A
STUDY GUIDE
for

Annie Finch's

CALENDARS

by
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and Brandon Brook Michalik
Edited by Kristin LaTour

Publisher's Note

This study guide to *Calendars* is a book in itself, and an astonishing one at that: a guide to poetics keyed to a single and singular volume of poetry. It contains two absorbing prefaces by poets, general discussion questions, poem annotations with discussion questions, form guides to the poems, a form-finder index, a scansion sampler, answers to questions frequently asked at Annie's readings, and a bibliography. Though clearly a companion piece to *Calendars*, it is also a teachers' guide, a road map, through poetics—specifically Annie Finch's own eclectic formalism—to wiccan/pagan themes, to scansion, to writing, and to poetry itself. It's a brilliant pedagogical text, as well as an entree into the creative process.

—Jeffrey Levine, Tupelo Press

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Teaching with *Calendars* and the Study Guide

On the Purpose of this Guide

Calendars stands as one of the most original books of poetry to appear in American letters in recent years. There is little I can add to the praise already given Annie Finch for her explorations of voice through meter. I would, however, point out that besides lauding her, each reviewer of this remarkable book has noted the complexities within the poems, how rhythm, for example, conveys meaning in communion with her words. Yet, while exploration of this aspect of the poems alone could warrant the creation of a study guide, I believe Tupelo Press has produced this volume because Finch's work challenges us to reexamine our notions of how we as writers experience and convey our understanding of the world through our own works.

Annie Finch, an avowed Wicca practitioner (see Brook Michalik's explanation of Wicca beliefs in the introduction to this guide), does not see herself apart from Nature and its systolic and diastolic rhythms. That said you are by no means obliged to embrace this world vision as your own to gain benefit from its study. What Finch holds up for us is understandable not only by practice but also through example, and is meant to show how our words can grow out of truths deeply experienced. I do not want to dismiss these wonderful poems as if the alternative view is to appreciate them as simply musings about Nature. For inspiration, these poems do not look to the Western pastoral tradition with all its fabrications, but instead draw their shape from the subconscious, the place where the Self is not separate from Nature. What Finch provides apprises us of how our sense of Self—over time—remains interdependent with the natural cycle of all things.

In *Calendars*, Finch shares some of the accumulated discoveries she has made over the years in her Wicca practice. One of the great aspects of this work is that it speaks to how we can develop as artists by following a new poetic path, in this case, one within Nature—an approach that stands in counterpoint to the tradition of objectifying it, and thereby placing ourselves outside of it looking in. The guide addresses this type of creative process by directing our attention to Finch's careful crafting of verses that issue from her practice of participating in the natural cycles. You also will find here how Finch, by living within and responding to these cycles, recovers myth (originally, the means civilizations devised for understanding themselves within relationship to the natural world) into poetry. The mythic world, in this way, comes alive, and is unlimited in expression. Within this enriched perspective, we come to know our world through a new language, new modes of expression for experiences, through rhythm and sound heard intimately.

This guide, therefore, asks some serious questions: how do we celebrate, mourn, abide, continue? It also prompts us to better understand the qualities and weight behind our words. In this manner, the guide serves as a source book by which we can begin to reconnect to the natural world and its rhythms, a subject that still remains largely unexplored in our Western poetic tradition. Many of

us have been drawn to the hermit poets of Golden Age China for this very reason. But the translators of these ancients honestly tell us how much is lost in translation—the allusions to other works, the play on words (i.e., deliberate double meanings), rhymes, and the innate rhythms, just to name a few. However, you will see in working through the discussion questions that Finch has defined an American poetic that is as all-embracing in scope as these Eastern works in the original.

Calendars *in the Classroom*

This guide will be of interest to teachers to develop lesson plans for an advanced undergraduate creative writing class or for graduate students in a workshop, using it to deepen their reading experience and understanding of contemporary poetics. Here is an account of my own classroom experience with this book.

In fall 2005 I taught a special topics graduate creative writing reading/workshop at Arizona State University entitled "Post-modernism." The reading list for the workshop included *Calendars*. Tupelo Press had asked me to "test drive" the study guide with the class, which I happily agreed to do, because I was familiar with most of Finch's seminal work as poet, essayist, and anthologist. I had the class read *Calendars* first without the study guide. The students were impressed that here is a poet who is openly in pursuit of a spiritual life, something often undervalued and unappreciated in our writing today, but it was easy to gloss over how Finch employed many of the poetic devices we had discovered in the other more overtly experimental books on the reading list.

The next week I assigned them to read the book again with the guide. The ensuing class discussion was the most animated of the semester. The guide proved invaluable for them to see into the nature of Finch's work, the depth of thought and development of ideas, her mythmaking, and the skillful use of meter as companion to the subject of the poems. The other works we had read over the semester displayed skillful use of fragmented grammar (or fractal logic), repetition of words throughout the book that expanded and redefined the meaning of those words, and the introduction of various voices into poems, among other approaches. What the students learned through the use of the guide was how Finch employs all of these poetic devices, but introduces other elements as well into her writing—all of which may be missed in a casual or unreflective reading. It might be that because we have become silent readers of poetry, we miss the intangible qualities presented to us. However, as my gifted students pointed out to me, this is precisely why this guide proves fruitful, by showing us how removed we are from accessing our full range of experience in our own works.

If only for this reason alone, I encourage you to take full advantage of this guide. Not only does it provide valuable instruction with which to explore Annie Finch's fine book, but it also will open for you new ways into your own imaginative territories.

Christopher Burawa
Arizona State University
December 17, 2005

INTRODUCTION TO THE WICCAN/PAGAN CONTEXT OF *CALENDARS*

by Brandon Brook Michalik

The poems in *Calendars* express a reverence for a cyclical sense of time, based on the human body, the body of the earth, and other natural sources. This "knowledge" of time is rooted in cycles of dark and light; the annual turning of the seasons; the elements of air, fire, water, earth, and spirit; the rounds of birth, growth, and death; and the rhythm and language of each poem.

Such bodily forms of knowledge are at the heart of contemporary earth-based religious paths, also known as "pagan" paths (Wicca is one well-known example of a pagan path, but there are many others, as well). Pagan paths do not offer up a single book as the basis for faith, although many texts are available and useful for study on pagan religious observations, spell casting, divination, etc. Rather than complete reliance on books for knowledge of ritual and rules to live by, pagans emphasize the lived experience of the individual worshipper, within a community of worshippers, as a source of revelation, connecting the worshipper to the rhythms of nature: body, earth, sun, moon, and God/Goddess.

Contemporary paganism offers a return to an ancient view of time, based on the rhythms of both the sun and the moon. These rhythms mark the pagan Wheel of the Year and the lunar calendar. Ancient Europeans and many other traditional societies observed solar and lunar calendars. Stonehenge, located on the Salisbury Plain in England, was but one of thousands of sites across ancient Europe and the rest of the world, where humans attempted to understand and use natural rhythms to mark time.

Through rituals to celebrate the rhythms of sun, moon, earth, and the human body, contemporary pagans are attempting to revive natural ways of marking time. By doing this, they believe they are connecting to the body of the divine, which they call Goddess and God. For many pagans, this is not only a religious experience, but also has larger political implications in the world. Human loss of connection to the earth and to natural cycles has led to environmental degradation worldwide. By honoring these cycles and consciously choosing to live in more environmentally responsible ways, they believe they are taking one small but important step to protect and heal the earth.

