

Classic Poetry Series

Connie Wanek
- poems -

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Connie Wanek(1952 --)

Connie Wanek is an American poet.

Life

She was born in Madison, Wisconsin, and grew up in Las Cruces, New Mexico. In 1989 she moved with her family to Duluth, Minnesota where she now lives.

Her work appeared in Poetry, The Atlantic Monthly, The Virginia Quarterly Review, Quarterly West, Poetry East, Prairie Schooner and Missouri Review.

She has published three books of poetry, and served as co-editor of the comprehensive historical anthology of Minnesota women poets, called To Sing Along the Way (New Rivers Press, 2006). Ted Kooser, Poet Laureate of the United States (2004–2006), named her a Witter Bynner Fellow of the Library of Congress for 2006.

Awards

Willow Poetry Prize

Jane Kenyon Poetry Prize.

2006 Witter Bynner Fellowship of the Library of Congress by United States Poet Laureate Ted Kooser.

2009 George Morrison Artist of the Year

After Us

I don't know if we're in the beginning
or in the final stage.

-- Tomas Tranströmer

Rain is falling through the roof.
And all that prospered under the sun,
the books that opened in the morning
and closed at night, and all day
turned their pages to the light;

the sketches of boats and strong forearms
and clever faces, and of fields
and barns, and of a bowl of eggs,
and lying across the piano
the silver stick of a flute; everything

invented and imagined,
everything whispered and sung,
all silenced by cold rain.

The sky is the color of gravestones.
The rain tastes like salt, and rises
in the streets like a ruinous tide.
We spoke of millions, of billions of years.
We talked and talked.

Then a drop of rain fell
into the sound hole of the guitar, another
onto the unmade bed. And after us,
the rain will cease or it will go on falling,
even upon itself.

Connie Wanek

Amaryllis

A flower needs to be this size
to conceal the winter window,
and this color, the red
of a Fiat with the top down,
to impress us, dull as we've grown.

Months ago the gigantic onion of a bulb
half above the soil
stuck out its green tongue
and slowly, day by day,
the flower itself entered our world,

closed, like hands that captured a moth,
then open, as eyes open,
and the amaryllis, seeing us,
was somehow undiscouraged.
It stands before us now

as we eat our soup;
you pour a little of your drinking water
into its saucer, and a few crumbs
of fragrant earth fall
onto the tabletop.

Connie Wanek

Butter.

Butter

Butter, like love,
seems common enough
yet has so many imitators.
I held a brick of it, heavy and cool,
and glimpsed what seemed like skin
beneath a corner of its wrap;
the décolletage revealed
a most attractive fat!

And most refined.
Not milk, not cream,
not even creme de la creme.
It was a delicacy which assured me
that bliss follows agitation,
that even pasture daisies
through the alchemy of four stomachs
may grace a king's table.

We have a yellow bowl near the toaster
where summer's butter grows
soft and sentimental.
We love it better for its weeping,
its nostalgia for buckets and churns
and deep stone wells,
for the press of a wooden butter mold
shaped like a swollen heart.

Connie Wanek

Coloring Book

Each picture is heartbreakingly banal,
a kitten and a ball of yarn,
a dog and bone.
The paper is cheap, easily torn.
A coloring book's authority is derived
from its heavy black lines
as unalterable as the ten commandments
within which minor decisions are possible:
the dog black and white,
the kitten gray.
Under the picture we find a few words,
a title, perhaps a narrative,
a psalm or sermon.
But nowhere do we come upon
a blank page where we might justify
the careless way we scribbled
when we were tired and sad
and could bear no more.

Connie Wanek

Daisies

In the democracy of daisies
every blossom has one vote.
The question on the ballot is
Does he love me?

If the answer's wrong I try another,
a little sorry about the petals
piling up around my shoes.

Bees are loose in the fields
where daisies wait and hope,
dreaming of the kiss of a proboscis.
We can't possibly understand

what makes us such fools.
I blame the June heat
and everything about him.

