



The Blue Estuaries

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Honored, during the course of her literary career, with almost every major poetry award, Louise Bogan (1898-1970) was the poetry critic for *The New Yorker* for nearly forty years. *The Blue Estuaries* contains her five previous books of verse along with a section of uncollected work, fully representing a unique and distinguished contribution to modern poetry over five decades.

The Blue Estuaries Details

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From Reader Review The Blue Estuaries for online ebook

Julie says

Intense poems.

They tell the truth about love and loss and hate.

I can't quite put my emotions into words but it seems that Miss Bogan can. I am fascinated but I have to admit that I'll have to reread a lot of the poems because even though they have all been very beautiful the first times I read them, I have not understood all of them so far.

But to be honest that makes these poems even more fascinating because I want to figure them out (as far as it is possible to figure poems out at all)

Nicole says

When I browse a book of poetry, the imagery and tone either captures me at once, or I put it back almost immediately and think, nope. There is very little room for anything in between, and I usually reserve that for the classics of poetry that would be found on a college reading list. Louise Bogan's poetry compilation "The Blue Estuaries" had me at the title. I had recently found myself thinking of estuaries for some random reason, and looking through the poetry section at Third Place Books, I gravitated immediately towards the word and blue book binding.

With adroit lyricism, Bogan's poetry inhabits that space we find ourselves in when we look out in thoughtful silence upon a scene of natural beauty. Contemplative, emotionally reflective, and intimate without being confessional, I love the mood it evokes in me. Her phrasing is complex and entrancing, vacillating between the internal and external world. Each poem has a flow to it that doesn't feel forced, even when they take a more traditional form. I was very surprised when I looked at her biography that I had never heard of her before, but I am now grateful that she has come to my awareness.

Arlitia Jones says

I've read and re-read this book many times over the years and I'm always grateful when I find my way back to it. It seems to remind me of something essential I have forgotten about myself. Rereading this time I chose it as my first book of 2017 because of its intense sense of purpose, beauty and unease. Bogan is a brilliant poet, never coddling or charming her reader with easy turns of phrase geared only for delight. Her poems unsettle, prick and stab, rage and smolder. They hold wonder and darkness in exquisite detail. Her lines are formal, but the language within is supple and what comes across is a woman of great strength who wields her craft as a shield and a weapon. There is truth and great wisdom in these poems and I read them as preparation for the year to come.

Jim says

Louise Bogan, a 20th century American poet and critic, was our country's fourth Poet Laureate. She was poetry editor of *The New Yorker* magazine for nearly forty years. Although her output was relatively small, she produced nuanced, compact, lyrical poems of high quality and intensity, written in a formal style.

I found some of her poems a bit obscure, but I had the distinct impression that it was my shortcoming, not hers. I would describe many of her poems as tantalizingly elusive, like getting a glimpse of a mysterious figure disappearing around the corner. Her poems are cool in the sense of being very controlled and formal, but beneath that restrained surface there are depths of emotional intensity. Her poems demand careful reading. I look forward to reading her poems again.

Anne says

Wonderful collection of Louise Bogan's poetry, who is considered by some to be the most accomplished female poet of the twentieth century. What a pity that I had not read her work before. She uses traditional techniques and accomplishes so much with an economy of words. This anthology shows her evolution as a poet through the years.

Sienna says

It seems impossible — or, if not impossible, because, after all, it's true, then at least really rather *wrong*. How is it that I only discovered Louise Bogan in May of this year? Why isn't she better known outside of the circles that already celebrate her work? Bogan's eloquence, depth of feeling and sharp-eyed restraint give voice to both head and heart. Her words move; they illuminate and adumbrate; they startle. It's difficult to do justice to a collection that spans four and a half decades. These poems reflect subtle stylistic shifts, changes in perspective, the weight of time: heartache and gratitude.

There's a lot of rhyming in the earlier collections. This results in a formal, occasionally stilted, sound to my modern ear, but it also produces moments of utter beauty:

Knowledge

*Now that I know
How passion warms little
Of flesh in the mould,
And treasure is brittle,—*

*I'll lie here and learn
How, over their ground,
Trees make a long shadow
And a light sound.*

"Summer Wish," the longest piece here, floored me. I hesitate to quote from it because the sum is so much more powerful than individual parts. But: "It is the month to make the summer wish; / It is time to ask / The wish from summer as always: *It will be, / It will be.*" In two voices Bogan recalls tragedy, passion, hope, the play of light on flora, on water, as the seasons change. She turns the act of wishing into a ritual that requires every last bit of focus and desire and strength and vision in the person wishing:

*Speak out the wish like music, that has within it
The horn, the string, the drum pitched deep as grief.
Speak it like laughter, outward. O brave, O generous
Laughter that pours from the well of the body and draws
The bane that cheats the heart: aconite, nightshade,
Hellebore, hyssop, rue, — symbols and poisons
We drink, in fervor, thinking to gain thereby
Some difference, some distinction.
Speak it, as that man said, as though the earth spoke,
By the body of rock, shafts of heaved strata, separate,
Together.
Though it be but for sleep at night,
Speak out the wish.*

And who hasn't played the solitary, resigned, questing game of "Cartography"?

