

o my soul, my soul

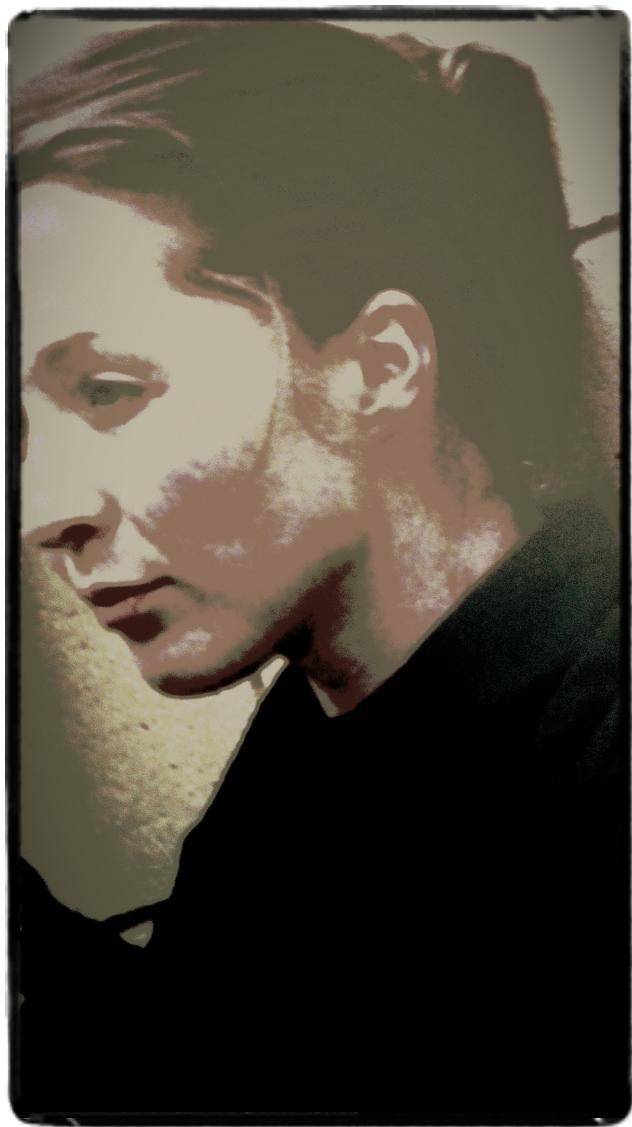
Poems for World Mental Health Day

by Matthew Pullar

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My tears have been my food

day and night...

(Psalm 42:3a)

Desert Tears

Why so downcast,
O my soul, my soul?
Why drag your heels through day
And scream into my ears at night?
Why eat your tears and drink
The salty air of noon?

Where is your God?
They say, they say,
Showing me the empty sky
And rubbing my face in mockery.
Where is your God?
I ask myself and cry.

I remember years
Long ago, long ago
When I went with joy to sing
And led the people singing too.
I remember and I weep
To see that I have fallen.

Why so downcast,
O my soul, my soul?
Why so anxious, so afraid,
So far flung from where you were?
Why do you rub your face

In the soil of tears?
Hope in Him,
My soul, my soul,
Hope, soul, in the Lord.
Look up from this wilderness,
Look up from your desert tears,
For I will yet praise Him.

Despair (After George Herbert's "Denial")

God, my soul is thick with dread
And muted tears,
Sinking deeper with every step I tread
And losing feeble years
In silence.

Heavy drags the weight of days
Pulling me under,
And still you swamp me with all of your waves
And deafen with thunder
Yet say nothing.

I look up to your sky to find
There some escape;
Instead the clouds encompass all my mind,
A heavy cloak, a cape
But no flight.

To you I call all day, all night,
My spirit splayed;
The dead cry with me, yet they have no sight
To see your grace displayed
And do not dream.

My eyes veiled from what you have done,
Already close to death,
I follow you into oblivion

With weak and fading breath
And thinning faith.

Darkness is my closest friend;
Still I pray,
For, with no resolution and no end,
You may yet mend the fray
And bring in day...

One Day

I wonder if, one day, we could find a place
Where the nettles of spring do not bite us,
Where the trees sing songs of comfort and peace
And I do not flee from these flowers.

I wonder if one day, amidst these thick hours,
I might face down the wildest of seas
And take in the birds' fluid motion of flight as
They swoop in their orbit of grace.

