

# Eavan Boland - Poetry | Notes Set

## The Famine Road

- Famine Roads were unrequired roads that lead nowhere. If people are physically exhausted they can't raise any resistance, they were a method of controlling people.
- Trevelyan- a senior overlooking this operation.

### Stanza 1

- Opens with a significant simile "idle as trout" – lazy.
- Dominant power always attempt to dehumanise the subjugated (victims) - makes it easier to have total disregard and psychologically it gives you the right to do it - realistic representation of when a colonial power takes over.
- Trevelyan is supposed to be in charge of famine relief and in opening stanza he is completely without empathy.
- He is extremely harsh – "give them no coins at all".
- Dehumanisation leads to emotional detachment.
- Jones introduces the building of roads matter of factly "give them roads, roads to force from nowhere, going nowhere of course" - No recognisable human emotions, a business like tone.

### Stanza 2

- Doctor delivering terrible news – cold, matter fact, no empathy "one out of every 10".
- Pain and horror can be a product of functional, ordinary language.
- Evil and tragedy can be born out of language devoid of drama

### Stanza 3

- Description of physically deliberated people as a result of hunger.
- "directionless" these people were as irrelevant as the roads being built.
- Severity of conditions highlighted to engage our empathy.
- "iron" is cold and hard just like the environment they were expected to live in.
- Cannibalism introduced "as if at a corner butcher- the others buttock" reinforced idea that Irish were savages; subhuman.

## Stanza 5

- “Dusk” how common death was...ending of another life as day ends.
- “Pariah” an outcast , even own family won’t touch or communicate with them.
- Lonely death, “death rattle” - final breath entirely on his own, peers forced to abandon him.
- Coldness of people reflected in coldness of winter described.

## Stanza 6

- Doctors response is shocking- casual nature of speech, matter of fact.  
Dismissive nature, detached and demeaning - “grow your garden keep house”.
- His lack of understanding undermines the woman’s tragedy.
- His lack of sensitivity and patronisation is mirrored by the British towards Irish.

## Stanza 7

- Poem comes full circle as Jones reports back to Trevelyan.
- Sinister language that doesn’t represent death is how we felt it.
- What he interpreted as a success, we shrunk from in horror “it’s gone better than you expected”. This was sanctioned right from the top “Lord”, “Colonel” protected by their rank.
- “from Parish to Parish, field to field” - reminded of scale of death.
- “we march the corn to the ships in peace” money valued over people.
- Last line is again matter fact by removing horror of a mass grave “I saw bones out of my carriage window. Your servant Jones”.
- Compares her body to a Famine Road “what is your body now if not a famine road”. What she saw as her purpose in life, to be a mother, has been taken away – Identity stripped.

## Style

- Use of two narratives – one to highlight the other...two seemingly unrelated things to make a point about the human condition and our capabilities.
- Direct speech - examines every day nature of the worst kind of evil

# The Black Lace Fan My Mother Gave Me

- Boland writing about youth of her mother.
- Inspired by an object – Similar to A Shadow Doll.

## Stanza 1

- Balanced pictures...positives and negatives.
- Title - not negative even though the colour black is associated with darkness.
- Fan=Heirloom passed from mother to daughter.
- A sense of longevity, a marriage that has lasted.
- Setting-Paris, most romantic of cities, sophisticated, elegant, exotic and enticing at a time when people didn't travel much.
- Opening line-this man and moment are important to her, she kept the fan... valued memory and relationship.
- "Pre-War" hint of trouble ahead in Paris during WW1, helps illustrate ups and downs. Pathetic fallacy of weather "stifling", "stormy"- uncomfortable, humid.

## Stanza 2

- 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> stanzas introduce element of fear.
- Sense of a regular occurrence, air of sophistication "cafes".
- Short clipped sentences-suggestive of a mind working quickly.
- Female protagonists unease - Pragmatic analysis of early stages of a relationship. Her fears are baseless as he is concerned about being late "he looked at his watch".

## Stanza 3

- Increasing desperation -"ordered more coffee" and embarrassment "she stood up" - can't relax - Fear that he has stood her up, not as committed as she is.
- Heat takes on a more ominous presence "killing" - self-doubt is what is killing her.
- She predicts sorrow in her future "she thought the distance smelled of rain and lightning".

## Stanza 4

- Focus turns to fan and what it has come to represent.
- "wild roses" flower "silk" expensive quality fabric.
- "by hand" "tortoiseshell"-calming nature of sea .

