

Resilience Circles Poetry

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Albany, Ca.

February, 2012

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Father Earth

There's a two-million year old man no one knows.
They cut into his rivers,
peeled wide pieces of hide from his legs,
left scorch marks on his buttocks. He did not cry out.
No matter what they did, he held firm.
Now he raises his stabbed hands and whispers that we can heal him yet.
We begin the bandages, the rolls of gauze, the unguents,
the gut, the needle, the grafts.

We slowly,
carefully, turn his body face up,
and under him,
his lifelong lover, the old woman,
is perfect and unmarked.
He has lain upon his two-million year old woman
all this time, protecting her
with his old back, his old scarred back.
And the soil beneath her
is black with their tears.

Clarissa Pinkola Estes

Wild Geese

You do not have to be good.
You do not have to walk on your
knees
For a hundred miles through the
desert, repenting.
You only have to let the soft animal
of your body
love what it loves.
Tell me about despair, yours, and I
will tell you mine.
Meanwhile the world goes on.
Meanwhile the sun and the clear
pebbles of the rain
are moving across the landscapes,
over the prairies and the deep
trees,
the mountains and the rivers.
Meanwhile the wild geese, high in
the clean blue air,
are heading home again.
Whoever you are, no matter how
lonely,
the world offers itself to your
imagination,
calls to you like the wild geese,
harsh and exciting --
over and over announcing your
place
in the family of things.

~ Mary Oliver ~

Arms Full

Gratitude means showing up on life's
doorstep,
love's threshold, dressed in a clown
suit,
rubber-nosed, gunboat shoes flapping.
Gratitude shows up with arms full of
wildflowers,
reciting McKuen or the worst of
Neruda.

To talk of gratitude is to be
the fool in a cynic's world.
Gratitude is pride's nightmare,
the admission of humility before
something
given without expectation or
attachment.

Gratitude tears open the shirt
of self importance, scatters buttons
across the polished floors of feigned
indifference,
ignores the obvious and laughs out
loud.

Even more, gratitude bears her
breasts, rips open
her ribs to show the naked heart, the
holy heart.
What if that sacred heart is not, after
all, about sacrifice?
Imagine it is about joy, barefoot and
foolhardy,
something unasked for, something
unearned.

What if the beat we hear, when we are
finally quiet is simply this:
Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

- *Rebecca del Rio*

Part Two, Sonnet XXIX

Quiet friend who has come so far,
feel how your breathing makes more
space around you.

Let this darkness be a bell tower
and you the bell.
As you ring, what batters you becomes
your strength.

Move back and forth into the change.
What is it like, such intensity of pain?

If the drink is bitter, turn yourself to wine.
In this uncontainable night,
be the mystery at the crossroads of your
senses, the meaning discovered there.

And if the world has ceased to hear you,
say to the silent Earth: I flow.
To the rushing water, speak: I am.

*Rainer Maria Rilke, Sonnets to Orpheus,
XII*

Thank You

Listen
with the night falling we are saying thank you
we are stopping on the bridge to bow from the
railings we are running out of the glass rooms
with our mouths full of food to look at the sky
and say thank you
we are standing by the water looking out in
different directions
back from a series of hospitals back from a
mugging
after funerals we are saying thank you
after the news of the dead
whether or not we knew them we are saying
thank you
in a culture up to its chin in shame living in the
stench it has chosen we are saying thank you
over telephones we are saying thank you
in doorways and in the backs of cars and in
elevators remembering wars and the police at
the back door and the beatings on stairs we are
saying thank you
in the banks that use us we are saying thank
you
with the crooks in office with the rich and
fashionable unchanged we go on saying thank
you thank you
with the animals dying around us
our lost feelings we are saying thank you
with the forests falling faster than the minutes
of our lives we are saying thank you
with the words going out like cells of a brain
with the cities growing over us like the earth
we are saying thank you faster and faster
with nobody listening we are saying thank you
we are saying thank you and waving
dark though it is

W.S. Merwin

Wild Mercy

The eyes of the future are looking
back at us and they are praying for
us to see beyond our own time.
They are kneeling with hands clasped
that we might act with restraint, that we
might leave room for the life that is
destined to come.
To protect what is wild is to protect what
is gentle.
Perhaps the wilderness we fear is the
Pause between our own heartbeats,
The silent space that says we live only
by grace.
Wilderness lives by this
Same grace.
Wild mercy is in our hands

Terry Tempest Williams

An Affirming Flame

Defenseless under the night
Our world in stupor lies;
Yet, dotted everywhere,
Ironic points of light
Flash out wherever the Just
Exchange their messages:
May I, composed like them
Of Eros and of dust,
Beleaguered by the same
Negation and despair,
Show an affirming flame.