Submitted by Venus

Connie Wanek

Hartley Field

<i>And place is always and only place
And what is actual is actual only for one time
And only for one place . . .

T. S. Eliot</I>

The wind cooled as it crossed the open pond
and drove little waves toward us,
brisk, purposeful waves
that vanished at our feet, such energy
thwarted by so little elevation.
The wind was endless, seamless,
old as the earth.

Insects came
to regard us with favor. I felt them alight,
felt their minute footfalls.
I was a challenge, an Everest . . .

And you, whom I have heard breathe all night,
sigh through the water of sleep
with vestigial gills . . .

A pair of dragonflies drifted past us, silent,
while higher up two bullet-shaped jets
dragged their roars behind them
on unbreakable chains. It seemed a pity
we'd given up the sky to them, but I understand so little.
Perhaps it was necessary.

All our years together—
and not just together. Surely by now
we have the same blood type, the same myopia.
Sometimes I think we're the same sex,
the one in the middle of man and woman,
born of both as every child is.

The waves came to us, one each heartbeat,
and lay themselves at our feet.
The swelling goes down.
The fever cools.

There, where the Hartleys grew lettuce eighty years ago
bear and beaver, fox and partridge
den and nest and hunt
and are hunted. I wish I had the means
to give all the north back to itself, to let the pines
rise in the hayfield and the lilacs go wild.
But then where would we live?

I wanted that hour with you all winter—
I thought of it while I worked,
before I slept and when I woke,
a time when the tangled would straighten,
when contrition would become benediction:
the positive hour, shining like mica.
At last the wind brought it to us across the pond,
then took it up again, every last minute.

Connie Wanek

Jump Rope

There is menace
in its relentless course, round and round,
describing an ellipsoid,
an airy prison in which a young girl
is incarcerated.

Whom will she marry? Whom will she love?
The rope, like a snake,
has the gift of divination,
yet reveals only a hint, a single initial.
But what if she never misses?

Is competence its own reward?
Will the rope never strike her ankle,
love's bite? The ends turn and turn,
two-handed as their arms tire,
their enchantments exhausted.

It hurts to watch her now,
flushed and scowling,
her will stronger than her limbs,
her braids lashing her shoulders
with each small success.

Submitted by Venus

Connie Wanek

Lipstick

She leaned over the sink

her weight on her toes

and applied lipstick

in quick certain strokes

the way a man signs

his hundredth autograph

of the morning.

She tested a convictionless smile

as the lipstick retracted

like a red eel.

All day she left her mark

on everything she kissed,

even the air,

like intoxicating news

whispered from ear to ear:

He left it all to me.

Connie Wanek

Monopoly

We used to play, long before we bought real houses.
A roll of the dice could send a girl to jail.
The money was pink, blue, gold as well as green,
and we could own a whole railroad
or speculate in hotels where others dreaded staying:
the cost was extortionary.

At last one person would own everything,
every teaspoon in the dining car, every spike
driven into the planks by immigrants,
every crooked mayor.
But then, with only the clothes on our backs,
we ran outside, laughing.

Connie Wanek

Radiator

Mittens are drying on the radiator,
boots nearby, one on its side.
Like some monstrous segmented insect
the radiator elongates under the window.

Or it is a beast with many shoulders
domesticated in the Ice Age.
How many years it takes
to move from room to room!

Some cage their radiators
but this is unnecessary
as they have little desire to escape.

Like turtles they are quite self-contained.
If they seem sad, it is only the same sadness
we all feel, unlovely, growing slowly cold.

Connie Wanek

The Coin Behind Your Ear

Before you knew you owned it
it was gone, stolen, and you were a fool.
How you never felt it is the wonder,
heavy and thick,
lodged deep in your hair like a burr.
You still see the smile of the magician
as he turned the coin in his long fingers,
which had so disturbed your ear
with their caress. You watched him
lift it into the light, bright as frost,
and slip it into his maze of pockets.
You felt vainly behind your ear
but there was no second coin,
nothing to tempt him back.
No one cared to know why he did it,
only how.

Submitted by Venus

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