“bullion” value -all suggest an object of worth.

- Tone is now calmer, Intensity of emotion at beginning is not sustained.
- “Patience” and compromise are valuable to longevity of a relationship.

To achieve this reticence trouble and pain had to be endured.

Looking at fan brings her back to moment, makes it alive, still has vitality.

## Stanza 5

- Acknowledges she is putting herself in her mother’s shoes.
- Emotion and psychology she has put into poem are her own creative response to the facts.

## Stanza 6

- Metaphor of the fan becomes “blackbird”.

To link past with present, sees a bird alive present day.

When it spreads wings it is a reminder of vitality of new fan and it’s “flirtatious” romance.

# The Shadow Doll

- A Shadow Doll-used for wedding trials.
- Title-very negative for a poem about marriage.
- A Doll is a representation of a person - A voiceless image of a woman.  
A doll is also a plaything ... Apply that to an adult woman=negative .
- Shadow-absence of light.  
Become a shadow of yourself, Hiding away what you really are.

## Stanza 1

- Detailed and artistic object .
- Flooded with colour "**Ivory and oyster gleam**"- Hinting at glamour of actual wedding day.  
Quickly changes this bright tone.
- Feminine-"**blooms**"-all about the woman on wedding day.

## Stanza 2

- Nearly every aspect is negative.  
"**healthy sewn**"-constricting, sealed fate  
"**porcelain bride**"- fragile  
"**oyster gleam**" will be chipped/shattered
- Act of getting married increases your vulnerability
- "**airless glamour**"-negative-living death?
- "**Survives**"- living beyond purpose - chosen definitely...Struggle, ordeal-negative connotations. Married life is difficult.

## Stanza 3

- "**Under glass, under wraps**"- Repetition of under-highlighting importance.  
'Wraps'-hiding, secret, Anonymity...Women who married didn't work.  
'Under'-buried  
'Glass'-display purposes only, trophy
- "**even now**"-long passage of time.....No separation/divorce in respectable society.

#### Stanza 4

- “she could see herself”-hindsight....Not what she expected.

#### Stanza 5

- “stephanotis”-tropical
- “never feeling”-no heat/passion left
- “satin rise and fall...”-no breathing lifelessness

#### Stanza 6

- “astray” lost, doubt
- “I kept repeatedly” trying to convince herself of vows.
- “coffee pots and clocks” didn’t live together until marriage, domestic nature.
- Contrast between seeming glamour and domesticity of marriage.  
Glamour of wedding day=fleeting.

#### Stanza 7

- Bleak final image-imprisonment.
- “locks” marriage and imprisonment.
- “pressing down” force and pressure on women to marry.

# The War Horse

- Typical poetic work - Everyday thing (a horse) used to provide inspiration for something deeper.
- Take ordinary and mundane to reflect on something more profound...Antithesis of modern works.
- Title - Sets tone and Reveals conflict/tension.
- Writing about Ireland, a suburban neighbourhood.  
Things that apply in past can relate to modern world.
- “clip clop casual” alliteration, rhythm, lightness
- “stamps death” language intensifies, darkness, leaves permanent mark.
- “like a mint” force of impact on earth.
- “innocent coinage” violence inflicted on innocent.
- “ambling” casual nature of violence that frightens normalisation.
- “loosed from its tether” A comment metaphorically on the human condition - When violence is loosed from tether of normal civilisation.  
Innate part of us as humans to be self-destructive.
- “hissing” serpentine threatening.
- “no great harm is done” not to her as she is safe in house...A truism of war-people not directly affected will look after themselves.
- Nature is damaged - war stops natural balance and flourishing.
- “rose” cut off in their prime, before prospering (like many soldiers).
- “expendable” normal value of life cast aside.
- “scream less dead” death was unforeseen, war can invade seemingly normal life.
- Contrast between “we are safe” with “corpses, remote, crushed, mutilated”... ordinary exists alongside horror.  
Shocking and graphic language = violence of war.

- Repetition of “Stumbles” is significant – awkwardness, clumsiness, lacks refinement and balance.

Conflicts does not take into account individuality or decency ever.

War is unthinking, that is what is “huge” and “threatening”.

- Passage of horse is symbolic of a war machine moving on with no consideration of destruction left behind in its wake.
- “illicit brand” frightening force.
- “hedge” and “countryside” rural aspect reinforced.
- “a world betrayed” conflict betrays our value; it is without decency, respect and the normal things that hold society together.
- “a cause ruined” ruined lack of resilience.