

Love Minus Love **by Wayne Holloway-Smith**



WAYNE HOLLOWAY-SMITH
LOVE MINUS LOVE

Wayne Holloway-Smith was born in Wiltshire and lives in London. His first book-length collection, *Alarum* (Bloodaxe Books, 2017) was a Poetry Book Society Wildcard Choice for Winter 2017, was shortlisted for the Roehampton Poetry Prize 2017 and the Seamus Heaney Centre for Poetry Prize for First Full Collection 2018, and longlisted for the 2019 Michael Murphy Memorial Prize for a distinctive first book of poetry. The final poem in the collection, 'Short', won the Geoffrey Dearmer Prize 2016. His book of poetry, *I CAN'T WAIT FOR THE WENDING*, was published by Test Centre Publications in 2018. He won The Poetry Society's National Poetry Competition 2018 for 'the posh mums are boxing in the square'.

Reviews

'I rejoice in Wayne Holloway-Smith's poems, and I miss them when I'm not reading them. *Love Minus Love* is a gorgeous painful classic of the Dead Dad genre, and the We Are All Meat genre and the Re-Building Mum genre. It is a beautiful tapestry-album of boy agony, wit and honesty, punctuated by devastating in-parentheses-bildungsromans. It's unforgettably brilliant.' (Max Porter)

'Exciting, excoriating, gorgeous, appalling, and eye-wateringly honest. Wayne Holloway-Smith's poems are blisteringly beautiful, and probe at a siege-like nucleus of familial harm. Histories of abuse, hurt and disease are confronted and dissected in all their messy, meaty complexity, but always with love, always with hope and a sweet, sweet tenderness. One of the truest poets writing today.' (Fiona Benson)

'*Love Minus Love* is perhaps best understood as a collective, albeit fragmented, verbalisation of this tormented poet's psyche, with many of its poems reading as snippets overheard from

a story already-in-the telling. Nonetheless, Holloway-Smith's guiding voice offers a substitute for the elusive authority figures of the poems themselves – if not through a fortitude of its own, then in its broad capacity for sympathy, and an ability to draw new strength from collective wisdom: “*everybody loves a comeback so*”. So, reading these poems, slowly, we bear witness to the beginnings of a reluctant pathway towards resolution. From behind gritted teeth, out of “the sun.../and my daughter laughing” the poet affords a genuine smile that, we believe, will see the tables turned on his personal tragedy: “I look silly doing it here goes/...everyone is dancing the rhythm is in me.” A heartfelt putting of pen to paper, it is best defined by a single, summative word: bravery.’ (Daniel Baksi, *The Arts Desk*)

let's get down to the boiled beef of it

let's get down to the boiled
beef of it let's get down to
the canned ham the corned
beef hash of it the pickled
herring the rump steak let's
get right down and inside the
black pudding the shepherd's
pie of this stuff let's tuck
right into the sausage and
mash the battered cod of it
the jar of mussels the pork
loin tender loin the liver and
onions of the thing let's dig
deep into the chicken and
chips the turkey thigh of
this business the sizzling
bacon the eggs of it *no foreign*
muck lamb shank gammon
you've got a screw loose my
father's face fastening and
unfastening around mouthfuls
of pheasant the game

[rip open my right lung and probably you'll find cig
ash butts a staunch inability to leave my dad behind
and something like a dirty great cow
getting roasted in all the heat]

what is sad is

what is sad is I wrote your name all over my jeans
keep the jeans keep the three-meat sandwich we ate
the rap song we made up together in a bedroom
at your house then mine with our parents getting
drunk downstairs and despising each other keep the
elderly woman we both wanted to be on her bike
riding her bike no hands keep the elderly woman
we saw cold and knocked down in the street circled
by an ambulance and an ambulance everything
zooming out and away from her keep the touching
when we touched our boy bodies in out-of-the-way
places in places that were out of the way keep those
David keep your alcoholic mum who left her family
to live on the streets keep the children who hate her
now the husband who did the washing up but also
slapped her in the face sometimes I'm sorry nothing
changed keep the woman throw away the husband
keep my own scar on my upper lip the weight loss
meat-based accelerating into the future

[canned laughter]

the posh mums are boxing in the square

the posh mums are boxing in the square
roughing each other up in a nice way
this is not the world into which I was born
so I'm changing it
I'm sinking deep into the past and dressing my own mum
in their blue spandexes
svelte black stripes from hip to hem
and husbands with better dispositions toward kindness
or at least I'm giving her new lungs
I'm giving her a best friend with no problems and both of them pads
some gloves to go at each other with in a nice way
I'm making it a warm day for them but also
I'm making it rain
the two of them dapping it out in long shadows
I'm watching her from the trees grow

strength in her thighs my mum
grow strength in her glutes my mum
her back taut upright
her knees
and watching her grow no bad thing in her stomach no tumour
her feet do not hurt to touch my mum she is hopping
sinews are happening
wiry arms developing their full reach
no bad thing explodes

sweat and not gradual death I'm cheering
no thing in her stomach no alcohol
no cigarettes with their crotonaldehyde let my dad keep those
no removal of her womb
- and I'm cheering her on in better condition

cheering she is learning to fight for her own body
in spandex her new life
and though there is no beef between them
if her friend is gaining the upper hand
I will call out from the trees

her name

Christine!

and when she turns as turn she must
my mum in the nicest possible way
can slug her right in the gut

Discussion Ideas

- How is your appetite after reading 'let's get down to the boiled beef of it'? What conversations might be taking place at the dinner table between this poem's father and child?
- Can it be true that the mugging in 'what is sad is' is an intimacy, or some sort of relief from troubling circumstances? How could that be?
- What role does niceness play in 'the posh mums are boxing in the square'?
- This poem won the 2018 National Poetry Competition. Judge Kei Miller said of it 'It seems unfair at times that poetry, one of the chief articulators of our deepest sentiments, should be required in the same breath to avoid sentimentality. But when you see it done, as it is done so well in 'The posh mums are boxing in the square' it takes your breath away – a mother reimaged into life, risen from her bed and given boxing gloves to fight off a terrible illness. The title and the set up are so wonderfully absurd, we are led smiling into a poem that hits us in our own gut with its devastating gravitas.' What do you think about the poem's sentiment?

- The contents page of *Love Minus Love* reads 'Love Minus Love – 9 / Notes – 63'. Are these separate poems or is this one long verse novel?

Other books by Wayne Holloway-Smith

I CAN'T WAIT FOR THE WENDING (Test Centre Publications, 2018)

Alarum (Bloodaxe Books, 2017)

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Wayne Holloway-Smith online

<https://www.liverpool.ac.uk/new-and-international-writing/poetry-class/holloway-smith/>