



Love is Not Anonymous (New Leaf)

Jan Wood

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Love is Not Anonymous is an exploration of the expectations and heartaches often projected onto women's lives and their spiritual journeys. The complexities of coming of age as a woman are presented with humour and parody as Jan Wood leads us on a journey through the many realms of love from first love and infatuation to marriage, motherhood, and even extramarital temptation. Spiritual love and the challenges of faith are also examined as Wood juxtaposes the competing themes of belief and female sexuality, examining the pain and injustice to which women are subjected in the realms of both love and faith and searching for order and meaning in the two most complicated territories of human experience.

Spirituality is at the forefront as Wood reflects on her religious background and converses directly with God in the interspersed "godtalk.com" poems. She illustrates a relationship to God that is physical and intellectual as well as transcendent, often drawing out the romantic elements of spirituality as in "is/there/a/prayer/to/mend/this?" when she bargains with God, promising to pay [him] back/on her knees." Elsewhere she wrestles with the challenges of faith when she confesses, "I liked you more when I thought/there was an alternate plan/with side benefits for being good." Despite these uncertainties, however, "she cannot leave/the idea of him/alone." Wood also explores women's issues and the experiences of women as they battle the expectations of both innocence and inherent sinfulness projected onto them in the realms of love and faith. The biblical Eve is a recurring character as Wood reflects on the sexual repression enforced by church and society, and the dark side of a woman's experience is explored in poems about domestic abuse ("Duplex"), prostitution ("Sometimes She's Afraid to be Loved"), and the lethal conclusion of being female ("Invasion").

Feminist undertones show through in Wood's narratives, but she refuses to be hemmed in by definitions, writing in "Mary, a Woman" that "she does not desire equality but freedom to celebrate/her differences," vocalizing the exhaustion many women experience at "being the culprit and the icon." She also celebrates the complexity of love and sexuality with honest portraits of teenagers sneaking out on a winter evening ("She Pretends") and experienced lovers revealing secrets by firelight ("Salvage"). These poems are small confirmations that love signs its name on everyone who seeks it, and they reveal the difficulties women face on the journey to well-being and wholeness.

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