

Diana began to devote herself to the composition of poetry more seriously in her middle years. Her “late harvest” is anticipated in *The Old Tree*, an early poem which has a refreshingly direct quality that is all her own. Her poetic skill is such that we are seduced by the all-embracing approach to her subject, leading us to think that an old tree, a robin, a log fire, old chimneys, a flowering cherry, butterflies and moonlight are the most undemanding expressions of the simple life, but we find ourselves within a few lines being drawn into a more contemplative, more expansive territory, which is both illuminating and uplifting. These are elements which Diana recognises with especial delight in the poetry of Ruth Pitter.

There is nothing vague or romantic about Diana’s view of nature. It is intense and often powerfully visual. She is not afraid to introduce classical and Biblical references into her poems, and some rarely-used vocabulary has led me back to my dictionary, invariably with a satisfying sense of discovery, and just when we are settling comfortably into a particular poetic mode, we are, from time to time, brought back to reality with a dose of wry humour, sometimes through whimsy, sometimes through self-parody.

The really refreshing aspect of Diana’s poetry is that its starting-point is often a simple, everyday image or idea. Judging from the sequence of poems in this volume, it might be supposed that Diana’s ‘early’ style is more compact, and that her ‘second period’ seems to bring in an element of descriptiveness, tinged here and there with the metaphysical and transcendental, in the very best interpretation of those styles of writing. A guttering candle or a pebble on a beach can become living entities with just as much right to a meaningful existence as we do.

Diana has a lively attitude to serious matters. I like her crusading views on the environment and conservation in *Trees Please*. However, we should not always be beguiled by her seductive language and themes, for, just when we are getting serious about things, she treats us to some tongue-in-cheek humour that bursts the iridescent bubble. These are, however, only occasional flights of fancy.

Diana is reticent about revealing her private world, leaving us to fathom what motivations may have given rise to her poems, and it is in a sequence of her

unpublished letters that we find partial answers to a fascinating enigma. What was it that gave rise to the remarkable outpouring of poetic inspiration from 1977 onwards?

One winter’s day, Diana discovered a copy of *Letters Home*, by Aurelia Schober Plath, in her local library. This volume of correspondence was devoted to the memory of Aurelia’s much-loved daughter, the poet Sylvia Plath, who had committed suicide in 1963. “I was so deeply moved by its account of the tragedy of brilliant unbalance and over-achievement that I composed an epitaph poem for Sylvia, and after much hesitation, sent it to Aurelia in Massachusetts.” There followed an intense correspondence, lasting some 14 years, during which Diana and Aurelia were able to unburden, after so many years, the tribulations of the heart, and explore their common love of poetry. Most importantly for Diana was the encouragement (of what she modestly calls her “poetic efforts”) she was able to receive from the “warm-hearted, intuitive” Aurelia which she desperately needed if she was to continue to write poetry.

Latterly, Aurelia, increasingly blind and infirm, could only dictate occasional short notes, but still they kept coming – a testament of that unbounding love and admiration the poet and her critic each required of the other. Plans were made for Aurelia and Diana to visit each other, but sadly, with Aurelia’s sudden death in 1989 (?), these two exceptional people were destined never to meet. The friendship, enhanced by a sense of Aurelia’s continuing presence, lives on in Diana’s mind and remains, in her own words, a true “meeting of minds”. Throughout her poetry, there is always that sense of harmony, order and proportion that places her humanity firmly in its natural setting and makes the richness of her world eminently accessible to us, a quality in Diana’s poetry which Aurelia found eminently attractive. In our troubled contemporary world-view, the experience must surely lift our spirits.

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