



New American Gazette: Transcript of Denise Levertov and Danny Glover Forum

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Title: New American Gazette: “Poetic Vision and the Hope for Peace,” and “Hope and Healing in a World of Horror” at Ford Hall Forum.

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Recording Summary:

Transcription of an archived edition of the New American Gazette that featured segments from two forums recorded at different times. The first featured poet Denise Levertov discussing “Poetic Vision and the Hope for Peace.” The second forum featured actor Danny Glover discussing “Hope and Healing in a World of Horror.” Levertov and Glover read several poems and Levertov discusses how poetry can be used to achieve peace. The forum was broadcast as part of the New American Gazette radio program and introduced by host Andrew Young.

Transcript Begins

ANNOUNCER: From Boston, the Ford Hall Forum presents an archive edition of the New American Gazette with guest host Andrew Young

[00:00:15]

ANDREW YOUNG: Peace on Earth, goodwill to men—a Christmas card greeting familiar to many. But what is peace? An interim between wars? Lasting harmony among all nations? Unity amongst all peoples? Exploring the state of peace this week is essayist, activist and poet Denise Levertov. Later in the program, actor Danny Glover reads poetry of peace and justice from around the world.

[00:00:45]

But first, in a world threatened by nuclear holocaust, environmental destruction and global warfare, Ms. Levertov wonders what a truly peaceful society would feel like. This week, Denise Levertov contemplates peace and how to achieve it as she reads her own poems on peace and the work of others. Touching on the power of poetry to transform society, Ms. Levertov believes it is poets who can infuse energy and strength into a movement for change. An activist for many years on issues such as Vietnam, the environment, avoiding nuclear war, Denise Levertov is the author of twenty-four books, most recently, *Breathing the Water*.

[00:01:27]

"Poets should present to the world images of peace," she says. "We need to imagine peace if we are to achieve it." Join us for "Poetic Vision and the Hope for Peace" with Denise Levertov.
(applause)

[00:01:55]

DENISE LEVERTOV: Well I was asked to speak about poetry and peace. And I assumed that that meant that I was to speak about the poetry *of* peace. So I have to begin with a question: Is there a poetry of peace?

A few years ago I participated in a panel at Stanford, on the theme of women, war and peace. And during the question period, someone in the audience, whom I couldn't see—someone whom I afterwards learned in fact was the distinguished psychologist Virginia Satir, who is one of the founders of family therapy—said that poets should present to the world images of peace, not only of war; everyone needed to be able to imagine peace if we were to achieve it.

[00:03:03]

I was the only poet on the panel, so this challenge was evidently mine to respond to, and I had only a lame and confused response to make. And afterwards I thought about it, and I remember a few days later discussing the problem—the problem of the lack of peace poems—with some poet friends, Robert Hass and David Shaddock. And what was said I have forgotten, but out of that talk and my own ponderings a poem emerged for me, which was in fact my delayed response. It was called "Making Peace." And it goes like this:

*A voice from the dark called out,
 'The poets must give us
 imagination of peace, to oust the intense, familiar
 imagination of disaster. Peace, not only
 the absence of war.'*

*But peace, like a poem,
 is not there ahead of itself,
 can't be imagined before it is made,
 can't be known except
 in the words of its making,
 grammar of justice,
 syntax of mutual aid.*

*A feeling towards it,
 dimly sensing a rhythm, is all we have
 until we begin to utter its metaphors,
 learning them as we speak.*

A line of peace might appear

*if we restructured the sentence our lives are making,
 revoked its reaffirmation of profit and power,
 questioned our needs, allowed
 long pauses . . .*

*A cadence of peace might balance its weight
 on that different fulcrum; peace, a presence,
 an energy field more intense than war,
 might pulse then,
 stanza by stanza into the world,
 each act of living
 one of its words, each word
 a vibration of light—facets
 of the forming crystal.*

[00:05:48]

This analogy still holds good for me. Peace as a positive condition of society, not merely as an interim between wars, is something so unknown that it casts no images on to the mind's screen. Of course, one could seek out utopian projections, attempts to evoke the Golden Age; but these are not the psychologically dynamic images Ms. Satir was hoping for, and I can think of none from our own century, even of the nostalgic or fantastic variety, unless one were to cite works of prose in the science fiction category. And these, particularly if one compares them with the great novels of life as it is—with *War and Peace*, *The Brothers Karamazov*, *Middlemarch*, *Madame Bovary*, *Remembrance of Things Past*—are entertainments rather than illuminating visions.

