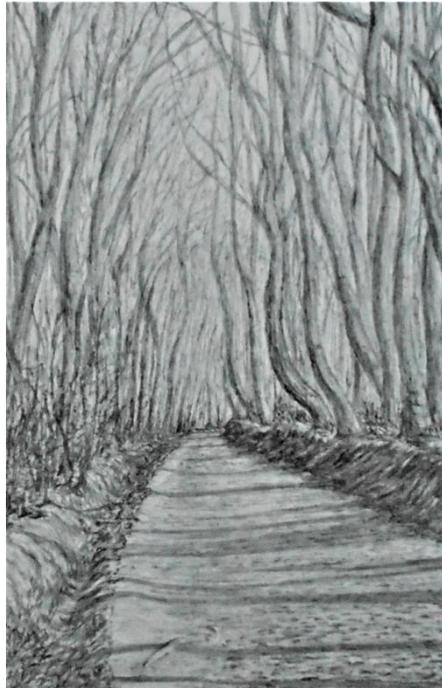


online edition

eternity in a moment



moments in eternity

Wimbledon Philosophical Society Summer Garden Party, 2020

eternity in a moment - moments in eternity

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Pencil sketches, Roland Rogers.

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Wimbledon Philosophical Society Summer Garden Party, 2020

Performers in order of appearance

Leslie Dighton

Ann Vaughan-Williams

Ewa Cobham

Roland Rogers

Juan Tafur

Playbill

Introduction and Fragments

Words; time; love foregone and love found; and place

My Ayah

River Nile

The Familiar Path

Hanging out with Grandma

Eco delle Marche : infinite change

Three poems

On the Inca Trail

Closure and more fragments on time and love

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Leslie Dighton

Introduction and Fragments

Words; time; love foregone and love found; and place

In planning this performance, the Poetry Committee of the Society was inspired by the idea that moments happen in life – a sight, a sound, a gesture, a context – so important that they stay with us forever. Indestructibly beautiful, unspeakably sad. Forever moments, eternal moments.

Memories from childhood, before experience has overprinted our capacity for wonder, are especially powerful. In adult life we can still be brought up short by the beauty of an idea or something we feel in a person which gives us a glimpse of that sense of eternity.

Lucretius said a long time ago 'all solid matter is made up of particles which move through the ages and are indestructible'. What a comforting continuity there is in that sense that all things are joined up and eternal. How beautiful also to know that moments happen and feelings are experienced which capture for each of us our sense of the eternal, the sacred.

Ann, Ewa, Roland, Juan and myself are going to share a few of those moments that we have personally experienced. They are intensely personal, expressions of love and loss and memory rather than logic.

FRAGMENTS

I am going to start by sharing some fragments of eternity which have been important to me. They are to do with words, with time – wrong time and right time, place, and love – love as a mist and love as a sacrifice.

WORDS

- * a seven-year-old playing in a place of private wonder
- * words of hatred as indestructible as Lucretius' particles
- * the verb to have which does not exist in Hindi, Tamil or Sanskrit and Cioran on 'the sickness of the idolatry of becoming, of progressing by having.'

LOVE AS A MIST

- * an extract from the Wanderer by Kahlil Gibran 'a man and a woman sat by a window that opened upon Spring. And the man said I love you.... you are a song in my dreaming. And the woman said I am not a thought, and I am not a thing that passes in your dreams'.

PLACE AND BELONGING

- * an extract about Hainault Forest 'we had been so permanently enriched by the Forest that we carry it in us to the end of our pilgrimage'.

My fragments stop there and we will hear more about place, memory and belonging now first from Ann.

Ann Vaughan-Williams

These poems come from my childhood in Uganda. They catch hold of moments in time whilst walking or travelling. They preserve images which stand out in all the activity and routine of life going on.

The first poem is about a child with her ayah or mother's help finding the lines we can trace in the palms of shared hands, in moments of childhood trust.

My Ayah

Her voice says
'Come.'
We sit in the shade of a palm.

She strips the leaves.
We weave the strands,
plait ourselves a mat.

