

Classic Poetry Series

Geraldine Connolly
- poems -

Publication Date:

2012

Publisher:

Poemhunter.com - The World's Poetry Archive

Geraldine Connolly()

Geraldine Connolly is the author of three poetry collections: *The Red Room* (Heatherstone Press), *Food for the Winter* (Purdue University Press) and *Province of Fire* (Iris Press). Her poems and reviews have appeared in *Poetry*, *Chelsea*, *Shenandoah*, *The Georgia Review* and *The Gettysburg Review*. She has been awarded a Maryland Arts Council fellowship as well as two poetry fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts. She was the Margaret Bridgman fellow at the Breadloaf Writers Conference. Billy Collins selected one of her poems, "The Summer I Was Sixteen," for the Library of Congress Poetry 180 Website: A Poem a Day for American High School Students. She won first place in the 2002 W.B. Yeats Society of New York poetry contest. Her work has appeared in eight anthologies including *Boomer Girls: Poems by Women from the Baby Boom Generation* (U. of Iowa) and *Sweeping Beauty: Poems about Housework* (U. of Iowa) and has been recorded and broadcast on WPFW Radio's *The Poet and the Poem* and *The Writer's Almanac*. She teaches at the University of Arizona Poetry Center and divides her time between Tucson and a home in the Rocky Mountain West.

Blue Bridge

Praise the good-tempered summer
and the red cardinal
that jumps
like a hot coal off the track.
Praise the heavy leaves,
heroines of green, frosted
with silver. Praise the litter
of torn paper, mulch
and sticks, the spiny holly,
its scarlet land mines.

Praise the black snake that whips
and shudders its way across my path
and the lane where grandmother
and grandfather walked, arms
around each other's waists
next to such a river, below
a blue bridge about to be
crossed by a train.

In the last gasp
of August, they erase the time
it might be now, whispering
into the darkness that passed,
blue plumes of smoke and cicada,
eager and doomed.

Submitted by Nola Garrett

Geraldine Connolly

In Praise Of Dawn

You can keep afternoon and its dwindling mysteries,
twilight with its seedy hauteur. You can have night
with its phony neon and rented motel rooms.

I prefer morning when the air is so quiet the rub
of a cricket's leg sounds like wildness beckoning.

My feet pad along the carpet like bears' paws
along a stretch of furred moss. The cherry tree
catches the first glint of gold in its deep green.

The kitchen is mine, empty and humming.

I am queen of the breakfast room, empress
of a new regime. Ideas sprout from my head

like bursts of startled blue jays. All possibilities
lie before me in the rustle of leaves at the window.

Something extraordinary is about to happen—

I could write an essay on forgiveness,
or construct an altar to Artemis with five red
maple leaves, a fish bone and a snake's rattle.

I have imagined dawn lifting her skirt, the limousine
of night pausing to release debutantes in important
gowns. I have watched schools of light
emerge from a window's shoreline and know that
beginning is always beginning, every midnight open
to a river of mornings, the day a fresh tributary.

Anything is possible: understanding quantum physics,
making plans for an innocent city. Pain could disappear
by sundown. Night could wear a sunlit dress.

We could start a journey to the new Jerusalem,
waving good-bye at the station where the trains pass
and dawn, blank as a newborn, floods each window.

Geraldine Connolly

Lydia

There was life before us

my sister and I discovered
looking at photographs

we shouldn't have been looking at
of the English girl my father

was engaged to during the war.
Here she is right in front of our eyes,

the woman before my mother,
in a black lace cocktail dress,

a cigarette in a holder,
pensive, earthy—waiting

in front of the carved wooden radio,
for news from the front.
This is the war, after all,
and here she is again, somewhere

on an English beach, draped
across my father's shoulder

all of her silky skin radiant
above the soft folds of sun dress.

They stand in front of a sign
that reads 'Seaside Cottages,

two dollars.' And here she is
again, painted onto the cockpit

of my father's plane with hardly
anything on at all, and here he is

in his flight jacket, looking
in fact, happy. My sister and I each

lift our pencils like cigarettes,
taking long sultry drags to puff
out invisible rings. They rise
in the air like silver nooses

that will catch our father
and hold him to us.

Geraldine Connolly

New Territory

Sent off to boarding school
at twelve, with a pair of oxfords,
a pair of patents, my sterling
silver christening rosary
and two dozen name tags stitched
like drops of blood onto the collars
of starched blouses, I stare
down the hall, long and dim,
slippery from too many waxings.
Plaster statues of the holy family live
here, in cave-like niches, the Blessed Virgin,
her face soft and chalky, cheeks
powdered pink. Everything about her
is pliable; she is to be our model.
Joseph is nondescript, covered by
a long brown robe. The baby sleeps.
I eye the nuns, black and fluttery,
and my parents, in wool, with fur collars,
giddy with their new freedom.
I unpack my suitcase and survey
the territory. One iron bed,
one chest of drawers, one slender closet.
A crucifix pierces the white wall.
A dark trunk opens its jaws
to swallow my life.

