



Against Love Poetry: Poems

Eavan Boland

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These powerful poems are written against the perfections and idealizations of traditional love poetry. The man and woman in these poems are husband and wife, custodians of ordinary, aging human love. They are not figures in a love poem. Time is their essential witness, and not their destroyer. A *New York Times* Notable Book and a *Newsday* Favorite Book of 2001.

Against Love Poetry: Poems Details

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Author : Eavan Boland

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Domhnall says

Boland uses the first half of this collection to set out her thoughts on the nature of love, and the remaining poems display her mastery of diverse topics. She uses her Irish identity to good effect, as also her experience of migration, and it is always clear that the poet is a woman with things to say from that perspective; the collection as a whole has the air of a mature reflection over a life lived fully. Her poems are serious and often profound, her ideas are original and quite inspirational, her imagery is kaleidoscopic and she can tell fantastic stories in the most simple terms. She has a very accessible style: nothing is dry and many poems are light hearted. Most of all, her poetry is gobsmackingly effective. I am so delighted that I stumbled upon this beautiful collection.

Antonio Delgado says

Boland knows how to subvert the conventions of love poetry. She positions herself outside the male gaze and desire into a historical place of invisibility and visibility at her own terms.

Gharonk says

eavan boland - the genuine irish poet with the irish style of writing. we can found her irish mark-ups in several poems. she more than adequate to impress me in the first sentences. shamrock, the durrow, all are in compact shape unfinish us in final world. i thirsty of her words in the end of her poet.

absolutely enigmatic

Shaindel says

Beautiful, beautiful look at love, in all sorts of terms. Perhaps the most poignant poem in this book is "Quarantine." Gorgeous work.

Laura says

Worth it just to read "Once":

"The lovers in an Irish story never had good fortune.
They fled the king's anger. They lay on the forest floor.
They kissed at the edge of death."

Christopher Barry says

The perfect combination of what can be done with words and what can be said with words while seeming effortless and capturing the ordinary.

Mei says

Because I read her poems in this book, Eavan Boland has become my favourite poet.

Sarah says

Boland's poetry is always lovely, and this book is particularly rooted in "place." My favorite from this book is "Code," which says it is "An Ode to Grace Murray Hopper 1906-88 maker of a computer compiler and verifier of COBOL." I love the comparison between writing poetry and writing computer code, how both are creating a world.

Kristin says

Loved this collection! "Quarantine" is a heartbreakingly beautiful poem and should be read by everyone.

Amy says

The poems about her marriage are particularly powerful.

Siria says

This is such a finely-crafted collection of poems, a meditation on the ordinariness of love, on the tension that exists between "womanhood" and the "servitudes of custom." Boland's observations are keen, picking apart not love but the conventions of love poetry, the expectations that lie behind relationships. 'Irish Poetry', 'Thanked Be Fortune' and especially 'Quarantine' are the stand-out poems for me—'Quarantine' startled me into near tears. I'm a generation or so further removed from the Famine than Boland is, but it's still a part of the landscape I grew up in, and Boland's writing about it always has a fierce power for me.

secondwomn says

"Code" is a standout for me. enjoyable, but hard to imagine myself coming back to these poems.

Kelly says

senior thesis

Rick says

Published in 2001 and therefore stuck in my To Read pile for over a decade. Shame on me: it's a fate the poems didn't deserve. *Against Love Poetry* is a mere slip of a collection, divided into two sections, "Marriage" and "Code." The first section is a single, eleven poem sequence. The second section holds sixteen individual poems thematically linked not just to each other but to "Marriage" as well.

So, the title. Ms. Boland is against the feverish strand of romantic poetry that is all roman candle passion, that ignores the deep measure of love that history takes on a relationship. Similarly, she rejects the notion that some lives, as in most lives, are not fit subjects for poetry, lacking the integrity, reality, life that we seem to deny to mainstream lives—too conventional, too risk free, too boring. The code word for that is variations of suburban. But let's stick to love and marriage.

The first poem sets the tone: "Hester Bateman made a marriage spoon / And then subjected it to violence. / Chased, beat it. Scarred it and marked it. / All in the spirit of our darkest century." Bateman is an 18th century English silversmith who made the spoon for an Irish couple. Later it states: "Art and marriage: now a made match." The poem concludes: "History frowns on them: yet in its gaze / They join their injured hands and make their vows." This sets up the second poem, the collection's title poem, which concludes, "It is to mark the contradictions of a daily love that I have written this. Against love poetry."

What follows is a mix of portraits that shine under the frowning face of history—personal, national and cultural—that nonetheless provides testimony to love and love's commitment. Here is one randomly chosen from the book's second section called "Irish Poetry":

We always knew there was no Orpheus in Ireland,
No music stored at the doors of hell.
No god to make it.
No wild beasts to weep and lie down to it.

But I remember an evening when the sky
was underworld-dark at four,
when ice had seized every part of the city
and we sat talking—
the air making a wreath for our cups of tea.

And you began to speak of our own gods.
Our heartbroken pantheon.

No Attic light for them and no Herodotus.
But thin rain and dogfish and the stopgap

of the sharp cliffs
they spent their winters on.

And the pitch-black Atlantic night:
how the sound
of a bird's wing in a lost language sounded.

You made the noise for me.
Made it again.
Until I could see the flight of it: suddenly

the silvery lithe rivers of the southwest
lay down in silence
and the savage acres no one could predict
were all at ease, soothed and quiet and
listening to you, as I was. As if to music, as if to peace.

courtney says

i love that this collection of poems about love and the transformations of love -- the surface and texture of it -- is entitled "Against Love Poetry" because it is. the collection stands against the thousands of poems about love and its evanescence, its fragility, and its fickleness. boland writes about the dangers of love and the risks of love, but more about the shifting, swaying, unlocatable, let alone undefinable center of love. it transforms and transforms. and boland shows us the passage of time and the transformations of life and love in small and powerful ways. a spoon, a plate, a desk, the color of her hair. beautiful. i read this woman's writing and i need to hug someone.
