

Poem

Apologist

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For Roger Gillett 1965–2024

They make procession across the years,
step out the doors of asthmatic buses, untaxed cars,
drag neglected feet, dispersing hope
to the clinic door, the poorly tended rooms
and institutional chair on which I sit.

Nod, prompt, scribe, cajole their tale
into the space to squat between us.
The theme plays out time and time again
as we approach together what we cannot know.

What it would be to not be here. Not anywhere.
No study has instructed me in this
but I am expert in hearing it said,
in bearing it, bearing witness.
A job. An end to care.

Keep close
I too have known pitch black days,
their every minute an assault,
shame diminishing each breath
and loved ones calling from far then farther away.

Some path brought me back
which I see in part when I turn
to find it. But cannot recount
in this ailing room the staging posts
by which I returned.

Perhaps:

a boy, a half my size, so serious, rowing me
wordlessly past the ghats and the pyres,
the air over the river misted with death;

Facundo, stoned, his riotous attitudes,
riding me shotgun across pampas grass;

The city seen the first time from the lagoon;

Lilt in the voice of the camel man, fire lit
under the tangible web of stars. Song igniting the heart;

A baby's weight, perfect, eyes not opened yet,
her length the exact fit of a forearm;

Our walk this morning, sky and sea below resonant blue
after the rain of the night and what it released from the moor,
petrichor to stir an ancient fold of the brain.

To go on.

Words fall from my mouth.
What could they convey?
To defend this flickering animation
bookended by nothing then nothing again,
this briefest partition of night?

All this fragile display,
this burning, complicated delight
not mine to explain or to justify.

But what I mean:
save your allowance of light
and stay.

I hope you'll stay.

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The British Journal of Psychiatry (2025)
226, 428. doi: 10.1192/bjp.2024.265