*As you lay in sleep
I saw the chart
Of artery and vein
Running from your heart,

Plain as the strength
Marked upon the leaf
Along the length,
Mortal and brief,

Of your gaunt hand.
I saw it clear:
The wiry brand
Of the life we bear

Mapped like the great
Rivers that rise
Beyond our fate
And distant from our eyes.*

This book contains an abundance of joy and sadness, too many perfect moments for me to highlight here. "Night," which I've read before, again and again, remains the pinnacle. Other favorites include "Betrothed"

("*What have I thought of love? / I have said, "It is beauty and sorrow."*"); "Dark Summer," "Henceforth, from the Mind" and "Evening Star"; "For a Marriage," "Several Voices Out of A Cloud," which shocked me (in a good way) with its straight-backed, raised-arm conviction; the cheeky, impossible-not-to-relate-to "Question in a Field" ("*Pasture, stone wall, and steeple, / What most perturbs the mind: / The heart-rending homely people, / Or the horrible beautiful kind?*"); "Animal, Vegetable and Mineral," which takes on the humble bee; and "Evening in the Sanitarium," which finds its rhythm in the rocking of minds.

I can't help admiring in Bogan what we often condescendingly describe as pluck: it's a mixture of pride and courage and virtue, the confidence to believe in herself even when temporarily flattened by the world in beautifully articulated but ultimately opaque ways, a quality you don't expect to find thriving in someone who worked as the poetry critic for *The New Yorker* for thirty-eight years. But nothing could be fitting in the case of a woman who said, upon resigning this position, "No more pronouncements on lousy verse. No more hidden competition. No more struggling not to be a square." (Wow. Yes!) I'm so grateful to learn she left more words behind for us to read.

*Goodbye, goodbye!
There was so much to love, I could not love it all;
I could not love it enough.*

(from "After the Persian")

Matt says

Unversed as I am in her work, I imagine I see why she has been overlooked by contemporary poets and anthologies, justly and unjustly. Her early work is quite versified, pretty and ornate but hollow at the core. As influences like Auden became ascendant she seemed to play with less strict rhythms and forms, but more as experiments than methods. The overall effect is of a very talented craftsman lacking the solid vision the great modernists conveyed. So while there are individual poems that are true gems ("Medusa," "Kept," "The Daemon") as a whole it seems less than the sum of its parts, beautiful pictures that ring false to my 21st-century sensibility.

Rachel says

Just finished up the last bit that I skirted around during the semester. I'd never read Bogan before and it seems astonishing that I hadn't—she feels so important to me now.

*O remember
In your narrowing dark hours
That more things move
Than blood in the heart.*

—"Night"

Akshat Jha says

Even though I found it a little difficult to get into some of her poems, I loved the music and the choice of words in her poetry.

Helen says

Meh.

There's a reason Bogan is better known as the New Yorker Editor of Poetry and not a poet. Largely derivative, From Heine is just a translation of Der Tod Das Ist de Kuhle Nacht with two of the verses knocked out of it, for instance. There is improvement in the later poems but even there, the poet could have used an editor other than herself.

Not without its charms and humor, one of the later poems has a title that is longer than the poem, and I'd like to think that was some self deprecating humor. But mostly these poems and their poet take themselves far too seriously, leaving out the art and focusing on the message in as wordy a way as possible.

Aeisele says

"...Where lies the leaf-caught world once thought abiding,/Now but a dry disarray and artifice?" (from "Winter Swan"). Bogan is probably the greatest technical American poet of the 20th century (or at least her and Elizabeth Bishop). She was *so in command of the technical mechanism of language that her poems never needed to be more than a page, and within that page, she would say as much as T.S. Eliot or Ezra Pound said in 20 pages (plus she wasn't an anti-semit or a fascist)*. Anyway, some of my favorites: "My Voice Not Being Proud", "Sonnet", "Medusa", "Feuer-Nacht".

B Sarv says

I could identify poems that struck me deeply but then what would be the fun in that? I found this book among a number of poetry collections I took from my late mother's bookshelf. Remarkably I came across all of her annotations to various poems, so the real joy in reading for me came from connecting with her in spite of her having passed so many years ago.

So for you, reading this review, you may think my rating is tainted by nostalgia for a past relationship. My failing may be that if I enjoy a book I rate it high. Bogan's poems are often captivating and thought provoking. This morning ritual I formed of reading poetry instead of the news has been good for me. I recommend it no matter which poet you may come across in your wandering. To my fellow travelers I recommend this book. Enjoy.

Miriam says

*And madness chooses out my voice again,
Again. I am the chosen no hand saves:
The shrieking heaven lifted over men,
Not the dumb earth, wherein they set their graves.*

Abby says

Theodore Roethke said of Louise Bogan: “For the most part, she writes out of the severest lyrical tradition in English.” This is perhaps why I found her mostly inscrutable. But if I ever feel that way about a poem, I always assume that it’s my failure; I am never confident in my reading of poetry. I always struggle to write about it or say what I feel. So, here: Some lovely lines? Enchanting images? But I feel like most of it escaped me.

Here’s a straightforward one, containing this book’s title:

NIGHT

The cold remote islands
And the blue estuaries
Where what breathes, breathes
The restless wind of the inlets,
And what drinks, drinks
The incoming tide;

Where shell and weed
Wait upon the salt wash of the sea,
And the clear nights of stars
Swing their lights westward
To set behind the land;

Where the pulse clinging to the rocks
Renews itself forever;
Where, again on cloudless nights,
The water reflects
The firmament’s partial setting;

—O remember
In your narrowing dark hours
That more things move
Than blood in the heart.

Ashley says

Do not mistake Bogan's seemingly imperturbable decorum for lack of passion. Within the traditional forms and restrained language, her poems contain deep, if quiet, humanness.

I first read some of these almost a year ago, and coming back to them now is a very painful kind of joy. The end of "After the Persian" used to play on a loop in my mind for weeks:

"Goodbye, goodbye!
There was so much to love, I could not love it all;
I could not love it enough.

Some things I overlooked, and some I could not find.
Let the crystal clasp them
When you drink your wine, in autumn."
