This Moment

‘This Moment’ is one of Boland’s most simple, yet beautiful poems. The poet takes a regular evening scene in a regular suburban neighbourhood and forces the reader to recognise the beauty in this simple moment. The poet immediately sets the scene in the opening two lines and somewhat transports us to the poem’s location, “A neighbourhood. / At dusk.” The punctuation in these lines slow the pace of the poem and gives us time to adjust to this familiar setting that Boland is creating. The lack of detail allows me as a reader to relate this scene to my own life and my own neighbourhood and put my own personal slant on the poet’s work. Boland creates a sense of suspense, “Things are getting ready/ to happen/ out of sight”, which effectively portrays to me the beauty and wonder to be found in everyday life. This feeling of suspense that Boland creates further engages me in the poem and forces me to reflect on the mysterious element of our world. Boland creates beautiful imagery of this evening scene, “Stars and moths”, which reveals her eye for detail and aids her portrayal of the beauty in everyday life. The sibilance in this line creates a hushed and calming tone, which evokes the same feelings within me. The poem pauses with the isolated line “But not yet.”, which reveals to me how everything in nature takes time and we must allow for its beauty to unfold. Boland creates a beautiful image of “One tree is black/ One window is yellow as butter”. The contrasting colours in this image create a certain cinematic quality and enhance its effectiveness. I feel that the simile of “yellow as butter” creates quite a homely atmosphere and leaves me longing for winter nights, curled up in front of the fire. This line is one I often think of now when passing illuminated windows during winter in my own neighbourhood. Boland’s ability to encourage the reader to appreciate and relate her poetry to their everyday lives is a distinctive aspect of her style and makes her a most unique poet. Boland also creates an intimate image of the relationship between mother and child, “A woman leans down to catch a child/ Who has run into her arms”. This is a heart-warming image which reminds me of the love between parents and children, as well as leading me to reminisce on my own childhood. By pointing out the beauty in a child’s reunion with their mother, Boland encourages the reader to appreciate the simple things in life and makes me aware of the power of reflecting on a regular scene. The final line reinforces the poet’s message of everything in the natural world being balanced, “Apples sweeten in the dark”. To me, I feel Boland is trying to portray the message that good things can come of dark times, which is a very important message in today’s society and is one I often reflect on. This final line teaches me to trust the natural course of life, and to take a moment to appreciate the wonder in the daily routine.
Eavan Boland’s poem ‘The Black Lace Fan My Mother Gave Me’ shares with us the story of her parent’s romance. Boland immediately sets the scene as a “stifling” night with a “starless drought”. Her use of pathetic fallacy to depict a mood of unease and anxiety effectively captures her parents’ feelings at the beginning of their courtship. Although this poem is set in “pre-war Paris”, the feelings of unease that Boland portrays are still as relevant in new relationships today, which adds to the poems authenticity.

In the first two stanzas, Boland gives us a lot of background information on her parent’s romance. She tells us they met in “pre-war Paris”, which is significant as Paris is known to be the city of love. This romantic setting gives the poem a fairy-tale like quality and makes it more engaging. Boland uses short sentences, which add pace to the poem and give the impression of a love that is changing and growing rapidly. These short sentences also add a cinematic quality to the poem, as if a camera were flicking through scenes. This is a deeply personal poem as Boland discloses to us that the fan was “the first gift he ever gave” to her mother. This openness, which is seen throughout the poem, helps to engage me as a reader as I come to feel a sort of personal connection to Boland’s parents as I know the story of their love.

As the poem progresses, the tone changes from one of anxious unease to one of blissful wonder. Boland is fascinated by the intricate detail of the “wild roses, appliquéd on silk by hand”. Through her vivid description of the fan, “darkly picked, stitched boldly, quickly” Boland passes on to me her appreciation for the time and effort that go into creating beautiful things, such as the fan and her parent’s love. However, Boland is under no illusion that love is perfect and acknowledges that her parent’s love, like the fan, has gone through rough patches, “a worn-out underwater bullion”, but it has weathered the storm, “it keeps, even now”. Boland employs a universal message that something does not have to be perfect to be beautiful, a very relevant message in today’s society which is so obsessed with perfection.

As the poem comes to an end, Boland realises that she can never fully understand her parents’ love, “no way now to know what happened”. This sense of mystery forces me to think about how
different and unique love is for everyone and this is what makes it so special. The poet leaves us with the idea that this love story, like all great love stories, is incomplete – we must “improvise” the rest. This sense of intrigue is very engaging and captures my imagination like no other love poem. The entire poem is set in the past tense, except for the final stanza which wistfully looks forward. Boland paints a picture of a fresh summer scene to highlight how although her parents’ love is old, it has kept with the seasons, constantly finding and learning new things, “in summer, finding buds, worms, fruit”. In the last few lines, Boland uses the image of a black bird to symbolise love. There is a tremendous surge of energy and celebration as the poet tells us “she puts out her wing - the whole full, flirtatious span of it”. This has a profound impact on me as it shows the confidence she has in her parents’ relationship, and such confidence and faith are characteristics we all wish to possess. This final line speaks to me on a deeper level and shows just how the blackbird needs its wings to balance, both love and we are stronger when balanced.

**Child of Our Time**

In ‘Child of Our Time’, Boland portrays the theme of tragic violence from an unbiased perspective. She portrays the view that we, as a society, are to blame for these futile killings and does not point the finger at any particular person or group, “We who should have known”. This use of simple, everyday language helps enforce Boland’s message that these killings are the fault of the simple, everyday people in society, as well as of those in power. Boland’s use of colloquial language has awoken me to the idea that by doing nothing, society is also to blame. The tone of regret that is present throughout the poem, “whose life our idle/ Talk has cost”, has a profound effect on me and leads me to feel guilty for the death of this child whom I did not know. Boland’s use of language is neither firm nor forceful, yet I am forced to agree with her view of a society that is to blame for this tragic violence.

