

Almost everyone wants peace.
But everyone does not find peace.
It may be dismissed as a cliché, a worn word, an ideal difficult to define –
or, in Joe Darion’s words, “The Impossible Dream.”

Perhaps only the artist can express what seems inexpressible. Poetry may be a lens through which we can view facets of peace, different for different people. Here we will look at some of those facets --- in nature, in places, in people, time, and paradox.

As Maya Angelou writes, peace is more than a cessation of conflict. What is it to her? To you? What is it to Wendell Berry, Mary Oliver, Billy Collins, and many others? Together, we will join several poets as they share their personal ideas about “the impossible dream.”

MH CL1:

SECTION ONE: FINDING PEACE IN NATURE

THE PEACE OF WILD THINGS

Wendell Berry

When despair for the world grows in me
And I wake in the night at the least sound
In fear of what my life and my children's lives may be,
I go and lie down where the wood drake
rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds.

I come into the peace of wild things
who do not tax their lives with forethought
of grief. I come into the presence of still water
and I feel above me the day-blind stars
waiting with their light. For a time
I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.

(Discussion)

THE LAKE ISLE OF INNISFREE

William Butler Yeats

I will arise and go now, and go to Innisfree,
And a small cabin build there, of clay and wattles made;
Nine bean-rows will I have there, a hive for the honey bee,
And live alone in the bee-loud glade.
And I shall have some peace there, for peace comes dropping slow,
Dropping from the veils of the morning to where the cricket sings;
There midnight's all a-glimmer, and noon a purple glow,
And evening full of the linnet's wings.
I will arise and go now, for always night and day
I hear the lake water lapping with low sounds by the shore;
While I stand on the roadway, or on the pavements gray,
I hear it in the deep heart's core.

(Discussion)

WHEN I AM AMONG THE TREES

Mary Oliver

When I am among the trees,
Especially the willows and the honey locust,
Equally the beech, the oaks and the pines,
They give off such hints of gladness,
I would almost say they save me, and daily.
I am so distant from the hope of myself
In which I have goodness and discernment,
And never hurry through the world
But walk slowly, and bow often.
Around me, the trees stir in their leaves
And call out, "Stay awhile."
The light flows from their branches.
And they call again, "It's simple," they say,
And you too have come
Into the world to do this, to go easy, to be filled
With light, and to shine.

(Discussion)

SONG FOR NOBODY

By Thomas Merton

A yellow flower

Light as spirit

Sings by itself

For nobody

A golden spirit

Sings without a word

By itself

Let no one touch this gentle sun

In whose dark eye

Someone is awake...

A golden heaven

Sings by itself

To nobody.

(Discussion)

EVENING

Thomas Merton

Now, in the middle of the limpid evening,
The moon speaks clearly to the hill.
The wheat fields make their simple music,
Praise the quiet sky.

And down the road, the way the stars come home,
The cries of children
Play on the empty air, a mile or more,
And fall on our deserted hearing,
Clear as water...

And where blue heaven's fading fire last shines
They name the new come planets
With words that flower
On little voices, light as stems of lilies.

And where blue heaven's fading fire last shines,
Reflected in the poplar's ripple,
One little, wakeful bird
Sings like a shower.

(Discussion)

STOPPING BY WOODS

(Edited)

Robert Frost

Whose woods these are
I think I know
His house is
In the village though.
My little horse must think it queer
To stop without a farmhouse near
He gives his bridle bells a shake
As if to question some mistake
This coldest evening of the year
To watch these woods
Fill up with snow.
The woods are lovely,
Dark and deep but
I have promises to keep
And miles to go before I sleep
And miles to go before I sleep.

(Discussion)

**LYING IN A HAMMOCK AT WILLIAM DUFFY'S FARM IN
PINE ISLAND, MINNESOTA**

James Wright

Over my head, I see the bronze butterfly
Asleep on the black trunk,
Blowing like a leaf in green shade.
Down in the ravine behind the empty house,
The cowbells follow one another
Into the distances of the afternoon.
To my right,
In a field of sunlight between two pines,
The droppings of last year's horses
Blaze up into golden stones.
I lean back as the evening darkens and comes on.
A chicken hawk floats over, looking for home.
I have wasted my life.

(Discussion)