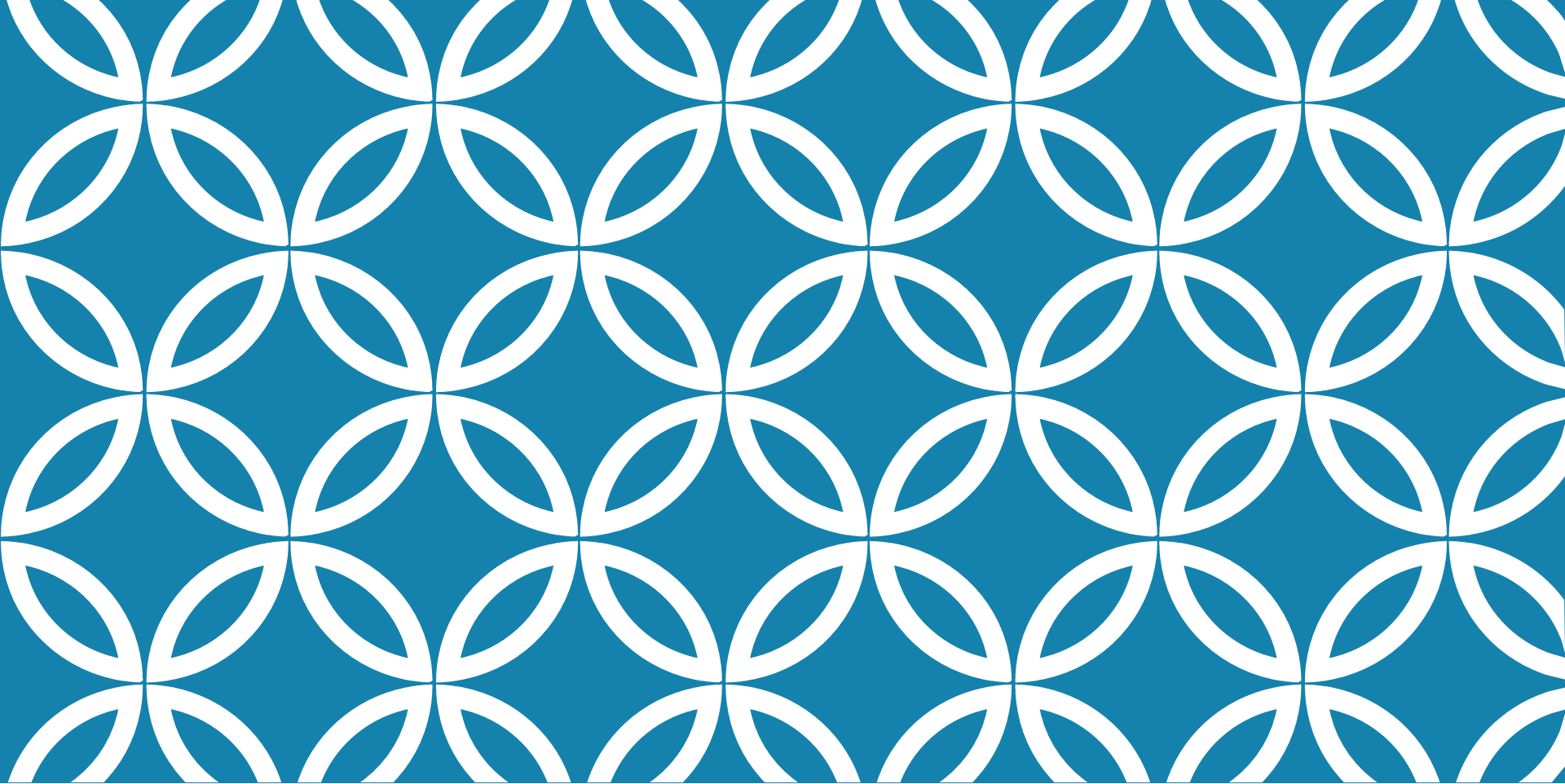


LOVE BY EAVAN BOLAND - COMPREHENSIVE ANALYSIS

CONTEXT

Eavan Boland's poem *Love* reflects on the nature of love, memory, and the passage of time, weaving personal and mythological imagery to explore the intensity and evolution of a long-term relationship. The speaker recalls a period in the Midwest, where she and her husband experienced both profound joy and near-tragedy when one of their children fell ill but recovered. Through the use of mythological allusions, Boland elevates the personal experience of love and loss to the level of epic storytelling, examining how love changes over time while also longing for the intensity of past emotions. The poem moves fluidly between present reflection and memories of the past, and it grapples with questions of whether the intensity of love in the past can ever be recaptured.