W.H. Auden

THERE IS A POEM

There is a poem in our Gratitude
in the Ancestry that is our Future
in the Presence
that fruits our past
and our passing

There is Gratitude in our
steps that find us standing still,
while our sitting down finds us
standing up

There is a poem
in the Honoring of our Grief
in the pain from which we are
no longer polarized
in our cradle that no longer
clutches for a calm,
in a torrent where we find tenderness
for tears so salty
they stream from the sea

In the Honoring of our Grief
we give as we receive
eyeing our way to the center of
the storm
and we do not hide
and we do not seek
the Stillness of this Movement

There is a poem
in our Seeing With New Eyes
where our Gaian vocabulary
loves composite words
Looking touching
Smelling hearing tasting
exists as a synesthetic prefix
to inhalexhale and a verb
for Living

There is poem in our infinite
dictionary that breathes
a poetry of symbiotic survival

There is poem in our Going Forth
in our groundedness that
dances in our soaring
that roots us
in our knitting that
re-weaves the web

There is a poem in all of us
in our Work that Reconnects

Bronwyn Preece

hymn to the sacred body of the universe

Let's meet at the confluence
where you flow into me
and one breath
swirls between our lungs

let's meet at the confluence
where you flow into me
and one breath
swirls between our lungs
for one instant
to dwell in the presence of the galaxies
for one instant
to live in the truth of the heart
the poet says this entire traveling
cosmos is
"the secret One slowly growing a body"

Two eagles are mating –
clasping each other's claws
and turning cartwheels in the sky
grasses are blooming
grandfathers dying
consciousness blinking on and off
all of this is happening at once
all of this, vibrating into existence
out of nothingness
every particle
foaming into existence
transcribing the ineffable
arising and passing away
arising and passing away
23 trillion times per second –
when Buddha saw *that*
he smiled

16 million tons of rain are falling every
second on the planet
an ocean perpetually falling
and every drop is your body
every motion, every feather, every
thought is your body
time is your body
and the infinite
curled inside like

invisible rainbows folded into light
every word of every tongue is love

telling a story to her own ears
let our lives be incense
burning
like hymns to the sacred
body of the universe

my religion is rain
my religion is stone
my religion reveals itself to me in
sweaty epiphanies
every leaf, every river,
every animal, your body

every creature trapped in the gears
of corporate nightmares
every species made extinct
was once your body

10 million people are dreaming
that they're flying
junipers and violets are blossoming
stars exploding and being born
God is having déjà vu
I am one
Elaborate crush
we cry petals as the void
is singing

you are the dark
that holds the stars
in intimate distance
that spun the whirling
whirling, world
into existence

let's meet
at the confluence
where you flow into me
and one breath
swirls between our lungs

Drew Dellinger

Tilicho Lake

David Whyte

In this high place
it is as simple as this,
leave everything you know behind.

Step toward the cold surface,
say the old prayer of rough love
and open both arms.

Those who come with empty hands
will stare into the lake astonished,
there, in the cold light
reflecting pure snow,

the true shape of your own face.

God speaks to each of us as he makes
us,
then walks with us silently out of the
night.

These are the words we dimly hear:

You, sent out beyond your recall,
Go to the limits of your longing.
Embody me.

Flare up like flame
And make big shadows I can move in.

Let everything happen to you:
beauty and terror.
Just keep going.
No feeling is final.
Don't let yourself lose me.

Nearby is the country they call life.
You will know it by its seriousness.

Give me your hand.

Rainer Maria Rilke

Riotous Meadow People

Tom Atlee

We're a meadow, not a highway,
a process, not a plan.
The space we make helps people take
their futures in their hands
to sow the world with selves and dreams
to blossom once again.

It's not a single dream we sow,
nor even garden rows—
the meadow reaches everywhere
and riotously grows,
a passionate diversity
no one designer chose.

Our meadow happens naturally,
it fills a space left bare.
Yet still we must protect it,
admire it and care
enough about tomorrow
to have a meadow there.

I think I could turn and live with animals,
they are so placid and
self-contain'd,
I stand and look at them long and long.

