

# BREATHING THE WATER



DENISE LEVERTOV

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Arranged in seven parts and culminating in the superb "The Showings: Lady Julian of Norwich," *Breathing the Water* draws the readers deep into spiritual domains—not in order to leave the world behind, but to reanimate our sometimes dormant love for it.

## Breathing the Water Details

Date : Published March 17th 1987 by New Directions

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Author : Denise Levertov

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## From Reader Review Breathing the Water for online ebook

### Will says

"There will never be that stillness.  
Within the pulse of flesh,  
in the dust of being, where we trudge  
turning our hungry gaze this way and that,  
the wings of the morning  
brush through our blood  
as cloud-shadows brush the land.  
What we desire travels with us.  
We must breathe time as fishes breathe water.  
God's flight circles us."

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### Marion says

I picked up this little book because the title intrigued me. This is the first book of poetry I purchased by Ms. Levertov and I fell instantly in love with the depth, beauty and soulfulness of the poems.

I highly recommend that you read it and even memorize some of the beautiful poems.

This is my favorite:

#### VARIATION ON A THEME BY RILKE

A certain day became a presence to me;  
there it was, confronting me--a sky, air, light:  
a being. And before it started to descend  
from the height of noon, it leaned over  
and struck my shoulder as if with  
the flat of a sword, granting me  
honor and a task. The day's blow  
rang out, metallic--or it was I, a bell awakened,  
and what I heard was my whole self  
saying and singing what it knew: I can.

Denise Levertov

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### Manuel Monroy Correa says

Gran poeta en cuanto a la enunciación de una relación con Dios, el arte, la Biblia y una experiencia personal con Él. Hace varios años, estando en Atlanta Ga., escogí este libro para un regalo; la autora aún estaba viva y

ofrecía en ese tiempo un taller de poesía. Es un placer releerlo y encontrarse con la verdad poética que exalta a Dios de una manera especial.

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### **Lauren says**

I've loved Denise Levertov's poetry ever since I dressed up as her for an English project in high school and staged a mock protest in front of the administration building. Breathing the Water goes everywhere with me, from apartment to apartment and school to school. It's moved across the country to Massachusetts and come back home again. We are inseparable, this book and I.

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### **Cynda says**

4 1/2\* I am floored. Elements of Romanticism and Spirituality  
Combined with  
Awareness of limitations--physical, social, spiritual  
The references to art  
The references aspects of Earth.  
The Christian/Catholic imagery  
The awe of what is, however rough hewn.  
The pondering upon Lady Julian of Norwich/Juliana of Norwich (1342-1416)  
The pondering upon the Mystery shown Juliana in a trance--the hazelnut as Creation.

The only thing--and it is a deal breaker, lowering rating to 4\*--is the reader not discovering that the Juliana being referred to several times in the text is not even identified until nearly the end of the poetry collection. What's up with that?

I hope to read more of this post. I am enchanted.

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### **Bruce Rogie says**

Some reviews compared it to classic Bangkok noir, but this one nowhere as dark as John Burdett's Sonchai Jitpleecheep series and thus in my opinion not quite on par. Not really a 4 star but I really can't limit it to a 3 star as Hallinan's affection for Thailand clearly comes through.

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### **Mark says**

In the first collection of Levertov's poems that I read, I was struck by her anger and sadness over the Vietnam war, as well as the attention to the natural world I had expected. In "Breathing the Water," her talent for observation of the world around her is again on display, with that focus turned to not just nature but also painting, daily life, photography and literature. But what surprised me this time was her sincere and intelligent exploration of religious themes. She shows me a model for how one can attune oneself and study religious stories, histories and places. And the same approach - close attention, reflection, expression -

heightens our understanding of any subject, whether a bird or a garden or the people one meets "Every Day."

It may just be that I didn't know enough about Denise Levertov to start, but she has been a surprising poet for me. And I think that speaks highly for her and adds to her power.

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### **Shelby Lynne says**

The Julian of Norwich cycle at the end bumped it up to 3 stars.

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### **Meesh says**

The Well

At sixteen I believed the moonlight  
could change me if it would.  
I moved my head  
on the pillow, even moved my bed  
as the moon slowly  
crossed the open lattice.

I wanted beauty, a dangerous  
gleam of steel, my body thinner,  
my pale face paler.  
I moonbathed  
diligently, as others sunbathe.  
But the moon's unsmiling stare  
kept me awake. Mornings,  
I was flushed and cross.

It was on dark nights of deep sleep  
that I dreamed the most, sunk in the well,  
and woke rested, and if not beautiful,  
filled with some other power.

Denise Levertov

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### **Kati says**

This is another I've been working on slowly; this one since last Christmas. I love it. I will revisit it often. Levertov is spiritual in all the most helpful ways.

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### **Krista Stevens says**

Liked section VII the best - more religious/Lenten poems here. Especially liked "Making Peace" and the phrase "desolation of survival" from "During a Son's Dangerous Illness".

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### **Kris Lundgaard says**

Enjoyable, but I read it too quickly to savor it.

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### **Scott Graham says**

Smart, beautiful, and filled with (Christian)faith, but not sentimental. This collection is worth the price simply for her set of poems on Julian of Norwich's mystic classic 'Showings'.

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### **mwpm says**

A certain day became a presence to me;  
there it was, confronting me - a sky, air, light:  
a being. And before it started to descend  
from the height of noon, it leaned over  
and struck my shoulder as if with  
the flat of a sword, granting me  
honour and a task. The day's blow  
rang out, metallic - or it was I, a bell awakened,  
and what I heard was my whole self  
saying and singing what it knew: *I can*

- Variation on a Theme by Rilke, pg. 3

\* \* \*

Uninterpreted, the days  
are falling.

The spring wind  
is shaking and shaking the trees.

A nest of eggs,  
a nest of deaths.

Falling  
abandoned.

The palms rattle, the eucalypts  
shed bark and blossom. Uninterpreted.

- **The Absentee**, pg. 20

\* \* \*

Stroking its blue shore  
throughout the night, patient, patient,  
determined rhetoric that never  
persuades, the rocks unwilling  
to be pebbles, nights and days and  
centuries passing before the pebbles  
dwindle to join the sand, the sand itself  
at last barring the sea's way  
into the land, an island  
forming from the silt. Yet still  
all this night and all  
the nights of our life the sea  
stroking its blue shore,  
patient, patient -

- **'The sea's repeated gesture.'**, pg. 48

\* \* \*

With certitude  
Simeon opened  
ancient arms  
to infant light.  
Decades  
before the cross, the tomb  
and the new life,  
he knew  
new life.  
What depth  
of faith he drew on,  
turning illumined  
toward deep night.

- **Candlemas**, pg. 70

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## **Jamie Dougherty says**

She does it all!

Favorites:

Hunting the Phoenix

Window-Blind

The Spy

Missing Beatrice

Every Day

During a Son's Dangerous Illness

Making Peace

'the myriad past...'

Wavering

On a Theme from Julian's Chapter XX

Variation on a Theme by Rilke (The Book of Hours, Book 1, Poem 4)

La Cordelle

The Showings, 1-6

Variation and Reflection on a Theme by Rilke (The Book of Hours, Book 1, Poem 7)

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