The notes throughout this study guide explain some of the specific pagan themes and references that occur throughout the poems in *Calendars*. Several of the poems are explicitly dedicated to specific holidays and occasions. Others evoke images or symbols associated with pagan beliefs such as the moon and the spiral, and themes such as the balance of light and dark, death and life.

POEM ANNOTATIONS WITH DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

SECTION ONE: LANDING UNDER WATER

"Landing Under Water, I See Roots"

1. Finch dedicates this poem to Rita Dove in the "Acknowledgments" and has mentioned during readings that this poem came to her after reading Dove's verse play *The Darker Face of the Earth*. The play, which retells the story of Oedipus among slaves on a nineteenth-century plantation, concerns the influence of a family's past history on the present. Are these themes reflected in "Landing Under Water, I See Roots"?

2. This poem has been performed with music and also recited on the HBO show "Def Poetry Jam." How would the oral experience of the poem be different if readers had never seen it written down? (An annotated scansion appears in the scansion section.)

"Moon"

Wiccans and many other pagans not only honor lunar cycles, but also celebrate the moon as an aspect of the "Goddess," or female divinity.

1. How does the view of the moon in this poem compare with the moon in "The Menstrual Hut"?

"The Menstrual Hut"

In her classic text *The Spiral Dance*, Wiccan writer Starhawk discusses the connections between lunar cycles and women's menstrual/fertility cycles and how contemporary Wiccan practitioners honor these connections.

1. The dynamic between viewer and viewed in this poem reflects Finch's reading in feminist anthropology and in feminist literary criticism regarding issues of subjectivity and objectivity (*BOP* 98-99). How does the speaker's subjectivity change during the poem?

2. What is the relation between the sun and the moon? (An annotated scansion appears in the scansion section.)

"Letter for Emily Dickinson"

1. What is the relationship between the two poets?

2. The phrase "called back" is a quote from Dickinson's tombstone. Does other imagery from Dickinson's poems appear in the poem?

3. How does the view of Dickinson here compare with that in Finch's previous poem to the poet, "Tribute" (in *Eve*)?

"To Vivienne Eliot"

T.S. Eliot committed his first wife, Vivienne Eliot, to a mental institution. He is said never to have visited her there. Cassandra is the prophet in Aeschylus' tragedies, condemned by Apollo to tell the truth and have no one believe her.

"Watching the Oregon Whale"

In ancient Middle Eastern cultures, the whale symbolized both a woman's womb and the mother Goddess.

1. How do the scientific facts and language work with the poem's overall theme and tone?

2. Finch says on page 38 that she altered the rhyme scheme in this poem repeatedly. How does the current rhyme scheme affect the meaning of the poem?

3. Why do you think this poem appears in the first section of the book and not with poems about nature in the last section?

SECTION TWO: NAME

"Winter Solstice Chant"

Winter solstice (also known as "Yule") is the day of the solar year with the shortest number of sunlight hours, and is honored by pagans as one of the solar cross-quarter "sabbats" or celebrations.

1. What is the view of the dynamic between darkness and light in the poem?

2. "Winter Solstice Chant" is in accentual meter (see EOF 15). Is there any regular pattern?

"Blue Willows"

This poem evokes a once-common china pattern called "Blue Willow." The pattern was supposed to tell an old Japanese story of young lovers who turned into birds because their parents would not let them marry. One of the earlier poems in the book, this poem describes a young couple living together. What is the attitude in the poem towards the passage of time?

"Name"

1. This elegy is set in Spring Grove, a grand and formal park-like nineteenth century cemetery in Cincinnati, Ohio. How do the repeating lines affect the feeling of the poem?

2. How does the switch between "light" and "movement" in the repetition of the last line affect the poem's ending?

"Elegy for My Father"

Finch's father was a scholar of the philosopher Wittgenstein (*Simone Weil and the Intellect of Grace* vii). Finch mentions in an interview that Crane's "Voyages" was one of the poems he loved to read aloud, and that when she thinks of this poem, "the words in my mind are [still] indistinguishable from his delivery of them"(Gwynn 1). For an explanation of pagan views on death and dying, see Starhawk and M. Macha Nightmare's *The Pagan Book of Living and Dying*.

1. What information does the poem give you about the father? How does this affect the feeling of the poem?

2. What is the attitude of the poem towards death?

"Final Autumn"

The word "sun" repeats three times in the poem. How does its meaning change each time? What is the role of the sun in the poem?

"Mowing"

1. What do the words "stand" and "lie" in the last two lines mean?

2. Robert Frost's "Mowing," a paean to agricultural labor, is one influence on this poem. Are there other allusions, literary or cultural, in the poem? How does the speaker's attitude towards nature in this poem differ from that in Frost's poem?

3. How does the sonnet form allow this poem to do something it could not do in free verse?

"Forest-Falling"

1. How does the subtitle, which according to Finch was added much later, affect the reading of the poem? What is the attitude of the poem towards the unborn baby?

2. What is the the feeling of the forest and forest floor?

"Without a Bird"

1. What is the emotional tone of the poem?

2. How can the fifth stanza be interpreted?

"Boothbay Harbor"

1. What is the movement of the tide in the first stanza?

2. What does "it" refer to in the second stanza? What is the relation between the ocean and the seaweed?

"Caribou Kitchen"

1. This is the earliest poem in the book; Finch remarks that it could have been included in a collection of juvenalia (page 38). Why do you think she included it here? What elements of style, theme, and image does it share with other poems in the book?

2. What is the relation between the lines in parentheses and the others?

SECTION THREE: CALENDARS

"Imbolc Chant"

Imbolc is one of the pagan "sabbats," or celebrations. It is a fire festival, honoring the rebirth of nature after winter and the ancient Irish goddess Brigit (also known as Bride (Scotland)/Brigantia (England)). A goddess of poetry and healing, she was later adopted by the Christian church as St. Bridget. The ivy is a widespread symbol of the Goddess. The four directions, east, south, west, and north, are invoked in that order to "cast the circle," creating sacred space at the beginning of each Wiccan ritual.

1. Who is the "she" in the poem?

2. Identify and scan the four different meters in the poem. How do they affect the moods of the different stanzas?

"Calendars"

The Greek myth of Persephone's descent into the Underworld is honored by many pagans as the "return to the light" of spring.

The myth was the basis for an ancient religion centered on the Eleusinian Mysteries. In the story, Persephone was picking flowers when she was abducted by Hades, the King of the Underworld. Because she ate pomegranate seeds in the underworld, she could never return to earth permanently. But her grieving mother Demeter, goddess of the earth, arranged for Persephone to return to earth for half of each year, bringing us spring and summer. This myth was the basis for an ancient religion centered on the Eleusinian Mysteries.

1. Is this poem a play? What is the conflict and where is the climax?

2. What is the relation between Persephone and Demeter?

3. Two other poems in *Calendars* are echoed or quoted here, and a reviewer has written that this poem is "the emotional center of the book" (Oktenberg 1). Why or why not?

