

Observation

Exhibit Two: Poetry Project

Drawn in Pencil: An Anthology on the Obscurity of Boundaries



(Photograph of Shark Fin)

Is it ever alright to lie? Some people believe that mild fabrications are completely acceptable. Others have determined that deceptions, regardless of the circumstances, should never be told. Little white lies, as these meek inaccuracies are often called, have the capability to cause damage, but it is not clear if this harm is in the inherent nature of the lie, or if it is only engendered when the lie stretches beyond its capacity. This boundary-this ill tension between help and harm-is indeterminate, and lies demonstrate only one of many examples of issues that conjure up opposing views. Conflicting ideas such as those of life and death, joy and sorrow, and beauty and tragedy rarely fail to appear without their antithetical companions. One always lurks in the mind of the other. So where, exactly, is the line between these abstracts? Does such a line even exist?

The poems in this anthology show that a boundary doesn't always exist between concepts that are seemingly polar opposites. After examining an abundance of works, pinpointing the poems that invoked a deep sense of amazement, sorrow, loss, and wonder proved easy. These poems allow the reader to visualize-and thus to question- presented between the aforementioned antithetical notions.

by Paula Meehan, the speaker is so distraught over the loss of her child that she wishes he had never been born, insisting she never would have felt such overwhelming pain if she had never had him to lose (Meehan 779). Although dealing with a grim subject, this poem demonstrates that intense pain can only stem from passionate love, establishing the unbreakable ties between beauty and tragedy and giving the reader a new way to view a bleak situation.

Matthew Sweeney also explores new perspectives in his poem "The Volcano." Sweeney challenges the negative destructive connotations of lava by introducing ideas of preservation. In the poem, the speaker mimics the natural reaction to run from and fear the volcano, only to be amazed by "a herd of donkeys, galloping, / and the sky filled with crows" (Sweeney 717). He observes that the volcano is actually evacuating the mountain to protect the inhabitants and conserve the land, turning their belongings "into sculptures / that one day [they'd] come back and see."

Ter Conatus by Bernard O'Donoghue, takes a completely different tone in regard to conservation. The poem features two siblings growing old together who, in all their years, haven't learned to care for one another. When the sister grows ill, she never tells her brother, and he never asks. It's heartbreaking that he embraced her with before she died, but the knowledge that he would change their estrangement if he could inspires great awe and sorrow because the brother is motivated to change, but it is already too late for his change to impact his relationship with his sister (O'Donoghue 539). O'Donoghue tinkers with ideas of regret-the should haves, could haves, and would haves of remorse. By advancing the brother's feelings from ostracization to affection, O'Donoghue proves that regrets and mistakes, as terrible as they can be, are the driving forces behind breathtaking improvements.

This sense of regret and remorse is featured in In the morning [the man and his wife] were both found dead. / Of cold. Of hunger. Of t implying that the couple featured in the poem didn't have to live or die in the tragic way they were forced to (Boland 490). Boland demonstrates love as defined by westernized wedding vows, by inherent antitheses: for better, for worse; for richer, for poorer; in sickness and in health. The despair in this poem allows Boland's true, harsh definition of love to shine through: until death do us part.

Death, featured prominently in "The Soul Kisses Goodbye" by Enda Wyley, turns into a beautiful but heartwrenching dance between body and soul, bringing forth the idea of a deep, lifelong connection now severed.

The soul talks to the body it has abandoned and returns to it time and time again because it cannot bear to be separated. Death, while appearing to silence the body, allows the soul to express the love and gratitude it couldn't before. Death finalizes many endings while simultaneously creating new beginnings, contradictory ideas necessary for mutual continuation.

All of these poems present their subjects as both tragic and beautiful, terms that are not as exclusive as they might appear to be. These works discuss varied topics but still embody the essence of boundary ambiguity. Together, they show that while black and white may be idealistic, they're certainly not realistic. Good and bad, light and dark, beauty and tragedy: in every scenario, there is more than meets the eye, and it is important for the reader to examine these scenarios from a multitude of angles before forming their own opinion. The entirety of a picture is more than the sum of its parts, and every piece may not function the way it initially appears to. When answering the question "Is it ever alright to lie?" a yes or no answer may not suffice.



