

Shyla's Session Transcript May 13 2020

Hello. I am Shyla the Super Gecko, and I would like to welcome all of you to this reading of Mental Health in Poetry. I am a published and Second Life award winning poet.

If you would like to follow along by notecard, please click (or touch) the red sign which says, "Touch to get notecards during an event". I have shared this first one. The rest will come through the notecard giver.

I will be reading a wide selection of poems by various poets on various mental health topics. I will provide a summary notecard about the poet (and sometimes the work itself) followed by a notecard with their poem. A poet may write about a topic, but may not necessarily have the condition. If it is on record, it will be noted in the summary notecard.

One more thing, some of these poems contain language. This is common in Slam poetry, but it can pop up elsewhere too.

With that said, let's begin. (smiles)

I want to explain Slam poetry, as some of the poems I will read fall into this category and I was asked once what it was and did not have a good answer. So here is the answer from the Encyclopedia Britannica:

Slam poetry, a form of performance poetry that combines the elements of performance, writing, competition, and audience participation. It is performed at events called poetry slams, or simply slams. The name slam came from how the audience has the power to praise or, sometimes, destroy a poem and from the high-energy performance style of the poets.

Encyclopedia Britannica <https://www.britannica.com/art/slam-poetry>

Blythe Baird

At only 23 years old, Blythe Baird is already one of the most recognizable names in spoken word and slam poetry.

Originally from the northwest suburbs of Chicago, the viral and award-winning writer has garnered international recognition for her poems that speak out on sexual assault, mental illness, eating disorder recovery, sexuality, and healing.

If you would like to watch Blythe Baird perform the poem: "When the Fat Girl Gets Skinny" you can find it online at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=16Tb_bZZDv0

Here is Blythe Baird's blog: <https://blythebaird.com/about>

When the Fat Girl Gets Skinny by Blythe Baird

The year of skinny pop and sugar-free jello cups,
we guzzled vitamin water and vodka.
Toasting to high school and survival,
complimenting each other's thigh gaps.
Trying diets we found on the Internet:
menthol cigarettes, eating in front of a mirror, donating blood.
Replacing meals with other practical hobbies
like making flower crowns, or fainting.
Wondering why I hadn't had my period in months, or why breakfast tastes like giving up.
Or how many more productive ways I could've spent my time today
besides googling the calories in the glue of a U.S. envelope.
Watching America's next top model like the gospel,
hunching naked over a bathroom scale shrine,
crying into an empty bowl of cocoa puffs
because I only feel pretty when I'm hungry.
If you are not recovering, you are dying.
By the time I was sixteen, I had already experienced being clinically overweight, underweight
and obese.
As a child fat was the first word people used to describe me,
which didn't offend me, until I found out it was supposed to.
When I lost weight, my dad was so proud, he started carrying my before-and-after photo in his
wallet.
So relieved he could stop worrying about me getting diabetes.
He saw a program on the news about the epidemic with obesity, said
he's just so glad to finally see me taking care of myself.
If you develop an eating disorder when you are already thin to begin
with, you go to the hospital.
If you develop an eating disorder when you are not thin to begin with,
you are a success story.
So when I evaporated, of course everyone congratulated me on getting
healthy.
Girls at school who never spoke to me before, stopped me in the hallway to ask how I did it.
I say, "I am sick." They say, "No, you're an inspiration!"
How could I not fall in love with my illness?
With becoming the kind of silhouette people are supposed to fall in love
with?
Why would I ever want to stop being hungry, when anorexia was the
most interesting thing about me?
So how lucky it is now, to be boring.
The way not going to the hospital is boring.
The way looking at an apple and seeing only an apple, not sixty, or half
an hour sit-ups is boring.
My story may not be as exciting as it used to,

but at least there is nothing left to count.
The calculator in my head finally stopped.
I used to love the feeling of drinking water on an empty stomach,
waiting for the coolness to slip all the way down and land in the well.
Not obsessed with being empty but afraid of being full.
I used to be proud when I was cold in a warm room.
Now, I am proud. I have stopped seeking revenge on this body.
This was the year of eating when I was hungry without punishing myself
and I know it sounds ridiculous, but that shit is hard.
When I was little, someone asked me what I wanted to be when I grew
up and I said..."small."

Emily Dickinson (1830 - 1886)

This 19th-century poem provides an inside look at Dickinson's struggle with her depression. Throughout, the speaker portrays a struggle between her soul and the 'fright,' as her soul experiences fleeting moments of freedom and capture. Dickinson's poem helps us understand the internal battle many of us must fight on a daily basis.

from <http://bloggingdickinson.blogspot.com/2012/10/the-soul-has-bandaged-moments.html>

MORE DETAILS:

More should be made of Emily Dickinson as a Gothic poet. Writing here in the Gothic romantic mood she enjoyed in Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights* (1847), Dickinson describes the dramatic and even perilous extremes to which the soul is subject. In the first stanza the Soul is introduced in a "Bandaged" moment when, constricted and paralyzed, "some ghastly Fright" stops to look at and caress her. Like in a nightmare when one is unable to move, the Soul is "too appalled to stir."

