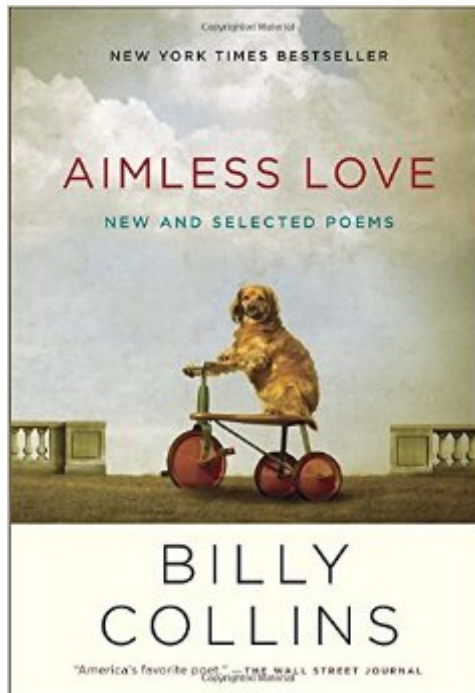


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Aimless Love: New And Selected Poems



Synopsis

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER • America's favorite poet. • "The Wall Street Journal From the two-term Poet Laureate of the United States Billy Collins comes his first volume of new and selected poems in twelve years. Aimless Love combines fifty new poems with generous selections from his four most recent books • Nine Horses, The Trouble with Poetry, Ballistics, and Horoscopes for the Dead. Collins's unmistakable voice, which brings together plain speech with imaginative surprise, is clearly heard on every page, reminding us how he has managed to enrich the tapestry of contemporary poetry and greatly expand its audience. His work is featured in top literary magazines such as The New Yorker, Poetry, and The Atlantic, and he sells out reading venues all across the country. Appearing regularly in The Best American Poetry series, his poems appeal to readers and live audiences far and wide and have been translated into more than a dozen languages. By turns playful, ironic, and serious, Collins's poetry captures the nuances of everyday life while leading the reader into zones of inspired wonder. In the poet's own words, he hopes that his poems • begin in Kansas and end in Oz. • Touching on the themes of love, loss, joy, and poetry itself, these poems showcase the best work of this • poet of plenitude, irony, and Augustan grace • (The New Yorker). Envoy • Go, little book, out of this house and into the world, • carriage made of paper rolling toward town bearing a single passenger beyond the reach of this jittery pen and far from the desk and the nosy gooseneck lamp. • It is time to decamp, put on a jacket and venture outside, time to be regarded by other eyes, bound to be held in foreign hands. • So off you go, infants of the brain, with a wave and some bits of fatherly advice: • stay out as late as you like, don't bother to call or write, and talk to as many strangers as you can. Praise for Aimless Love • [Billy Collins] is able, with precious few words, to make me cry. Or laugh out loud. He is a remarkable artist. To have such power in such an abbreviated form is deeply inspiring. • "J. J. Abrams, The New York Times Book Review • His work is poignant, straightforward, usually funny and imaginative, also nuanced and surprising. It bears repeated reading and reading aloud. • "The Plain Dealer • Collins has earned almost rock-star status. . . . He knows how to write layered, subtly witty poems that anyone can understand and appreciate • even those who don't normally like poetry. . . . The Collins in these pages is distinctive, evocative, and knows how to make the genre fresh and relevant. • "The Christian Science Monitor • Collins's new poems contain everything you've come to expect from a Billy Collins poem. They stand solidly on even ground, chiseled and unbreakable. Their phrasing is elegant, the humor is alive, and the speaker continues to stroll at his own pace through the plainness of American life. • "The Daily Beast • [Collins's] poetry presents simple

observations, which create a shared experience between Collins and his readers, while further revealing how he takes life's everyday humdrum experiences and makes them vibrant. "The Times Leader" From the Hardcover edition.