SECTION FOUR: INTERPENETRATE

"A Seed for Spring Equinox"

Spring equinox is the day of the solar year with equal numbers of daylight and dark hours. Pagans also call this day Ostara or Eostre, and honor it as one of the solar cross-quarter sabbats on the Wheel of the Year.

1. How do darkness and light interact, compared to the way they interact in "Winter Solstice Chant," written for another seasonal celebration three months earlier?

2. This poem is written in dipodic meter, which alternates strong and weak stresses in succeeding feet. Read the poem aloud to listen for the strong and weak beats. How does this rhythm connect with the season when the poem takes place?

"Interpenetrate"

1. This poem, inspired by the dictionary entry for the word "interpenetrate,"was written at a time when Finch claims she was trying "to reconfigure the idea of agency and the self" (Kiely 43). What is the idea of the self in this poem?

2. How do you understand the imagery of "ink" and "pages"?

"The Woman on the Beach"

In many pagan theologies, the earth is the body of the Goddess. The spiral shape is an ancient symbol of the Goddess, found in prehistoric carvings throughout the world.

1. Why won't the waves in the third stanza hear the woman on the beach?

2. What is the "bounded dream"?

3. How could this poem be read in relation to Wallace Stevens' "The Idea of Order at Key West," which also concerns a woman on a beach?

"Chain of Women"

1. How does the title poem "Calendars," which includes two lines from this poem, relate to this poem?

2. What is the season in which the poem takes place? If it is not spring, then why does the poem appears in the "spring" section of the book?

"A Carol for Carolyn"

The carol is a medieval song form with a refrain, used to accompany pre-Christian ritual celebratory dances and banned by the church for that reason in the middle ages.

1. The poem was written for a ceremony honoring poet Carolyn Kizer at a literary conference. How does this poem to a living poet compare with the poems addressed to dead poets, such as "Letter to Emily Dickinson"?

"Faces With Poulenc"

1. Listen to some music by Poulenc and see how it resonates for you with the feeling or imagery of the poem. How does the personification in the poem (attributing human qualities to objects such as the flowers and oboe) relate to the experience of hearing music?

2. What does it mean to say that the ceiling is "turned curving" by music? Are there other unusual phrases in the poem?

"Ghazal to a Poetess"

1. Laurence Hope was an English poet who lived in India and wrote passionate poetry on Indian themes. What role does she play in this poem?

2. Agha Shahid Ali describes in *An Exaltation of Forms* how the ghazal is often read aloud with the audience filling in the repeated refrain for the poet (EOF 213). Try reading the ghazal in

this way; how does it affect your experience of the poem?

"Lamia to Lycius"

1. What is Lamia's attitude towards Lycius in the poem?

2. In Keats' "Lamia," Lycius falls in love with a beautiful woman not knowing she is a "lamia," or half-serpent. Accused by his philosopher-teacher of being a lamia at their wedding altar, she turns into a serpent and disappears, and he dies. Read Keats' "Lamia" and compare his depiction of the lamia with the Lamia character in Finch's poem.

"The Intellect of Woman"

1. How does this poem answer the poem by Yeats quoted in its epigraph?

2. What kind of art might be symbolized by the diamond, which is so hard it can cut glass? What might be the "window we have never loved"?

SECTION FIVE: EPITHALAMIUM

"A Wedding on Earth"

In contemporary pagan traditions, a wedding is also known as a "handfasting." This could be either a state-sanctioned marriage or a symbolic ceremony, with "a year and a day" commitment. Part of the tradition involves honoring the "God and Goddess" in each of the partners. These ceremonies are often performed in the spring, around the sabbat of Beltane.

This poem's invented stanza combines the meters of the Sapphic stanza with the rhyme scheme of the Spenserian stanza. Sappho is known for her love poems, and Spenser for his Epithalamium (wedding poem) to his wife. Each stanza has 11 lines and the 11 stanzas add up to 121 lines.

1. Each stanza of the poem brings a new aspect of nature to the wedding. What qualities do the different kinds of natural imagery bring to the poet's understanding of marriage?

2. What is the view of marriage explicitly presented in the poem? Is it consistent with the view implicitly presented through the natural imagery?

SECTION SIX: TWO BODIES

"Summer Solstice Chant"

For pagans, the summer solstice is a fire festival, honoring the day of the year with the longest number of sunlight hours. It is also known as Midsummer or Litha.

1. How can fire be like a flower? Is this relationship appropriate to the time of summer solstice?

2. How do dark and light relate in this poem, as compared to in "Winter Solstice Chant?"

"Paravaledellentine"

The paradelle form was invented by contemporary poet Billy Collins as a practical joke. As he writes in *An Exaltation of Forms*, at first he claimed it was a rediscovered Renaissance form (EOF 396). The first two lines of each stanza are repeated twice, and the last lines of the stanza use only those words and no others. The last stanza uses only the words used in the rest of the poem.

1. What differences separate the repeating lines from each other?

2. This poem is also a valentine. How is the feeling of love conveyed in a poem whose form prevents it from making much logical sense? How does the form affect the way the poem conveys love?

"Conversation"

This poem, commissioned for a show of poems about pieces in the Yale Art Gallery, is an "ekphrastic poem"—a poem based on a work of art. It illustrates Edward Weston's black and white photograph of two summer squash linked around each other, one standing in an arch and the other lying sideways. The squash that is lying down speaks first in the conversation.

1. What kind of relationship does the poem imagine between the two squash?

2. What is the relation between death and life in the poem?

"Two Bodies"

Pagans consider sexuality a spiritual expression and an honored way of embodying the Goddess and God. In "The Charge of the Goddess," a pagan poem often used in ritual contexts and originally attributed to the British witch Doreen Valiente (a later version called "The Charge of the Star Goddess" was written by Starhawk), the voice of the Goddess proclaims, "All acts of love and pleasure are my rituals."

1. "Two Bodies," with its 4-3 meter and abab rhyme scheme, is written in the centuries-old ballad form. Traditionally, the ballad tells a dramatic, often tragic story in a detached tone (EOF 170). Are there images or themes in this poem that seem to connect with the expected subject or mood of a ballad?

2. Imagine that the imagery of the poem is telling a different story than the surface story. For example, how does the image of bodies relate to the imagery of an ark? What are the connotations of the idea of night holding bodies still?

"A Valentine for Hands"

1. In what way does the shape of the poem's rhymes relate to the imagery of hands?

2. What is the effect of the third repetition of the phrase in parentheses?

3. What is the difference between the imagery of building like rain and returning like seas, and

how do these images relate to the theme of the poem?

"The Coming Mirrors"

1. How do the different images of the pregnant woman's body evolve through the poem?

2. How does the image of glass relate to the natural images of stems and evergreen needles? How does the image and idea of the mirror function in the poem?

"Meeting Mammoth Cave, Eight Months Pregnant"

1. What is the relation between the setting and pregnancy?

2. "Circumference" is a word frequently used by Emily Dickinson. Are there any other connections with Dickinson in the poem?

"Butterfly Lullaby"

2. The poem was originally written with a tune, as a song to be sung to an unborn baby. How does it differ from a traditional lullaby?

