

2019

Stay in Motion

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Recommended Citation

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https://creativematter.skidmore.edu/eng_stu_schol/28

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First Law

*An object in motion
tends to stay in motion.*

I am sprinting towards the future.
It never stops, and so I keep chasing it.

*An object at rest
tends to stay at rest*

Morning comes with the weight of covers holding me down.
Time, gravity, pressure – all are friction. I have slowed and stopped.

*unless acted on
by an external force.*

The sunlight is external, and so are the promises I make.
Some of these are to myself. Will they ever yield momentum?

Morning comes with the weight of covers holding me down.
I must begin my sprint towards the future. It will not stop.

Terminal Velocity

Just to fall
is what I wish
for when the
evening comes
and I'm settling
in for sleep.
I want to never
slow, to hurry
and hurtle down
at anything the
moonlight shines
vaguely down on,
like a glimpsed
home, with its
city sitting room
of crammed-in sofas.
Glimpsing my future
trajectory in air,
I vow to gather speed.
In the morning,
I will wake but
keep eyes closed.
While asleep,
constant velocity
is only natural. It
lulls you into its
sweeping downward
melody, and so I may
have forgotten how
to accelerate, moving
down past city spires
and hitting the sidewalk,
caught unaware.

Homeostasis

What about the endless chatter
in my mind? Why do these
vague associations lead to you?
What is it about your red plaid
Shirt, cemented in my brain
like a monument? Meanwhile,
your eyes gaze into mine on the way to
class, disrupting the present
with past seeping in.

Never mind
the fever, never mind its chills.
I believe my body can
keep itself alive, can keep me
constant, can keep me breathing.
Breath catches when I think of
you, not you, not again, this time
when I need focus. Keep the
temperature constant, keep it all
humming along.

I can't seem to find the mechanism
to keep control in mind, keep me sane.

Collapse of the Sun

Under pressure and out of fuel, I lack
the heat and passion to go on. Billions
of years have led to this. My core contracts
to its limit, and I await the destruction
of a supernova – chaos on a cosmic scale.
But no explosion greets me; I am too small
for this stellar swan song. What was once
my surface has been expelled by runaway fusion;
it silently sails into interstellar darkness, no longer
illuminated. My compacted core is white hot.
Is it hot enough to light the layers drifting away –
for heat running into clouds of dust and gas
to make me a nebula, little beauty out of death?

No. There is not enough heat,
not enough passion contained
within my mass. All I ever was drifts
off silently into icy space, just visible,
shedding residual light. No one
will ever see me shrink down,
drift into lonely skies,
fade out.

Freeze

Ice-water collection
pooled, underneath feet
in winter boots, is dreaming of
becoming stiff, starting to form

ice-stripes and small dashes.
Gossamer lines point
to deep-frozen night, striated,
unexpected, bumpy hardness

slows me on my way home.
Water particles'
constant energized vibration
slows down at last below my feet.

My thoughts, insulated,
still move sluggishly.
I carefully step over stripes
although there is nothing to fear –

moments when molecules
could cause me to fall
from lack of energy still come.
The grid of atoms loses drive

and craves security.
But I cannot slow down.
I can't give up from lack of drive;
cannot yet freeze. I lift my foot.
Again, I step over ice-lines.

Ghost Fracture

I lean on my arm while reading,
shifting my weight when I feel the ghost –
the pain diminished fully, weakness
holding fast, the absence I can't quite place.

My elbow snapped once and then again,
first on a sidewalk, in suburban darkness,
then on Crough Patrick's mountainside,
months later. These toothpick arms could

break once more. I don't believe that
it's been too long. Don't tell me – I know
how in weeks, bleeding bone grows
a shell of cartilage, beginning renewal

complete in months, even weeks. But
it can take years for the body remodel
new bone, make it calcified, as it was.
In the interim, the ghost remains, a scar

under skin that will show up in any x-ray.
But this is subtle sculpting. It cannot be felt.
My ghost is muscular, and mentality calls
it forward. How terrible – not the pain

but how it snapped so easily twice –
toothpick arms were defenseless.
An instant holding wholeness, then
the next, brokenness. I did this.