Her legs
tuck sideways, folded wings,
her arm about me.

We sing along
the lines we trace
in her palms.

The second poem is a journey on the river Nile in Uganda, near the source of the river. Sharpened memory catches images of threat and of love in a journey that said goodbye to a homeland.

River Nile

Crossing the Nile,
on a ferry fashioned from trees,
I was eight, stood in the heat
by my father's hardy Ford Dagnum.
Children swam alongside, and I wished
that I could jump into the cooling water,
not allowed. So hot, it was so hot.
We left the shouting and laughter,
drove on, stirring up red dust;
boarded a steamer, towed a flat raft of people
with their goats and chickens and *matoke*;
chugged alongside islands of reeds
with white egrets and pelicans
flapping and unmolested.
Came to Paraa camp, boarded a launch,
rode the river in its upper reaches,
gatherings of hippo heaving and snorting;
didn't go too close. Alone, I watched
the dark serrated tail of a crocodile
cutting into our wake as we moved fast away.
We moored at a grassy bank,
walked in single file along the river's edge,
our escort with his gun in his hands.
Dozens of huge crocodiles basked alongside,
mouths wide open, eyes hooded;
a bird pecked at the teeth of one
as we walked steadily towards the roar.
Pulled ourselves up through bushes,
over rocks, reached a metal bridge,
watched a massive green tongue
cascade over the escarpment.
White froth churned beneath us.
The spray made a mist which hid my father
sitting on a rock in contemplation,
his twenty-one years' service in Uganda coming to an end.
Round the back of Murchison Falls a sudden quiet pool
reminded my mother of her honeymoon —
she and my father went to the Mountains of the Moon,
bathed under a waterfall,
her blue eyes were bright with the memory.

The third poem is from a walk as a child into a swamp where the landscape has changed because of fire burning the papyrus, a walk when the world has turned upside down and the elder child is lost and is no longer the natural leader.

The Familiar Path

I am walking down a familiar path,
following my sister who knows the way,
she lives here in Kawanda and wanders near and far
while I am at boarding school.
The European houses are of brick
with red tiled rooves,
have gardens growing roses and zinnias.
You can descend to the swamp which makes a divide
from the African homes we have never reached,
mud and straw huts surrounded by banana groves.
I am glad to be home,
glad to follow my knowing little sister,
looking forward to the swamp
with its swaying papyrus fronds
high above our heads, a thousand
weaver birds darting busily among them.
But what is this? As we walk
the land turns to black harsh stubble,
smoke is drifting from the ash,
the horizon has dropped to reveal hills.
On one of them is a sacred monument
desecrated by missionaries.
We walk on in a strange land.
We walk on, my sister leading.
I am smitten by the blackness,
want to go back from this strange flat land
want the stream that we cross
where tadpoles collect.
We reach the dark trickle where the water gushed.
I want to go home,
but there are none of the signs we usually see,
the papyrus heads have gone.
I don't know the way home.
My sister walks on as if nothing has happened.
Yet I am the big sister, the one who leads —
But today the smell of burnt stalks fills my head.
An African man comes along
greeted and passes on
intent on his own business
as dusk suddenly falls.

Ewa Cobham

This is an entry in my diary which bears the title: *Diary of One who is First in the Queue*. It is a conversation with my granddaughter.

Hanging out with Grandma

'Grandma, are you going to die next?' Amelie had asked when she was twelve and a half. 'Of course,' I assured her. 'I am by far the eldest in the family so I am first in the queue.'

As the subject of our conversation had not met with family approval, we abandoned it, but Amelie did not forget and so now we are alone she broaches it again.

It is Amelie's birthday and I have come to a village in Somerset where she lives to celebrate it with my son's family.

While her question, posed a year and a half ago, was of a personal nature, now aged fourteen, Amelie has matured and her question has grown into a more universal one.

Perhaps the subject of living and dying is prompted by the presence of an old village cemetery on our left as we follow the narrow footpath leading from the village shop back home.