"Belly"

1. The epigraph is Finch's translation of a famous anecdote from the Anglo-Saxon historian Bede. In the original version of the story, King Edwin was converted to Christianity by fear of the dark night a missionary described as looming outside the hall of life. In this poem, is the darkness from which the sparrow comes also frightening? Why or why not?

2. Finch has written that her study of Anglo-Saxon "permanently de-familiarized my language for me" (Davis 69). The images and syntax of "Belly," for example in the fourth stanza, are less logically coherent than those in some other poems in the book. Discuss whether this technique seems appropriate to this poem.

"Over Dark Arches"

1. What does the image of the building convey to you?

2. If the baby has been nursing, why do you think the poem ends with the baby empty and the mother full?

3. A critic has written of this poem, "The persona's birth as a subject in her own right, as a person separate from a mother who "held [her] for years" occurs only in the presence of her own infant, who reaches through the mouth to find her—who reaches and finds the true self, seemingly being born at the instant her infant contacts her." (Guernsey-Shaw). Do you think this is an accurate description of what happens in the poem? Why or why not?

"Churching"

1. Is the style of this poem like that of "Belly"? How is the experience of reading it different from the experience of reading "Belly," "Elegy for My Father," or "Two Bodies"?

2. How does the movement of this poem lead up to its final statement in the last line?

"Lammas Chant"

Lammas is the first of two harvest festivals on the pagan Wheel of the Year. It is also called "Lughnasad," after the Celtic sun god Lugh. On this day, some of the first harvest was buried in the earth as an offering in hope of a good harvest.

1. Finch has named the form of this poem a "descending refrain." How does the positioning of the repeated stanza after the various lines provide a new context? Does it change the meaning of the stanza each time it appears? Do you see any relation between this form and the theme of the harvest season? Can you imagine this poem in another form?

SECTION SEVEN: EARTH GODDESS AND SKY GOD

"Earth Goddess and Sky God"

In the Greek/Roman pantheons of gods and goddesses, the earth was originally conceived of as the goddess Gaia and the sky as the god Uranus. This dichotomy of earth goddess/sky god is also seen in other cultures.

1. How does the Sky's voice (the lines in roman lettering) differ from the Earth's (the italicized lines)? How does the relation between the two voices change as the poem progresses?

2. This form could be considered as an English sonnet missing the third quatrain. Does this knowledge add anything to the poem?

"Iowa Barn"

1. What is the speaker's attitude towards the barn?

"Desire for Quiet"

1. In Jungian psychology, water symbolizes the unconscious where experiences can be repressed. Within the context of this poem, what might be "brutal" about the flowers?

2. How will the speaker resolve the question of whether or not to trust the impulse towards quietness?

"Hostage Wildflowers"

1. How are the flowers held hostage?

2. What is the relation between the sea and the rain?

"A Dance for the Inland Sea"

1. The "inland sea" is a traditional nickname for the tallgrass prairie that used to cover much of the Midwest. How are the prairies like palaces?

2. Why is the poem called a "dance"?"

"The August Porch"

1. How does the mood change as the poem progresses?

2. Try imagining the line breaks arranged in different ways; how would different breaks affect the mood of the poem? Which of the line-breaks in this poem is a "hinge"—a phrase or word that functions as part of two different clauses?

"Wild Yeasts"

1. It is extremely unusual for a sonnet to be written in dactylic meter. What do the form and the meter, and the relationship between them, add to this poem?

2. Why is this the last poem in the book?

GENERAL DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

THEMATIC QUESTIONS

The season chants, like the goddess poems in *Eve*, structure the book as a whole. Finch has said in an interview that these poems were originally written "for use by an earth spirituality group to celebrate the solstices, equinoxes, and other times in the cycle of the year" (Kiely 44). How does this knowledge change your reading of the poems? Is the same spiritual approach reflected in other poems about nature in the book?

In the essay "Coherent Decentering" in her collection *The Body of Poetry*, Finch wrote about the need to create a new model of poetic subjectivity as an alternative to the Romantic idea of the poet who makes the world into an object for contemplation. As one example, she mentions "Inside the Violet" from *Eve*, where the poet who is looking at a violet suddenly feels herself as the object of the violet's contemplation (*BOP* 99). Is there a similar dynamic at work in any of the poems in *Calendars*?

"A Wedding on Earth" and "Elegy for My Father" address occasions that are traditionally Christian sacraments in Western culture, instead providing an earth-centered religious context for the rituals of marriage and death. How far do these poems succeed in creating a new sense of sacredness, and how far do they fail? In what ways do "A Wedding on Earth" and "Elegy for My Father" accept or alter Christian traditions of marriage and death?

"Landing Under Water, I See Roots" can be read as having two opposite meanings or attitudes: one where the underwater forests have overpowered the speaker's freedom to love, and another where they don't. Do you feel that one meaning is stronger? Are there other poems with possible double meanings in the book?

Some poems in *Calendars* evoke other poets including Emily Dickinson, T.S. Eliot (indirectly through his wife Vivienne), Wallace Stevens ("The Woman on the Beach"), Carolyn Kizer ("A Carol for Carolyn"), Laurence Hope ("Ghazal for a Poetess"), John Keats ("Lamia to Lycius"), W. B. Yeats ("The Intellect of Woman"), Edmund Spenser ("A Wedding on Earth"), Hart Crane ("Elegy for My Father"), and Robert Frost ("Mowing"). Pick one of these poets to discuss in relation to the poem that involves them. Is the influence of this poet also apparent in other poems in *Calendars*? Are there any differences in attitude in the poems addressed to female and male poets?

STRUCTURAL QUESTIONS

Many of the poems develop unique or multiple speakers. For several poems, identify the speaker and examine how Finch uses speaker in her poems. Do the same for tone.

Look at how different repetitions of lines have different meanings in various poems in *Calendars*. For example, in "Lammas Chant," how does the stanza that is repeated three times change in feeling as the preceding lines change?

Look at some of the poems in free verse such as "The August Porch" and "Over Dark Arches." What is the effect of the line breaks? How would the effect be different if the lines were broken differently?

You may want to use the Sample Scansions to get you started noticing how the meter works in

different poems in *Calendars*. How do metrical variations (changes in the basic meter that can add to the expressiveness of poems) contribute to the meaning or feeling of poems in the book?

Contrasting dactylic with iambic meter, Finch has said in an interview that "whatever it's doing allows me to write in a way that seems to come directly from my chest, rather than from my brain. It's more soothing, almost more hypnotic" (Maas p. 2). Finch's *The Ghost of Meter* posits that the echoes of various meters can carry different connotations. Are there any differences in attitude, voice, or theme between the poems in different meters in *Calendars?*

STYLISTIC QUESTIONS

Finch ends her essay "Confessions of a Postmodern Poetess" with the statement, "I am a poetess. It's a relief at last to admit it." (*BOP* 130). *Calendars'* epigraph also reflects Finch's awareness of a debt to this tradition of women's poetry. Is there anything provocative about this statement? Does it add to or detract from your reading of the book, or influence it at all?

