

Out of Time by Jay Ramsay
Review for *Caduceus* – by Helen Moore

In *The Inner Journey of the Poet*, Kathleen Raine writes: “To recreate a common language for the communication of knowledge of spiritual realities and of the invisible order of the psyche, is the problem now for any serious artist or poet.” And who better than Jay Ramsay, visionary poet, psychotherapist and healer, to direct himself towards this task?

Out of Time, selected poems from 1998-2008, is a sustained exploration of these spiritual realities – what John Cowper Powys termed ‘the real reality’. The poems venture into many aspects of metaphysics – the mystery of life after death, the coniunctio of spirit and matter, angels, spirits, the relationship of the ego with the daimon, telepathy, past lives – as well as how we connect with the timeless realm.

Christian mysticism figures strongly – “to know finally/everything has its being in God/every moment, meeting, journey” (‘On Haresfield Beacon’). And it is a ‘pure Christianity’, like the Cathar tradition evoked in ‘Montsegur’: “... a love that goes beyond all bounds/A dangerous love, that will not fit the rules”. Other poems reveal the influence of Rumi, Taoism, and an animistic sensibility.

A theme of awakening to the remembrance of the timeless – the Platonic ‘anamnesis’ – features in several poems. In ‘Shapwick’, timeless time is evoked “out of reach of chainsaws and graffiti”, where nature is “this Reserve for Human Beings/remembering who we are again at last”. For Jay our openness to pure love also appears to stem from our awareness of our being “formless consciousness living in time”. In ‘A Dream for Easter’, we find: “the whole we never dreamt we could dream.”

As in Raine, a poetic exploration of these spiritual realities is set against modern secular materialism. Jay describes “Modern Man:/diseased in the place of vision”. And he has a Blakean idealism and passion, which may jar modern sensibilities. In ‘Round Trip’, a sequence poem exploring Ireland, spirit self-aware in matter contrasts with “the young animals of Galway city”, which “could be Any Place/Where humanity is on the boil/In the putrefaction of its undoing.”

But he also expresses tenderness towards humanity, and occasionally reveals his own disconnections. ‘Lullaby’ is an outstanding example of a love poem; while in ‘Ecstasis’, the fall-out from an argument with a lover is the “strange sickening between us”. This is followed by the beautifully phrased recollection “I don’t have to disengage, or play the game/all I have to do is tickle back/my soul into my body like a trout”.

Much of the writing is characterised by an intrepid directness, often employing questions and injunctions to engage the reader. Sometimes there are lapses, lines verging on cliché, or losing their technical precision – “a hard working girl at reception with a heart of gold” is, I suspect, an unintentional evocation of a tough, but good-natured prostitute?

This is perhaps the flip-side of the poems' irrepressible spontaneity, Jay an effusive channel unable to stem the flow – “so like a poem, that races on beyond/what the hand can keep up with”. Furthermore, just like the Tibetan monk with his sand mandala, this poet is fearlessly non-attached to his work: “To build the Palace of God without fear/poet of sand.../letting our works go/... to build itself enough, being happiness.”

At times the omniscient narrator interprets events for the subject. ‘At the Hotel Leusden’ begins by inviting the reader to: “...imagine arriving nowhere/that is familiar: a hotel in the middle of Nowhere...” and concludes: “you have at last arrived nowhere, where the Self lives/where you don’t need anything, not even your mobile phone.” In ‘Antonia’, the speaker tells a transsexual: “the poem is you: your true life, or nothing/being far more alive than you ever were/so what else do you need? Not art, but a mirror/reflecting eyes of love, of longed-for understanding.”

When the narrative is mediated in this way, the poem’s ability to fire the reader’s imagination can be diminished. Some of the most powerful poems rely on a different approach – for example ‘A Suicide Bomber Reaches the Light’, a dramatic monologue in which a Muslim terrorist shares his realisations about the true nature of the afterlife.

Overall, *Out of Time* is a courageous attempt to communicate spiritual truth at a time when few poets dare to do so. It is a work of the imagination, evoking, as Kathleen Raine would have it, “the longing to be what we truly are.”