Poetic Escape

YpsiWrites Workshop for the Houdini Poetry Wall Challenge

Inclusion/Warm-up

In the chat, share the following:

- Your first name
- Your preferred pronouns
- One sentence about something *magical* you've experienced in your life
  - *"This year, the winter has been magical, disappearing and reappearing snow so suddenly."*

Me

David Boeving - they, them, theirs

MA - Creative Writing, Eastern Michigan University

LLMSW - Clinical Social Work, University of Michigan

Our Goals Today Include the Following:

- *Think about* what makes a poem <u>effective</u>
- *Explore* the work of Muriel Rukeyser
  - A few poems
  - Focus on *Houdini: A Musical*
- *Draft* own own effective Houdini-inspired poems for the YpsiWrites Houdini Poetry Challenge

This workshop is meant for all skill levels, so if something seems confusing or tough, no worries!

Ask questions as you have them by dropping them in the chat, and feel free to ask after the workshop has ended.

Disclaimer

POETRY CHALLENGE

sponsored by YpsiWrites

Call for

original poems

inspired by
Magic and upcoming readings of Muriel Rukeyser's "Houdini"

Deadline to submit: March 11th, 2022
For submission: https://tinyurl.com/poetrywall

Selected poems will be displayed on YpsiWrites.com and a portable poetry wall that will travel around Ypsilanti. For more information on the Rukeyer event and poetry challenge, see our website:

YpsiWrites

Who was Muriel Rukeyser?

Muriel Rukeyser (1913-1980) was a Jewish American writer who produced a prolific body of work: fifteen collections of poems; essays about American poetry and culture, *The Life of Poetry*; a memoir; children's literature; plays; films; translations; and biographies. Rukeyser is known for political themes; much of her writing responds to events of her time: a devastating industrial disaster in West Virginia, "Book of the Dead"; World War II and the Shoah; and racial and environmental injustices in the U.S. and abroad.

Who was Muriel Rukeyser? (continued)

Rukeyser believed poetry creates unique meeting places for readers needed during conflict. Aware of a resistance to poetry (discussed in *The Life of Poetry*), Rukeyser incorporated it into forms—film, radio plays, children's books, her musical on Houdini—that might engage audiences from differing backgrounds. She *also* insisted that artistic accessibility need not discourage complexity, which is essential for complex times.

> *Houdini* is an example of her commitment to complexity *and* accessibility. While entertaining audiences, *Houdini* encourages us to question truth, illusion, the fears that imprison us, and the desires that can set us free.

Check out http://murielrukeyser.emuenglish.org/

Welcome - The Muriel Rukeyser

Not secure | murielrukeyser.emuenglish.org

Muriel Rukeyser
A Living Archive

WELCOME ABOUT US SELECTED WRITINGS SCHOLARSHIP RUKE BLOG CONTACT PEDAGOGY

Currently accepting online submissions | Learn More

The Muriel Rukeyser Living Archive

As a "Living Archive," our website is designed to engender lively interdisciplinary conversations about this important twentieth-century poet. We include a rotating number of selected poems by Muriel Rukeyser. Published with permission of Bill Rukeyser, the poet's son, these offer a representative sample of her voluminous and variegated body of work. The Collected Poems of Muriel Rukeyser, edited by Janet Kaufman and Anne Herzog and available from the University of Pittsburgh Press, remains the most comprehensive collection of Rukeyser's poetry.

Please take a minute to acquaint yourself with the site. Also consider contributing responses–critical, pedagogical, or creative–to the website by contacting us here.

Featured News

Locks, Keys, Freedom: Houdini Makes a Comeback

Ladies and Gentlemen—step this way and take your seats. You're in for an amazing show! Coming to a theatre near you (or via Live Stream) is the legendary escape artist Harry Houdini as imagined by Muriel Rukeyser. First

Selected Work

I Make My Magic

Published in Houdini (2002)

1:32 PM
2/23/2022

Poetry is magic!

A root of the word, “poetry,” is *poiesis*…

Our word “poetry” is based in an ancient word that means, “the activity in which a person brings something into being that did not exist before.”

Poetry is magic!

Many common poetic devices make magical use of that definition:

Metaphor conjures something by saying something else.

Anaphora is like pulling many items out of the same hat.

Hyperbole makes something magically bigger than it actually is.

Personification makes inanimate things become surprisingly animate.

Apostrophe is like a séance, where someone who is not there is communicated with.

Metonymy is like the illusion where a person is split into boxes.

Poetry is magic!

