

Episteme: an online interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary & multi-cultural journal

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IN THE SPACE BETWEEN

By Elizabeth McCardell

Gaston Bachelard, French philosopher, mathematician, and dreamer of dreams, inspires me, for I too am philosopher and dreamer. Like him, I am enlivened by intersections, balances, confluences, and transformations. Jorge Luis Borges has also influenced me, not only for his take on magic realism but the conciseness of his thought and expression. Thus what I contribute here are sometimes not strictly poems, nor prose pieces, rather I am moved to write in the interstices of these. My feeling is in the processes of the kinesthete, of a geometry of shape, form and meaning. I am intrigued by the impulse to silence and words, the microcosm more than macro, the jewel in the grass carried there by some strange imaginary bird.

I am a psychotherapist and clinical hypnotherapist by profession and inclination. My work is untangling knots in the stories of others and thus bringing greater easefulness of mind. My training has been in literary theory, linguistics, psychology and philosophy and the tools learned there are implicit in all I write.

I offer these small pieces to play with, to allow a drift for dreamers, and an occasional query to stimulate creative outpouring and wondering.

WORDS BEFORE WORDS

I want to write about the dark inchoate space that is night.

I want to describe the beginning before the setting out without a plan, guided only occasionally by a snatch of moon and shiny patches of wet on the leafy ground.

I want to write of this before, before, before, because that's how it feels right now, to write without a clear sense of what I'm writing about. I have only a feeling; nameless and wordless.

Words before words, before even concepts, before even a sense of direction, before the division of light into dark, before the Genesis of God himself, before beforebefore... I saw the movie a Theory of Everything the other day, the movie about the life and work of Stephen Hawking. In the beginning was not even the word, the thought, nor time, nor a beginning shining in darkness, exploding in the night, just an inchoate nothing.

And yet, a mere dot in which all worlds, all words, spawned and into which all will retreat. There is a hum threading each precious bead of wordlessness to words to nothing once more. A snatch of light, a glistening of moon captured in grass, a stumbling, a bird call... and then the night.

UNDER THE WATER

You were brilliant under the water: caring, careful, aware of me learning the art of diving.

Out of the water, you bombarded me with your stories. Chatting, without listening, talking talkingtalking. You didn't hear me. Your voice jostled the air that I was trying to breath.

Under the water you showed me the universe: Port Jackson sharks, giant rays the size of rooms, dolphins, head down, feeding on seaweed, wise eyes greeting us. You showed me coloured Chinese lamps and luminous light-twitching fish. You checked my gauge to make sure I had air enough.

Out of the water, you took away my breath with your chatter. I didn't want to know you anymore; I craved silence and coolness in the head, and so I told you to go.

I see you sometimes around town with your current lady. I see your performances as a balloon-clown, blowing up these rubbery things for the delight of children. She paints their faces and they wear balloon hats.

I invented an underwater sign for "Wow!" The lexicon had "good," "crayfish," "shark," "air low," and concepts such as these. No, "Wow!" for the exuberance, the joy, the amazingness of the underwater world. Without you, I would've known these things only as a snorkeler. With you, I became a fully fledged diver.

I miss our dives, but I don't miss you.

EASTER EGGS

This Easter I painted eggs that I'd dyed as I've done every Easter since childhood. My mother and I prepared these eggs in the beginning. Some we boiled in food colouring and painted and some we wrapped in onion skins tied up in a piece of stocking and string. There was always industry here, in the making of beautiful eggs, and it had a special sense of holiness, if I may put it that way. I cannot imagine not making eggs.

I get my friends involved as much as possible. Perhaps it is just wanting to share delight in the process of creation, perhaps I have a mission. A mission, you ask? I do feel a certain fervour for the camaraderie that this task sets in place and somehow want a tradition of shared creating to continue with me, and beyond me, into generations and generations after my time on earth. It was my mother's gift to me, and this I give to you; this sort of thing.

We sit together, with paints and paint brushes, and a little container of gold colour for buffing onto an egg, a roll of kitchen paper, and two glass jars of water, one for the reds and one for the blues, and we talk, reminisce, joke, laugh, drink coffee, eat cake, and paint. One day of the year we paint together, sharing a tradition of the ages of Russian Orthodox Christendom (for my mother was Russian), but beyond that, beyond that, to a mystery beyond that, to an inchoate knowing, hardly formed flocculant sense of birth and rebirth, just beginning and mysteriously just ending. How can I say what I mean? I do not have the words for it. So I just paint.

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IN THE CRACKS BETWEEN THE ORDINARY AND IMAGINARY

My mother used to tell me to write about stuff I knew. She'd found me writing about the imaginary. She said the ordinary was already rich enough.

But, but, what about Swift's houyhnhnms, what of busy rabbits with watches waiting for tea?

She showed me the brilliance of leaves, the luminance of grains of sand, the smell of earth...

What though of the elementals in lava flows? What of the Dreamtime serpent lifting the asphalt under our feet? What of talking horses?

Her world at night was scattered with stars, hurtling meteors, and worm holes. Mine had goddesses, wild boar, and boats coursing the Milk Way. Her days shone with sunlight glancing off dew on the mulberry tree, mine moved to the cracks between worlds.

I can hear them both, see them both, for my imaginary horse has whinnied-away the veils between this and that.

WOLF

I was twenty three when I studied at the Jung Institute of Analytical Psychology in Zurich, Switzerland for the second time. I stayed with nuns around the corner and up the road a bit.

Each lecture day I walked past winter gardens, smelled coffee, apples, and hot chocolate and each Sunday rode the train to some sweet sounding village.

And I drank in the silence from the mountain springs

And I watched puppets in the medieval towns with babies in bonnets

And I ate strawberries soaked in kirsch with clotted cream

And I'd walk miles upon miles. I'd walk in the hills, past garden allotments, into the wilderness.

I'd walk alone.

One time I saw a wolf padding around the fields. She was very beautiful, fierce and elegant.

This was my Switzerland. It changed everything for me, and I've never been the same. I tried to return to my life in Perth in Australia. I tried to fit in. I tried the life of wife, I tried employee, but the call of the wolf is the call I listen to.

I tread a path that is solitary, and it suits me. I enjoy the pack, it is true, but then at the end of the day, I pad back to my lair, lick my fur, eat my food, contemplate the hours that have past and go to sleep.

The Tao of Acknowledgements

I have in hand a book of poems written by my old friend and teacher, Peter. From his hand, my sense of the poem was nurtured, like breath upon a little fire burning in a solitary place.

I am a voice in a line of voices, flowing like the Tao down generations after generation, connecting us from then to now, to now, to now.

Poetry is the language of connection, the language of connective patterning,
of words evocative of much,
and yet bringing a gentle silence into the space between.

Poetry is the language of the heart, the language wrought by the mind, and settled like smoke in the hollows of the soul.

It rests,

I rest,

glad to have been a part.

Bio:

Elizabeth McCardell, BA, BA (Hons), M. Couns., Ph.D. is a psychotherapist, independent scholar, and well published writer. She currently lives in Lismore, northern New South Wales, Australia.