

OUT OF TIME

poems 1998 – 2008

Jay Ramsay

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Anamnesis—the remembering of soul (with Tibetan Bowls)

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PREFACE

Out of time: both ‘timeless’ and ‘running out of time’—both these meanings specific to our time, and suggesting a third, another kind of time at ‘the End of Time’ beyond the tyranny of the clock and the maniac acceleration that is our slavery to it. To stop, pause and linger (which is also the practice of poetry) is to enter and re-enter this state that we might simply call Present Time, but it does not by any means cancel or erase the past: rather it deepens it into a more meaningful continuum which poetry also demands. To really be present means also to be open to past and future simultaneously at the seed point that each moment is in its encapsulation: what is remembered and what is anticipated are then part of one thing, one being as any poem is: both actual in itself, and potential, uncertain.

Mysticism, with its evocation of the ‘Timeless Moment’, long before the Now became fashionable as it now is, has been my bedrock here and key to the expanded state of presence that all these poems refer to, and take place in: ‘the real reality’ as John Cowper Powys also named it and which is essential to poetry as I understand it. That is, poetry not just as something written on paper but alive in the living air all around us and, so, intrinsic to the experience of life itself seen and witnessed as something that is always both literal and symbolic, concrete and meaningful (imbued with soul and spirit, and our secret becoming).

All these poems, beyond *Kingdom of the Edge*, my last selection published just before the millennium, move into this Out of Time realm where these simultaneous meanings of ‘time’ are all co-present as we face an uncertain future. But if the spirit of prophecy is still meaningful or possible when time has ended, or because it is beyond time and always has been, then where we’re going to is deeply to do with where and how we are *now* in all senses, and the evocation of that is a story that poetry has always told best, and the poet in us (in all of us) is here to live.

for all we love

You desire to hear something new
but I have no news
except that love should renew you.
This commandment is the news I give you:
nothing is more known to you
yet nothing is more new.
—Gilbert of Holy Land, *early Cistercian*

The hours of folly are measured by the clock; but the
hours of wisdom no clock can measure...
—William Blake

I sleep and my heart stays awake
it gazes and the stars, the sky, and the helm
and at how the water blossoms on the rudder.
—George Seferis, *Logbook III*

A poet overhearing a conversation out of time,
must be his time's interpreter...
—Vernon Watkins, *Aphorisms*

How we imagine our lives is how we will
go on living our lives.
—James Hillman, *Healing Fictions*

Time becomes more and more dream-like. It's often only
possible to know something happened or somewhere
was visited by seeing the marks I made.
—Kurt Jackson, *Sketchbooks*

Change is not accumulative, bit by bit. Change
happens out of time, all of a sudden...
—Geoffrey Windham, *Usual Me*

This is a journey without distance, to the place we never left.
—Tom and Linda Carpenter, *Healing the Dream*

Prelude: Midnight Silver



FROM THE DEAD

1. *for Anneke*

Your last photograph—or the one we remember you by—
Smiling in your pink hood, flashing your white teeth
Broader than your tautened skin and greyed ageing hair,
Warrior: as you motored round the Arboretum...
Still, silent, on the window's broad ledge inside

And outside, in the garden, in a flash of light
A goldfinch at the feeder, brighter than coal tit, chaffinch,
Greenfinch—any of these

And then landing on the ivy clad wall, feet away—
A kestrel, for a full half-minute, perfect, alert

Your gay greeting cards. Four days on.

And all your dying gone, into this magic of colour
As if these birds had sprouted from your fingers,
Your poor fingers that were clenched purple
Your laboured breath that fought it to the end—

Warrior: your smile now as wide as Creation
As as possible as anything
 beyond the boxed bend of our minds

Where these birds, like you, are all zest and eyes.

2. for Ted

You are now
What you always were inside.

You come as a shower of light, a quickening
Beam of concentration around my crown—
At the very thought of your name, you can be here—
As I see you stretch your arms, free as an eagle now—
And you send your images and symbols direct
To her, in the sash of yellow round her belly
The half blue disc in her throat...
And the glowing red ammonite between her legs

You are present, gold, amazing
Ten times stronger in your radiance
Calling me to what is real in myself, too

The only thing that is in fact alive
That all our meetings prepared for: your passing

And to think that you'll one day all be there, my dear ones,
Leaving me here for you to communicate through
only

In the silence when you go, you go so completely
Out of reach of all our senses and imagining
You fly and fade like wingbeats, dissolving
As I wonder at your freer state
and where, and if you are—

Until I see, greeting me, the simple thought
That *because* of our unknowing, we expand here
This is where we can go, beyond, into It All
Like a vast dome of light, an endless sky
where you belong

That is just the other side of Nature
And the rising curve of this Gloucestershire hill,

14 *Jay Ramsay*

Like the thinnest of veils, a crystal wall
Present in every living cell...echoed in birdsong

And then you're here again, with another name and form,
Coming closer and closer... and going as far
on your journey home,

As far as we go out of each other's minds

Erased into the presence of what walks inside us,
This body of light, clothed, naked in its armour.

BLUEBELL TIME

after my mother

1

'Bluebell time,' you said, in a ray of sun
Ghosting the graveyard path through the trees,
As time stood still in that evening light...

And then later in the flowers I saw
That could not be plucked, picked, brought in
But had to be gone out to...in the wild

And as ever, your time ahead of mine
—the way ours is, when we can see—
Like a pathway from your invisible eyes

A pathway through the dream: I mean the one
We cannot help taking, the only way there is.

2

World time took over, cluttering the deep
With its dreamless daylight sleep of busy-ness
Before I saw them, and suddenly stopped, startled
Like the hands on a clockface where no clock was:

Here among the nettles—and so lustrous, blue
They're surreal: their cups veined blue to mauve,
Rising to their tight sheathed topmost tips
As I wade in, clear a patch, and crouch

And they say nothing, only
I must give them the time

Give *what* time?
Your voice, your hazel eyes

The tan-brown river rippling among its stones,
Your body arched by the flickering firelight...

