

Classic Poetry Series

Nancy Willard
- poems -

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Nancy Willard()

Nancy Willard (born June 26, 1936) is a novelist, a poet, and a children's writer and occasional illustrator. Her 1981 collection of poems, *A Visit to William Blake's Inn*, won the Newbery Medal as that year's most distinguished contribution to American children's literature.

Willard was born in Ann Arbor, Michigan, where she later received the B.A. and Ph.D. from the University of Michigan and won five Hopwood Awards for creative writing. She also studied at Stanford University, where she received her M.A.

Her first novel, *Things Invisible to See* (1985), is set in her home town of Ann Arbor in the 1940s. Two brothers become involved with a paralyzed young woman, and it "ends with a baseball game that anticipates the film *Field of Dreams* in its player lineup of baseball luminaries.[clarification needed] Susan Fromberg Schaeffer said the novel "has the quality of a fairy tale ... a paradigm of life as a Manichean conflict between good and evil."

As of 2005, Willard lives in Poughkeepsie, New York where she lectures at Vassar College.

A Wreath To The Fish

Who is this fish, still wearing its wealth,
flat on my drainboard, dead asleep,
its suit of mail proof only against the stream?
What is it to live in a stream,
to dwell forever in a tunnel of cold,
never to leave your shining birthsuit,
never to spend your inheritance of thin coins?
And who is the stream, who lolls all day
in an unmade bed, living on nothing but weather,
singing, a little mad in the head,
opening her apron to shells, carcasses, crabs,
eyeglasses, the lines of fisherman begging for
news from the interior-oh, who are these lines
that link a big sky to a small stream
that go down for great things:
the cold muscle of the trout,
the shinning scrawl of the eel in a difficult passage,
hooked-but who is this hook, this cunning
and faithful fanatic who will not let go
but holds the false bait and the true worm alike
and tears the fish, yet gives it up to the basket
in which it will ride to the kitchen
of someone important, perhaps the Pope
who rejoices that his cook has found such a fish
and blesses it and eats it and rises, saying,
"Children, what is it to live in the stream,
day after day, and come at last to the table,
transfigured with spices and herbs,
a little martyr, a little miracle;
children, children, who is this fish?"

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The Vanity of the Dragonfly

The dragonfly at rest on the doorbell—
too weak to ring and glad of it,
but well mannered and cautious,
thinking it best to observe us quietly
before flying in, and who knows if he will find
the way out? Cautious of traps, this one.
A winged cross, plain, the body straight
as a thermometer, the old glass kind
that could kill us with mercury if our teeth
did not respect its brittle body. Slim as an eel
but a solitary glider, a pilot without bombs
or weapons, and wings clear and small as a wish
to see over our heads, to see the whole picture.
And when our gaze grazes over it and moves on,
the dragonfly changes its clothes,
sheds its old skin, shriveled like laundry,
and steps forth, polished black, with two
circles buttoned like epaulettes taking the last space
at the edge of its eyes.

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Two Sunflowers Move In The Yellow Room

'Ah, William, we're weary of weather,'
said the sunflowers, shining with dew.
'Our traveling habits have tired us.
Can you give us a room with a view?'

They arranged themselves at the window
and counted the steps of the sun,
and they both took root in the carpet
where the topaz tortoises run.

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