

How Your Poetic Voice is Strengthened Through Your Other Disciplines and Passions

We'll explore how poetic voice is NOT something to create, but to uncover.

And, how each of us carries a distinct mode of expression that emerges naturally in the places where we are most fully ourselves.

They are portals that reveal and strengthen our most authentic poetic voice.

Hi, I'm Stefanie.
I'm a professional ballet dancer and poet.



There are countless passions and disciplines that strengthen poetic voice:

- ~ Gardening, hiking, running, acting, studying art
- ~ Playing the guitar, singing in the choir, walking in nature, scrapbooking, taking photos
- ~ Parenting, coaching, consulting or treating patients and clients
- ~ Connecting with friends, family, neighbors, community
- ~ Leading workshops, protesting, teaching in a classroom, dog walking

Today, our poets are:

- **Physicians: William Carlos Williams and Fady Joudah**
- **Nature Lovers: Mary Oliver and Ada Limón**
- **Activists & Performing Artists: Dr. Maya Angelou and Andrea Gibson**

BOTH/AND!

We'll see how each poet's voice is unique and inseparable from the way they personally inhabit(ed) their work, passions, disciplines and the world around them.

We'll see that there is not one "voice" for having practiced medicine, communing with nature or being an activist.

Conditions of Writing

- constraints and freedoms of their daily lives within their other disciplines that impacted and influenced their poetic voices.
- the habits of attention that they developed inside their disciplines that strengthened their poetic voices.



William Carlos Williams & Fady Joudah: Medicine

Conditions of Writing

- **Long days at the hospital, clinic**
- **Most their time with patients and their patients' families and communities**
- **Confronted with the immediacy of life, death, illness, emergencies → the body**
- **Limited time & space to work on poetry, immersed in most basic primal/emotional environment**
- **They steal time between patients to write, or between time at the clinic and home (e.g., prescription pads, smartphone)**



William Carlos Williams & Fady Joudah: Medicine

“The mind's the thing, that and the desire. Fifteen minutes is all that is needed to clinch a masterpiece. The first conception of any work comes to me most often when I am most busy at my practice...The ride in a car between patients is filled with imaginings and the more familiar the route, the more humdrum, the more boring, the more the mind is released to its purposes.”

— William Carlos Williams to a medical student & aspiring writer

“...why not harness my anxiety about not being able to write longer poems, due to time constraints, clinic and home, into the art of the short poem through the medium of text message.”

— Fady Joudah, in conversation with Angélique Jamail



William Carlos Williams (1883 to 1963)

Physician, Poet

How did medicine strengthen his poetic voice?

Focus on local American life / creating American poetics

- “No ideas but in things.” → concrete images
- accessible language

Common theme of birth and rebirth

- Ob/Gyn confronted with birth, death, bodies; high infant and maternal mortality rate of the time

"Of mixed ancestry I felt from earliest childhood that America was the only home I could ever possibly call my own. I felt that it was expressly founded for me, personally, and that it must be my first business in life to possess it."

"I lost myself in the very properties of their minds: for the moment at least I actually became them"

Fady Joudah (1971 -)

Physician, Poet

How has medicine strengthened his poetic voice?

Global perspective

- humanitarian doctor with Doctors Without Borders
- identity, religion, war, shared humanity

Intimacy about the body in various aspects

- the primitive qualities of a cadaver during med school
- the sensuality of lovers
- the body as a representation of history and politics

Experiment with form, language due to time constraints

- “Textu” collection: Text You & Haiku
- 160 characters: *“the poems’ meter already becomes tied to capitalist market.”*

“How could it be that one’s humanity is tied to a map?”





