
“At Mornington by Gwen Harwood

Time and change are significant factors which influence an individual's reassessment of their identity. In Gwen Harwood's poem “At Mornington” she explores the transient nature of life contrasted with the finality of death and powerlessness through her own personal experiences and memories. Also in the poem “Mother who gave me life” Harwood portrays the memory of motherhood as a timeless typical part of the human way of life. In analysis of the two poems, the responder gets an insight on the reassessment of Harwood's own identity. In the poem “Mother Who Game Me Life”, Harwood relates to a profoundly personal experience and also reflects upon human history to display the self-sacrificing figure of motherhood. Here, the declination of a mother to her daughter during the transition between time and change, is made eternal by the typical nurturing role of a mother, that is universal to the human condition.

The individual experience is expressed through Harwood's individual tone of contemplation and sentimentality, in which the use of personal pronouns convey a confidential and sincere connection between a daughter and her mother. “Mother who gave me life, the wisdom I would not learn from you”, strikes unity within the audience through the use of her authentic reflection on a universal commonality. Through this personal experience, Harwood develops the concept of motherhood that endures through the momentary experience of the persona. The imagery used in “women bearing women” and “the wild daughters becoming women”, emphasises the the past and upcoming generations of women being mothers, in particular to the context of the poem. Harwood succinctly examines the memoir of motherhood as an eternal and essential factor of humanity, a constant which clarifies both the present and the future, a timeless role which infuses time.

This idea is reinforced through the use of imagery similar to time, “seasons burning backward in time” and “guileless milk of the world”, emphasising the endless nature of motherhood. Harwood returns to a personal tone of voice once again, implying the tension that exists between her warm connection to her mother and the recognition and acknowledgement of the cyclical nature of motherhood. The employment of imagery resonates with the audience as Harwood highlights the sacrifices which a mother undertakes as the typical characteristic in the role of a mother. Finally, Harwood expresses her dissatisfaction that despite the sacrifices which mothers endure in raising their daughters, they are still forced by a patriarchal society which denies them ownership.

The use of biblical allusion in “your voice calling me in as darkness falls on my father's house” makes clear the male-centric heaven which allows the audience to empathise with the constraints of women in the 1980s. Harwood strategically addresses time and change as influencing factors in the reassessment of one's identity in her insightful poem ‘Mother who gave me life’. Harwood's ‘At Mornington’, encourages audiences to develop a judgement in regards to the value of memories in response to the passing of time and change. The poem begins with Harwood's memory of her early childhood where she “leapt” from her father's arms into the sea. The alliteration to introduce this, “They told me,” highlights her lack of personal memory of the uncertainty of her childhood and the need of others to reinforce this memory. For many responders, the uncertainty of their childhood was not realised until adulthood, allowing them to appreciate Harwood's poetry as relevant to their lives. The high

modality to describe her memory of believing she could walk on water, “Indeed I remember,” depicts the prominent memories of the innocent child. This brings responders to consider that while the memory of invincibility is strong, the sense of invincibility itself has been lost as time has progressed.

The motif of water is also continued, this time referring to memories, “on what flood are they borne.” This metaphor highlights that memories are able to cross the boundaries of time, thus emphasizing the importance of them to responders who are experiencing the effects of time's passing. This motif is continued in the fourth stanza, “There is still some water left over.” This depicts to the contemporary reader that even when time seems to have reached it's end, memories still retain the ability to bring back the sense of abatement attached with them. In the final stanza, the metaphor, “rolled in one grinding race of dreams, pain, memories, love and grief,” highlights that memories are attached to varying emotions and are apart of the race that is life, where the inevitable end is death. This causes readers to consider the importance of the varying memories within their life, to make the journey to the end worthwhile. Through the appreciation of memories in response to the times passing throughout, responders are able to identify with Harwood's poetry and thus develop a significant association with it. In conclusion, the poems ‘Mother who gave me life’ and ‘At Mornington’ by Gwen Harwood portray time and change as significant factors in which the reassessment of an individual's identity is greatly impacted by. We see this evident through Harwood's own experiences and memories and the context of the poems.