They do not sweat and whine about their
condition,
They do not lie awake in the dark and
weep for their sins,
They do not make me sick discussing their
duty to God,
Not one is dissatisfied, not one is
demented with the mania of owning
things,
Not one kneels to another, nor to his kind
that lived thousands of years ago,
Not one is respectable or unhappy over
the whole earth.

~ Walt Whitman ~(*Song of Myself*, #32)

It Is I Who Must Begin

It is I who must begin.
Once I begin, once I try --
 here and now,
 right where I am,
 not excusing myself
 by saying things
 would be easier elsewhere,
without grand speeches and
 ostentatious gestures,
but all the more persistently
 -- to live in harmony
with the "voice of Being," as I
understand it within myself
 -- as soon as I begin that,
 I suddenly discover,
 to my surprise, that
I am neither the only one,
 nor the first,
nor the most important one
 to have set out
 upon that road.

Whether all is really lost
or not depends entirely on
whether or not I am lost.

~ Vaclav Havel ~

When the Shoe Fits

Ch'ui the draftsman
Could draw more perfect circles freehand
 Than with a compass.

His fingers brought forth
Spontaneous forms from nowhere.
 His mind
Was meanwhile free and without concern
 With what he was doing.

No application was needed
His mind was perfectly simple
 And knew no obstacle.

So, when the shoe fits
The foot is forgotten,
 When the belt fits
The belly is forgotten,
 When the heart is right
"For" and "against" are forgotten.

No drives no compulsions,
No needs, no attractions:
 Then your affairs
 Are under control.
You are a free man.

Easy is right. Begin right
 And you are easy.
Continue easy and you are right.
 The right way to go easy
 Is to forget the right way
And forget that the going is easy.

~ Chuang Tzu ~

(*In the Dark Before Dawn*, trans.
Thomas Merton)

INVITATION

Oh do you have time
to linger
for just a little while
out of your busy

and very important day
for the goldfinches
that have gathered
in a field of thistles

for a musical battle,
to see who can sing
the highest note,
or the lowest,

or the most expressive of mirth,
or the most tender?
Their strong, blunt beaks
drink the air

as they strive
melodiously
not for your sake
and not for mine

and not for the sake of winning

but for sheer delight and gratitude—
believe us, they say,
it is a serious thing

just to be alive
on this fresh morning
in the broken world.
I beg of you,

do not walk by
without pausing
to attend to this
rather ridiculous performance.

It could mean something.
It could mean everything.
It could be what Rilke meant, when he
wrote:
You must change your life.

- MARY OLIVER -

there is a brokenness

There is a brokenness
out of which comes the unbroken,
a shatteredness out of which
blooms the unshatterable.

There is a sorrow beyond all grief
which leads to joy and a fragility
out of whose depths emerges
strength.

There is a hollow space
too vast for words
through which we pass
with each loss,

out of whose darkness
we are sanctioned into being.
There is a cry deeper than all
sound

whose serrated edges cut the
heart
as we break open to the place
inside which is unbreakable and
whole,
while learning to sing.
—Rashani

The Summer Day

Who made the world?
Who made the swan, and the
black bear?
Who made the grasshopper?
This grasshopper, I mean—
the one who has flung herself out
of the grass,
the one who is eating sugar out of
my hand,
who is moving her jaws back and
forth instead of up and down—
who is gazing around with her
enormous and complicated eyes.
Now she lifts her pale forearms
and thoroughly washes her face.
Now she snaps her wings open,
and floats away.
I don't know exactly what a prayer
is.
I do know how to pay attention,
how to fall down
into the grass, how to kneel down
in the grass,
how to be idle and blessed, how
to stroll through the fields,
which is what I have been doing
all day.
Tell me, what else should I have
done?
Doesn't everything die at last, and
too soon?
Tell me, what is it you plan to do
with your one wild and precious
life?

—Mary Oliver

When I Was the stream

When I was the stream, when I was
the forest,
when I was still the field, when I was
every hoof, foot, fin, and wing, when
I was the sky itself;

No one ever asked me did I have a
purpose,
no one ever wondered was there
anything I might need . . .
for there was nothing I could not
love.

It was when I left all we once were
that the agony began,
that the fear and questions came
and I wept. I wept.
And tears I had never known before.

So I returned to the river. I returned
to the mountains.
I asked for their hand in marriage
again. I begged--I begged
to wed every object and creature.
And when they accepted,
God was ever present in my arms.