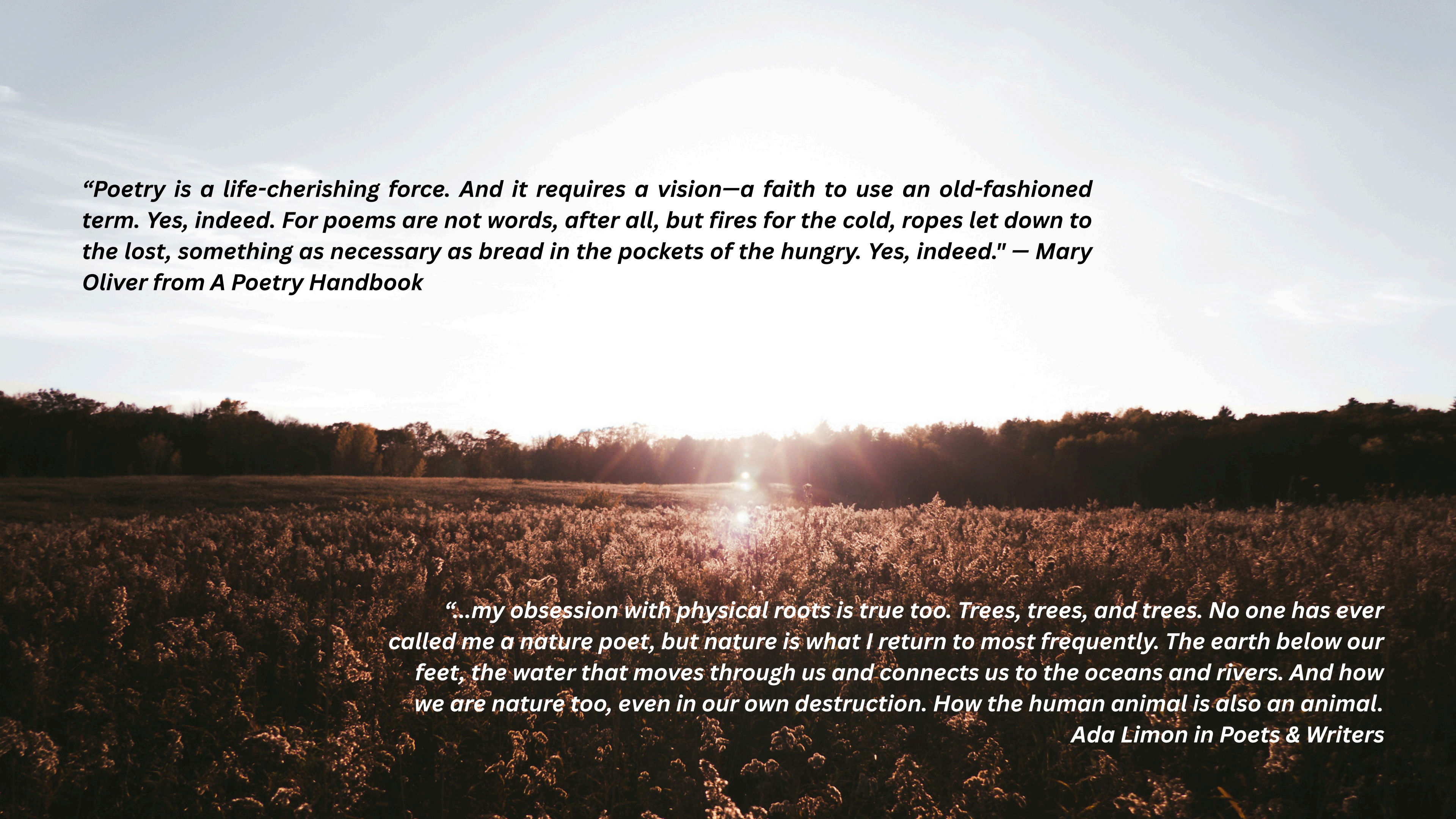
Mary Oliver and Ada Limón: Nature, Poets

Conditions of Writing

Solitude and silence

Natural world as a place of return

Writing from interconnectedness with nature



“Poetry is a life-cherishing force. And it requires a vision—a faith to use an old-fashioned term. Yes, indeed. For poems are not words, after all, but fires for the cold, ropes let down to the lost, something as necessary as bread in the pockets of the hungry. Yes, indeed.” — Mary Oliver from A Poetry Handbook

“...my obsession with physical roots is true too. Trees, trees, and trees. No one has ever called me a nature poet, but nature is what I return to most frequently. The earth below our feet, the water that moves through us and connects us to the oceans and rivers. And how we are nature too, even in our own destruction. How the human animal is also an animal.

Ada Limon in Poets & Writers

Mary Oliver (1935-2019)

Nature, Poet

How did the natural world strengthen her poetic voice?

