

This interview with Annie Finch was conducted by Dave DeGolyer for the lifestyle magazine “The Best Me” in 2013.

1. What is creativity (and what is the biggest hindrance to creativity)?

Creativity is a way to play in the timeless state: right brain, unconscious, dreamtime, love, bliss, or whatever we like to call it. It’s a self-sustaining temple, dancefloor, playground, ecosystem for the better parts of our natures, the parts of us that are one with other beings whether human, plant, animal, mineral, or spiritual. Creativity’s biggest hindrance is fear.

2. Do you feel a sense of responsibility to a particular community? If so, what responsibility/why?

I feel three different kinds of responsibility. To those communities who are especially vulnerable to us—plant, animal, air, water, sky, Native and indigenous people, children—though of course we are all vulnerable—I feel a responsibility to listen, to increase in understanding. To my Muse and community of revered poets, living and dead, I feel a responsibility to honor my voice and keep my poetic standards pure. To those communities I feel I especially speak for — witches, pagans, women and men who are seeking to live in a more spiritually alive way—to these communities, I feel a responsibility to speak out, to write honestly and courageously, to make myself known as the person I most truly am.

3. Do you have a ritual that is part of your creative practice?

I have a vocabulary of rituals that I use depending on the circumstance. I might stretch, do some yoga, breathe a certain way, stand in the sunlight or moonlight with my hands held out, ask for help from the Goddess, chant some words from the piece I’m working on, eat, sing, touch a body of water, or take off my shoes and feel the earth. I choose what will keep me feeling honestly alive in the moment.

4. Do you have a different process for each of the kinds of creative work you do? Do you keep, for example, a separate space and prepare yourself differently for poetry as compared to when you compose a libretto, write an essay, translate, or blog?

Sometimes I move between different projects fairly seamlessly on my computer; for example, while doing this interview I also have a file open for a poem that I've been revising for years, and I allow myself to move back and forth as I'm moved to do. That environment works fine for essays, blogging, and for revising creative works. New poems are different. They can track me down almost any time I have a quiet mind—in the middle of the night and early morning are favorite times—but I don't think I can recall any time when one found me at the computer. I love to work on poems and translations at an electricity-free cabin in the woods, and I wrote most of the libretto "Sylvia and the Moon" in my simple room at the Georgia O'Keefe Ranch while teaching at A Room of Her Own, the women's writing retreat. If I have a poem I'm thinking about, or even if I just want to be open to write one, I'll usually take a long walk with a notebook. The beach is a favorite spot, but the Muse has also found me while walking in cities.

5. We are interested in the intentions of the artists we interview. What are you writing for?

I write for the Muse, who insists on it; for my readers, who make it feel worthwhile; for the earth and its future, as political action; and for the Goddess, as prayer.

6. In your essay "The Body of Poetry," you lay out a fundamental difference between mainstream poetics (which strives to transcend the body) and what you call a goddess poetics (which says dirt, blood, sex, soul, earth, death, animal are not meant to be transcended, which seems to be all about sensuality)...As I read your essay I was reminded of the work of David Abram—immanent spirituality being a central idea. What he's saying about the earth, the nature we inhabit (that we must inhabit), you seem to be saying about the poem, that sustainability begins by returning to the physical, to form, and communicating with it, celebrating it, living in it.

7. Is this poetics of form/earth/sensuality in some way a direct response to the devastation of our natural world?

You've understood a profound connection. A poetics based on the transcendence of poetry's physical nature would feel dangerous to me at such a time; we can no longer take nature and the physical world for granted. We need to remember how to listen, as deeply and as soon as possible, to the physical heartbeat of the earth. Poetic form is a channel to full rhythmic engagement with ourselves and the rest of nature.

8. Is our relationship with the body of a poem a mirror of our relationship with the human body and with the natural world, and if so is there a call to action for poets in there? Is the poem in as vulnerable a position as our natural, physical world?

We lost contact with the body of the poem during the exact same time period that we were losing our connection with the human body and the natural world. In both cases, technology, over-thinking, and arrogance led us astray. In both cases, the United States provided a dangerous model that much of the rest of the world followed during the twentieth century. In both cases, we have approached the brink of near-total loss. I do think they mirror each other—and it's impossible to say which came first. The good news is that in both cases the inherent power of the vulnerable, betrayed force—in spite of our conscious, egotistical resistance—calls persistently to and in our hearts.

9. Where do we begin? If I want to practice a "goddess-oriented spirituality" as a woman and a writer where/how do I begin? And how do YOU define "goddess"?

The beauty of the situation is that we, even here in the over-developed world, are as human as ever. I travelled in the Congo recently and felt an immediate deep connection with the marvelous people there that reminded me how everything native to all humans is still in our immediate reach. The beginning is as close as our next dream, our next laugh, our next moment of gratitude. That's where spirituality is, in our humanness. So where to begin, for you, needs to be about hearing what's close. That

goddess-oriented spirituality is already all there and ready to go, in you, in you with nature, in you with food and music, and perhaps especially in you with other women: writers or just friends, a small group that makes you feel happy. It's a fundamental mistake to think that writers, especially women writers, need to write in isolation. My definition of "goddess" is the sacredness of everything in the physical world, including humans. . . I'm now writing a memoir that will go into quite a bit of depth on these questions.

10. Who is one of your favorite poets writing today and why?

Joy Harjo is one. She is generous and courageous, willing to speak about the most important things in our lives, to use her art as a channel for the most sacred energies. I respect her greatly, and I'm thrilled that she is teaching with me at the Stonecoast low-residency MFA program.

11. Part of the website is called Creative Juice. We intend to offer recipes and creative prompts in this section. Would you be willing to share your favorite food recipe (if so, where did it come from and why do you like it) or a favorite writing or creative prompt? Thank you!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

My recipe is roasted kale. I first ate roasted kale at a restaurant called Miranda's in Rockland, Maine, where they roast it in a brick oven. I couldn't rest until I figured out how to make it myself. The combination of crunchiness and greenness makes me so grateful; I can feel the edge between life and death as the kale offers itself.

ROASTED KALE WITH OLIVE OIL, GARLIC, AND LEMON

Tear leaves of kale (or any green) into a few very large pieces, toss with olive oil and sliced garlic, and pile on a cookie sheet. Bake in a convection oven or regular oven at 375 for 15 min or until crisp. Squeeze on a little fresh lemon, sprinkle with sea salt if you like, and serve.