



Tickets for a Prayer Wheel: Poems

Annie Dillard

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A stunning poetry collection by the Pulitzer Prize-winning author of whom *The New Yorker* said, "She has the ability to write with enduring grace." The *Boston Globe* called her "one of the most distinctive voices in American letters today."

Tickets for a Prayer Wheel: Poems Details

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From Reader Review Tickets for a Prayer Wheel: Poems for online ebook

Monte says

some of these poems become sentences in later prose work - it isn't surprising...
my first reading of annie dillard was followed by the delight of finding her other books - encounters with
chinese writers, holy the firm, mornings like this, the living - and each in its turn...

giao says

There are days when I am not sure whether I do or do not like Annie Dillard's style of writing. I think poetry fits her style of writing the best after having read this collection, and it has also made me appreciate her essays and novels much more. I would recommend reading this during November/ December months.

Daniel Gualtieri says

Fantastic little book of poetry... Dillard's work is beautiful and organic, and often creates a lovely sense of yearning. This is particularly the case with the title poem, which is my personal favorite.

Abbey Gohren says

Stunning.

Especially "The Man Who Wishes to Feed on Mahogany" and the title piece, "Tickets for a Prayer Wheel".

Jana says

annie dillard has become my writing idol. i love the way she thinks, i love the way she expresses, i love her. i just got three books in the mail of hers that i ordered and one of them had a picture of her on the inside cover, which i cut out, and is now taped to my writing desk :) if you want to try her out, start with "pilgrim at tinker creek", it is the kind of book you can read all at once or in fragments. sometimes i like to read just a few paragraphs or pages before i go to sleep.

Liz VanDerwerken says

I love Annie Dillard's prose, having read several of her non-fiction works, and her poetry is just as lovely. Some of the poems were hit or miss for me, but I loved many in the first and third sections of the book.

Much of her poetic style reminds me of Mary Oliver, though it is very much her own.

Cheryl says

I am a bit obsessed with Dillard. I scour the internet for more of her. I reread her over and over. I am so sad that she seems to have stopped writing, and seems to have agoraphobia or something that prevents her from engaging in the world. Her website says, "Now I can no longer travel, can't meet with strangers, can't sign books but will sign labels with SASE, can't write by request, and can't answer letters. I've got to read and concentrate. Why? Beats me." Maybe she is just living her life, absorbed in nature and the divine, and her family. I hope so. She gives such beauty to us in her words, and these poems are a such a cool peek into who she is, I hope she is doing okay. She is a funny human being, and her humor is on display here as well as her deep knowledge of theology and her awareness of the divine in nature. Oh I wish there was a need for an Annie Dillard scholar, and it was me. She revisits many ideas and imagery from Pilgrim at Tinker Creek, and I love it.

She starts right away in FEAST DAYS, and readers familiar with her might wait breathlessly for the glimpse of the divine after seeing a wood duck:

*Today I saw a wood duck
in Tinker Creek.
In the fall flood, look
what the creek floats down:
once I glimpsed
round the edge of a bank
a troupe of actors
rained in from Kansas,
dressed for comedy.*

No divinity, yet, here's a laugh, a picture you can't get out of your mind, but wait, here it comes, well after a while. You can't ever avoid a journey when you read anything this author writes.

*One thing we've got plenty of
here on the continents
is soil...*

*Inside I stand at the window, god,
with your name wrapped around my throat like a scarf.*

*Lean through the willow, look
upstream, and see what's floating down!
I see camels swimming
with long-lash, golden eyes...*

*Oh, I've been here and there
around the heart-
a few night spots, really...*

*I love with my hand, not my heart.
When I draw your face,
my fingers trace your lips.
Crossing a page, my hand keeps
contours: I know that art
is edges...*

*That the soil and fresh-water lakes
also rejoice
as do products
such as sweaters
(nor are plastics excluded
from grace),
is less well known.
Further:
the reason
for some silly-looking fishes,
for the bizarre mating
of certain adult insects,
or the sprouting, say,
in a snow tire
of a Rocky Mountain grass,
is that the universal
loves the particular,
that freedom loves to live
and live fleshed full,
intricate,
and in detail.*