I can't get over the weakness.
It's in my muscles, fighting body weight
and haunting my mind, fighting itself.

Sunspot

The tiny window at the base
of my apartment stairs leading up
to the kitchen looks out upon snow.

From the kitchen table,
facing down towards
the window, I stare out
until a spot appears
on my vision, sunlight

reflected on cold white.

The Sun is at a sunspot minimum;
its surface isn't as hot. Sometimes,

plasma gets mangled by magnetic
field lines, electric tangles pierce
the Sun's surface, making cooler
spots. Even so, the sunspots
seethe with heat, edges hotter
than the Sun's unmarred surface.

But not now. Now, magnetic
fields lie dormant, under shining
gas, no disruption of yellow glow
or magnetic chaos wreaking havoc

here on Earth. Still, a dark spot
has appeared on my vision from
the Sun and snow in the midst

of solar winter. It seems
too much to ask for me
to feel some calm, to be
impervious to disruption
even for only a season.

I am tangled up even now,
even exposed to steady sunlight,
even while staring out at cold snow.

Interwar Period

Radiation kills, and you don't even realize it's happening. Say the bomb has gone off, and you're safe, surveying profound wreckage. Surviving it all, how could one conceive of the silent night air, conspicuously silent, turning from one thing to another, corrupting itself, decaying for no reason at all? And if I told you this, you might say that of course the air is turning into something poisonous when it sheds that tiny mass, a particle smaller than small, and that's why we suffer, if you believed it at all. But the truth is that it's only the energy released, offspring of decay, that ruins it all. Always it was bound to harm, even if it wasn't transformed into poison. The energy couldn't linger in the night air. It had to enter us, corrupt us. We didn't realize, but of course, it happened.

Synapse

Explain it to anyone at all.

Say it's a connection, a wire,
conducting the spark of thought.

After all, it really is electricity

that speeds through the brain,
a train of charge, and thoughts
respond. But this is wrong.

Imagine – electrical potential

speeds through neurons like a wave
builds up and culminates,
eventually crest and breaks.

There is a connection here, but

it is a gap. Two neurons just a hair
apart, just their arms, their axons
extended towards each other,
reaching, like a child calling out for

his mother, lost at the seashore,
desperate. The spark jumps across
anyway – the gap becomes a bridge.

At last, he meets the eyes of his mother

and all is well. Explain it to anyone
at all. To the mother and the child.

Electric connection, the smallest gap;
this tiny space, the sparks between.

Love

Perhaps it has to hurt

like a slap or
an ache of the heart

to fill the space between
two outstretched hands, as it

reaches, as it leaps, then contracts
in empathy from another's pain, felt

from miles away. My sister's heart pounds
in anxiety. She says that this is common

and I cannot slow my own breaths. Years
ago, my best friend sat beside me in English class

and we laughed at everything and nothing.
I wonder if she knows how my heart has weathered

our separation, no laughter in the empty
space I am just now learning to accept.

I'm thinking now of a pang of endearment,
imagining what tenderness that visceral link

holds in its reach when two pulses synch.

Vernal Equinox

Just a hint of it is all
it takes. Every year, early
March days bring that hint
of what's to come, the sun

which has seemed so meek
and shy slowly comes to stay
again. The snow, too long a fixture,
gradually recedes, revealing the grass,

still yellow-brown, but with the promise
of green. It's not that we are looking for pure
comfort, not yet – not long hours of sun, shining
until mere hours before sleep, illuminating flawless

summer sky. No – for now, we long only for
balance, for the sun and moon to be equal in turn,
neither dominating the sky. When the sun yields
his power in winter months, we forget

he ever had so much. Yet, here is that hint
of brighter days to come. Soon, yellow grass,
tinged with green, will bare its wildflowers,
the trees will sprout their hopeful blossoms

and vital leaves, and the air will cease to threaten
its encroaching chill. We ask only for this absence,
this openness, us lacking our fear of the cold;
to be granted this gift, this season of balance.