[00:06:40]

Credible, psychologically dynamic poetic images of peace exist only on the most personal level. None of us knows what a truly peaceful society might feel like. And since peace is indivisible, one society, or one culture, or one country alone could not give its members a full experience of it, however much it evolved in its own justice and positive peace-making: the full experience of peace could only come in a world at peace. It's like the old song:

*(sings) I want to be happy,
but I can't be happy
unless you are
happy too!*

[00:07:28]

Meanwhile, as Catherine de Vinck says in her *Book of Peace*, "Right Now":

*Right now, in this house we share
—earth the name of it
planet of no account
in the vast ranges of the sky—
children are dying
lambs with cracked heads
their blood dripping on the stones.*

*Right now, messengers reach us
handing out leaflets
printed with a single word:
death
misspelled, no longer a dusky angel
death in the shape of a vulture
landing on broken bodies
torn flesh.*

*We look elsewhere
hear the buds sliding out of their sheathes
unroll voluptuous green leaves.
we fill the garden room with cushions
hang wind-bells in the trees
toss the word death*

*to the flames
over which good meat is sizzling.*

*Messengers are sent away
but others arrive in endless procession
old women, weepy-eyed, speechless
young one with nerves exposed
they have crossed the sierras
they have sailed in leaky boats
they have trudged through the desert to say
our lives have no weight.*

*They are made of grass, of clouds
of stories whispered at nightfall
we are burning fields
we are fires fanned by the wind.*

*How can we mix this knowledge
with the bread we eat
with the cup we drink?
Is it enough to fill these words
these hollow flutes of bones
with aching songs?*

[00:09:32]

And terror is what we know most intimately—that terror and the ache of chronic anxiety Yarrow Cleaves articulates in "One Day."

*When you were thirteen, thoughtful,
you said, "When
the bomb falls, I won't run, I won't*

*try to get out of the city like
everyone else, in the panic."*

*When I was a child,
younger than you, I had to
crouch on the floor
at school, under my desk.
How fast could I do it?
The thin bones of my arms
crossed my skull,
for practice. My forehead
went against my knees. I felt
the blinding light of the
windows behind me.
I knew what the bombs did.*

*"I'll find a tree," you said,
"and the tree will protect me."*

*Then I turned away, because
I was crying and because you are my child.*

What if you stood on the wrong side?

*What if the tree, like me, had
only its ashes to give?*

*What if you have to stand one day
in blasted silence,
screaming, and I can never,
never reach you?*

[00:11:01]

What about the testimony of peace on a personal level? Yes, I do believe that poems which record individual epiphanies, moments of tranquility or bliss, tell us something about what might—what peace might be like. Yet because there is no peace they have, always, an undertone of poignancy. We snatch our happiness from the teeth of violence, from the shadow of oppression. And on the whole we do not connect such poems with the idea of peace as a goal, but, reading them, experience a momentary relief from the tensions of life lived in a chronic state of emergency.

[00:11:43]

Meanwhile, what we do have is poems of protest, of denouncement, of struggle, and sometimes of comradeship. Little glimpses of what peace means or might come—might mean come through in such poems as Margaret Randall's "The Gloves."

*Yes we did march around somewhere and yes it was cold,
we shared our gloves because we had a pair between us
and a New York City cop also shared his big gloves
with me – strange,
he was there to keep our order
and he could do that
and I could take that
back then.*

*We were marching for the Santa Maria, Rhoda,
a Portuguese ship whose crew had mutinied.
They demanded asylum in Goulart's Brazil
and we marched in support of that demand,
in winter, in New York City,
back and forth before the Portuguese Consulate,
Rockefeller Center, 1961.*

*I gauge the date by my first child
—Gregory was born late in 1960—as I gauge
so many dates by the first, the second, the third, the fourth,
and I feel his body now, again, close to my breast,
held against cold to our strong steps of dignity.*

