


The Beautiful Work A Short Poetic Essay

Sally Atkins



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Soul Brother
For Paolo¹

See how the ripples
Spread out now
From the center
Where you have dropped
Your heart stone
Into the pool
Of our souls.

This poem was offered as a thank you to Paolo Knill in the closing ritual of the Second Session Summer School of the Arts, Health and Society Division of the European Graduate School in Saas-Fee, Switzerland in 2011. In Paolo's hands, the ending of a session, with its goodbyes and its acknowledgment of the significance of what we created together in the summer school, becomes a work of art, carefully shaped by a master artist. Paolo demonstrates again and again in the Community Art sessions of the summer school how clearly he knows the way art works and how a beautiful work of performance art may be shaped with a community of individuals.

Another of my poems from the summer session, written in response to a lecture by Dr. Peter Sinapius, also relates to the theme of this special issue of *POIESIS* and to the work of Paolo Knill.

Lecture on Therapoetic Aesthetics and Life in 45 Minutes
For Peter

I asked myself, what is beauty.
I asked myself, what is love.
I asked myself, what is reality
And how shall I live?

The wave on my retina
Tells me the tree is green.
An encounter of skin
Becomes a dialogue of story.

Sometimes the beautiful work
Arrives in the morning
With the sun spilling red
Over the high mountains.

Sometimes the beautiful work
Arrives in a handshake,
In the dancelike silence
Held in the sensitive

And sustaining
Presence of another,
The one who stays,
The one who cares.

Sometimes the beautiful work
Arrives in the quiet assurance
Of the teacher who calls us
To honour the teacher who arrives
In ourselves.

Today I find shelter
In this nest woven of words
And I name this place
Beauty.

Will You Meet Me in the Watery Place
Elizabeth Gordon McKim

-For Pao

*Will you do me a favour, you ask
Of course, I say
Will you shampoo my hair, you ask
I can't do it myself with my eye like this after the surgery*

*Of course, I say
In the tub?, you say
Yes, I say
Great, it's been five days
I stink, I feel sticky, my hair is hang
down dirty, you say*

So we do this bathing with the warm water and the soap and the shampoo
And the towel covering your injured eye and your hand grasping the porcelain railing
And your head thrown back like a wild horse taming and trusting... gentling

I shampoo and rinse your hair, my fingers massage your scalp
and temples, the nape of your neck
It's been almost forty years
Since we listened to Dylan sing *sarahahahahahaha sarah*
Until my lampshade burst into flames in the little room
In Brookline looking out on lime green leaves in deep flickering shadow

We're elders now friends familiars performing partners teaching *companeros*
Of the work and road through time and time past tumbling towers and torn treaties
Tanks at dawn rumbling through the streets of Tel Aviv
A dog in a hot country lazily chewing
On the bones of a cat...
We've pledged our lives to this work and the ones we move beside
The soap moves here and beyond
All the sacred shelters I have journeyed to
Half a lifetime ago ago ago

*It's done, we did it, you are clean
I feel like a baby or an old man, you say,
as you climb out of the tub
Fresh, you say, I feel fresh*

I give you a rose-coloured towel

Take the one that sucks up moisture, you say... not the other one

I help you dry your steadfast and eloquent body
You put on a clean soft thinly-striped cotton shirt
and tan trousers and we sit in your sweet-smelling kitchen
at dusk at your wooden table where you and your beloved,
your wife, my friend usually sit

We drink full-bodied red wine, warmed by a Spanish sun
We dip our fingers in strawberries soaked with framboise brandy from the Loire Valley
We remember other times when we stained our fingers
with cherry juice high in the mountains above Siblingen
and slept on goosedown puffs with our separate loves
Under a thousand plummeting stars

*It was happiness, you say
Yes, happiness, unpursued, unprovoked
Just staining our hands our fingers like berry juice*

We eat and talk, I watch you
Your brown eye covered with a white patch
From a delicate and precarious operation
Endured only five days ago

We clink our glasses and see each other
Clearly and forever in the broken shards of light
Moving toward the night
Watched over by the constant eye
Of the full and strawberry moon

We repeat our talisman as we always do before the show

*Will you never forsake me I will never forsake you
Will you always laugh at my jokes I will always laugh at your jokes*

Are you ready I am ready are you ready I am ready

We move together in slo/mo....
Two old troupers / out and further out
Onto the brightening stage

Visit www.egspress.com/poiesis2012gallery online for a selection of live performances featuring Elizabeth McKim and Paolo Knill, Saas-Fee, Switzerland, Summer, 2011.