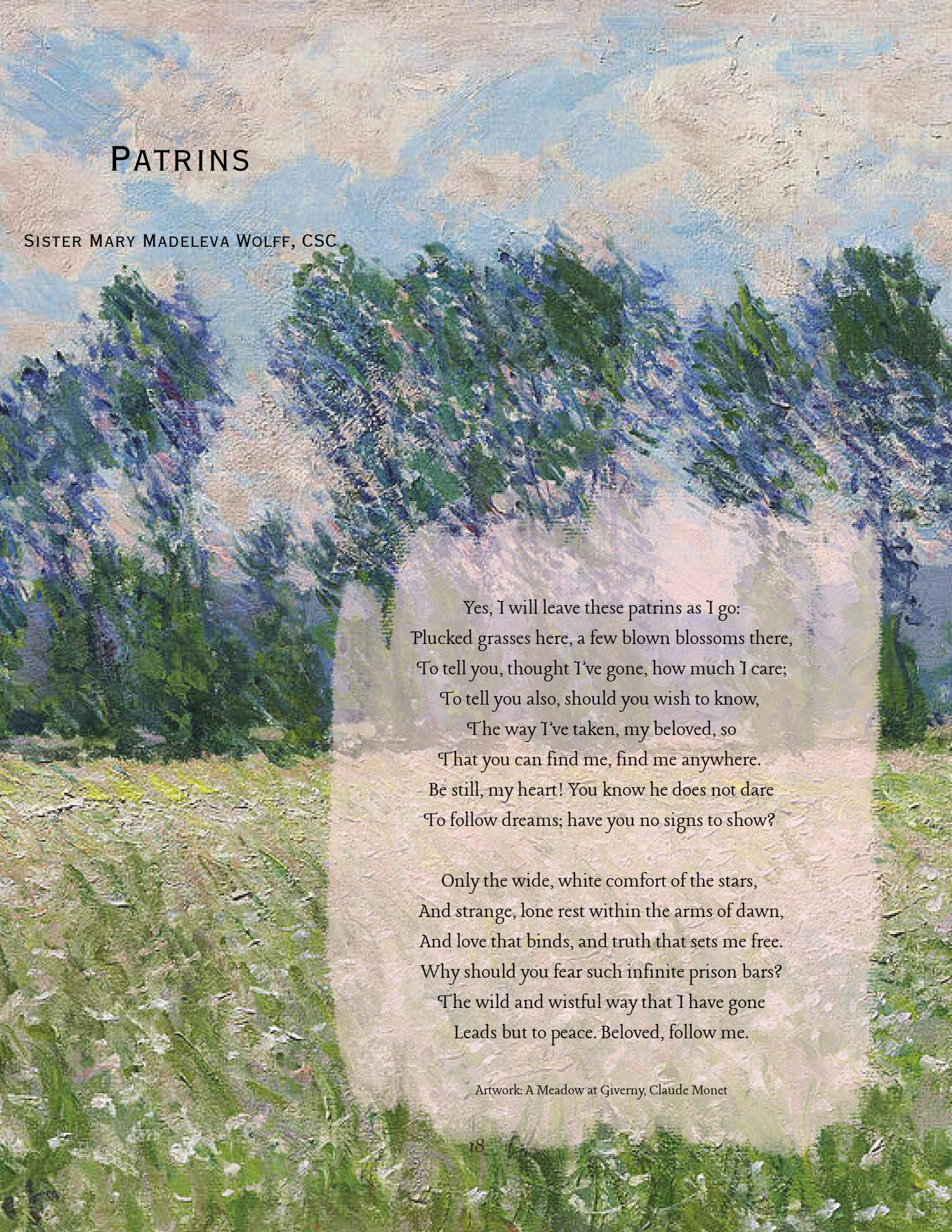
A guest, I answered, worthy to be here:
Love said, You shall be he.
I the unkind, the ungrateful? Ah, my dear,
I cannot look on thee.
Love took my hand, and smiling did reply,
Who made the eyes but I?

Truth Lord, but I have marred them: let my shame
Go where it doth deserve.
And know you not, says Love, who bore the blame?
My dear, then I will serve.
You must sit down, says Love, and taste my meat:
So I did sit and eat.



