

THE LANGUAGE OF YOUR LIFE

This poetry workshop was developed in collaboration with Wychwood Open Door community members in Fall 2024.

In the first three weeks, we wrote individually, aloud, and collectively. The structure that emerged from these experiments was the following: In the first half of the session, the group discussed that week's theme-word, then wrote individually. In the second half, everyone shared their work, lines from which EJ brought together into a collective poem written on a big sheet of paper. The group then transformed the collective poem based on the poem EJ had brought in that week – e.g. changing “I” to “we,” or changing every noun to say “love.” The group then read the collective poem aloud together at the beginning of the next session.

Because this workshop was a drop-in, it was important that it function both as a one-off as well as a possibility for momentum. We modified activities to include members for whom English was not their first language, or for whom reading and writing was more difficult, such as word search games and poems written “aloud” to forego the shame or worry of misspelling. This work will culminate in a printed zine and collaborative performance.

The title of the workshop comes from the poet June Jordan, who writes, "Poetry is not a shopping list, a casual disquisition on the colors of the sky, a soporific daydream, or bumpersticker sloganeering. Poetry is a political action undertaken for the sake of information, the faith, the exorcism and the lyrical invention, that telling the truth makes possible. **Poetry means taking control of the language of your life.** Good poems can interdict a suicide, rescue a love affair and build a revolution in which speaking and listening to somebody becomes the first and last purpose to every social encounter."

September

Week 1 - Intro + Poetry is Not a Luxury Audre Lorde

Prompt: Write a letter to yourself

Week 2 - Sound + Aracelis Girmay

Prompt: Writing poems aloud

Week 3 - Momentum + Ross Gay

Prompt: Write into your flow. First collective poem

Week 4 - Repetition + Terrance Hayes + Billy-Ray Belcourt

Prompt: Start every word with the same sentence + Collective Poem

October

Week 5 - Renewal (Rosh Hashanah Oct 2) + Natalie Diaz

Prompt: What is a window? + Collective Poem

Week 6 - Truth - Zaina Alsous

Prompt: What would you say, if you said the truth?

Week 7 - Solidarity - aja monet & Mohammed El-Kurd

Prompt: Write a letter to someone you don't know. How can you love them?

Week 8 - Love - bell hooks & Pablo Neruda

Prompt: Write a letter to someone you love very much. How do you love them through action?

Week 9 - Fear (Halloween Oct 31) - two poems by Gwendolyn Brooks

Prompt: What is the opposite of fear?

November

Week 10 - Forgiveness - Mary Oliver

Prompt: When do you feel forgiveness?

Week 11 - "Rehearse"

Week 12 - "Rehearse"

Week 13 - "Rehearse"

Performance Week of December 1

Poetry is not a Luxury (1985)

by Audre Lorde

Audre Lorde (1934 – 1992) was an American writer, professor, philosopher, intersectional feminist, poet and civil rights activist. A self-described "Black, lesbian, feminist, socialist, mother, warrior, poet," she dedicated her life and talents to confronting different forms of injustice, as she believed there could be "no hierarchy of oppressions" among "those who share the goals of liberation and a workable future for our children."

The quality of light by which we scrutinize our lives has direct bearing upon the product which we live, and upon the changes which we hope to bring about through those lives. It is within this light that we form those ideas by which we pursue our magic and make it realized. This is poetry as illumination, for it is through poetry that we give name to those ideas which are, until the poem, nameless and formless-about to be birthed, but already felt. That distillation of experience from which true poetry springs births thought as dream births concept, as feeling births idea, as knowledge births (precedes) understanding.

As we learn to bear the intimacy of scrutiny, and to flourish within it, as we learn to use the products of that scrutiny for power within our living, those fears which rule our lives and form our silences begin to lose their control over us.

For each of us as women, there is a dark place within where hidden and growing our true spirit rises, "Beautiful and tough as chestnut/stanchions against our nightmare of weakness" and of impotence.