Some of the poems in *Calendars*, such as "Belly," use a more associative and less coherent style than others. Why does Finch use a more syntactically coherent style in certain poems than in others? What patterns are identifiable in these groups of poems? In the essay "Langpo, Pomo, Newfo," Finch remarks that her students are sometimes surprised to see how close her aesthetics as a "formalist" poet seem to those of the "avant-garde." She remarks, "Both of us are interested in defamiliarizing language. . .what else has meter always done?" (*BOP* 21). In *Calendars*, is there any correlation between meter or its absence and syntactic coherence or fragmentation?

CHRONOLOGICAL QUESTIONS

Read the calendar of dates of composition at the end of the book. Why are the poems not arranged chronologically within the book? Would this have been more appropriate for a book with a calendar as its theme?

How do the dates of completion at the end of the book affect the reading of the poems? How do the poems written in the 1980's, for example, compare with those written in 1999 and 2000? Consider form, diction, voice, structure, rhythm, and theme.

How do the poems on similar subjects (for example, birth and nature) from different periods compare with each other? How do they compare with poems on similar subjects in the earlier book *Eve*?

FORM GUIDE TO THE POEMS

"Landing Under Water"	trochaic meter, ballad stanza
"Moon"	iambic pentameter, unrhymed
"The Menstrual Hut"	iambic tetrameter with invented refrain
"Letter for Emily Dickinson"	iambic pentameter, ballade form (a curtailed version of the form)
"To Vivienne Eliot"	anapestic tetrameter, interspersed form
"Watching the Oregon Whale"	dactylic pentameter, invented rhyme scheme
"Winter Solstice Chant"	four-beat accentual meter, falling rhythm
"Blue Willows"	dactylic rhythm, irregular line-lengths
"Name"	dactylic tetrameter, invented form with last line of each stanza as first line of next
"Elegy for My Father"	dactylic tetrameter, unrhymed
"Final Autumn"	dactylic tetrameter, with two three-foot lines
"Mowing"	iambic pentameter, English sonnet
"Forest-Falling"	Spenserian stanzas
"Without a Bird"	iambic dimeter
"Boothbay Harbor"	free verse
"Caribou Kitchen"	two-beat accentual meter, strongly dactylic in rhythm
"Imbolc Chant"	one stanza each in anapestic, iambic, trochic, and dactylic meter

"Calendar"	pastiche of free verse and various meters and rhythms
"A Seed for Spring Equinox"	dipodic meter
"Interpenetrate"	iambic pentameter, unrhymed
"The Woman on the Beach"	iambic pentameter, unrhymed
"Chain of Women"	accentual meter, ballad stanza
"A Carol for Carolyn"	amphibrachic meter, carol form (a medieval form with a refrain)
"Faces With Poulenc"	free verse
"Ghazal to a Poetess"	five-beat accentual rhythm, ghazal form
"Lamia to Lycius"	heroic couplets with an occasional alexandrine (six-foot line); the same form as Keats' *Lamia*
"The Intellect of Woman"	iambic pentameter quatrains
"A Wedding on Earth"	invented stanza, combining meters of the Sapphic stanza with rhyme scheme based on the Spenserian stanza.
"Summer Solstice Chant"	irregular rhythmic chant form
"Paravaledellentine"	five-beat accentual rhythm, paradelle form
"Conversation"	iambic pentameter, invented form
"Two Bodies"	ballad stanza
"A Valentine for Hands"	four-beat accentual, invented form
"The Coming Mirrors"	iambic tetrameter, chant-like repeating form
"Meeting Mammoth Cave"	free verse, heavily accentual
"Butterfly Lullaby"	ballad stanza (originally written as a song)

"Belly"	rhythmic free verse with refrain
"Over Dark Arches"	rhythmic free verse
"Churching"	rhythmic free verse
"Lammas Chant"	Cretic meter, invented refrain form ("descending refrain")
"Earth Goddess and Sky God"	iambic pentameter, shortened English sonnet form
"Iowa Barn"	trochaic dimeter
"Desire for Quiet"	iambic pentameter
"Hostage Wildflowers"	iambic pentameter, mirror rhyme
"A Dance for the Inland Sea"	dactylic tetrameter, irregular rhyme
"The August Porch"	free verse
"Wild Yeasts"	dactylic pentameter, English sonnet

SCANSION SAMPLER:

METRICAL POEMS IN 15 METERS

Readers may prefer other ways of scanning some of the more ambiguous passages in the poems. These scansions are offered as suggestions only.

"Landing Under Water, I See Roots"	trochaic tetrameter, ballad stanza
"The Menstrual Hut"	iambic tetrameter
"Letter for Emily Dickinson"	iambic pentameter
"To Vivienne Eliot"	anapestic tetrameter
"Winter Solstice Chant"	four-beat accentual meter, falling rhythm
"Elegy for My Father"	dactylic tetrameter
"Without a Bird"	iambic dimeter
"Caribou Kitchen"	two-beat accentual meter
"A Seed for Spring Equinox"	dipodic meter
"Chain of Women"	accentual ballad stanza
"A Carol for Carolyn"	amphibrachs
"A Wedding on Earth"	hendecasyllabics and adonics (Sapphic meter)
"Lammas Chant"	cretic meter
"Iowa Barn"	trochaic dimeter
"Wild Yeasts"	dactylic pentameter

LANDING UNDER WATER, I SEE ROOTS

/ u | / u | / u | / u
All the things we hide in water
/ u u | / (u)| / u | / (u)
hoping we won't see them go—
/ u | / u | / u | / u
(forests growing under water
/ u | / u | / u | / (u)
press against the ones we know)—

\ u | / u | / u | / u
and they might have gone on growing
\ u | / u | / u | / (u)
and they might now breathe above
\ u | / u | / u | / u
everything I speak of sowing
\ u | / u| / u | / (u)
(everything I try to love).

Notes on the scansion of "Landing Under Water, I See Roots"

Line 2: The rest or omitted syllable, very unusual in the middle of a trochaic line, creates an emphatically strong stress on "won't." The diminishing accents from "won't" to "see" to "go" have the effect of receding ripples after a thrown stone; between these stresses, the pronoun referring to the hidden things,"them," is so faint it is almost inaudible. It is also possible, but maybe less graceful, to scan the first four syllables as a trochee and iamb; the effect of the stresses would be the same.

Lines 2, 4, 6. 8: Such truncated endings are common in trochaic poems; the missing final unstressed syllable provides a firmer ending to the line (for example, see Blake's "Tyger, Tyger")

Lines 5, 6: The half-stress (a useful mark if not overused) reflects the lightness of the first syllable. "And" is stressed very slightly more than the second syllable due to the expectation of the stress-position and the initial position in the line, as well as, possibly, the grammar and the hard consonant "d."

THE MENSTRUAL HUT

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

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

(u) / | u / | u / | u /
Now I am the one with eyes.
u / | u / |u / | u /
Your blood can listen, every time.

Notes on the scansion of "The Menstrual Hut"

Line 1: A trochaic substitution in the first foot is very common in iambic lines (see Wordsworth's "I Wander'd Lonely as a Cloud"). As opposed to the lines beginning with trochees in "Landing Under Water," here the remaining feet in the line are clearly iambic.

