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Oh Sunflower

by [A. F. Moritz](https://canlit.ca/canlit_authors/a-f-moritz/) (https://canlit.ca/canlit_authors/a-f-moritz/)

In the black after you
will another traveller
or merely wanderer
come across the region
of where you were,
which has no regions now—
or must it be called then:
no expanse, or track, or traveller?
The region of nowhere
where someone, you, once stood
already imagining
the place he was dwelling in
that moment
become empty of him.
And later someone
comes across it except
there is no it: it has
no boundaries, no features then,
and no inhabitant, unless
this straggler now
entering. Entering into
where someone, you, already
had held in mind
that region of nowhere
springing up. It springs up
in the moment of one's leaving:
it's the dark
or the light where all
eternal moments
are to be buried
as though carefully
to wait and where
the traveller may come.

Questions and Answers

Is there a specific moment that inspired you to pursue poetry?

I've told the story before: when I was in the third grade, I'd already felt for two years that I was, or was to be, a writer. The things I read were the legends of King Arthur and the Trojan War and that was the kind of thing I was going to create. Then in grade three, one day I went to the library looking for more Edgar Allan Poe stories and found a large two-volume "complete." I started reading from the end of the second volume, and that's where his poems were. I was transfixed. From that instant I wanted to be a poet. It's the only vocation I've ever had. If I had to mention a single Poe poem, it would be "The Lake." Anyone who knows that poem and reads my poems will find many traces of it.

Do you use any resources that a young poet would find useful (e.g. books, films, art, websites, etc.)?

I don't like the idea of "using resources." One has a vital need to be a poet, and that automatically includes themes and subjects, it automatically includes, it IS, one's thrust of experience. Or you could put it the other way around. The pallid phrase "have a theme," if it actually means something because we're talking about a real poet, means a passionate and needful engagement in, a part played in, human existence from some angle that belongs to the creative personhood, and this automatically includes, or goes out to embrace, "resources." The only valid resource is experience.

If we're talking only about needing to get something right or assisting one's memory, then it's fine to look things up in dictionaries, encyclopedias, online resources, thesauruses, rhyming dictionaries. But the whole tradition, which I admit has become very widespread today, of working up poems out of research into subjects in which the writer "has an interest" or "identifies as significant" is entirely foreign to me, and I don't like it. I think of it as related to the element in some teaching which teaches the student "how to get an idea" for writing or research. If you don't already "have" an idea in the sense of being vitally attached to it, so that without it your heart and mind would be empty, then what use is it? For technology, maybe, some. For poetry, none.

What poetic techniques did you use in this poem? How much attention do you pay to form and metre?

In a way, my answer to this question is inherent in my answer to the one above. Form and idea arrive together, are one thing, although I'm not one of those who objects to differentiating them; they are different aspects or the one thing. If I have to put one first, then: Form is an aspect of meaning. What this means, practically speaking, is that to create your meaning you have to get the form as appropriate and perfect as possible. The meaning is the form, it is not any particular thing that the poem states, lexically, within its compass, nor even all the things it states lexically. It's the contemplative shape in its material that it makes stand and leaves standing in the heart and mind. By form, by meaning as form, the poem is something that is always always there: "Once I saw Annapurna!" "Once I saw The Man of Fire!" Then it is there, where it is, it stands there and speaks in the permanent universe, even if man or nature destroys it, even if your memory destroys it because you forget or die.

What did you find particularly challenging in writing this poem?

The technique of this poem is in one sense the short lines, in another sense the abstract concepts, in another sense the necessary repetition of images or elements. This repetition is an aspect of the theme, hence necessary, and yet it isn't pure repetition, since the fact has to be conveyed, that the "once-something" that becomes nothing and nowhere, when the person who was it vanishes, is utterly distinct from, yet potentially neighboring and resurrected by, the "now-something" that comes to exist afterward, after the vanishing of the first one, and in "the same spot," although that concept is absurd: there are no coordinates. First, the repetitions had to revolve around each other, communicate with each other, and be sufficiently similar to each other and sufficiently differentiated. Second, the "abstractions" had to be concrete in clearly referring to real persons and their real experience and agony in confronting the presence or absence of those who are gone and the unavoidable contemplation of their own presence or absence. Third, the drawing of this through the short lines had to convey and assert that this reality has lyric rhythm, and hint that this rhythm is in fact identical with its reality. Somehow music is the dance not just of presences but of all things brought together. The grand cotillion!

At this point I'd just like to repeat Wallace Stevens, "We reason about these things with a later reason." To try to explain it makes it sound abstruse and thus remote. But it's actually the most intimate, unavoidable, concrete reality of both our life and our thought. Everyone lives it every day, no one escapes the question over it for even one second.

I don't know how well I succeeded in expressing what I grasped. But I don't despair because I know I've always been and I'll always be writing this same poem. There's a sense of failure, but turn that slightly and it's a sense of possibility, of a future, of much still to do.

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