If it happens to be a Saturday when I am staying with Paul, Leila, Amelie and Ben, I make an early morning trip to the village shop. Today, Amelie has sacrificed her week-end lie-in to join me.

'Grandma?' asks Amelie following me as we walk single file. 'What do you think happens to us when we die?'

As I near the time when death is likely to occur, it is not a question I have not considered. Having had an interest in philosophy for as long as I can remember, I realised about fifteen years ago, how slack I had become in establishing a spiritual discipline of any sort.

Lazy and practical by nature, I decided to rekindle my interest in my search for enlightenment while having my nightly shower. It seemed a time-saving way of having a foot in both the earthly and the spiritual camp.

As I turn on the shower, I begin to recite *The Eight Verses on Transforming the Mind* which I had learnt, many years ago, while on a week's retreat in Belfast with the Dalai Lama. My version is simpler than the one I had been given then.

I recite aloud which helps me to concentrate. Verses finished, I turn off the tap. *The Eight Verses* are the perfect length for showering and can be recommended for saving water.

So now, while walking with my granddaughter beside the old graves covered with moss and mellowed Bath limestone, the question of life and death has come up again and Amelie and I exchange views.

'It's your turn first, Grandma'.

'This is how I see it,' I begin. 'Deep down, we humans know the difference between right and wrong and it is important at all times to try to do the right thing as we understand it, even when it is not easy. Should we do the wrong thing, either by mistake or due to some driving force within us, we need to make every effort to correct it. That's what mistakes are - and our ability to recognise them - a way of teaching us to make corrections. In my view, it is important that, when it's time to die, we die knowing we had done as much right and as many corrections as we could.'

In her reply to the question, which is quite beyond me to repeat, Amelie shows a knowledge and understanding of Hindu scriptures which she quotes and names in Sanskrit! It includes reincarnation.

To ensure there is no misunderstanding between Amelie and me, I clarify that my philosophy does not incorporate my coming back to earth as myself in another form.

Nevertheless, as I speak, I tread carefully, making sure I am not treading on my grandmother, now reborn as, say, an ant or a worm, just to be on the safe side.

'No', I pronounce sententiously, 'I as me, as a person, will dissolve.'

I am concerned that our points of view could diverge irreconcilably at this point, but I need not have feared.

'Yes, I totally agree. We think almost exactly alike.' says the budding philosopher, cheerfully trotting behind me.

We reach home just in time for breakfast. It would appear, however, that our dialogue is not over.

Now, three weeks since my return home from Somerset I get a text from my son. 'Please come over at half-term. Amelie says she wants to hang out with Grandma.'

July 2018

Roland Rogers

Eco delle Marche: infinite change is set in four hilltop towns in the Marche region of central Italy. Here we wait, travel, arrive, and leave.

I. 11:10 for Caldarola

Waiting in Tolentino, death closes one door and opens another for a new life to begin.

II. Macerata coach

Travelling to and from Macerata, the mind muses on transient things, and ends with Mother Nature's own drama on the stage of the open-air arena.

From the coach, I would often see a mongrelly dog watching the traffic from the corner of a road. We grew old together, and he became my chorus. (Forgive me Fido if my imagination does not match your imaginings. Humans have much to learn.)

III. A gentle quake

Arriving in Caldarola was a homecoming. Over the centuries, my maternal side of the family owned farms, houses, and even villages in and around the Sibillini mountains and hills. Change was reassuringly slow or brutally sudden when the earth decided to shake.

IV. The Infinite

We take our leave at Recanati, where Giacomo Leopardi was inspired on Monte Tabor to write *L'infinito*. It became Italy's most famous, much-loved, and much-discussed poem.

Leopardi's 'hermit hill' takes its name from Mount Tabor in Israel: to many Christians the site of the transfiguration of Jesus, where human nature meets God, the temporal meets the eternal, and Jesus bridges heaven and earth. Leopardi, poet-philosopher-philologist and doubter, envisioned his spiritual epiphany on Monte Tabor.

Out of nothingness, a moment in time resurrects the past in imagination, to bring peace of mind on an infinite journey: fear ends in serenity.