These places of possibility within ourselves are dark because they are ancient and hidden; they have survived and grown strong through darkness. Within these deep places, each one of us holds an incredible reserve of creativity and power, of unexamined and unrecorded emotion and feeling. The woman's place of power within each of us is neither white nor surface; it is dark, it is ancient, and it is deep.

When we view living, in the european mode, only as a problem to be solved, we then rely solely upon our ideas to make us free, for these were what the white fathers told us were precious.

But as we become more in touch with our own ancient, black, non-european view of living as a situation to be experienced and interacted with, we learn more and more to cherish our feelings, and to respect those hidden sources of our power from where true knowledge and therefore lasting action comes.

At this point in time, I believe that women carry within ourselves the possibility for fusion of these two approaches as keystone for survival, and we come closest to this combination in our poetry. I speak here of poetry as the revelation or distillation of experience, not the sterile word play that, too often, the white fathers distorted the word poetry to mean – in order to cover their desperate wish for imagination without insight.

For women, then, poetry is not a luxury. It is a vital necessity of our existence. It forms the quality of the light within which we predicate our hopes and dreams toward survival and change, first made into language, then into idea, then into more tangible action.

Poetry is the way we help give name to the nameless so it can be thought. The farthest external horizons of our hopes and fears are cobbled by our poems, carved from the rock experiences of our daily lives.

As they become known and accepted to ourselves, our feelings, and the honest exploration of them, become sanctuaries and fortresses and spawning grounds for the most radical and daring of ideas, the house of difference so necessary to change and the conceptualization of any meaningful action. Right now, I could name at least ten ideas I would have once found intolerable or incomprehensible and frightening, except as they came after dreams and poems. This is not idle fantasy, but the true meaning of "it feels right to me." We can train ourselves to respect our feelings, and to discipline (transpose) them into a language that matches those feelings so they can be shared. And where that language does not yet exist, it is our poetry which helps to fashion it. Poetry is not only dream or vision, it is the skeleton architecture of our lives.

Possibility is neither forever nor instant. It is also not easy to sustain belief in its efficacy. We can sometimes work long and hard to establish one beachhead of real resistance to the deaths we are expected to live, only to have that beachhead assaulted or threatened by canards we have been socialized to fear, or by the withdrawal of those approvals that we have been warned to seek for safety. We see ourselves diminished or softened by the falsely benign accusations of childishness, of non-universality, of self-centeredness, of sensuality. And who asks the question: am I altering your aura, your ideas, your dreams, or am I merely moving you to temporary and reactive action? (Even the latter is no mean task, but one that must be rather seen within the context of a true alteration of the texture of our lives.)

The white fathers told us, I think therefore I am; and the black mothers in each of us-the poetwhispers in our dreams, I feel therefore I can be free. Poetry coins the language to express and charter this revolutionary awareness and demand, the implementation of that freedom. However, experience has taught us that the action in the now is also always necessary. Our children cannot dream unless they live, they cannot live unless they are nourished, and who else will feed them the real food without which their dreams will be no different from ours?

Sometimes we drug ourselves with dreams of new ideas. The head will save us. The brain alone will set us free. But there are no new ideas still waiting in the wings to save us as women, as human. There are only old and forgotten ones, new combinations, extrapolations and recognitions from within ourselves, along with the renewed courage to try them out. And we must constantly encourage ourselves and each other to attempt the heretical actions our dreams imply and some of our old ideas disparage. In the forefront of our move toward change, there is only our poetry to hint at possibility made real. Our poems formulate the implications of ourselves, what we feel within and dare make real (or bring action into accordance with), our fears, our hopes, our most cherished terrors.

