

Annie Finch Lectures

THE SPIRIT OF METER AND THE METER OF MATRIX (AMPHIBRACHS)

Sample Poems

A CAROL FOR CAROLYN

By Annie Finch

"It is easy to be a poet, / brim with transparent water."

—Carolyn Kizer, "In the First Stanza"

I dreamed of a poet who gave me a whale
that shadowed clear pools through the sea-weeded shade.
When beached sea-foam dried on the rocks, it would sail
down currents that gathered to pool and cascade
with turbulent order.
She brims with transparent water,
as mother and poet and daughter.

The surface is broken and arching and full,
impelled by the passions of nation and woman.
The waves build and fall; the deep currents pull
toward rocky pools cupping the salt of the human.
The ocean she's authored
brims, with transparent water,
for poet and mother and daughter.

Samuel Woodworth

THE OLD OAKEN BUCKET

How dear to my heart are the scenes of my childhood,
When fond recollection presents them to view!
The orchard, the meadow, the deep-tangled wildwood,
And every loved spot which my infancy knew;
The wide-spreading pond, and the mill which stood by it,
The bridge, and the rock where the cataract fell;
The cot of my father, the dairy-house nigh it,
And e'en the rude bucket which hung in the well —
The old oaken bucket, the iron-bound bucket,
The moss-covered bucket which hung in the well.

That moss-covered vessel I hail as a treasure;
For often, at noon, when returned from the field,
I found it the source of an exquisite pleasure,
The purest and sweetest that nature can yield.
How ardent I seized it, with hands that were glowing!
How quick to the white-pebbled bottom it fell;
Then soon, with the emblem of truth over-flowing,
And dripping with coolness, it rose from the well —
The old oaken bucket, the iron-bound bucket,
The moss-covered bucket arose from the well.

How sweet from the green mossy brim to receive it,
As, poised on the curb, it inclined to my lips!
Not a full blushing goblet could tempt me to leave it,
Though filled with the nectar that Jupiter sips.
And now, far removed from the loved situation,
The tear of regret will intrusively swell,

As fancy reverts to my father's plantation,
And sighs for the bucket which hangs in the well —
The old oaken bucket, the iron-bound bucket,
The moss-covered bucket which hangs in the well.

Anna Akhmatova

THE WHITE BIRD

Jealous, and worried about me, and tender —
As steady as God's sun, as warm as Love's breath —
He wanted no songs of the past I remembered.
He took my white bird, and he put it to death.

At sunset, he found me in my own front room.
"Now love me, and laugh, and write poems," he said —
I dug a grave in the old alder's gloom
Behind the round well for my happy, bright bird.

I promised him I wouldn't cry any more —
The heart in my chest was as heavy as stone.
Everywhere, always, it seems that I hear
The tender, sweet voice of the one who is gone.

[translated from the Russian by [Annie Finch](#) with [George Kline](#)]

Lyrae Van Clief-Stefanon

MEASURED

About This Poem

“An amphibrach is a metrical foot made up of three syllables: unstressed-stressed-unstressed. An elegy for Aiyana Stanley-Jones—a seven-year-old Black girl shot and killed by a Detroit police officer while asleep on her grandmother’s sofa in 2010—‘Measured’ takes its amphibrachic meter from the syllables (ai-YA-na) of her first name. Used to construct limericks, which are often bawdy, amphibrachic meters are also found in some works by Dr. Seuss. In popular culture, amphibrachs are so associated with Black girls’ names, one finds when someone wants to make a joke about Black girls, the amphibrachic name itself sometimes may stand in for the gag and punchline. In the face of calls for ‘measured responses’ to police brutality and murder, I have been writing a series of poems articulating the grief of attempting to inhabit such a measure, asking how do we dis-embed Black women’s lives from structures of violence embedded in language’s standard units and calculations?”

If space makes the pattern, her absence is filling a quota.

The president says,

“we’re a nation of laws” :—

The limerick

under her dreaming :—that lilting.

At seven

a Seuss-rhyme’s still funny.