Meister Eckhart (1260-1328)

Connections

Connections are made slowly,
sometimes they grow underground.
You cannot always tell by looking at
what is happening
More than half a tree is spread out in
the soil under your feet.
Penetrate quietly as the earthworm
that blows no trumpet.
Fight persistently as the creeper that
brings down the tree.
Spread like the squash plant that
overruns the garden
Gnaw in the dark, and use the sun to
make sugar.
Weave real connections, create real
nodes, build real houses.
Live a life you can endure: make life
that is loving.
Keep tangling and interweaving and
taking more in, a thicket and bramble
wilderness to the outside but to us it
is interconnected with rabbit runs
and burrows and lairs.
This is how we are going to live for a
long time: not always.
For every gardener knows that after
the digging, after the planting, after
the long season of tending and
growth, the harvest comes.

Marge Piercy

A Portrait of America in Trash,

Jose Padua

I give to you a portrait of America in trash.

I give it to you with love and respect, America:

mountains of beer cans crumpled,
plastic figures
with fallen action, black velvet
portraits of Elvis

with broken frames and food stains; I
give to you
all the beautiful useless objects of our
time built

up into great muddy walls of stench,
solemn monuments to steady
gimmicks and confidence games,

women and men with voices and no
spines. Like
hallelujahs falling on a parking lot's
wet pavement,

or tattoos of hearts on wrinkling skin,
I am moving on,
trying to find a way around these
American mountains.

High above the fruited plain I hover;
America, my
lover, I give to you my rotten paradise,
I bequeath

to you my hog's view, I toss to you
what is heaven
and disposable, a gracious state of
nothing that lifts us,

a celebration saying that everything
we know is trash.

The poor cast off plastic wrappers,
paper soaked with

grease and noisy metal as the rich cast
off the poor
like an itch; it's as easy as a blink,
witty or dry like

a fly; attracted to what dies, he makes
his way toward
the glaze of a poor man's eye. What
America makes,

America can throw away: we have the
right, right?
I step off the plane and into the
flushing river. I am

petrified. I am stone. My eyes are all
aquiver.

To Be of Use

The people I love the best
jump into work head first
without dallying in the shallows
and swim off with sure strokes almost
out of sight.

They seem to become natives of that
element, the black sleek heads of seals
bouncing like half-submerged balls.
I love people who harness themselves,
an ox to a heavy cart,
who pull like water buffalo, with
massive patience,
who strain in the mud and the muck to
move things forward, who do what
has to be done, again and again.

I want to be with people who
submerge in the task, who go into the
fields to harvest and work in a row
and pass the bags along,
who are not parlor generals and field
deserters but move in a common
rhythm when the food must come in
or the fire be put out.

The work of the world is common as
mud. Botched, it smears the hands,
crumbles to dust.
But the thing worth doing well done
has a shape that satisfies, clean and
evident.
Greek amphoras for wine or oil,
Hopi vases that held corn, are put in
museums, but you know they were
made to be used.
The pitcher cries for water to carry
and a person for work that is real.

Marge Piercy

All I Cannot Save

Adrienne Rich

My heart is moved by all I cannot save
So much has been destroyed
I have to cast my lot with those, who,
age after age,
Perversely, with no extraordinary
Power, reconstitute the world.

On Waking

I give thanks for arriving
Safely in a new dawn,
For the gift of eyes
To see the world,
The gift of mind
To feel at home
In my life.
The waves of possibility
Breaking on the shore of dawn,
The harvest of the past
That awaits my hunger,
And all the furtherings
This new day will bring.

John O'Donohue

Lost

David Wagoner

Stand still.
The trees ahead and bushes beside you
Are not lost. Wherever you are is
called Here,
And you must treat it as
a powerful stranger,
Must ask permission
to know it and be known.
The forest breathes. Listen. It answers,
I have made this place around you,
If you leave it you may come back
again, saying Here.
No two trees are the same to Raven.
No two branches are the same to Wren.
If what a tree or a bush does
is lost on you,
You are surely lost. Stand still.
The forest knows
Where you are.
You must let it find you.

The Larger Circle

Wendell Berry

We clasp the hands of those that go
before us,
And the hands of those who come after
us.
We enter the little circle of each other's
arms
And the larger circle of lovers,
Whose hands are joined in a dance
And the larger circle of all creatures
Passing in and out of life
Who move also in a dance
To a music so subtle and vast that
no ear hears it
Except in fragments.