



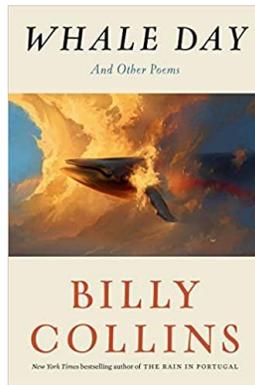
Our Interview with Poet Anika Amann



Poets write poems because they love it, because they have words flying out of their fingertips and arranging themselves on the page, because the words won't be quiet until they are a poem.

Sally: Thank you for joining us on the Poetry Page, Anika!

Your poem, “A Tree of Life,” appears in the Norwalk Public Library’s 2019 Art & Text exhibit booklet. I remember you couldn’t make it to our reception because you were one of just twelve young poets selected by Billy Collins for *The Poetry of Trains*, the **2019 Young Poets Contest**, sponsored by the **New York Botanical Garden** and **Poetry Society of America**. That event fell on the same day as our reception.



Your poem, “A Winter’s Reverie,” was selected by Billy Collins:

A Winter’s Reverie
by Anika Amann

There’s the snapping crackle of the fire’s twinkling glow,
and the powdery banks of some white fluffy snow.

There’s a peppermint scent that pipes in through the vents,
and there in the chimney is a Santa-shaped dent.

There’s a growing excitement that shows on your face
as you dream of toy soldiers and dolls dressed in lace,

there’s a quiet static on the radio
with the comforting chords of the songs we all know

-and then in the stillness, a change in the air,
rustling up snowflakes from here and from there.

As the clock ticks on slowly, the world smells of pine,
and we fall asleep knowing that it’s wintertime

It's a beautiful poem. Both "A Winter's Reverie" and "A tree of Life" are formalist poems. Do you consider yourself a formalist, or do you sometimes also write in free verse?

Anika: First of all, thank you so much for having me on The Poetry Page and for giving me this wonderful opportunity! That's a really great question.

I would say that I do not actually consider myself a formalist. My style is pretty amorphous, as of now, and I'm really trying to find my "voice" in poetry. I've shifted from my seventh-grade style of simple quartets to a more unstructured free verse, although I do sometimes write formalist poetry. I find free verse to be less restricting, and I feel that it comes from a rawer, realer place in my poetry. When I write a structured poem, it is usually just to create a whole, polished idea of something, or to be entertaining. Yet, when I write free verse, I tend to find the work more thought-provoking. I write freely in order to create something more relatable, because not everybody thinks in verse. When I write something unrestricted by rhyme patterns or even physically by stanzas, I write something that I believe to be closer to the soul. I want people to read my poems not to see a "meaning," but rather to see a reflection of themselves. In my poetry, I want to describe things we all know in a way that lets the reader see it just a bit differently. Thus, my usual poem consists of words that go wherever on the page they want to. I don't want to define my style just yet, but as of right now, in the tenth grade, I prefer contemplative, observational free verse.

Sally: That is a great answer, Anika.

Please share with us a few of your favorite poets, and some of your favorite poems.

Anika: One poet I find particularly inspiring is Emily Dickinson.

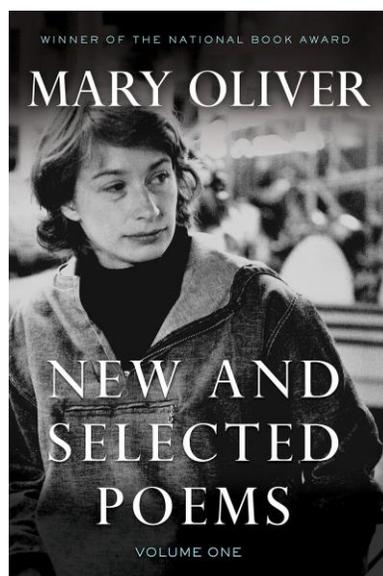


I love her style, her Random capitalization, her love of dashes— she has such a unique voice. I love how she never titled her poems. Sometimes I don't want to give my poems a title, because for some reason it makes them more like formal works to me, when I would often rather they stay as thoughts I happened to write down. She inspires me because her style of poetry was unconventional for the times, but she did not write to fit the times. She wrote in the way that she liked to write. I've always found her poetry to be beautiful, and often thought-provoking. I wrote an analysis essay on her in the eighth grade and gave a presentation. I own a few books of her poetry. One of my favorite poems is one of hers, which has a sentiment I know the library shares.

