



Garments Against Women

Anne Boyer

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Garments Against Women is a book of mostly lyric prose about the conditions that make literature almost impossible. It holds a life story without a life, a lie spread across low-rent apartment complexes, dreamscapes, and information networks, tangled in chronology, landing in a heap of the future impossible. Available forms—like garments and literature—are made of the materials of history, of the hours of women's and children's lives, but they are mostly inadequate to the dimension, motion, and irregularity of what they contain. It's a book about seeking to find the forms in which to think the thoughts necessary to survival, then about seeking to find the forms necessary to survive survival and survival's requisite thoughts.

“Here Anne Boyer accounts for a form of life—form of life of a woman in this century living in Kansas City apartment complexes or duplexes with names like The Kingman or Colonial Gardens, form of life of a low-rent, cake-baking intellectual parenting a Socratic daughter, form of life of a person whose body refuses to become information or pornography, which are the same. These are the confessions of Anne Boyer, a political thinker who takes notes and invents movements, social and prosodic. Ta gueule, Rousseau.” —Lisa Robertson

Anne Boyer Artist Statement:

I read a lot, old works and new ones, but there were so many books that I couldn't find. These were the books that should have contained an answer to the problem—how do we survive our survival? If a work of literature approached an answer, the answer was bent, aseptic, obscured, distorted into sentimental accounts, melodrama, or pornography by literary convention established to make knowing what we needed to impossible.

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Sometimes the answer was deformed by the failure of survival itself—there were texts severed by their author's severed lives, by madness, by social isolation, by early death or a long life passed always wanting it. Literature, like garments, had so often been against so many of us, enforcing and sustaining the hostilities of a world with the unequal distribution of resources and the corresponding unequal distribution of suffering.

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The libraries I needed were full of works written by ghosts of the dead so common their graves lacked stones, the literature of those humans whose names were never their own, whose names were mostly said aloud so that someone might make a command of them, whose names were never used as the mark of their own property—what was it they had known? How did the great human majority—women and girls, those without property, the poor and the workers and enslaved people—resist? In what forms, what languages, what codes were their poems? What possibilities inhabited their thinking, their philosophies, their politics? What names would they be called if they could choose their own?

During much of the time Garments Against Women was being written, I wanted to stop writing. I wanted to

stop wanting and needing to write. This was so that my daughter and I could better survive; this was also because of my disappointment with literature.

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But Garments Against Women exists because I failed. I failed to find the literature I needed, so I had to try to write it down. I failed, also, at refusal, failed at failing, failed at self-negating, failed at being ruined despite all that would ruin us, failed at keeping survival bare, failed at obeying history's prohibitions, failed at being intimidated by the centuries of hostile traditions. What I failed at was not writing despite all the conditions that had been relentlessly calibrated to keep not writing sustained.

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Some of us write because there are problems to be solved. My life is different than it was when I wrote Garments Against Women, but there's still a problem: the world as we know it remains the world.

Garments Against Women Details

Date : Published March 16th 2015 by Ahsahta Press (first published March 15th 2015)

ISBN : 9781934103593

Author : Anne Boyer

Format : Paperback 90 pages

Genre : Poetry, Nonfiction, Feminism, Autobiography, Memoir, Writing, Essays

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From Reader Review Garments Against Women for online ebook

Jaredjosephjaredjoseph harveyharvey says

This book would be a book also about the history of literature and literature's uses against women, also against literature and for it, also against shopping and for it[...]But who would publish this book and who, also, would shop for it? And how could it be literature if it is not coyly against literature, but sincerely against it, as it is also against ourselves?

Leonard says

A witty and original collection of writings that is quite interesting. Read the review in the New York Times for some more praise.

Nancy says

Brilliant.

Jerrod says

"The world of things so often barely perceptible. It's a condition. It can be diagnosed. To be precise, it is a condition called an entire city built on a city built on a city built on a city built on a city built on a city. It is a condition called "infinite sedimentary monument not to cities but to sediment itself." But it is a condition: that is, it is a set of unstable foundations, holes, tunnels, passageways from one strata to the next. And in the strata, not ruin, but the war before it. And every movement is a movement upward rather than the settling. What moves up?"

Life is Stockholm (Syndrome).

It is the product of infinitely recursive conditions.

