

POETRY

AT THE

BACKYARD

August 14, 2024
Tahoe Poetry Collective



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Muriel Rukeyser, "Untitled"

Melanie Parrish

Note to Muriel Rukeyser

"A tree of rivers flowing through our lives... the energy of each, which is relation/ A flare of linked fire which is the need to grow... Each being witness to itself, entering to relate... Bearing the flood... Which is our eyes and our lives/Related, in bonds of flow."

Oh Muriel
who I read. Oh Muriel
who I've listened to
in person, on the page,
in dreams. Oh Muriel.

When do we float
into rivers of relation?
In the movie, when he raised the hunting bow
horizontal, huge across his bent knee,
foot on the back bumper,
and aimed at the golden lab, grey muzzled
who sat in the back of the white van
in the dark,
I clicked off the TV.
In the world, it's happening again:
dust and rubble, not a building
the stove dangling by its gas line,
coat-hanger abortions.
A politician talks about truth
and the alternate truth
in the service of a bully.
Books banned, second graders
shot in classrooms.
Distended bellies daily
of every skin color,
every flesh,
the same blood.
I am the grey muzzled dog, Muriel –
no linked sparks of fire among us,
no rivers in sight.

Mountain side

After Nic Alea

Melanie Parrish

I think I am a creek, no.
I think I am Morse code, no
I think I'm driving – my hands cramped,
the steering wheel sweaty, the lake road
still iced and snow-packed and fast
is something no brake can handle. I think
Kiev's been bombed again and the news
means nothing. I think the guardrails fail and
getting slammed back in my seat by the airbag
my nose bleeding the red on white
like the red on white print dress you like,
the one with slashes of black and a black
jacket your ex-wife wanted and your daughter
hated and you always help me take that jacket off
and turn me around to face your face usually
to kiss me, you tell me the daughter who wishes
I'd turn to vapor in thin air will arrive for
the holiday and we both say nothing.
I think god says pray for her just as the car
that's side-rolled lands on the jut of a granite outcrop
and I'm hanging upside down because my seatbelt
is doing its job. I'm a bat in a cave skin too light no
leather wings, the cave boulders iced with ice. No,
I'm a creek frozen with currents running
underneath the skater's surface and you have

put your arm around me. No, you have pulled me
close to your wool vest, your tweed blazer and we
kiss, half a cloud settling on the side of the mountain
and we can count every crystal snowflake before it falls.
I think my car is dented, my headlights smashed
I am the hatchback flung open.
When you kiss me, I cannot find
your tongue or mine
and that's not a surprise at all.

In My Life

Melanie Parrish

I could live listening to the Beatles,
still fishing, trail hikes,
snowshoes clamped on could
carry me into February fields.
I could live alone or with you,
grow blue potatoes, cut kindling,
tie flies while you find the best maps.
You are flesh and seasons
and baritone eyes. We nap, breaths even,
wake with words, without words.
Under a light quilt, yes, look at us
undeniably here.
We are old and I could be living now
thinking of death as butterflies or mercy
while you do not think of death at all, talk
with your son. Our bodies promise
surprise: a night with little sleep and still
radiant the next day. An unchartered
fall without fracture. The red taste
of tomatoes, garden grown, roasted at high heat.
The heart's eye, John Lennon, the soul's
conference call with saints
and wide skies guide me. I could live.
My bare feet in your naked hands.

Through the Contour of Life

Aimee Penrose

Through the contour of life
I look alright

I close my eyes
Just to realize
All these holes
With no
Material mind

like
Questions left unanswered
Leaving room for
The truth
To be misconceived

They say
Reality is what you make it
But

Before this
when you cannot yet
create your truth

When heart and soul
not yet full

Reality
Conceives
The truth

Here I am in my truth

Down
Below
Where nightmares grow
And no one shall be left shining

Where women
Are taught as girls
That our bodies
Are not ours

And When that man touched me
I was his all along

My body
no longer felt like mine
But
My comfortability and confidence
Was stripped from mind

Left unprotected and vulnerable
started to decay
Leading my
decision to love
The feeling
And idea
Of love

Awry

The decision
In the hands of anyone who made it
Already had an answer
For my unaware submission
Was the open doorway
Into the empty hallway
Which was my self-respect

Where love
Was just a word
In which I used
To compliment someone
Who was able to like me
More
than I liked myself

The shadow of love
When you can't even love yourself

Now this was the life I was living

Scattered in time and space
Between moments in life
Where I was taught
To fade away

And dim my light
so
piece by piece
I send myself away
Until there was nothing left
But the shadow
Of what

'Who do you think you are?'