Geraldine Connolly

Procession Of All Souls

Gnarled and blessed
be the hour of autumn
when spotted pears sink
into wet sod, and blessed be
the songs of virgins rising
into the hunchbacked trees.

November dawn.
Down damp stone stairs
we followed the priest,
past leaf-choked wells
and jagged trees,
past the red rage of dogwood
ringing a black lake.

Dies Irae, he intoned,
Dies Illae, day of wrath.
We followed his swinging
censer, trail of smoke:
schoolgirls in gray, novices
in white veils, nuns in ragged black
tapping tortoise canes.

What joy to bear the fear,
to smell orbs of incense
perfuming the rot of leaves,
to cross the stubbled field
as crows rushed and whirled,

pecking at windfall seeds.
We arrived, rainsoaked, awed
to watch young nun-brides
kneel, and spread their thin bodies
across green doors of graves.

Geraldine Connolly

Regrets

Out of their secret places
in autumn, from under

dark logs and smooth gravestones
they come, black snakes,
stripped, floating free

in the golden September sunlight
which drifts as they try
to hold onto it.

They lay their bodies
across our warm paths,
branches of misspent hours,

limbs from the low gullies.
Past school children and old men
they wind, making no sound

sliding the earth in silence,
riding a world that seems dull
and hazy, half-spent,

beautiful errors
that rise up as we gasp.

Geraldine Connolly

The Entropy Of Pleasure

By the time you walk up to the ocean
the wave has already disappeared,
replaced by another wave, another sadness
as in passion or the light dying at dusk

or the shell split under your foot, another
scar made in the sand. You can't remember
exactly what you need to remember. White fluttering
wings arrive in the sweet grass like letters

from someone you loved who has abandoned you
for another city. And all the signs
read 'Dangerous Currents', 'Sea Forest'.
It's so difficult to keep track of the tracks
that are leading to unexpected places.

Change is a way we can't easily follow,
the water disappearing; even the dunes
have shifted and right when you are about to lose
your way into the wild oats, shuddering,
there are the stars in the center of sand dollars

that make you remember what you spend is spent,
the entropy of pleasure a wave's body
you can't hold in your hands for long. You
know the only way out is landmarks

you can't even imagine, the way we are drawn,
pulled by the tides, the first step
into happiness, its dangerous pleasure,
licked by the water's green flames

Geraldine Connolly

The Summer I Was Sixteen

The turquoise pool rose up to meet us,
its slide a silver afterthought down which
we plunged, screaming, into a mirage of bubbles.
We did not exist beyond the gaze of a boy.

Shaking water off our limbs, we lifted
up from ladder rungs across the fern-cool
lip of rim. Afternoon. Oiled and sated,
we sunbathed, rose and paraded the concrete,

danced to the low beat of "Duke of Earl".
Past cherry colas, hot-dogs, Dreamsicles,
we came to the counter where bees staggered
into root beer cups and drowned. We gobbled

cotton candy torches, sweet as furtive kisses,
shared on benches beneath summer shadows.
Cherry. Elm. Sycamore. We spread our chenille
blankets across grass, pressed radios to our ears,

mouthed the old words, then loosened
thin bikini straps and rubbed baby oil with iodine
across sunburned shoulders, tossing a glance
through the chain link at an improbable world.

Geraldine Connolly

To A Joshua Tree

I watch you flare up from the Mojave backdrop,
obstreperous, a lyric of exploding tar—
bold and unpredictable after legions of vernacular,
tawdry scrub pine. I am taken aback,

dazed by a temperamental tremor
of branches flung across the desert's spine.
High limbs swirl into vivid saxophones.
A tree that plays on being a tree, an impostor

among the true believers, you are all asymmetry
and wild trumpets of spiked hair unloosed at noon,
the disorder of a jazz riff, a July blizzard.
I love your crazed charm, a madman raving at sky.
An old world prophet, you brandish a vision
as the world's traffic turns its back, glides onward

Geraldine Connolly

Why I Was Sent To Boarding School

to lengthen my hemlines and straighten
my morals

because I was difficult

because my parents were tired

to lock me in chastity's cupboard

to Latinize me, teach me manners,
give me a good solid dose of fear

to place over my face the mask
of stoic cheerfulness

to take away my swagger
tame my wild hair and rebellious tongue

because that's where the doctors
sent their daughters

because the nuns would know what to do
with a girl like me
because they would do their best
to pour me into the mold
with china limbs and lace collars
and because they had their fingers crossed
that I would come out nice
like a floral centerpiece you could
put right into the center
of your dinner party, gleaming

as heads of cut flowers
bobbed there, grateful, arranged,
blinking and nodding with grace
saying yes, yes, turn me
and they would turn me,
from what I was
into what they wanted

not the wolf girl
not soaring beast with smoking hair
but a tame Hereford
amiable, smooth child they could love
with no thoughts that were devil-born
a flat good prize of a girl

and there where I looked
in a morning mirror
I would encounter myself
calm, bovine, accepting

beloved of Mother Superior
cherished of God the Father.

Geraldine Connolly