

A half-finished Poem – ‘No’ 17 times.

This is about a poem – which has just reminded me that it was there; half-lost in the messy, unarchived life-notes; waiting for some heartfulness, attention.

It is telling me that now seems like a good opportunity to bring some of its ‘no’ energy to the present moment. The main word being – No – which is the poem’s (working) title.

“No.

The truest partner, stubbornness.
Perhaps sentinel to Yes *and* No,
Rooted into ground itself as
Breath-burnt care,
Subtle prayer?
No”

It is possible that some poems can only be lived, and that some poems are never to be finished ... Not because the effort to do the work is too difficult. Instead, the neglected poem reminds me how lives are lived in certain ways – when we have absolutely no say in the matter. It pains me to share this half-poem, because I feel vulnerable showing something so unfinished, incomplete. My sole responsibility. I am ashamed to have neglected it, but only when it reappears, sprouting, rooting, no; alive.

If it is not right, for me, to share its fully unformed openness, its undemanding presence means a new crucible, reformed boundaries; are its conditions. Unfinished work is at the threshold between the ‘no longer’ and the ‘not yet’ – present – and needs everything but routine.

“Monstrous decay,
Eats the flesh of thought to bone
Apparently alive, apparently not,
No is the worm”

The present demands a particular ‘No’. Not to stop or to surrender but to cease. Ultimately, we will have to accept our lives unfinished. We bring our unfinished selves to the carnival. And these many frayed edges, on all sides, will allow me to return to writing this poem, when the next opportunity presents itself, just as we find others listen to what we do not yet know we have to say.

“To write within its cursive straights its elementary chemical.
Minus minus does not become a plus.
No is not a commentary on life, pretence that I am I.
Force of love and loss combined. No sees
through shallow presence”

Borrowing from an incomplete poem; that speaks to me now, I’m thinking of the many “Nos” of my children; at 2, at 10, at 16 and at 21; each with a distinctive sound, and resonance, and how we’ve unlearned to reclaim the word ‘no’ - one of those few we speak, if it can be called speaking, with all-of-the-body-at-once.

For now, because there will never be another “now” (a sound very similar to “no”) these ‘extracts’ are dedicated to Drawing Lines of Care.

All I had to do was rediscover the voice in which the note was written, consciously plant myself in the earth, and say ‘No’, with everything I’m for and against, both united in this No - strange wisdom, left unfinished, until now.

“No is not a word
It does not dream; its metal
song unfurls”