

HELEN MOORE

Spacing Out

A sequence poem commissioned & first performed at The Universe Story Experience, Core Arts, Hackney, London, May 1st 2009

I. The Past Lives of Stars

Sirius, Pollux, Castor –
cosmopolitans of this primal night,
my eyes water at your stardom.
No telescope will suffice –
I feel that I'm observed;
that you sing harmonies
my ears have yet to glean.

Deneb, Polaris, Peacock –
for eons you've witnessed
the fulminations of wannabe stars.
Burning with ambition,
they leave their stellar nurseries,
the gas and dust
from which they issued,
shoot up,
and swiftly exit the scene.

Diphda, Almach, Ankaa –
unique, and yet as infinite as sand-grains
on all the beaches of this planet,
you seem the speckles on a Starling,
but in truth are huge fulgent suns,
who live millions of years.

Markab, Menkar, Zuben-ubi –
I heard a rumour that Tiamat
was the greatest star ever born.
From her dying body, the sky
and molten Earth were formed.
Tiamat –
*Ancestral Star.*¹

¹ Tiamat is a Babylonian goddess, the primordial mother of all that exists. Defeated by the young god Marduk, her body was cleaved in two, the upper half creating the sky, the lower half the Earth. Tiamat is also the name given by Brian Swimme and Thomas Berry in their book *The Universe Story* to the ancestral star that created all the complex elements on Earth. Since its publication in 1992, scientists have concluded that these atoms derive from perhaps twenty such stars, which exploded as supernovas.

2. Tiamat's Gifts

Stoking their hearths with helium and hydrogen,
the Red Dwarves watched as Tiamat died.
She was lying across their mighty anvil,
a stream of supernovas raining from her eyes.

“Bring your hammers and knock out my teeth!”
she cried. Grimly the dwarves obeyed;
chipping away, they sent sparks of calcium
flying from the nebula of her mouth.

Next with their tongs they took her tongue,
and from it tungsten was licked
into shape. From her hair they forged
the first copper; from her bones, phosphorus.

Then, through the melt-down of her body
there rained titanium, atoms of bromine,
caesium, nitrogen, carbon, and oxygen,
which would become the stuff of Life.

3. Helios, our Sun

In an outer suburb of this galaxy,
Helios was next to emerge
from a dense cloud of gas.

A Yellow Dwarf
spinning planets like hot plates,
his heliosphere could get hectic.
But he'd a serious side too,
was set to be Father
of all known Life – his face
bursting with an energy
that his firstborn would use,
laying down their leaves and bones
in bedrock drawers –
these grave gods of fossil fuels.

And he's prolific, this Helios,
has driven billions of barrels
of liquid gold – must be a trillionaire.
And yet, lurking in an inner rim
of the Milky Way's Orion Avenue,
he's just like many others –
a suburban kind of sun.

4. Goldilocks Earth

Not too near, and not too far –
a bunch of junk in the Sun's entourage,
She became the third of nine planets,
a lump of iron and rock.

Not too fast, and not too slow –
in the beginning comets cratered Her virgin
medium, bringing carbon and water; ingredients
for a hot, bubbling porridge.

Not too wet, and not too dry –
Her primordial crust cooled, was swept
by oceans. Steam; clouds; rain; steam –
water began its hydrological cycle.

Not too hot, and not too cold –
Ursa Major, Ursa Minor and Arcturus,
Guardian of Bears, shone brightly above Her,
and sensed this planet would be just right.

5. Becoming Gaia

Out of space-chaos rained the seeds of Tiamat's atoms,
lacing the Milky Way with potential to become

other than what already was – yet as to its nature,
not even my Moon could conjecture.

Then, deep in my boiling, poisonous seas,
I could feel these atoms stretching out their arms to tease,

to make what modern biophiles call 'self-replicating molecules.'
In truth, it was a long, incestuous affair – a tiny fooling

with feeling for thousands of millions of years,
during which time my new frontiers

were the burgeoning of cells and a blue-green algae
that improved my seas' capacity

to harbour Life. But it was the Stromatolites who first puffed oxygen
into my atmosphere, and o, what sweet relief! Protection

from the Sun's radiation. And so new life-forms began evolving –
the soft belling up of Jellyfish herds at sunset; scabs of Lichen colonising

land. Soon there'd be clans of Sea Squirt, Coral, Sponge; tribes
of Ammonite, Lampshell, simple-eyed Trilobites....

And somehow it was all taking off, as if it couldn't stop;
as if my right hand barely knew where my left hand held off –

each being following the logic of its species;
yet each hooked into the mantle of my aegis.

Out of space-chaos came sweet anarchic order,
and I was going with the flow...