

# Annie dillard. bio essay

Profession, Writer



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Annie Dillard started out her writing career misunderstood but admirable. Dillard became well known after her first published book, 'Pilgrim at Tinker Creek' won the 1974 'Pulitzer Prize for General nonfiction at age 29. She received many complaints on her first novel such as, "not one genuine ecological concern is voiced in the entire book," critics state. (Begiebing) Dillard's reputation has exceeded what was once known as boring and unsatisfactory to one of admiration. In a review of 'Pilgrim at Tinker Creek,' Hayden Carruth states, "In many respects to Annie Dillard's book, 'Pilgrim at Tinker Creek,' is so ingratiating that even readers who find themselves in fundamental disagreement with it may take pleasure from it, a good deal of pleasure." (Carruth) Indeed Carruth is correct. Dillard's creativity with and in nature puts us in awe. Her writing is abhorrent and yet so beautiful. In 1971 Dillard stumbled upon an old writer's nature book and thought, "I can do better than this. (Dillard) In 1968, Dillard spent a few years, following her graduation, by oil painting, writing, and keeping a journal. This journal is how many of her first poems and short stories were published In this journal, 'Pilgrim at Tinker Creek' slowly started its well known novel. Dillard began her writing career as a young adult attending Hollins College (now Hollins University). Dillard studied literature and creative writing which motivated her to read classic novels as well as many books that humanity has promised themselves to read in the future, but never got around to it. After spending some time in college, Dillard married her writing teacher, the poet R. H. W. Dillard. In college, I

learned how to learn from other people. As far as I was concerned, writing in college didn't consist of what little Annie had to say, but what Wallace Stevens had to say. I didn't come to college to think my own thoughts; I came to college to learn what had been thought. " (Dillard) Like many other creations in life, her writing began with a simple thought... At the end of the island I noticed a small green frog. He was exactly half in and half out of the water, looking like a schematic diagram of an amphibian, and he didn't jump. He didn't jump; I crept closer. At last I knelt on the island's winter killed grass, lost, dumbstruck, staring at the frog in the creek just four feet away. He was a very small frog with wide, dull eyes. And just as I looked at him, he slowly crumpled and began to sag. The spirit vanished from his eyes as if snuffed. His skin emptied and drooped; his very skull seemed to collapse and settle like a kicked tent. He was shrinking before my eyes like a deflating football. I watched the taut, glistening skin on his shoulders ruck, and rumple, and fall. Soon, part of his skin, formless as a pricked balloon, lay in floating folds like bright scum on top of the water; it was a monstrous and terrifying thing. I gaped bewildered, appalled. An oval shadow hung in the water behind the drained frog; then the shadow glided away. The frog skin bag started to sink. I had read about the giant water bug, but never seen one. " Giant water bug" is really the name of the creature, which is an enormous, heavy-bodied brown bug. It eats insects, tadpoles, fish, and frogs. Its grasping forelegs are mighty and hooked inward. It seizes a victim with these legs, hugs it tight, and paralyzes it with enzymes injected during a vicious bite. That one bite is the only bite it ever takes. Through the puncture shoot the poisons that dissolve the victim's muscles and bones and organs -

all but the skin – and through it the giant water bug sucks out the victim's body, reduced to a juice. (Dillard) In the above quoted passage from 'Pilgrim at Tinker Creek,' Dillard describes an event of nature that is both horrible and beautiful. Through each stage of a life, being human, animal, or insect, life has its beauty and value. We live and evolve and learn with every stage of our life. Does beauty lie in the eye of the observer? " (Krishnamurti) What an excellent question. Every individual has their own eye for beauty, but nature is the one beauty of the world that will never die. Dillard's eye of beauty is unique. She discovers two ways in which to view nature: one of passionate and fixed attention to all things around her, and her second state is focused on an unaware state, where she connects, lives, and is the nature around her without regards to time in the present state. Dillard's two states of 'stalking' and unawareness differ in various ways, but allow her to connect with nature and her surroundings on a whole different level of understanding and appreciation. In 'Pilgrim at Tinker Creek,' Dillard relives multiple events in the past using both states (aware and unaware) to evaluate lessons she has learned and the closeness she experienced with nature. Dillard appears to be in confusion to which state of mind is most precious in the world, awareness or unaware. Dillard feels that the state of awareness is to be valued for it is a state of mind that does distinguish humanity from both, our creator (god) and our fellow animal friends.

Without our ability to distinguish ourselves from other 'creations,' humanity would not easily learn and acquire information regarding the many creatures before us and nature itself, while being partially blind to our current surroundings as they stand before us. While at Tinker Creek, Dillard's

appreciation for plants and animals come by no surprise, but while she greatly admires the state of awareness, she has multiple interpretations of the state. Dillard implies that by being aware all the time may slow down, or deprive us from our experiences and living conditions in the here-and-now time frame.

The state of awareness, or “innocence”, Dillard believes to be the ultimate state to view nature and the world in. By being in her “innocence” state, she becomes, (experiences first hand) all things surrounding her. She is able to “Live them as purely as we can, in the present.” BY the spirits “Unself-conscious state at any moment of pure devotion to any object.” (Dillard) When learning, experiencing, and connecting with nature, both states, “innocence” and “stalking” are necessary to Dillard. Dillard’s section including the frog that slowly has its insides liquefied then devoured, allows her to witness such creatures in their natural state while “stalking” them. Dillard examines a Giant Water bug inject, liquefy, and devour its dinner; she watched the frogs spirit drift away from its eyes, and its skin sag, to be swept away by the ocean. Dillard evaluates the feelings of horror but beauty by this event which in return, helps her observe and learn from the events of nature while at Tinker Creek. From experiencing her “innocence” and “stalking” state, Dillard states, “I am prying into secrets again, and taking my chances. I might not see anything happen; I ight see nothing but light on the water. I walk home exhilarated or becalmed, but always changed, alive.” (Dillard)I believethat while Dillard visits Tinker Creek, she gives us a gift; the tool to observe nature, seeing and experiencing every event; a new view for appreciating nature in its beauty and horror. Through Dillard, and many

other authors, we must find our own way to experience and learn from nature, whether that is through reading such books as ' Pilgrim at Tinker Creek', or a nature hike of our own, if we choose to learn from nature. We can learn a great deal from nature writers all over the world. Dillard views beauty in nature through horrible events by learning and experiencing thousands of things nature has to show and teach us. Dillard learns that while a picture of a darkened sky with remnants of clouds is a wonderful experience, nature, just like everything else beautiful in the world, has a horrible side that is seen when watching. " It's the most beautiful day of the year. At four O'clock the eastern sky is a dead stratus black flecked with low white clouds. The sun in the west illuminates the ground, the mountains, and especially the bare branches of trees, so that everywhere silver trees cut into the black sky like a photographers negative of a landscape. " (Dillard) WORK CITED: 1. Elliott, Sandra S. " Annie Dillard Biography. " Annie Dillard Biography. Rob Anderson, n. d. Web. 29 Mar. 2013. <http://hubcap.clemson.edu/~sparks/dillard/bio.htm> 2. Krishnamurti, J. " The Beauty of Death as Part of Life. " J. Krishnamurti Online. Krishnamurti Foundation, Sept. 2012. Web. 29 Mar. 2013. <http://www.jkrishnamurti.org/krishnamurti-teachings/view-text.php?tid=1515&id=1212>