

Wellspring: Poetry for the Journey

May 8, 2017

A weekly poetry resource
from St. Stephen's Episcopal Church, Richmond, Virginia



This Moment

A neighborhood.
At dusk.

Things are getting ready
to happen
out of sight.

Stars and moths.
And rinds slanting around fruit.

But not yet.

One tree is black.
One window is yellow as butter.

A woman leans down to catch a child
who has run into her arms
this moment.

Stars rise.
Moths flutter.
Apples sweeten in the dark.

Eavan Boland¹

Reflections

As I write this, there's a new moon in the sky. A cherished friend of mine, with enviable wisdom, tells me that the new moon is understood to be a time to reset, a time to be still, a time to renew ourselves in strength, by faith. The new moon offers us no light, she reminds me, and yet we know it's there; our faith is tested in the dark, but when we look closely, it is only now, at this particular moment, that we are able to see the tiniest stars, the ones otherwise lost and invisible. Having already chosen the poem for this week, I find it serendipitous that my friend's insight would so closely align with what this poem seems to be singing to me about.

¹ "This Moment" by Eavan Boland from *In a Time of Violence*. W.W. Norton & Company, Inc. Used by permission.

One thing I notice right away is the use of present tense. The poet draws us to *this* moment (as in, this current moment, this right-now moment), and “things *are* getting ready/ to happen,” and “a woman leans,” and “apples sweeten”—currently, presently—“in the dark.” I notice, too, that she places us in *a* neighborhood, rather than *her* neighborhood, or *your* neighborhood; it isn’t *ours* or *theirs*, or even *the*. It’s a non-specific place that is somehow also familiar, as though it could very well be mine, or one I know intimately. After all, dusk falls everywhere; the stars and moths appear whether we are in Dublin, or Jerusalem, or Richmond, Virginia. I love it when poems remind us that though the world is enormous, we are all inhabiting the same place, under one sky, one moon and one sun.

Boland’s small sentences are what one teacher of mine would call “one breath long”; they are rhythmic, deliberate, and remind me of a shifting but relaxed gaze: here, now here, now here. Each moment builds on itself until we have *this* moment: “A woman leans down to catch a child /who has run into her arms...” And not only have we come to the longest lines in the poem, but we have reached the only moment of companionship, a kind of crest and crown. The poem is an otherwise solitary meditation during that already-rich twilight period where we are between worlds, literally “of two lights.” But it is *this moment*, this embrace—as though the entire neighborhood if not the entire earth was anticipating such a reunion—that feels to me a sublime gesture.

The best poems—like the best songs and the best sermons—can, rather than teach us something new, instead affirm that which we knew already to be true, though we may have forgotten. This poem reminds me of one definition of faith: a belief in the invisible. In this way, its meditative gazing feels prayerful to me. After all, though we cannot see the stars nor the new moon rising, they do still rise. And though we cannot see apples sweetening any more than we can see God’s invisible hand leading us in the dark, they do still sweeten. And God’s hand is still there.

✂ About the poet

Eavan Boland is one of the foremost voices in contemporary poetry, and in Irish literature specifically. Author of a volume of prose, *Object Lessons: The Life of the Woman and the Poet in Our Time*, as well as many collections of poetry, much of her work centers on an appreciation for the ordinary and for domestic life. She has articulated the tension she felt—particularly as a burgeoning female poet, who was also a mother and wife—in the male-dominated genre of the 1960s and 70s, and the difficulties of grappling with Irish suburban ideals concerning female identity. The book in which “This Moment” appears, *In a Time of Violence* (1994), was shortlisted for the prestigious T. S. Eliot prize. She has taught at Trinity College, University College, Bowdoin College and, since 1995, Stanford University, where she directs the creative writing program.



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