

Matthew Pullar

The Still Advance Ten Poems for World Mental Health Day

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Circuitry

Neurons short-circuit somewhere
On the road from stimulus to response A moment suspended, a rush
Of pollen wind, a snatch
Of last year's expression
Caught in this year's mute dance;

And then: that power-surging arrival, The recognition of things oppressive To the heat-weary brain And the sparks that fly upwards For having nowhere else to go. Silence is what follows

For silence is sometimes
Not unlike prayer A quiet longing for things unlike this
And moments that make sense
When we only have moments
That injured us last year and now.

So the silence bends its knees;
This is all our brains have left.
But tomorrow we reassemble
And brains debate old routes
While we guide fragile neurons
Through ditches and jungles, onto
The pathway of the next year.

The Still Advance

Blank spaces yawn where thoughts belong. Vertigo drops heads and lifts them With sudden jolts of indecision.

Daytime lags and lengthens,
A lazy prairie field of quiet companions;
But night welcomes with the arms of a brother.

Street lights flicker; Drowsy minds falter and snap to attention. Time, in all its broken glory, listens.

Running, Lagging

Legs, lift these sluggish feet.
Bending, rising, take the weight
Of bodies dragging, sinking, lagging;
Oppose the pull of death and wind.

Swollen, swelling wounds, be silent; Tendons, hold firm—do not snap; Blood, push out the stagnant fluid Clogging, blocking every flow.

Lungs, give force to move this body; Charge, instruct; give breath, give wind. Push this sagging bag of life's weight; Let it move through air and sing.

My soul, be still; let running be The rhythm of your silent sleep. O God, lift up this head and let it Hope in all Your rushing wind.

A Prayer

The day's excess leaks from recesses
Of bones and punctured consciousness;

Minds, overflowing, soak up dust, Expunging it at the day's burst end.

If, draining outwards, I should falter, Let these faint words staunch the flow;

Let this vapour prayer waft upwards; Let it mix with air and wine

As I drift, awash in myself, You, my harbour and my storm.

Broken Praise

Sing for joy, you who are not joyful; Strike your instruments in song; Open hands of desperate clutching, Open your sore hearts and praise.

Lift the dead-strings of your heart; Let them tune again to praise. Let your memory recall All the good that's gone before,

Though in your mind there is no tune Of remembered joys or peace, Though you have misplaced the key To the rusty chest of memories,

Though your bones have ossified And your joints refuse to bend, Though your voice crackles and cracks And your throat denies all song,

Praise! There is no other answer.
Though it feels like an open wound
Anointed with the oil of pain,
Praise for He is good and you,

Far though it is from you right now, Will praise again. This is the truth. And when you cannot praise at all, Sit beside the rivers and

The seas, the mountains; let them praise. And hear the songs of joyful earth Celebrating what you can't. Let that soundtrack be your praise, And wash your brokenness in grace.

The Marks of Grace

My heart this morning was a sore And wounded thing; I saw it when I rose but did not know it for It only bore the marks of shame. But with no other hearts around, I walked with into the day.

It dripped its refuse about the house,
Marked my furniture and my clothes
And as I sat with it inside
My lap it bled down to my feet;
All I saw was smeared with it,
These marks of shame from my own heart.

Nursing it yet empty in my
Chest where this sore heart belonged,
I saw the king of love, carrying
Like me a wounded, bleeding heart,
Though unlike me he smiled to hold
That heart which was besmirched and red.

Take this heart, he said to me
As he took the broken thing
Which I held in my red hands;
And as he took it I looked in
To his eyes which flowed and his
Brow which bled from open wounds.

Why do you bleed? I asked, and in My empty chest despaired to see That kings should weep and bleed like me; If, I thought, his heart is no Stronger or more whole than mine, What hope have I, far from a king?

At my words his eyes poured out More tears and redder grew his brow. He gave me no reply but fell, A broken and defeated king, Upon the ground where he lay in The redness of my death and shame;

But as his blood commingled with
The shame that poured still from my heart,
I saw a magic, perfect thing
Emerge from this unholy mess:
I saw his brow glow fiery white
And saw his radiance fill my heart;

It glowed now like him and its shame
Was nowhere to be seen within
The glory of the glowing haze,
A sight that shone straight into me,
And where the blood had made all red
Was now this wondrous white-as-snow.

Did I see him stand and take
His place upon a jewelled throne?
I cannot truly say, though I
Heard his voice above me say
That now I bore the marks of grace
Where had before been only shame.

And if I bleed still and am sore
Upon my weary, broken brow,
It is because I am like him.
And so I will not be ashamed
To feel these wounds that scar his heart
For he has made me shine like him.

Your Eternal Yes

Show me a quietly place in Your sun; Stretch out my lowly side in the soil. Massage my wincing coldness in rays Of blinding, reviving Yes-ness of hope.

When sideways and downwards crawling I stand, When soon my backwards is close to Your side, Encircle me; rewrite Your name in my hand. Scratch out my dust places: make them Your sand.

Let Your new-making warmness enfold and console me, While You tell to me places I have never seen, Of trees that enslaved You, of slaves that are free, While I, ever nothing, have nothing to give.

At canyons and caverns, show me Your depths; Energise me for the leap I must take; In soaring, restoring flights of grace bounding, Swoop in me, pour me, in Your eternal Yes.

Well

I will tell a truth not familiar to your ears;
It will crackle and fizz as your mind receives it.
You may startle at it; you may leap in fear;
And it may take captive some old, familiar friends.
Let them go with the wind as its tenderest fingers
Prise open your rusty, closed-fisted mind,
And with its smallest breeze, the truth will pour in,
Over cracks and ravines unacquainted with light.

I have watched you crawl into your shell at the noontide;
I have seen you take shelter from the harshness of light.
Soon - even soon - the sun will not harm you,
The arrow by day, nor the pale moon by night.
Soon - very soon - as you open, you will be
The dancing one, all of your joints brought alive;
And long, long forgotten the locks you once cherished,
Dropped in the ocean with all you now hide.

Rondeau for the Broken

When I am set free I'll be A marvellous, bright thing to see, A humbled crown of godly pride, A rosy thorn within the side Of all I used to be;

I will shine there such glory
I could not create if I tried.
Christ will glow and glow inside,
When I am set free.

So will the angels think of me When they have Christ's face to see? We'll all fall in vanquished pride, Before the conqueror who died And now, alive, will ever be, When we are set free.

Origami Prayer

Open me outwards; Too long I've wandered Inside inward caverns In search of the words For textures and fissures And tensions inside.

Open me upwards; Let Your sun fill me. Too long I've enclosed Myself in my Self, Wounding and licking The wounds of the dark.

Open me up to the Surge of recharging Grace like a spark-shower, Then outwards open Me, Origami-like, To live and to love,

In arms, ever-holding, Your arms, ever-outstretched, Head raised to heaven, Heart turned to Outside, Love drawing, holding me: Open me up.