Work is what happens in these conditions. Not-work is what happens in these conditions.

Boyer shows how we fear imagination not because of its impotence, but because of its power.

To acknowledge the conditions, to give them language, is to feel (the conditions)

What is parenthetical are the realities, the instructions for acknowledging we are trapped.

A great book about how avoiding thinking about constraint in its material & immaterial dimensions (which are inextricable) is the avoidance of conversing to power and the abnegation of (not justice) responsibility to our selves

We are (not) information

Labor Labor Labor

Andrea Lakly says

This slim and lovely book of poetry challenges what poetry is while examining how we make our lives. I especially loved the poem "What I'm Not Writing" all about the things she is not writing when she is not writing. Sounds like a great writing exercise!

Jasmin says

Ahhhhhhhhh so beautifully written and engages beautifully peripherally around inhabiting a body, and what surrounds our bodies, and the tension between that. Reading it caused me to sigh so much. Will reread again and again.

Kathleen says

"The flaneur is a poet is an agent free of purses, but a woman is not a woman without a strap over her shoulder or a clutch in her hand."

Kylie Q says

YES!!!!!!

Rob says

Beautifully written!

Sierra says

I really, really wanted to love this book, but I just didn't. I went to a reading that Anne Boyer did and when she was reading her work, I thought it sounded lyrical and pleasant to the ears. But when I was reading it myself, it just didn't make any sense to me. I kind of got the feeling that if I could just figure out what she was saying it would have been some kind of beautiful commentary on the state of things in the world, but honestly most of it just sounded like rambling nonsense to me. There were some quotes and some sections that I did like, but most of it I just couldn't understand. Anne Boyer is such a great person and I really wanted to like her book, but I just didn't.

Liz Howard says

"I was at the edge of cities. I was at the edge of economies. In those days some even accused me of googling my dreams.

I ignored the ordinary digital manners of those times."

Marta says

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Jeanne says

This little book is so hard to characterize...is it poetry? A lyrical essay? Definitely a musing on life, the condition of being a woman and an artist/thinker who works and does not work...I just know that I found myself at times laughing at loud and other times resonating deeply with the confusion, pain and loveliness of her language. Not like anything else I've ever read, which for me was part of the fun.

Megan says

I appreciated Boyer's syntactical play, but it was a collection I could only be read in short bursts. She has constructed a house that has no doors, only windows, and Boyer herself can only be seen through those windows as she goes from room to room with a faulty flashlight.

There are great, honest bursts of light, though: "I believed that if one came to poetry for solace one was fucked. I believed things would go on like this."

It is a good read, a dense read, a read that probably needs a re-read, at least for me.

Taylor says

2/26/18: This just grows more and more important to me every time I read it.

At Least Two Types of People by Anne Boyer

There are at least two types of people, the first for whom the ordinary worldliness is easy. The regular social routines and material cares are nothing too external to them and easily absorbed. They are not alien from the

creation and maintenance of the world, the world does not treat them as alien. And also, from them, the efforts toward the world, and to them, the fulfillment of the world's moderate desires, flow. They are effortless at eating, moving, arranging their arms as they sit or stand, being hired, being paid, cleaning up, spending, playing, mating. They are in an ease and comfort. The world is for the world and for them.

Then there are those over whom the events and opportunities of the everyday world wash over. There is rarely, in this second type, any easy kind of absorption. There is only a visible evidence of having been made of a difference substance, one that repels. Also, from them, it is almost impossible to give to the world what it will welcome or reward. For how does this second type hold their arms? Across their chest? Behind their back? And how do they find food to eat and then prepare this food? And how do they receive a check or endorse it? And what also of the difficulties of love or being loved, its expansiveness, the way it is used for markets and indentured moods?

And what is this second substance? And how does it come to have as one of its qualities the resistance to the world as it is? And also, what is the person made of the second substance? Is this a human or more or less than one? Where is the true impermeable community of the second human whose arms do not easily arrange themselves and for whom the salaries and weddings and garages do not come?

These are, perhaps, not two sorts of persons, but two kinds of fortune. The first is soft and regular. The second is a baffled kind, and magnetic only to the second substance, and made itself out of a different, second, substance, and having, at its end, a second, and almost blank-faced, reward.

Please, please read this collection. Will try and write about it, but I think I have too much to say to organize any of it.
