

Annie Finch Lectures

THE DIVERSITY OF METER AND THE METER OF AIR (IAMBES)

Sample Poems

[Annie Finch](#)

YOUR FOREST

Your forest goes as green as love;
Your ferns are dappled near the ground,
and moss they dappled curls above
stones that your glacier dappled down.

Your night is sadness well-contained
within the sap that runs the stem
of plants that grow along the night
and root at morning; joy finds them,

and oceans, lost because they are vast
(like ruined roads left on the land)

Take your kind waters home each time
that they, pushing raptly at the sand,

make tides with your evaporate rain.

The ocean is at peace again.

Far algae grows, the blue stays smooth,

And in dim light, the beach is soothed.

Your forest goes as green as love.

Your night is sadness well-contained,

and oceans, lost because they are vast,

make tides with your evaporate rain.

Anonymous

O WESTERN WIND (1530)

O Western Wind, when wilt thou blow

That the small rain down can rain?

Christ, that my love were in my arms

And I in my bed again.

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Gwendolyn Brooks

THE CHILDREN OF THE POOR

What shall I give my children? who are poor,
Who are adjudged the leastwise of the land,
Who are my sweetest lepers, who demand
No velvet and no velvety velour;
But who have begged me for a brisk contour,
Crying that they are quasi, contraband
Because unfinished, graven by a hand
Less than angelic, admirable or sure.
My hand is stuffed with mode, design, device.
But I lack access to my proper stone.
And plenitude of plan shall not suffice
Nor grief nor love shall be enough alone
To ratify my little halves who bear
Across an autumn freezing everywhere.

Paul Laurence Dunbar

WE WEAR THE MASK

We wear the mask that grins and lies,
It hides our cheeks and shades our eyes,—
This debt we pay to human guile;
With torn and bleeding hearts we smile,
And mouth with myriad subtleties.

Why should the world be over-wise,
In counting all our tears and sighs?
Nay, let them only see us, while
We wear the mask.

We smile, but, O great Christ, our cries
To thee from tortured souls arise.
We sing, but oh the clay is vile
Beneath our feet, and long the mile;
But let the world dream otherwise,
We wear the mask!

Marilyn Nelson

DAUGHTERS 1900

Five daughters, in the slant light on the porch,
are bickering. The eldest has come home
with new truths she can hardly wait to teach.

She lectures them: the younger daughters search
the sky, elbow each other's ribs, and groan.
Five daughters, in the slant light on the porch

and blue-sprigged dresses, like a stand of birch
saplings whose leaves are going yellow-brown
with new truths. They can hardly wait to teach,

themselves, to be called "Ma'am," to march
high-heeled across the hanging bridge to town.
Five daughters. In the slant light on the porch

Pomp lowers his paper for a while, to watch
the beauties he's begotten with his Ann:
these new truths they can hardly wait to teach.

The eldest sniffs, "A lady doesn't scratch."
The third snorts back, "Knock, knock: nobody home."
The fourth concedes, "Well, maybe not in *church* . . ."
Five daughters in the slant light on the porch.

Edna St. Vincent Millay
I SHALL GO BACK (1923)

I shall go back again to the bleak sand,
And build a little shanty on the shore
In such a way that the extremest band
Of brittle seaweed shall escape my door
But by a yard or two. And nevermore
Shall I return to take you by the hand.
I shall be gone to what I understand,
And happier than I ever was before.
The love that stood a moment in your eyes,
The words that lay a moment on your tongue,
Are one with all that in a moment dies,
A little undersaid and oversung.
But I shall find the sullen rocks and skies
Unchanged from what they were when I was young.

LOVE (III)

Truth Lord, but I have marr'd them: let my shame
Go where it doth deserve.
And know you not, sayes Love, who bore the blame?
My deare, then I will serve.
You must sit down, sayes Love, and taste my meat:
So I did sit and eat.

John Milton

From PARADISE LOST (1674)

Of Mans First Disobedience, and the Fruit
Of that Forbidden Tree, whose mortal taste
Brought Death into the World, and all our woe,
With loss of Eden , till one greater Man
Restore us, and regain the blissful Seat,
Sing Heav'nly Muse, that on the secret top
Of Oreb , or of Sinai , didst inspire
That Shepherd, who first taught the chosen Seed,
In the Beginning how the Heav'ns and Earth
Rose out of Chaos : or if Sion Hill.
Delight thee more, and Siloa's Brook that flow'd
Fast by the Oracle of God; I thence
Invoke thy aid to my adventrous Song,
That with no middle flight intends to soar
Above th' Aonian Mount, while it pursues

Things unattempted yet in Prose or Rhime.
And chiefly Thou O Spirit, that dost prefer
Before all Temples th'upright heart and pure,
Instruct me, for Thou know'st; Thou from the first
Wast present, and with mighty wings outspread
Dove-like satst brooding on the vast Abyss
And mad'st it pregnant: What in me is dark
Illumin, what is low raise and support;
That to the height of this great Argument
I may assert Eternal Providence,
And justifie the wayes of God to men.

R.S. Gwynn

APPROACHING A SIGNIFICANT BIRTHDAY, HE PERUSES *THE NORTON
ANTHOLOGY OF POETRY*

All human things are subject to decay.

Beauty is momentary in the mind.

The curfew tolls the knell of parting day.

If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?

Forlorn! the very word is like a bell

And somewhat of a sad perplexity.

Here, take my picture, though I bid farewell,

In a dark time the eye begins to see

The woods decay, the woods decay and fall—

Bare ruined choirs where late the sweet birds sang.

What but design of darkness to appall?

An aged man is but a paltry thing.

If I should die, think only this of me:

Crass casualty obstructs the sun and rain

When I have fears that I may cease to be,

To cease upon the midnight with no pain

And hear the spectral singing of the moon

And strictly meditate the thankless muse.

The world is too much with us, late and soon.

It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze.

Do not go gentle into that good night.

Fame is no plant that grows on mortal soil.

Again he raised the jug up to the light:
Old age hath yet his honor and his toil.
Downward to darkness on extended wings,
Break, break, break, on thy cold gray stones, O sea,
And tell sad stories of the death of kings.
I do not think that they will sing to me.

Annie Finch

THE MENSTRUAL HUT

How can I listen to the moon?
Your blood will listen, like a charm.

I knew a way to feel the sun
as if a statue felt warm eyes.
Even with ruins on the moon,
your blood will listen, every time.

Now I am the one with eyes.
Your blood can listen, every time.