An illusive form
Resembling
What could be a human
Just going about the motions
Of being

Void of any concrete perception
Sovereign intention
Or individual direction
Treading

In this pool of life
Waiting for the next strongest current
To take me away
So I don't have to feel this way

Allowing myself to erode
Further and further
From this idea of self

As the currents keep coming
And absorbing me into their flow
My substance runs low
And there was nowhere else to go

So treading turns to sinking
And I begin to drown

The waters of life

Flooding my system
Extinguishing any spark
To be found

As the spectrum of light
slowly fades from my life
As my imagination
Runs black and white

Dreams turned to deeds
On the plate of someone
With no desire
To create anything at all
And the entire idea of being
Deemed miserable
Leaving me incapable
Of changing anything at all

So here I lay
At the depths of life
Where everything in gray
And nothing feels right

The same depths
At which
I meet the pieces of myself
Neglected
Rejected
Waiting to be collected

The pieces of me
I've grown to hate

The silence that surrounds me
And how
When I start to speak
What I say
Takes everything a little
to deep

the sound of my voice
And how the tone
Just the right frequency
To be heard

I've grown to hate
How being me
Attracts energy
Forcing me to be seen
but
If I dress a certain way
This energy mutates
Into a whole new
Entity

As if I
Was asking
To be objectified

I've grown to hate
The way I feel
Disconnected from reality
But I can't communicate
This fear
"Just wait life only gets harder from here"

A life deemed miserable
This is what your telling me
That this
is just a baseline for reality

How dare you wish that upon me

If this is what society has set forth for me
I don't want to be a part of it

Here
is
rock bottom

I've looked in the mirror
And acknowledged the truth
That the existence
I was living
A mere subject of its conditioning
Deconstructing my whole reality
Reverting to neutrality
as
I empty out
all of me

I sit in silence
And let myself be still
decompressing
for the first time
In all of my years
I allow myself to feel

My truth

The persisting presence
Of this hole I've been trying to fill
Comes alive

Demons roam my mind
Digging up the memories
I chose to hid

I recognize
The guilt
Acknowledging
The shame
And confirming
The pain
Of
The life I lead
when I didn't know
Any other way

The weight of my heart
Deepened with sadness
As I met the pieces of me
That wanted to scream
so badly
But were met with silence
As the knots in my throat began to tighten
Suffocating all of me
Except
The Insecurity
that conducts
This symphony of hate
Inside of me
Playing on repeat
That I am unworthy
Of all the things

My heart
Wants so badly

This internal war proceeds
And I play with the idea
That I could leave
For It is so easy

Numbing it all away

The substances
Allowing me to float

Dampening the lights inside

Perfect conditions
Living half alive
While the other half
Hides

Were getting by

realizing
the existence
I am now living
a mere reflection
Of my new found
Misery

Haunting me

Like A nightmare

I'm running and running
But going

Nowhere

My feet sinking
into the ground below
As I'm followed
By the psychedelic whispers
Of my own internal hell

There is
No where else to go

So

Here I stay
At the depths of life
While I catch my breath
And rest my light

retreating from a fight that wasn't even mine

Little did I know
This shadow of me

In all her glory

She doesn't want to fight

In fact
She comes to me
in peace
Waiving a white flag
As she asks me
to love her

I wish I could say
it was easy

But Its definitely
One hell of a journey

The weight
Of my past
slowly
Sheds from my back

As I
go way
Back

And breathe

Pinpointing the
Points In time
Where I lost
Peace of mind

I embrace each piece of me
emerging from these
depths of being
With open arms
As the strength to be seen
Is achieved

I hold them close to me
And usher in ease
As I
Return them
To safest place
That could be

Step by step
Piece by piece

I walk myself
back home

to me

To the present moment
And the space I've grown to hold

Transforming
from surviving
to thriving
As I retreat from a fight
That wasn't even mine
invest All my energy
into me