Patrins

Sister Mary Madeleva Wolff, CSC



Yes, I will leave these patrins as I go:
Plucked grasses here, a few blown blossoms there,
To tell you, thought I've gone, how much I care;
To tell you also, should you wish to know,
The way I've taken, my beloved, so
That you can find me, find me anywhere.
Be still, my heart! You know he does not dare
To follow dreams; have you no signs to show?

Only the wide, white comfort of the stars,
And strange, lone rest within the arms of dawn,
And love that binds, and truth that sets me free.
Why should you fear such infinite prison bars?
The wild and wistful way that I have gone
Leads but to peace. Beloved, follow me.

Artwork: A Meadow at Giverny, Claude Monet

THE IDEA OF ORDER AT KEY WEST

Wallace Stevens



She sang beyond the genius of the sea.
The water never formed to mind or voice,
Like a body wholly body, fluttering
Its empty sleeves; and yet its mimic motion
Made constant cry, caused constantly a cry,
That was not ours although we understood,
Inhuman, of the veritable ocean.

The sea was not a mask. No more was she.
The song and water were not medleyed sound
Even if what she sang was what she heard,
Since what she sang was uttered word by word.
It may be that in all her phrases stirred
The grinding water and the gasping wind;
But it was she and not the sea we heard.

For she was the maker of the song she sang.
The ever-hooded, tragic-gestured sea
Was merely a place by which she walked to sing.
Whose spirit is this? we said, because we knew
It was the spirit that we sought and knew
That we should ask this often as she sang.

If it was only the dark voice of the sea
That rose, or even colored by many waves;
If it was only the outer voice of sky
And cloud, of the sunken coral water-walled,
However clear, it would have been deep air,
The heaving speech of air, a summer sound
Repeated in a summer without end
And sound alone. But it was more than that,
More even than her voice, and ours, among
The meaningless plungings of water and the wind,
Theatrical distances, bronze shadows heaped
On high horizons, mountainous atmospheres
Of sky and sea.

It was her voice that made
The sky acutest at its vanishing.
She measured to the hour its solitude.
She was the single artificer of the world
In which she sang. And when she sang, the sea,
Whatever self it had, became the self
That was her song, for she was the maker. Then we,
As we beheld her striding there alone,
Knew that there never was a world for her
Except the one she sang and, singing, made.

Ramon Fernandez, tell me, if you know,
Why, when the singing ended and we turned
Toward the town, tell why the glassy lights,
The lights in the fishing boats at anchor there,
As the night descended, tilting in the air,
Mastered the night and portioned out the sea,
Fixing emblazoned zones and fiery poles,
Arranging, deepening, enchanting night.

Oh! Blessed rage for order, pale Ramon,
The maker's rage to order words of the sea,
Words of the fragrant portals, dimly-starred,
And of ourselves and of our origins,
In ghostlier demarcations, keener sounds.

Holy Words, Ingenious Nonsense

by Hrabanus

Words are poetry's token. They are characters, peoples, and civilizations. Words have histories. They have traditions that their present selves have forgotten, dignities that the debauchery of their current usage squander, sometimes greater dignity than befits their humble or even savage stock. Words themselves come from the voice, which, according to Aristotle is the most imitative or *mimetic* organ we possess. Poetry, as a mimetic art form, comes from the voice—more proximately the tongue. To ask where poetry comes from, wants a deeper answer than the material root, since by the tongue we express that which is innermost to us—our thoughts, feelings, desires, intelligences, loves.

The distinction, made by Aristotle, between verse and poetry was the Ockham's' razor of literature. Poetry is now essentially linked with the meaning conveyed rather than the form of the words. Thus, prose poems are a possibility. In today's world, where controversy over "art" and "content" is live and hot, we could ask the question: what's the essential content that makes *these* words poetry and these not?

We can ask the poets themselves. They have pitched definitions of poetry over the rolling years. In the aftermath of the long warfare on man's essence—the onslaught of man's own reason against his own spirit—some definitions, even from great poets, are more distressing than others.

Some can sound naïve: "poetry is the record of the best and happiest moments of the happiest and best minds," said Percy Bysshe Shelley. One hardly knows how to apply this to Homer or to Shakespeare.