Lines 1-2: A trochee, while common at line-beginnings, is not very common at the beginnings of poems; it is a tentative way to launch an iambic poem, and the pyrrhic further destabilizes the first line. Together they create a questioning rhythm, in contrast with the definite iambic meter of Line 2's answer. Some people may hear a half-stress on "to" in line 1 or "your" at the beginning of Line 2.

Line 4: The spondee on "warm eyes," the only spondee in the poem, might be felt as slowing and warming the only image of warmth in the poem.

Lines 5 and 7: Line 5 opens with a true trochaic substitution. Line 7, by contrast, is better scanned as a headless iambic line, because of the simplicity principle: to scan it as a trochee would change the scansion of the entire line from the iambic base, but if it is scanned as a headless line only one foot is affected. The metrical contrast between these two lines is heightened by the repetition of the line that follows them.

LETTER FOR EMILY DICKINSON

u / | \ / | u / | u / | u /
When I cut words you never may have said
/ u | / / | u / | u / | u /
into fresh patterns, pierced in place with pins,
/ u |u / | u / | u \ | / /
ready to hold them down with my own thread,
u / | u / | u / | u / | u /
they change and twist sometimes, their color spins
/ u | / / | u / | u /| u /
loose, and your spider generosity
/ u | u / | u / | / / | u /
lends them from language that will never be
/ u | / / | u /| u / | u /
free of you after all. My sampler reads,
/ / | u / | \ u | u / | / /
"called back." It says, "she scribbled out these screeds."
u / | \ / | u / | u / | / /
It calls, "she left this trace, and now we start"—
u / | u / | u / | / u | u /
in stitched directions that follow the leads
\ / | u /| u /| / / | u /
I take from you, as you take me apart.

Notes on the scdansion of "Letter for Emily Dickinson"

Lines 2-3: The spondees in "fresh patterns" and "own thread," the only spondees in the stanza except for the quote from Dickinson, "called back," add energy to the speaker's youthful defiance.

Lines 6-9: The four initial trochaic substitutions beginning with the word "loose" set up a spinning effect.

Line 11: The unusual placement of the trochee "follow," following an iamb, slows down the pace of the line considerably, in preparation for the introduction of the refrain line.

TO VIVIENNE ELIOT

u / | / / | u u / | u u /
Your gray dress stings in the canopied dawn
u / | u u / | u u / | u u /
(Cassandra has hair that is twisted, and curls)

u / | \ / | u u / | u /
your eyes aren't closed and your hair is wild
u u / | u u / | u / | u u /
(she is gaunt, very strong, as loud as a gong)

u / | / / | u u / | u /
your gray dress stings, and the man is gone
\ u / | u u / | u \ u | u u /
(going morning, and there is nothing she ignores)

u / | \ / | u / | u /
your eyes aren't closed, your hair is wild
u u / | u \ / | \ u / | u u /
(If I watch her face curl, burned with anger, the pearl)

u / | / / | u u / | u u /
your gray dress stings, in the canopied dawn

u u / | u u / | u u / | u u /
(that has coated the sand will dissolve in my hand)

Notes on the scansion of "To Vivienne Eliot"

The last line is the only completely anapestic line; the rest of the poem moves gradually towards the full realization of this rhythm.

Line 6: There is a cretic substitution in the first foot and an amphibrachic substitution in the third foot. The same two substitutions appear in line 8. These are standard substitutions in anapestic meter, though not as common as iambs.

WINTER SOLSTICE CHANT

/ / / /
Vines, leaves, roots of darkness, growing,
/ / / /
now you are uncurled and cover our eyes
/ / / /
with the edge of winter sky
/ / / /
leaning over us in icy stars.
/ / / /
Vines, leaves, roots of darkness, growing,
/ / / /
come with your seasons, your fullness, your end.

Notes on the scansion of "Winter Solstice Chant"

Some lines would be trochaic, some dactylic, and some anapestic if this poem were scanned as accentual-syllabic meter. But the point of scanning is to describe what holds the rhythm of a poem together. The simplest way to describe the rhythmic unity of this poem is to scan it as accentual meter. Each line has four strong stresses. Some may hear a half-stress on the first "leaves"; the second time the line is repeated, after such a rhythmic variety of four-beat lines, the impetus is strong enough that "leaves" will likely not sound stressed.

ELEGY FOR MY FATHER

HLF, August 8, 1918—August 22, 1997

"Bequeath us to no earthly shore until
Is answered in the vortex of our grave
The seal's wide spindrift gaze towards paradise."
—Hart Crane, "Voyages"

"If a lion could talk, we couldn't understand it"
—Ludwig Wittgenstein

/ u u | / u u | / u u |/ u u
Under the ocean that stretches out wordlessly
/ u \ | / u u | / / u | / (u u)
past the long edge of the last human shore,
/ u \ | / u u | / u u | / u (u)
there are deep windows the waves haven't opened,
(u) / u u | / u \ | / u u | / (u)
where night is reflected through decades of glass.
/ u u | / u u| / u u | / u
There is the nursery, there is the nanny,
/ u u | / u u | / u u | /
there are my father's unreachable eyes
/ \ u | / u u u | / u | / u
turned towards the window. Is the child uneasy?
/ u u | / u u | / u u | / (u u)
His is the death that is circling the stars.

Notes on the scansion of "Elegy for My Father"

This stanza includes several of the most common variations in dactylic meter: the trochee (line 3, last foot, line 7, third foot, and elsewhere), the cretic (Line 2, first foot), bacchic (line 2, third foot), first paean (line 7, second foot), running start or extra-syllable beginning (line 4, first foot), catalectic or footless line (lines 2, 4, 6, and 8). (These variations are discussed in *An Exaltation of Forms*, p. 66).

WITHOUT A BIRD

/ \ | u /
This is a dawn
u / | u /
without a sun

u / | / /
(that has no birds)

/ \ | u /
This is a dawn
u / | u /
that will not part

u / | / /
(that will not sing)

/ u | / /
Night has no birds
u / | \ /
that will not sing

/ u | / /
(out of this cold)

/ \ | u /
This is a dawn
u / | u /
This is a dawn

u / | / /
(that is not spring)

Notes on the scansion of "Without a Bird"

Lines 5-6: "Not part" scans as an iamb, while "not sing" in the following line, due to the balance of consonant sounds between the two words and perhaps to the force added to "not" through repetition, can scan as a spondee.

Lines 10-11: Repetition also changes the rhythm in the second repetition of "this is a dawn," adding a more emphatic stress on "is."

CARIBOU KITCHEN

/ /
Most things have vanished
/ /
while we were talking
/ /
(the dents in a pitcher
/ /
gleam by the gas lamp),
/ /
but nothing is lost
/ /
(cups in far corners).
/ /
Arms still lean
/ /
over the table
/ /
(shadows on the oilcloth).

Notes on the scansion of "Caribou Kitchen"

Jack Foley has labeled this poem as dactylic , and it does have a strong falling rhythm. Lines 1, 2, 4, 6 and 8 all scan identically, as "adonics" (dactyl followed by a trochee), the pattern of the short line of a Sapphic stanza, also used in "A Wedding on Earth." Lines 3 and 5 can also be scanned as adonics if the first syllable is considered a parenthetical "running start" (EOF 67). But lines 7 and 9 don't fit that pattern, and a two-beat accentual scansion may be simplest. The alliteration of the stressed syllables in lines 4 and 6 suggests Anglo-Saxon accentual, alliterative verse.