THE SHAPE OF THE AIR

Some Specifics

*Cut a hole through the roof of your house
leading to your bedroom closet.
Close and caulk.
Stand on the roof,
pour plaster down
into your shoes,
around, through your shirts,
pants, bathrobe, hats,
allow to dry.
Remove with hooks.
Split. remove the clothes;
discard.
This is the shape of part of the air.*

TICKETS FOR A PRAYER WHEEL

The son, a scholar, speaks:

*Our family is looking
for someone who knows how to pray.
Ora pro nobis, pray for us now
and now.
We sent
all our strong cousins out as runners. . . .*

*One of the cousins
brought back a doll
which he had purchased at great price.
The doll is dressed in feathers
and beads of mistletoe.
His head, according to our cousin,
is stuffed with millet seed;
on each seed is written,
in a tongue foreign to us,
“PRAY.” We are uncertain
whether to shake the doll
like a rattle, or worship him.
We took turns wearing him
around our necks;
we may yet stew him
in a soup of herbed broths
and pass him round
and drink him up.
Whose prayers are good?
Whose prayers are good?
My book says,
“it is a characteristic practice
to write prayers on small leaves
which are then chewed
and fastened on the faces of the idols.”
We have lot a taste for other foods.
I cannot cross a room without falling down.
My mother is piecing a cover
for Christ, if he should come.
She feeds all strangers; she saves
skins; her fingers pray over
wound wool on skeins.
Saint Irenaeus said
collective prayer
accompanied by fasting
could raise the dead.
Christ was unable to work
miracles, according to Luke,
in Nazareth,
where no one had faith.
Saint Irenaeus!
And the dead? And the dying?*

*I met him down the ruining stair,
wearing a necklace of macaws
threaded through the eyes;
I met him on the flat space
in the brain—
thin bones strewn
in a box, like lace.*

Pray without ceasing.

*Hoc licet orare,
quod licet desiderare.*

*Saint Thomas: we may pray
for all those things we are not
forbidden to want.*

But Christ says needs:

*your Father knows what you need
before you ask him;
your heavenly Father knows
that you need them all.*

*My sister,
who works well in small,
has made a device
to strap on her wrist.*

*A sensitive lever
that touches her pulse
flips open a door
to a circular well
in which is inscribed the word “GOD.”*

*We hear her walking the halls
or shut in her windy rooms
clicking minutely her prayer.*

*And sometimes, look
how her heart beats hard: . . .*

GOD GOD GOD GOD GOD GOD GOD GOD GOD....

*The Dominican,
Gregorio Lopez,
prayed continuously for three years,
“Thy will be done on earth
as it is in heaven.”*

*If we all stop at once
will the arches collapse?*

*How were those three years?
There’s someone else in the house;
I saw the edge*

of his topcoat round the stair.

*Mother went out to the kitchen for milk
and found a kettle of bones
boiling on the fire.*

*We smell
wind in our beds;*

*we sweep dead bees
and a deer leg from the fire.
Our astronomers have found and named
the two moons of Mars;
Phobos and Deimos,
dread and terror,
winding over the house.
What rood or aspergillum
banishes this brood?
We baited our hooks
with burnt pigeons,
with papers of prayer on a string
and pieces of fire that hissed in the river.
That night was clear; stars floated on water.
We baited our hooks
and cast them into the sky.*

*At dawn my father
drew in the line
and threw the doves to the dogs.
The papers of prayer were ruined,
the fires put out.*

*Reflections confuse our astronomers;
many doubt the accuracy of the casts.*

Our gifts are rejected.

Our own people despise us.

*Who will teach us to pray,
who will pray for us now?*

Pascal:

*“Every religion
which does not affirm that God is hidden
is not true.”*

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The third horseman, and a voice:

*“A quart of wheat for a denarius,
and three quarts of barley for a denarius;
but do not harm oil and wine!”*

Fast days.

*We feather our nests
with froth; the rivers roll,
the screens of mercy part. . . .*

Needs, he says; knock; seek;
and still they die,
who do not wish to leave.
We must not need life. "Not
as the world gives do I give to you."
My sister sleeps.
My father went away.
My mother serves a soup of smoke and snow.
How long has it been?
My diagrams
cancel each other out.
There is one prayer left:
"Teach us to pray."
Teach us to pray.

