

TALKING TO GRIEF : A POETRY ENCOUNTER

Mary Ellen Lough, Haden, December 2024

"that your world is in pain is no reason to turn your back on it."

~ ~ *Joanna Macy*

You are not alone,
the poem said
in the dark tunnel.
- Louise Gluck

The potflower on the windowsill says to me
In words that are green-edged red leaves :
Flower flower flower flower
Today for the sake of all the dead Burst into flower.
- Muriel Ruckeyser

The grieving have only the unknown.
It's their only staple and inheritance.
Pain has no logic. All things redeem
the grieving except your rational questions.
- *From You Can Be the Last Leaf by Maya Abu Al-Hayyat and Fady Joudah.*

There lay all my love of life: a silent passion for what would perhaps escape me, a bitterness
beneath a flame. Each day I would leave this cloister like a man lifted from himself, inscribed for
a brief moment in the continuance of the world... There is no love of life without despair of life.
- Albert Camus

A life truly lived constantly burns away veils of illusion, burns away what is no longer relevant,
gradually reveals our essence, until, at last, we are strong enough to stand in our naked truth.
- Marion Woodman

What... is the difference between destiny and fate? We are all fated to die. Destiny is
recognizing the radiance of the soul that, even when faced with human impossibility, loves all of
life. Fate is the death we owe to Nature. Destiny is the life we owe to soul.
- Marion Woodman, *Bone: Dying Into Life*

You must realize
that something is happening to you, that life has
not forgotten you, that it holds you in its hand
and will not let you fall.

- Rainer Maria Rilke

Here's my creed, (in response to Benjamin Franklin's) This is what I believe:

"That I am I."

"That my soul is a dark forest."

"That my known self will never be more than a little clearing in the forest."

"That gods, strange gods, come forth from the forest into the clearing of my known self, and then go back."

"That I must have the courage to let them come and go."

"That I will never let mankind put anything over me, but that I will try always to recognize and submit to the gods in me and the gods in other men and women."

There is my creed.

- D.H. Lawrence

When we win it's with small things,
and the triumph itself makes us small.
What is extraordinary and eternal
does not want to be bent by us....
This is how he grows: by being defeated, decisively,
by constantly greater beings.

- Rainer Maria Rilke

It seems to me, that if we love, we grieve. That's the deal. That's the pact. Grief and love are forever intertwined. Grief is the terrible reminder of the depths of our love and, like love, grief is non-negotiable. There is a vastness to grief that overwhelms our minuscule selves. We are tiny, trembling clusters of atoms subsumed within grief's awesome presence. It occupies the core of our being and extends through our fingers to the limits of the universe. Within that whirling gyre all manner of madnesses exist; ghosts and spirits and dream visitations, and everything else that we, in our anguish, will into existence. These are precious gifts that are as valid and as real as we need them to be. They are the spirit guides that lead us out of the darkness.

- Nick Cave

The Crossed-Out Swastika

- Cyrus Cassells

something flew between the throats
of the grieving,

heart-gutted mothers,
and a great beauty arose:

In the dream, Isa recalled,
the singing of the harrowed women

with war-taken sons
hushed the world's barrenness.

In the dream, the startling river of sound
altered the embattled earth.

Adrift

- Mark Nepo

Everything is beautiful and I am so sad.

This is how the heart makes a duet of wonder and grief.

The light spraying through the lace of the fern is as delicate as the fibers of memory forming
their web around the knot in my throat.

The breeze makes the birds move from branch to branch as this ache makes me look for those
I've lost in the next room, in the next song, in the laugh of the next stranger.

In the very center, under it all, what we have that no one can take away and all that we've lost
face each other.

It is there that I'm adrift, feeling punctured by a Holiness that exists inside everything. I am so
sad and everything is beautiful.

Greensickness

- Laurel Chen (*after Gwendolyn Brooks*)

My wild grief didn't know where to end.
Everywhere I looked: a field alive and unburied.
Whole swaths of green swallowed the light.
All around me, the field was growing. I grew out
My hair in every direction. Let the sun freckle my face.
Even in the greenest depths, I crouched
Towards the light. That summer, everything grew
So alive and so alone. A world hushed in green.
Wildest grief grew inside out.

I crawled to the field's edge, bruises blooming
In every crevice of my palms.
I didn't know I'd reached a shoreline till I felt it
There: A salt wind lifted
The hair from my neck.
At the edge of every green lies an ocean.
When I saw that blue, I knew then:
This world will end.

Grief is not the only geography I know.
Every wound closes. Repair comes with sweetness,
Come spring. Every empire will fall:
I must believe this. I felt it
Somewhere in the field: my ancestors
Murmuring Go home, go home—soon, soon.
No country wants me back anymore and I'm okay.

If grief is love with nowhere to go, then
Oh, I've loved so immensely.
That summer, everything I touched
Was green. All bruises will fade
From green and blue to skin.
Let me grow through this green
And not drown in it.
Let me be lawless and beloved,
Ungovernable and unafraid.
Let me be brave enough to live here.
Let me be precise in my actions.
Let me feel hurt.
I know I can heal.
Let me try again—again and again.

Talking to Grief

- Denise Levertov

Ah, Grief, I should not treat you
like a homeless dog
who comes to the back door
for a crust, for a meatless bone.
I should trust you.

I should coax you
into the house and give you
your own corner,
a worn mat to lie on,
your own water dish.

You think I don't know you've been living
under my porch.
You long for your real place to be readied
before winter comes. You need
your name,
your collar and tag. You need
the right to warn off intruders,
to consider
my house your own
and me your person
and yourself
my own dog.

From : The Diver's Clothes Lying Empty

Rumi (trans. Coleman Barks)

In the ocean are many bright strands
and many dark strands like veins that are seen
when a wing is lifted up.
Your hidden self is blood in those,
those veins that are lute strings
that make ocean music,
not the sad edge of surf
but the sound of no shore.