There are others which take the more mysterious and magical qualities of poetry and reduce them to altogether too well-known and lesser realities, such as Wordsworth's "Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity." Fuse tranquility with recollected emotion, and bam, that's poetry. Curious that Wordsworth doesn't mention the words of poetry—the actual stuff that we identify as a poem—which does make one wonder what the words are worth.

It is refreshing, then, when poets of the same era can give a much more grounded account, as Coleridge's: "prose; words in their best order; —poetry; the *best* words in the *best* order." This would imply, however, that poetry is something only qualitatively distinct from any other words. It gives warrant to Ezra Pound's appealing short definition that "poetry is language charged with meaning." It still begs the question: with what meaning is it so charged as to make it poetry? Is there something essentially distinct in poetry, such that what is expressed cannot be expressed

in any other way? One could be as blithe as Robert Frost to define it negatively: "Poetry is what gets lost in translation."

There's an innate draw to taking the via negativa. In an more disillusioned age than Wordsworth's, Eliot says:

> Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality. But, of course, only those who have personality and emotions know what it means to want to escape from these things.

This too reaches toward a more dynamic and fruitful meeting of the sensed to the unsensed and unsensible, the changeable to the unchanging and unchangeable, the meld of all things visible and invisible. It also evokes notions from the writings of fourteenth century English mystics. It implies a desire for something beyond our sense—it is non-sense—yet innermost to our desires.

There is something more appealing—something truer, more *juste*—about definitions that evoke mysticism. By using this term, I myself invoke *l'Inconnu* of Arthur Rimbaud, blithe as Frost whether the source or even the content is unknown. An unknown inspiration expressing something not fully grasped, or even at all—but regardless, something whole, alive, touching the spirit—something expressed with the tongue but indeed "lost in translation." This conveyance of what ultimately evades expression gives credence to Eliot's statement that "genuine poetry can communicate before it is understood."

This mystical aspect, the belief that a poem's "content" is unknown at least in part, can be taken for granted in all poets, or else we would have long ago solved this problem of where a poem comes from. A poem brings the unknown to light, makes it flesh, without completely unveiling it. There has to be belief in the poem's nonsense.

The meaning cannot be so elusive that it does not have any bearing on reality. Dylan Thomas made a marvelous comment that fuses the dynamic of visible and invisible, the imminent world and its mystical ground: "A good poem is a contribution to reality. The world is never the same once a good poem has been added to it. A good poem helps to change the shape of the universe, helps to extend everyone's knowledge of himself and the world around him." Words build worlds. There is something creative within them that gives birth to new life.

Small wonder then, that the word "poetry" comes from the Greek word "to create." Interesting that the Old English word *scop* retains this meaning, from which comes the modern English "shape." *Scieppend* or *scepen* (depending on dialect) was the word used for God the Creator, such as, for instance, in the very first recorded poem in English known as Caedmon's Hymn:

hē ærist ***scōp*** *aelda barnum* he first **created** for the children of men
heben til hrōfe, *hāleg* ***scepen.*** heaven for a roof, holy **creato**r

According to the story, Caedmon, a stable boy, sang these words by divine inspiration. Creation, holiness, inspiration—a mystical world-view might suggest a first stab at a more robust account of poetry: "holy words." Theodore Roethke said "You must believe: a poem is a holy thing — a good poem, that is."

What is holy is something set apart, something *other*, for the sake of something *other* than what exists in our ordinary, normal plane. That *other* is all but known, yet it is innermost to us: "eye has not seen, nor has ear heard." While being very real, a poem should remind us of something hardest to define. It entails a certain *belief* that the poem's own *holiness* compels. Edith Sitwell said that "poetry is the deification of reality. It should make our days holy to us. The poet should speak to all men, for a moment, of that other life of theirs that they have smothered and forgotten."

Damage is done when words are used in an unholy manner. As mere tools for empire, propaganda, advertisement, man's sense of self is wounded. Poetry sharpens our ken of ourselves and of our origins precisely because it will not let us get away mere utilitarianism, or even with the proud claim of reason that it can know everything about ourselves or about our origins. Thus Novalis could say: "Poetry heals the wounds inflicted by reason."

The poet's office is therefore a holy one, mediating the mysteries of the unknown life that draws us and heals us. Wallace Stevens said "The poet is the priest of the invisible." It is the priest's job to mimic the mysteries he serves.

