

East Coker Poetry Group

Poetry Competition Entries 2007

On Twombly and The Course

Pencil waves
and thickened paint crusts
share the canvas.
Twenty four pieces
traverse corners, flat plaster;

and

I am moved by it.

Later, on The Course
thoughts, memories, histories
are unravelled,
minds are fragmented and scraped
then rehashed and spread across
the nylon carpeted upper room.

I found the memory
crawling the plastic coated
lavatory door.
It was hiding
and seeking a good wash
(I think)
but you know how memories are?
Once sullied,
they are stained.

Reds, pinks, dirty browns
fingered and smeared
pasted and
ending up considered.
Better for distance
but fascinating up close.
Not like the memory.

Ellie Madden-Crosby

Freefall

Time slinking hand in hand
with the journeying sun,
stalks the imprisoned spirit seeking
to kill the empty hours of its own dull making.

Time, like a spy, waits in ambush;
frosts the moon shadowed mind
with starched minutes of the day;
smothers the dormant soul
with un-lived seconds on its breath.

Time, lost in the steady rhythm of the years,
deaf to the bugle-call of spring's
false notes of summer,
muffles the drums of age
beating the heart out of winter.

Time....beware...

Follow the movement of the stars,
drift in the wind-laced tunnels of twilight change;
sense the scent of rain;
feel the blackbird song of woods;
measure the depth of darkness
with the candle glow of hope;
weigh the pure colours of silence
with the meaning of truth
And know the deep sanctity of *Peace*

Jenny Harding-Rolls

Forty Minutes - Freestyle

It's time
To enter an alien universe.
Echoing, high-ceilinged, with light
Splashing from shiny communal tiles,
And all the paraphernalia of cubicles, showers,
Lockers and search for coins.
No rush.

Pausing,
Awkward on the unforgiving edge,
Goggled eyes glance clockwards, ten to eight.
Cold-footed briefly, then a breath and – IN!
The cool slip of water slides from toe to head,
Smooth and sibilant as silk.
Now, swim.

Gasping,
Grasping fat handfuls of limpid water,
Dragging them back, push under, kick away.
Crawling through this resistant nothing
In a semi-solid, wobbly, other-world
A slow tally of lengths travelled
And the quick, unnoticed movements
Of the clock.

Water,
Confined precisely, laned with ropes,
Bubbles, rattles in the under-water ear.
It moves and murmurs, shimmers, seethes
And holds itself within these measured walls.
Its weight and power contained in rigid oblong,
Biding time.

Seconds pass,
Counted on a bubbling abacus,
Left trailing in disordered wake.
Concentrate on timing and on strength,
Control technique – stroke on stroke,
A breath, then stroke again, again, and turn,
Another length.

Sometimes
Effort, breathing, timing, all elements combine,
Achieving something close to beauty
In this quickened, rippling water-world.
An exciting, heady, nearness to perfection,
An almost, nearly, nearly flying.
The clock hands reach half past eight.
Time's up.

Iona Lambe

Equilibrium

I am here, or there or elsewhere

I

Behind the walled garden lies graveyard
and church tower, inverted tongue of the bell
suspended between chimes, while I play mother
with the cream tea, your voice reciting poetry,
the lovers now turned each to each.
If I travel at the speed of light away from the clock face
the sound of the next chime will never reach me.
Is it then five o'clock forever in this perpetual light?

II

Key turning in the little lock and moon in the mullion window,
quietly, quietly hand down the family bible and light
the candle stub on the window ledge. Two heads
bending each to read the text ...*and the greatest of them is love.*
A moth flutters like a sigh across the lamp shade;
it seems an echo has woken the unquiet dead.
Is time the straight flight of candlelight to God's infinite mercy
or do strange currents and eddies guide its flow instead?

III

You amaze me. You say that right now you are happy.
Is this what happiness is? Tiny islands in the seas of time?
Come then Lenka and dance with me while the broken doors still stand
wide open - I don't care whose eyes are upon me.