*That was my first public protest, Rhoda,
strange you should retrieve it now
in a letter out of this love of ours
alive this—these many years.
How many protests since that one, how many
marches and rallies
for greater causes, larger wars, deeper wounds
cleansed or untouched by our rage.*

*Today a cop would never unbuckle his gloves
and press them around my blue-red hands.
Today a baby held to breast
would be a child of my child, a generation removed.
The world is older and I in it
am older,
burning, slower, with the same passions.*

*The passions are older and so I am also younger
for knowing them more deeply and moving in them
pregnant with fear and fighting.
The gloves are still there, in the cold,
passing from hand to hand.*

[00:14:26]

In that poem, focused on a small intimate detail—gloves to keep hands warm—and raying out from it to the sharing of that minor comfort, and so to the passing from hand to hand, from generation to generation, of a concern and a resolve, peace as such is a very—it's very far off-stage, a distant unnamed hope which cannot even be considered until issues of justice and freedom have been addressed and cleared. Yet a kind of peace is present in the poem, too—the peace of mutual aid, of love and communion.

[00:15:09]

Our own Mel King here in Boston sent out a calligraphed Christmas greeting a couple of years ago to people who have supported his various campaigns. Peace, it reads, on this planet between nations; on the streets between people of mind; within ourselves. A longing, a prayer, not a vision.

[00:15:35]

John Daniel, in his book *Common Ground*, writes of the mystery of there being anything at all, and of love for the earth. In a poem called "Of Earth":

*Swallows looping and diving
by the darkening oaks, the flash
of their white bellies,
the tall grasses gathering last light,
glowing pale gold, silence
overflowing in a shimmer of breeze—
these could have happened
a different way. The heavy-trunked oaks
might not have branched and branched
and finely re-branched
as if to wave—to weave themselves into air.
There is no necessity
that any creature should fly.
That last light should turn*

*the grasses gold, that grasses
should exist at all,
or light.*

*But a mind thinking so
is a mind wandering from home.
It is not thought that answers
each step of my feet, to be walking here
in the cool stir of dusk
is no mere possibility,
and I am so stained with the sweet
peculiar loveliness of things
that given God's power to dream worlds
from the dark, I know
I could only dream Earth—
birds, trees, this field of light
where I and each of us walk once.*

[00:17:23]

This is a clear example of the kind of poem, the kind of perception, which must for our time stand in for a poetry of peace. It is an epiphany both personal and universal, common to all conscious humans, surely, in kind if not in degree. Whether they remember it or not, surely everyone at least once in a lifetime is filled for a moment with a sense of wonder and exhilaration. But the poem's poignancy is peculiar to the late twentieth century. In the past, the dark side of such a poem would have been the sense of the brevity of our lives, of mortality within a monumentally enduring Nature. Eschatology, whether theological or geological, was too remote in its considerations to have much direct impact on a poetic sensibility illumined by the intense presentness of a human—of a moment of being.

But today the shadow is deeper and more chilling, for it is the reasonable fear that the earth itself, to all intents and purposes, is so threatened by our actions that its hold on life is as tenuous as our

own, its fate as precarious. Poets who direct our attention to injustice, oppression, the suffering of the innocent and the heroism of those who struggle for change, serve the possibility of peace by stimulating others to support that struggle.

[00:19:03]

Yesterday it was Vietnam, today it is El Salvador or Lebanon or Ireland. Closer to home, the Ku Klux Klan rides again, the Skinheads multiply. Hunger and homelessness, crack and child abuse. There are poems—good, bad, or indifferent—written every day somewhere about all of these, and they are a poetry of war. Yet one may say they are a proto-peace poetry; for they testify to a rejection which, though it cannot in itself create a state of peace, is one of its indispensable preconditions.

[00:19:46]

For war is no longer—if it ever was—a matter of armed conflict only. As we become more aware of the inseparability of justice from peace, we perceive that hunger and homelessness and our failure to stop them are—stop them are forms of warfare, and that no one is a civilian. And we perceive that our degradation of the biosphere is the most devastating war of all. The threat of nuclear holocaust simply proposes a more sudden variation in a continuum of violence we are already engaged in. Our consciousness lags so far behind our actions.