For within structures defined by profit, by linear power, by institutional dehumanization, our feelings were not meant to survive. Kept around as unavoidable adjuncts or pleasant pastimes, feelings were meant to kneel to thought as we were meant to kneel to men. But women have survived. As poets. And there are no new pains. We have felt them all already. We have hidden that fact in the same place where we have hidden our power. They lie in our dreams, and it is our dreams that point the way to freedom. They are made realizable through our poems that give us the strength and courage to see, to feel, to speak, and to dare.

If what we need to dream, to move our spirits most deeply and directly toward and through promise, is a luxury, then we have given up the core-the fountain-of our power, our womanness; we have give up the future of our worlds.

For there are no new ideas. There are only new ways of making them felt, of examining what our ideas really mean (feel like) on Sunday morning at 7 AM, after brunch, during wild love, making war, giving birth; while we suffer the old longings, battle the old warnings and fears of being silent and impotent and alone, while tasting our new possibilities and strengths.

FOR ESTEFANI LORA, THIRD GRADE, WHO MADE ME A CARD (2012)

by Aracelis Girmay

This week, the creative writing drop-in talked and played with sound. Try reading this poem out loud. Notice the way Girmay uses sound to make meaning strange, and to return to meaning again.

*

Elephant on an orange line, underneath a yellow circle
meaning sun.

6 green, vertical lines, with color all from the top
meaning flowers.

*

The first time I peel back the 5 squares of Scotch tape,
unfold the crooked-crease fold of art class paper,
I am in my living room.

It is June.

Inside of the card, there is one long word, & then
Estefani's name:

Loisfoeribari

Estefani Lora

*

Loisfoeribari?

*

Loisfoeribari: The scientific, Latinate way of saying hibiscus.

*

Loisforeribari: A direction, as in: Are you going North? South? East? West? Loisfoeribari?

* I try, over & over, to read the word out loud Loisfoeribari. LoISFOeribari.

LoiSFOEribari. LoisFOERibARI.

*

What is this word?

I imagine using it in sentences like,
"Man, I have to go back to the house,
I forgot my Loisfoeribari."

or

"There's nothing better than rain, hot rain,
open windows with music, & a tall glass
of Loisfoeribari."

or

"How are we getting to Pittsburgh?

Should we drive or take the Loisfoeribari?"

*

I have lived 4 minutes with this word not knowing
what it means.

*

It is the end of the year. I consider writing my student,
Estefani Lora, a letter that goes:

To The BRILLIANT Estefani Lora!

Hola, querida, I hope that you are well. I've just opened the
card that you made me, and it is beautiful. I really love the way
you filled the sky with birds. I believe that you are chula,
chulita, and super fly! Yes, the card is beautiful. I only have one
question for you. What does the word 'Loisfoeribari' mean?

*

I try the word again.

Loisfoeribari.

Loisfoeribari.

Loisfoeribari.

*

I try the word in Spanish.

Loisfoeribari

Lo-ees-fo-eh-dee-bah-dee

Lo-ees-fo-eh-dee-bah-dee

& then, slowly,

Lo is fo e ri bari

Lo is fo eribari

*

love is for everybody

love is for every every body love

love love everybody love

everybody love love

is love everybody

everybody is love

love love for love

for everybody

for love is everybody

love is forevery

love is forevery body

love love love for body

love body body is love

love is body every body is love
is every love
for every love is love
for love everybody love love
love love for everybody
loveisforeverybody

This week, the creative writing drop-in played with the flows and stops of collective Momentum.

Ross Gay's poetry is a beautiful example of this kind of flow. As you read, let yourself follow his thoughts as they morph, mourn, and find themselves.

Content warning: Death, Anti-Black violence. The N-word appears in this poem.