“He ate and drank the precious words/His spirit grew robust;/He knew no more that he was poor/Nor that his frame was dust./He danced along the dingy days/And this bequest of wings/Was but a book. What liberty/A loosened spirit brings!”

Another of my favorite poems is “Anne,” by Mary Oliver:

“The daughter is mad, and so/I wonder what she will do./But she holds her saucer softly/And sips, as people do,/ From moment making/Comments of rain and sun,/ Till I hear my own heart shaking/Till I am the frightened one./ O Anne, sweet Anne, brave Anne,/ What did I think to see?/ The rumors of the village/Have painted you savagely./I thought you would come in anger-/ A knife beneath your skirt./ I did not think to see a face/So peaceful, and so hurt./ I know the trouble is there,/ Under your little frown;/But when you slowly lift your cup/And when you set it down,/ I feel my heart go wild, Anne,/I feel my heart go wild./ I know a hundred children,/ But never before a child/Hiding so deep a trouble/Or wanting so much to please,/Or tending so desperately all/The small civilities.”



I love this poem because I think it represents how what others tell you about a person can so drastically influence your image of them even before you have met. The lines, “But she holds her saucer softly/ And sips, as people do,” is particularly powerful to me, because it is important to remember that your opponents are also humans, and that you most likely have more in common than you think. I find it so powerful how, throughout the poem, the narrator is deconstructing the narrative she has been told of this girl Anne and forming her own opinion, which is that she is but a child trying her hardest to do everything she must.

Sally: I love your insight—your close, perceptive, and caring reading— into that seemingly simple line, Anika. I also love the lines: “But when you slowly lift your cup / And when you set it down.” I love how “down” rhymes with the preceding “frown,” the juxtaposition between “lift,” and “down.” I have to say, I don’t know this particular poem by Oliver. I shall have to look through my Oliver collections!

Is there any one poet whom you feel brought you to poetry? Any poem—or poems—that made you realize you were a poet, or inspired you to begin writing?

Anika: I think that I came to poetry naturally. I have always been drawn to music and words, and that has only been strengthened by the excellent teachers at Norwalk Public Schools who introduced me to new forms of poetry and writing, and who supported and encouraged my creativity. Poets to whom I have been introduced—such as the aforementioned, and many others— have strengthened my desire to write and have influenced my style. Reading books, even if it’s just a page or two, immediately makes me want to write. I would say that everything I’ve ever read has pushed me further in this direction.

Sally: Some poets do not begin writing until later in life, and here you are a high school student who has already thought in form (although I know you currently prefer free verse). At what age did you begin writing poetry? Were you attracted to poems at a very young age?



Anika: I have always written poetry. My mother recalls how when I was very young, I would run around in circles and tell myself stories. I would sing to myself whatever melodies and lyrics popped into my head. In elementary school, I would always write creative stories and poems, and I've never stopped. It's just always been a natural fun thing for me, and it will always be a part of my life.

Sally: Do you still have a poem that you wrote when you were very young?

Anika: Yes! I was looking through my fourth grade notebook, and I found a variety of poems, both in English and Spanish. Most of them were things I did during free write time, and I could tell which one was an assignment, because it was worse than the others. It was a poem about the spring which was an exercise in using similes, so the whole structure was really stilted and unnatural. Here's one of the poems I found, which I wrote independently in the fourth grade, when I was probably nine.

“Faeries”

By me, a long time ago, at age 9

Faerie rings and silver bells,
Where they come from, no one can tell,
They've got you under their spell
Once you drink from their enchanted wishing well

Deep, dark forests laden with faeries,
Magic shrubberies laden with berries,
Beware, traveler, always be wary,
Their dark magic can be quite scary

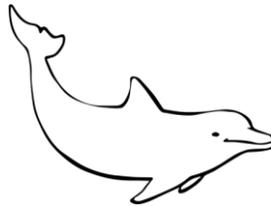
They live in trees or in deep, dark holes
Sharing apartments with mice or moles
They live in their kingdoms with elves and trolls,
Who join them for supper on grassy knolls

Their idea of a mansion is as big as a dime,
At night, into the trees they stealthily climb,
And finally, when it's time
They can hear the moon chimes chime.

Sally: Do the sounds in poems draw you in? The meter?

Anika: I would say a combination of both. I love the singsong feel of some poetry, how it sways almost playfully. I also love the sounds of alliteration and onomatopoeia in poetry. Literary devices and rhetoric can seem technical in a classroom, but seeing them active when we “hear” the poem makes the whole experience of the poem more immersive for the reader. I think every element of a literary work is just stunning. Sounds in a poem, if done correctly, make it almost like music, where you can hear every aspect falling together in your mind’s...ear.

