

Beneath the simple crests of 'you' and ' I ',
 we let great, inexorable currents move.
 And so we are happy to be gone.
 But sometimes in dream, twilight, the uncertain moment,
 or even at some other high-pitched moment of communion,
 your form, your love, your essence returns -
 This makes for what is happy,
 for, lady, your luminosity still illumines
 (“many?”) a thousand and more ways still.

If one morning at the moment you awake
 some strange white eagle or some snow-white dove
 has seemed to call you by tapping on the pane,
 Think only that a current of my thoughts has flown
 - 3,000 miles with a following wind -
 to greet you as in New York City you awaken.
 You remember once I sent you crimson roses
 to tell you simply 'I love',
 Now my thoughts, as yours, sometimes surge out to tell you
 that once we loved, and history is firm,
 that once we loved, and the past will help us build
 present and future firm.

ⁱ On the death of Nyree Dawn Porter (the one other Nyree we both knew of), the obituaries maintained the word meant “little flower”. To my knowledge they were wrong.

Behind the poem – as one early reader realised - is the gist of the Dryden stanza (a translation of Horace):

Happy the man, and happy he alone
 He who can call today his own:
 He, who secure within, can say
 ‘Tomorrow do thy worst, for I have liv’d today.
 Be fair, or foul, or rain, or shine,
 The joys I have possessed in spite of fate are mine
 Not Heav’n itself upon the past has power
 But what has been, has been and I have had my hour.

When this is perceptible to someone who did not know the Dryden, how – as the editor of John Donne’s love poetry said to me – can the poem be “going nowhere”?

Aetat 58

Through each and every window I pass
 I see the brown and green Earth
 I look back each time, hooked on departing years
 - yes, the past did hold more futures than face me now.

Valentine's Day hovers – a will o'the wisp – in the calendar and the diary
 The ghost presence of yellow hopes – a little callow now they seem –
 Hover, flower and even dance before me.

Young lovers come to me, the silver haired and bearded seer –
 'Can I help them?' says their address but not their words.
 Behind my back I feel the presence of the love poets
 - my ancestors for more than 2,000 years – peers and sparring partners too

So I distil life lived and wisdom uttered – the parent bird in drought, its beak wide
 open, on which the fledglings perch and slake their thirst.

But that Earth promises more than drinking cups...
 It promises energy surges – and gentle inundations – green and blossom.
 Twigs through bark tell as much as the scars and drilling, drumming beaks.
 The mighty pendulum of the universe is in motion.

The sap rises. No one comments. Eyes open on new and resurgent beauties.
 (Once I sounded the limpidity of other eyes
 Before experience perplexed the candour of my gaze.)
 What was under that Earth? Did it just brood and wait its time?

The simple awakening of the young took no guile,
 For grades of veterans wily Nature turned to ultimate stratagem,
 Enlisting for her minions the ancient gods.

Wily Nature and those gods have left their traces – algae of human greatness
 They cohered and grew – inexorable and tender, courageous and gentle...

On the youngsters the gods swoop, vast enveloping presences
 They open compliant eyes for a very first time
 With us they come and go, old and familiar
 Veteran friends we know and curse and bless.

Our resurgent love – robust and concentrate, seasoned experience, scars and all
 Let us declare it, radiate its force
 So that heartened young lovers can witness,
 While age-old sentinel gods acknowledge, the real right thing.