A Reflection on Time

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Abstract

This Capstone is a multigenre project—a portfolio of creative works consisting of many different styles of writing. The composition encompasses several modes of poetry and prose, utilizing each one’s unique capacity for creative expression to approach the central themes of the work from a variety of perspectives. Those themes regard the human experience of time. The project begins by envisioning time as a child might experience it and progresses through varying human responses to time at different stages in life, paralleling the maturation of an individual as they age. One secondary theme is humanity’s tendency to minimize or ignore the effects of time through the use of distraction or deceptive “masks” of makeup and success; another is our desire to find meaning and permanence in the time we have left. Each poem is carefully arranged to build upon themes introduced and elaborated upon by its predecessors. The lack of structure in some poems and structure’s intentional breaking in others was designed to convey the experiences of those poems’ subjects, echoing their own feelings or understandings. Natural imagery also appears frequently because I found it useful as a parallel to the growth and decay which is characteristic of our experience with time. It is hoped the reader will leave with a greater respect for time’s power over our unconscious lives and a newfound awareness of their own actions and beliefs regarding time.
“The Grand Illusion”
Freestyle Poem

We opened our eyes to bright sterile lights
and a mother’s loving embrace.
No curtains to call, or lines to rehearse
The accolades and roses abounded.
The world was a stage, each child its critic,
But the reviews a resounding success.
Five senses alive, eyes bright, opened wide,
We took in Life’s Broadway production.
But when the manager cried “We’ve just two acts to go”
We hardly gave him a thought.
We were children, and fools—we failed to take heed,
Scarce blinking to take in the show.
“What’s new? What’s next? What more can you show me?”
We’d trade all for a few seconds more.
Nothing was savored, nothing was cherished,
just on to the next joy or vice.
The show must go on, so that viewers enrapt,
ever guess it might draw to a close.
For to look up or around at the truth
bearing down would shatter that sacred lie:
That Time is no object, but pleasure a currency—
for what else can one get out of life?
So we laugh and pretend
In a play without end
‘Til they turn off the lights to the stage.
“Why?”
Freestyle Poem

Papa, why is the sky blue?
Who bestows each drop of dew?
What could make my time with you
Ever slip away?

What force bears the crane aloft?
What hand made the kitten soft?
Why should the clock strike so oft
When time’s hands lie still?

Who creates the fallen snow?
What alights the evening glow?
Why must Mommy always go
With no tomorrow?

What could feed the pouring rain?
Why must all men suffer pain?
Though it isn’t such a strain—
We have forever.

What keeps sickly man alive?
And why must he always strive?
Why can’t Mommy be revived?
Maybe there is a yesterday.

Who draws in the ocean’s tide?
Why have friends and family died?
What good all worldly wealth and pride
If we don’t have forever?

Why should apples fall so fast?
Why can’t man outrun his past?
Does nothing he does ever last?
We don’t have forever

Why are some men bad and good
When left the bounds of childhood?
Each moment now slips on apace
And time runs out.
“Arrogant Spring”
Japanese Tanka

Passing girl in spring
Tumbled raven locks like rain
Water glowing skin.
Ah, the arrogance of spring
And summer not far behind!
“Cosmetic Deception”
Rhymed Poem

Hair dye,
Lip gloss,
Skin cream,
Botox—
A mask of deception,
Bright life the complexion.
Big bucks,
Fast cars,
Late nights,
Long bars,
Life as a ruse,
Its object to muse.
Don’t think,
Pretend,
Life’s joy—
No end.
Embrace the delusion:
Cosmetic deception.
“Popular Delights”
Japanese Haiku

Popular delights
Leave no time for creation
Or watching sunsets
“Glamours”
Freestyle Poem

Once I walked a wood and saw
A sprite who led me on
Down burrows, through meadows
Through thickets course and wild
Til I grew feeble, weary, weak
Tripped o’er hoary hair
And cursed the iridescent prize
I was fool enough to seek
I’d lost my way
If I’d one before
She laughed as she led
And played her fickle tunes
And sang of age and growth and rot
And glamours of the moon
A tear ran down my weathered face
Though I knew not whence it came
I’d chased a phantom through the brush
And now my hour had grown late
A low peal of thunder rumbled in the distance, but few in the somber procession looked up or took notice. A chill, light drizzle soon fell from an overcast sky that made the early afternoon seem more like evening. The drifting mist slowly collected on dark clothes, reserved for such solemn occasions, before surrendering to the pull of gravity once more and becoming indistinguishable from the tears of this grave gathering. Heads and shoulders drooped as clothing grew gradually heavier, and empty words floated past which no one would remember. All too soon, the words drifted into silence; the moment ended, and the group dispersed, individuals returning to their normal lives, ready to forget—all but one. One man remained.

He was of average height and build, dressed in nondescript blacks and grays as befit the occasion. Middle aged, his black hair was shot through with gray at the temples, the crown just beginning to recede, but still long enough that damp ringlets hung down about his eyes and ears. Curiously, he made no move to brush them away; the entirety of his attention was focused on the freshly churned grave in front of him and the tombstone resting at its head. Relentless, obsessed, his eyes worked their way across the block lettering once more:

**James P. Hogan**

**Dec. 19, 1939—Jan. 27, 2007**

**Father, Brother, Son**

There was a Bible verse too, and some anecdote about living life to the fullest, but these etchings failed to register; James P. Hogan’s message to the living was like any of a hundred others left by those he had joined in the grave. The man’s eyes were drawn instead to the dates which signified
Hogan’s existence, and to the hyphen resting between them. Hogan hadn’t been that much older than the man standing above him, but now here he lay, the sum of all his experience, his hopes and dreams and fears all encapsulated by that insignificant hyphen. That was what Hogan had been, the man reflected—insignificant. To his knowledge, in all the years encompassed by that hyphen, Hogan hadn’t done anything of import—no discoveries or books; no great wealth or explorations or accomplishments. He was just another nameless face, already as good as forgotten by those whose tears had soaked the soil such a short time ago. How could that hyphen possibly have meaning, the man pondered, when the thing it signified was already lost to time?

