

COULD I?

by

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I. Three threads

On the western side of Lebanon, Oregon, there could be an ambitious businessman.
The sun could be more sympathetic, possibly he could have chosen a less obnoxious attire.

He could spread his wings, go to New York, lead the pack.
But he could not.

In the corner house (just shy from being visible from Margaret's angle), Maggie could engage in the social aspects of her youth.

"You must be really good with the boys, dear."

Maybe she could stretch her limbs, take a shower, try to discover the joy of walking.
But she could not.

In the community college, Wayne could be the top of his class.

If he could just focus and

"Just stop shaking. And why are your hands so sweaty?"

But he could not.

Decision:

Incision?

Collision?

Occision?

Why is she engaged to four legs and a crumpled pillow
When she ought to cross the threshold? They billow
in unappreciated skies. They drag their feet and stumble
on mounds of shoes and dissertations, sometimes on blunders.
Could they?

II. The Rain Dance

The sky was radiating with divine beauty, though the traveler could not see the storm
that wrecked the village, no more than a fortnight ago.

They did the rain dance;

"Bless us with rains, and we shall never complain"

They brought this onto themselves.

III. The surgeon

His leg was wounded by wrath divine
Cure what ails you with prayer-ed iodine!

Night after night
By friends and candlelight
He sweat out the sepsis
Battling to rid the blight

But by divine will
Or maybe by gangrene
The surgeon's saw of torment
The prophecy fulfilled

IV. Drops of recurrence

Even glass is altered by the drops of recurrence.
Tiny little scratches are now covering its surface.
The nooks and crannies (though repeated but individual scars)
Fog its former brilliance, forming a single veil of dullness.

Listen here folks, we throw these in the garbage. The customers like them shiny.
I can still drink from them, if you ask me. Water tastes just the same in them.

* * *

The importance of mental health and the tangibility of emotions; I feel it, it is real

Struggle can arise from every aspect of human existence. From dropping your keys on a bad Monday, to accepting the passing of a loved one, humans are gifted with an extensive range of emotions, triggered by every event. The way our brain perceives such events can define our life.

Our body has biological needs. Failure to satisfy them can compromise our health and feeling of wellness. The importance of health and wellbeing is a central topic of research and public discussions. One's emotional and social needs are often considered secondary factors to their being complete and satisfied individuals. The incredible complexity of our emotional range and the innumerable constituents that create the mosaic of our psyche is what I have attempted to replicate with the form and organization of this poem. Our conscious and unconscious mental processes are chaotic and non-linear; thoughts and emotions escalate from one state to another, making them almost impossible to describe or illustrate in a comprehensible manner. Following this pattern, this piece of writing appears almost intelligible, even random when it is read as a whole. The sections do not complement one another in terms of style, form, and content. Yet, all these parts are interlinked, representing the collective conscience of an individual, as it is affected by external factors. Society, opinions surrounding our being and minor or major events contribute to the formation of one's

identity. My purpose is not to prescribe a way of interpreting this work. To do so would do injustice to every reader and appear offensive to many others. Instead, I will attempt to stimulate the thought and provide some context, drawing from my personal experiences and thoughts, but leaving the choice of interpretation to the reader's discretion.

Let us not mingle with labels, names or definitions; let us think of ourselves as living in a body that is weighted down by immense weight. You could be falling asleep, but you forgot to lock the door. While you know you must go and lock, if you care enough about yourself and your belongings, you are too tired to do so. Let us put ourselves in a mindset where there is no hope, no reason, no explanation for any constituent part of the perceived world. On an awfully warm day you keep on dragging your feet to reach the peak, and you have been walking for hours. Unfortunately, you know there is no view once you reach the top, because the fog has veiled everything. You keep wondering: What is the point in getting tired? Imagine that something is not quite right, though you are unable to determine what. Imagine an itch that will not go away until you have scanned every inch of our body trying to scratch it away. These hypothetical situations are presumably easily identified. In a similar manner, this poem is comprised of individual sections that describe various situations.