The Infinite and *L'infinito* will both be read.

Eco delle Marche: infinite change

I. 11:10 for Caldarola

It's spring in Tolentino.
The martins nest
in the *campanile*,
and swirl and squeal
around the *piazza*.

The bells chime
time for coffee,
and a naughty
diplomatico
in the bar at *Zazzaretta*.

Hushed conversations
hum and hurry
past my table,
and a mother feeding
her child under an arch.

The sun begins to shine
as winter slips away,
and Nature makes spaces,
while people find places,
and Time cares not a jot.

One shadow takes its leave,
as another enters play.
Drink up your *tazza*,
vacate your place, catch the bus,
and take the *via* waiting for us.

II. Macerata coach

May blossom bathed
in emerald green and poppy red;
greys grazing under cotton clouds;
snow glistening on the Sibillini hills;
swifts returning and wheeling;
alban *pioppi* dancing in the air...
Macerata motors on.

A cold wet nose rests on a paw,
one eye open, watching the bus.
The head turns:
'Should I bark at that?'

A turquoise tide rushing to the shore;
silver ghosts pitch and roll;
diamonds glint on flashing waves;
sails line the sea and sky;
gulls cry like lovers
over salty slatey graves...
Macerata rumbles on.

A cold wet nose rests on a paw,
one eye open, watching the bus.
The head lifts:
'Why waste a yap on this.'

Ranks of vines on hillsides wait,
where legions once came and went.
Under fields lie buckles,
swords, sandals and amulets;
above, olive groves shelter
nannies, billies and kids...
Macerata rings out.

A cold wet nose rests on a paw,
one eye open, watching the bus.
The head shakes:
'I've seen it all before.'



And now the Sferisterio lights up.
An arena fills with sparks and riggers,
ushers, audience, choir and divas.
The baton rises for the overture
and into the spotlight arrives...
a bat chasing a desperate moth.
Macerata plays on.

A cold wet nose rests on a paw,
eyes shut, not missing the bus.
The head tilts:
'Dreams are made of this...'

III. A gentle quake

The cast is changing in Caldarola.
The piazza is pink and restored;
the ironwork is buffed and black,
and the barber and grocer back
under new signs for old.

Old Alfio's blue eyes are fading,
though not Danielle's peepers, twinkling
as they do when a pretty girl wafts by.
Sadly, dear Nonni strides no more
down familiar cobbled streets; but,
at least, Nenè no longer has to scrub
her sheets on Chienti's cold river stone.

Keen-eyed Giulietta embroidered flowers
for the great and the good,
while her postman brother,
Beppe, delivered all their bills.
Gone is the beat of a hammer
on a last at home:
shoes are shipped from China.

Things shift in the blink of an eye
when the earth decides to stir.
This time it was a gentle quake,
though it still took years
to rebuild the tower and the clock.

People returned to ancient roles
fixed by generations before;
some went back to the Picenes,
Romans, Normans, Popes,
and cardinal Pallotta,
who left his castle just
five hundred years ago.

We and ways come and go;
while some stay, others move on.
Today we tango; tomorrow we reel.
The rhythm changes; the dance goes on.
But when next the music stops,
and jangly bells fill the square... Run! Run!!

IV. The Infinite

This hermit hill was always dear to me,
with its hedgerow hiding
the last horizon in so many places.
But as I sit and gaze beyond,
and conjure unending spaces,
unearthly silences,
and utter stillness,
my heart almost stops in fear.
When...storming through the leaves,
the wind brings me a voice to set against
that infinite silence; and eternity
and seasons past are summoned
to breathe in this moment and sound.
And my thoughts drown in this vastness,
where to founder is sweet and gentle in this sea.

Giacomo Leopardi. Translation, Roland Rogers.