IV

Say it! Say it then, you coward! It's time to speak of longing;
that dog in the water whose eyes are a pilgrim's bright shells.
There is no shame in it for all have made this beggar's procession
on bended knee, 'O grant me this, O Lord, grant this to me!'
so that the flagstones to the gaudy shrine are quite worn down
and all encrusted over in layers of dripping wax; a sea of candles,
I lit one too. I made up words and kept singing how I loved you,
and you had gone. Words of longing, the breath of song.

V

The three graces weighed against the weird sisters:
fate, choice and chance and the greatest of them all is chance,

for without perfect knowledge there can be no true choice,
and in the raging chaos of time, fate is too slender a thread,
and the engine of chance is choice or there could be no consciousness
and choice itself is a kind of fate. Tick. Tick. Tick.
Providence, close the door behind you on your way out.

VI

Let's take refuge in balance then;
the breathing out and the breathing in
and the moment in between
and the heave of the waves upon the shore and their drawing back
and the moment in between
and the forging of bonds and their breaking
and all that comes between
and of here, there and elsewhere
and the distances between.

May eternal light shine on us
till the fires of the sun burn out;
only eight minutes of radiance remain.

Frances Bathgate

Wingless, featherless
under the lank and draggled ruffs
these gawky bird-things nursing
their plucked pates in the grass –

larkhigh
dwindling in blue
the one plumed warrior who

just might make it

back

to the heart of the sun

Anthony Watts

Chains of Time

Time that
Weaves and drifts
Chains of ribbon
Around our lives
Invisibly binding us up
With lists of priority
Seen in a tumbling hourglass
That plans away
The days of our lives
Getting shorter
Spare minutes
In the form of
Single grains of sand
Slip away
As we are
Handcuffed to the
Hourglass' side
Yanking helplessly
Against Time's
Demanding bonds
A million reasons
In the mind's eye
of Time tapping
It's wrist
As the voices
Of the day
Drop like
Acid rain
Into the
Wishes and dreams
Pulling tighter
The leash
Chafing our throats
Held
Unmercifully by Time
We fail to break free.

Tasha Mapes

As I Sit and Think

Time is a commodity a new mum searches for
The baby and all its needs go on with no space between
The elderly sit in a chair wishing the time to speed on
Dogs sit by the door patiently waiting to charge across the fields
Time in this busy world, seasons changing sooner than expected
Daffodils, welsh poppies vying for attention with their bright yellow
Hue
Hyacinths and bluebells mingling in between
Natures time hasn't a clue
With climate changes the whole world through
We all need time to get through the day
To think, to work and time to play
Then as the night sky approaches and our work is done
It's time to sleep to prepare for the morn
To start a new day and search for that
Elusive Commodity - Time

Barbara Chatwin

A Word From Time

You call me Father Time,
The hourglass my domain –
Your enemy I seem,
Your nemesis, your pain.

Within my bounds you lie,
Frail, momentary, small,
Knowing as I go by
I will collect you all.

You talk of killing me,
Or keeping me, or such -
Too little sometimes see,
Or else you take too much.

You waste me, yet I stay
Unharmd and undiminished,
No action curbs my sway;
It's only you are finished.

Track, use or mark me, friend,
Spend, beat, make, measure, save,
Find, lose, I have no end,
No obsequy, no grave:

I do not grudge my gift.
Keep it, for all I care -
The hourglass cannot sift,
And I have much to spare.

The hurt that you deplore
Was never wrought by me:
It all lies at your door
If only you could see.

That which I give, I give
Past hope and past recall:
Within my skirts you live –
Embrace me. That is all.