STANZA BY STANZA ANALYSIS



STANZA 1 (LINES 1-6)

- 'Dark falls on this mid-western town / where we once lived when myths collided.'

The poem opens with a memory of a past time, set in a 'mid-western town.' The phrase 'when myths collided' introduces the blending of personal and mythological worlds, suggesting that the love the speaker experienced here was of great significance, even epic proportions. The use of 'dark falls' sets a melancholic, reflective tone, indicating that the speaker is looking back on the past with a sense of loss or longing.

- 'Dusk has hidden the bridge in the river / which slides and deepens / to become the water / the hero crossed on his way to hell.'

These lines introduce a mythological reference to a hero crossing a river on his way to hell, possibly alluding to the Greek myth of Orpheus or other epic heroes who journey to the underworld. The bridge hidden by dusk symbolises a passage between the past and the present, as well as between life and death. The imagery of the river 'sliding and deepening' suggests a sense of inevitability and the deep emotions that underlie the poem.

STANZA 2 (LINES 7-16)

- 'Not far from here is our old apartment. / We had a kitchen and an Amish table. / We had a view.'

The speaker recalls the domestic details of her past life, grounding the mythical imagery of the previous stanza in everyday reality. The 'Amish table' and 'view' are symbols of the life they built together, suggesting both simplicity and stability. The tone here is nostalgic, evoking a time when their love was new and intense.

- 'And we discovered there / love had the feather and muscle of wings / and had come to live with us, / a brother of fire and air.'

In these lines, Boland personifies love as something both ethereal and powerful, with 'feather and muscle of wings.' The metaphor of love as a 'brother of fire and air' suggests that it is both a gentle, nurturing force (air) and a passionate, transformative one (fire). This personification elevates the experience of love to something almost divine, reinforcing the mythological undertones of the poem.

STANZA 2 CONTINUED

- 'We had two infant children one of whom / was touched by death in this town / and spared.'

The speaker then introduces a moment of near-tragedy, recalling how one of their children almost died but was ultimately 'spared.' This adds a layer of emotional depth to the poem, as the speaker reflects on how love endured through hardship. The theme of survival is central here, as the family not only survived this event but grew stronger from it.

- 'And when the hero / was hailed by his comrades in hell / their mouths opened and their voices failed and / there is no knowing what they would have asked / about a life they had shared and lost.'

The mythological allusion returns, comparing the child's brush with death to the hero being hailed by comrades in hell. The comrades, unable to speak, represent the unknowable questions and emotions that arise in the face of death and near-loss. This imagery suggests that some experiences, especially those involving life and death, transcend language.

STANZA 3 (LINES 17-23)

- 'I am your wife. / It was years ago. / Our child was healed. We love each other still.'

The speaker reaffirms her present identity as the man's wife, acknowledging that although the events she is recalling happened 'years ago,' the love between them remains. The tone here is plain and declarative, emphasising the endurance of love over time.

- 'Across our day-to-day and ordinary distances / we speak plainly. We hear each other clearly.'

Here, Boland contrasts the intensity of past emotions with the 'ordinary' communication of their present life. While the love remains, it has settled into a more practical, less intense form. The phrase 'ordinary distances' suggests the physical and emotional space that has grown between them over the years, though they remain connected.

STANZA 4 (LINES 24-33)

- 'And yet I want to return to you / on the bridge of the Iowa river as you were, / with snow on the shoulders of your coat / and a car passing with its headlights on:'

The speaker expresses a desire to return to the past, to a specific moment by the Iowa River, when their love was at its most intense. The snow on the shoulders of his coat and the image of a car passing evoke a sense of stillness and quiet intimacy, a moment frozen in time. This longing to return suggests that the speaker feels a sense of loss or nostalgia for the intensity of their earlier love.

- 'I see you as a hero in text-- / the image blazing and the edges gilded-- / and I long to cry out the epic question / my dear companion: / Will we ever live so intensely again?'

