

AGENDA

BROADSHEET 13

Loveday Why, 25, is featured as one of the fifteen young poets in the 50th Anniversary issue of Agenda.

Lines of Passage: inside the threshold

On the plane over to Australia, after a quick decision to sink the last of my study loan into the ticket, I opened my mother's 'Bon Voyage' card, and the distress of the last year, a culmination of seven years struggling with M.E., erupted in sorrow. Made from a Japanese sea chart, a souvenir of my brother's last trip, there was something beautiful in its functionality, ecstatic in its objectivity, creative in its science. Here I was, my flight path blessed by a sea chart, the shattered lines of my projected life being willed back on course.

I had left battered but determined and settled soon in Noosa, Queensland, north of Brisbane. The stunning coastline that stretches from Noosa Main Beach to Sunshine Beach is part of the National Park. Walking this coast was truly freshening: climbing the rocks from Little Cove, Johnsons, to National Park, in February heat, the warm sea stretching around me, the wide sands backed by pandanus and eucalyptus trees, the sliding shallows washing over my feet and the little peelers picked off and surfed by some of the cruisiest and most welcoming locals in the world. In these relaxed and physically stunning surroundings, I started writing haikus.

The brevity and simplicity of the form confirmed my consciousness and appreciation of the present moment. It also stirred dormant ideas that a place can so deeply influence that it can draw a creative response without demanding too much intellectual involvement, at least in an acknowledged Cartesian way. This was not magic or spirituality, just a loosening of poetic authority, a revoking of human agency. The long line of some of my previous poetry had reduced in bulk and complexity to three lines of five, seven, five syllables, as my circle of activity had reduced to the coastal beaches and the backpackers' hostel in which I worked, and the extent of my planning ahead to an hour at most.

Although each haiku stood alone, when strung loosely together, they created a larger work with a broader motion, a meandering but cohesive and rhythmic line. Similarly, each day I was experiencing in Noosa stood alone as one full event, but when taken and savoured together made a line of progression and development. Each day was slightly different but retained a familiarity, just as the beaches changed with the tides and swells, and each day I followed the coast-line and gained physical and emotional strength. All this across the equator line from my anchor: my mother. After reading a

few of the haikus to her and sending a couple through email, I began to think of another way to pass them that would add a further dimension to the process and provide us with the deeper contact with each other that we were both so seriously missing.

I wondered what would happen to the haiku when it was taken out of the context in which it was written and sent to England to be responded to visually by a person who had never visited the place of its origin, the place in which it was so firmly rooted; what would happen to a present moment poetic form when imbued with a history and a future by the experience of its passage; what would happen to the poet, the artist, the mother and the daughter. Each week then, I would post my mother an envelope containing up to seven haikus on separate pieces of paper, folded and numbered. She would open one each morning and immediately start a piece of art in response which she would then photograph and post in a private album on her Facebook page. This would add a further layer of communication, another connection line in the internet. The circle of our communication would be in some way (in)complete, the meandering sequence further developed. The short line poetic form would be transformed into artistic lines, supported too by our conversations on the phone line.

My mother paints in acrylics, flat and often abstract with an astonishing command of colour and ratio. Her usual subjects are coastal scenes and domestic still lifes with a few portraits. I was unsure how she would approach this experiment. The results have been fascinating and wonderful.

My mother grew up in Weymouth, Dorset, and our family home is on the estuary of the River Blackwater, so perhaps I should not have been surprised by the exactness of her representation of the coast. I was physically jolted though by the accuracy with which she had captured the shallow waters of Little Cove. It was as if she had been there that March day and witnessed the cross currents washing over my feet at low tide. I was surprised too by the small scale she had chosen. The illustrations for this first sequence are a fraction of her preferred canvas size. Just as my line length and poetic bulk had shrunk, so had the space in which she chose to work. Before I left, she had given me that minute card on a sea chart fragment and had slipped inside it a St Christopher. Now, in the circular format of this first illustration, she had given me what seemed like a second talisman, its small scale reflecting the delicacy of the Japanese form. As this was the first haiku, it was also my first step to health: a more flamboyant expansive visual response may have threatened the ensuing sequence. We were setting up small stepping stones like those through a Japanese garden. The first had now been laid.