Dickinson would have heard about and seen pictures of mummies--and the image seems to have rooted in her imagination

That first line, "The Soul has Bandaged moments," is among my Dickinson favorites. The use of "bandage" as an adjective still sounds fresh since we are used to hearing the word only as a noun or verb. And while a bandaged soul is clearly a metaphor for the stifling constriction of depression, it also suggests protection. We bandage something wounded to protect it. The bandaging also recalls mummification—another Gothic image. Victorian explorers had been bringing mummies out of Egypt for decades by Dickinson's time and a couple of mummy books and stories had been published. In fact, within a few years of this poem, Louisa May Alcott, author of the beloved *Little Women*, wrote a short story called "Lost in a Pyramid; or, the Mummy's Curse." There were a few famous incidents prior to this poem, including one in Boston, of mummy unwrappings. Dickinson was explicitly tapping into a very current element of horror here.

As for the romance aspect, the very next stanza couples the frightening apparition and the mummified soul with the remembrance of a lover. Just as the Lover kissed the woman whose soul is bandaged, so the Fright hovers to "Sip" Goblin-like, from those very lips. That's a vampire image, or even a succubus (which would be an interesting gender reversal as the

succubus is a female demonic figure who drains the souls of men by having sex with them as they sleep). The “Theme—so—fair” is the lover; the “thought so mean” that accosts it is the frightful apparition. Could it be that in its depression the Soul converts the touch of the lover to the touch of the vampire dead or the soul-stealing succubus? Unlike Snow White who is revived by the life-giving kiss of her prince, the Soul of this poem seems to subliminally dread and fear it.

Thankfully, the soul “has moments of Escape” when it bursts out of its confinement to dance and swing all day and night. The word Dickinson chooses to describe this is “Bomb.” Talk about manic depressive—the poem takes us from catatonia to explosive delirium. She likens herself in these moments to an imprisoned bee, miserable without the nectar of “his Rose.” When finally released from his dungeon, he becomes so lost in his flower that he is aware only of “Noon”—the fullness of day—and “Paradise.” If this sounds familiar, it’s because Dickinson wrote about this very bee in “Come slowly—Eden!”. In that poem, written the previous year, the “fainting Bee—”

Reaching late his flower,
Round her chamber hums—
Counts his nectars—
Enters—and is lost in Balms.

The vampire or demon lover were other images Dickinson would have been known. It’s a beautiful and very sexual image. Yet, in tandem with the current poem, the flower might be read as dangerously passive. It is the bee who flies to her, hums around her, “counts his nectars,” and then enters to become lost in the flower’s luscious sweetness. The flower is no more able to escape the attentions of the bee than the bandaged Soul those of the demon lover. In some way, the poet has become both flower and bee in this poem. She knows what it is to fly in ecstasy to a loved object; she also knows what it means to be besieged.

The very excess of the Soul during its escape seems to lead to the awful and humiliating punishment that follows. “Retaken,” the Soul’s “plumed feet” are shackled, she is “led along”—and one imagines a prisoner cruelly dragged back to jail as the townspeople watch. The plumes suggest a bird, a common symbol for the Soul—one frequently used by Dickinson. But of course a shackled bird cannot fly. In perhaps the most horrifying image of the poem, the bird’s very song has been stapled. These wouldn’t be the dainty staples we use to fasten a few pieces of paper together. Those hadn’t yet been invented. These staples would have been heavy blacksmith-forged fasteners for holding carriage parts or large door latches together—not the ethereal beauty of birdsong or poetry.

A bird whose song was killed would be like a poet whose poems had been stilled. Is there a toll on the poet’s pleasures so that if she enjoys a lover’s kiss or a few hours of delirious joy (as in “He touched me, so I live to know”) she must pay for it by periods of incapacitating depression? The last two lines seem to imply as much. “The Horror” of the bandaged moments when the soul is helpless against the Fright, “welcomes her, again.” What a sad line! This is something she is used to. The very last line, “These, are not brayed of Tongue—,” a particularly ugly and awkward one, is worth unpacking.

“These” refers to all the frights and indignities that the soul is subjected to while unable to stir. The tongue does not bray about this. Donkeys, not poets, bray and it is not an attractive sound at all. To speak of the horrors would be like the grating noises of a farm animal known for stubbornness and lack of sense. And why does Dickinson twist normal sentence structure so that the poem ends in “not brayed of Tongue” instead of the more natural “the tongue does not bray”? Perhaps she wanted “Tongue” at the end as a slant rhyme with “again.” It is also a rather ugly word and that is the way, I think, she wanted to leave the poem. The harshness is what lives.

