

A Song for Older Life

Ron Carey

This poem was commissioned for the Bealtaine Festival, Ireland's national celebration of the arts and creativity as we age. It appeared in the Irish Times, Monday 1st May 2017.

'O unworn world enrapture me.' Patrick Kavanagh

Now we know that we are mortal, let us spend Servitude's weighty crowns. Now that we know the sun will rise with or without us, let us ignore the grey sheets on the laundry-floor of the sky and go out into the rain-forgiving world. Now is the time to touch wild things and praise innocent animals for their truth. Now let us teeth and tongue fruits that smack the lips with surprise; learn the difference between something rare and something common and see God's beauty in both.

Now it is time to remember that we once were creatures who climbed the cloudy mountains just to breathe; who grew beneath the cooling stars and listened to the tuning notes of created heaven. Then we held our humanity fast, unaware of what we had become, observing only that we were lost. We looked for God everywhere, then in each other, calling this the soul and this the life-exalted. Now that we are wise enough to know, let us leave the chains we forged in the dust.

Now, let us give love back a hundredfold to the people who love us and forgiveness to those who need it. And let us not sit quiet by friendship's fire when there are humans in the East in need of our shelter and in the West in need of our bread. Now that we know the world is beautiful, let us throw away the dark journal of our days and let the answer to all questions asked of by the heart be a simple, Yes. Let us leave the caterpillar's transitory house and go, out into the wing-spreading warmth of the Earth.

“While not specifically addressing the present political and social upheaval, this poem is set as a counter-balance and fulfils the theme of All Together Now by taking the position of Martin Luther King – “I have decided to stick with love. Hate is too great a burden to bear” – and celebrates the fact that now we have the time and the knowledge to make a difference. The poem calls to us older (and wiser?) heads to do the things we should always do as human beings, look out for those that need our help, understand the world and our place in it.” Ron Carey

Ron Carey was born in Limerick and lives in Dublin. His poetry collection Distance was shortlisted for the Forward Prize for Best First Collection 2016. He has written verse and prose most of his life but only started to write poetry seriously in his sixties while studying for a diploma in creative writing at the Open University. He has been a prize winner and finalist in many international poetry competitions including the Bridport Prize, Lightship International Poetry Prize, Cinnamon Press Poetry Awards, Fish International Poetry Prize, Gregory O’ Donoghue International Poetry Awards, Hugh O’Flaherty Poetry Award, iYeats Poetry Prize and the Wasafiri New Writing Prize for Poetry. His poems have appeared in New Irish Writing, The Irish Times as well as anthologies and magazines. He was awarded Special Commendation in the Patrick Kavanagh Awards 2015 and received a masters degree in creative writing at the University of South Wales.