The circular form of that first illustration also, of course, refers to the globe around which I had travelled and now remained on the other side of to her. The second image spread to a horizontally tilted oval, echoing the widening sentiment of the haiku: 'possessions fly off / enter the wide sea.' The brush strokes making up the clouds were applied with a lighter touch and the composition gave a sense of leading in. If this sequence were a piece of music, the initial strong chord was struck with that first haiku, shaped like a gong, the waves within it like sound waves pulsing out from the point of impact, and this second stood like a searching start to a new melody. Were we already, in this organic shifting of styles and mixing of media, being placed outside of the strictures of time and 'leaning into the fast light of obsolescence?'

(Bauscheit) Anticipation, the process's hallmark of futurity rushed through this second painting: my mother's anticipation at receiving the haikus, mine at seeing the resulting art works and both of us anticipating my continued good health. As I received each image, I experienced the freshness of the moment again. I too was given a surprise and we had – had we? – beaten time. The past had not been frozen or fetishised: those days in March were given to me again as fresh gifts. By passing the present moment to her so that she could actively respond to it on her own terms. I had released my experiences from being fixed into a memory: my haiku would now never be simply a monument to Noosa. As the coast line was altering it seemed that we were in a small way adjusting the patrilineal notions of time. By revelling in a triple freshness, we were (and indeed are as the experiment is ongoing), overruling the deferred relationship with an event which historically springs from the hero's epic quest, thus rendering it patriarchal, and which all language and story telling by its nature upholds. In this experiment, we are not trying to stabilise experience or time, but we are perhaps attempting to investigate the politics of passage.

In the second sequence, the coast line evolved into the lines of a path. The haikus and corresponding images were moving away from the beach and up the hill. Excitingly, the painting of the architect's house seemed like an architect's draft itself. We had laid the stones in the garden; now we were building the house. The situation of indigenous people is not addressed openly in Noosa or indeed in any of the coastal areas of Queensland, so, although my mother was drawing not only in her work but in our brief conversations on their central cultural distinction of songlines, the references to Aboriginal art in both the colour and upward movement of some of the paintings, particularly: 'sense of direction lacking,' were still subsumed by a Western artistic tradition. And of course this was apt enough. These layered images were a sort of portal where Aboriginal could meet white British in terms of art and experience. The idea that I was climbing the hill to 'your house / white like a clean canvas,' not only has echoes of a Western and very masculine tradition of fairy tale or pilgrimage, but connotations of racial empiricism. However, when that house was reached, it was as if we were only looking through one of the windows. There was a distance between viewer and art and the image remained distinct, just as the tone of the haikus simultaneously gives a sense of apartness and of intense involvement. In the haiku, the specific meets the infinite, in the words of Lisa Robertson, the 'Imperium' (the civilised and urban) collapses into the primitive ('The Device' The East Village Poetry Web), yet somehow manages to remain distinct and outside of normal time and space.

When reading the haikus and looking at the art works, one feels as if one is handling a mirrored talisman. The triple experience is further refracted by the Aboriginal aspect: this extra layer does not solidify or root, but rather allows endless readings and space for your own story. A friend told me of a white man at a corroboree who, after enjoying the Aboriginal tales that formed the centre of their gathering, cast around for one that he could contribute. It was so well received that his companions took it on as their own, showing the fluidity and agentlessness of story telling, a form of passage which can beat time and the single 'I am,' authority of Western thought as well as providing a forum for contact between opposing cultures or genders.

Where the images in that first sequence were very concerned with light and meditation, these in the second seem more governed by physical motion. The simple premise is one of walking the poem, walking the painting, of our bodily presences in art and these are inherently linked to time: the time it takes to read, the time to paint, the painting and poem as a suspension of time, the step of the walker as a gesture of passage and disruption of space. Once disrupted though, that space resettles, like the surface of a lake returning to stillness after the ripples of entry but now with something added to it. My mother said she felt as if, walking the poems, she stumbled over the nut introduced in 'today I met a / macadamia nut tree' and from then on was pushing it up the hill. See how the brown circle recurs in the later paintings as a symbol of initial impasse. The notion of walking returns explicitly in the next short sequence, the images for which begin to take on iconography of Western religious tradition. It is as if in the first sequence possessions were shed and a meditative state reached which prepared the way for pilgrimage: 'a long hot stretch. hauled / round Dolphin Point. Three thirty / Alone and barefoot.' The specification of time here as well as the introduction of cartoonish imagery (the sandals), modish symbol (the scallop shell), and, in the 'Devil's Kitchen' haiku, stick-on kitsch (the butterflies), unsettles: sudden material concerns which stand alone in the midst of a fluid, unpinned sequence. 'Three thirty,' a definite marker, serves to highlight the plasticity in the presentation of time through the rest of the poems.

