

[Anita Barrows: Poem](#) [1]

March 12, 2014 [Honoring Rukeyser](#) [2]

Lessons from Darkness

*"I'm afraid of the darkness, and the hole in it;
and I see it sometime of every day!"*

-Martin Luther, in *Luther*

Everything you love will perish. Try saying this to yourself
at breakfast, watching the amber-colored tea
swirl in the teapot. Try it on the tree, the clouds, the dog
asleep under the table, the sparrow taking a bath
in the neighbor's gutter. A magician's act: *Presto!*
On a morning you feel open enough to embrace it
imagine it gone. Then pack the child's lunch: smooth the thick
peanut butter, the jeweled raspberry preserves,
over the bread. Tell yourself the world
must go on forever. This is why
you feed her, imagining the day—orderly—
unfolding, imagining what you teach her
is true. Is something she will use. This is why, later, you will go out
into the garden, among the calendula, rosemary, hibiscus,
run your finger along the trunk of hawthorn
as though it were the body
of a lover, thinking of the child
on the steps of the schoolyard, eating her sandwich. Thinking *nothing*,
transparent air, where her hands are.



Publishing Information

- *Luther* by John Osborne (Faber and Faber, 1961).

Art Information

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Published on Talking Writing (<https://mail.talkingwriting.com>)



Anita Barrows has won numerous national awards for her poetry, including a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, a *Quarterly Review* Award, and a Riverstone Press Award. Her work has appeared in the *Nation*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Bridges*, and many other journals. She is also a translator from French, Italian, and German; her most recent translations (with Joanna Macy) have been three volumes of the poetry and prose of Rainer Maria Rilke.

Barrows lives in Berkeley, California, where she works as a clinical psychologist in private practice and as a professor of psychology at The Wright Institute. She has two grown daughters and a granddaughter, and she shares her house with dogs, cats, and birds.

The first poet whose reading she ever attended was Muriel Rukeyser.

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[1] <https://mail.talkingwriting.com/anita-barrows-poem>

[2] <https://mail.talkingwriting.com/talkingwriting-categories/spotlight-honoring-rukeyser>

[3] <http://www.flickr.com/photos/shazbot/224298796/>