

**Classic Poetry Series**

# **Debora Greger**

**- poems -**

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### **Debora Greger (1949-)**

Debora Greger is an award-winning American poet as well as a visual artist.

She was raised in Richland, Washington. She attended the University of Washington and then the Iowa Writers' Workshop. She then went on to hold fellowships at the Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown and at Harvard University's Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study. She is a professor of English and creative writing at the University of Florida.

Her poetry has been included in six volumes of *The Best American Poetry* and she has exhibited her artwork at several galleries and museums across the country. She also has a poem on *Poetry 180* in number 42. Her work appeared in *Paris Review*, *The Nation*, *Poetry*, and *The New Criterion*.

She lives in Gainesville, Florida and Cambridge, England with her life-partner, the poet and critic, William Logan.

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Bibliography

2004: *Western Art*. Penguin.

2001: *God*. Penguin.

1996: *Desert Fathers, Uranium Daughters*. Penguin.

1994: *Off-Season at the Edge of the World*. University of Illinois Press.

1990: *The 1002nd Night*. Princeton University Press.

1985: *Blank Country* (limited edition chapbook). Meadow Press.

1985: *And*. Princeton University Press.

1980: *Cartography* (limited edition chapbook). Penumbra Press.

1980: *Movable Islands*. Princeton University Press.

## **A Woman on the Dump**

Is it peace,  
Is it a philosopher's honeymoon, one finds  
On the dump?

—Wallace Stevens

Out of the cracks of cups and their handles, missing,  
the leaves unceremoniously tossed, unread,  
from a stubble of coffee ground ever more finely  
into these hollowed grounds,

the first shift coaxes bulldozers to life,  
sphinxes to tease the riddled rubble  
into fresh pyramids of rot. A staleness warms enough  
to waft round the lord of all purveyed.

His to count the hauls past the yawning gates  
of this New Giza into the Middle Kingdom's  
Late Intermediate Period. There, to purify,  
to honor ourselves, we beg these offerings

of refuse be cast out. To the archaeologist  
of the far-flung future, enough evidence  
in the inscriptions to identify most owners:  
spells scratched on the backs of envelopes

to be read out before animal sacrifice,  
the milk, ground meat, beer, and soap  
joined in this hereafter with the feast's remains.  
Over tomatoes splitting their sides,

over a teacup stained with roses  
flattened into mosaic petal from petal,  
earthmovers move a little mountain  
and, having moved it, move on,

overturning a diamond sprung from its ring,  
glitter to a magpie's covetous eye.  
If the art of loneliness is landscape,  
armload by carload of black-bagged leaves,

landfill contours its likeness.

Debora Greger

## Head, Perhaps Of An Angel

limestone, with traces of polychromy, c. 1250

Point Dume was the point,  
he said, but we never came close,  
no matter how far we walked the shale  
broken from California.

Someone's garden  
had slipped, hanging itself by a vine  
from the cliffs of some new Babylon  
past Malibu.

Drowning the words,  
the wind didn't fling back in our faces,  
the Pacific washed up a shell:  
around an alabastron

of salt water for the dead,  
seaweed rustled its papers, drying them out,  
until it died. Waves kept crashing  
into the heart

of each shell  
I held to my ear like a phone,  
but they were just the waves of my blood.  
And through it all

I heard him say,  
how could it be nine months ago  
his grandson had taken his own life,  
somewhere back east?

He was fifteen.  
O Pacific, what good is our grief?  
Something screamed at the sandy child  
who poured seawater

into a hole.  
Child, you'll never empty the ocean,  
Augustine said. How can I believe?  
The wet fist of a wave

dissolved in sand.  
Like a saint, a seagull flapped down the beach  
in search of something raw—an angel  
with an empty pail?

No, a teenage boy,  
hands big as a man's, held a sea slug  
quaking like an aspic. Under a rock, another  
drew into its body

a creature  
larger than itself. Live, said Death,  
to child and childless alike, indifferently.  
I am coming.

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