

tiles he adds the unexpected information that really makes us believe he was on the scene in the park.

Artful use of detail is not the central theme of this poem, of course. The detail merely sets the stage. The main theme is, as he says,

This leaving and returning,

and how a place and a life once rejected can be taken back into the heart.

Here's a translation, from the Russian, by Jane Kenyon. It's one of Anna Akmahtova's untitled poems, written in 1917. Notice the detailing:

We walk along the hard crest of the snowdrift
toward my white, mysterious house,
both of us so quiet,
keeping the silence as we go along.
And sweeter even than the singing of songs
is this dream, now becoming real:
the swaying of branches brushed aside
and the faint ringing of your spurs.

Much of the magic of this little poem comes from very deft handling of the auditory sense. Notice how the ringing of the spurs, the only sound, at the very end of the poem, is showcased by the meticulous enforcement of silences elsewhere. Despite the fact that the couple is walking across hard snow, and we might expect to hear footsteps, there is no noise in the first line, and then none in the second, and so on. Throughout the poem the *absence* of sound is heightened and used. She even underlines the absence of noise by "both of us so quiet, / keeping the silence as we go along." And then that silence is heightened even further by "And sweeter *even* than the singing of songs" (emphasis mine) so that when we finally come to the "faint ringing of your spurs" that ringing carries so much.

Here's another good example of unpredictable detail from Charles Baxter's 2003 novel, *Saul and Patsy*, published by Pantheon. Early in the story, Patsy asks her husband, Saul, to go down to the cellar of their rented house to dispose of a dead mouse in a trap: "He stood up,

shaking the letters on the Scrabble board, and clomped in his white socks to the kitchen, where the flashlight was stuck to the refrigerator with a magnet that was so weak that the flashlight kept sliding down to the floor, though it was only halfway there now. 'I didn't say you had to do it instantly,' Patsy shouted. 'This very minute. You could wait until the game is over.'"

That flashlight with its weak magnet is the authenticating detail in this scene, completely unpredictable. It makes the scene real.

I'll close this chapter with a poem by Donald Finkle, based upon paying attention to something. The poem is triggered by a momentary event, a sonic boom, and the poet pays attention to the specifics that surround that event. And, returning momentarily to what I said about first impressions, notice how easily he draws us in, using very ordinary, conversational language. Once we are safely aboard, the poem begins to lift off:

◆ SONIC BOOM

Nothing has happened, nothing has been broken,
everything is still in place, including yourself;
even now the juice of alarm begins to settle:
the bomber drags away her diminishing roar.
Nothing has happened; this was practice,
you are free to return. If there is a day
to come when you will be called out
to answer for somebody else's doings, this is not it.

Yet what is this delicate balance, that it shall not
be shaken? On the bookcase the figurine teeters;
which of its two thousand years gives it the right
to withstand one blow of the wind? Somewhere over
the plains an angel gathered enough speed
to outrun even the sound of her own voice.
In consequence, for miles around the night
exploded with the violence of her escape.
Yet she has not escaped. Behind her
and her ghostly silence, wherever she goes,
she drags like a harrow her unsettling past.

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