

Two Poems

Charles Henry

RUNNER-UP, THOMAS McGRATH AWARD FOR POETRY

Charles Henry is a second semester English M.A. student at UND, with interests in composition theory, sociolinguistics, and the early modern and medieval British periods. He received his undergraduate in English and Education at West Liberty University, where he also began his creative writing journey. His writings often deal with exploring the underside of the expected experience of language and examining the shifting forms and conventions of writing. Charles has lived all over the eastern U.S., originally growing up on a farm in the Ohio valley, and he enjoys bringing those experiences into his writing.

On Charles' poetry, the Creative Writing Scholarship Committee observed: "In his poems, Charles approaches the substance of everyday living with candor, warmth, and sensitivity. His poems make deft use of enjambment, indentations, and the silence between stanzas to invite us to meditate, in comfortable silence, with the speakers of his poems."

Silly Little Word

Where is that word,
 that I just had in my head?
 Ah! It found its way to the page,
 by going through my fingers.
 Silly little verb,
 always doing something.
 But, I'm not sure I like what it's doing.
 So, I picked it up and threw it on the floor
 Then grabbed it back up
 to see if it could become something more.
 I rolled in my hand,
 to see if I could give it a sense of self,
 and all of the sudden it became something else.
 An adjective!
 ...that's fun,
 but not quite what I need.

Next, I gave it a bend, but it broke in two;
that's not what I was trying to do.
Infinitives don't give a sense of who.
So I taped it together and gave it a stretch.
Stretched it right into a gerund,
but the word wasn't quite there and...
I wanted something closer to a name.
Frustrated I let out a sigh, picked it up, and held it to my eye.
And pled,
"Help me, silly word, I need something profound."
It jumped from my hand,
back onto the page.
And when I looked down,
I was surprised at what I found.
The little thing had bent itself into a noun.
"Ah, yes of course!
That there is just the thing.
What a good team, you and me."
Then I smiled.
How flexible that silly little word can be.

My Old Friend

The waves of time pull at me.
They pull at me all the time; I've come to find.
Like swirls in the surf,
my attention draws to the questions near the center.
Questions to which the answers can only be found in time.

The ebbing waves used to be my friend, you see.
They'd wash over me, but I was unaltered by the pull.
In truth, I couldn't even feel the waves. I felt only my youth.
But I could see the pull,
though only on others.
But the pull on others, delighted me.
I'd point and giggle as time pulled wrinkles on my family's face.
They'd blush, or laugh,
and then warn me of time's fickleness.
Then all of the sudden,
I realized that time could pull too hard.
In a reddish casket with white pillows laid
a familiar grey face in front of a small boy.
That was the first time my little heart cracked,
but I didn't understand the crack,
just as I didn't understand the pull.

Time comes in waves though.
And I've seen several low tides since my first.
Oh... I suppose I've seen just as many high tides, as well.
For years, I tried to tug back at the tide, even if only in words.

But it seems that time tugged at me first.
I can see the tiny crevices, from the times that I smiled so wide,
that it cracked the skin around my eyes,
and I can see the creases, from where the tears were pulled down my face.
The tears that time had pooled into puddles of dangling questions
that swirl with answers yet to come.

These cracks,
they're not that deep, you see.

These cracks that time has placed all over me.
I've still time to watch them grow, I know.
But seeing them hurts all the same.
And they'll deepen, as time pulls at all of the things that I love.
Those loves will slowly fade at the hours' grasp.
The hours and minutes will slowly pull, and then pass
until I no longer see the moments, at all.
And instead I'll only remember the waves.

Time is not all loss though.
Sure it rises and falls, pushing then pulling, and it slowly drags us to the sea.
And yes, because of time, one day I will die, and you... just as me.
Because the cracks will never not continue to grow.

But... just as it ebbs, it also flows.
My skin had to suffer these cracks
and my eyes had to crease.
Because without the flow of time,
I couldn't have met my favorite niece.
The one that loves to point out the wrinkles.
That she can clearly see, even easier than me.
I blush and laugh, and pass on the warning,
but then she asks, what the world was like before I had them.

And time had to swirl for me to make up my mind
on what kind of life was supposed to be mine
and to make me decide what my purpose should be.
It took time for time to pass into memory.
You know the one I mean, the one's half hers,
that kiss, that blush, that first time under the covers.

Time then has two parts.
The first, of course, is my enemy
But it would seem the other part is still my friend,
Because time brings more than only the end.