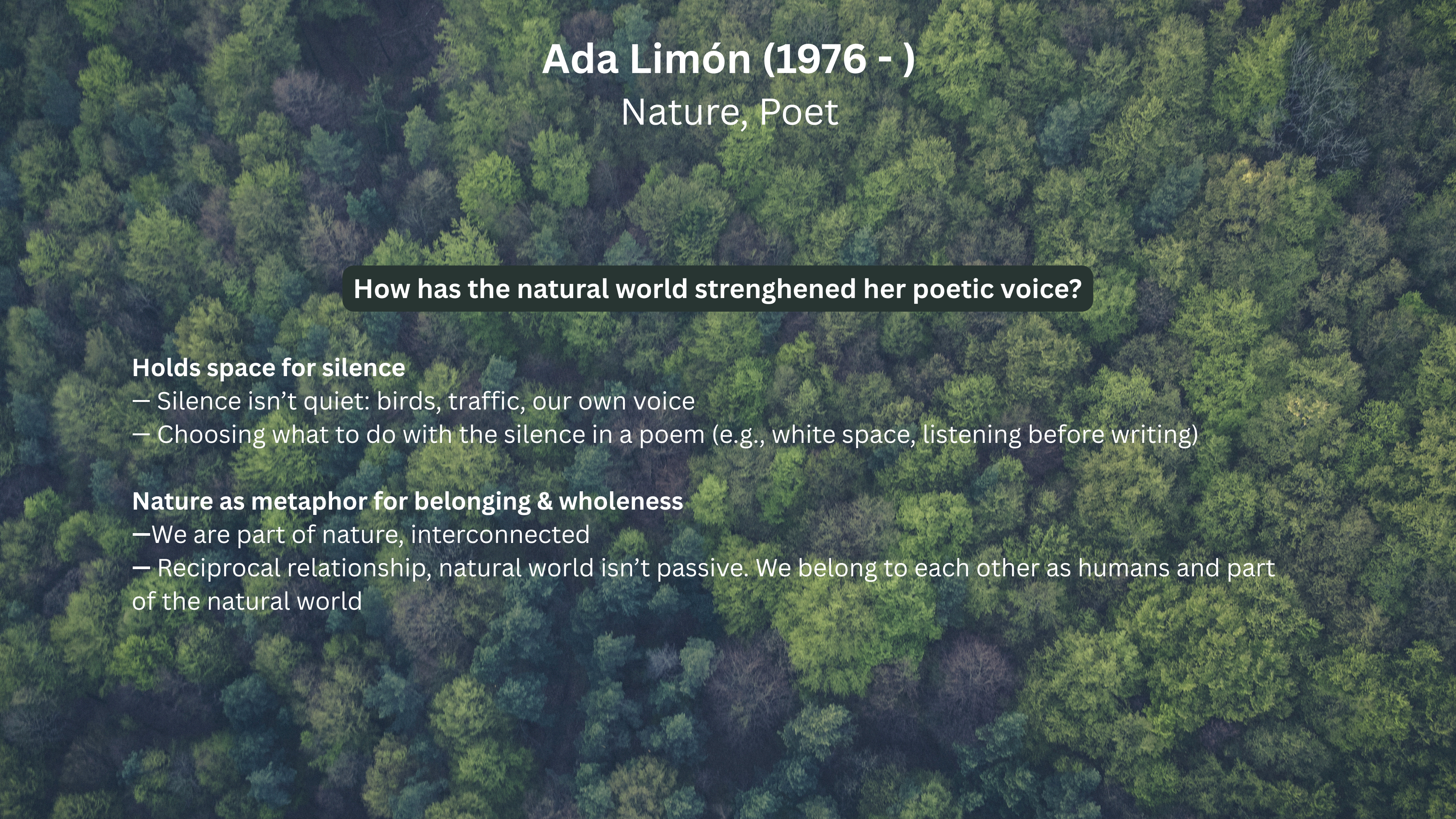
Poetry as prayer / an offering

—Like a song to memorize and repeat

Use of the “I”

Careful observation, with empathy

“Attention is the beginning of devotion.” (Upstream)

An aerial photograph of a dense, lush green forest, likely a tropical rainforest, with a variety of tree canopies visible from above. The text is overlaid on this background.

Ada Limón (1976 -)

Nature, Poet

How has the natural world strengthened her poetic voice?

Holds space for silence

- Silence isn't quiet: birds, traffic, our own voice
- Choosing what to do with the silence in a poem (e.g., white space, listening before writing)

Nature as metaphor for belonging & wholeness

- We are part of nature, interconnected
- Reciprocal relationship, natural world isn't passive. We belong to each other as humans and part of the natural world

Dr. Maya Angelou and Andrea Gibson:

Activists, Performing Artists, Poets

Conditions of Writing

Wrote in solitude

Wrote with their voice and the audience in mind

Wrote around touring, protesting, teaching, speaking



Dr. Maya Angelou (1928 - 2014)

Activist, Performance Artist, Poet

How did activism and being a performing artist strengthen her poetic voice?

Language as action

The power of words

Literary + oral traditions

Voice as responsibility

Poetry as music

“All my work, my life, everything is about survival. All my work is meant to say, “You may encounter many defeats, but you must not be defeated.” In fact, the encountering may be the very experience which creates the vitality and the power to endure.” — In conversation with Claudia Tate for Black Women Writers at Work

“Poetry is music written for the human voice.”



Andrea Gibson (1975 - 2025)

Activist, Spoken Word Poet

How did activism and being a spoken word poet strengthen their poetic voice?

Embrace vulnerability within community

Political from personal perspective

Using voice to uplift and offer hope

“That face is in almost every poem I’ve ever written.”

*“I discovered my voice as a poet within activist communities in Colorado.
My first poems were essentially rally cries.”*

P
o
e
t
r
y

Your Poetic Voice Already Exists

- Notice where it feels strongest
- Notice where it feels clearest
- Notice what feels distinctly yours
- Look at the life you're already living
- What brings your voice forward?