

Classic Poetry Series

Elizabeth Jennings
- poems -

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Elizabeth Jennings(20 July 1926 – 25 October 2001)

Elizabeth Joan Jennings was an English poet.

Life and Career

Elizabeth was born in Boston, Lincolnshire, England in July 18, 1926. Her father was a respected Chief Medical Officer who moved the family to Oxford when she was six years old. She later discovered poetry while attending the Oxford high school.

After attending St Anne's College, Oxford, Elizabeth became a librarian at Oxford city library. Having more time to focus on her writing she published her first collection of poetry (1953) which drew the attention of Robert Conquest. Mr. Conquest would later publish her work with the likes of famous authors Kingsley Amis, Philip Larkin, Thom Gunn and others in his 1956 "New Lines Anthology", which would later become known as "The Movement".

Throughout the 1960's, Elizabeth was one of the most popular poets in England. She never married and published a great number of works. Elizabeth once said, "I write fast and revise very little".

<i>Delay</i>

"The radiance of the star that leans on me
Was shining years ago. The light that now
Glitters up there my eyes may never see,
And so the time lag teases me with how

Love that loves now may not reach me until
Its first desire is spent. The star's impulse
Must wait for eyes to claim it beautiful
And love arrived may find us somewhere else."

Regarded as traditionalist rather than an innovator, Jennings is known for her lyric poetry and mastery of form. Her work displays a simplicity of metre and rhyme shared with Philip Larkin, Kingsley Amis and Thom Gunn, all members of the group of English poets known as The Movement. She always made it clear that, whilst her life, which included a spell of severe mental illness, contributed to the themes contained within her work, she did not write explicitly autobiographical poetry. Her deeply held Roman Catholicism coloured much of

her work.

She died in a care home in Bampton, Oxfordshire and is buried in Wolvercote Cemetery, Oxford.

Selected Awards and Honours

1953: Arts Council of Great Britain Prize for the best first book of poems for Poems

1955: Somerset Maugham Prize for A Way of Looking.

1987: W.H. Smith Literary Award for Collected Poems 1953–1985

1992: Commander of the Order of the British Empire (CBE)

2001: Honorary Doctorate of Divinity from Durham University

Rembrandt's Late Self-Portraits

You are confronted with yourself. Each year
The pouches fill, the skin is uglier.
You give it all unflinchingly. You stare
Into yourself, beyond. Your brush's care
Runs with self-knowledge. Here

Is a humility at one with craft.
There is no arrogance. Pride is apart
From this self-scrutiny. You make light drift
The way you want. Your face is bruised and hurt
But there is still love left.

Love of the art and others. To the last
Experiment went on. You stared beyond
Your age, the times. You also plucked the past
And tempered it. Self-portraits understand,
And old age can divest,

With truthful changes, us of fear of death.
Look, a new anguish. There, the bloated nose,
The sadness and the joy. To paint's to breathe,
And all the darkneses are dared. You chose
What each must reckon with.

Elizabeth Jennings