

Poetry Group July 2022 report by Annie Clouston

Our theme was 21st century poetry; it was very refreshing to consider the inspirational work of contemporary writers. The bias was inevitably towards more well-known poets, and this prompts me to think that a future theme should be looking at the next generation of poets.

Seamus Heaney's *Follower* was our opening poem, and is a pastoral homage to his father, possibly less well known than his extraordinarily poignant *Digging*. Less well known than Heaney is Owen Sheers – a mere youngster aged 48. His 2005 poem, also about a tender father-son relationship, *The Hill Fort (Y Gaer)* evokes the depth of tradition and glory in the landscape of Wales.

An Anglo-Ghanaian poet, previously unknown to us, Caleb Azumeh Nelson (29 years old) wrote a poem that had echoes for me of Maya Angelou's *Still I Rise. I'm Strong* is a poem that in my view creaks with desperation to break out of the limits that racism has imposed on his self-esteem.

Having read Jacky Kay's autobiography *Red Dust Road* for book group I was keen to read her poetry, so my choices were *Divorce*, a bleakly ironic rant against perceived poor parenting and *Between the Dee and the Don*, a highly personalised and lyrical poem about the intersectionality of her being:

I was born between the Dee and the Don.
I was born in the city of crag and stone.

I am not a daughter to one father.
I am not a sister to one brother.
I am light and dark.
I am father and mother.

Born in Aberdeen to a young Scottish mother who was abandoned by the Nigerian father, with an adopted brother, and three half-siblings, Jacky is gay, and mother to a son. Jacky was for ten years Macca, the Scottish Poet Laureate, and is also a novelist of acclaim.

Carol Ann Duffy (incidentally a former lover of Jacky Kay) wrote *Text* in 2005 and bemoans that very activity that sends messages that frustrate: "The codes we send/ arrive with a broken chord" and to which we accord a significance that depletes or raises hope, unreasonably in each case. Our final poem was by Robin Beth Schaer – *Holdfast*. It is a work about the power of touch and the sadness of lost opportunities:

...In a study on love,
baby monkeys were given a choice
between a wire mother with milk
& a wool mother with none. Like them,
I would choose to starve & hold the soft body.

In a change to the published programme, our next meeting will be with Meg Peacocke giving readings of some of her poems. Scottish poetry will be the theme of our September meeting. As always, if you would like our poetry file, please email me: annie@cloustons.uk.