Welding these pieces together
With love
Filling the space
with purpose and passion
As I start the creation
Of a new dream
One I can call my own

Why Must You Deny Your Own Magic

Aimee Penrose

you are the creator of reality
the forger of dreams
you are the vortex of intention pulling everything that is meant for you
towards you

you are the artist the muse
as well as the canvas to be put to use
your mere presence testifies to the strength of your soul
everything you touch turns to gold
And everyone you meet is blessed with peace

May all blessed being find peace

May your essence glimmer in gold
May you shed and mold
Melt away
Renew
Unbound, unchain
And Transform

Allowing yourself to tune in to your highest form of expression

May your eyes be enchanted by the magic of light
And the perception of reality
That is all that it seems

May you dance with the bees
And Sing with the trees
listening to their leaves
Tell you a story of peace

May you play with the seas
And Flow with the streams
Ceaselessly, never held back

May you lay in the grass
And feel the breeze
recognizing the path
Back to you

Smile with father sun
And feel his warmth
Smiling back upon you

Howl at the moon
And collide With the magic of the cosmos
That is you

Pursuing passion
Supplying Solace
Coursing Curiosity

This is what we are here to do

Curses

Aimee Lowenstern

Originally published in Soliloquies Anthology

You've got rats in the ceiling. You've got pixies in the walls. You dye your hair green and sit on a green couch and eventually no one can see you. You wrap yourself in ivy and run off into the forest. You come back an hour later, drunk. You collapse on the couch and when you wake up three quarters of a fairy circle have grown around you. The pixies giggle and bite your ankles. The rats curl up in the heating vents and die. You make up what a human is, and three other stories. There is werewolf fur all over the upholstery. It hasn't been a full moon in years.

I Eat The Earth

Aimee Lowenstern

Originally published in Synaesthesia Magazine

Here I hold the world, a globe
of fruit in my hand. I lick
the sulfur-salty peel, the roads and regencies

we mold here.
And plugging my finger
in a volcano, I strip
the rind away, scooping dirt
beneath my nails,
uncovering the red pulp
of magma, citrus and ripe
I tear into
the flesh of it, lava
burning ruby down my chin
my mouth swimming with
delirious spice, and I
claim my animal tongue

Dead Squirrels and Other Gifts

Roxy Hankinson

I was never going to be the person you wanted
the person you probably deserve
You tell me this is the problem
Push me away, lock me in the hollow places of your mind until you need
someone
And, for once, I will suffice
For once sixteen years means something to you

It makes you happy
And, of course, that's all that matters
I am the ever-convenient filler for when you don't have anyone else

The old stuffed animal laying on your bed in your parent's house
The childhood best friend
Sitting at a table set for you and all my disappointments

I am here all year waiting
Like a stray cat outside your door, the remains of a squirrel laid out before
me, an offering, a promise that I will always bring you everything you need.
I will keep bringing them until you have graveyard built beneath your lawn
Because maybe today is one of the days you decide I am worth even a mo-
ment of your time.

It's foolish,
It always is
To be the one who holds on
To memories
To people

It is even more foolish, perhaps,
To wait
For the next time you want me.

When She Said She Could Love Me

Roxy Hankinson

When she said she could have loved me
I laughed
Because how could I have possibly done anything else?
I... could have loved her
She liked my eyes
She complimented my smile
She knew what she wanted
And that, apparently, was me
It would have been easy to let myself love her
She kissed me like she wanted me
And kissed her like that was enough
It was, for a moment, in my bed
It was, as I peppered kisses down her body and she called me pet names I
can't remember.
It was, for a few dates
Loving her was the kindest thing I almost did
It would have been easy,
To simply let her love me
And let myself fall into something that looked like love from a distance
I want to be loved
Gently, slowly, completely
But I am not sure I know how
Because it is far easier to be desired than to desire
This, I am told, is my problem

Various Poems

Jesse James Ziegler

Reno Poet Laureate



The Moon Above the Magnolia Trees is A Cure for Claustrophobia

John Merryfield

If I open these pages
there is the expectation
of some importance.
I am aware
that I am the story
that wants an escape route.
I sit by the door.
I leave early.
I talk to the birds.
I've always been close
to this body's
inevitable conclusion.
And if this is the last moment,
what words would I say?
Would words be necessary?
Would my back-seat-face-in-the-window
tell the story of my life?
Or would the moon
with its open magnolia husks
perched between Orange Grove
and the lavender sky
intervene on my behalf
and without words
say something beautiful?

