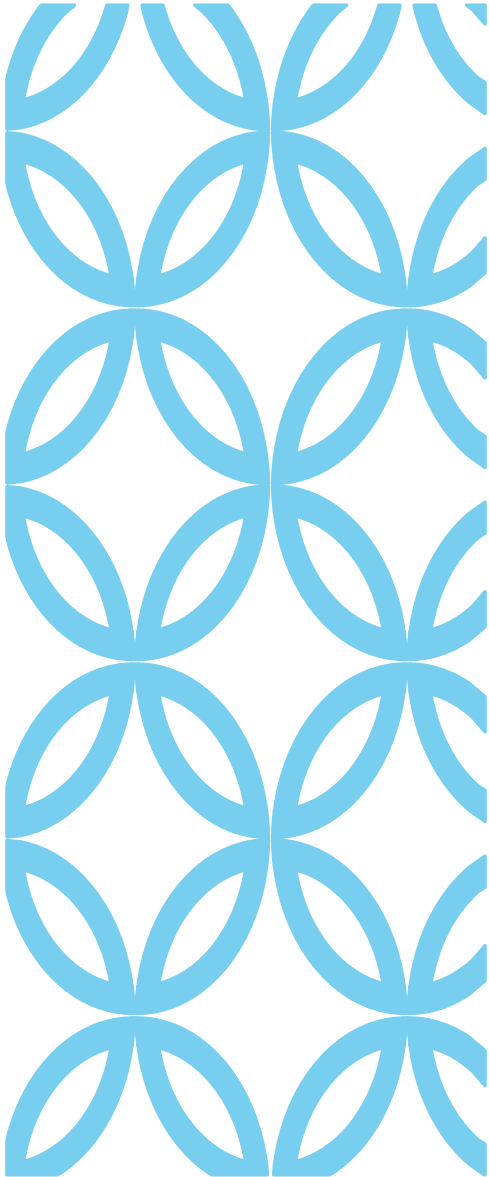


**THE BLACK LACE FAN MY MOTHER
GAVE ME BY EAVAN BOLAND -
COMPREHENSIVE ANALYSIS**

CONTEXT

Eavan Boland's *The Black Lace Fan My Mother Gave Me* reflects on memory, love, and the passage of time through the symbolic object of a lace fan. The speaker reconstructs a scene from her mother's past, exploring the tension between memory, storytelling, and the unknown. The poem moves fluidly between a personal memory of pre-war Paris, where her parents met, and a reflection on the lace fan as a physical object imbued with history. The fan acts as both a memento and a metaphor for the complexities of love and time, and Boland's use of rich, sensory language evokes both the literal and symbolic weight of the object.



STANZA BY STANZA ANALYSIS

STANZA 1 (LINES 1-4)

- 'It was the first gift he ever gave her, / buying it for five francs in the Galleries / in pre-war Paris. It was stifling. / A starless drought made the nights stormy.'

The poem begins by recalling a specific memory from the speaker's mother's past. The gift of the black lace fan, bought 'for five francs in the Galleries' in Paris, is framed as a romantic gesture. However, the setting, with its 'stifling' heat and 'starless drought,' introduces an undercurrent of tension. The description of the 'stormy' nights foreshadows the emotional turbulence in the relationship, and the pre-war setting suggests a time of impending change or disruption, symbolising both the political landscape and the uncertain future of the lovers.

STANZA 2 (LINES 5-8)

- 'They stayed in the city for the summer. / They met in cafés. She was always early. / He was late. That evening he was later. / They wrapped the fan. He looked at his watch.'

This stanza focuses on the interactions between the two lovers, offering small details that hint at their dynamic. The woman, always early, is portrayed as more attentive or perhaps more emotionally invested, while the man's habitual lateness suggests either casualness or indifference. The repetition of his tardiness creates a sense of tension, and the wrapping of the fan, followed by his glance at the watch, emphasises the passing of time and the growing distance between them.

STANZA 3 (LINES 9-12)

- 'She looked down the Boulevard des Capucines. / She ordered more coffee. She stood up. / The streets were emptying. The heat was killing. / She thought the distance smelled of rain and lightning.'

In this stanza, the speaker's mother is shown waiting for her lover, staring down a famous Parisian boulevard. The 'emptying' streets mirror her growing impatience and perhaps a sense of isolation. The 'heat was killing' intensifies the oppressive atmosphere, suggesting that the wait and the emotional tension are becoming unbearable. The 'rain and lightning' she senses in the distance represents the possibility of a storm—a metaphor for an emotional climax or conflict.

STANZA 4 (LINES 13-16)

- 'These are wild roses, appliquéd on silk by hand, / darkly picked, stitched boldly, quickly. / The rest is tortoiseshell and has the reticent, / clear patience of its element. It is'

Here, the focus shifts from the scene in Paris to a detailed description of the fan itself. The 'wild roses' appliquéd on silk reflect the beauty and intricacy of the fan, but they are 'darkly picked,' suggesting that the beauty of the object also carries a shadow or a sense of danger. The tortoiseshell, described as having 'the reticent, clear patience of its element,' symbolises endurance and the passing of time. The juxtaposition of the delicate, quick stitches and the slow, patient tortoiseshell reflects the contrast between the fleeting nature of human experiences and the lasting nature of objects.