And who’s to say wouldn’t have been, still, at 30?

The Sneetches or What Was I Scared Of?

She’s seven, asleep on the living room sofa.

] in amphibrachs—:

who hears her

breathing? [

If space makes the pattern, her absence is filling a quota.

This absence—: Aiyana.

But what was the officer scared of?

What reaches for him in the recesses of

his attention?

What formal suggestion of

darkness needs stagger

to formless?

If space makes the pattern—:

egregious—:

This grief in the rhythm of—: uplift too

graphic—:

a measure of struggle.

Which struggle with law

holds the dark in it? Keeps

the dark of

Quinletta, LaToya, Kimkesia, Oneka, Natasha, Breonna...

my still-breathing cousins

] your still-breathing cousins [

alive in it. Aiyana. Her breath in perfection—:

at seven—: This measure for measure on measure on measure

or else—:

—

Law is dead, Aiyana. It never was

Edward Lear

LIMERICK

There was an Old Man with a beard,
Who said, 'It is just as I feared!
Two Owls and a Hen,
Four Larks and a Wren,
Have all built their nests in my beard!'

Dr. Seuss

From IF I RAN THE ZOO

And somehow or other I think I could find
Some beasts of a more unusual kind.

A fourfooted lion's not much of a beast.
The one in my zoo will have ten feet at least.

Five legs on the left and five more on the right.

Then people will stare, and they'll say, 'What a sight!'

My New Zoo, McGrew Zoo, will make people talk.

My new zoo, McGrew zoo, will make people gawk.

They'll be so surprised, they will swallow their gum.

They'll ask when they see my strange animals come,

'Where do you suppose he gets things like that from?'

If you want to catch beasts you don't see every day,

You have to go places quite out of the way.

THE CUTTY WREN (14th Century)

Oh where are you going? said Milder to Moulder

Oh we may not tell you! said Festel to Fose

We're off to the wood! said John the Red Nose

We're off to the wood! said John the Red Nose

And what will you do there? said Milder to Moulder

Oh we may not tell you! said Festel to Fose

We'll shoot the cutty wren! said John the Red Nose

We'll shoot the cutty wren! said John the Red Nose

Oh how will you cut him up? said Milder to Moulder

Oh we may not tell you! said Festel to Fose

With knives and with forks! said John the Red Nose

With knives and with forks! said John the Red Nose

And who'll get the spare ribs? said Milder to Moulder

Oh we may not tell you! said Festel to Fose

We'll give them all to the poor! said John the Red Nose

We'll give them all to the poor! said John the Red Nose

W.H. Auden

O WHERE ARE YOU GOING?

"O where are you going?" said reader to rider,
"That valley is fatal where furnaces burn,
Yonder's the midden whose odours will madden,
That gap is the grave where the tall return."

"O do you imagine," said fearer to farer,
"That dusk will delay on your path to the pass,
Your diligent looking discover the lacking,
Your footsteps feel from granite to grass?"

"O what was that bird," said horror to hearer,
"Did you see that shape in the twisted trees?
Behind you swiftly the figure comes softly,
The spot on your skin is a shocking disease."

"Out of this house"---said rider to reader,
"Yours never will"---said farer to fearer
"They're looking for you"---said hearer to horror,
As he left them there, as he left them there.

Annie Finch

I BURN WITH MY MOTHER, THE WITCH

I'll lie inside my darling Mother

Deep and deep when the leaves fall —

— “Three Mothers,”

Margaret Rockwell Finch

(April 20, 1921 - January 14, 2018)

I dreamed we were walking in fields that were green— all
the heartbreaking — beauty — of green — rearranging —
surrounded by men — were you mother, or sister? —
Our wrists roped together — our shaven heads — hanging —
We've loved through that bowing-down grass— that long whisper—
its — seed-heavy singing— then clanging, then changing —
Through our many lives — Now you're hearing Her call
Again — through the musk and the smoke — as I blister —
And bend —through the hope — of these embers — and crawl —