(Photograph of Gold Fish with Fin)

Beauty and Tragedy

Paula Meehan



(Photograph of Paula Meehan by D. Meehan)

Paula Meehan was born in the inter-city districts of Dublin, Ireland (Davis 773). Throughout her life, she has written a wide variety of plays and poems for audiences both young and old ("Paula Meehan"). Her poems most notably handle the inner, personal depths of everyday situations (Davis 773).

Paraphrase

Your tiny coffin is so elaborate. Everything you have been buried with and in has been chosen as a reflection of you. You will be alone, and you will not know where you are. There will be no one there to show you the ways of the world and the beauty it possesses. There are so many things you will never know, my child. If I could, I would reverse time, go back to a time when you were alive and healthy inside of me. I would go back further, to the night you were made, the night you became a twinkle in my eye. Instead of having you and subjecting us both to this pain, I would give you back to the world just as you came.

Summary

I carefully chose every detail of your burial to make you feel comfortable and protected. There are so many concepts I will never teach you and you will never learn. I would rather you never have been born than have suffered this fate.

Analysis

The eldest of six children, Paula Meehan was born in Dublin, Ireland in 1955 (Carty). She attended a variety of schools in her youth, but since education wasn't deemed a necessity for women at the time, it wasn't until later in her adulthood that she decided to attend university (Meehan qtd. in Carty). Writing about everything from plays to poetry, her topics of choice are often deeply personal [terrains] in which the imagination charges ordinary occurrences . . . with meaning (Davis 773). As such, Meehan has been known to write about the "terrain" of her surroundings as opposed to writing about herself. Following this observation, and given that Meehan has not had any children of her own, it is unclear if the inspiration for her work stemmed from personal experience, but whether it spouted from her imagination or an observation is unknown.

"Child Bury" is an elegy written from a mourning mother to her deceased son. This narrative gives the poem a sense of intense privacy and has the reader intruding on the speaker's most intimate thoughts. The speaker freely expresses the emotions that she truly feels, regardless of the opinions others might form. Meehan uses this point of view to address an often hidden side of human nature, beautifully conveying the speaker's bare emotions in the face of tragedy. To further illustrate the speaker's severe depression, the author has composed the lament of heterometric couplets that do not abide by a rhyme scheme. The lines often end in enjambment, which adds to the chaotic nature of the poem and gives the poem a hint of quick, sporadic movements. Thoughts pour fluidly into each other, giving the poem an essence of raw honesty. The speaker compares her son's coffin to a wedding, comparing two events that have vastly different connotations (P. Meehan 778). This comparison invites the reader to see another side of this tragic event; weddings mean looking forward to a happy life, while funerals mean looking back on a life well lived. Funerals wouldn't embody such sorrow if the life preceding them didn't embody equivalent joy.

The speaker then shifts from this evoked antithesis into describing the clothing she buried her son in, including his favorite striped shirt (P. Meehan 778). These descriptions allow the reader to see the child through his mother's eyes; these descriptions make the child real, and the more palpable the reader's image of the child becomes, the more pain his absence causes. To best elicit a sense of sorrow in the audience, the author must remind them that the loss of a child is dependent on the existence of a child. Meehan continues to tap into the reader's sympathy as the speaker says that she

gansy of handspun wool, // warm and fleecy for [him]. I to show that even though her child is not alive, the mother still has a strong desire to protect him and to keep him safe and comfortable (P. Meehan 778). While the speaker's deep affection for her child demonstrates the astonishing depths of maternal love, the audience is forced to come to the realization that this love is now missing a recipient. Meehan proves that maternal love does not die with death. The speaker's desire to protect her child transcends death; she still wants to help him develop, to answer the questions he never got a chance to ask, as proven when she says to him:

No light can reach you and teach you
the paths of wild bird,

the names of the flowers,
the fishes, the creatures. (P. Meehan 778)

She implies that her son was a bright, inquisitive boy and illustrates the joy that this kind of blissfulness brings while also showing the heartbreak that results when this joy vanishes. Teaching a child is a beautiful process, and being robbed of that experience is tragic.