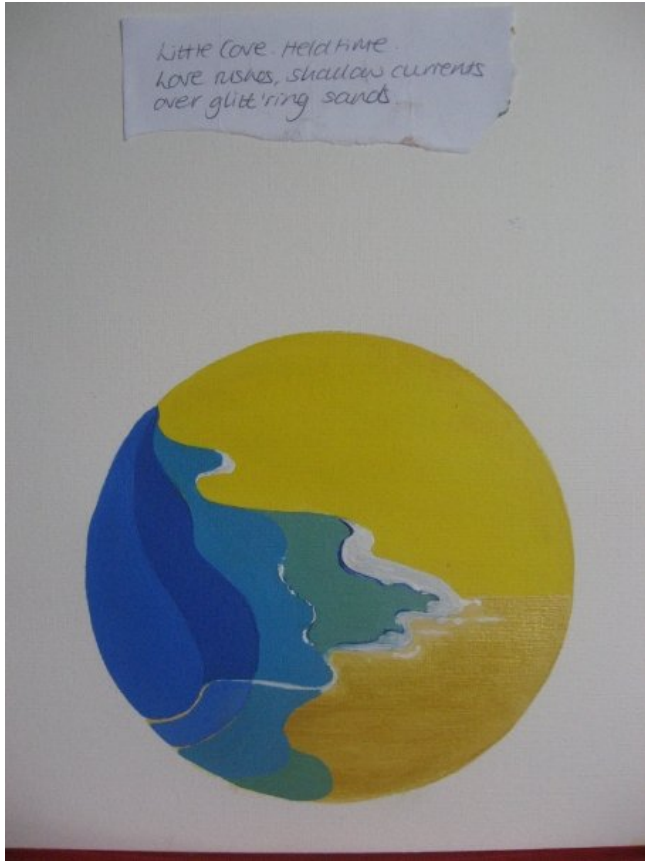
The 'Gustav' sequence deals with time and passage most directly and introduces a second figure into the narrative, a second walker, a second swimmer and with this, instead of developing a more elusive style which might complement the suggestion of the Other, the physicality grows to surreal proportions. The rocks are textured, the fish fat and exuberant, and the lips and eyes imposed in a Dali-esque fashion, giving a montage style that lends itself to a depiction of female communication. However, it is subverted: is my mother blocking the surrealist objectification of women through dissection by upending the wry knowing montage art of, for example, Magritte, and converting it into the inimitably jolly sexual humour that belongs to women? She herself later told me she was thinking of the work of Chagall. The prominence of those lips underlines the centrality of communication in this sequence and of femininity in the whole haiku experiment, the lips being the physical symbol around which Luce Irigaray's discussion winds in her seminal feminist work, *This Sex Which is Not One*, 1985. Shadows are prominent in this sequence as physicalised symbols of time passing. They are light not substance yet depend upon the body to be created. Again, though, the suggestion for elusivity has been resisted and the shadows that 'climb the rocks' are cartoonish and unthreatening: the image has converted the sentiment of the words from poignancy to something less ethereal. I admit that I felt with this sequence my mother attempting to root me into her familiar jocularly and it crossed my mind that perhaps the experiment was already too lengthy to remain precise. Time again was a concern even in the execution of it.

It is a cliché but only because it is true that time is a healer. Time is also a director, a constraint, a spur, a facilitator of creativity and of love because at some point it will run out. All water activities depend on time: the tides, patience needed to reel in the fattest fish, waiting for a wave. Time stretches between us into our selves in the past and into our future selves – we are continually enacting our future memories. On the bathroom wall in the hostel in which I am writing this is written: 'I want to be what I was when I wanted to be what I am now.' It is essentially impossible to dwell within