Colin Bailey

A Presence Undiminished

*In that setting sun over the mud-flat estuary,
Incoming tide cleansing all the gullies and holes,
The wading birds are grouped like silent tourists, waiting.
Through the Poet's window, over his still-untidy table,
The other side of the estuary lies unchanged
From that which his eyes last saw.*

*Powerful, is this deep peace,
This peace vibrant with all Nature
Gliding through it like a silent Pavane.
And Jackdaws wheel still, over St John's Wood,
With its fuzziness of bare-budded trees.*

*By the Shed a stranger sits and,
Feet away from the Poet's table,
Reads the same words he wrote upon it.
There is a presence heavy now,
With the growing excitement from the rushing tide,
Amidst the gentleness of the evening's golden colours.*

*Along the path, the stranger walks
Where the dead one trod,
Seeing the same sights that his eyes saw,
Listening to the same bird and water-sounds,
Feeling the same unspeakable awe
Which fuelled only his pen.*

*Dusk deepens, and falls into blackness of night.
In the bars, glasses are emptied through the nets of ephemeral joy,
And timeless First Light seeps like water, over the invisible horizon,
Creeps through misty gloom,
Where the town's owners, the water-birds,
Wait to sing their exultation of the coming Light.*

*Heavy, the thick greyness over that millpond of the estuary,
That piece of borrowed-heaven which the town came here for,
And now bows down to in reverence.
Birds skim like low-level raiders over the flat water
And ascend into wheels of graceful joy.*

*Through the dead streets and still-asleep houses,
Smells of bacon cooking assail the senses,
With yet more, as Jenkins & Son
Load their van with fresh-baked loaves.*

*In the hub of all this,
In this microcosmic stamen of infinite peace,
The Spirit within the Shed lolls,
Moving words about still,
Within the cosmos of their own possibilities,
Contented, infinite, invisible to the human eye.*

*Amidst the song of the Thrush and his choir,
The Spirit gazes out over that water and its headlands,
Drowsy in that musty interior,
In its ecstasy of peace and knowing,
From its plane on another world.*

*In that rising sun over the mill pond estuary,
At the water's edge now,
The water birds face the Shed,
In the way that iron filings point towards a magnetic pole,
Sensing timeless truths beyond mere reason.*

M Elfed Williams

A Dismal Doggerel Ditty on Time

Time is a demon that mankind invented,
Then chopped into hours, but the demon dissented.
Said Time to mankind: "You are just witless fools
For the demon you've loosed will brook nobody's rules
I will chide and torment from your birth to your graves,
I'll trip you and trap you and make you my slaves.
You'll be late when I run and you'll wait when I stay,
You will try to escape but you can't run away,
So I'll taunt you again when your tired and you're old
And curse you with illness and plague you with cold!
I am always the winner, but right at the end,
When I cut the thread, I'll come as a friend.

James Nash

Time

I wonder how long
it would take me to work out
the right conclusion.

Nell Stephens

Time

- 1) I had an early rise at seven
to catch the train at eight.
The train was late.
I did not get to work till ten.
- 2) Late, late, behind with things,
due at six but couldn't reach till eight.
The moment marked but could not wait,
moved on & made me late.
- 3) We changed the hour & pushed time on –
six o'clock was turned to seven
– oh! Heaven –
An extra hour of light to garden on.
- 4) As darkness falls we tire.
For us the day is done.
Our batteries need a charge.
For others it is just begun!

Jacqueline Clough

Time

From the moment I emerged from a warm watery home---

Time travelled, at varying speeds which went mostly unnoticed

Until I reflected –

Baby bouncing in the pram, what lovely curls, where do they come from?

At two, they are snipped never to appear again. Such sadness when curls are cute

At the age of 3 and 5 months sitting on a potty, in my pink bedroom daddy enters to say a brother has been born for me tonight. "I wanted a sister" I say with some force, but anything's better than no sibling of course!

Time travelled, Infant school appeared on the horizon. Was I looking forward to school?

This seemed a place of wonder. Would I be happy there? Would there be plenty of play?

Of course there was, I soon knuckled down to endless spellings. Weighing was wonderful, with heavy black cylindrical shapes and a little tray the other side for balance. I was slightly hesitant in wishing to pour, as nothing should be spilt on the floor.

Time travelled, Secondary school was different. Not just one class all day, but a bell rung at 45 minute intervals to ensure you changed classes to whichever was on the timetable. Maths was memorable in the fact that Mr Jones favoured flinging the blackboard rubber across the room to anyone not paying attention. He was not averse to punishment and did not have the nick name "Slipper Jones" for nothing. Teddy, my mongrel, had munched my maths book, when entering classes I always shook.