Sally: I believe you are in the **Marine Science Academy** at Brien McMahon High School. Can you tell us a little about that?



Anika: Oh, yes! I love the Marine Science Academy. It’s a program at Brien McMahon High School that specializes in marine science, including marine biology, technology, engineering, etc.. There are super fun field trips that involve field work and getting out on the water. There is even an opportunity to get your boating license before you get your drivers license! In your freshman year, you take Marine Studies I, which was a really fun course. We were going to do a project pairing with the Maritime Aquarium involving Sheffield Island, for which I was really excited, but we were unable to do it because of COVID-19. Once, we had kids from a Marine Science preschool come over to our lab, and we gave them the tour. The lab itself is a beautiful room with a ton of tanks and a breeding system. We have two baby sharks right now, a pufferfish, a bunch of freshwater fish, some saltwater and brackish water fish, some eels, and a lot of crabs. We test the water quality and feed the fish every class, and we measure for things like dissolved oxygen, temperature, pH, ammonia levels, nitrates, and salinity.



Pufferfish!

We also do tank maintenance like setting up tanks, cleaning tanks, transferring fish, mixing salt water, and water changes. This year I'm in Marine Studies II, where we're taking a deeper dive into water chemistry. This program goes through senior year, and is an amazing choice for anyone interested in marine science. I love it so much!

Sally: You are also a member of the **Literary and Art Magazine club** at the high school, *Hidden Voices*. Please tell us about this, too!

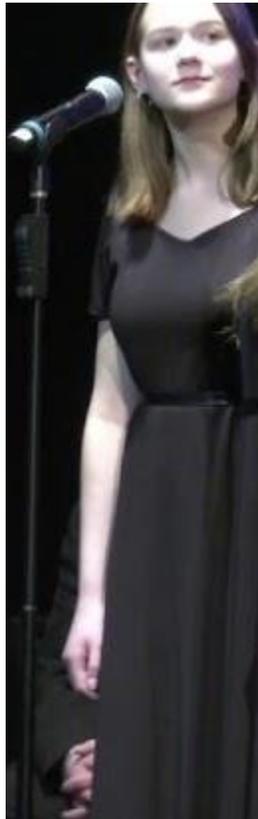


Anika: *Hidden Voices* is so amazing. I would encourage any BMHS student to try it out or submit poetry, photography, art, stories, etc. It's driven by student innovation, and it produces a magazine full of student-produced work every year. Students can submit their own work, either anonymously or not, and they can be a part of the club. Some students either edit or put together the magazine. Some members, like myself, do both. I am currently an Underclassman Officer, and this year we're trying to expand the reach of our work by participating in more poetry and art-related events, like open-mic nights or other poetry readings. Maybe the library would be a good place to do something like that. We want to showcase the artistic and creative talent of BMHS students, and my push for this year is to include submissions in other languages, like Spanish poems.

Sally: Oh, Anika, the Norwalk Public Library will certainly have an open mic night for *Hidden Voices* once we reopen! I promise!

Aside from singing as a poet, you are also a chamber singer in **the Fairfield County Children's Choir**. Please share with us a little bit about your singing, and your involvement in the choir.

Anika: Absolutely! The **Fairfield County Children's Choir** has been a huge part of my life ever since I was in the fifth grade, and became an even bigger part in seventh grade when I became a Chamber Singer.



This is a picture of me with my choir in February doing an ensemble piece from *Oklahoma!*

Just like with poetry, I've always been attracted to singing. I find them both to be beautiful expressions of feeling. Within the Chamber Singers, we have a wonderful community of singers and friends from many towns in Fairfield County. My choir has given me so many opportunities to sing beautiful music at famous locations like David Geffen Hall at Lincoln Center, and Carnegie Hall, and to tour in the summers. Our group frequently collaborates with the Greater Bridgeport Symphony, and other groups. In the summer of my first year as a Chamber Singer, we participated in the Golden Gate

International Choral Festival in Oakland, California; we came in first in two categories, and second in the other two!

Last summer, we were supposed to participate in the World Choir Games in Belgium, but that was postponed. I also wrote the lyrics (which were a poem) to a new song written by choral composer, Rob I. Hugh. It will have its world premier at Carnegie Hall, hopefully this summer. I'm so excited to perform that song for the first time, especially since I have the solo!