I also think that “brayed of Tongue” is too suggestive of the word “prayed” to be ignored. Whatever the poet is experiencing is not something that she either prays about or feels that prayer could properly express. Her bandaged prison of depression or despair is truly a hell from which no words can escape, whether a call for help, a poem, or a prayer.

The Soul has Bandaged moments (360) by Emily Dickinson

The Soul has Bandaged moments –
When too appalled to stir –
She feels some ghastly Fright come up
And stop to look at her –

Salute her, with long fingers –
Caress her freezing hair –
Sip, Goblin, from the very lips
The Lover – hovered – o’er –
Unworthy, that a thought so mean
Accost a Theme – so – fair –

The soul has moments of escape –
When bursting all the doors –
She dances like a Bomb, abroad,
And swings upon the Hours,

As do the Bee – delirious borne –
Long Dungeoned from his Rose –
Touch Liberty – then know no more,
But Noon, and Paradise –

The Soul’s retaken moments –
When, Felon led along,
With shackles on the plumed feet,
And staples, in the song,

The Horror welcomes her, again,
These, are not brayed of Tongue –

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A.S. Minor

A.S. Minor (Allen Minor) is a former TEDX speaker, an award-winning spoken word poet, a novelist, father and an active mental health awareness advocate. He lives in Florida with his dog, spends most of his time either writing or celebrating the craft in some way, be it at poetry slams or on his YouTube channel:

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCb0XwouSHmMLNmVQSYtvXcA>

He travels the country trying to bring awareness on stages, in classrooms, hospitals,... Articles and other works pertaining to my work can be found on his blog under "Press":

<https://www.asminor.com/home>

As a spoken word poet, he is always looking for opportunities to spread the message of Post-Traumatic Growth to the general population, regardless of the venue.

A.S. Minor Blog: <https://www.asminor.com/who-is-he>

It's Not That Simple by A.S. Minor

My therapist once asked me if I was truly committed to treatment. She said things wouldn't get better unless I was completely invested.

I tried to tell her that I am, but that sometimes there's a part of my mind that's like another person, and he doesn't necessarily know if he's completely on board.

She shot back with, "There are not different parts of you; there's just you. And you need to decide if you really want this."

Now let me begin by saying that I love my therapist. She's guided me through hell and back, and not once has she led me down the wrong path.

But what she doesn't understand is sometimes it's not as simple as that.

Sometimes I'm drowning so deep in the ocean of medications that all I want is to feel like me again.

I wanna pull him out of the water, breathe life into his lungs and tell him that he can't give in!

Sometimes I feel so lost in this cold place, this purgatory between heaven and hell, that even Satan's fingertips seem inviting,

Because sometimes his flame is the only light I can see.

You see, there's a separate person in the minds of all of us.

He's the one telling boys that they're not men unless they're doing manly things,

He whispers sweet nothings into your ear as you stare into the mirror, things about how big your nose is, how flat your chest is, how dorky your glasses are and how no one really likes you,

They just want you around for what you can do for them.

We all have that little voice in the back of our minds that feeds our insecurities, tells us we're weak and speaks contrary to everything we believe.

The only problem is mine doesn't whisper.

Mine screams at the top of his lungs, trying to cause an avalanche of negativity to come down and crush me.

And the worst part is mine doesn't just poke fun at my physical or mental features,

No, he's too cunning for that.

Mine will remind me that when all the chips were down, he was the only one there.

Mine will point out that when I was too far out to sea, drowning in that ocean of medicine,

The fog of unawareness enshrouding me, it was he that brought the life boat.

It may not have brought me to safety, and though I knew it wasn't right to get off the medications, it was him that helped me feel again.

It was him that helped me be me again.

No, he didn't take me to dry land,

But he...he was the only company I had.

So when I tell the doctor that there's a part of me that doesn't want to give in, that he doesn't want to go silently into that goodnight, I'm not saying that I am not committed.

What I'm saying is that there's a part of me that I hate, that I wish nothing more than for it to go away, and yet he's been with me since the beginning.

When things were at their worst, even though he's the one who probably caused it, he was still there, as dependable as ever,

Whispering sweet, negativity into my ear.

He's my worst enemy but he's also my best friend,

And though, more often than not, I want to

And though, more often than not, I want to get rid of him, sometimes... it's not as simple as that.