Small flashes of the everyday lives of individuals, combined with some of their thoughts, attempt to help us understand that regardless of importance or intensity, struggle and pain are always there. We begin with the 3 threads, pieces from the puzzle of three unique individuals and their stories. Let us take a close look at Maggie, for instance. Why is it that she is secluded? It could be physical pain, or emotional pain. The important thing here is that it does not matter; pain, discomfort, and anything that makes her suffer do exist and are substantial. The human psyche, however, is more complex than the flat and dull portrayal of a stock character. Every other individual and every existing situation exert influence on our mental state. The way we are viewed and treated by others contributes to our mental image of our own selves. No-one, nevertheless, is able to effectively analyze and comprehend our façade. How many times have we been surprised by someone's inexplicable behavior, one that does not fit the profile we have constructed of them by mixing objective views with misconceptions? Margaret keeps pestering Maggie with all that she could do or should do. What holds Wayne from being the Valedictorian, and why is it so hard for the office clerk to evolve professionally? It might be the anxiety, or their pessimistic attitude in general. It seems that their untapped potential is the most bitter part of their inner dialogue. Maybe they do lack the potential, the skills, and the will. But the fear of failure and self-doubt hold us from even attempting to pursue our personal goals. In this way, one's potential remains undiscovered, and one lingering thought remains: Could I? The process of imagining possibilities is perpetual and tiresome. When the burden of life becomes too heavy for one to carry, thoughts can escalate, and emotions can become volatile. One may then develop an excruciating inner conflict. A decision could change the course of their entire life, but it is not always possible to distinguish the lines between the conventionally sane and the reckless actions. A violent outburst is a quite frequent reaction to the overwhelming load of emotional frustration. We may turn against ourselves, or everyone but ourselves. The decision is not a simple one and it is possibly not made consciously.

Any sensitive mental state tends to be romanticized, even idealized, perhaps as a way of coping with the dire circumstances of real life: “They billow / in unappreciated skies.” In this line, the ironically poetic portrayal of their mental state violently clashes with the reality: “They drag their feet and stumble / on mounds of shoes, and dissertations, sometimes on blunders.”

Reality can often be unpleasant or distressing. Everything can prove to be a predicament, from the simplest aspects of living to the most challenging. The bard singing about the man that lost his leg presents us with another grim reality. Due to fear, lack of emotional strength or stigmatization of anything related to non-physical pain, the individual is unable to come to terms with the reality and alleviate the pain. On the one hand, it is claimed that there is no need for cure, because nothing is wrong. This is true for some patients’ feeling of omnipotence and sense of invincibility, or for outsiders who attack one for their inability to display emotional strength. The common advice in those cases is to stop occupying our mind with it, in order to banish the feeling. On the other hand, I have personally witnessed people argue that certain somebody deserves to feel the way they do, due to their previous behavior or lifestyle. In the case of the tribe, the catastrophic storm that hit the village was interpreted by outsiders to have been caused by the tribesmen’s dance. These ominous tales are imbued with hints of fatalism and superstition, elements that appear as symbols for ignorance and anti-modernity, but which become familiar when placed in a contemporary context. Note that the villagers’ and the sick man’s voices are never heard; all these fictional embedded narratives require the reader to draw all the necessary inferences, even though misjudgment and misconceptions are likely to arise. Our personal biases are shaping the reality we think we are experiencing, and this is something I wish to urge against through this piece of writing.

In order to illustrate the substantiality of the feeling of seclusion and discrimination I have been experiencing for quite a few years, I came up with the analogy of the worn bar glasses. Like the scratched glasses, the flawed and problematic by societal standards individual is judged and assessed according to their appeal and their immediate effect on others. Just like an inanimate object, perpetually scrutinized by the public gaze, we are all judged according to our assets and the way we perform the tasks by which the society determines our usefulness. As weakness and sensitivity are generally disapproved and condemned, we are socially discarded when we are no longer deemed purposeful. Significant others, friends, even family may be intimidated by the transformative power that these negative feelings can have on the individual and end their support. I believe, however, that ignorance, instead of bad intentions, lies at the root of these behaviors.

The importance of mental health and the reality and tangibility of problems, even when not in the context of mental illness, are the central points I have attempted to illustrate. The intricacy and indeterminacy of human emotions continues to fascinate me as I am discovering new aspects and dimensions of my own psyche. In the most dire and disconsolate of times, I believe that life itself will not bring about balance. In the same way, we must not allow ourselves to believe we can base our existence and wellbeing on others only. Solidarity and genuine social bonds combined with cultivation of self-acceptance can only help us bring about the change we wish to see. A loving and accepting society that values mental health can only be achieved by us making the first move, hoping others will follow.