



Talk to Me of Love

Julia Anne Bernhardt

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This well-structured collection celebrates different types of love through meditative verse.

The poems in Julia Anne Bernhardt's first collection, *Talk to Me of Love*, range from erotic to spiritual as they investigate love in all its forms. Repetition, rhyme, and mantras produce hypnotic sonic effects and support the central message of the epigraph: "God is in the detail."

The book is divided into four themed sections. "A Tale of Love and Longing" recalls a European love affair gone sour, making reference to Brussels and Italy. In this romantic atmosphere, "wistful memory shrouds the days / and hope beckons the nights." "Tales of Love and Loss" laments infertility and the loss of a grandparent. In "Tales of Love and Laundry," Bernhardt finds alternating drudgery and joy in marriage and parenting, while "Tales of Love and Learning" offers spiritual wisdom through prayers and meditation.

There are occasional end rhymes, but most of the poems prioritize internal rhyming and alliteration instead. "Lost in Paradise" exemplifies these pleasing sound techniques: "nesting swallows swoop and call" and "clouds cocoon us after noon." By repeating phrases within poems, such as "quite quiet," "cold, old," and "expense account love," Bernhardt cements thematic and sonic unity. Alliteration helps create the seductive feeling of the love poetry, as in "blood swimming boldly, body-through."

Although the verses adhere to no recognizable forms, the author utilizes well-known structures. "A Sonnet to IVF," for instance, has a sonnet's fourteen lines but not its usual rhyme scheme. Indeed, the only rhyme is the final couplet, a wry observation on modern pregnancy. With imagery blending harsh realism and metaphor, this one stands out: "the needle pierces my moony buttock ... // so this is how / new life is made now." Elsewhere, lines repeat in multiple stanzas, resembling an adapted villanelle—most notably in "Ode on St. Valentine's Day or Bio-identical HRT Blues or Menopause Mania" and "The Naked Offering."

The everyday and the eternal mix here. "Love List: for those Days when I Forget and Need to Remember" is a prime example of locating sacred joy in life's routines. Expressing love for her garden as well as her spouse and children, Bernhardt recognizes the aesthetic value in duty: "my love is laundry: the rhythm of my days ... / my love is [a cat's] purr when I come up the garden steps." References to myths (Eve and Perseus) and mantras reinforce the poems' timelessness; "Rachamana. Rachamana. Rachamana. // compassion," for instance, echoes Eliot's *The Wasteland*.

There are minor missteps: misspellings ("momento," "knarled") and verses that seemed to be aimed more at children ("Poems Are Cool" and "Inside of a Rainbow") do not belong. However, the themes' strength is enough to recommend this collection to readers of Jo Shapcott and Julia Copus.

REBECCA FOSTER (September 8, 2015)

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