Time travelled, Work beckoned 'Office Junior' advertised in the local paper. I would not like to be in an office all day. "Just try it" said my mother with a gentle persuasion. The interview went well and I was accepted. Money carefully earned and by Friday the great expectancy of the little brown packet. Counted out carefully, some for saving, some for spending. Oh what a joy! Wheels are the first priority, a little fawn Ford. Rupert it was called, it travelled far, that little car.

Time travelled, our firstborn came, a bouncing baby boy, 7lb 12ozs, jet black hair, snub little nose, those cherubic folds of chubby skin. No fuss over the name whichever sex, its moniker had been known for the past three months. This is Motherhood what bliss. Responsibilities a plenty, creeping every five minutes when asleep, to see if he is breathing. Lost chances are threefold, over many years, before an unexpected late arrival of a darling baby girl with such a cute little curl...

Diana Turton

Time is never the same

Time is never the same.
Just sometimes it stands still,
When the trees are quiet
And only the pigeons fill
The silence – continue to blame-
Not willing just to wait.

Time can be like a great bird,
Heavy wings pushing down
On some creature trying to move.
A dream that has flown.
But feathers lift, flight sounds are heard,
Free again – the vastness to prove.

Clare Phillips

Time by the cliffs

Coins are found to buy the piece of paper time
date stamped and blu-tacked to the windscreen
and we saunter down to Chesil beach;
take in the scene. A walk is planned.
The rain, though hovering in the wings
will bide its time: I hold her hand.
It is the sea that draws the eye
with its ever moving timeless form
and it faces its adversary:
The cliffs; hard, unmoving
yet vulnerable; fated to be worn
day upon day, year upon year
by the constant soft attention of the waves;
the gusting Southern wind;
and the hot sun's rays.

Here is layer upon layer of an alien time
locked in the curving strata
squeezed and forced to bend by forces
that ever after, have left their mark
over time immemorial until now,
their heart exposed for all to see
their past; their very soul laid bare.
The little shells bear witness to another time:
Their curving fossil forms are there
so delicately kept in such a weighty trap.
How long is it since these small creatures
lived and felt the lap and wash of water
in some Jurassic sea? What turn of fate
has left them now exposed and visible to me?

But not for long. Another winter storm will come
then slowly, sliding piece by piece, the rock,
now warm in the summer sun, will crumble.
A slip here; a few boulders there,
then, the great cliff will tumble and fall,
collapsing to the foaming sea;
The insistent, destructive wash of waves
and coming and going of the tide will see to that.
And our glimpse of that other far-off time
will disappear for ever in the rhythmic swell.
I stop, pick up a fan-like shell; you smile;
this small memento, like the parking ticket
I will lose beneath the seat, will later reappear
to remind us of this time, this day, this year.

David Cloke

Some Times

The fresh cut lawn smells warm and sweet,
Somewhere my father calls, he's home.
Within the trees the evening blackbird sings
His liquid song of ageless summer days.
The growing shadows creep across the lawn
And time slips softly from the evening light.

My white doves have been taken from the loft.
'We can't feed them in wartime' says the man.
My father also goes he says he must,
The children sent to live across the seas.
My father says No our country is here.
But time feels stony beneath my feet.

The air is clean again the Machair short
And brave with Pinks amongst the whitest sand.
The islands float and shimmer in the heat.
My Father in his boat a happy man.
The child sits on the sand amongst the sheep
But Time a rocky path between the ferns

The winter pines stand tall and warm
Heavy with scent though the air is cold.
A Rook on his own in a tree top talks,
Singing and muttering at ease with himself
The moment is ours to remember and hold
Our Time is complete – we are home

Joyce Best

RED ROCK CAFE

The mouths of serpents are irises
showing off scarlet seeds, wagging
their anger at encroaching trains,
looking for somewhere to spit.

Two bicycles prop a sea wall,
one for Mr Café man who clips bramble,
one for Mrs Iris Café active
with wire wool to erase the chalk
of yesterday's menu; forever
scraping at her memories.