The Mighty. (Title is incorrect at the top the Mighty page):

<https://themighty.com/2016/07/spoken-word-by-a-s-minor-its-not-that-simple/>

Theodore Roethke (1908 - 1963)

Theodore Roethke hardly fits anyone's image of the stereotypical high-minded poet-intellectual of the 1940s through 1960s... Though as a child he read a great deal and as a high school freshman he had a Red Cross campaign speech translated into 26 languages, he suffered from issues of abandonment and loss, and his lack of self-esteem led him to strive to be accepted by peers. When he was 14, his father died of cancer and his uncle committed suicide. He attended the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, where he adopted a tough, bear-like image... Roethke yearned for a friend with whom he could talk and relate his ambitions. Poet and writer James Dickey once named Roethke the greatest of all American poets... His difficult childhood, his bouts with bipolar disorder, and his ceaseless search for truth through his poetry writing led to a difficult life, but also helped to produce a remarkable body of work that would influence future generations of American poets to pursue the mysteries of one's inner self.

Poetry Foundation:

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/theodore-roethke>

I Knew a Woman by Theodore Roethke

I knew a woman, lovely in her bones,
When small birds sighed, she would sigh back at them;
Ah, when she moved, she moved more ways than one:
The shapes a bright container can contain!
Of her choice virtues only gods should speak,

Or English poets who grew up on Greek
(I'd have them sing in chorus, cheek to cheek).

How well her wishes went! She stroked my chin,
She taught me Turn, and Counter-turn, and Stand;
She taught me Touch, that undulant white skin;
I nibbled meekly from her proffered hand;
She was the sickle; I, poor I, the rake,
Coming behind her for her pretty sake
(But what prodigious mowing we did make).

Love likes a gander, and adores a goose:
Her full lips pursed, the errant note to seize;
She played it quick, she played it light and loose;
My eyes, they dazzled at her flowing knees;
Her several parts could keep a pure repose,
Or one hip quiver with a mobile nose
(She moved in circles, and those circles moved).

Let seed be grass, and grass turn into hay:
I'm martyr to a motion not my own;
What's freedom for? To know eternity.
I swear she cast a shadow white as stone.
But who would count eternity in days?
These old bones live to learn her wanton ways:
(I measure time by how a body sways).

Theodore Roethke, "I Knew a Woman" from *Collected Poems of Theodore Roethke*. Copyright 1954 by Theodore Roethke. Used by permission of Doubleday, an imprint of the Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, a division of Penguin Random House LLC. All rights reserved. Source: *The Collected Poems of Theodore Roethke* (Random House Inc., 1961)

Linda Pastan (1932 - Present)

Poet Linda Pastan was raised in New York City but has lived for most of her life in Potomac, Maryland, a suburb of Washington, DC. In her senior year at Radcliffe College, Pastan won the Mademoiselle poetry prize (Sylvia Plath was the runner-up)...Since the early 1970s, Pastan has produced quiet lyrics that focus on themes like marriage, parenting, and grief. She is interested in the anxieties that exist under the surface of everyday life.

Poetry Foundation

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/linda-pastan>

Agoraphobia by Linda Pastan

(She starts her poem with a quote from Shakespeare.)

"Yesterday the bird of night did sit,
Even at noon-day, upon the marketplace,
Hooting and shrieking."

—William Shakespeare

1.

Imagine waking
to a scene of snow so new
not even memories
of other snow
can mar its silken
surface. What other innocence
is quite like this,
and who can blame me
for refusing
to violate such whiteness
with the booted cruelty
of tracks?

2.

Though I cannot leave this house,
I have memorized the view
from every window—
23 framed landscapes, containing
each nuance of weather and light.
And I know the measure
of every room, not as a prisoner
pacing a cell
but as the embryo knows
the walls of the womb, free
to swim as its body tells it, to nudge
the softly fleshed walls,
dreading only the moment
of contraction when it will be forced
into the gaudy world.

3.

Sometimes I travel as far
as the last stone

of the path, but
every step,
as in the children's story,
pricks that tender place
on the bottom of the foot,
and like an ebbing tide with all
the obsession of the moon behind it,
I am dragged back.

4.

I have noticed in windy fall
how leaves are torn from the trees,
each leaf waving goodbye to the oak
or the poplar that housed it;
how the moon, pinned
to the very center of the window,
is like a moth wanting only to break in.
What I mean is this house
follows all the laws of lintel and ridgepole,
obeys the commandments of broom
and of needle, custom and grace.
It is not fear that holds me here but passion
and the uncrossable moat of moonlight
outside the bolted doors.

Linda Pastan, "Agoraphobia" from *Carnival Evening: New and Selected Poems 1968-1998*, published by W. W. Norton & Company, Inc. Copyright © 1998 by Linda Pastan. Reprinted with the permission of the Jean V. Naggar Literary Agency, Inc.

