

Poetry Series

**Deborah Ager**  
**- poems -**

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## Deborah Ager(1971)

Deborah Ager is an American poet.

<b>Life</b>

Ager founded the poetry magazine known as 32 poems or 32 Poems Magazine in 2003 with the poet John Poch. She was educated at the University of Maryland (B.A.) and the University of Florida (M.F.A.).

Her writing has appeared in New England Review, The Georgia Review, Birmingham Poetry Review, Los Angeles Review, Barn Owl, North American Review, and Best New Poets 2006. She has received fellowships and/or scholarships from the MacDowell Colony, the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts, the Atlantic Center for the Arts, the Mid Atlantic Arts Foundation. She was a Walter E. Dakin fellow at the Sewanee Writers' Conference as well as a Tennessee Williams Scholar.

Her manuscript, Midnight Voices, was a semifinalist for the A. Poulin, Jr. Poetry Prize in 2007 before being accepted for publication by Cherry Grove Collections.

In 2011, she edited the poetry anthology Poetry Doesn't Need You with the poet John Poch and scholar Bill Beverly. The book is forthcoming in 2012.

# Alone

Over the fence, the dead settle in  
for a journey. Nine o'clock.  
You are alone for the first time  
today. Boys asleep. Husband out.

A beer bottle sweats in your hand,  
and sea lavender clogs the air  
with perfume. Think of yourself.  
Your arms rest with nothing to do

after weeks spent attending to others.  
Your thoughts turn to whether  
butter will last the week, how much  
longer the car can run on its partial tank of gas.

Deborah Ager

## Dear Deborah,

They tell me that your heart  
has been found in Iowa,  
pumping along Interstate 35.  
Do you want it back?

When the cold comes on  
this fast, it's Iowa again--  
where pollen disperses  
evenly on the dented Fords,

where white houses sag  
by the town's corn silos,  
where people in the houses  
sicken on corn dust.

Auctions sell entire farms.  
It's not the auctions that's upsetting  
but what they sell, the ragged towel  
or the armless doll, for a dollar.

I hear they've found  
an eye of yours in Osceola  
calling out to your mouth in Davis City.  
That mouth of yours is in the bar,

the only place left in town,  
slow dancing and smoking.  
It's no wonder you look so pale.  
Ever wish you'd done more

with your thirty years?  
Seeing you last week I wonder  
if you crave that sky  
filled with the milky way

or the sight of Amish girls in blue  
at sunset against wheat-colored prairie grass.  
Here, the trees are full of gossip.  
They're waiting to see what you'll do next.

Deborah Ager

# Morning

We are what we repeatedly do.  
—Aristotle

You know how it is waking  
from a dream certain you can fly  
and that someone, long gone, returned

and you are filled with longing,  
for a brief moment, to drive off  
the road and feel nothing

or to see the loved one and feel  
everything. Perhaps one morning,  
taking brush to hair you'll wonder

how much of your life you've spent  
at this task or signing your name  
or rising in fog in near darkness

to ready for work. Day begins  
with other people's needs first  
and your thoughts disperse like breath.

In the in-between hour, the solitary hour,  
before day begins all the world  
gradually reappears car by car.

Anonymous submission.

Deborah Ager

# Night In Iowa

Nimbus clouds erasing stars above Lamoni.  
Jaundiced lights. Silos. Loose dogs. Cows  
whose stench infuses the handful of homes,  
whose sad voices storm the plains with longing.

Deborah Ager

## Night: San Francisco

Rain drenches the patio stones.  
All night was spent waiting  
for an earthquake, and instead

water stains sand with its pink foam.  
Yesterday's steps fill in with gray crabs.  
Baritone of a fog horn. A misty light

warns tankers, which block the green  
after-sunset flash. My lover's voice calls  
to others in his restless sleep.

The venetian blinds slice streetlights,  
light coils around my waist and my lover's neck,  
dividing him into hundredths.

Would these fractions make me happier?  
My hands twist into a crocodile.  
My index finger the tooth that bites

Gauguin's Tahiti. My thumb is the head feather  
of a California quail crying chi-ca-go.  
Night barely continues. Is this the building

staying still? Is this hand the scorpion  
that will do us in? A few of Irving Street's  
sycamores will blue the air come morning.

Deborah Ager

# Santa Fe In Winter

The city is closing for the night.  
Stores draw their blinds one by one,  
and it's dark again, save for the dim

infrequent streetlight bending at the neck  
like a weighted stem. Years have built  
the city in layers: balustrades filled in

with brick, adobe reinforced with steel,  
and the rounded arches smoothed  
with white cement. Neighborhoods

have changed the burro trails  
to streets, bare at night—  
no pedestrians, no cars, no dogs.

With daylight, the houses turned galleries  
and stores turned restaurants open—  
the Navajos wrapped in wool

crowd the Palace of the Governors plaza  
to sell their handmade blankets,  
silver rings, and necklaces

to travelers who will buy jewelry  
as they buy everything—  
another charming history for themselves.

Deborah Ager

# Summer Nights

The factory siren tells workers time to go home  
tells them the evening has begun.

When living with the tall man

whom I didn't love, I would wander  
the streets, dreaming of Italy.

Trekking the handful of avenues

with him, he would say look there  
between pink cobblestones,  
there's manure like mortar.

The sweet smell of it Wednesday nights,  
the night before auction,  
when the misery of cows greets me

heading home through town.

Lake quiets, tired of my lies.

When will I tell truths again?

The siren. My love is home.

Nights, we stay in and X the days.

Deborah Ager

# The Lake

The yard half a yard,  
half a lake blue as a corpse.  
The lake will tell things you long to hear:  
get away from here.  
Three o'clock. Dry leaves rat-tat like maracas.

Whisky-colored grass  
breaks at every step and trees  
are slowly realizing they are nude.  
How long will you stay?  
For the lake asks questions you want to hear, too.

Months have passed since, well,  
everything. Since buildings stood  
black against sky, rain hissed from sidewalks  
and curled around you.  
O, how those avenues once seemed menacing!

I know what you miss  
sings this lake. Car horns groaning  
in rush hour. Sweet coffee. Wind  
pounding like hammers. Warmth of a lover.  
Crickets humming love songs to the street.

Deborah Ager

# The Space Coast

Florida

An Airedale rolling through green frost,  
cabbage palms pointing their accusing leaves  
at whom, petulant waves breaking at my feet.  
I ran from them. Nights, yellow lights  
scoured sand. What was ever found  
but women in skirts folded around the men  
they loved that Friday? No one found me.  
And how could that have been, here, where  
even botanical names were recorded  
and small roads mapped in red?  
Night, the sky is black paper pecked with pinholes.  
Tortoises push eggs into warm sand.  
Was it too late to have come here?  
Everything's discovered. Everything's spoken for.  
The air smells of salt. My lover's body.  
Perhaps it is too late. I want to run  
the beach's length, because it never ends.  
The barren beach. Airedales grow  
fins on their hard heads, drowned surfers  
resurface, and those little girls  
who would not be called back to safety are found.

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# The Tortoise In Keystone Heights

When I knew, it was raining.  
Winter in decline. I was tired.  
You in your soaked shirt diffused  
into the western sky bulging with clouds,  
speeding cars a few feet away—  
why would they not slow down?

Though afternoon, a slip of moon  
busied itself with rising,  
and it had to mean something.  
If only the moon were not out.  
You shoveled the crushed tortoise  
and her eggs off the highway into the dirt.

Those soft, white eggs.  
This is how I love you:  
drenched with Florida rain  
and looking like hell,  
Florida itself a hell,  
the moonlit rain a rain of fire.

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