Julie's Tune
for Julie Vallimont

Simple, the way it can emerge.
At the workshop, we knit together
these notes, sequential, mundane.
Made from freely available colors

by all of us with yarn. Maybe,
it could be enough for us
to make anything, a scraggly scarf,
or some mittens with holes,

but have we crafted real warmth?
Are stitches tightly interwoven,
forming something soft and bright
and new? Your tune longs to be complete

but stubbornly resists it. The notes
stop being simple when they could be
perfect. Your dozens of recordings, short,
incomplete, reach towards construction

of a song that moves you, but might
never be what you think you want.
You realize this – that instead, your tune
will breathe and bring itself into the world

but not yet. We ready our knitting needles,
impatient to begin. But no, you tell us.
You will make a scarf in what ways you can,
waiting for it to weave its name, to finish singing.

The Festival's Heartbeat

Inside the ballroom, driving drum keeps time
so that the rhythm seems to be so strong

it warms the air I breathe. The guitar is strummed,
the fiddle's cheerful tune adds melody

to swirling people, stomps of feet, my pulse
at one with his, my partner's heart, until

the contra dance has ended. And still,
in outside hallways, music grows from groups

of strangers who gather to play. Their fiddles sing;
Guitarists strum ecstatic chords for hours.

From back inside, the caller shouts, "Hands four!"
I rush to meet the madness of the crowd,

anticipating joy in every step.
But even as I dance the night away

my beating heart at one with pounding feet,
outside, musicians jam without a care

but these two tunes have never seemed to clash.
They race through notes; I dance across the hall.

This music is my breaths, air in and out,
notes rise and fall – my beating heart keeps time

with notions of these melodies – that all
of this can beat as one, a wayward rhyme.

My Violin Resonates

Stripe-grained,
shining, golden
sunlight-woven
honey-painted hue

shimmers and softly
starts to glow. My hands
skim its surface, breath
shallow, stifled by awe

by this new wood, finely crafted.
When I tuck it under my chin,
the silence is expectant, edge
of dawn. I wait for the coming day –

before horsehair moves across
taut strings and sunlight sings.
Honey-colored, honey sound rings
in waves, resonating in my bones.

Sound resonates in the violin's graceful
body, fine-grained. Physics says this means
consistency, an even sound. All this careful
curving, deliberate carving by engineers

will replicate the sun. But try
to build beauty from cold fact.
Try to find it with a calculator.
Try to set it equal to joy.

The luthier knows what
the physicist, the astronomer
can only dream of – that polished
wood radiates, sheds its own light.

Scattered Light

bounces off April atmosphere
and hits squinting eyes. It looks blue,
arbitrarily. The atmosphere
scatters more purple light,
but my eyes fixate on the blue.

Really, the sky

is a fiction. It's just what we call
the surface-less color that
seems fixed up there; really
there's nothing, only color-less air.

Yet, is there another color

the Spring could hope to inspire?

I stare up from this common path.

Rubber shoes scrapes cement

as my apartment door slams

behind me. I swim up, supported

by encompassing color

and liquid vitality.

Random Access Memory

I have lost the thread
of the conversation.
Maybe I never had it –
words slipping through

my messy clockwork mind –
gears clashing, never easy meshing.
My sister stands akimbo as I try
to recall – what was it about last Tuesday?

As she waits, I remember in class
talking about RAM. Everyone thinks
it's a measure of computing power
But it's only temporary storage

present processing kept in the forefront.
I look up. She is still waiting
for my gears to catch up
to hers, rotating soundlessly,

never a pause or flaw. Belatedly,
I remember that she mentioned
a friend of hers that I once knew.
I continue to weave words.

Keep the present in the forefront.
It shouldn't be a challenge – right there,
right in recent memory, only just
out of range of this needle and thread

or these halting, spinning gears –
How do gears weave perfect cloth?
O old computer, my sewing machine,
keep going, keep going, keep track.