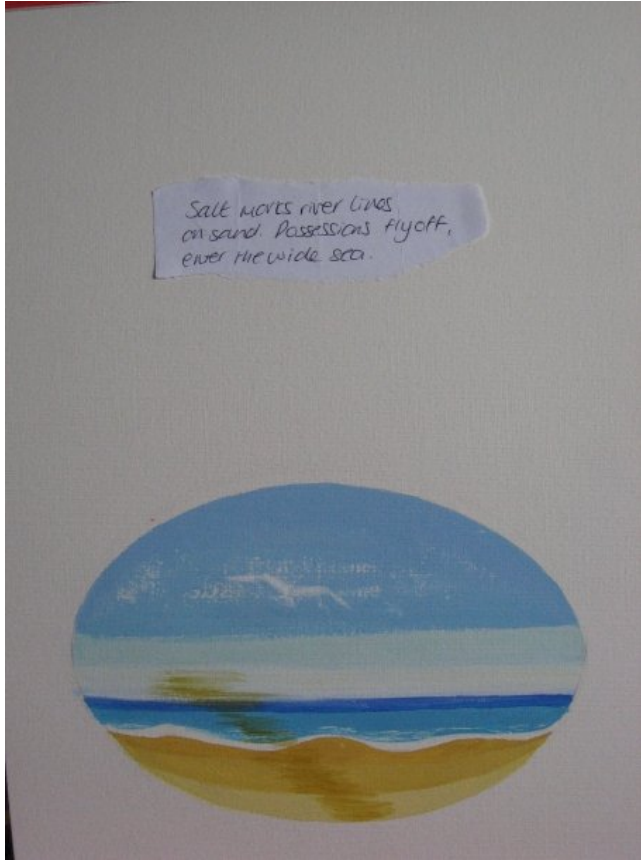
the present moment as a single thinking person. I would say the only times one is thoroughly present is when surfing and when free writing. If 'metaphor is a matter of travel, of displacement in order to give presence,' (Nancy) then perhaps I too needed to be away from home in order to discover and reveal to myself and my mother my thoughts relating to the past seven years. The haiku, as the most iconic of poetic forms, and its corresponding images attempt to cross the distance between mother and daughter and rejoin us while at the same time, through their very existence, they uphold our separation. Our attempt at contact is a sign of our apartness: this experiment presents poems and paintings which are at once moments of contact and of separation. The haikus are single instances of intimacy and as sparse forms they are infinitely interpretive: because there are few words set down, they encourage creativity from the reader. To paraphrase Jean-Luc Nancy, the bare obscurity of the haiku conceals at the same time as it reveals: it makes a living space then for a meeting between an artist and a poet. If alone they are windows into a dwelling which houses numerous rooms, when added to by the image the observer not only peeps through the window but is within the house itself. This Heideggerian idea of poetry as dwelling is reinforced by the introduction of the architect's office in the second sequence. In this experiment, origin and limits are erased - we enter and play within the threshold itself and, due to the time difference between England and Australia, when we meet, one of us is always asleep: 'only one of you was in.' With this small experiment, with the passage involved and the time difference between us, I believe we have made some venture towards entering the space of complicity, and dwelling within the border itself where time no longer holds its vigorous sway. Just as polarities conjure each other, the haiku is where the specific meets the infinite: like a star, its concise tininess is essential to the untrammelled endlessly interpretive chaos around it.

So what happened? The poem retained its sense of the present moment but gained infinite additional interpretations. Time was challenged gently. Of course, the relationship between my mother and me was strengthened by the fact that we allowed each other freedom in intimacy. I wrote her a poem in which I say 'thank you for holding my rope on the slip, but more for forgetting to keep a tight grip.' It's a silly lyric but the lapsing of concentration similar to those 'THING' activities like gardening, surfing, walking are ways in which we can extend time and fill it with freedoms that we may not have considered possible and moments when we can be released from Cartesian patrilineal and nominal notions of time. As Cyril Wong says in his beautiful 'Tilting our plates to catch the light,' 'there will always be time.' Things happen when you don't notice. This is why I believe this experiment ran its course after the Gustav sequence. As soon as we began to analyse it intently, the relaxation of communication and the sense of play within the space of complicity was gone. I believe we can catch it again though in a fresh way and of course to the reader and viewer it is always fresh so I pass it on to you now to enjoy as you wish.

Little Cove. Held time.
Love rushes, shallow currents
over glittering sands.



Salt marks river lines,
on sand. Possessions fly off,
ever the wide sea.



Surfers troop the steps,
carry longboards like a shield
down to little Cove.



Sun falls in her hands,
Ocean runs through her fingers,
waves spill from her lap.