Metaphor - referring to one person, place, thing or idea, by naming another that's *unrelated* to the first

Anaphora - repetition of a word/phrase at the start of two or more lines

Hyperbole - exaggeration meant for emphasis (Greek meant *a throwing beyond*)

Personification - giving human features/qualities to nonhuman things

Apostrophe - talking to someone or something that is not present (Greek meant *turn away*)

Metonymy - Using a part of a thing to refer to the whole thing

Poetry is magic! (All examples form Rukeyser's *Book of the Dead*)

Metaphor - referring to one person, place, thing or idea, by naming another that's unrelated to the first

"Post office window, a hive of private boxes"

"green rivers cut the rock"

Anaphora - repetition of a word/phrase at the start of two or more lines

"*I have gained mastery over my heart.*

I have gained mastery over my two hands.

I have gained mastery over the waters.

I have gained mastery over the rivers."

Poetry is magic! (All examples form Rukeyser's *Book of the Dead*)

Hyperbole - exaggeration meant for emphasis (Greek meant *a throwing beyond*)

"...blazed trees, pillars of God"

"vicious as this commercial field, its hill of glass."

"my face becoming glass"

Personification - giving human features to non-human things

"...the whole valley is witness."

"...see if that dust killed me."

Poetry is magic! (All examples form Rukeyser's *Book of the Dead*)

Apostrophe - talking to someone or something that is not present
(Greek meant *turn away*)

"These are the roads to take when you think of your country"

"Here is your road, tying / you to its meanings: gorge, boulder, precipice."

Metonymy - Using a part of a thing to refer to the whole thing

"The hill makes breathing slow"

"The subcommittee subcommits. / Words on a monument."

Poetry is magic!

Again, many poetic devices make magical use of poiesis.

Metaphor conjures something by saying something other than its name.

Anaphora is like pulling many items all out of the same hat.

Hyperbole makes something magically bigger than it actually is.

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See if you can spot any of those devices as we read a couple different poems by Muriel Rukeyser!

1. “The Key” - *Beast in View* (1944)

I hold a key in my hand
And it is cold, cold;
The sign of a lost house
That framed a symbolic face.
Its windows now are black,
Its walls are blank remorse,
Here is a brass key
Freezing to the touch.

Of that house I say here
Goodness came through its door,
There every name was known,
And of all its faces
Unaligned beauty gives
Me one forever
That made itself most dear
By killing the cruelest bond:
Father murder and mother fear.

What perception of that face
Nothing but loneliness
Can ever again retrace—
Conflict and isolation,
A man among copper rocks,
Human among inhuman
Formal immune and cold,
Or a wonderful young woman
In the world of the old.

I walk the world with these:
A wish for quick speech
Of heathen storm-beaten poems
In pure-lined English sound,
A key in my hand that freezes
Like memories of faces
Whose intellectual color
Relieves their cruelty,
Until the wish be found
And the symbols of worship speak,
And all may in peace, in peace,
Guiltless turn to that mouth.

What do you notice about this piece <u>generally</u>? *Images*? *Repetition*? Its *structure*? What feels *effective* here? Drop some of your ideas in the chat!

Do you notice in the poem any of the devices we just reviewed?

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Final thoughts on “The Key” from *Beast in View* (1944)?

2. “Children, The Sandbar, That Summer” - *Body of Walking* (1958)

Sunlight the tall women may never have seen.
Men, perhaps, going headfirst into the breakers,
But certainly the children at the sandbar.
Shallow glints in the wave suspended
We all knew at the breaker line, running that shore
At low tide, when it was safe. The grass whipped
And nothing was what they said: not safety, nor the sea.
And the sand was not what they said, but various,
Lion-grained, beard-grey. And blue. And green.
And each grain casting its shadow down before
Childhood in tide-pools where all things are food.
Behind us the shores emerged and fed on tide.
We fed on summer, the round flowers in our hands
From the snowball bush entered us, and prisoner wings,
And shells in spirals, all food.
                All keys to unlock
Some world, glinting as strong as noon on the sandbar,
Where men and women give each other children.

Again, what do you notice about this piece <u>generally</u>? *Images*? *Repetition*? Its *structure*? What feels *effective* here? Drop some of your ideas in the chat!

Do you notice in the poem any of the devices we just reviewed?

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Final thoughts on “Children, The Sandbar, That Summer” from *Body of Walking* (1958)

What makes these pieces effective?

1. Thoughtful structures
    a. *Repetition of words and sounds helps!*
2. Concrete/specific/detailed language
    a. *Sets a scene and keeps attention present!*
3. Many devices
    a. *Reveal the magic ways language can help us know things!*
4. More?