[00:20:31]

W. S. Merwin has written in a poem called "Chord"—that's c-h-o-r-d—which is included in his book, *The Rain and the Trees*, about this time-lag. "Chord":

While Keats wrote they were cutting down the sandalwood forests
 while he listened to the nightingale they heard their own axes
 echoing through the forests
 while he sat in the walled garden on the hill outside the city they
 thought of their gardens dying far away on the mountain
 while the sound of the words clawed at him they thought of their wives
 while the tip of his pen traveled the iron they had coveted was

hateful to them
while he thought of the Grecian woods they bled under red flowers
while he dreamed of wine the trees were falling from the trees
while he felt his heart they were hungry and their faith was sick
while the song broke over him they were in a secret place and they
were cutting it forever
while he coughed they carried the trunks to the hole in the forest
the size of a foreign ship
while he groaned on the voyage to Italy they fell on the trails and
were broken
when he lay with the odes behind him the wood was sold for cannons
when he lay watching the window they came home and lay down
and an age arrived when everything was explained in another language

[00:22:20]

The tree has become a great symbol of what we need, what we destroy, what we must revere and protect and learn from if life on earth is to continue and that mysterious hope, life at peace, is to be attained. The tree's deep and wide root-system, its broad embrace and lofty reach from earth into air, its relation to fire and to human structures, as fuel and material, and especially to water which it not only needs but gives—drought ensuing when the forests are destroyed—just as it gives us purer air. All these and other attributes of the tree, not least its beauty, make it a powerful archetype.

[00:23:08]

The Swedish poet Reidar Ekner has written in "Horologium," in his own translation, as follows:

*Where the tree germinates, it takes root
there it stretches up its thin spire
there it sends down the fine threads
gyroscopically it takes its position*

*In the seed the genes whisper: stretch out for the light
and seek the dark*

*And the tree seeks the light, it stretches out
for the dark*

*And the more darkness it finds, the more light
it discovers*

*the higher towards the light it reaches, the further down
towards darkness*

it is groping

*Where the tree germinates, it widens
it drinks in from the dark, it sips from the light
intoxicated by the green blood, spirally it turns
the sun drives it, the sap rushes through the fine pipes
towards the light*

*the pressure from the dark drives it out
to the points, one*

*golden morning the big crown of the tree
turns green, from all directions insects, and birds*

*It is a giddiness, one cone
driving the other*

Inch after inch the tree takes possession of its place

it transforms the dark into tree

it transforms the light into tree

it transforms the place into tree

*It incorporates the revolutions of the planet, one after the other
the bright semicircle, the dark semicircle*

Inside the bark, it converts time into tree

*The tree has four dimensions, the fourth one
memory*

*far back its memory goes, further back than that of Man,
than the heart of any living beings
for a long time the corpse of the captured highwayman hung
from its branches
The oldest ones, they remember the hunting people, the shell mounds,
the neolithic dwellings
They will remember our time, too; our breathing out,
they will breathe it in
Hiroshima's time, they breathe it in, cryptomeria
also this orbit of the planet, they add it to their growth
Time, they are measuring it; time pieces they are, seventy centuries
the oldest ones carry in their wood*

[00:25:40]

Ekner causes us to perceive the tree as witness; and when we are stopped in our tracks by a witness to our foolishness, the effect is, at least for a moment, that which A. E. Housman described when he wrote:

*But man at whiles is sober.
And thinks, by fits and starts;
And when he thinks, he fastens
His hand upon his heart.*

[00:26:08]

What of a religious approach to the state of war in which we live and to the possibility of peace? The Welsh poet R. S. Thomas, an Anglican priest, whose skepticism and pessimism, however, often seem more profound than those of secular poets, offers in "The Kingdom" a remote and somewhat abstract view of it and a basic prescription for getting there. "The Kingdom":

*It's a long way off but inside it
There are quite different things going on:*

*Festivals at which the poor man
Is king and the consumptive is
Healed; mirrors in which the blind look
At themselves and love looks at them
Back; and industry is for mending
The bent bones and the minds fractured
By life. It's a long way off, but to get
There takes no time and admission
Is free, if you will purge yourself
Of desire, and present yourself with
Your need only and the simple offering
Of your faith, green as a leaf.*

[00:27:24]

Catherine de Vinck, from whom I quoted earlier, a Catholic writer, all of whose work expresses her deep faith, adds to that prescription the ingredient of action: we must act our faith, she says, at the end of the last poem in her *Book of Peace*, by practical communion with others, offering up and sharing our bodily nourishment, the light of our belief, the living-space we occupy. The time for peace, the title of this poem makes us recognize, is now. "A Time for Peace":

*We can still make it
gather the threads, the pieces
each of different size and shade
to match and sew into a pattern:
Rose of Sharon
wedding ring
circles and crowns.*

*We can still listen:
children at play, their voices
mingling in the present tense*

of a time that can be extended.

