

Kindly Apparitions: Reflections upon reflections

I think it was Basho the extraordinary Japanese poet that compared his infamous journey to the process of writing his poetry. Remarking that the walk was a conversation between ghosts and a ghost-to-be. I think writers experience this metaphor frequently. And there is something about the notion that appeals to me. Not necessarily in a mystical way, but in a simple, neither good, nor bad kind of way: A longing to connect through expression, but not in a linear fashion. Instead, like Basho in a way that recognises that we should learn how to listen as things often speak for themselves.

My current research has involved a great deal of reflection upon how it is that I actually write, why I write, and what it does to me. Indeed, why I feel I need to do it. I realised something after the recent Lapidus day conference where I presented a keynote speech that explored tradition and innovation through songwriting. I came to recognise a similar kindly apparition: a remarkable and unexpected appearance of something (or someone).

Like an old friend, the roots of my writing – poetry – gave a comforting, patient and knowing nod. I will return to this point shortly.

My presentation had been primarily concerned with how the tension between tradition and innovation is an aspect that creates composition; that they bring each other in to being. And I had wanted to express my thoughts to those gathered through a theoretical framework to make some sense of my thinking. I used the theory of a German Folklorist named Bausinger, who in his book “Folklore in a world of technology”, “demonstrates that while man's environment changes, the dynamics of tradition may be transformed but they do not disappear. He proposed a theory of expansion rather than disintegration, of traditional culture in an age of technology” (Bausinger, 1961, p. 12). I will confess I was entirely unsure of how to present my ideas, I was aware that the gathering would consist of people from all walks of life, and how to express my often muddled thoughts succinctly and clearly was I felt crucial. So, I sang.

Everybody else sang.

And somewhere within the exposition, was an evocation: A sharing; a collective experience; an understanding.

The day was welcoming, and enlightening on so many levels. Yet, for all of my theory, expansions, and wishes to sing, I hadn't seen the spectral image in my work.

And here I return to my old friend.

The points I chose to share about the construction of the song we sang: ‘sparrows on the roof’, were related to poetry, to the writing and sharing of it with friends.

I think until this presentaton, although I recognised writing lyrics to be a poetic exercise, I had always presumed it was the music that was my catharsis; the performance was my cure. To rephrase, Bartleet's (2015) tale of recollection: One of my primary motivations as a songwriter had always been to find ways of making my songs relevant to the *time* and *place* in which I lived. Creating songs that drew on my background, without being bound by any particular idiom; to write songs that embody the personal. I wished to write songs that unfolded with the inevitability and inner-logic of tradition but with the energy, surprise and uncertainty of innovation. But I now wonder whether song is just the vehicle; whether music is merely a receptacle containing words as a tonic within. This needs more rumination on my part.

I would not want to presume how others felt that day, but I am content enough with the image of myself and Basho coming to some consensus of what Ted Hughes meant when he described his writing as a “road back to myself”. The discussion on and after the day also offered me further insights in to my own writing. Whether labelled song or poetry, it represents more than how I feel, it is how I know the world, and the past. It goes beyond mere personal expression towards an embodied truth. It regards the formation of my identity and intrinsically linked to this is my well-being

References

Bartleet, B.-L. (2015). Artful and Embodied Methods, Modes of Inquiry, and Forms of Representation. In S. Holman Jones, T. E. Adams, & C. Ellis (Eds.), *Handbook of Autoethnography* (pp. 443-464). Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, Inc.

Bausinger, H. (1961). *Folkskultur in der technischen Welt*. Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer GmbH.