A SEED FOR SPRING EQUINOX

/ u \ u | / u \ u | / u \ u | / (u u u)
. . . till I feel the earth around the place my head has lain
/ u \ u | / u u \ u | / u \ u | / (u u u)
under winter's touch, and it crumbles. Slanted weight of clouds.
/ u \ u | / u \ u | / u \ u | / (u u u)
Reaching with my head and shoulders past the open crust

/ u \ / | / (u u u)| \ u / u | / (u u u)
dried by spring wind. Sun. Tucking through the ground
/ u \ u | / u \ u | / u \ u | / u \ (u)
that has planted cold inside me, made its waiting be my food.
/ u \ u | / u \ u | / \ / u | / u \ (u)
Now I watch the watching dark my light's long-growing dark makes known.

Notes on the scansion of "A Seed for Spring Equinox "

Dipodic meter consists of pairs of trochaic feet, alternating strong and weak stresses in the first position, so the pattern of each foot is / u \ u. It has been used in light verse, as in the lyrics to "I am the very model of a modern major general" from Gilbert and Sullivan's H.M.S. Pinafore. This meter has been so rarely used in serious poetry that there is little precedent for the amount of variation it can accommodate. But if the meter is going to be used for serious poetry (as A.E. Housman predicted it would be in the famous footnote to his essay "The Name and Nature of Poetry,"), it will need to be expressively varied, as it is here. W.S. Gilbert's song lyrics would probably not allow a catalectic ending as in the first four lines here, or a dactyl in place of a trochee as in line 2. A subtler variation is the occasional use of half-stress in the unstressed position, as in line 4, first foot, and line 6, third foot. In line 4, the rest in the second foot lasts for the equivalent of three syllables, giving ample time for the sun to warm the earth before the regular rhythm is reestablished in the next foot.

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CHAIN OF WOMEN

/ / / /
These are the seasons Persephone promised
/ / /
as she turned on her heel;
/ / / /
the ones that darken, till green no longer
/ / /
bandages what I feel—

/ / / /
Now touches of gold stipple the branches,
/ / /
promising weeks of time
/ / / /
to fade through, finding the footprints
/ / /
she left as she turned to climb.

Notes on the scansion of "Chain of Women"

The ballad or folk stanza (also sometimes called hymn meter) has two incarnations: a smoother, more "literary" metrical type (usually iambic) and a rougher, more oral-based accentual type. This poem is something of a hybrid, since it falls mostly into a falling rhythm of trochees and dactyls, rather than iambs. While the accentual scansion used here is simple and somewhat expected for a ballad stanza, it would also be possible, and correct, to scan the poem as dactylic meter with trochaic substitutions, a few running starts, catalectic endings on every other line, and rests (missing unstressed syllables) in the middle of lines 5 and 7. One reason to choose to scan it as accentual is that the alliteration in line 7 evokes the Anglo-Saxon accentual alliterative tradition.

A CAROL FOR CAROLYN

"It is easy to be a poet, / brim with transparent water."
--Carolyn Kizer, "In the First Stanza"

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

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

Notes on the scansion of "A Carol for Carolyn"

This poem, and amphibrachic meter, are discussed by Finch in *The Body of Poetry* (p, 12-17.)

Lines 1-4, 8-11: The iamb in the final foot of the amphibrachic line is a very common variation in the Russian tradition of amphibrachic poetry.

Line 10: The "rest" in the second foot is an original and unusual variation. It contributes to a feeling of energy and urgency.

Line 13: The headless amphibrachic line is an unusual variation that may be said to create a sense of brimming.

A WEDDING ON EARTH

/ u | / u | / \ u |/ u | / (u)
Like the feet that root deep to walk the ground
(u) | / u | / u u | / u | / u | / (u)
with circling steps that no one of us can hear,
/ u | / u | / u u |/ u | / (u)
or the leaves that die just to coil down
/ \ | / u u | / u |/ u | / (u)
through lost blossoms and wait to reappear—
/ u | / u | / u u |/ u | / (u)
as the stamen, pistil and fragrant dust
/ u u| / u | / (u)
sing with the pollen's trust,
/ \ | / u | / \ u | / \ | / (u)
as each fruit that drips down the earth's strong chin
/ \ | / u | / u u| / u | / (u)
spills new sugar over an ancient face–
(u)| / \ | / u u| / u |/ u | / (u)
we all hold seeds that vibrate alive within,
(u) | / u | / u | / \ u | / u | / (u)
and every hardened pod pulls the world's embrace
/ u \ | / u | / (u)
from a new hiding place.

Notes on the scansion of "A Wedding on Earth"

The classic sapphic stanza has a specific metrical pattern:

/u|/u|/uu|/u|/u
/u|/u|/uu|/u|/u
/u|/u|/uu|/u|/u
/uu|/u

This invented stanza uses the same line lengths, with the rhyme pattern of the Spenserian stanza. As befits a meter related to the Sapphic stanza—a meter that does not lend itself to substitution, since a particular pattern of different metrical feet constitutes its identity—this invented meter does not usually use substitution within the line. However, it does tend to leave off the final unstressed syllable of a line, lending the poem a more insistent, drumlike and ceremonial quality.

LAMMAS CHANT

/ u / | / u /
Fill the earth's belly full.
/ u / | \ u /
Bring the fruits we have grown.
/ u / | / u /
There are cold months ahead.
/ u / | / u /
Give them peace in the ground.

Notes on the scansion of "Lammas Chant"

Cretics, a highly unusual meter in English (and the meter of the military dirge "Taps"), lend the poem a chantlike, heavily stressed rhythm. Because the meter juxtaposes two stresses in adjacent feet, it forces a slow, rolling pronunciation. The lines do not gain momentum from foot to foot as they would if the poem were, for example, in trochees or dactyls.

IOWA BARN

/ u | / u
Light and shadow
/ u | / u
frame a window
/ u | / u
that comes reaching
/ u | / \
past a roof-edge
\ u | / u | / (u)| / \
and becomes a hole. Sky goes
/ u | \ u
funneling to
/ u | / u
any darkness,
/ u | / (u)
cut by warped
/ u | / u
wooden framing,
/ u | / u
long-abandoned
/ u | / u
by the glass that
/ u | / u
could reflect us.

Notes on the scansion of "Iowa Barn"

Line 5: In contrast with the metrical regularity of the rest of the poem, the extra foot and a half in this line underscore the surprise of the imagery. The missing syllable (hole) in the third foot is more evident since it is surrounded by full trochaic feet on both sides, which would not have been possible in a dimeter line.

WILD YEASTS

/ u u | / u u | / \ u | / u u | / (u u)
Rumbling a way up my dough's heavy throat to its head,
/ u u | / \ u | / u u | / u u | / (u u)
seeping the trailed, airborne daughters down into the core,
/ u u | / u u | / u \ | / u \ | / (u u)
bubbles go rioting through my long-kneaded new bread;
/ u \ | / u u | / u | / \ u | / (u u)
softly, now, breath of the wildest yeast starts to roar.
(u)| / \ u | / \ \ | \ u u | / u u | / (u u)
My hands work that peaked foam, push insides out into the light,
(\) | / u \ | / u \ | / u u | / u u | u (u u)
edge shining new sinews back under the generous arch
(u)| / \ u | / \ u | / \ | / \ \ | / (u u)
that time's final sigh will conclude. (Dry time will stretch tight
/ u u |/ u \ | / u u | \ / u | / (u u)
whistling stops of quick heat out of my darkened starch.)