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Later:

My mother lay
in a windless room
under blankets, on the floor.
The walls were cold,
the cloth hangings without color,
dry.
We live among the dead....
By her bed
a wooden desk appeared,
stray, austere,
and on it four white cups—
earth, air, water, fire.
Many things are becoming
possible for us.
We are recalling
forgotten lore;
we are exploring
our own house and garden
like hard men charting
the Ultima Thule.
Martin Luther prayed for rain.
Under the hearth we dug down,
found rain water, salt,
and an old coin

printed with a gold cloud.
With ropes we drew up rocks
hung damp in sea thong,
living mussel.
Under the water grew eglantine,
standing either for Poetry
or the saying
“I wound to heal.”
My father is back.
The house is a plain
the old man crazes through.
He has carved on his belly
and chest the Nicene Creed.
He rubs grit in
to raise the scars....
po? ???? ?o po? ????
????l ?o ???l
po? ?o po? (*)
He wants to break his will
like a stick across the knee.
But God meets always
the prayer for faith.
Woe, my father cries one day,
and Mercy the next.
Once he snared a nun
and bid her beat him,
but she beat soft.
Rape? Imitation?
We kept her round the house
till she flew off.
Something is already here.
The prayer for faith
routs it out the air; or,
only faith can cry for itself
up the short, inspirited night
or down the drear day.
In Luke eleven
and again in Luke eighteen,
Christ demands
importunate prayer,
prayer that does not faint.
Fatigare deos,
wearing God out.
Is Christ as good as his word?
If God does not tire, still
we may tire of longing.
Pray this prayer:
receive our prayer.
Teach us to pray, teach us to pray, to pray, pray.

The river Chebar

flows to the sea;

the river Hiddekel

flows to the sea.

Maranatha, amen.

My sister stands like Archimedes,

drawing spirals in the sand.

When the wind comes

it washes her with spindrift;

water fills the spirals

where the sea grapes hatch.

Our cousin came

and called, "Hello, hello..."

"Ho!" we cried,

"If you are thirsty,

come down to the water;

ho, if you are hungry,

come and sit and eat."

At last we understood

he could not see

or hear us. We walked

in the sky; we were crossing

a wooden bridge across the sea.

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You go down the hall

and open the door,

down the hall

and open the small door,

down the dark hall

and open the smaller door,

down the hall,

small as a wire,

bare, and the final door—

flies from the wall.

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*God in the house
teaching us to pray:
and the family crazed
and full of breath.*

*We nailed a picture
by the door, on the whitewashed wall.*

*My father leaned close
to examine the picture,
the universe—At once,
the universe rang its call
and clapped him in to itself,
to its ebon, unthinkable thrall.*

*God held him close
and lighted for him
the distant, dizzying stairs;
God looped him
in a sloping loop of stars.*

*He came back and asked
for a cup of cold water only.*

*He planted beans on the bookshelf;
they grew, and fed us
for a year. He said,
“I cannot bind the chains of the Pleiades,
nor loose the cords of Orion.*

*The one and holy God of heaven can, alone,
whose hand is his face.*

*We pray at his command
a prayer of praise.”*

*The presence of God:
he picked me up
and swung me like a bell.*

*I saw the trees
on fire, I rang
a hundred prayers of praise.*

*I no longer believe
in divine playfulness.*

*I saw all the time of this planet
pulled like a scarf
through the sky.*

*Time, that lorn and furling
oriflamme...*

*Did God dilute
even his merest thought
and take a place in the scarf,
shrink and cross*

*to an olive continent
and eat our food at little tables for a time?
All those things
which were thought to be questions
are no longer important.*

*I breathe
an air like light;
I slough off questions
like a hundred suits of motley;
I wear a bright mandorla
like a gown.*

*We keep our paper money shut
in a box, for fear of fire.
Once, we opened the box
and Christ the lamb stepped out
and left his track of flame across the floor.*

Why are we shown these things?

God teaches us to pray.

*My sister
dreamed of a sculpture
Showing the form of God.*

*He has no edges,
and the holes in him spin.
He alone is real,
and all things lie in him
as fossil shells
curl in solid shale.*

*My sister dreamed of God
who moves around
the spanding, spattered holes
of solar systems hollowed in his side.*

*I think that the dying
pray at the last
not "please"
but "thank you"*

as a guest thanks his host at the door.

*Falling from mountains
the people are crying
thank you,
thank you,
all down the air;
and the cold carriages
draw up for them on the rocks.*

Fare away, fare away!

