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

To order *Lamb*, or any Perugia Press title, you may do so through the bookshop on our website: perugiapress.org. For questions about bulk order discounts, course adoption, desk copies, or Frannie Lindsay’s availability for readings and book talks, contact Editor/Director Rebecca Olander at 413-537-2588 or editor@perugiapress.org.