

Not Me (My Hunted Poem Exercise)

This exercise is a combination of a couple of impulses I've always associated with poet Eileen Myles, whom I interviewed at the Auburn SPLAB in April 2002. It involves going out and hunting a poem. The memory of it come up in a workshop I facilitated in February 2021 and thought I might have written it up as a one-page, but alas, no, so off to the archives as no online search combination was striking poetry gold.

At the end of her 1991 Semiotexte book *Not Me* Eileen has an essay entitled "How I Wrote Certain of my Poems." (It was evocative of George Bowering's *how i wrote certain of my books* (Mansfield Press, 2001) but Eileen beat him by a score and I wouldn't put it past Big Daddy to lift something tasty from a far-away poet, but ask him, eh?)

In the Myles essay there is this wonderful passage:

The process of the poem, the performance of it I mentioned, is central to the impression I have that life is a rehearsal for the poem, or the final moment of revelation. I literally stepped out of my house that night, feeling a poem coming on. Incidentally, it hadn't started raining yet, so I wasn't alone in being ready to burst. I was universally pent up. I had done my research, pretty unconsciously, celebrating the mood I was in. Taking the ferry, watching the angels, then the explosion of rain and light made it absolutely necessary to go in the deli on 6th street and buy a notebook and pen. I went over to Yaffa and wrote it looking out the window. I haven't changed a thing... I've had this feeling before — of going out to get a poem, like hunting. The night that comes to mind is the night where I wrote the earlier poem. I felt "...erotic, oddly / magnetic..." like photographic paper. As I walked I was recording the details. I was the details. I was the poem...

For some reason I had it in my mind that Myles got it from John Ashbery, which makes sense, as they are both New York poets, but nothing in *Not Me* says that. But, looking through bankers boxes of old SPLAB stuff in my closet, about 8 feet from where I sleep every night was the gold mine of a poet's handout from a SPLAB Anne Waldman workshop, wherein it is written:

A John Ashbery Method: Create a title for a poem, then take a walk and come back and write.

Shortcut: carry a pocket journal with you, more satisfying than a cellphone, but that works in a pinch.

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