

The Gift of Time

By William Matter

At first I am a youthful poet—
Filled with rhyme,
Expecting endless time,
Not knowing yet what is true.
My inexperienced muse loses hues
Turning colorless in pirate hands.
My verse slips through lips
Down fingertips and fires
Like vapor onto paper
Through no filter or restraint—
Fires like cannon balls
And cuts through rigging.
Tears through borrowed bulkheads
Ball and chain.
Fires salvos of stolen images
Yellow and unnatural
Like sunlight on cold skin.
Struggling to discover what is real
I am young and only learning
What to say and what to feel.

Then I am the poet caught
In the quandary of middle age
Struggling to be original
To build a home for my heart
Breathing life into the inanimate
Soul of time—moving stone to sand
Sand to glass.
Measuring words like those grains
Lost to the other side,
Turning upside down
And measuring again.
Words float in thin wind
Moving across the page
And back again
Episodic, uncontrolled
But maybe somewhat true.

Finally, I am the ancient poet.
I do not go gently
Into that bad daze that stays
And lays ahead of me.
Facing eternity,

I realize that being what you are
Is what you've been.
Skin sags in bags
And muscles disappear.
Where once was future
Now is past,
And the last mast
Of that younger ship,
With ragged rigging,
slips through wrinkled waves
and sinks beneath the surface
of a life that's gone too fast—
Of words that tried to last.
Where is the promise lost in youth?
Where is the paradigm of truth?
That inexorable gift of rhyme,
The promise of a younger time,
Was only loaned. It wasn't mine.
And as the waves encompass me
I've finally found my poetry.