The choir is a really beautiful group, and I love it so much. It's also a great bonding experience to travel with a group that has a shared purpose. The sense of unity that one feels being a part of a group— all singing in harmony— is so overwhelmingly wonderful! This choir has most definitely inspired its fair share of poetry!

Sally: What advice, if any, would you give other young aspiring writers?

Anika: I would say to other young aspiring writers that you *will* publish that book, or that anthology. Maybe not now, maybe not five years from now, but you will. You are meant to write a book, and that book will force its way out, no matter what. Right now, you may be saying that school and other commitments do not allow you to write for fun, and later you'll have a full time job. You can't let that stop you, because there may never be the perfect time to write. You just have to believe that it will happen, and it will.

My bucket list is full of all sorts of things like "Earn PhD," "Get into Ivy League College," "Publish book," and "~~Be featured on Poetry Page.~~"



I write those things not because they are easy, but because they are not. If I write them down, they become more real. If I plan them out, step by step, there is suddenly almost nothing that cannot logically be done with a lot of time, and a lot of work. If I care enough about writing that book, which I do, I will.

Another thing I would say to a young writer who feels that they are too young to write a good book, or that the challenge is insurmountable, is this: other people have done it, and so can you. If someone else can, who's to say that you cannot? If it can be done, you can

do it. There is so much power in just believing that you can do it. If you just start, and never take a minute to doubt yourself, you can get so much done.

Sally: I am so happy you are in the world of poetry, Anika. Please share with us any other thoughts you might have on poetry, and the role it plays in your daily life.

Anika: Poetry influences my life every day. I observe through the eyes of a poet, finding new ways to describe the things I see. When I write in a non-academic setting, the language is not naturally concise. I am, as you may have noticed, a very flowery and poetic writer. This was not good for me when I was learning how one is supposed to write in an academic setting, especially in terms of history and science classes.

A lot of people that I know do not like poetry because they don't understand it, or it doesn't make sense to them. I understand that people want to find the answer, and sometimes the language is vague or the references are obscure. To me, however, the point of poetry is not to understand it.

Poetry, to me, is supposed to reflect the reader. You are supposed to find yourself between the lines, to find a purpose that maybe was not the poet's intent but rings true for you. There is not one correct interpretation, because the beauty of poetry is that what the author really meant, and what you get out of it individually, can be entirely different; but no interpretation is truly wrong if it is yours. When a poet manages to make your heart sing, or take you into its world with the magic of literary devices, when you can almost actually hear the sounds of the poem- that is the meaning of poetry. When the poet makes you see the world from an entirely new perspective- that is the meaning of poetry.

The meaning of poetry sometimes has nothing to do with you, the reader. Poets write poems because they love it, because they have words flying out of their fingertips and arranging themselves on the page, because the words won't be quiet until they are a poem. The meaning of poetry is doing what you love, no matter if other people don't understand it.

Now, three poems by Anika...



seasons

color creeps into her cheeks at the
first sighting of springtime, the
flapping commotion, the
freshness,
the green, the
crocus peeking demurely from the thawing ground

and she grins with the brilliance of the
summertime sun, the
merry buzzing, the
sun-dappled grass, the
symphony of cicadas and the

coolness of night descending, the
fireflies' glow,
the smell of campfire smoke

in the crisp autumn days and the
beauty of death
swirling to the ground,
carried up in the wind,
tossed every which way.

stained with death,
they collect in drifts

at her feet,
curling in acceptance

and she reaches,
but they are gone.

her world is enveloped in white,
the mad flurry,
the soft powder,
the callous crunch of ice,
and the

warmth just nearby,
from a hearth,
just a whisper of nostalgia,
a faint tune in the whistling wind

and she looks, but it is gone.

she looks, and she
sees, and she
feels, and she
knows, and she
inhales the springtime once again.

And then sneezes.

Anika Amann





leaves

how was it not clear

that when the leaves turned,

they were doomed to shrivel in the light and fall,
crunching under footfalls in the thin morning light,

that when the wind blew,

it would scatter them like ashes,

that one day,

inevitably,

winter's first frost would descend with its kiss of death
and dangle the light in front of us for a moment more-

-before it turned to black.

Anika Amann

Unbroken

We are unbroken and yet bent
Badly torn in some places
Not enough to be a sentence
But enough to be a pain

We are alive but not contented
Regardless of the times
Not enough to be a worry
But enough for a complaint

We are seen but not completely
Because that would be impossible
Not enough to feel exposed
But enough to feel known

We are somewhere in the future
But nothing anyone can see
Just enough for a sliver
Just enough for a glance

Just enough for a chance.

Anika Amann

