

# Poem

## KNOWING

*by Christopher Southgate*

My first experiment on living tissue.  
Pick a new leaf – copper beech –  
chop into chloroform. Watch  
as the hydrophobic pigments  
leach to solvent.  
A longer lesson is to follow those leaves  
from bud-burst,  
each morning after lovemaking,  
savour their tints from pale strawberry  
to old, tannic claret  
and on into honey and on into rusted gold.

Dusk falls on the Sound of Sleat.  
I feel, as much as see, the pulse  
that is each new wave. Each is a pattern  
duplicable in a ripple-tank.  
Each is known, felt,  
by the way it gathers out of Sleat  
to beat on the Skye shore.  
Gannets at their dusk feeding  
stoop and plunge, piercing  
the vibration as it runs for the rocks,  
eloquent of time, eloquent of sadness.

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Home. Above the beech-tree's blur  
I trace star-shapes – swan,  
dragon, chained maiden,  
the same lion the Babylonians saw.  
The stars are the frame, the ambit of our dreams  
yet without Edwin Hubble's  
patiently gathered spectra  
we would not know their headlong retreat  
from primordial densities  
unpicturable  
from our low-cubit vantage-point.

And humans have to be known  
not only by our courteous kisses over wine,  
the massive band-width of our communication  
and the tuned nuances of the cat-walk,  
but by the open hazard of the savannah –  
eagles screaming overhead, baboons jeering,  
the need for survival, the need for tribes,  
ever the hankering  
for Eden.