Source: *Carnival Evening: New and Selected Poems* (W. W. Norton and Company Inc., 1998)

Dr Sreelatha Chakravarthy

...author and medical practitioner...with very little creative writing experience in her past--Dr. Chakravarthy began blogging as a way to tap into her own creativity. The resulting text, *An Eternal Romantic*, published by Leadstart Publishing, is an exploration of love, schizophrenia, mind and body.

Poetry Foundation, "Dr. Sreelatha Chakravarthy Uses Poetry and Prose to Communicate Her Struggles with Schizophrenia, Thoughts on Love, Mind and Body", by Harriet Staff, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/harriet/2013/08/dr-sreelatha-chakravarthy-uses-poetry-and-prose-to-communicate-her-struggles-with-schizophrenia-thoughts-on-love-mind-and-body>

Dog of the House by Dr Sreelatha Chakravarthy

I don't like our dog
For a simple reason:
He gets to roll over on all sides
And gaze with limpid eyes
As his hair is brushed to smooth silk
By the man of the house;
While my hair remains tangled
In hope, someday the man would
Run his fingers through them
To make my limp heart bounce;
He thinks I don't love the
Dog enough or take him for a walk
And I murmur to myself
I hate the dog, go figure that out;
It is a dog's world for sure
While I take my sweet revenge
In bitching about him and his master
In a poem that circulates around;
Perhaps seek a counselor we must
To know who gets to keep the grouse
While we are in the business
Of making a home out of our house
While the dog comfortably
Takes the couch.

Now a poem that I have written.

Pain

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Petrarchan Sonnet; Prompt: Winning

My body revolts winning attention;
My heart's compulsion flooding sentiments.
Oh! The physical pain's extreme laments
Is sedentary in my room's isolation.
The world I love, I crave to rest upon;
I love our planet's pathways, so content.
I love children's sounds, dusk shadows' ascent.
Yet there is a freedom in isolation -
A freedom in great meditation, awareness;
Loneliness replaced with inward seeings,
Surreal realities without bitterness,
Lost in wholly independent healings.
Understanding my peace hosts a finesse
Unintended for earth's able weaklings.

Neil Hilborn (1990 - Present)

Neil Hilborn...is an American slam poet who writes and performs poetry. His poems often detail personal experiences and battles with mental illness. He is best known for his poem "OCD", which has received 75 million views online. Hilborn tours to perform his poetry at colleges and other venues.

Wikipedia

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Neil_Hilborn

Blog: <https://buttonpoetry.com/neilhilborn/>

OCD by Neil Hilborn

The first time I saw her...

Everything in my head went quiet.

All the tics, all the constantly refreshing images just disappeared.

When you have Obsessive Compulsive Disorder, you don't really get quiet moments.

Even in bed, I'm thinking:

Did I lock the doors? Yes.

Did I wash my hands? Yes.

Did I lock the doors? Yes.

Did I wash my hands? Yes.

But when I saw her, the only thing I could think about was the hairpin curve of her lips...

Or the eyelash on her cheek—

the eyelash on her cheek—

the eyelash on her cheek.

I knew I had to talk to her.

I asked her out six times in thirty seconds.

She said yes after the third one, but none of them felt right, so I had to keep going.

On our first date, I spent more time organizing my meal by color than I did eating it, or fucking talking to her...

But she loved it.

She loved that I had to kiss her goodbye sixteen times or twenty-four times if it was Wednesday.

She loved that it took me forever to walk home because there are lots of cracks on our sidewalk.

When we moved in together, she said she felt safe, like no one would ever rob us because I definitely locked the door eighteen times.

I'd always watch her mouth when she talked—

when she talked—

when she talked—

when she talked

when she talked;

when she said she loved me, her mouth would curl up at the edges.
At night, she'd lay in bed and watch me turn all the lights off.. And on, and off, and on, and off,
and on, and off, and on, and off, and on, and off, and on, and off, and on, and off, and on, and off,
and on, and off, and on, and off, and on, and off, and on, and off.
She'd close her eyes and imagine that the days and nights were passing in front of her.
Some mornings I'd start kissing her goodbye but she'd just leave cause I was
just making her late for work...
When I stopped in front of a crack in the sidewalk, she just kept walking...
When she said she loved me her mouth was a straight line.
She told me that I was taking up too much of her time.
Last week she started sleeping at her mother's place.
She told me that she shouldn't have let me get so attached to her; that this whole thing was a
mistake, but...
How can it be a mistake that I don't have to wash my hands after I touched her?
Love is not a mistake, and it's killing me that she can run away from this and I just can't.
I can't – I can't go out and find someone new because I always think of her.
Usually, when I obsess over things, I see germs sneaking into my skin.
I see myself crushed by an endless succession of cars...
And she was the first beautiful thing I ever got stuck on.
I want to wake up every morning thinking about the way she holds her steering wheel..
How she turns shower knobs like she's opening a safe.
How she blows out candles—
blows out candles—
blows out candles—
blows out candles—
blows out candles—
blows out...
Now, I just think about who else is kissing her.
I can't breathe because he only kisses her once — he doesn't care if it's perfect!
I want her back so bad...
I leave the door unlocked.
I leave the lights on.