Give time to what cannot be denied.

3

*Wild earth, just beyond our reach
Silence of touch and of meeting —a man
Who walks in nature and does not speak
Till he becomes the river inside him*

*Till he chances to take the step
Beyond his life—loosening the bands
That fettered his horse from its kicking gallop.*

4

What is this ? Still not bluebell light,
There is a language behind all we say or speak
That is, as It Is...and they grow there

Their coming brings that light
That is the new dream of mind to go by.

Blue, deeper than the green. Blue like night
That is its own light, glowing

That beckons at the corner of your eyes
Until you turn to face it—

Until I meet the face behind your face,
And you meet mine.

5

Blue, Madonna blue—
Blue-pale, sapphire, the heart's breathing
Blue freedom in the space between us, smiling
Holding, cherishing and releasing—

And bluebell blue, jewelled, remembering
The magic that is lunar, the dream that dissolves
Away from all our grasping...

The grace of you seen
In a shaft of sunlight among the trees,
Where no form, or face or body was
Only your innermost being.

VARIATIONS

after Loop My Loop, 1991 by Helen Chadwick

Braid my hair bright
With my mutton grey tubes
This is my transparency, and yours
That you do not see me

I am woman: mortal flesh and ache,
Beauty and gut pain—
Not an image in your brain

You will never see me again
As you have.

It's too late for fantasies and lies,
Wake up:

This is my beautiful braid
Without eyes or breasts or thighs.

Can you love me now ?

+

Braid me into the body
Weave my light into the flesh:

I am meat-bright, raw,
Outside in

I am an embryo in the eye
Of matter.

Where mother ? Where lover now ?
These piss flowers are wedding cakes of snow
Isolated, laughter-frozen, absurd.

I am abandoned into the darkness

I am my other brightness now

But here is my testament:

And can you braid me into you
Can you find me in your gut of guts too ?

+

Braid, weave
And then the snake of it moves
Bright blonde hair and tract
Coiled, sliding around each other

In love with each other
Beauty and her other

No penetration: no vagina
All sinuous weaving curves
Of invisible hips and thighs

All a dancer
With her red mouth on fire
Her red flower
Her red bleeding underflower

A woman's body is one,
She breathes the earth in
Through every orifice

She can feel a leaf falling from a tree,
So when she says *beauty*, she means it.

Can you see what it means
To see the light of everything
Inside out in everything ?

Then you will see
Into the liquid soul of what we are
That is not stardust alone
But star-membrane in every cell;

The matter we are is everywhere
In the living stream of its seed—
And all our ache for union is this:
To be in it.

THE STONE SHADOW

at the Ceim Hill Museum, West Cork

Your crone's face, parting the lace curtain
Your finger like a beak, stabbing, gesturing
Us round to your frosted glass front door
With its cracked white paint and sign
And rusted bell pull:

And then you're here: eyes smiling, hair lank
Hands filthy, fingernails uncut "Hello to you",
As you gather us us to this room like a basement
Stacked with its stone, all over the long table
Covered with handwritten tags, under bare low lighting
Your old front room turned cave, wild woman's lair

As you start your unvarnished patter
Reaching for the first polythene bag of proof:
"Now here's the Irish elk", jaw-brown, intact,
"Here's the mama—and look, here's the baby"
As we clothe them in flesh with our eyes, nodding
But it's only the beginning—

"Now what d'you t'ink this is?" you ask
As you hand us a see-through plastic box
Filled with round rolled earth like grapeshot
And we've no idea. "Dinosaur droppings!"
Caught between awe and impolite laughter
As we turn to the mass of stone on the table'
On it, under it, everywhere...

As you reach for an ancient cleaver
With its rough handle and downward-driven edge
As you hold it...and then, with everything you lift,
It's as if your body has always secretly known it
As you show us the indentation on a stone
With your finger and thumb "like this, see?"

A stone shadow soul, remembering
A woman remembering, sheer stone-cast survival
With knife-edge, spear, axe-handle and plough
As phantom professors hover at your shoulder,
Authenticating them, one by one

And it's true, this is where we began
With nothing at the ends of our hands, but stone
Stone and flesh, flesh-stone, wedded to it
Even scratching the stars on it: the Great Unknown
That wheeled around us from sunset to dawn
And season to season's equinox

And then it's not far-fetched: but as near as breathing
As you cup this mottled circle in your palm
And tell us it is the moon, and how
You stood outside gazing "and it was just like this"
The lines, the pitted layerings, moulded,
Mountains, valleys, the Sea of Tranquility
As it glows white-silver in our dreaming eyes

To think of it being broken and shaped
Held like a sketch book to be pencilled in
But with something far stronger and stranger
That lies at the pulsating heart of Creation

Muscled in man and woman, clay, rib, rooting, rushing
Ground to a fineness, rugged, raw, earth-perfect—
Under the blazing helium ball of the sun.

CONUINCTIO

for Sally

This crystal twilight.

That new moon,
 etched in the shadow of its circle
Where the whole air is translucent like a screen
Above the misty valley ground beneath

Those stars opening out like a vast
 Inner smile above your head,
 Your whole chest expanding to meet them

As I wonder what signs will be written there,
 As we drift into this quickening wave of light...

And now, as I turn,
 the moon again
In the shimmering aura of its aureole

Venus below it,
 and over in the west
The spreading gash of salmon-pink sunset sky—
Its cirrus streaks scaled like fish skin
As they stretch and flare
 over my head

Announce in language that is neither spoken or silent
The coming together of spirit and matter.