L'Infinito

*Sempre caro mi fu quest'ermo colle,
E questa siepe, che da tanta parte
Dell'ultimo orizzonte il guardo esclude.
Ma sedendo e mirando, interminati
Spazi di là da quella, e sovrumani
Silenzi, e profondissima quiete
Io nel pensier mi fingo; ove per poco
Il cor non si spaura. E come il vento
Odo stormir tra queste piante, io quello
Infinito silenzio a questa voce
Vo comparando: e mi sovvien l'eterno,
E le morte stagioni, e la presente
E viva, e il suon di lei. Così tra questa
Immensità s'annega il pensier mio:
E il naufragar m'è dolce in questo mare.*

*Giacomo Taldegardo Francesco di Sales
Saverio Pietro Leopardi (Recanati, 1798 -
Naples, 1837)*



Ewa Cobham

Three poems written when I was very young and living in the Caribbean.

Hear that constant rhythmic sound
The sea's passion for the sand?
It stretches out until it's found
its lover on the land.

Over the eager, open shore
It spreads its foaming rapture,
Gently envelops it before
It takes it for its capture.

They join in a rolling embrace
Within each other enclasp'd,
Atop the crest they face
The Now and all that's past.

On a thousand shores they have loved
In fair and foul weather;
In eternity they have carved
Their wish to love together.

Sirius has risen, light fades fast,
The Caribbean opal sky
Turns sapphire, one more day passed
Waiting for you.

Sea mourns the departing rays.
A tear-filled iridescent pool;
Wind stilled, witnesses the day's
Expiring breath.

Voluptuous night embraces
The yielding, hot, succumbing Earth;
They lie, secreted from my gaze
As I wait for you.

Don't ask me not to grieve, my friend
And never to be sad
When even hours after parting
I long to be with you once more
And never leave again.

Today the pain is everywhere
Although I show no hurt;
The wind, the sky, the tall grass cries
And hearing it, I ask
'Cry with me, my friend'.

You told me to be happy,
So here, behind my eyes,
I form deliberate images
Where one is two and more
As one is too much pain.

Perhaps, if I can really try
I'll find you after all,
Not far but here in my heart.
Real, dear, never parted,
Both now and evermore.

Juan Tafur

On the Inca Trail

My contribution to these moments in eternity comes from a trail I followed as a young man in Perú. It was born as a tale by the side of the road, and I would like to share it with you as such. These notes only provide an introduction.

The trail I followed was part of a longer journey across South America that was a sanctioned rite of passage amongst young South Americans of my generation. The unanswerable question *who am I?* was at the origin of many of these voyages of self-discovery. Once on the path, it was often replaced by *why did I come?* and, sometimes, *will I make it back?*

In my case, one of these “encounters with truth” —invariably, also encounters with doubt—, began in Cuzco, the ancient capital of the Inca empire. I had already toured the town’s main attractions, and found them somewhat soulless, when a nine year old boy offered to take me to two Inca labyrinths that no tourist knew of.

To my surprise, and after a long walk up the Andes, I found the labyrinths did exist. One was so small you could hardly call it a labyrinth. The other one was so daunting that my guide declared we couldn’t cross the threshold. When I pressed and asked why, he answered. “The Inca still live inside.”

This revelation would haunt me two days later when I trekked into Macchu Picchu, the legendary sacred city that went undiscovered throughout the Spanish Colony until it was unearthed by archaeologists a hundred years ago.

In Rumasimi, or Quechua, as the language is more commonly known, Macchu Picchu means “Old Man”. The iconic peak that usually features in postcards of the city is actually the Wayna Picchu, which means “Young Man”. More than three hundred slippery stone steps climbed up to the top, from where one could truly fathom the dimensions of Macchu Picchu.

At the time, travellers were required to declare in writing that they undertook the climb under their own responsibility.

I signed up. And this is where the tale begins.

Leslie Dighton

Closure and more fragments on time and love

TIME AGAIN

Excerpt from Daphne du Maurier in Frenchman's Creek 'and all this she thought is only momentary, a fragment of time that will never come again...'

MORE LOVE

Alan Paton tells the story in 'Ah but your land is beautiful' of a girl with a terrible blemish.

CLOSURE

Buddha's first Noble Truth 'life is suffering' but within that rummage sale of life eternal moments of great beauty have been brought to life by Ann, Ewa, Roland and Juan.

Thank you.