Eileen Myles
- poems -

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Eileen Myles(1949 -)

Eileen Myles is an American poet who has also worked in fiction, non-fiction, and theater. She won a 2010 Shelley Memorial Award.

<b>Early Life and Career</b>

Eileen Myles grew up and attended Catholic schools in Arlington, Massachusetts and graduated from U. Mass (Boston) in 1971.

Arriving in New York in 1974, Myles gave her first reading at CBGB and attended workshops at St. Mark’s Poetry Project, studying alongside Alice Notley, Ted Berrigan, and Bill Zavatsky. She developed as a part of the poetry and queer art scene that developed in Manhattan's East Village. She worked as assistant to poet James Schuyler; met Allen Ginsberg at the Nuyorican Poets Café.

Her first performances and theater pieces (Joan of Arc: a spiritual entertainment, Patriarchy, a play, Feeling Blue Pts. 1, 2 7 3 and Modern Art and Our Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz) at the St. Mark's Poetry Project, P.S. 122 and The WOW Café. Myles has performed her work at colleges, performance spaces, and bookstores across North America as well as in, Iceland, Ireland and Russia. She lives in New York.

Myles's works include poetry, fiction, articles, plays and libretti, including: Hell (an opera with composer Michael Webster).

<b>Professional Life</b>

In 1992 Myles conducted a female-led write-in campaign for President of the United States. In the 1980s she was Artistic Director of St. Mark's Poetry Project. In 1997 and again in 2007 Eileen toured with Sister Spit, a post-punk female performance troupe.

Myles is Professor Emerita of Writing and Literature, and taught at University of California, San Diego from 2002 to 2007. She continues to teach during summers at the Naropa Institute in Boulder, Colorado, and was the Hugo Writer at University of Montana for the spring of 2010. She contributes to several publications, recently including Parkett, aNother Magazine, the Believer, H.O.W journal and Provincetown Arts. During summer 2009 she contributed regularly to the Poetry Foundation's "Harriet" blog.
<b>Critical Reception</b>

Bust Magazine has called Myles "the rock star of modern poetry", and Holland Cotter in The New York Times described her as "a cult figure to a generation of post-punk female writer-performers." Of her poetry book Sorry, Tree, the Chicago Review wrote: "Her politics are overt, her physicality raw, yet it is the subtle gentle noticing in her poems that overwhelms."

In 2010, her novel Inferno won the Lambda Literary Award for Best Lesbian Fiction.
An American Poem

I was born in Boston in 1949. I never wanted this fact to be known, in fact I've spent the better half of my adult life trying to sweep my early years under the carpet and have a life that was clearly just mine and independent of the historic fate of my family. Can you imagine what it was like to be one of them, to be built like them, to talk like them to have the benefits of being born into such a wealthy and powerful American family. I went to the best schools, had all kinds of tutors and trainers, traveled widely, met the famous, the controversial, and the not-so-admirable and I knew from a very early age that if there were ever any possibility of escaping the collective fate of this famous Boston family I would take that route and I have. I hopped on an Amtrak to New York in the early '70s and I guess you could say my hidden years
began. I thought
Well I'll be a poet.
What could be more
foolish and obscure.
I became a lesbian.
Every woman in my
family looks like
a dyke but it's really
stepping off the flag
when you become one.
While holding this ignominious
pose I have seen and
I have learned and
I am beginning to think
there is no escaping
history. A woman I
am currently having
an affair with said
you know you look
like a Kennedy. I felt
the blood rising in my
cheeks. People have
always laughed at
my Boston accent
confusing &quot;large&quot; for
&quot;lodge&quot; &quot;party&quot;
for &quot;potty&quot; But
when this unsuspecting
woman invoked for
the first time my
family name
I knew the jig
was up. Yes, I am,
I am a Kennedy.
My attempts to remain
obscure have not served
me well. Starting as
a humble poet I
quickly climbed to the
top of my profession
assuming a position of
leadership and honor.
It is right that a woman should call me out now. Yes, I am a Kennedy. And I await your orders. You are the New Americans. The homeless are wandering the streets of our nation's greatest city. Homeless men with AIDS are among them. Is that right? That there are no homes for the homeless, that there is no free medical help for these men. And women. That they get the message—as they are dying—that this is not their home? And how are your teeth today? Can you afford to fix them? How high is your rent? If art is the highest and most honest form of communication of our times and the young artist is no longer able to move here to speak to her time...Yes, I could, but that was 15 years ago and remember—as I must I am a Kennedy. Shouldn't we all be Kennedys? This nation's greatest city is home of the businessman and home of the rich artist. People with beautiful teeth who are not on the streets. What shall we do about this dilemma? Listen, I have been educated.
I have learned about Western Civilization. Do you know what the message of Western Civilization is? I am alone. Am I alone tonight? I don't think so. Am I the only one with bleeding gums tonight. Am I the only homosexual in this room tonight. Am I the only one whose friends have died, are dying now. And my art can't be supported until it is gigantic, bigger than everyone else's, confirming the audience's feeling that they are alone. That they alone are good, deserved to buy the tickets to see this Art. Are working, are healthy, should survive, and are normal. Are you normal tonight? Everyone here, are we all normal. It is not normal for me to be a Kennedy. But I am no longer ashamed, no longer alone. I am not alone tonight because we are all Kennedys. And I am your President.