The speaker compares her husband to a 'hero in text,' reinforcing the mythological imagery that runs throughout the poem. The 'epic question' she wants to ask—whether they will ever experience such intensity again—reveals her deep longing for the passion of their earlier years. The 'edges gilded' suggests that these memories have been idealised over time, becoming more mythical in her mind than they may have been in reality.

LINES 34-40

"Will love come to us again and be / so formidable at rest it offered us ascension / even to look at him?" Here, the speaker wonders if they will ever experience a love so powerful that it feels transcendent, even when it is "at rest." The use of the word "ascension" evokes religious imagery, suggesting that the speaker views love as a force capable of lifting them beyond the ordinary into something sacred or divine. • "But the words are shadows and you cannot hear me. / You walk away and I cannot follow." The poem ends on a note of resignation. The speaker acknowledges that her words are "shadows," lacking the power to reach her husband. His "walking away" symbolises the emotional distance that has grown between them over time, and the speaker's inability to "follow" suggests that she cannot return to the intensity of their past love, no matter how much she longs for it.

KEY THEMES

THE INTERSECTION OF MYTH AND REALITY

Throughout the poem, Boland weaves mythological imagery into the everyday reality of the speaker's life, elevating personal experiences to the level of epic storytelling. The speaker views her husband as a 'hero,' and their love as something mythic and larger than life.

Quotes:

- 'The hero crossed on his way to hell.'

This mythological reference sets the tone for the rest of the poem, where personal experiences are framed as part of a larger, epic narrative.

- 'I see you as a hero in text-- the image blazing and the edges gilded.'

The speaker's memory of her husband is idealised, turned into a heroic figure from myth, suggesting that love and memory can elevate ordinary life to something extraordinary.

MEMORY AND LONGING

The poem is suffused with a sense of nostalgia and longing, as the speaker reflects on past moments of intense love and wonders if they will ever experience such feelings again. The memories are both cherished and painful, as they highlight the distance between the past and present.

Quotes:

- 'And yet I want to return to you on the bridge of the Iowa river as you were.'

The speaker's desire to return to a specific moment in the past reveals her deep longing to recapture the intensity of their earlier love.

- 'But the words are shadows and you cannot hear me. You walk away and I cannot follow.'

The closing lines express the speaker's resignation to the fact that she cannot return to the past, no matter how much she longs for it.