STANZA 5 (LINES 17-20)

- 'a worn-out, underwater bullion and it keeps, / even now, an inference of its violation. / The lace is overcast as if the weather / it opened for and offset had entered it.'

In this stanza, the fan is described as 'worn-out' and bearing an 'inference of its violation.' This suggests that the fan has endured time and perhaps witnessed or symbolised some kind of emotional or relational rupture. The 'lace is overcast,' implying that the fan, like the relationship it represents, has absorbed the emotional atmosphere of the past—both the heat and tension of the summer in Paris. The fan, having 'opened for and offset' the weather, now metaphorically holds the memories and emotional weight of that time.

STANZA 6 (LINES 21-24)

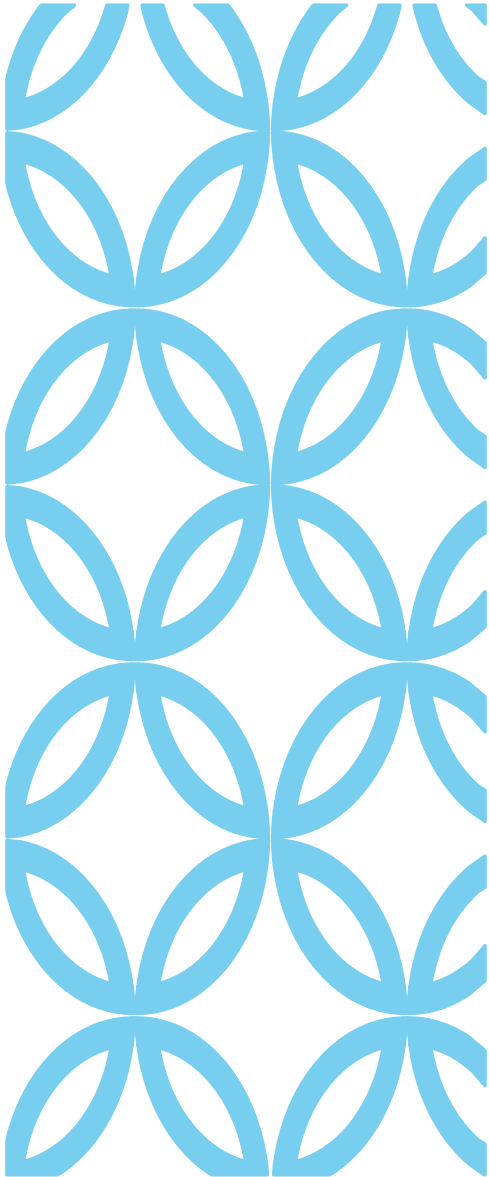
- 'The past is an empty café terrace. / An airless dusk before thunder. A man running. / And no way to know what happened then — / none at all — unless, of course, you improvise.'

The speaker reflects on the past, likening it to an 'empty café terrace,' an image that conveys both absence and mystery. The 'airless dusk before thunder' suggests an unresolved tension, and the 'man running' is an ambiguous figure, representing either the speaker's father or the possibility of lost or forgotten moments. The line 'no way to know what happened then' highlights the unknowability of the past, suggesting that all recollections are incomplete or fictionalised to some degree. The speaker acknowledges that, in the absence of certainty, one must 'improvise,' which speaks to the way we reconstruct and reinterpret the past through memory.

STANZA 7 (LINES 25-28)

- 'The blackbird on this first sultry morning, / in summer, finding buds, worms, fruit, / feels the heat. Suddenly she puts out her wing — / the whole, full, flirtatious span of it.'

The final stanza brings the poem to the present, with a blackbird spreading her wings in the heat of a summer morning. The image of the bird 'putting out her wing' mirrors the opening of the fan and carries connotations of both freedom and seduction. The 'whole, full, flirtatious span' of the wing suggests a moment of beauty and vitality, contrasting with the earlier descriptions of tension and waiting. The blackbird's instinctive action, in response to the heat, suggests a natural, effortless display of life, in contrast to the fraught human relationships described earlier.



KEY THEMES

PASSAGE OF TIME AND THE WEIGHT OF MEMORY

The poem explores how objects like the black lace fan can hold the weight of memory and time. The speaker reconstructs a scene from her mother's past, but there is a sense that much of it is uncertain or incomplete. The fan becomes a symbol of the enduring yet mysterious nature of memory.

Quotes:

- 'The past is an empty café terrace. / An airless dusk before thunder.'

This quote captures the sense of emptiness and unresolved tension that characterises the speaker's view of the past, suggesting that memory is both vivid and elusive.

- 'And no way to know what happened then — / none at all — unless, of course, you improvise.'

This line speaks to the idea that memory is inherently unreliable, and that we often fill in the gaps with imagination or interpretation.