Her accent - *that'll be one pound ten, dear*,
doesn't belong, neither does his earring,
nor the lobe, the cold-weathered skin, close-
shaved head and hard urban look through his eyes.

They have escaped the past they think;
the railway lines that brought them - before them;
their seaside café kiosk behind,
with the succulent covered red rock block,
brown sand and the edge of the world
where a dying sea laps.

The mouths of a serpent and Iris
spit, *look at us now ay*, squeezed
between yesterday and eternity
like the mouths of serpents
that are irises that wag;
mauve grey flags forgotten in the waste.

Graham Burchell

Precious Time

A priceless commodity
Doubtless clouds
Nourish my spirit
Now above the concerns
of clocks and schedules
No longer shackled
to relentless demands
Sleepless nights
now out of reach
The warmth of time
frees my spirit
Precious time

Rochelle Moore

Time

Is an old man holding
Can be a skeleton
with scythe:
Cuts all down.
that spare no one,
Is sand, always
Is money
or spent well.
with oblivion.
Is mean
Keeps track. Tells
chimes, ticktocks,
bombs,
What can time do?
Stop?
Run out?

*A poet
arranging words
in lines
in time
for deadline.
chasing words.
Blank paper.
Giving words
time.
Fitting words.
Beaten-out words.
Stopwatch
ticking.
Time's up.
No.
Yes.*

an hourglass.
hooded,
Death.
Is tides
Nothing.
Always sliding.
Wasted
Can heal pain
Takes care of us all.
or kind.
in pips, bongs,
heart beats,
bells.
Stand still?
Fly?
For you.

Juliet Aykroyd (Lacey)

Time *by Richard Strong*

Time like an ever-flowing stream
Bears all its sons away.

Of course I feel honoured
To be one of Time's "sons"
And yet feel helpless
At being borne away.
It is undoubtedly
A wonderfully expressive metaphor
But one must pause for thought. And think.
What sort of stream?

I ask.

There must certainly be
A large percentage of beer in mine
And other alcoholic beverages
To make the trip worthwhile.
But what else?
I have been borne also in my mother's arms,
And as the years went on
I have been in the arms of
other women.

Which has made the trip worthwhile.
Enveloped in the love
And warmth
Of family and friends.
It has largely been
A pleasant trip.
Warm, smooth,
Without eddies or currents.

At times

There have been storms and squalls
And rocky cascades,
Which is what one expects
In a journey to the sea
As no river is
Ever completely smooth.
The river has been bounteous,
Providing me with food and drink
And Love and Care,
Laughter, good times
Sometimes sad,
But always a joyful
Undertow.

The river has been good.
May it be many, many miles
Before it carries me to the sea.
And when I am there?
I shall embrace it with the vigour

And joy that I have enjoyed life.
With my waning strength,
Facing life's last great adventure.
I shall exult.

Time

Time is a most mysterious thing.
Space-time continuum, the scientists say.
'Time like an ever-rolling stream' we sing
And see one day leading to another day.

Time is a joker with a chameleon face,
Sharp as a razor or heavy as lead.
Time cherished marches on at a wing-footed pace;
Waiting time plods with slow ponderous tread.

'I don't know where time goes', the busy man cries,
The day is too short'. 'It hangs on my hands,
With long empty hours', the workless man sighs,
As he watches the hour-glass's slow filtering sands.

Once on a time or a time not a time
There were stories of wonders and magical things-
Wizards and giants and transformations sublime
With men turned to beasts and beasts into kings.

There is a time for everything,
For everything, the bible says,
In its season, Summer through to Spring,
From 'Hard Times' or the good old days,

Time past is a long chain of what might have been,
What was and was not and what could be done.
The present a small slot in a limited scene
Imposed by the actions the past had begun.

The future's a deep haze of uncharted years
But we bravely endeavour to clothe the unknown
With a fabric of guesswork, of hope and of fears
To cope with the harvest the present has sown.

