

Denise Levertov

Poet Description:

Born in Ilford, Essex, in England, Levertov was educated at home until she went briefly to ballet school and then trained to work as a nurse in London during World War II. Her father was a Jew who converted to Christianity and became an Anglican priest; her mother was Welsh. Levertov came to the United States in 1948. She later served briefly as poetry editor for *The Nation* and taught at several schools, including Stanford. Influenced by the English Romantic poets early on, she began increasingly to be inspired by the open form poetry written by William Carlos Williams and other American poets, including Robert Creeley and Robert Duncan. That aesthetic combined with both a strong mystical bent and a long family tradition of political commitment. Her mother had worked on behalf of the League of Nations and on behalf of European refugees. Her father and sister protested Britain's indifference to the Spanish Republic's struggle with fascism. Years later, Levertov would write about nuclear war, compose a series of powerful poems about Vietnam, and late in her career take up the Gulf War. Among her major achievements, however, is also the haunting sequence of elegies to her sister, Olga, reprinted here. Placing the Vietnam poems beside the elegies suggests a unifying spirituality, a belief in the sacred character of all life. Taken together, the poems also show Levertov's simultaneous commitment to open forms and careful craft.

Race/Ethnicity:

European ^[1]

Picture:



Gender:

Female ^[2]

Sexuality:

Straight ^[3]

First Name:

Denise

Last Name:

Levertov

Birth & Death Dates:

Wednesday, October 24, 1923 to Saturday, December 20, 1997

School of Poetry:

Other ^[4]

Birth Place:

Illford

United Kingdom

See map: [Google Maps](#) [5]

GB

Death Place:

Seattle , Washington

United States

See map: [Google Maps](#) [6]

Washington US

Group visibility:

Private - accessible only to group members

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[2] <http://modernamericanpoetry.org/category/gender/female>

[3] <http://modernamericanpoetry.org/category/sexuality/straight>

[4] <http://modernamericanpoetry.org/school-poetry/other>

[5] <http://maps.google.co.uk?q=%2C+Illford%2C+%2C+gb>

[6] <http://maps.google.com?q=47.602597+-122.337635+%28%2C+Seattle%2C+WA%2C+%2C+us%29>