

READING COMPANION

*Lamb*, by Frannie Lindsay

Sample poem:

The Ewe Lamb

– 2 *Samuel* 12: 3

I raised my one ewe lamb  
as a daughter, fed her  
red clover, the last hearts  
of my cabbage, offered  
her inky lips my cup.  
She rested her chin  
on my neck at night, her hoofs  
on my cloak, her breathing  
the wind on the waves  
of sleep's pure waters.  
*Sleep*: an animal's word  
for *bless*: hoof of her heart  
to the hoof of my heart.  
The dusk before her slaughter  
we walked together, pauper  
and kin, over the meadow.  
I sang to her, then  
I unstrung the rusted bell  
from her collar.

Questions to consider:

1. In *Lamb*, Lindsay grapples with both violence and tenderness, often in the same moment. How do vocabulary choice and imagery impact the tone throughout the collection? As an exercise, try employing different vocabulary and imagery in one of Lindsay's poems to see how these aspects can alter a poem and produce a different result in the reception of the poem.
2. How do poems such as "Henry" and "Dorothy" confront both tenderness and suffering/pain? Why does Lindsay link these in her work?
3. In "Altar," Lindsay writes, "This is the prayer, but not the words." How do the poems in this collection look at the use of action as prayer, or image as prayer?
4. "Receiving the Host" is one of many poems in this collection that uses religious (specifically Christian) language or rituals. How does Lindsay both invoke this religion and complicate it?
5. Why is the first section of the book called "Good, Good Daughter"? How do poems such as "The Chores" and "Mother Leaving, 1965" examine ideas of gender roles and "goodness"?
6. Many poems in this collection examine the complicated relationship between abused and abuser. Discuss the pairing of the two poems "Something He Did" and "Eleventh Summer," which appear side by side in the book.
7. How do the poems in this collection use stories and imagery of wounded animals to tell us not only about the animals themselves, but also the narrator? Consider "Hatchling" and "The Ewe Lamb."
8. How does this collection show the arc of relationship change between a child and her parents, and also the role reversals in that arc?

Writing prompts:

1. Write a poem where you list unusual items for an altar that tell a story, as Lindsay does in "Altar."
2. Write a poem telling the story of characters just outside of/adjacent to a famous narrative, such as Lindsay's "The Nativity of the Animals."
3. Write a poem that uses vocabulary or a ritual from your religious or spiritual background, in an unexpected way, such as in "Receiving the Host."
4. Start a poem with the line "You too might, in the holiest hour / of your life" (from "Beatitude").

Other Perugia books that could pair with this collection:

*Girldom*, Megan Peak

*Grayling*, Jenifer Browne Lawrence

*Two Minutes of Light*, Nancy K. Pearson

Areas of study in which to teach this title:

Women's Studies

American Studies

Creative Writing/Poetry

English

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