She follows her saddening realization by addressing her son with a variety of animal names: my lamb, my calf, my eaglet, / my cub, my kid, my nestling, // my suckling, my c (P. Meehan 779). Her narration has many meanings; she uses these terms as expressions of youthful innocence and to show that the bond of motherhood exceeds the bond of species. The loss of her child speaks to her identity as a mother more than any other aspect of her existence. She presents herself as a mother, and she unites herself with the universal definition of motherhood. A key aspect of being a mother is having a child, and losing him means losing a piece of herself.

From this poignant point on motherhood, Meehan delves into "alternate reality," a popular topic of hers (Davis 774). Davis claims the author "[probes] the moment of infinite possibility just at the cusp of tragedy, trying to imagine alternate stories, but often colliding with the stony reality of inevitability," and this claim is seen when the speaker wishes she could "spin // time back . . . through nine cancel the love feast / (P. Meehan 779). True to would; the speaker says:

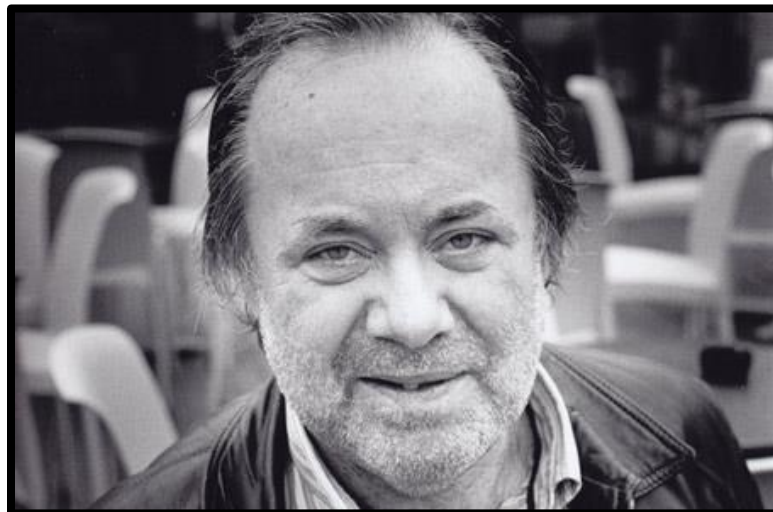
I would travel alone
to a quiet mossy place,

you would spill from me into the earth,
drop by bright red drop. (P. Meehan 779)

Her writing here can mean one of two things: instead of creating the child, his potentiality would leave her in a menstrual cycle, and she would never know the pain of losing him; or, knowing the devastation caused by his birth and subsequent death, she would have killed herself there and then to spare herself from the pain of his loss. The speaker's thoughts can be classified as selfish, but the reader must remember that these thoughts were not expressed with the purpose of being shared. Her reflections are raw, which contributes to their grimness. However, the speaker would not have known this kind of torment if she had not borne a deep, eternal love for her child. A pain this consuming can only come from a love just as fulfilling, and while it is horrible to imagine this mother's sorrow, her sorrow can only deflate her as low as her happiness elated her. This tragedy could not exist without its eternal sister, beauty, and when this kind of beauty exists, it *always* has the possibility of ending in tragedy.

Preservation and Destruction

Matthew Sweeney



(Photograph of Matthew Sweeney)

Born and raised in Ireland, Matthew Sweeney himself says that his poems often showcase a form of
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employs in or getting as much use as possible from as few words as necessary (Davis 706).