Eileen Myles
Dream

Close to the
door in
my dream the
small signs

I saw a brown
sign with wisdom
on it
I saw a brown
one leaning
with wisdom
on it

fringe of a mirror
my mother
leaning over a pond
cupping water

leaning against
the moulding
cardboard or
wood which materials do you

does your wisdom prefer

which a-
partment in a summer
with someone
I felt brave to
have touched
her love the screen
door and the dogs
and the cats always
getting out. That
was the fear
two signs
fading but recalling
they had faded like words
fade in stone because
of the rain and the days
and waking and the dream
is leaving with every
step leaning over the meat
because I do not want
you to have died in vain
kissing the turkey and
the neck of? my dog
all animals am I.
all dreams, all stone
all message am I.

Eileen Myles
Each Defeat

Please! Keep reading me Blake because you're going to make me the greatest poet of all time

Keep smoothing the stones in the driveway let me fry an egg on your ass & I'll pick up the mail.

I feel your absence in the morning & imagine your instant mouth let me move in with you— Travelling wrapping your limbs on my back I grow man woman Child I see wild wild wild

Keep letting the day be massive Unlicensed Oh please have my child I'm a little controlling Prose has some Magic. Morgan
had a whore in her lap. You Big fisherman I love my Friends.

I want to lean my everything with you make home for your hubris I want to read the words you circled over and over again A slow skunk walking across the road Yellow, just kind of pausing picked up the warm laundry. I just saw a coyote tippy tippy tippy I didn't tell you about the creature with hair long hair, it was hit by cars on the highway Again and again. It had long grey hair It must've been a dog; it could've been Ours. Everyone loses their friends.

I couldn't tell anyone about this sight. Each defeat Is sweet.

Eileen Myles
London Exchange

I have utmost respect for you but in that moment if I were to get out of your way instead of walking up the stairs to my home I would have no respect for myself.
I didn't know why you couldn't understand this when I told you. Instead you screamed at me and told me I was rude. And then you said someone of my age should know meaning that you were adding to my crime the fact that I am older than you. What am I to do. How many days have passed and I have no
reason to think
that
your ancestors
were stolen
from their
home in A-
frica
and because
of my not
knowing that this
is true
but thinking
that it
is possible
it makes
me certain
that respect
next time
would be
for me
to step around.
Maybe
I could say
quietly joining you
for a moment
in your
vast and
ancient
sorrow
that was
my home

Eileen Myles
You're like
a little fruit
you're like
a moon I want
to hold
I said lemon slope
about your
hip
because it's one
of my words
about you
I whispered
in bed
this smoothing
the fruit &
then alone
with my book
but writing
in it the pages
wagging
against my knuckles
in the
light like a
sail.

Eileen Myles
Our Happiness

was when the
lights were
out

the whole city
in darkness

& we drove north
to our friend's
yellow apt.
where she had
power & we
could work

later we stayed
in the darkened
apt. you sick
in bed & me
writing ambitiously
by candle light
in thin blue
books

your neighbor had
a generator &
after a while
we had a little
bit of light

I walked the
dog & you
were still
a little bit
sick

we sat on a stoop
one day in the
late afternoon
we had very little
money. enough for
a strong cappuccino
which we shared
sitting there &
suddenly the
city was lit.