*Peace, we say
looking through our pockets
to find the golden word
the coin to buy that ease
that place sheltered
from bullets and bombs.
But what we seek lies elsewhere
beyond the course of lethargic blood
beyond the narrow dream
of resting safe and warm.*

*If we adjust our lenses
we see far in the distance
figures of marching people
homeless, hungry, going nowhere.
Why not call them
to our mornings of milk and bread?
The coming night will be darker
than the heart of stones
unless we strike the match
light the guiding candle
say yes, there is room after all
at the inn.*

ANNOUNCER: From Boston, you have been listening to an archive edition of the New American Gazette presented by the Ford Hall Forum.

[00:29:41]

DENISE LEVERTOV: Muriel Rukeyser, in a poem begun on the trip to Hanoi she and I made together with one other woman in 1972, shortly before Nixon's Christmas carpet-bombing of the North, wrote of the paradoxical presence of peace that we felt there in the midst of war. "It Is There":

Yes, it is there, the city full of music.

Flute music, sounds of children, voices of poets,

The unknown bird in his long call. The bells of peace.

Essential peace, it sounds across the water

In the long parks where the lovers are walking,

Along the lake with its island and pagoda,

And a boy learning to fish. His father threads the line.

Essential peace, it sounds and it stills. Cockcrow.

It is there, the human place.

On what does it depend, this music, the children's games?

A long tradition of rest? Meditation? What priest—peace is so profound

That it can reach all inhabitants, all children,

The eyes at worship, the shattered in hospitals?

All voyagers?

Meditation, yes; but within a tension

Of long resistance to all invasion, all seduction of hate.

Generations of holding to resistance; and within this resistance

Fluid change that can respond, that can show the children

A long future of finding, of responsibility; change within

Change and tension of sharing consciousness

Village to city, city to village, person to person entire

With unchanging cockcrow and unchanging endurance

Under the skies of war.

[00:31:46]

On that journey I had felt the same thing—the still center, the eye of the storm. "In Thai Binh (Peace) Province":

*I've used up all my film on bombed hospitals,
bombed village schools, the scattered
lemon-yellow cocoons at the bombed silk-factory,*

*and for the moment all my tears too
are used up, having seen today
yet another child with its feet blow off,
a girl, this one, eleven years old,
patient and bewildered in her home, a fragile
small house of mud bricks among rice fields.*

*So I'll use my dry burning eyes
to photograph with in me
dark sails of the river boats,
warm slant of afternoon light
apricot on the brown, swift, wide river,
village towers—church and pagoda—on the far shore,
and a boy and small bird both
perched, relaxed, on a quietly grazing
buffalo.*

Peace within the long war.

*It is that life, unhurried, sure, persistent,
I must bring home when I try to bring
the war home.*

Child, river, light.

*Here the future, fabled bird
that has migrated away from America,
nests, and breeds, and sings,
common as any sparrow.*

[00:33:48]

Yes, though I've said we cannot write about peace because we've never experienced it, we do have these glimpses of it, and we have them most intensely when they are brought into relief by the chaos and violence surrounding them. But the longing for peace is a longing to get beyond not only the momentariness of such glimpses but also the ominous dualism that too often seems our only way of obtaining those moments.

[00:34:18]

Although the instant takes us out of time, a peace in a larger sense experienced only through the power of contrast would be as false as any artificial paradise, or as the hectic flush of prosperity periodically induced in ailing economies by injections of war and arms industry jobs and profits.

[00:34:40]

No, if there begins to be a poetry of peace, it is still, as it has long been, a poetry of struggle. Much of it is not by the famous, much of it is almost certainly still unpublished. And much of it is likely to be by women, because so many women are actively engaged in nonviolent action, and through their work—especially at the peace camps, such as Greenham Common and elsewhere in England or Germany, or here at the Nevada Test Site, or the Concord, California railroad tracks—they have been gathering practical experience in ways of peaceful community.