Without belief in an altogether *other*, unknown, creative, mystical inspiration—without the eye on man's mysterious origins and possibilities—one could sympathize with Sir Isaac Newton that poetry is "a kind of ingenious nonsense." Replace the pejorative with awe, and the saying is quite just.





since feeling is first

since feeling is first
who pays any attention
to the syntax of things
will never wholly kiss you

wholly to be a fool
while Spring is in the world

my blood approves,
and kisses are a better fate
than wisdom
lady i swear by all flowers. Don't cry
—the best gesture of my brain is less than
your eyelids' flutter which says

we are for each other: then
laugh, leaning back in my arms
for life's not a paragraph

And death i think is no parenthesis

~E. E. Cummings

Wandering a Land of Wonder

By Rosemar Avelyn

Hush, friend! There is something here that wants quiet. A beast? No, something far, far more wild, marvelous, elusive, beautiful. It is a poem...

When wandering through the lands of language, it is generally only a matter of time before one stumbles upon the gentle country of poetry. This is a lovely land, breathing beauty through its starlit skies, snow-peaked mountaintops, and weird and eerie valleys. It is a melodious land, softly singing sublimity through rolling plains, vast oceans, and—every so often, hidden by some quiet stream or in a gentle wood—a rare and exquisite pearl.

This is a land in which it is largely beneficial to get lost. Let us consider ourselves fellow wanderers and explorers here.

Do not be afraid of the dark corners of this land; language, after all, has many imperfections—to the benefit of poetry! Like fragments of air and water that gather around the center of a snowflake and form its crystalline limbs, those delightful imperfections give rise to many a striking pattern and marvelous shape. Imperfections, fragments, things that defy the mind and its power—poetry freely makes use of all these. Happily far less scientific than its linguistic relatives, poetry does not concern itself with knowledge and definition the way other parts of language do. Cousin Prose, for instance, wishes to paint, define, explain, elucidate; our Little Poetry seeks to allure, open, beckon, draw in. Poetry has a genius of delighting in the imperfect, for that very "imperfection"—the glory of the wounded redeemed thing—gives rise to greater heights of the art.

The art of poetry has, by my measure, two distinct parts (or acts): craft and core. The craft of poetry is fairly straightforward; it is essentially the structural bones of the thing. The craft dictates the rule of meter and the law of emphasis; it mixes the colors of capitalization and punctuation; it tests the flavor of letters and the flow of grammar. In a word, the craft of poetry forms the framework and refines that aspect of the art that is subject to fine-tuning and dependent largely upon education and practice. Craft's bones are the bones of the poet; they reside in his hands and his mind and depend upon them. An excellent craftsman's work can be recognized by the harmony throughout his piece.

The second act of poetry is quite different but inseparable from the former: it is the core of the thing. It is that wonderful, beautiful *something* that breathes life into a harmony, revealing it to be truly a symphony. This is the core of the snowflake—or better still, the heart of the pearl. This second part of poetry cannot be learned (or, rather, it is an education of an entirely different sort). Unlike the craft of poetry, the core does not depend upon the poet. It is timeless; though it, too, exists in a sense within the poet, it does not depend upon him for its life. It existed before him; it will continue to be long after he sets the ink-blotted paper down and his bones turn to dust, woven through the words of the piece, illuminating them with a light far beyond the deepest ken of the artist.

The second act of poetry requires a deeper kind of sight, the ability to recognize the power and marvel at the centre of things. This deeper sight gives the ability to see, as Gerard Manley Hopkins put it, "the dearest freshness deep down things"[1]. It bestows upon one an everyday mysticism that reveals a striking

[1] From "God's Grandeur" by Gerard Manley Hopkins.

and undeniable dynamism flowing through every facet of life. With this new vision, pebbles are revealed to be truly jewels; the blush of a simple rose proves itself an unbreakable seal.

If it sounds like madness, good! There is a sweet sort of "madness" that the lover and the poet know well. It has other names. Plato and Aristotle knew of it and spoke of it each in their turn. Another Lover, later in time but first before all, in His goodness revealed even more of its breadths and depths[2]. Do not be afraid to be "wholly a fool"—for Spring runs deep in the world[3].