Notes on the scansion of "Wild Yeasts"

This is a heavily stressed poem, and many of the feet contrast a strong stress (/) with half-stresses (\). This underscores the fact that stress is always relative; a syllable that would sound stressed in another context can sound unstressed compared to a more strongly stressed syllable next to it.

It would also be possible to scan the poem by marking the less-stressed syllables as unstressed (u), but a scansion that shows the tension between the unstressed expectation and the actual lightly-stressed syllable seems to provide the most subtle and accurate description of a line's rhythm.

Lines 1-8: The catalectic ending (ending on a stress with the final unstressed syllables missing) is common in dactylic meter, as it is in trochaic meter.

Lines 6, 7: The "running start" or extra-syllable beginning is also quite common in falling meter. Usually the syllable is unstressed, but sometimes it is lightly stressed as in line 6.

Line 8: The amphibrach (fourth foot) is a standard substitution in dactylic meter, as it is in anapestic meter (see "For Vivienne Eliot").

Poet's Note:

ANSWERS TO FIVE QUESTIONS FREQUENTLY ASKED AT MY READINGS

by Annie Finch

How do you get the ideas for your poems?

Some poems just come to me, before I have a chance to think about them ("Moon," "Caribou Kitchen," "The Coming Mirrors," "Chain of Women," "Two Bodies.") "Landing Under Water" came to me on finishing Rita Dove's *The Darker Face of the Earth.* Some poems come to me as a line or phrase that I use as a seed to work with ("Belly," "Without a Bird.") Some are about things or experiences that I decide I want to write a poem about because I want to spend time with them and understand them more deeply ("Watching the Oregon Whale," "Hostage Wildflowers," "Mowing"). Some simply inspired by places or experiences that inspire me, like the visit to a tallgrass prairie preserve which inspired "Dance for the Inland Sea." Some are inspired by words I love ("Interpenetrate," "Butterfly Lullaby"). Some are poems I decide I want to write for a certain occasion ("Elegy for My Father," "A Wedding on Earth," "A Carol for Carolyn," the valentines, which are an annual tradition for my husband, and the five seasonal chants); in the elegy and the wedding poem, for example, I wanted to provide an earth-centered religious context for certain rituals of marriage and death. Some are commissioned for anthologies or literary events ("Conversation," "Paravaledellentine," "Ghazal for a Poetess," "Letter for Emily Dickinson").

In a formal poem, do you know beforehand what form the poem will be in?

A poem's form can happen in many different ways. Some poems appear initially in my mind with a certain rhythm or form ("Two Bodies," "The Coming Mirrors"). Sometimes I discover the right form quite late during the process of writing and revising the poem "("Lammas Chant," "A Valentine for Hands"). Sometimes I invent or choose a form to help me find a way into a poem a want to write ("Elegy for My Father," "A Seed for Spring Equinox"); I invented the stanza form of "A Wedding on Earth" as a hybrid of two meaningful poetic forebears, and its length based on the numerical symbolism of two people becoming a couple but remaining individuals (11 x 11 = 121). Sometimes I decide ahead of time that I want a poem to be in a certain form ("Lamia to Lycius") or I am commissioned to write in a certain form for a journal or anthology ("Paravaledellentine").

Do you write or type your poems?

I almost always start by writing, either on whatever scraps are nearby (envelopes, paper towels, the blank pages at the ends of books) or on legal pads. After a few drafts, I start to type or print

out each draft and make further changes on the clean drafts. One of my favorite places to work on a poem is on the printed version when it is published in a magazine.

How do you revise a poem?

I often read poems aloud as I revise, either quietly or loudly. I tend to do a lot of moving of stanzas or lines. Revision can involve small changes (repeatedly reconfiguring the linebreaks at the end of "The August Porch"; repeatedly shuffling the rhyme scheme of "Watching the Oregon Whale"), or big changes (adding a second stanza to "The Intellect of Woman" ten years after the first; cutting out the first two thirds of "Boothbay Harbor"; combining two separate poems in "To Vivienne Eliot" and "Dance for the Inland Sea.") Occasionally, revising is a matter of reading rather than writing; at one time, I considered "Caribou Kitchen" to be juvenilia rather than a mature poem.

How do you know when a poem is finished?

Sometimes a poem can seem finished for a long time before I realize it isn't; "Forest-Falling" was finished for 15 years before I changed the epigraph from "for Edmund Spenser." I revise in large ways or small until the poem seems to come to life, seems to speak back to me. When I finally hear the poem saying something I didn't know before, and I know it will keep saying it for a long time, then I feel the poem is finished.

Born in 1956 in New Rochelle, New York, Annie Finch studied poetry and poetry-writing at Yale, verse-drama with Ntozake Shange at the University of Houston's graduate creative writing program, and earned a PhD in English and American Literature from Stanford University. Currently, she directs the Stonecoast Masters of Fine Arts program in creative writing at the University of Southern Maine.

Annie Finch's books of poetry include *Eve* (Story Line, 1997), a finalist for the National Poetry Series and the Yale Series of Younger Poets, among other awards; *Calendars* (Tupelo, 2003), shortlisted for the Foreword Poetry Book of the Year Award; and the performance poem *The Encyclopedia of Scotland* (Salt, 2004). Her translation of *The Complete Poems of Louise Labé* is published by the University of Chicago Press.

Finch's poetry is featured in *The Norton Anthology of World Poetry*, *The Penguin Book of The Sonnet*, *Poetry Daily*, *Writing Poetry: An Introduction*, and many other anthologies and textbooks, and appears in numerous journals including *Hudson Review*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Fulcrum*, *Court Green*, *Kenyon Review*, *Partisan Review*, *Yale Review*, and *The Paris Review*. Finch's work has been featured in such media outlets as "Voice of America" and HBO's "Def Poetry Jam," and songs inspired by her poetry have been performed at venues including Cincinnati Conservatory of Music, Lawrence Conservatory, the Spoleto Festival, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art. She is also the author of two opera librettos, "Lily Among the Goddesses" and "Marina," based on the life of Russian poet Marina Tsvetaeva, which premiered at American Opera Projects in New York in 2003.

Finch's critical writings about poetry have been collected in *The Ghost of Meter* (Univ. of Michigan Press, 1993) and *The Body of Poetry: Essays on Women, Form, and the Poetic Self* (Univ. of Michigan Press, 2005). She has also edited several ground-breaking, popular anthologies including *A Formal Feeling Comes: Poems in Form by Contemporary Women* (Story Line,1994), and *An Exaltation of Forms: Contemporary Poets Celebrate the Diversity of Their Art* (coedited with Kathrine Varnes, Univ. of Michigan Press, 2002).

Finch's poetry is inspired by the natural world, especially the landscapes of Maine, where she lives with her husband the environmentalist Glen Brand and their two children Althea and Julian.

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