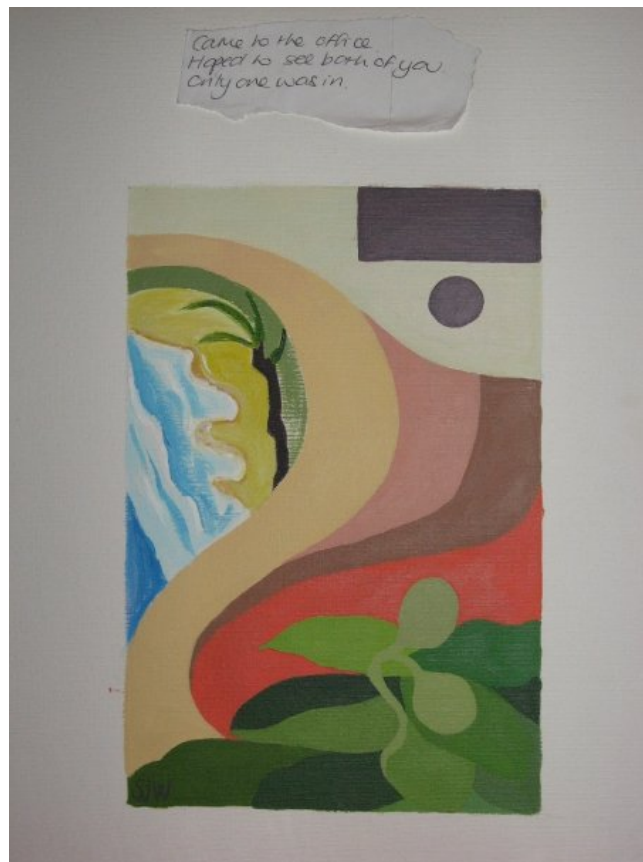


James said, p'raps someone
is thinking of your problems
on another beach



On a silver thread
paper eggs from home strung up
New life, hope, you said.





Sense of direction
lacking, I found your place by
the log at the door.



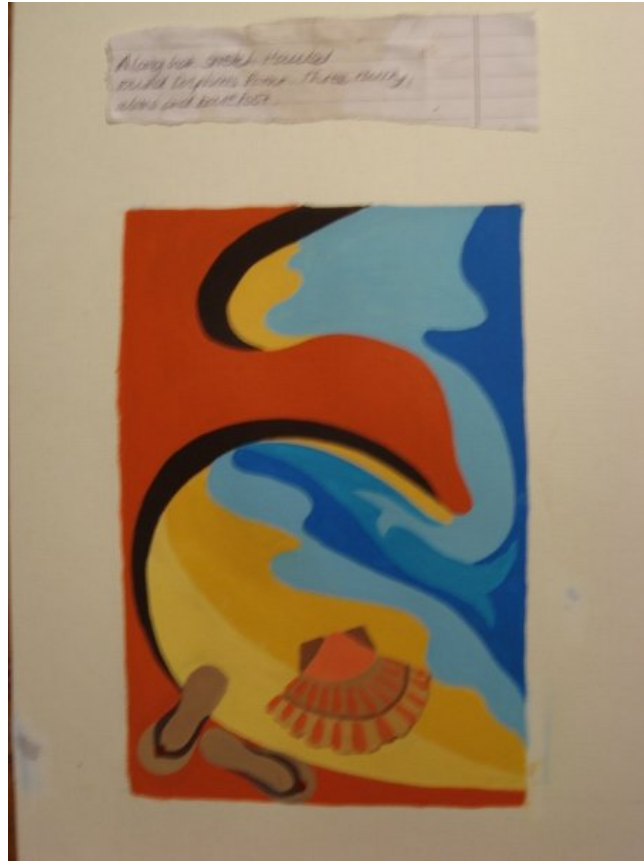
SJW

Stepped into your box
full of paper and houses.
White like a clean canvas.



On Pandanus Street,
the street of moving trees, it
starts now. You move me.





After night's pelt a
rainbow over Rainbow Beach
fills the van window.



Then at Tim Can Bay
we found shadows on the sand -
light was overcastly grey



First time you see fish
you may mistake the shadow
for the animal.



V

Granite n widened path,
spread sea, rocks all around me
nothing underneath.



Sail like a moth wing
Sun beats through it, gives a plink
of golden ocean.



Hot eyes, white rambling
Gustav, the water baby,
King of Granite Bay



Our shadows climb rocks,
breeze rolls the dusting sand
we look out like dogs



Halo to the left,
sun lowering behind the point,
our right sides cast now



Sliding time opened
by our light concentration,
this is our shared gift.



I'm pictas. You
are a true friend. The sunset.
Then, "andiamo."