[00:35:17]

Ann Snitow, writing about Greenham in 1985, said that, quote:

“When I describe Greenham women, their lives in these circumstances, I often get the reaction that they sound like mad idealists, detached from a reality principle about what

can and cannot be done, and how. In a sense, this is true. The women reject power and refuse to study it, at least on its own terms. But the other charge, that they are utopian dreamers, who sit around and think about the end of the world, while not really living in this one, is far from the mark.

[00:35:49]

In a piece in the Times Literary Supplement last summer—which was the summer of '86 or '85 that she's talking about—a piece called, "Why the Peace Movement is Wrong," the Russian émigré poet Joseph Brodsky charged the peace movement with being a bunch of millenarians awaiting—waiting for the apocalypse.

Certainly there are fascinating parallels between the thinking of the peace women and that of the radical millenarian Protestant sects of the seventeenth century.

Both believe that the soul is the only court that matters, the self the only guide, and that paradise is a humble and realizable goal in England's green and pleasant land. The millenarians offered free food just like the caravans now on the Common: "Food," says one sign. "Eat Till You're Full."

[00:36:37]

But the women are not sitting in the mud waiting for the end, nor are they—as Brodsky and many others claim—trying to come to terms with their own deaths by imagining that soon the whole world will die. On the contrary, the women make up one of the really active anti-millenary enforcers around. President Reagan has told fundamentalist groups that the last trump ending human history might blow at any time now. The women believe that the dreadful sound can be avoided, if only we will stop believing in it.

[00:37:07]

Greenham women see a kind of fatalism all around them. They, too, have imagined the end, and their own deaths, and have decided that they prefer to die without taking the world with them. Nothing makes them more furious than the apathy in the town of Newbury, where they are often told, "Look, you've got to

die anyway. So what difference does it make how you go?" Those are the real millenarians, blithely accepting that the end is near.

[00:37:29]

In contrast, the women look very hardheaded, very pragmatic. They see a big war machine, the biggest the war has known. And rather than sitting in the cannon's mouth hypnotized, catatonic with fear or denial, they are trying to back away from the danger step by step. They refuse to be awed or silenced by the war machine. Instead they say calmly that what was built by human beings can be dismantled by them, too.

Their logic, clarity and independence are endlessly refreshing. Where is it written, they ask, that we must destroy ourselves?"

[00:38:03]

There can be, then, a poetry which may help us, before it is too late, to attain peace. Poems of protest, documentaries of the state of war, can rouse us to work for peace and justice. Poems of praise for life and the living earth can stimulate us to protect it. The work of Gary Snyder, of Wendell Berry, comes to mind, among others. Poems of comradeship in struggle can help us—like the thought of those shared gloves in the Margaret Randall poem—can help us to know the dimension of community, so often absent from modern life. And there is beginning to be a new awareness, articulated most specifically in the writings of Father Thomas Berry, the talks and workshops of people like Miriam MacGillis or Joanna Macy, that we humans are not just walking around on this planet but that we and all things are truly, physically, biologically, part of one living organism; and that our human role on earth is as the consciousness and self-awareness of that organism.

[00:39:13]

John Daniel, who almost certainly had not read Thomas Berry, shows how this realization is beginning to appear as if spontaneously in many minds; perhaps rather on the lines of the story of the hundredth monkey. A poem of Daniel's says, and I quote it only in part:

*A voice is finding its tongue
in the slop and squall of birth.
It sounds,
and we, in whom Earth happened to light
a clear flame of consciousness,
are only beginning to learn the language—
who are made of the ash of stars,
who carry the sea we were born in,
who spent millions of years learning to breathe,
who shivered in fur at the reptiles' feet,
who trained our hands on the limbs of trees
and came down, slowly straightening
to look over the grasses, to see
that the world not only is
but is beautiful—
we are Earth learning to see itself*

[00:40:23]

If this consciousness—with its corollary awareness that when we exploit and mutilate the earth we are exploiting and mutilating the body of which we are the brow—brain cells—if that consciousness increases and proliferates while there is still time, it could be the key to survival. A vision of peace cannot be a vision of a heaven in which natural disasters are miraculously eliminated, but must be of a society in which companionship and fellowship would so characterize the tone of daily life that unavoidable disasters would be differently met. Natural disasters, such as earthquakes and floods do, anyway, elicit neighborliness, briefly at least; a peaceful society would have to be one capable of maintaining that love and care for the afflicted. Only loving kindness could sustain a lasting peace.