Paraphrase

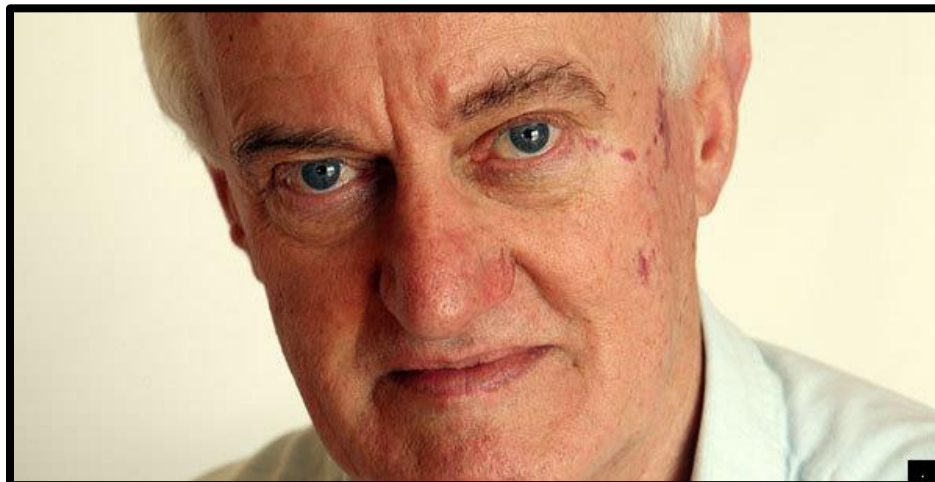
The volcano near us is erupting, so we grab our valuables and leave for safer ground. We are afraid we won't make it, but soon we are running as fast as we can go, being filled with the sights, smells, and sounds of the volcano. We are reckless and our pet monkey panics, so I calm him down and try to get a sense of the impending danger we are in. But instead of seeing the horror I expect, I see a beautiful landscape filled with the animals that the mountain is personally evacuating. Time slows down, and I realize the volcano is nothing to fear. The volcano will not destroy our home; the lava will preserve it.

Summary

We flee from the volcano in fear, and as we flee, we observe the beauty of the mountain's evacuation. The volcano is not destroying; its lava is preserving.

Familiar and Estranged

Bernard O'Donoghue



(Photograph of Bernard O'Donoghue)

Born in County Cork, Ireland, O'Donoghue says he has always had an interest in written and oral linguistics (Davis 529). He credits this to his upbringing in rural Ireland and the historical prevalence it brought to his life, which he often uses in his own poems and in his interpretations of poetry (Davis 530).

Paraphrase

A brother and sister were estranged growing up. She developed a mysterious illness that she mistook for a common, recurring pain. By the time she went to the doctor, she could not do anything about her cancer. She never intended to tell her brother, but the pain made it difficult for her to do common tasks. Still, she refused his help when he offered it. It was the first time he had tried to help her, and he didn't know how to. Instead, he chose not to try. She died, and there was a funeral. All the funeral attendees wanted to know what the brother was thinking. He was thinking that for once, he should have tried something new instead of sticking to what he knew.

Summary

A brother and sister were so distant that she could not tell him when she got sick, and he could not help her when he should have. She died, and he was filled with regrets.

Love and Despair

Eavan Boland



(Photograph of Eavan Boland)

While born in Ireland, Boland's upbringing was mostly divided between New York and London (Eavan Boland). As she blossomed into a young Irishwoman, she noticed that there was an absence of prominent woman in both Irish culture and in Irish history (Davis 470-471). She addresses and challenges this absence through her poetry.

Summary

During the potato famine, a married couple tried to find a better life. They died because they were in the wrong place at the wrong time, but their love-true love -was proved through their actions toward one another in a period of darkness.

Life and Death

Enda Wyley



(Photograph of Enda Wyley)

Enda Wyley, born in Dublin, Ireland, began her writing career at a very early age (Davis 844-845). Her poems tend to focus on love and seeing mundane objects from hidden angles.

Summary

I, the soul, am so deeply connected to you that your death represents my own. You were my everything, and you treated me so well in life, so I will treat you well in death.

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