He looked to the far corner of the cemetery, where once grand plinths of granite and marble had stood monument to the wealth and influence of those they towered over—now weathered by wind and rain and overgrown with ivy. Relics of an age past, they struck him now as pathetic and broken, their faces, names and dates eroded into obscurity by time itself. The names and dates, he suspected, were he able to read them, would look much the same as Mr. Hogan’s, and were just as forgotten. Yet they had been powerful people in their time, he mused, with all the wealth and accomplishments and relationships Hogan had lacked; still they were lost to history. What good was it then, he wondered, whether one was remembered for ten minutes or ten years or ten thousand years, if in the end they were forgotten?

He glanced down at his body, then back to the mound of wet clay at his feet, acutely aware of the ache in his knees and back. Time doesn’t just creep in with old age, he realized, to steal comfort and health and finally life away. Given long enough, time erases even memory—makes it as though one had never been. It renders everything which the hyphens on the tombstones before him stood for useless.
The man slowly gathered himself before ambling off silently through the falling mist, deeply troubled. It couldn’t be long before his own hyphen reached its natural end, and one final date was carved in stone beside it.
“Masks”
Japanese Haiku Set

I'll hide behind this
Pretty shell, and you in your’s;
We’ll make up our game

I, oblivious,
Flaunt my youth until one day
My mask slips, shatters

Despair at winter’s
Harbinger snows, Time’s revenge:
‘Morrow’s end draws near
"Reflection"
Ekphrastic Prose

He looks out upon a vista weathered gray with age and circumstance, saltwater tears leaking from rheumy eyes to match the pace of the freshwater counterparts which run down the window of his study. He’s alone and has been for some time; he’s outlived everybody, for all the good it’s done him, and the depths of his eyes reflect their age. Those eyes are ensconced in wrinkles, a complex series of crags and canyons that, were anyone to take the time, would tell the story of this man—of laughter and anger, private joys and private sorrows, and the worry, etched deeper than them all. He’s worried that all the other lines won’t mean anything in the end. They were earned through his every experience with loved ones, and some not-so-loved ones, but they’re all dead now, and the lines hold meaning only to him. Soon not even that. That is why the tears flow—he doesn’t have long now. The clock he thought would stop if he ignored it has kept ticking all this time, and now his time is nearly up. He puts his chin in his hand and wonders again what it could all mean, whether it meant anything at all. The clock can’t be rewound, and it’s too late to put the wrongs to right. It’s too late to change anything. The clock strikes twelve, and a single bell tolls.
“Blooms”
Japanese Haiku

Blooms of early years,
Vibrancy of life, grow old,
Drift away, and die
“Manner of Man”
Japanese Renga

Trav’ling with the day,
I lived the lives of men, but
Now I rest with dusk
    Time draws near, yet fleeting fades
    What manner of man are you?

Though autumn sun sinks,
I will not relinquish spring!
There is more to do.
    Beg, plead, rail against the night;
    Sleep has always dogged your steps.

Will I dream of life,
Mem’ry sweet, and legacy?
Or forgotten wane?
    Some dream content; some regret.
    What manner of man were you?
“Epitaph”
Epitaph

Despite the world your fears allay,
Time will steal the years away.
“Life’s Song”
Japanese Tanka

Spring roots turn old earth;
New life draws breath from old lungs,
Cries anew life’s song.
Children who dance on father’s grave
Sing of things your father sung.
Short Reflective Essay

This Capstone project challenged me as both a writer and a student. Going into the project, I had desired something which I knew I would enjoy and which would showcase what ability I had as a writer and a poet. I quickly realized, however, that in order to truly enjoy the experience I required some kind of learning component as well. The project thus evolved into an intellectual challenge as much as a creative one as I sought to learn and experiment with new forms of writing that I was entirely unfamiliar with. Having now completed the composition, I can honestly reflect upon my experience and say that I feel more confidence in my ability to compose larger works and to adapt to new and challenging art forms.

As I was unfamiliar with the genre at the time and I felt its natural themes would dovetail nicely with my own topic, I chose primarily to focus upon learning the various forms of Japanese poetry. With such a rich poetic tradition to draw upon, I was able to learn much about that nation’s literary history and try my hand at a number of its styles. Progressing from learning these styles from scratch to successfully applying them was a frustrating process. By embracing its many false starts, abandoned experiments, and poor compositions, however, I was eventually able to improve my writing and distill my works down to the finished ones which appear in this project. I can confidently say that I now possess a firm grasp of the underlying structure behind these poems and a greater appreciation for their intricately woven themes and imagery.
What revisions I made were primarily for clarity or structural corrections. Several poems had to be rewritten entirely or rearranged within the project as other works which appeared before them were edited. I was surprised by how surreal it was as those revisions were made and the project came together. The subject of time and how we each deal with it has been on my mind for quite a while and grows even more so as I near my own graduation and the time for a significant stage of my life seems to be running out. This has been a personally and intellectually rewarding experience—one that I believe I will be able to look back on as a suitable challenge with which to close my college career.