Perhaps; though my mind so often devours
Itself in these cycles, these cries of unease,
All the flowers of the sea turned to detritus,
Short seasons of triumph to disgrace.

Perhaps; then the anguish of my every pace
Might lift and the sea's soft rhythm requite us,
Midst the cooing of seagulls, the swaying of trees,
The safety of love and its towers.

Otherwise

As it is, my wheels get stuck
And spin around in deep ravines,
While I rehearse dark thoughts and lies.
The dusk wears down dawn's hopeful pluck
And clanging thoughts know where I've been;
I wish it could be otherwise.

You may know too what I mean:
That way we have of looping fears,
The circling hum of tired minds,
The darkest shots of what we've seen,
The loudest thoughts in breaking ears.

Yet if it could be otherwise...

If it could – we have not thought
Beyond that moment, nor have dreamed
That there might lie more peaceful skies
Than show in our minds' dark reports,
And truths unlike the ones we scream
As we long for Otherwise.

Listen: you may hear a voice
Which does not yell and does not kill
And does not trade in painted lies;
Let fragile, timid hearts rejoice,
If they have room for praises still,
And sing the songs of Otherwise.

Obsession

(After George Herbert's "Affliction (IV)")

Torn beyond my recognition,
Lord, here I wait
At Your tall gate,
Too small to hope or beg permission,
Too weakened by the distance, height
Which seems to cut You from my sight.

I do not dare to dream or fear.
Just this I know:
Go where I go,
These nagging, dragging thoughts are near,
Accusing me in my own voice;
Even silence threatens noise.

My prayers echo inside my mind.
I cling to them;
Your garment's hem
Is hard and harder now to find,
And though my praying does not cease,
It has no knowledge of Your peace.

Oh God, if You can't calm these waves,
They will swamp me
In turgid sea
While my obsession raves and raves.
If You are life, then break through cloud

And still the thunder, ranting loud –

Then I may rest within Your arms

Which lift me high,

Your love's reply

To every gate which locks and bars,

And all my battles shall be won

And I shall dwell in Your *Well done.*

How long will you assault me?

Would all of you throw me down -

this leaning wall, this tottering fence?

(Psalm 62:3)



Waiting

For God alone my soul will wait
(Though every day my soul grows faint,
Besieged by arrows from without
And from within by teeming doubts).
In silence I will pray and wait,
For He is my salvation.

How long will wars about me rage
While I hide silent in this cage?
How long will they attack this tower
Which moans and teeters every hour
While I, in hiding, disengage
To keep from desperation?

Lowborn, highborn – both will fall.
And I will fall and fall before
The silence of my waiting turns,
Before the one who waited earns
The promised recompense for all
His fainting expectation.

For God alone my soul will wait,
Though every day my soul grows faint.
Besieged by arrows from without,
And from within by teeming doubts:
In silence I will pray and wait,
In silence I will pray and wait,

In silence I will pray and wait,

For He is my salvation.

Sonnet

Since setting minds on things above is hard,
The mind always diverting to the place
Of greatest comfort, fearing open space;
Since often thoughts break off in weary shards
And off we go, empty, scanning the yard
Of day's vacuum confusions, seeking peace
But scared to look directly at His face;
Since heads are weak and break too soon apart:
Let's look instead upon the scars He bears;
Look at the throne He mounted, at His crown.
If, seeing in this sight our fractured shame,
Our minds connect through brokenness and tears,
Then we, perhaps, might sing to be His own
And turn aside from all He overcame.

Solitude and Grace (After William Cowper's "The Solitude of Alexander Selkirk")

This is the kingdom I have found;
I claim it as my own, my flag
Is planted firmly in its ground;
I own its every hill, each crag.
I alone have scaled these ravines;
I know their contours and their depths.
Their grooves are friends to me, their veins
Run through me, and bind like threads.