[00:41:31]

How can poetry relate to that idea? Certainly not by preaching. But as more and more poets know and acknowledge—as I believe they are already starting to do—that we are indeed "made of the ash of stars," as the poem said, their art, stirring the imagination of those who read them—few, perhaps, but always a dynamic few, a thin edge of the wedge—can have that oblique influence which cannot be measured. We cannot long survive at all unless we do move towards peace. If a poetry of peace is ever to be written, there must first be this stage we are just entering—the poetry of preparation for peace, a poetry of protest, of lament, of praise for the living earth; a poetry that demands justice, renounces violence, reverences mystery.

[00:42:24]

I would like to end with this Native American invocation of the powers. It's from the Hako: Pawnee, Osage, Omaha. "Invoking the Powers":

*Remember, remember the circle of the sky
the stars and the brown eagle
the supernatural winds
breathing night and day
from the four directions*

*Remember, remember the great life of the sun
breathing on the earth
it lies upon the earth
to bring out life upon the earth
life covering the earth*

*Remember, remember the sacredness of things
running streams and dwellings
the young within the nest
a hearth for sacred fire
the holy flame of fire*

[00:43:45]

Thank you.

(applause)

[00:43:51]

ANDREW YOUNG: A human rights activist for many years, Danny Glover is best known to audiences around the world as an actor, portraying a wide range of leading roles in such films as, *The Color Purple*, *Lethal Weapon*, and a documentary on Nelson Mandela. On Broadway, he starred in *Master Harold ...and the Boys*, by South African playwright Athol Fugard. Through his work with the African Liberation Support Committee and Amnesty International, Mr. Glover has campaigned for human rights, justice and freedom.

[00:44:25]

Today, he reads the words of those who have struggled and continue to struggle for change in Latin America and Africa. The poets explore themes of exile, freedom from oppression and the dignity of the human spirit. Participating in a Ford Hall Forum program on "Hope and Healing in a World of Horror" is actor and activist Danny Glover.

(applause)

[00:45:00]

DANNY GLOVER: I'm going to read from some poetry of a personal friend of mine, Abena Busia, who's a professor of English at department—English department at Rutgers University. She was born in Accra. She spent the first years of her childhood at home, as well as in Holland and Mexico, before her family finally settled in Oxford Uni—England, where she had all her secondary and university education before coming to the U.S. to teach in 1981.

[00:45:39]

Ms. Busia's sister is a dear friend of mine, and in fact we performed in *The Color Purple* together, Akosua Busia. Ms. Busia's father, Kofi Abrefa Busia, was prime minister of Ghana in the early seventies, before the military coup. I'm going to read some of her poetry.

“Freedom Rides Quiz”:

*Can you tell me where Dien Bien Phu?
I'll give you a clue;
Kent State is the place you must ride roughshod through*

*How'd you reach D.C. on the Freedom Trail?
It's quite a tale,
You boycott Montgomery, pass through Birmingham jail*

*Can you tell me what took place in Sharpeville?
I'll tell you who will;
Ask the children of Soweto if the answer rhymes with still*

*The histories of nations
are in the end spelt out
only through the dying breaths
of succeeding generations*

*And of those now laboring to be born,
the first of these generations must weep
and bear a heavy burden
from age to hopeless age
on age that the children's children's
embittered children
may at the last first learn
to laugh, among the ripening fruits
they will silent tears now sow*

Another poem:

I can't—"And Anyway, I Can't Go Home":

*Suddenly I recall that yesterday I was going to write a poem
Something about lost children and forgotten souls
And being a long way from home.
I don't know that I'll write it.*

*All my friends are exiles,
Born in one place we live in another
And with this sophisticated—sophistication rendezvous
In most surprising places,
Where we would never expect to find us.*

*Between us, we people are the world
With aplomb and a command of language,
We stride across continents with the self-assurance
Of those who know with absolute certainty
Where they come from.*

*With the globe at their command.
We have everywhere to go, but home.*

[00:48:34]

I am part of an educational film festival. And the film—a year ago, the festival's best film was a film, *The Mothers of Plaza de Mayo*. And it was such an incredible experience for me to see the film and to present the award at the time. This is by Pablo Neruda.