(Would you rather listen to the sound of this poem's momentum? Here is a link to Ross Gay reading it himself <https://soundcloud.com/inreview/ross-gay-spoon>)

SPOON

by Ross Gay



for Don Belton

Who sits like this on the kitchen floor
at two in the morning turning over and over

the small silent body in his hands
with his eyes closed fingering the ornate

tendril of ivy cast delicately into the spoon
that came home with me eight months ago

from a potluck next door during which
the birthday boy so lush on smoke

ad drink and cake made like a baby
and slept on the floor with his thumb

in his mouth until he stumbled through my garden
to my house the next morning where I was frying up

stove top sweet potato biscuits, and making
himself at home as was his way,

after sampling one of my bricks
told me I could add some baking powder

to his and could I put on some coffee
and turn up the Nina Simone and rub, maybe,

his feet, which I did, the baking powder,
stirring it in, and I like to think,

unlikely though it is, those were the finest
biscuits Don every ate, for there was organic coconut oil

and syrup bought from a hollering man
at the market who wears a rainbow cap

and dances to disguise his sorrow,
and it might be a ridiculous wish,

but the sweet potatoes came from a colony
just beyond my back door, smothering

with their vines the grass and doing their part
to make my yard look ragged and wild

to untrained eyes, the kale and chard so rampant
some stalks unbeknownst dropped into the straw mulch

and the cherry tomatoes shone like ornaments
on a drunken Christmas tree and the blackberry vines

gnawed through their rusty half-ass trellis,
this in Indiana where I am *really* not from, where,

for years, Negroes weren't even allowed entry,
and where the rest stop graffiti might confirm

the endurance of such sentiments, and when
I worried about this to Don on a cool September evening,

worried it might look
Don in his kindness abundant and floral, knowing my anxiety

before I state it, having been around,
having gone antiquing in Martinsville a few weeks back

and been addressed most unkindly by a passing truck
or two, trucks likely adorned with the stars and bars,

knowing the typhoons race makes our minds do,
twirling with one hand a dreadlock and patting my back with the other

asked, smiling sadly and knowingly, *niggerish?*
before saying, *it looks beautiful*, and returning to some rumination

on the garden boy of his dreams,
whose shorts were very short, and stomach taut

and oily enough to see his reflection in.
Don told me this as we walked arm in arm

through our small neighborhood,
which he asked me if he could do,

is this ok, he asked, knowing mostly

how dense and sharp the dumb fear
of mostly straight boys can be—oh Don—
walking arm in arm, shoulder to shoulder,
his hand almost patting my forearm, resting there,
down the small alley next to the graveyard,
fall beginning to shudder into the leaves,
and Don once dreamed he was in that graveyard
next to his house on 4th, where in real life
we sang Diana Ross's "Missing You" while decorating
his kitchen, where I once asked to borrow
a signed Jamaica Kincaid novel at which
Don made one sound by sucking his teeth that indicated
I was both impossibly stupid and a little bit cute
and in the dream in the graveyard
where century-old oak trees look giants trudging
into a stiff wind, and some gravestones are old
enough to be illegible and lean back as though
consulting the sun, Don was floating
into the air which, pleasant at first,
became terrifying, he told me, beginning to cry,
just a little, as the world beneath him
grew smaller and smaller, his house
became a toy, the trees' huge limbs like the arms
now of small people, calling him down,
but he couldn't stop going higher, he said, crying,
just a little, and I have inserted myself
two or three times into the dream, imagining a rope
cinched to his waist by which Don might be tethered
to this world, snatching it as it whips uncoiling
through the grass at my feet, and gripping it
with all my strength until it almost hauls me up
and takes the skin of my palms with it, twisting slowly into the sky
at which I become like the trees here on earth shouting
Come back, come back
running some blocks looking into the sky,
first down 4th, but as the wind sends him this way and that
I too veer through backyards, hopping a fence or two,

not wanting to take my eyes from him,
not wanting to lose him, as he sails

in and out of the low clouds, looking down
with his sad eyes, just as he did

when he said at breakfast *I'm a survivor, I survived,*
this 53-year old gay black man,

to which we did a little dance
listing the myriad bullets he'd dodged,

swirling the biscuits in their oily syrup,
Don occasionally poking his fork into the air for emphasis,

laughing and sipping coffee and
shaking our heads like we couldn't believe it,

and having survived Don wanted a child to love,
and we made plans that I might make the baby

with my sweetie and he could be the real dad, reading
and cooking and worrying, while I played in the garden

and my sweetheart made the dough,
which maybe would have worked,

though Don never once cleaned a dish, and when I told him
to put his goddamned plate in the sink, he writhed

in his seat and called me bitch before plopping it in,
returning to his Destiny's Child tune about survival,

while he scooped and slurped the remaining batter
with this spoon in my hands, into which I stare, seeing none of this.