St. Catherine of Siena, a Catholic mystic of the 14th century, said: "All the way to Heaven is Heaven, because Jesus said, 'I Am the Way.'" Remembering this word and allowing it to inscribe itself on one's heart unlocks a sure path to that everyday mysticism so necessary for poetry's pure core and so indispensable for the full flowering of the human heart.

We are assured that man is surrounded by angels and the Holy Spirit Himself dwells in man's heart. And this not in a hypothetical nor figurative sense, but in a true and concrete one! The great mystics of the Church would rejoice if we would allow ourselves to be transformed by this mystery, one that is not reserved for a select few, but rather one that is mysteriously and marvelously available to every human soul. Akin to prayer (though not the same, there is an important difference) poetry sees the veil that lies between the visible and invisible parts of the world, for it is an art deeply in love with Beauty.

Look! The blush of sunset is touching the tops of those hills, and the clouds are turning all delicate golden-pink. We must part ways soon, but I would terribly remiss if I did not briefly speak of words: those singular, unique, musical arrangements of letters and dew-strung webs of meaning. (Synonyms? No, there is no such thing in this country, nor elsewhere either.) Regarding words, I shall say only this: words have incredible power—meaning and depth that you should explore with eagerness and wield with both intensive care and exquisite abandon; for proper use of words requires both in their time and sometimes both together.

Words compose the bridge between the first and second acts of poetry, and to a degree, form part of the substance of both. All words ultimately lead back, like rivers to the ocean, to Something, Someone, in light of which words ultimately fail. Even the great Dante found that, in that Light, words failed him—and this again, far from negating poetry, rather affirms the goodness of that art which in its turn affirms the goodness of redeemed creation.

Seen through the eyes of that everyday mysticism which is emboldened by the sweet certainty of hope, poetry proves itself ultimately a mimesis of the very Incarnation of the Divine Word. It is conceived in contemplation, borne in silence and wonder, birthed incarnate, and ultimately bears he who encounters it back to that which is greater than silence—not by way of nihilism but by its antithesis, apophasis.



[2] Cf. 1 Cor. 1:18-25.
[3] Cf. "Since Feeling is First" by E. E. Cummings

Coddiwompling Corner

Dear Pilgrim Puddleglum,

We hold that the "Eater of Ants" office should stay,
For he faithfully keeps all the termites away;
But the civilization devourer's station
We theorize should come to a swift termination.

We hope this eases your concern regarding our anteater friends.

Sincerely,
Anonymous

Ðear Anonymous,

With the deepest respect, and with all due regard for the innate dignity of the anteater and its purpose in a noble creation, who the heck are you?!?

Cordially,
Pilgrim Puddleglum (on her own behalf, as her native trust in her friends and her universe rapidly unravels)

A Poet's Wish

Go now friend! Rise strong your way! Walk with sure the slopes of day
Dream alive deep star-drenched rills; wonder, wander, where you will
Reap with tears bright sun's rejoice; claim as Key young lover's choice;
Further on, refulgent be! I am bound for Eastern Sea

Do words fail? Yes?
Then fearless haste
To make of them
A fruitful waste!
Sincerely,
Anonymous



Want to respond to anything in this issue? Deeply disagree with any one of us? Have concerns about our mental health? Thoughtful and substantial responses to this quarter's journal can be directed to:

coddiwomplingquarterly@gmail.com

or submitted via the contact form on our website at

coddiwomplingquarterly.com

Please keep responses under 300 words.
Publication will be at the discretion of the editors.

They always welcome comments. Send them comments. They need the criticism. It could be constructive. Or not. Sincerely, Anonymous



We focus each issue of Coddiwompling Quarterly around a central question or theme. Do you have questions you would like us to explore? Can you guess what this issue was centered around?





When the pale leaves descend
From the high crowns of trees
And the cold airs ascend,
Hazel and willow freeze,
To sweet melodies
The forest is then no friend,
Yet, who may flee,
I long for true Love again

~Arnaut Daniel



Grace-filled Autumn, bounteous lord
Brow wreathed in leaf of flaming gold
Laughs man's joyous harvest in
Bidding festival begin
Yet in wonder yields to fair
Winter, crowned with silence rare

~The Traveling Troubadours

