



The Redress of Poetry

Peter Watkins

I have been a subscriber to *Self & Society* for many years and have felt anchored in the Human Potential Movement – as I prefer to call it – since the 1970s. I applaud the transformation of the journal into a publication that brings more academic rigour and credence to its thematic explorations, but I also love the continued inclusion of poetry. Poetry deals with a different kind of knowing – an experiential truth. We cannot get to the heart of what it means to be human without the portal of poetic language. At its best, poetry addresses our relational self: our relationship with ourselves; with others; with the earth and other sentient beings; and with the Beloved, whatever that encompassing universal spirit might mean for us.

As Seamus Heaney suggests in the *The Redress of Poetry*, the poem helps us ‘push back’ against the sorrow of being in these times when the bitter angels of our nature strut upon the stage. We use the term ‘humanity’ to imply a compassionate, benevolent and loving way of being, and my contention is that the resonances of a poem can help connect us with what is deepest in ourselves – what is ‘real’ and essentially ‘good’. Good humanistic territory, this!

These are perilous times. Our severance from nature, and our consequential exploitation and degradation of it, threaten our survival as a species. It has already ushered in the third ‘Great Extinction’ of other beings, both plant and animal. In *The Song of the Earth*, Jonathan Bate talks about the place of poetry – a poetry that raises humankind’s consciousness of what it means to ‘dwell upon the earth’, to be both in nature and of nature. He concludes that poetry exists to remind us that we have a responsibility for whether ‘the earth will sing or be silent’.

For the healing of the earth community we need nothing less than a shift in consciousness – an eco-spiritual consciousness, which roots us in a joyful, compassionate and reverential regard for all beings and the earth. *Self & Society* is one small voice, the poems it publishes smaller voices still; but many voices make a chorus!

BLUE IRIS

Then there was the single blue iris,
Full, open, at the zenith of its life:
Somehow proud though not through pride –
Glorious though seeking no glory –
Beautiful though not desiring that attribution –
Somehow joyful though not clinging to its joy –
Impermanent yet here now
In the fulsomeness of its being –
Somehow divine yet knowing nothing of its Godliness –
Its blueness resonating in the heart and soul
Like a silent healing prayer
And all I can say is thank you, thank you, over and over.

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References

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