I swore when I got into this poem I would convert
this sorrow into some kind of homey with the little musics

I can sometimes make with these scribbled artifacts
of our desolation. I can't even make a metaphor

of my refection upside down and barely visible
in the spoon. I wish one single thing made sense.

To which I say: *Oh get over yourself.*
That's not the point.

After Don was murdered I dreamt of him,
hugging him and saying *you have to go now.*

fixing his scarf and pulling his wool overcoat snug,
weeping and tugging down his furry Russian cap

to protect his ears, kissing his eyes and cheeks

again and again, *you have to go*,
cinching his coat tight by the lapels,
for which Don peered at me again with those sad eyes,
or through me, or *into* me,
the way my dead do sometimes,
looking straight into their homes,
which hopefully have flowers
in a vase on a big wooden table,
and a comfortable chair or tow,
and huge windows through which light
pours to wash clean and make a touch less awful
what forever otherwise will hurt.

AMERICAN SONNET FOR THE NEW YEAR (2019)

by Terrance Hayes

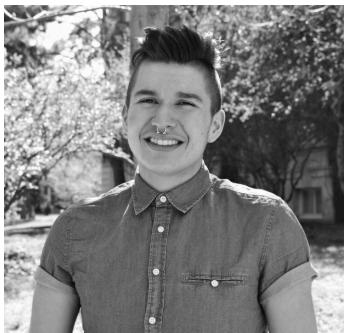


This week, the creative writing drop-in talked about repetition and grief. How does grief repeat? What words return?

Things got terribly ugly incredibly quickly
Things got ugly embarrassingly quickly
actually Things got ugly unbelievably quickly
honestly Things got ugly seemingly infrequently
initially Things got ugly ironically usually
awfully carefully Things got ugly unsuccessfully
occasionally Things got ugly mostly painstakingly
quietly seemingly Things got ugly beautifully
infrequently Things got ugly sadly especially
frequently unfortunately Things got ugly
increasingly obviously Things got ugly suddenly
embarrassingly forcefully Things got really ugly
regularly truly quickly Things got really incredibly
ugly Things will get less ugly inevitably hopefully

GRIEF AFTER GRIEF AFTER GRIEF AFTER GRIEF (2018)

by Billy-Ray Belcourt



This week, the creative writing drop-in talked about repetition and grief. How does grief repeat? What words return?

1. my body is a stray bullet. i was made from crossfire. love was her last resort. his mouth, a revolver.
I come from four hundred no man's lands.
2. "smell my armpit again/ i miss it when you do that."
3. his moaning is an honour song i want to world to.
4. one of the conditions of native life today is survivor's guilt.
5. it is july 2016 and the creator opens up the sky to attend a #blacklivesmatter protest. there, she bumps into *weesageechak* and warns him that if policemen don't stop killing black men she will flood america and it will become a lost country only grieving mothers will know how to find. this, she says, is how the world will end and be rebuilt this time.
6. haunting is a gender. gender is another word for horror story.
7. "i can hear him screaming for me, and i can hear him saying, 'stop, honey help me.'"
8. i am trying to figure out how to be in the world without wanting it. this, perhaps, is what it means to be native.

2: from *Lilting* (2014, dir. Hong Khaou).

7: see :h <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/Calgary/rcmp-gleichen-christian-duck-chief-excessive-force-1.3521620>

MY BROTHER MY WOUND (2014)

by Natalie Diaz

This week, the creative writing drop-in talked about renewal. How can something become a window?