*The Dominican
Gregorio Lopez
prayed on God's command.
A hand
raised my mother up,*

*and round her poured
a light like petalled water.
For thou only art holy,
thou only art the lord...
and we are drowned.*

Tia says

What a beautiful, seemingly-easy way with words Annie Dillard has. There is a breeziness about her...her lines move like something natural...a breeze, a creek. Mmm.

Read her poem about the planets and then listen to Holst's "Planets," just for fun.

C. Hollis Crossman says

This book was much better than I expected. My impression of Dillard is that she is a very good writer who too often gets carried away with her own cleverness to the point that she loses sense of direction and purpose. Sometimes she even goes so far as to say things that are baldly ridiculous, just because she thinks they sound pretty. She resisted that urge when writing most of these poems.

Like her prose, the poems here demonstrate a preoccupation with the natural world. Unlike Wendell Berry, however, she loves nature because of what it means to humanity, not as a refuge from, or a critique of, humanity. This means that her poems are softer and more inviting, even as they tend to be jagged and sharp-edged. The effect is most noticeable when she speaks of trees and wind.

There are a few meandering poems here that have pretty lines but don't amount to much. "Some Questions and Answers About Natural History" seems particularly to fall into this category. It's the cleverness taking root, not letting the truly profound flourish.

This is easy to forgive, however, when one considers three poems in particular. One, "The Man Who Wishes to Feed on Mahogany," takes its premise from a Chesterton quip about the ability of poetry only to address the familiar and commonplace rather than the bizarre and novel. It's easily one of the best poems Dillard has ever written. She turns the Chesterton quote on its head by making the man's desire commonplace, and showing the altogether strange nature of desire itself.

The next poem of note is "An Epistemology of Planets" in which the poet addresses each of the planets in our Solar System directly. Somehow she manages to offer impressions of the planets themselves, the entities they're named for or represent, and their role in the heavens. It's short, but impressive.

Finally, the titular "Tickets for a Prayer Wheel" is probably the best thing I've read by Dillard (with the possible exception of her essay "An Expedition to the Pole" in the collection *Teaching a Stone to Talk*—absolutely brilliant). It deals with the struggle of mortals to pray, the fear of unanswered prayer, the fear of answered prayer, and the nature of death and grief. It does all this in a lilting dark free verse that is

itself prayer-like. I don't like everything Dillard writes, but I will defend her stature as a great American poet in virtue of this poem alone.

Christopher says

Overly obscure at times, but when she nails it, she hits hard.

Bryana Johnson says

There is no question that Annie Dillard is a splendid writer. Like all good poets, she hallows everything and shrouds it in mystery. I just wish her mysteries weren't so utterly impenetrable and gloomy, and keep hoping she will be unreservedly jubilant about something for once, rather than behaving as though the few visible parts of the mostly-veiled truth are not particularly gladdening. I feel I am getting only half of the story with her, and I want the other half wildly. That said, there were some sections in here that made me stop short and reread and reread and reread. Like this,

God am I smug when they talk about Belsen—
I've never killed anyone in my life!
I simply betray:

let the phone ring,
seal a typed letter,
say to the girl in the courtyard,
“I never saw him before in my life,”
call a cab, pull on gloves,
and leave. And leave you,
and leave you with the bill.

Miles Smith says

With the very real caveat that I am at best an amateur connoisseur of poetry, I enjoyed this early collection from Annie Dillard. Their poems are earthy and convey a sense of playful yet reflective interaction with the natural and spiritual world. In some ways they are child-like, but certainly not childish.

Maria says

One of my favorite books of poetry. She looks at poetry and people in a deep but whimsical manner. I feel like if I sat with her poems for dinner, we'd be laughing and talking late into the night about literature and philosophy and muskrats and constellations and God. I love how she embraces nature, animals, trees, and yet without cliche. Some poems are surreal, some absurdist, some lyrical nature odes and some are almost like hymns. What keeps me reading is that Annie Dillard is fresh and original, and has something striking to say.

Jenny says

Dillard's intensity is mesmerizing. This collection contains thematic seeds that are expanded repeatedly throughout her later work.

Julia says

I've been wanting to ready more poetry than I typically do, and this was lovely. Graceful, whimsical, dark at some times, thoughtful.
