

Institutionalised Poetry

by Evie Muir

So, how are you?

In this moment, I'm well. There's blue skies, a peppermint tea in hand and my cat's stomach is vibrating with contentment on my lap. Downstairs, my partner's playing Ezra Collective's new record. The saxophone's ecstasy rises to greet me where I rest and I'm visited by blurred memories of festival suns setting over sweaty, swaying bodies. Through the window I can see the outstretched palms of chestnut leaves radiating with transition. The tree bows with the weight of plump conkers and they plop to the ground like their only purpose is to be found by curious hands. I've gifted myself a lay in this morning. Soft soft. The pain in my neck, though ever-present, is quietly humming along in the background.

Manageable. Yesterday I wept for hours because the crescendo in a movie's score ripped at something inside my chest that I'd left unattended. I thought I might die from the heartache and wished it so. In this moment, I'm glad to be here.

Tomorrow, who knows. Each day I renew my commitment to trying - does that answer your question?

the system

As a result of ~~your condition~~, your ability to work is impaired?

*^ in ways that fill my
being with aliveness*

As a result of your condition, your ability to complete basic personal care tasks is impaired?

The self-maintenance my body needs in order to show up full - fuller - each day requires its own disciplined routine. I recently found myself saying "sorry I'm skint" to refer to the currency of my capacity. Each day is its own unique calculation. An assessment of how many spoons I awake with. How many I can replenish before starting the slog. How many are diminished by said slog. How empty, or full - fuller - I am when I return to bed.

- ☐ Sleep early, sleep well if the shadow people try to visit when my eyes close, remember they loved me once.
- ☐ Wake up & relish in the liminal space filled only with fuzzy cuddles
- ☐ Shake off the night, somatically
- ☐ Breakfast & a herbal tea carefully pared w/ the needs my body's communicating
- ☐ Don't forget to take my herbal tincture
- ☐ Morning peeges while sat by the river - rain or shine
- ☐ Shower, skin care, brush teeth, etc
- ☐ Begin the day. Believe it will be a good one.

As a result of your condition, you have felt embarrassment or shame?

[Pause]

Not anymore. Not really.

Thanks for asking though.

I may not have noticed this about myself otherwise.

That the shame has decreased, less and less with each passing season, each turning year.

Nowadays, I barely notice it at all.

I'm embedding grace for myself in my practice, you see.

And am trying, really trying, to see the moments of turmoil as lessons, sites of wisdom, guides.

Shame isn't an internal emotion, you see.

It's an external projection, etched upon my skin by people, systems who refuse to see, refuse to understand, my wholeness.

The more fugitive I become, the less these projections haunt me.

I know it is possible to surround myself with people and environments that affirm instead of other.

I hope one day you can orient yourself from this place too.

As a result of your condition, you have caused arguments, property damaged or otherwise engaged in unsociable behaviour?

Stupid question.

Next!

I have to answer?

Fine!

One. Engaging in conflict is, arguably, the most sociable behaviour I can commit to. I *move towards* conflict with intention.

In the hopes that it can be generative.

What measure of wellness relies on a person's avoidance?

Two. Would damage to property be seen as unhealthy in a world where land is longer owned? Or where a release of all the rage that possesses us is something to be celebrated, not punished?

Three. I started drinking at thirteen, fourteen, maybe. When I was a teenager, we'd all drink in the park next to the closed down youth centre on a Friday night. Hoards of us, across multiple year groups. Getting chased by the police then returning to the hedgerows to reclaim our stashed Vodka-Fanta-Fruit-Twist's. This would be the highlight. We lost our virginities in that park. Cemented lifelong friendships in that park. We all did it. Whether some agent of the state in a sterile room weaponised it against your sanity and branded you unsociable was simply a matter of luck. I was unlucky.

Medication 1

As a result of your condition,

you

want

me

to

take

possession

of

your

body?

"Nobody in the world, nobody in history, has ever gotten their freedom by appealing to the moral sense of the people oppressing them."

Assata Shakur said that.

If embodying my being is what it takes for you to stop asking questions and join me in pursuit of revolution, go ahead. See if you'd have survived this far...

As a result of your condition, you know your mind can not be trusted?

Sometimes. Sure. Once a month. When I'm luteal and purging. Sure. Sometimes I have to remind myself that in these days, I can't trust my mind. But I *can* trust my body. Oh, my body is the most honest, most trustworthy vessel I know.

Within white walls it's easier to forget. Forget that I must hold onto my body tighter. So as to not lose the truths it speaks to the thieves that masquerade as carers.

Behind clipboards, name badges and locked-door keys, they pillage our truths, mistranslate and misconstrue, until our honesty is no longer ours to speak. Until our cheeks feel gaunt, skeletal.

Like we're gasping for life, holding each breath as sacred and scarce. I've bitten my tongue for fear it will betray me. I've clenched my jaw so tight that the infrastructure of my skull concaves.

In the debris, my mind lies. But my body, oh, my body can *always* be trusted. I know this now.

'Institutionalised Poetry' Description:

'Institutionalised Poetry' is a series of pieces that respond to the questions asked of the protagonist with White Walls. Distorted example pages from PIP forms foreshadow the pieces, prompting the words to disrupt institutionalised models of so-called "health care". Incorporating, both digital and hand written text, each response was curated by experimenting with the ways somatic practices create space for the body to answer in ways that bureaucracy can't - allowing Evie to honour their humanity while tending to a part of their past that still haunts them.

Evie Muir Bio:

Evie Muir (she/they) is a Black, queer, disabled and working class nature writer and founder of Peaks of Colour - a Sheffield and Peak District-based nature-for-healing community group, by and for people of colour.

As a survivor of gendered violence, Evie is interested in the ways writing can forge a landscape of healing and justice outside of carceral feminist models. Their work seeks to further the Black Feminist legacy of writing new worlds into being, in service of collective liberation for the human and more-than-human.

Evie's debut book, 'Radical Rest: Notes on Burnout, Healing and Hopeful Futures' explores Black Feminist and Abolitionist approaches to activist burnout, and was published by Elliot & Thompson in 2024.