He was calling in the bulls from the street.
They came like a dark river —
a blur of chest and hoof —
everything moving, under, splinter — hooked
their horns through the walls. Light hummed
the holes like yellow jackets. My mouth
was a nest torn empty.

Then, he was at the table.
Then, in the pig's jaws —
he was not hungry. He was stop.
He was bad apple. He was choking.

So I punched my fists against his stomach.
Mars flew out
and broke open or bloomed —
how many small red eyes shut in that husk?

He said, *Look. Look.* And they did.

He said, *Lift up your shirt.* And I did.

He slid his fork beneath my ribs —
Yes, he sang. A *Jesus side wound*.
It wouldn't stop bleeding.
He reached inside
and turned on the lamp —

I never knew I was also a lamp — until the light
fell out of me, dripped down my thigh, flew up in me,
caught in my throat like a canary.
Canaries really means dogs, he said.

He put on his shoes.
You started this with your mouth, he pointed.
Where are you going? I asked.
To ride the Ferris wheel, he answered,
and climbed inside me like a window.

THE WORKERS LOVE PALESTINE (2014)

by Zaina Alsous



This week, the creative writing drop-in talked about truth. What would you say, if you told the world the truth? What truth needs to be repeated, chanted, shared? What truth needs to be protected, like a secret power?

The week before the SUN announced hospice
my great-great-great-grandchild the harpist announced:

WORKERS OF THE WORLD
JOIN THE STRIKE FOR GUARANTEED LIGHT

The florists union in Caracas and the Algerian weavers presented joint proposals

TOWARD ILLUMINATION THAT MULTIPLIES

Bare hills, lakes of salt sutured dim ruins
shadowless
of shipping yards and empires of memories of sarin

The children's council listened in wreaths of yellow iris,
patterned leaves designating each role

Did you know that within attunement to effort
the end of monument resides?

Then the harpist, my progeny, that fate I had so long evaded—
debt I owe to demographic warfare

and names sliced open, reborn in disfigured repetition—
sang three hundred years of returning

Language is merely the placeholder
for what the LAND has always known

Species being is an observation of MOM (preface)
Absent the wet painting of a razed village (sold)

This land is land
Land is land
LAND LAND

I AM COMING
HOME

WEDNESDAY (2021)

by Mohammed El-Kurd



This week, the creative writing drop-in talked about solidarity. aja monet writes in the introduction to El-Kurd's book, "Solidarity is a series of choices we make with one another. It is not just about our shared pain or struggle but most importantly, about our shared joy, visions, and dreams. It is an energetic force and a resounding love." How could our series of love-choices transform this poem's rain?

A man wailing is not a dancing bear.

—Aimé Césaire

There's death in the eyes of this newborn.

I heard the baby complain about a treacherous defeat,
called it *the same old catastrophe*.

A storm in his ear says it's raging for silence.

Thunder erupts when he's shushed.

What a worsened scenario. He skipped ahead.

What do you do when your destiny is predetermined?

Life in this hospital laughs at us.

Long is the wait. Wild is the wind.

I ask if there's a wedding going on.

The nurse complained of the clouds.

If I were a stupid flower, I'd wither under the rain.

They asked her, *What's wrong with the flower?*
not *What's wrong with the rain?*

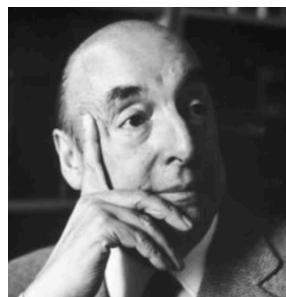
"To begin by always thinking of love as an action rather than a feeling is one way in which anyone using the word in this manner automatically assumes accountability and responsibility. We are often taught we have no control over our "feelings." Yet most of us accept that we choose our actions, that intention and will inform what we do. We also accept that our actions have consequences. To think of actions shaping feelings is one way we rid ourselves of conventionally accepted assumptions such as that parents love their children, or that one simply 'falls' in love without exercising will or choice, that there are such things as "crimes of passion," i.e. he killed her because he loved her so much. If we were constantly remembering that love is as love does, we would not use the word in a manner that devalues and degrades its meaning." —bell hooks



This week, the creative writing drop-in talked love. The Black feminist writer bell hooks asks us to think of “love as an action rather than a feeling.” If a love poem were an action, what would it do?

