

The Verse of *Dānu*

A traveler once asked of the ferryman,
"Where does the great river *Dānu* end?"
And this is how the ferryman answered him:

~/~/ / a Million Thoughts,
~/~/ / just Rainy Jots,
~/~/ / mist Mountain Prides.
~/~/ / a Thousand Dreams
~/~/ / do Surge in Streams
~/~/ / down Steep hillSides.

~/~/ / o the River Lives
/~ / Time by Time.
~~~/~/ / still the River Gives  
/~ / Time by Time.

/~/ / Water Gleams.  
~/~/ / our Eyes reFlect  
/~ / And perFect,  
~/~/ while Time's presence Teems.

~/~/ / a Hundred Plans,  
~/~/ / hope's CaraVans,  
~/~/ / wend Boats of Needs.  
~/~/ / a Single Life,  
~/~/ / the Ferry's Fife,  
~~~/ to the Sea it Leads.

~~~/~/ / o yet *Dānu* Lives  
/~ / Time by Time.  
~~~/~/ / still the Giver Gives  
/~ / Time by Time.

/~/ / Summer's Clime,
/~ / Autumn's Fen,
/~ / Winter's Chime,
/~ / Spring's Green Glen,

~/~/ / forEver When,
~/~/ / forEver When,
~/~/ / forEver When.

Versification is much like a puzzle. The magic is to fit the words and phrases to the framework, while using the structure to illustrate the underlying meaning of the poem.

The metrical scheme of *Dānu* is iambic dimeter, that is, there are two poetic feet per line, with an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable making up each foot, the iamb.

~/~/ / Iambic Dimeter

The convention used on the left shows the stresses with capital letters and the rhyming words in color. Most lines are strict iambs, but there is the occasional use of lyrical triplets and of extra stresses for emphasis, such as in the phrase "Time's presence teems."

It's not just the meter that creates the sensation of rhythm and movement in verse. *Dānu* is thick in rhymes, especially when compared to the more conventional iambic pentameter of the epic poem *Amāyō*. Every line in *Dānu* incorporates a perfect rhyme, so about one in three words contributes to the musicality of the poem.

~/~/~/~/~/ / Iambic Pentameter

Besides the meter and rhyming scheme, the verses function much as paragraphs do in prose. The central verses move the reader from a million to just one (then none), from the mountains to the river (then finally the to sea), from thoughts to a single life (then oblivion). Each of these movements contain three lines each, with six lines grouped together rhyming AABCCB. The other verses are four lines each, rhyming either ABAB or ABBA.

The use of the present tense, the mesmerizing iambic dimeter, the closeness of the rhymes, and the hypnotic repetitions of "forever when" emphasize our awareness of the presence of the moment and of the slipping sensation of time's passage.

So, read the poem again, and remember the ferryman's answer, "*O yet *Dānu* lives!*"