



Grit and Pearl

An address to the AHPb Annual Conference on 'Love, Madness and Transformation: Humanistic Stories', London, Saturday 30 June 2018

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What I have to say may not surprise you, but it may shock you. Cancer is not only a profoundly shocking event in the middle of your life's way, but it calls for a healing that is so radical it challenges your deepest sense of self, and the self that is still separate from the Divine. The self that just wants to do its own thing. To, of course, *be individual*. Now what does that really mean? I always felt it had to do with God. Inscrutable. Also implacable:

THUNDERBALL

Coming out of nowhere

then overhead

cracking open the air

and rolling

– a division bell over bare floorboards –

as the rain streams down onto this dry oasis garden through the dry forecast, and into your dream behind you, above you, around you –

A great globe of wet and hissing silver closing in, ever closer

commanding obedience.

And still echoing

in the great dark-shadowed trees
a seething sea, breaking
to the metronome of the after-rain

dripping its beat from the guttering.

19 September 2014

...and also faith, understanding as Stephen Batchelor the Buddhist teacher at Sharpham says, 'doubt belongs to a living faith.'

From **FAITH**

And faith: a window (it has to be –)
something on the other side of the glass
that answers the blind call, that
came in greater earnest, more for real
because you'd said when I asked you
if there was more I could do

'You don't say the name of God enough.'

It was Stephen Turoff who said that to me, early 2015. Meanwhile the fundamental question, Why? As we say 'why this, why now?' And I can tell you that there is never a complete answer to that question.

My faith: that if I reached a high window I could get on the train. A migrant!

My doubt: Are you the soul's transformer or the soul's destroyer? Meanwhile I was doing all I could to avoid chemo, and if possible surgery as well. But no, my liver demanded it.

Then just a month later, bowel as well. That was Summer. I woke up in ICU on its hottest day (35 degrees) without a colostomy bag as expected, crying with relief.

Recovery in a small hamlet in South Devon gave me time for reflection.

From **THE WOUND**

What will it be?
What will I decide?
What is deciding me?

3.

Realization –
the wound I had was inside
secret, in its cave

now it's outside – emblazoned.

The wound that was concealed
to the point of mortal danger
now covers the space
where healing can enter.

What naked man is picking his way
among the ceiling drops and river stones
where a steam flows? Is it a sea cave?

Is it the man I was a million years ago?

It was Andreas Moritz who made me realise I had been living
outside of the great circadian rhythms of day and night, a wild
child of my time, staring at a blue screen way past midnight...
emails, poems, massive anthology (with Andrew Harvey in the
USA)! Facebook... – just trying to do my own thing, and virtually
connected – *but separate*. Do you see it?

My Stroud house lit up like a tower, an 'I' never fully resting,
sleeping.

Thank God for my small family, for Angela and Ruby, in Devon's
lap.

I can offer you a map of the stages I have been through to give
you an idea of the territory, and I can tell you that every stage
points to *surrender*, and that this is the fundamental challenge
for the will between our own and a 'higher' (or deeper) will.

1. shock and refusal – The 'No' here, however, also essential to the 'Yes' to life.
2. disbelief – 'it is not my time...' (I do still feel that).
3. determination – 'I will fight this thing....'. *Paradox*: you will not survive this if you have no fight in you. Don't be New Age about it.
4. humility... – this is where things change... brought closer to the ground and to a narrow gate you have to bend fully under. That was my eventual choice, to do chemo in late 2016. *Paradox*: general state of health very good. At the same time – a disease that was out of control. My London consultant Professor Dagleish explains kindly in his pink shirt in Tooting.
5. ah, weariness... – the wear and tear aspect... you have to allow for this. It's a Camino, sometimes a long walk in the rain. And the darkness of a whole winter as we know (2017-18) that seemingly cannot become spring. It keeps failing.
6. and at the same time an ever-more important: faith *and intuition*, navigating forward, no Sat Nav. But no intuition, no wheel! You have to keep your hands on the wheel.
7. identity and disidentification – well, who am I now? And more importantly as the bigger picture opens out beyond your shattered and humiliated (and separate) ego, What am I here for?

'Either the pattern dies, or you die', as one healer said to me.

8. (and 2018 for me) learning to live with pain. It is unlivable with! You can't think, plan, read, dream, wonder... but it is working in you. Every pain-free day or hour opens like a flower, Buddha's flower, his silent sermon.

9. surrender to You, the Divine, Yeshua, Mother, Mary, and the names you have, Shiva, Shakti, Kuan Yin – ...but the intimate You is what you need, the eye of the needle that allows you to go beyond separation – Augustine's 'Lord make me worthy, but not yet'.

You are my breath. I choose to breathe You in.

You are my incarnation. Without You, it means nothing. Jay Ramsay means nothing, he is a transient self-created *nom de plume* fiction over three decades. What a reputation! A very well-known nothing!

We are brought to our knees to return to the one we are in our hearts.

Who willingly goes there? Only a saint.

From **SURRENDER**

This place, this moment, is *surrender*
its reverse, inverse.

Above becomes below
a star you follow...
reflected in a pool.

All night you dream of falling,
like you're breaking down.

Then it's letting go, like you launch
your notebook onto the floor,
and the pen with it –

where the inadmissible dawns
to embrace the very thing
you declared war against
in fear and loathing
of its presence in your house

where it becomes
no longer the enemy
but the ally and the teacher

The teacher! You mean the stranger who moved into my house for a week and then refused to leave? A back-door man, if ever there was one. Not exactly Shams of Tabriz. But dark as he is, he's deeper than Deathwish, your first hurdle after the fear.