Eileen Myles
Peanut Butter

I am always hungry
& wanting to have
sex. This is a fact.
If you get right
down to it the new
unprocessed peanut
butter is no damn
good & you should
buy it in a jar as
always in the
largest supermarket
you know. And
I am an enemy
of change, as
you know. All
the things I
embrace as new
are in
fact old things,
re-released: swimming,
the sensation of
being dirty in
body and mind
summer as a
time to do
nothing and make
no money. Prayer
as a last re-
sort. Pleasure
as a means,
and then a
means again
with no ends
in sight. I am
absolutely in opposition
to all kinds of
goals. I have
no desire to know
where this, anything
is getting me.
When the water
boils I get
a cup of tea.
Accidentally I
read all the
works of Proust.
It was summer
I was there
so was he. I
write because
I would like
to be used for
years after
my death. Not
only my body
will be compost
but the thoughts
I left during
my life. During
my life I was
a woman with
hazel eyes. Out
the window
is a crooked
silos. Parts
of your
body I think
of as stripes
which I have
learned to
love along. We
swim naked
in ponds &
I write be-
hind your
back. My thoughts
about you are
not exactly
forbidden, but
exalted because
they are useless,
not intended
to get you
because I have
you & you love
me. It's more
like a playground
where I play
with my reflection
of you until
you come back
and into the
real you I
get to sink
my teeth. With
you I know how
to relax. &
so I work
behind your
back. Which
is lovely.
Nature
is out of control
you tell me &
that's what's so
good about
it. I'm immoderately
in love with you,
knocked out by
all your new
white hair

why shouldn't
something
I have always
known be the
very best there
is. I love
you from my
childhood,
starting back
there when
one day was
just like the
rest, random
growth and
breezes, constant
love, a sand-
wich in the
middle of
day,
a tiny step
in the vastly
conventional
path of
the Sun. I
squint. I
wink. I
take the
ride.

Eileen Myles
Snakes

I was 6 and
I lost my snake.

The table shook
I can do better
than this
and shambled
to the kitchen
to the scene
of the crime

I was green
I put my sneaker
down, little shoe

I felt the cold
metal tap
my calf

moo and everything
began to change.
I am 6
turned into lightning
wrote on the night

At 6, I was feathers
scales, I fell into
the slime of it, lit

You think you are six,
it yelled. I am face
to face with a frog
a woman alone
in bed. The square
of the window
persists. I am 6.

The phone rings
It's my sister
blamm I dropped
a plate. Sorry.

Now the clouds slide
by afraid, awake
my feet are cold
but I’m fearless

I am 6.

Under here
with bottle caps
and stars
adults and low
moans, busses

slamming on brakes
I am 6

the cake is lit
it's round
the children
sing. I will never
return. We are
so small.

My husband turns
his fevered
face. I put
the medicine
down. Click.
I am 6.

The movie rolls on.
Tramping feet,
music blaring
at the end of
the war. I
am frightened
hold my hand

The round face
of the woman
upstairs, moving
the faucets, strips
of vegetable

slithering down,
her reptile child
will never
return. The telephone
rings. It's me.
I'm six.

Eileen Myles
Sympathy

She's rubbing his shoulder
and he's reading about
Western birds. There's a scoop
of light just above my knee

it resembles the world, the one I know
a layer of smoke spread thin, a shelf

my mind returns again &
again to the picture
you gave me. In pain.
I'm holding the receiver
in Denver some woman making
human eyes at me from her
blue seat, but I later
conclude she's crazy

I'm helpless, rushing back to fix the
"h," how can I help you

I think we tried this long enough
our cure
we would save us from everybody
else, we "got" it,
us

and now we're another falling down car
complaining animal
empty house

you bleeding & expanding
until

the red night itself
is your endless disappointment
in me
who promised so much
on that hill
O Glory to everybody & everything
that we will fish again & again
& get lucky

Anonymous submission.

Eileen Myles
The Honey Bear

Billie Holiday was on the radio
I was standing in the kitchen
smoking my cigarette of this
pack I plan to finish tonight
last night of smoking youth.
I made a cup of this funny
kind of tea I've had hanging
around. A little too sweet
an odd mix. My only impulse
was to make it sweeter.
Ivy Anderson was singing
pretty late tonight
in my very bright kitchen.
I'm standing by the tub
feeling a little older
nearly thirty in my very
bright kitchen tonight.
I'm not a bad looking woman
I suppose O it's very quiet
in my kitchen tonight I'm squeezing
this plastic honey bear a noodle
of honey dripping into the odd sweet
tea. It's pretty late
Honey bear's cover was loose
and somehow honey dripping down
the bear's face catching
in the crevices beneath
the bear's eyes O very sad and sweet
I'm standing in my kitchen O honey
I'm staring at the honey bear's face.

Eileen Myles
Uppity

Roads around mountains
cause we can't drive
through

That's Poetry
to Me.

Eileen Myles