“So is My Life”:

*My duty moves along with my song:
I am I am not: that is my destiny.*

*I exist not if I do not attend to the pain
of those who suffer: they are my pains.
For I cannot be without existing for all,
for all who are silent and oppressed,
I come from the people and I sing of them:
my poetry is song and punishment.
I am told: you belong to darkness.
Perhaps, perhaps, but I walk toward the light.
I am the man of bread and fish
and you will not find me among books
but with women and men:
they have taught me the infinite.*

[00:49:52]

Dennis Brutus is a South African writer and poet, who's been in exile, who was in prison in South Africa, and has been in exile in this country. There have been many attempts by the State Department to have him exported back to South Africa. His poem, "Dear God":

*Dear God
Get me out of here
Let me go somewhere
Where I can fight the evil
Which surrounds me here
And which I am forbidden to fight
But do not take from me my anger
My indignation at injustice
So that I may continue to burn
To right it or destroy it*

*Oh, I know
I have asked for this before*

*In other predicaments
And found myself most wildly involved
But it is—but if to be possible and comfortable
To your will
Dear God, get me out of here*

[00:51:11]

"In This Country":

*In this country,
In this air;
Where these trees grow:
Where clear air flows
Before, behind, above
And through the throat
Flows a cool and crystal stream
To where the milk white domes
In all-embracing curve.*

*In this country,
In this air;
Where these trees grow:
Poised and moving
As a flame intruding
Projects through rings of encircling dark
Where sweet air flows
And the slim tree grow
In this country
Festers hate in fetid wounds
Infection floats on fluid air
Anger roars in the placid night*

And the dark is drizzled with our tears.

[00:52:15]

"We Survive, If Nothing Else Remains":

*We survive,
if nothing else remains
in assurance of affliction, pains
For you and I, by this affliction,
each on each,
a private agony
the certainty of suffering
knows something of the heart's immortality
and through—though we die,
each day we know, too, in the heart of each
remembrance survives
this pain we suffer.
We inflict, we cherish and enjoy
knowing that in this way, somehow
we keep alive something of the love we knew.*

[00:53:02]

I am going to read another poem by Abena Busia. And I was talking to Akosua, and she said this poem was written when they were, they were in exile, and there were assassins after her father, and they had just moved into this empty house. Her father placed a suitcase against a door as a barrier, and they were about to have a meal. There was no furniture in the house. They were on—they were running. "The Meal":

*You wonder what it is
that makes them pray
regardless of the presence of strangers*

*to think what distracted God
for this hasty meal prepared in flight
eaten cold
in alien rooms in foreign lands.
Where not assassins, not friends
can find them with names not their own
wearing clothes not their own
in rooms not their own.
They say grace that they are not forsaken
and mean it.*

[00:54:21]

And I'm going to read one more poem before—I'm getting kind of used to this. "British Boarding School Blues":

*Rainbow after rainbow
I waited for you
to leap through the arch
and save me and my toys
from the downpour
and the cold.
I cling to your memory
for warmth
In my heart and in my dreams.
Sister says, "Pa is in hiding"
but you will return.
16 weeks ago
they let us see your—our brothers.
We hang on
hang on.
I beg you, Mama, do not leave us*

fragmented
in this foreign land.

[00:55:10]

Akosua wrote this when she was nine years old.

Okay. I guess questions.

(applause)

ANNOUNCER: You have been listening to an archive edition of the New American Gazette from Boston's Ford Hall Forum. The New American Gazette was produced by Deborah Stavrow with post-production engineers Roger Baker, Brian Sabo and Anthony Debartolo. The New American Gazette was produced in cooperation with the nation's presidential libraries, the National Archives and Northeastern University. To purchase a copy of this program or receive information about the 2006 spring season of the Forum, please call 617-373-5800, or visit www.FordHallForum.org. Thank you for joining us.

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