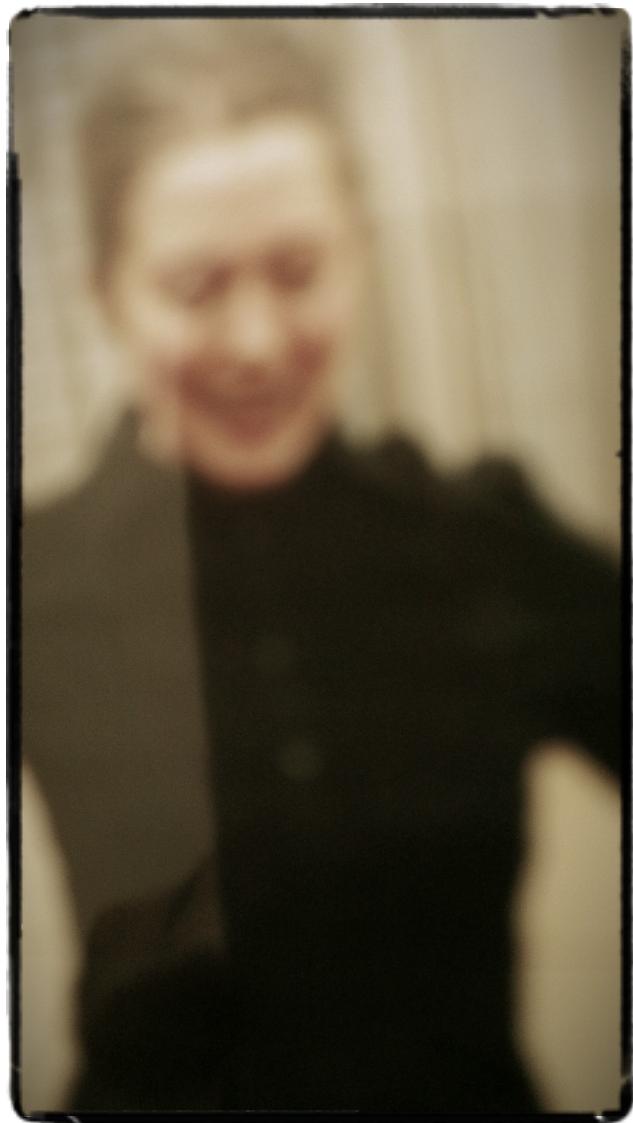
The walls, the mountains of my mind,
Are boundaries which no-one can scale;
I keep each thought safely inside,
Secure from victory, sure to fail.
The desert sands, the highest hills,
The isolated islands and
The widest seas: these are my fill,
My world within my hand.

The Body, broken into shards,
Does not console me; I am king
Of all that loneliness discards,
Hiding from every breathing thing.
The eyes of day are far from here:
Hands cannot hold my messiness
And voices cannot reach my ear,
No knowing smiles, no caring threats.

But water pours sometimes into
These caverns and these crevasses,
Water washing, reaching out to
Sea, eternal, vast, the masses
Of my heavy days and years
Floating for that moment in
A current of free-flowing tears,
My rock-walls wearing thin.

The ocean's body then reminds me
Of a space much wider than
The closed parameters I see,
Much wider even than the span
Of years, of fear, of solitude;
And so I turn my anxious gaze
Past my kingdom's finitude,
Into the vista of His grace –

It frightens, then, to see beyond
The comfort of my walls, my towers,
Where I have safely hidden from
The shine of sun, the scent of flowers;
But still I am drawn into light,
My kingdom pulled away from me,
All I have known – my pain, my pride –
Pulled out to Grace's sea.



*He lifted me out of the slimy pit,
out of the mud and mire...*

(Psalm 40:2b)

Stability

This will take some time; it changes
with the sun and with the tide.
Every season, with its flux,
brings new pollens and new paradigms
and, like the leaves, we must adjust
with each faint, incremental
shift we feel, and each reminder
of last year.

This will take some strength; I feel
weaker as each corner comes.
Sometimes a victor in the mirror
of my days, the corners take
years off our lives when minds are tired
and the new and unfamiliar
has sometimes the taste and scent of
of failure.

This will take some grace; the thorn
within my side at times can smart
and, though I know sufficient grace,
my night-time cries to be set free
ring sometimes still in tired ears,
and hope will whisper where despair
shouts and clamours like a gong
in fainting souls.

This will take a hand with wounds
to hold and heal and hope.

It will take its toll and it
will take salvation to the depths
and to the limits of our prayers.

This will take us where we never
thought to go. This surely will
take us, one day,
home.

This will take some time.

In His field, amidst the flowers (After Ann Griffiths' "His left hand, in heat of noonday")

In His field, amidst the flowers,
While He weaves these petal chains,
Here I sit, His grass around me,
As He sings rejoicing strains:
God Himself, the prince of ages,
Singing for His broken child.
Listen, earth, and listen, angels:
Hear His song in love's wide field.

