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,
elloquent of time, eloquent of sadness.
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.