The Time Team's limit makes them concentrate
To unearth, explore or verify the past,
Or find someone's untimely fate
For whom the dread Reaper's die was cast.

When we travel the world we join in time's play.
One way we go backwards, the other ahead
In crossing the dateline we gain or lose a whole day,
And when it's daytime 'down-under' Britain's in bed.

Time is a multifarious blend
Of marking, taking or doing it (in jail).
Saving it or wasting it with no time to spend
Or beating it in common time, that rhythm shall prevail.

Running up to, running on, and even working over-
Time, at half-time in part time and hopefully in full,
In good time, at closing time, we may be in clover
As our pastime, in the meantime exerts its timeless pull.

The time-machine will take us through the ages
As time-warp and time-lag weave their magic spell.
A time-piece and time-table's useful pages
Tell the time, as later time will tell.

The members of the Time to Share
Meet together in the village hall
Where younger folk with time to spare
Make sure a good time's had by all.

'Here's to the next time' 'Long time no see'
By keeping time there may be time in hand
For Worker's Playtime round the mulberry tree
To Alexander's Ragtime Band.

This time exposure is all that I can do
With time at my disposal it is clear
The time is ripe to say goodbye to you
And running out of time – I'll disappear!

In this space-time continuum
Dominus vobiscum.

Sally Jackson

Time

Time is a cell
with a sill untidied
by a butterfly.

Time is hell
when it's gone.

Time is a raindrop
that will never fall again.

Time is the slippage of sleep.

Time is a breath,
brush of love
across your ear.

Time is the march of Frenzy
feeding on the Future
and defecating
lumps of history.

Paddy Hughes

Time.

The greatest healer amongst us,
buries pains deep underground 'til they rot to dust.
One cannot possibly comprehend
her power – only glance at it
out of the corner of one's eye
as it briefly aids them.

The almighty, all-seeing, omniscient
ally to Death; only masquerading
as a clock, not a dark
hooded figure with a large scythe
(She has fewer crops to reap).

She stands still. As the
saying goes,
rather, she's anticipating –
wrapped up in – the impending
scenario so she forgets to turn the page –
so no one knows what to do.

She turns the Sun's rays grey,
until night replaces day;
She holds back the clock at work,
and chases it forward at play;
She airbrushes the mind's memories,
and restricts what the future might say.

She always has been, and always
will be,
so the human race, is stranded
out at sea.

Sam Cunningham

War-Time 24.11.1940

The birds had no knowledge
of our war. In that red dawn
they sang a glorious chorale
as joyfully as any Easter Oratorio

their song descanting our matins music:
the long wail of the *All Clear*, whistles,
rattles, shouts, the ring of shovels,
as mum and I straggled up
the path to our back door.

The bliss of sliding between sheets,
hearing dad's voice, safe home,
feeling rough khaki stuff
against my cheek; his kiss.

On that November night I learned
there can be euphoria in time of war.

Jane Williams

Time

We run away
And still it catches our coat-tails
And hauls us back
Boxes us in
Wraps, stamps and expedites us
On our journey through life
Stretches paper thin and taut,
A tiny vibration of anticipation.
Shrinks
To a hop, skip, jump and away
Just when we're having the most fun.
Cannot be caught, nor stilled,
Even if we never look at a clock or watch,
Have the curtains drawn
And hide in the deepest, darkest hole.

Relentless.
Impartial
Tick tock.

So.
So what?

I shall let time take up my heartbeat
And count me down
To that distant place
Marked on a map I have never seen.

Anne Gullo

Time

Time past, time now and time to be,
The thread with which our lives are spun,
A word for ever on our lips –
In time, next time, just give me time.
But what is time?

Is it the passing of the years?
A waiting pause, the held in breath?
Anticipation, hours in sleep?
Or memories of younger days?
Yes, what is time?

Time's all too short for those in joy
And overlong for those in pain.
It slows or speeds uninfluenced
By any action we may take.
So what is time?

Were there no turning of the earth,
No wind, no breath, no spinning stars,
No living creatures to and fro,
Nor life, nor death, nor time there'd be.
Movement is time.

Anne Bingley