Jeanann Verlee

Jeanann Verlee is a poet, editor, and former punk rocker who collects tattoos and kisses
Rottweilers. She is a National Endowment for the Arts Poetry Fellow...

Her first poem was drafted in pencil on the inside cover of a collection of Grimm's Fairy Tales at
the age of seven. She won her first writing contest for a short story at the age of eleven and in
the same year became the youngest recipient of Parade Magazine's Young American
Ambassadors prize for an essay.

Verlee lives in New York City, She believes in you.

Jeanann Verlee blog:

<https://www.jeanannverlee.com/who>

The Mania Speaks by Jeanann Verlee

You clumsy bootlegger. Little daffodil.
I watered you with an ocean and you plucked one little vein?
Downed a couple bottles of pills and got yourself carted off to the ER?
I gifted you the will of gunpowder, a matchstick tongue, and all you managed
was a shredded sweater and a police warning?
You should be legend by now.
Girl in an orange jumpsuit, a headline.
I built you from the purest napalm, fed you wine and bourbon.
Preened you in the dark, hammered lullabies into your thin skull.
I painted over the walls, wrote the poems. I shook your goddamn boots.
Now you want out? Think you'll wrestle me out of you with prescriptions?
A good man's good love and some breathing exercises?
You think I can't tame that? I always come home. Always.
Ravenous. Loaded. You know better than anybody:
I'm bigger than God.

Sylvia Plath (1932-1963)

Sylvia Plath was one of the most dynamic and admired poets of the 20th century. By the time she took her life at the age of 30, Plath already had a following in the literary community. In the ensuing years her work attracted the attention of a multitude of readers, who saw in her singular verse an attempt to catalog despair, violent emotion, and obsession with death...Intensely autobiographical, Plath's poems explore her own mental anguish, her troubled marriage to fellow poet Ted Hughes, her unresolved conflicts with her parents, and her own vision of herself...

Poetry Foundation:

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/sylvia-plath>

My Experience With Complex PTSD: A Poem by Natalie Mejias

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is like a snake that never leaves

It coils itself around my body taking control

Sometimes I don't realize it's there until it's crushing my soul

The pain is debilitating and the guilt and fear

I do everything to tell myself it'll be better in a week or month or year

If I could just stay in the present today right now right here
But in this moment when everything feels so overwhelming
When I'm curled up in a ball and I feel like nothing can help me at all
My body shakes and my mind races
The memories take me back to all the people and all the places
That broke my heart and fractured my mind
And healing is just a thing I think I will never find
Out of broken hopes and broken limbs
I'd always choose the latter
But when it comes right down to it
None of that seems to matter
I am restless and I'm exhausted
I am hopeful but I am haunted
Every breath I breathe is sharp
Every heartbeat I feel is dull
I am completely drained of life
And of death, I am completely full
I have to shine a light
I have to tell my story
Yet sharing all this darkness seems like it might be the end of me
I try to comprehend how I could have survived this gore and horror
When simply recalling it all

Seems to have much more power

My mind betrays me because I don't just see, I feel the memory

all of a sudden I'm right back in it

I have fallen down a rabbit hole where a lifetime goes by

But it's only been a minute

When I come back the world is different than it was before

And there's a new layer of pain

That I just can't ignore

But underneath the weight of debilitating devastation

there's a thread of strength that keeps fighting without hesitation

I will push on, push through every prison

I will climb every mountain

I will fight for my freedom like it is my mission

I will hold onto the truth

And tear down the lies

I will ring the neck of this beast

Until this diseased snake finally dies

Mario Benedetti (1920 - 2009)

...best known as Mario Benedetti, was a Uruguayan journalist, novelist, and poet and an integral member of the Generación del 45. Despite publishing more than 80 books and being published in twenty languages he was not well known in the English-speaking world. In the Spanish-speaking world he is considered one of Latin America's most important writers of the latter half of the 20th century.

Wikipedia:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mario_Benedetti

ABOUT THE POEM:

In this poem, Bendetti explores feelings of joy, anxiety, and repression through the metaphor of little stones being thrown at a window. This quick poem provides a personal yet relatable account of how it feels to experience yet avoid our full range of emotions. Bendetti's words remind us that, though there are good days and bad days, joy will find its way in.