The Lost Coast

John Merryfield

A droopy
drooping string
of colored party lights
are blinking
alternating patterns
red blue
red blue
red blue
Which,
to those of you
paying attention
are the colors
of an emergency.
It is the Sea of Cortez
at night
where
the ocean pillage gang
in their newly
rusted Mexican bottom trawlers
moan and bellow
like corroded evangelical bells.
Listening closely
you can hear the clanks
of Hemingway's empty bottles.
This fishing village bears
a strange fruit.
And I am Billie Holiday
alone and unafraid.

Every glowing candle
needs a window
And I see you
I see the blank stare
of the upside down fish
swinging in the breeze
Grandmother fish
whose eyes
are desperately searching
the lost coast
for someone else
to help.

A Room Without a Voice

Priya Hunter

Aspen leaves flutter
Cragged peaks loom
The last rays of light slip behind the crest
The high pitch whistle of a lone osprey retiring for the night
Darkening skies outline the shore
Gentle currents ripple across the shadowy water
A lone head bobs

Venus rises
Slowly other celestial bodies join herin the evening sky
Plunged into the darkness
I sit alone
The phone rings -a banjo strum
Hi dad.
I am a greeted by a mumbling slurred hello
He trying to say something
I don't understand
I promise to call back

The months have taken their toll
Mumbled, slurring, hacking, fits of laughter.
Thinning, graying, worsening.
Like a snake shedding his skin,
Writhing to escape from its form.

Tick Tock Tick Tock.

The acknowledgment of time shatters the night
Wasting away,
Like a hungry ghost unable to swallow.
Trapped in his own glass cage
Thrashing
His own words stuck in his throat.

He fights to swallow
He fights to survive
3-6 years.
Tick Tock Tick Tock

I fly east
for a few precious moments,
It will be the last time
Time to say goodbye.
Time to heal old wounds
Time to let go
The past dissipates in the face of death.
Old pains, an elusive shadow -pales in the face of impermanence

Some let go and surrender into the unknown with ease
Some fight a valiant fight.
While others fear the uncertainty of the impending transition

Are we ever ready to leave this plane of existence?
Are we ever ready to tread into the abyss of unknowing?
Will our loved ones, long gone, be waiting to greet us with open arms?
Or do we dissipate into the fabric of consciousness

Wheels touch down on the tarmac
Palm trees sway
The air is thick
Sweat drips between my breasts
A pair Sandhill Cranes shriek a deep throated cry as they fly by
Flipflops slap on asphalt

The door to the lanai screeches
We embrace
I ease onto the couch next to him
He points and stutters.

Read it, I ask?
He nods
I take the book from his hand.

He closes his eyes
I clear my throat and read the dog-eared passage
Death, time, oneness, love -each sentence dropping deeper into his reality

In a room without a voice
Pages rustle
He writes in his journal
He pushes it toward me.
A treatise of love from father to daughter

He points at me and passes the journal and a pen
I write.
I forgive.
I let go.

We sit in silence for a long time
"It's ok to go now," I say.
He scribbles quickly and pushes the pad back
"I am afraid".

I tell him it will be ok
But I don't really know.
A tear drops onto the lined pages of his notebook blurring the ink.

One last hug
One last cry
One last I love you
It's a somber journey home
Raw and unmoored.

Death arrives soon after
Not without rousing him out of his morphine induced state one more time.
Gasping for breath once again
And then it is done.

I feel him in random moments.
The old New Mexican dish on my counter,
a crystal on my altar,

a carved eagle on the shelf,
black beans
We move on.
We live our lives

The yellow haze of the full moon rises

She reaches through the pines to meet the billowing gray.
Clouds skirt across the sky.
The stillness of the moon's reflection illuminates the outline of the mountains surrounding me
A lone bat flies
The whistling of the wind blows through the trees.

In the quiet of the night,
I breathe in the wonder of it all
I ponder impermanence
Thousands of stars dance above me
I feel him.

Various Poems

Karen Terry

Poetry At The Backyard



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Tahoe Poetry Collective

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