LOVE

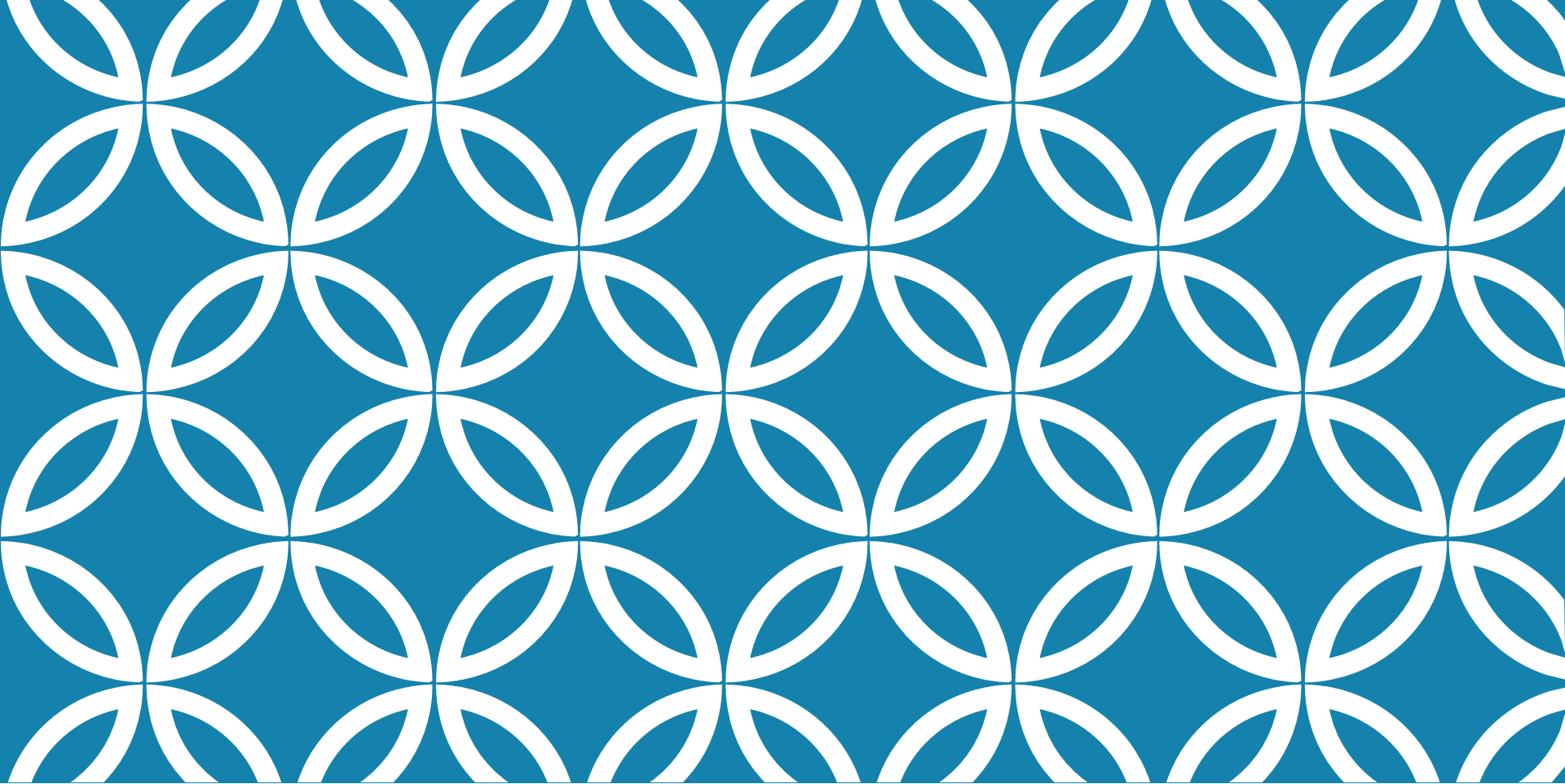
The poem explores how love changes as time passes, from the intense passion of early love to the more subdued, ordinary love of later years. While the love remains, the speaker longs for the intensity of the past, wondering if they will ever experience it again.

Quotes:

"We love each other still. Across our day-to-day and ordinary distances we speak plainly. We hear each other clearly." This quote highlights how love has become more practical and less passionate over time, though the connection remains strong. • "Will we ever live so intensely again?" This question reveals the speaker's deep longing to recapture the intensity of their earlier love, suggesting a sense of loss as love evolves.

MOOD OF THE POEM

The mood of Love is reflective and nostalgic, with an underlying sense of melancholy. The speaker looks back on a time when her love for her husband was intense and transformative, but there is also a sense of loss as she acknowledges that this intensity has faded over time. The poem is imbued with a wistful longing for the past, as well as a quiet acceptance of the realities of love in the present.



LITERARY DEVICES



METAPHOR

'Love had the feather and muscle of wings / and had come to live with us, a brother of fire and air.'

This metaphor personifies love as a powerful, almost divine force, elevating the couple's experience of love to something extraordinary and otherworldly.

MYTHOLOGICAL ALLUSION

'The hero crossed on his way to hell.'

This allusion to epic heroes who journey to the underworld, such as Orpheus, elevates the personal experience of love and loss to the level of myth, suggesting that love itself is an epic journey.

IMAGERY

'With snow on the shoulders of your coat / and a car passing with its headlights on.'

The vivid imagery in this line evokes a specific, intimate moment from the past, highlighting the speaker's longing to return to this time when love felt pure and intense.

IRONY

'But the words are shadows and you cannot hear me. / You walk away and I cannot follow.'

The irony in these lines lies in the fact that the speaker's desire to reconnect with her husband emotionally is thwarted by time and distance, even though they remain physically together.

CONCLUSION

Eavan Boland's *Love* is a deeply reflective poem that explores the complexities of love, memory, and time. Through the use of mythological allusions, vivid imagery, and powerful metaphors, Boland elevates the personal experience of love to the level of epic storytelling. The poem captures both the intensity of early love and the quieter, more subdued love that remains as time passes. Ultimately, *Love* is a meditation on the evolving nature of relationships, the longing for past intensity, and the acceptance of love as it exists in the present.