Little Stones at My Window by Mario Benedetti

for roberto and adelaida

Once in a while
joy throws little stones at my window
it wants to let me know that it's waiting for me
but today I'm calm
I'd almost say even-tempered
I'm going to keep anxiety locked up
and then lie flat on my back
which is an elegant and comfortable position
for receiving and believing news

who knows where I'll be next
or when my story will be taken into account
who knows what advice I still might come up with
and what easy way out I'll take not to follow it

don't worry, I won't gamble with an eviction
I won't tattoo remembering with forgetting
there are many things left to say and suppress
and many grapes left to fill our mouths

don't worry, I'm convinced
joy doesn't need to throw any more little stones
I'm coming
I'm coming.

From Little Stones at My Window by Mario Benedetti. Edited and translated by Charles Hatfield. Copyright © 2003 by Curbstone Press.

Tennessee Williams (1911 - 1983)

The production of his first two Broadway plays, *The Glass Menagerie* and *A Streetcar Named Desire*, secured Tennessee Williams's place...as one of America's major playwrights of the twentieth century. Critics, playgoers, and fellow dramatists recognized in Williams a poetic innovator...

...In the course of his long career he also produced three volumes of short stories, many of them as studies for subsequent dramas; two novels, two volumes of poetry; his memoirs; and essays on his life and craft...

The Poetry Foundation

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/tennessee-williams>

Life Story by Tennessee Williams

After you've been to bed together for the first time,
without the advantage or disadvantage of any prior acquaintance,
the other party very often says to you,
Tell me about yourself, I want to know all about you,
what's your story? And you think maybe they really and truly do

sincerely want to know your life story, and so you light up
a cigarette and begin to tell it to them, the two of you
lying together in completely relaxed positions
like a pair of rag dolls a bored child dropped on a bed.

You tell them your story, or as much of your story
as time or a fair degree of prudence allows, and they say,
Oh, oh, oh, oh, oh,
each time a little more faintly, until the oh
is just an audible breath, and then of course

there's some interruption. Slow room service comes up
with a bowl of melting ice cubes, or one of you rises to pee
and gaze at himself with mild astonishment in the bathroom mirror.
And then, the first thing you know, before you've had time
to pick up where you left off with your enthralling life story,
they're telling you their life story, exactly as they'd intended to all along,

and you're saying, Oh, oh, oh, oh, oh,
each time a little more faintly, the vowel at last becoming
no more than an audible sigh,
as the elevator, halfway down the corridor and a turn to the left,
draws one last, long, deep breath of exhaustion
and stops breathing forever. Then?

Well, one of you falls asleep
and the other one does likewise with a lighted cigarette in his mouth,
and that's how people burn to death in hotel rooms.

"Life Story" by Tennessee Williams, from The Collected Poems of Tennessee Williams, copyright © 1937, 1956, 1964, 2002 by The University of the South. Used by permission of New Directions Publishing Corp.

Source: The Collected Poems of Tennessee Williams (New Directions Publishing Corporation, 2002)

In this next poem, "An Open Letter to My Former Therapist", I express frustration with a support structure which often misjudges or mis-directs care.

I have CPTSD. I also have a physical disability, am primarily homebound, and have adjusted to my new life. I spend a significant amount of time in Second Life. It extends my social reach, provides creative opportunities and stimulates my brain.

Not all professionals see it this way...

Also, important to note, this poem was written in 2016, shortly after the shooting of police officers in Dallas, TX, and there are several references to the event.

An Open Poem to My Former Therapist

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Seriously?

Isolating?

You think I isolate with my words?

My actions?

You?!?

Screwed into that blabber box?

Did you learn something this week

From that hate-mongering,

pest infestering,

discombobulating and distorting

visual portrayal of life?

Seriously...

I cried this week.

Yeah, I cried.

Did you know?

No?

Yeah, well probably cuz I isolate, right?

Guess what, I spoke to an avatar who was there.

Right there, in Dallas.

Did you speak to anyone who was right there?

Do you know anyone who does anything

to make

anything better

than the way things are?

Anyone?!?!

Am I angry?

Yeah I'm angry!

Your head high in the clouds as if I should work harder,

As IF all I do is never enough,

As if my limitations should be surpassed!

Why, I should just invite folks over to, to...

Oh yeah, to watch me lay here and navigate my

World from a bed!

Yeah, that's high on their calendar, baby!

I can't imagine why there's no waiting list for that one!

So what do I do?

I lay here, typing words and

Changing this bastardized world -

This world that thinks love is hoarding,

gorging,

sucking

the life out of everything that's weak.

Go for it world!

You got a Super Gecko to deal with -

I'm cute,

but I'm punchy;

have a long tongue;

a gargantuan bite!

Don't laugh, dude.

You think this is a game.

It's not, this is my life!