Who helped you let him stand aside, with his gesture of always holding back from life, his literary persona, his smoking habit, his

love of Leonard Cohen?

Saturn. After Uranus in my own sign (Aries) turning everything electric.

And the darkness you have to face inside, the transcended negativity, the gloom beneath the buoyant optimistic stream of sun in you, deep in your solar plexus and sacral. Very humbling to acknowledge....

but it becomes a prayer

DARK ANGEL

Dark angel, who bound you?
In your dream

you stand behind me
and I can't even sense you.

Angel of my life! Guardian
that dis-ease has slipped past

under our radar.
How do demons enter in?

They see a darkness. And all we know
is that the sun's no longer shining

high in its hole of mist...
and that it's the sun alone, Christ

like the man himself, returning
that alone can set him free:

Angel of my life, return to me.

and the teaching continues...

From **So Below**

Not random mutation either
but precisely positioned by the teacher
that is the disease grasped as intentional,
his location perfectly symbolic.

Look here. Focus your eyes
lean forward, and let go
into your imagining
in the knowledge that is in you.

From **THE MICRO MANAGER**

I am the micro manager
I live in the present moment
dictated by the body. Yours

you spend your life seeing beyond
head leaning forward, stomach driven
grandiose dreams always on the horizon
or at least a better life than this, no?
Now is never good enough, is it?

Well, sometimes, maybe – a few times in a life
and the rest: denied, discarded, transcended
until you feel the depths –
Pluto's dark hand grasps you by the ankle;
'there was no way in, only down'.

I am the micro manager
of a very small supermarket
called the Present Moment.
You've been shopping here a long time
but only out of convenience, never love.
The range is limited, but exact
you could easily complain, and you have
but now, now...
you're wondering how to get up that hill again.

What is crucial is that you realise you have to become your own
healer, it simply can't all come from out there. The experience
brings up the suppressed longing to be totally looked after
(infancy) – but the only regression that is meaningful is from
doing to being (to Being) which means you have to revise your
schedule.
It's all about balance. And then spirit, your own, shining

TAROT (for Caroline)

I have been driven
into the earth. How did I manage
all these years to escape?
How have we escaped?

Sadness, grief stands behind us
in a wasted landscape
that past, present. Black figure,
blue planet.

The present is all this matter
that matters, or we do not matter.
The Knight of Wands rides strong.
The Page of Pentacles sits on the ground,
eight discs surround him.
The sword above pierces the crown.

The cards glow on your winter carpet. What now?

Magic – as above, so below
out of the bowels of the ground!
The Hanged Man thinks with his gut,
the world is upside down.
And there's a dancer holding

a lemniscate between his hands –
a joyous man, a fool turned wise.
Eternity lies all around,
he knows true life is out of time.

The knight of knowledge stands,
wisdom in his eyes. He scans
the far horizon; turns his horse, and rides.

And up above, in a dream
a lost cup is returned
to a man beneath a tree,
by grace alone, the time redeemed. I do not see
how else it can be done.

Our destiny rises clear
out of the mud. This love. One for all,
and one and one is one.

Back to the question of 'why?' – that swan in a snowstorm, that
mauve dot in the centre of a mauve canvas. What is it?

Becoming grounded, adjusting your acidic diet, is vital. You throw
out all carcinogenics. You embrace as much of what you can is
there in the Book of Nature. Green grows the wheatgrass, the
brassica, and the cannabis.

You meet the causative aspect of (in my case: long term
self-employed) stress, and you become aware of how the
environmental factors are also inside your body. You *become*
deep ecology.

You wonder about unconscious atonement because of ancestral
patterns (OMG, who am I doing this for?).

Your faith may be: I am held in this process/chrysalis for as long
as I need to learn a very major lesson, the biggest of my life.

You work every day on keeping your enthusiasm for life, finding
Eros where you can (you may no longer be a functioning sexual
being) and the yes to new life.

And your life is ultimately not simply your own, and its healing is
by grace.

David Manning (CPS) once said to me, 'I reached a point where I
no longer minded if I live or die. But if I can't find the joy, then why
live?'

Chrysalis to butterfly; grit to pearl – the pearl is grace, the pearl
only grows in the oyster shell because of the grit.... So thank you,
Ken Wilber, for seeding the metaphor!

And thank you for listening.



Jay Ramsay co-founded Angels of Fire in London (1983) with its Festivals of New Poetry, has published over 30 books of poetry, non-fiction, and classic Chinese translation, including *Psychic Poetry – a manifesto*, *The Poet in You* (his correspondence course, since 1990), *Monuments*, and *Agistri Notebook* (both 2014), and a poetry-music album, *Strange Sun* (2012). Editor of six poetry anthologies – most recently *Diamond Cutters* (with Andrew Harvey: www.tayenlane.com), and many collections for other poets under Chrysalis Poetry imprint – Jay is Poetry Editor of *Caduceus* magazine, is a UKCP-accredited psychotherapist and healer, and runs workshops worldwide (www.jayramsay.co.uk). His latest book is *Pilgrimage – a Journey to Love Island* (www.awenpublications.co.uk)

Note

1 Harvey, A. & Ramsay, J. (eds) (2016). *Diamond Cutters: Visionary Poets in America, Britain, and Oceania*. Oakland, Calif.: Tayen Lane Publishing.