



Linda Gregg

1942–2019

Linda Gregg was born in New York and raised in Marin County, California. She earned both a BA and an MA from San Francisco State University. Gregg published many several collections of poetry, including *All of It Singing: New and Selected Poems* (2008), a *Los Angeles Times* Favorite Book of 2008 and winner of the Poetry Society of America's William Carlos Williams Award; *In the Middle Distance* (2006); *Things and Flesh* (1999), finalist for the Kingsley Tufts Award for Poetry; *Chosen by the Lion* (1995); *Sacraments of Desire* (1992); *Alma* (1985); and *Too Bright to See* (1981). Gregg's lyrical poetry is often admired for its ability to discuss grief, desire, and longing with electrifying craftsmanship and poise. W.S. Merwin has praised Gregg's poems, observing, "They are original in the way that really matters: they speak clearly of their source. They are inseparable from the surprising, unrolling, eventful, pure current of their language, and they convey at once the pain of individual loss, a steady and utterly personal radiance."

Gregg won many awards, including the Whiting Writers' Award, the Sara Teasdale Award, the PEN/Voelcker Award for Poetry, the Jerome J. Shestack Poetry Prize, and numerous Pushcart Prizes. She has also been awarded a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts and fellowships from the Guggenheim Foundation and the Lannan Literary Foundation.

Gregg taught at the University of Iowa, the University of California, Berkeley, and Princeton University. She lived in New York until her death in early 2019.

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Alone with the Goddess

BY LINDA GREGG

The young men ride their horses fast
on the wet sand of Parangtritis.
Back and forth, with the water sliding
up to them and away.
This is the sea where the goddess lives,
angry, her lover taken away.
Don't wear red, don't wear green here,
the people say. Do not swim in the sea.
Give her an offering.
I give a coconut to protect
the man I love. The water pushes it back.
I wade out and throw it farther.
"The goddess does not accept your gift,"
an old woman says.
I say perhaps she likes me
and we are playing a game.
The old woman is silent,
the horses wear blinders of cloth,
the young men exalt in their bodies,
not seeing right or left, pretending
to be brave. Sliding on and off
their beautiful horses
on the wet beach at Parangtritis.

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Source: *All of It Singing* (Graywolf Press, 2008)

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Elegance

BY LINDA GREGG

All that is uncared for.
Left alone in the stillness
in that pure silence married
to the stillness of nature.
A door off its hinges,
shade and shadows in an empty room.
Leaks for light. Raw where
the tin roof rusted through.
The rustle of weeds in their
different kinds of air in the mornings,
year after year.
A pecan tree, and the house
made out of mud bricks. Accurate
and unexpected beauty, rattling
and singing. If not to the sun,
then to nothing and to no one.

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Source: *In the Middle Distance* (Graywolf Press, 2006)

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The Lamb

BY LINDA GREGG

It was a picture I had after the war.
A bombed English church. I was too young
to know the word *English* or *war*,
but I knew the picture.
The ruined city still seemed noble.
The cathedral with its roof blown off
was not less godly. The church was the same
plus rain and sky. Birds flew in and out
of the holes God's fist made in the walls.
All our desire for love or children
is treated like rags by the enemy.
I knew so much and sang anyway.
Like a bird who will sing until
it is brought down. When they take
away the trees, the child picks up a stick
and says, this is a tree, this the house
and the family. As we might. Through a door
of what had been a house, into the field
of rubble, walks a single lamb, tilting
its head, curious, unafraid, hungry.

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Lies and Longing

BY LINDA GREGG

Half the women are asleep on the floor
on pieces of cardboard.
One is face down under a blanket
with her feet and ankle bracelet showing.
Her spear leans against the wall by her head
where she can reach it.
The woman who sits on a chair won't speak
because this is not her dress.
An old woman sings an Italian song in English
and says she wants her name in lights:
Faye Runaway. Tells about her grown children.
One asks for any kind of medicine.
One says she has a rock that means honor
and a piece of fur.
One woman's feet are wrapped in rags.
One keeps talking about how fat she is
so nobody will know she's pregnant.
They lie about getting letters.
One lies about a beautiful dead man.
One lies about Denver. Outside
it's Thirtieth Street and hot and no sun.

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The Secrets of Poetry

Linda Gregg - 1942-2019

Very long ago when the exquisite celadon bowl
that was the mikado's favorite cup got broken,
no one in Japan had the skill and courage
to mend it. So the pieces were taken back
to China with a plea to the emperor
that it be repaired. When the bowl returned,
it was held together with heavy iron staples.
The letter with it said they could not make it
more perfect. Which turned out to be true.

