

“Appreciating the opportunities we have to rediscover ourselves is the key to self-awareness”

The need for individuals to seize and appreciate opportunities to rediscover their personal identities is instrumental to forging a greater understanding of themselves and their relationships with other people, thereby enabling them to look ahead toward the future. In Rosemary Dobson’s poetry, opportunities for individuals to rediscover themselves arise in emotional challenging situations, such as maturation and psychological conflict between the realms of family and demands of society. Such opportunities enable individuals to rediscover and reflect upon the need to embrace change, or revitalize their understanding of the role in society, thereby rekindling a sense of self-awareness. In Christie Arthur’s short story, A Slice Without Passionfruit (2014), opportunities for individuals to rediscover themselves are presented in moments of introspection, leading to greater self-awareness through a renewed understanding of their relationship with others. In both texts, these rediscoveries and consequent self-awareness lead to a greater ability to embrace the future.

While appreciating opportunities to rediscover oneself is paramount for self-awareness, a sense of reluctance that is often met with milestone moments of transition can inhibit an individual’s attainment of self-awareness. In “Young Girl at a Window”, Dobson conveys the challenges of embracing opportunities to uncover knowledge about oneself through the speaker’s reluctance to transition from childhood innocence to adulthood. The imperative mood of “Lift you hand...” exemplifies instruction given to a young girl who is guided by an experienced presence nurturing this transitory moment. Yet, this instance to rediscover the realm of opportunity and learning beyond the confines of childhood is met with reluctance, foregrounded through the imagery of cessation and harsh finality of the consonant sounds in “Since Time was killed and now lies dead”. A sense of unease and immediacy concerning the transition from childhood into the unknown future is engendered through the use of the present tense. This inability to embrace the opportunity of moving forward is heightened through Dobson’s anthropological reference to liminal spaces, as the girl’s contemplation “on thresholds at the end of the day” remains doubtful about the foreign nature of the next stage in life. Yet, this unwilling attitude is displaced when Dobson references the “window”, an archetypal symbol of a threshold that denotes an outlook for the girl’s future. The recurrence of the imperative mood in declaring “this journey you must go” heightens the need for the girl to seize the time before her. Alliteration in “forward footsteps” connotes a sense of advancement, and symbolism of vitality, achievement and even clarity at the end of one’s life through the symbolism of “grass, and sheaves and lastly snow” articulates opportunities for self-discovery in coming stages of life. Hence, in encouraging the girl adopt a greater awareness for new possibilities ahead, Dobson affirms the notion that transformative discoveries about oneself arise from the rediscovery of the importance of growth and learning.

Likewise, Arthur illuminates the importance of appreciating opportunities as avenues for self-examination and rediscovery, albeit to better understand one's changing relationship with others. In "A Slice Without Passionfruit", Alexandra's discovery is again conceptualized as a journey from naivety to acceptance and maturation and mirrors the girl's emotional journey from reluctance to appreciation in Dobson's poem. Alexandra's reluctance to discover a new relationship in light of her grandfather's Alzheimer's diagnosis is established through her reflection "Christmas is different, not bad different, just different. But I still pretend it's the same", where the repetition of "different" and her act of "pretending" reveals a character of naivety. Her initial stance is reinforced through her tone of indifference and use of euphemism by describing the disease as "a label; the name for his occasional slip of the tongue". However, evidence of her growing self-awareness is exemplified in the poignant simile of her grandfather's eyes "like a seashell...the memories, the musings, all echo louder with his vacancy", highlighting her ability to begin to see what is truly valuable in their relationship, in face of adversity. This ultimately demonstrates Alexandra's ability to appreciate reality and discover what is sacred to her relationship with her ill grandfather elucidated through her rhetorical question "His lips move - no words, but what do words matter anymore?" and resulting conclusion "Time matters". Alexandra's journey of maturation is akin to the girl's reassessment of her future in Dobson's "Young Girl at a Window". Arthur illuminates the highly impactful self-discovery that an emotional connection in relationships far outweighs deficiencies of a person that arise in situations of hardship, hence resonating with Dobson's perspective that self-awareness and personal transformation can be attained through acceptance of the unknown.

While maturation through phases of life offers possibilities of rediscovery, opportunities to rediscover oneself are also presented during moments of introspection, particularly in situations when individuals become physically and emotionally burdened by the conflicting responsibilities present in their social lives. Introspection enables individuals to re-examine the multifaceted nature of their roles, and in doing so make transformative discoveries about themselves by formulating new perspectives on their identity, ultimately leading to greater self-awareness. In Dobson's "Cock Crow", these self-discoveries lead to an awareness about the realm of female experience. A state of dissatisfaction prompted by the speaker's inner conflict is introduced through the confessional tone and urgent sincerity of her "wanting to be myself, alone". Such conflict is centred on the female experience, and caused by the fact that whilst she wishes to fulfil her filial obligations, she requires time for personal reflection. Generative tension evident through the metaphoric use of "bridge" as a threshold between the "town" and house", which are symbols of social expectations concerning her role as a woman and mother, catalyse the discovery that there has previously been a suppressed inner desire to be alone, and away from these responsibilities, thus denoting a sense of betrayal toward her family. During her reflective moment, the central motif of "love that grows about the bone" encompasses evocative imagery highlighting the powerful and necessary bonds of family and love, while harsh consonants

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and plosives in “cut off from human cries, from pain” simultaneously conveys a sense of restriction and repression of the nature of motherhood. Her return to the home and exclamation “too brief illusion!” signifies her rediscovery of the importance of her connection with her family and helps her reframe her perspective of defining relationships.

Like Dobson, Arthur attributes the transformative discoveries made in “A Slice Without Passionfruit” to opportunities of reflection, following the onset of challenges from one’s conflicting familial and social role. Generative tension between Grace’s love for Sam as his wife, and the demanding challenges that arise from her role as his primary carer prompt these discoveries, which come in the form of a new awareness about personal identity. Grace’s initial remark that “nobody ever understands” the emotional toll of her situation is eroded by moments of introspection where she is able to understand Sam as more than just a burden of care. The deeply poignant simile of Sam’s “frail shoulders... like a shoreline destroyed by waves” symbolises her realisation that his suffering is not merely “childishness” or simply “forgetting”, but rather a complex medical and emotional illness that demands her love. Her sorrowful tone as she “watch(es) his lips move in incoherent patterns” represents a moment of introspection akin to the speaker’s quiet journey from the house in “Cock Crow”. Within this opportunity of reflection, Grace understands there is no distinction between her role as his carer and his wife. Both her and the speaker in “Cock Crow” experience a shift in understanding about their familial roles and rediscover that their identity is neither just carer nor wife, or just mother, but rather a complex identity that encompasses all the above. Thus in both poems, a sense of self is affirmed through the rediscovery of formative relationships.