

Esperança, a Covid Lockdown Sestina Challenge,*

With Apologies to Shakespeare, Keats, Rossetti, Dickinson, Wilde, and Angelou

Angela Kingston

I

Tomorrow and tomorrow, we deny the moment
the lover's staff splits, the undeniable fissure
when expectations fail,
and we become an excommunicate
from the church of love, from the miracle
of which the Bard would tell.

II

Tomorrow and tomorrow, we think that we can tell
the bare heath will bloom, that our thoughts are of no moment
to such a miracle.
Between dreams and life there grows a fissure.
We look to the gods, excommunicate
beliefs that blooms can fail.

William Shakespeare

'Hope is a lover's staff; walk hence with that
And manage it against despairing thoughts.' (*Two Gentlemen of Verona*, Act 3, Scene 1)

'Oft expectation fails, and most oft there where most it
promises; and oft it hits where hope is coldest, and despair most
fits.' (*All's Well That Ends Well*, Act 2, Scene 1)

John Keats

From 'To Hope'

When by my solitary hearth I sit,
And hateful thoughts enwrap my soul in gloom;
When no fair dreams before my "mind's eye" flit,
And the bare heath of life presents no bloom;
Sweet Hope, ethereal balm upon me shed,
And wave thy silver pinions o'er my head!

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III

Tomorrow and tomorrow, we long to see but fail
to glimpse our heart's desire, only hear sweet voices tell
and excommunicate
from the light, the tune, the song, the moment.
Between day and night a twilight fissure
swallows the miracle.

Christina Rossetti

'A Hope Carol'

A night was near, a day was near,
Between a day and night
I heard sweet voices calling clear,
Calling me:
I heard a whirr of wing on wing,
But could not see the sight;
I long to see my birds that sing,
I long to see.
Below the stars, beyond the moon,
Between the night and day
I heard a rising falling tune
Calling me:
I long to see the pipes and strings
Whereon such minstrels play;
I long to see each face that sings,
I long to see.
Today or may be not today,
Tonight or not tonight,
All voices that command or pray
Calling me,
Shall kindle in my soul such fire
And in my eyes such light
That I shall see that heart's desire
I long to see.

IV

Tomorrow and tomorrow, dreaming the miracle
of the singing, feathered thing, we reach and strain and fail
to accept the fissure,
entreat the creature wordless songs to tell,
soothing songs to perch in every moment,
not excommunicate.

V

Tomorrow and tomorrow, we excommunicate
thoughts of black despair, drinking the morning miracle,
every silver moment.
When faith is dead, and laws and justice fail,
even captives under the blue tent tell
of a light-lined fissure.

Emily Dickinson

'Hope is the thing with feathers'

"Hope" is the thing with feathers -
That perches in the soul -
And sings the tune without the words -
And never stops - at all -

And sweetest - in the Gale - is heard -
And sore must be the storm -
That could abash the little Bird
That kept so many warm -

I've heard it in the chilliest land -
And on the strangest Sea -
Yet - never - in Extremity,
It asked a crumb - of me.

Oscar Wilde

From 'The Ballad of Reading Gaol'

I never saw a man who looked
With such a wistful eye
Upon that little tent of blue
Which prisoners call the sky,
And at every drifting cloud that went
With sails of silver by.

...

VI

Tomorrow and tomorrow, even after fissure,
past pain and history's shame we excommunicate.
A story swells to tell
of a clear, rising, leaping miracle,
that like sun, moon and tide will never fail:
a daybreaking moment.

He did not wring his hands, as do
Those witless men who dare
To try to rear the changeling Hope
In the cave of black Despair:
He only looked upon the sun,
And drank the morning air.

Maya Angelou

'Still I Rise'

You may write me down in history
With your bitter, twisted lies,
You may trod me in the very dirt
But still, like dust, I'll rise.

Does my sassiness upset you?
Why are you beset with gloom?
'Cause I walk like I've got oil wells
Pumping in my living room.

Just like moons and like suns,
With the certainty of tides,
Just like hopes springing high,
Still I'll rise.

Did you want to see me broken?
Bowed head and lowered eyes?
Shoulders falling down like teardrops,
Weakened by my soulful cries?

Does my haughtiness offend you?
Don't you take it awful hard
'Cause I laugh like I've got gold mines
Diggin' in my own backyard.

You may shoot me with your words,
You may cut me with your eyes,
You may kill me with your hatefulness,
But still, like air, I'll rise.

Does my sexiness upset you?
Does it come as a surprise
That I dance like I've got diamonds
At the meeting of my thighs?

Out of the huts of history's shame
I rise
Up from a past that's rooted in pain
I rise
I'm a black ocean, leaping and wide,
Welling and swelling I bear in the tide.

Leaving behind nights of terror and fear
I rise
Into a daybreak that's wondrously clear
I rise
Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave,
I am the dream and the hope of the slave.
I rise
I rise
I rise.

Poetry: *Esperança* by Angela Kingston

VII

Tomorrow a new fissure, another miracle.
Our fears we'll excommunicate, once more we will fail
and tales tell, each moment.

Angela has a PhD in English literature (Oscar Wilde) from The University of Adelaide. Her novel manuscript about Oscar Wilde's childhood has won the Penguin Varuna Scholarship, an Arts SA Project Grant and a shortlisting for the Impress Prize (UK). Angela is currently completing her Creative Writing PhD at Adelaide University.