You watch some guy videotape the death of a cop,

Some woman videotape the death of her fiancé

Then?

Nothing. YOU DO NOTHING!!!

You're an asshole for judging me,

an asshole.

I wrote a letter.

I didn't just light a candle.

I wrote another letter, and another.

I called an old activist friend -

We strategized, we socialized, we cried.

Yeah, remember? I cried.
Do you even remember I said that?
What? Our time is up?
Continue next week?

Naw, I don't think so...
This is a waste, more a waste than
My anti-social isolating virtual world
Shit of a life.

Remember, I'm angry - remember?
And they're not saying,
"No Justice - No Peace" moron -
They're saying their lives matter.

My life matters too.
I don't wish it on anyone,
But it still matters -
 It matters to me -
 It's gotta be mine -
Not your God-forsaken assumption
Of what 'healthy' is for home-based PWD like me.

So I won't be here next week,
Or the week after -
I got a life that matters,
And there's no time to waste.

Peace out dude -
You're cool -
You just don't get it,
 Like so many don't get it
 Or do anything about whether they get it,
 Or even understand how they don't get it.

If I festered over every person who didn't get it
I'd be dead inside and out -
So you're cool, you're not alone -
But I gotta let you go, you're not good for me -
 You don't get me
 Or hear me
 Or even understand me.

I suppose I could march about that too.
I wouldn't be marching alone, for sure -
If all the people
 people don't get marched,
 and talked, and hugged and cried -
 well, well...
 it would all work better -
 it would WORK!

Do you get we all have blood?
 we all feel?
 we all matter?
 we all are different?
Do you get that?
There isn't a mold —
There's no book.

Life is scary shit when it's like that isn't it?
There's not even answers.
Just one day at a time,
One experience at a time,
One moment at a time -
And then we decide what to do -
In that moment -
 for good or bad,
 better or worse,
 right or wrong.

And sometimes it is sooooo wrong.
And we can't take it back -
 And it hurts, and we cry -
 Remember? I cried this week.
 It hurt.

I wish I just had watched it,
From afar on a blubbering machine -
But I wrote —
 I spoke —
 I felt.
 I'll never be the same.

So I'm not isolating
In my room
 or virtual world

or whatever.

Maybe one day we'll meet again -
But you'll have to leave this office
and those blabbery machines.
I'm tired of explaining me -
So from now on,
if you want to know me,
come find me.
I'm not hiding -
Find me!

William Cowper (1731 - 1800)

William Cowper was the foremost poet of the generation between Alexander Pope and William Wordsworth. For several decades, he had probably the largest readership of any English poet. From 1782, when his first major volume appeared, to 1837, the year in which Robert Southey completed the monumental *Life and Works of Cowper*, more than 100 editions of his poems were published in Britain and almost 50 in America.

Poetry Foundation:

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/william-cowper>

ABOUT THE POEM:

Cowper's poem juxtaposes images of nature that one would normally find soothing with intense personal trauma and suffering. Instead of finding relief and calm in the idyllic scenes of nature as one would expect, Cowper's narrator instead only has his personal trauma amplified by their beauty. His suffering is so immense that it "shows the same sadness ev'rywhere, and slights the season and the scene."

A Poem a Day:

<http://poetry-fromthehart.blogspot.com/2014/04/the-shrubbery-william-cowper.html>

The Shrubbery by William Cowper

Oh happy shades—to me unblest!
Friendly to peace, but not to me!
How will the scene that offers rest,
And heart that cannot rest, agree!

This glassy stream, that spreading pine,
Those alders quiv'ring to the breeze,
Might sooth a soul less hurt than mine,
And please, if any thing could please.

But fix'd unalterable care
Foregoes not what she feels within,
Shows the same sadness ev'rywhere,
And slights the season and the scene.

For all that pleas'd in wood or lawn,
While peace possess'd these silent bow'rs,
Her animating smile withdrawn,
Has lost its beauties and its pow'rs.

The saint or moralist should tread
This moss-grown alley, musing, slow;
They seek, like me, the secret shade,
But not, like me, to nourish woe!

Me fruitful scenes and prospects waste
Alike admonish not to roam;
These tell me of enjoyments past,
And those of sorrows yet to come.

Thank you all for coming today and listening. I hope this has been as rewarding an experience for you as it was for me to research.

I would like to thank Virtual Ability and Gentle Heron for inviting me to read today.

I hope too, that if you have an interest in poetry you will check out the rich, poetic community that exists right here in Second Life. Some of these poets are here today. The next notecard I provide will be "The Apple". It is a listing of poetry events in Second Life put together by Klannex Northmead, a great, published poet and pirate.

I am happy to answer questions you may have.

NOTE: To receive that notecard, contact Klannex Northmead by IM in Second Life.