Soneto XVII (2021)

by Pablo Neruda



No te amo como si fueras rosa de sal, topacio o flecha de claveles que propagan el fuego: te amo como se aman ciertas cosas oscuras, secretamente, entre la sombra y el alma.

Te amo como la planta que no florece y lleva dentro de sí, escondida, la luz de aquellas flores, y gracias a tu amor vive oscuro en mi cuerpo el apretado aroma que ascendió de la tierra.

Te amo sin saber cómo, ni cuándo, ni de dónde, te amo directamente sin problemas ni orgullo: así te amo porque no sé amar de otra manera,

sino así de este modo en que no soy ni eres, tan cerca que tu mano sobre mi pecho es mía, tan cerca que se cierran tus ojos con mi sueño.

I don't love you as if you were a rose of salt, topaz, or arrow of carnations that propagate fire: I love you as one loves certain obscure things, secretly, between the shadow and the soul.

I love you as the plant that doesn't bloom but carries the light of those flowers, hidden, within itself, and thanks to your love the tight aroma that arose from the earth lives dimly in my body.

I love you without knowing how, or when, or from where, I love you directly without problems or pride: I love you like this because I don't know any other way to love, except in this form in which I am not nor are you, so close that your hand upon my chest is mine, so close that your eyes close with my dreams.

This week, the creative writing drop-in talked fear. The philosopher Ernst Bloch writes that fear is hope's "pendant." How can we remember hope within fear? Who reminds us?

This week, the creative writing drop-in talked fear. Who gets to be afraid? Who is not afraid? What is scary to some, but not scary at all to you? What is the opposite of fear? How does it sound? When does it happen?

Two Poems

by Gwendolyn Brooks



Life for my child is simple, and is good.

Life for my child is simple, and is good.
He knows his wish. Yes, but that is not all.
Because I know mine too.
And we both want joy of undep and unabiding things,
Like kicking over a chair or throwing blocks out of a
window
Or tipping over an ice box pan
Or snatching down curtains or fingering an electric outlet
Or a journey or a friend or an illegal kiss.
No. There is more to it than that.
It is that he has never been afraid.
Rather, he reaches out and lo the chair falls with a beautiful
crash,
And the blocks fall, down on the people's heads,
And the water comes slooshing sloppily out across the floor.
And so forth.
Not that success, for him, is sure, infallible.
But never has he been afraid to reach.
His lesions are legion.
But reaching is his rule.

To the Young Who Want to Die

Sit down. Inhale. Exhale.
The gun will wait. The lake will wait.
The tall gall in the small seductive vial
will wait will wait:
will wait a week: will wait through April.
You do not have to die this certain day.
Death will abide, will pamper your postponement.
I assure you death will wait. Death has
a lot of time. Death can
attend to you tomorrow. Or next week. Death is
just down the street; is most obliging neighbor;
can meet you any moment.
You need not die today.
Stay here--through pout or pain or peskyness.
Stay here. See what the news is going to be tomorrow.
Graves grow no green that you can use.
Remember, green's your color. You are Spring.

This week, the creative writing drop-in talked forgiveness. The feminist philosopher Julia Kristeva writes that forgiveness says, “I take you for a child. I exclude you from history for a while.” What does forgiveness say to you? When do you hear it? In the voice of someone you love? When you stand in front of the ocean?

Wild Geese

by Mary Oliver



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.