LOVE AND EMOTIONAL DISTANCE

The poem reflects on the dynamics of love and relationships, focusing on the emotional distance between the speaker's parents. The man's habitual lateness and the woman's waiting suggest a tension between them, and the fan becomes a symbol of both their connection and the distance that grows between them over time.

Quotes:

- 'She was always early. / He was late. That evening he was later.'

This quote highlights the imbalance in the relationship, with the woman portrayed as more emotionally engaged while the man is detached or indifferent.

- 'She thought the distance smelled of rain and lightning.'

This line suggests the woman's anticipation of conflict or emotional intensity, as she waits for something to happen that never quite arrives.

THE INTERPLAY BETWEEN OBJECTS AND MEMORY

The black lace fan serves as a physical object that carries the weight of emotional and historical memory. Boland explores how objects can evoke the past, but also how they become repositories for the emotional weather of their time.

Quotes:

- 'The lace is overcast as if the weather / it opened for and offset had entered it.'

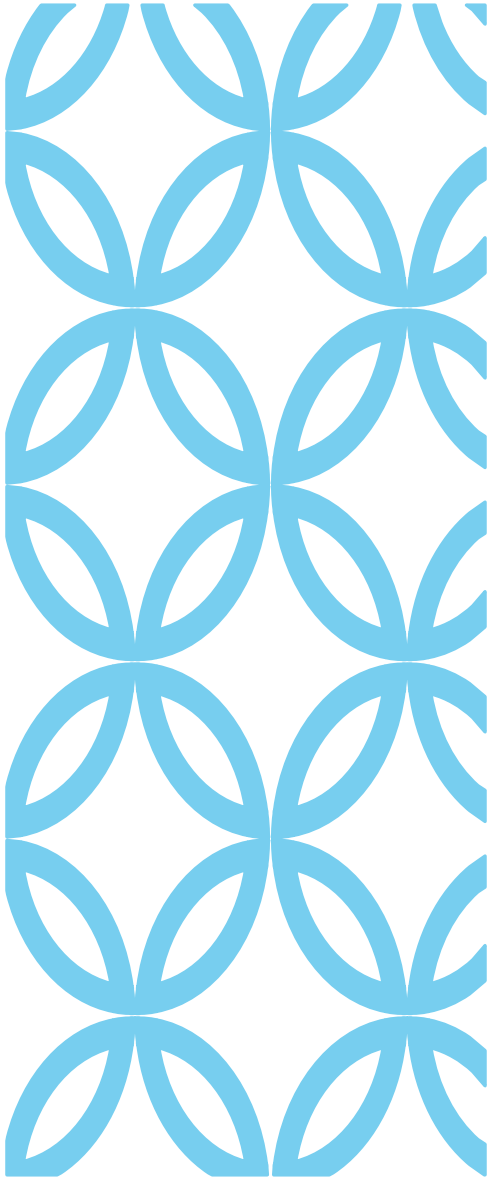
This quote illustrates how the fan has absorbed the emotional atmosphere of the past, becoming a symbol of the tension and unresolved emotions of the time.

- 'It is / a worn-out, underwater bullion and it keeps, / even now, an inference of its violation.'

This line suggests that the fan holds traces of the emotional or relational rupture that occurred, making it a repository for the hidden or forgotten aspects of the past.

MOOD OF THE POEM

The mood of 'The Black Lace Fan My Mother Gave Me' is reflective, with an underlying sense of tension and mystery. Boland evokes both the heat and intensity of the past, as well as the uncertainty and elusiveness of memory. There is a sense of nostalgia in the speaker's reconstruction of her mother's past, but also a recognition that much of it remains unknown or unknowable. The mood shifts between a kind of romantic intensity and a more detached, observational tone, as the speaker reflects on the complexity of love, memory, and time.



LITERARY DEVICES

IMAGERY

'The heat was killing. / She thought the distance smelled of rain and lightning.'

Boland uses vivid imagery to create a sense of both physical and emotional tension, with the oppressive heat and the anticipation of a storm mirroring the tension between the lovers.

SYMBOLISM

'The lace is overcast as if the weather / it opened for and offset had entered it.'

The fan becomes a symbol of the emotional atmosphere of the past, absorbing the tensions and unresolved emotions of the time.

METAPHOR

'The past is an empty café terrace.'

This metaphor captures the sense of absence and mystery that characterises the speaker's understanding of the past, suggesting that memory is both vivid and elusive.

JUXTAPOSITION

'A man running. / And no way to know what happened then — / none at all — unless, of course, you improvise:'

The juxtaposition of the running man with the uncertainty of what happened reflects the tension between action and mystery, as the speaker acknowledges that memory often requires improvisation or interpretation.

CONCLUSION

Eavan Boland's 'The Black Lace Fan My Mother Gave Me' is a complex meditation on memory, love, and the passage of time. Through the symbolic object of the fan, Boland explores how objects can carry the weight of emotional history, while also highlighting the elusiveness and mystery of the past. The poem moves between vivid sensory imagery and reflective observation, capturing both the intensity of human relationships and the uncertainty of memory. Ultimately, the fan becomes a symbol of the complexities of love and the way it is remembered and reconstructed over time.