Boland explores the theme of the death of innocent children throughout “Child of Our Time”. She emphasises the point of how unjust and immoral it is to murder children who had no knowledge about the political troubles, “which takes from your final cry its tune, from your unreasoned end its reason”. While talking to the child, Boland points out that it took the death of this child for us to realise the harm in our actions, “you have taught me overnight to order”. Although Boland’s language is formal, which somewhat de-humanises the poem, her underlying message still causes
me to feel very deeply. Her reflective tone caused me to reflect on her point that we need to understand that our rash actions have consequences. Though many people died throughout the troubles, by speaking directly to one child who died, Boland effectively convinces me of the futileness of political violence.

Towards the end of the poem, Boland portrays a more positive outlook. She speaks of how, despite its devastation, this child’s death was not in vain. She explains how we will now find “a new language”, a language of peace, to ensure such tragedy does not occur again. This enforces to me the idea that good things can come from bad and that maybe we will learn from our mistakes. In one of the most striking lines in the poem, Boland tells us “Child of our time, our times have robbed your cradle”. This line explains to me how our actions now will affect future generations. Therefore, I can’t but agree with Boland’s message that we must learn from this tragic violence and take action to prevent future strife.

**Love**

‘Love’ is Boland’s poem which had the greatest impact on me. Boland openly and bravely discusses her relationship with her husband and how it has changed over the years. The poem opens with a reflection on her and her husband’s past in a “mid-western town”. There is a hidden connection with the Greek myth of Aeneas as Boland compares her husband to the hero who “crossed on his way to hell”. Both the reference to mythology and her comparison of her husband to “a hero” highlight the special and magical qualities that were present in Boland’s marriage. The reference to mythology makes it appear that their love was like something out of a fairy tale, almost too good to be true and scarcely to be believed. This fairy tale like element makes the poem engaging and sparks my interest in the story Boland has to tell.

Boland goes on to describe the simplicity of their past life. The poet and her husband didn’t have much in terms of physical possessions, merely “a kitchen” and “an Amish table”, but they had a love that was overwhelmingly strong. It appears to me that the strength of this love made up for everything else that was lacking in their lives, which I feel gives the poem a great sense of hope and meaning. Boland paints a beautiful picture of the love between her and her husband,
describing it as having “the feather and muscle of wings”. The “feather” gives the idea that their love was gentle and delicate, while the “muscle” gives the impression that it was also strong and powerful. Boland personifies her and her husband’s love, describing it as having “come to live with us”. This emphasises the presence and impact of such powerful love on their lives and reveals to me that the strength of love cannot be underestimated. Boland also uses a metaphor, comparing love to “a brother of fire and air”. This elemental imagery creates lasting, vivid images in the reader’s mind, as well as showing the passion in their relationship.

The tone of the poem then changes from one of immense passion and love, to a more solemn and grief-filled tone. I cannot help but be overcome with sadness as Boland tells of her child “whom was touched by death”. Boland’s open discussion of the trauma herself and her husband endured forces the reader to feel immense compassion and sympathy towards her. Boland again intertwines the idea of mythology. Aenas could not communicate with his comrades in the underworld, just as friends and neighbours did not know what to say as Boland and her husband went through what is any parents’ worst nightmare, “their mouths opened and their voices failed”. Through her description of speechless friends, Boland displays an understanding of the position of others, as well as revealing to me how nobody could ease her pain. Boland’s portrayal of her own anguish creates a raw and open poem for me to engage with. Through comparing her husband to a “hero” as they went through “hell”, I come to appreciate the rock her husband was to her, as well as fully grasp the terror Boland experienced.

In the fourth stanza the atmosphere of the poem changes entirely and loses all passion and wonder. The use of short, to-the-point sentences, “I am your wife/ It was years ago” reflects how their relationship has changed. By informing us that “Our child was healed”, I believe Boland is almost trying to convince herself that this was the perfect outcome, instead of pondering on the love lost between her and her husband. Although Boland’s tone is quite factual and unattached, I cannot help but develop a profound sadness for the lack of romance in their marriage, “we speak plainly”.

However, Boland’s want for romance is still evident in her somewhat pleading tone, “I want to return to you”. I cannot help but feel somewhat sympathetic towards Boland in her cries for passion in her marriage. The fact that Boland speaks directly to her husband, “as you were,/ with snow on the shoulders of your coat” adds a sense of intimacy to the poem and makes me feel like
I am intruding on a very personal moment. The descriptive image of “a car passing with its headlights on” gives the reader an insight into Boland’s own thoughts and memories and creates quite a romantic and picturesque image in my mind.

Alas, the love is not lost as Boland reveals she still sees her husband “as a hero in a text”. Boland’s open display of her feelings for her husband allows me to understand their relationship and gives me hope for their future. Boland’s longing and nostalgia are very evident when she asks her husband a series of questions, “Will we ever live so intensely again?”. The uncertainty Boland seems to be experiencing is a relatable human experience and allows me to connect with her. It is evident that although her child’s sickness brought her great grief, it had a strengthening effect on her relationship with her husband, which is something she longs to get back. This desire to rekindle her love shows us that she is a poet of great emotion, as well as showing her natural human impulses. There is undoubtedly a hint of sadness in the final line of the poem, “You walk away and I cannot follow”. A sense of loneliness and isolation permeates Boland’s tone, and a feeling of empathy is evoked within me. Although her child was healed, I cannot say that this poem has a happy ending, as although Boland didn’t lose her child, she lost the intimacy and passion in her marriage.