Growing Up

From childhood – those days I can't recall¹
to high school years and up to present day
I've been inside this skin and seen it all –
these private thoughts nobody else can say.²
I've known the changing features of my face,
my busy thoughts and slightly sluggish mind,
and every feeling I have learned to trace –
the roots of pain and joy are there to find.³
And yet, I can't explain the things I do
when careless words, spontaneously said
emerge in actions bold and strange and new
that contradict the life that I have led.⁴
My own heart seems like one that I should know
but never have I known her less than now.

1

My kindergarten backpack
was pink. I loved it – the color,
my backpack, or my mother
who picked it out. One never
knows which came first,
the color or the love.

2

You can never say how I see
the color green (my favorite).
You can never see how I softly look at
her. I always wanted to be a princess;
I thought I wanted to marry a prince.

3

I love the sound of my mother
playing honey-warm songs
on her viola as the night deepens.
I hate to hear my sister cry –
piercing pain rings discordant.

4

This boy on my bed kisses me
as *Doctor Who* plays in the background.
We have forgotten to pause it. Detached,
I'm scared I will forget his name. But
anyway, it doesn't make sense. Any of it.

Cliffs of Moher

Namurian shale - upon each ancient layer comes newly
compacted sand and dust, sculpted, pressed over ages,
climbing the sky, grass crowning its surface improbably.
The oldest layers, almost black, embrace the ocean,
submerging them beneath these raging waves,
anxious to erode the past as it recedes, to smooth it out.
I'm thinking of that past, when the grass blanketed
that now-submerged rock, before so many steps
wore away this path, maybe even before it towered
over the sea. Did shores even with waves know human
steps, our eyes to the ocean? I imagine cliffs, always cliffs
along this edge as I tiptoe, fearful and exhilarated.
It seems impossible to imagine that absence of feeling,
no fear, or perverse longing, of falling from this height,
doom-filled and alluring. What intrigue could these shores
have held on level ground, pressed up only against
cold, raging sea? No, there must always have been cliffs
above these waves. Long ago, an Irish woman, first to this edge,
dangled her feet into empty space. I do the same. Time and sky
press down upon us - ages ahead, the sea below.

My Mother Crosses the Snow

Two lines lead me on. Not quite parallel,
skis never intersect as they form new tracks,
guiding me into golden light, the setting sun.
These tracks, so new, seem to be permanent

but in front of her, there is only untouched snow
like approaching time. Against the wind, eyes
narrowed, she makes her way across the field,
pressing on, forging this path I now follow.

My mother pauses. Up ahead, the weight of all
she can't yet know presses against her vision,
snow swirling in the wind. The weight of her body
pushes down on the crust of the snow – it seems

that despite her slight frame, she might break
through. She thinks of the deep years piling,
the swirling winds of the future. Her children,
swaddled in newborn warmth, never knew

this cold, this fear snow brings. But what of
its beauty? No feeling on earth like marking
down fresh snow. Nothing so pure and bright
as this great unknown, no joy like leading on

another life. Now, glimpsing that headwind,
I think I'll keep what I found in the snow:
amber sunsets and ski poles angled
into flawed but tender geometry.

Bioluminescence

We are born on a blue blip
encased within insensible night.
In a photograph, space appears
deep ink-black, darker even
than the underside of eyelids.

The many lights that dot our globe
give us clarity. This image of us
is a world we've come to know -
the mess of the city; its electric apathy,
its lightning hum, its inorganic song.

The city shines not for us, but because
of us on the ground, where these lights reign.
But looking up into the night, I see the stars -
tiny fireflies, winking, casting their vitality;
Obliquely, I glimpse myself shining.

It's true that we are made of stardust
only in the way of old things becoming
new, the way the ground sprouts
from the embers of the past -
that past encased in ordinary rock

from which we tunneled out.
We inherit what light we make;
We are of that unyielding glare.
If intention can flow in electrons,
then invention seeds life. The city sings our name.

And yet, an interstellar spark
flared up in the dark and split open
ancient sky. It gave us all we are,
casting its vitality. On a clear night,
I peer up at my past, grasping at starlight.