‘Blessing’ Analysis

The opening of this poem is very powerful, with its image of skin that “cracks like a pod”. This phrase delivers a strong image of dehydration, of drought, and of cracked earth in the heat. The cracked “pod” brings to my mind a pod of seeds, scorched by the sun so that it will never produce or grow or bear fruit…”There is never enough water.” The simplicity of this second statement to me amplifies the tragic ramifications of its significance. Nothing can grow — nothing can live — where there is no water.

In the second stanza, as the poet invites us to “imagine the drip of it”, I find that the sound of the words here are so cleverly evocative that they even make me thirsty! The sibilance of the “small splash”, and the pleasing clanging of consanants in “echoing”, “tin” and “mug” deliver such a strong image of water that is so needed after the image of the “crack[ed].. pod”… It is significant that the poet describes this sound of water as the “voice of a kindly god” because it emphasises to us that very often the people in such a situation (where water is so scarce), view the advent of such a commodity as a kindly act of god. What else is there to do when you have no possibility to improve your situation? What else is there to believe when you have no possibility of educating yourself? I imagine this poem to be set in India somewhere, because of Dharker’s background.

There is a “sudden rush of fortune” in the third stanza, when the municipal pipe bursts. I think this is very clever, the way the poet draws a parallel between financial wealth and the water. Notice that the water is “silver” — so much more bright and expensive than the “brass, copper, aluminium,/ plastic buckets,/ frantic hands” that scramble to trap just a bit of the precious liquid. I think the fact that the water comes from a “municipal pipe” is important. To me, this evokes the idea of a mistake on the part of the authorities — the pipe burst and so the water got out. When I read this poem it makes me think of corrupt authorities that could help their people, but don’t. And when the pipe bursts, the reaction is a furious scramble to get as much from the happy accident as possible.  The people in the poem are described as a “congregation” here; again we have some ambiguous religious language that (to me) enforces the notion of superstitious, uneducated people, who do not know how wronged they are by the authorities.

For a moment, in the final stanza, the people — “the naked children” — become perfect, even godlike, as everything around them seems to turn to water. They stand in the “liquid sun” and are turned to gold, “polished to perfection”; they are rich as they stand in the world that has come alive thanks to the water. I think this is such a clever, and beautiful image because it really brings home to us the significance of water — how absolutely indispensable a commodity it is — and how a “rush” of water can be a miracle and a gift from god for those who are not fortunate enough to have been born in a country where it is taken for granted.

The final line, “the blessing sings over their small bones” is so very beautiful. I love the use of “sings”, and the “small bones”, and think it just reinforces the idea of the children’s mortality, reminding us that without water, they would certainly die.