On *Houdini: A Musical*

"*Houdini* presents the spectacular life of world-renowned escape artist, Harry Houdini. Part biography, part fantasy, Houdini unlocks Rukeyser's worlds of illusion and reality as she leads us from Houdini's childhood in Appleton, Wisconsin (picking up pins with his eyelids) to his acts under water and onstage. We meet his wife Bess, his mother, Arthur Conan Doyle, and the poet's own Marco Bone, vehicle of voices, spirits, and songs. Rukeyser presents Houdini's shocking congressional testimony against spiritual mediums. She shows his great feats of escape, his complex relationships with his mother and his wife, and his ironic, untimely death…." (Amazon).

On *Houdini: A Musical*

“In addition to revealing the story of this country's tantalizing icon, Houdini offers a new understanding of Rukeyser's own work and life. Written at the height of the women's movement, the musical gives us Rukeyser's most famous lines, spoken by Houdini's wife Bess: "What would happen if one woman told the truth about her life? The world would split open." … With subtexts of desire, race, grief, and love, Houdini presents Rukeyser's gorgeous, reaching language and her brilliant observations of the human psyche” (Amazon).

Muriel Rukeyser

HOUDINI

LOCKS | KEYS | FREEDOM

The Muriel Rukeyser Living Archive presents four staged readings of Rukeyser's musical ***Houdini***, with the help of a generous grant from the Michigan Humanities–an affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities–as well as the support of EMU's Center for Jewish Studies and the English Department.

SCAN FOR MORE INFORMATION

March 20 | 2 p.m.
Sponberg Theatre
Eastern Michigan University
Ypsilanti, Michigan
This event will be live streamed, preceded by a webinar, at 11 a.m., featuring talks and conversation with three experts: Jan Freeman, Stefania Heim, and Matthew Solomon.

March 24 | 7 p.m.
Riverside Arts Center
Ypsilanti, Michigan

March 26 | 8 p.m.
March 27 | 3 p.m.
Matrix Theatre
Detroit, Michigan

Prompts

Link to the prompts!

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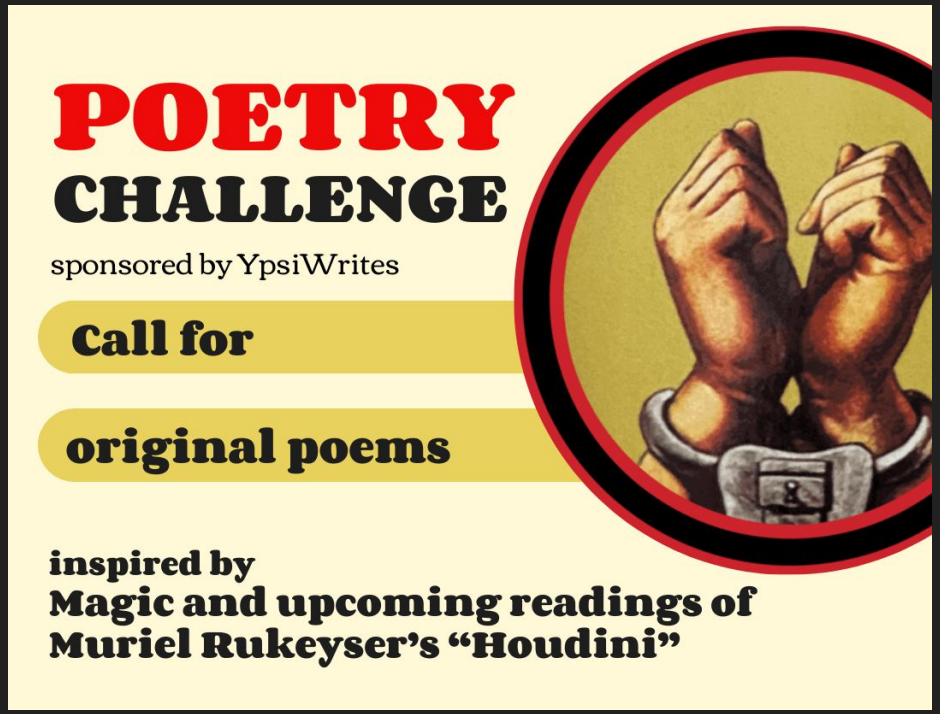
Present your magic!

Any volunteers willing to share what they’ve worked on so far?

Submit your work to the poetry challenge!



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