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Customer Reviews

Former US Poet Laureate Billy Collins regularly reads to standing-room audiences, and reading his poems, it's not hard to see why. They reward multiple levels of interpretation, unpack hidden implications in seemingly undistinguished moments, and wink sly humor at playfully receptive readers. But there's a moment in this collection where a switch flips unexpectedly. This produces a book that starts strong, but ends on a surprisingly flat, tired-sounding note. Collins' longtime readers know his familiar arc: an ordinary moment on an ordinary day triggers a Proustian connection, seemingly sudden but wholly consistent. Perhaps memory intrudes, or ruminations run wild--a quote from a writing text imbues a moment with unanticipated urgency, or an ancient photo in a modern building creates a discordance Collins can't easily reconcile. Sometimes he just starts thinking, and the results surprise even himself: "Writing in the Afterlife"...I had heard about the journey to the other side and the clink of the final coin in the leather purse of the man holding the oar, but how could anyone have guessed that as soon as we arrived we would be asked to describe the place and to include as much detail as possible--not just the water, he insists rather the oily, fathomless, rat-happy water, not simply the shackles, but the rusty, iron, ankle-shredding shackles... While scholarly poets vanish into themselves, equating incomprehensibility with depth, Collins recognizes

who reads his work. The baker doesn't bake the bread he wants to bake, but the bread his customers need to eat. No wonder, in a crowded poetry market, readers seek Collins out. Collins' poems have familiarity not in their outcomes, which persistently surprise even attentive readers. Rather, we relish the surprise as his words expose something distinctly novel in familiar circumstances. We anticipate being blindsided, and come to prognosticate: what will he do next? Thus he forces us to reexamine our own preconceptions, and turns us into poets ourselves. Could you have created "Divorce," which I quote in full: Once, two spoons in bed, now tined forks across a granite table and the knives they have hired. Yes, I suspect you could have created it if, like Collins, you have practiced thinking like a poet. Collins challenges us to circumvent our learned limitations and see moments anew. At his best, Collins opens our eyes, guides us through the labyrinth of our own minds, and returns us to the start, enlightened and ready to bring his lessons in poetic insight into our regular life. At his best. Sadly, like any of us, Billy Collins isn't always at his best. This book suffers moving into the "New Poems" section. Compiled for the first time, these poems lack the muscular through-line that defines his prior sections, and meander episodically. This last section, running nearly ninety pages, percolates with such Hail Mary passes as (gasp!) poems about poets and poetry. Seriously. He has a villanelle, titled "Villanelle," about writing a villanelle. MFA instructors work assiduously to stop students doing that. "Lines Written at Flying Point Beach" or at least in the general vicinity of Flying Point Beach, certainly closer than I normally am to that beach where the ocean crests the dunes at high tide spilling tons of new salt water into Mecox Bay, and probably closer to Flying Point Beach than you are right now or I happen to be as you read this. Not that he stops being good. Moments of insight penetrate, as in "Digging," about backyard artifacts unearthed, and histories imputed to them. But it becomes much harder to find such moments. Instead, he gives over to what many non-poetry readers disparage in contemporary poetry: formless prose broken into ragged, end-stopped lines. It reads like diary entries, like Collins stops pushing himself to that next level. It pains me to say this about one of my heroes, but at 72, Collins may be getting tired. Poetry's heightened aesthetic, its language inviting multiple interpretations, its intensively layered themes, demand time and energy. And Collins, who maintains a teaching and reading schedule that would deplete much younger men, maybe can't dedicate himself to writing like he once could. That would explain these later poems' rushed feel. I love Billy Collins, and I love most of this book. Like the best poets, when Collins succeeds, he could transform our world. But the more a poet risks, the bigger his potential disappointment. Let's just say, Collins writes more reliably than William Wordsworth; but if you read his work, recognize, not everything succeeds equally.

To me, a Billy Collins poem is like a box of Cracker Jacks: each has a familiar, "comfort food" flavor, but each also contains a little surprise by the end. I can't resist their ironic humor and plain-spoken style, and often they take me somewhere I didn't expect to land. This collection contains selections from his last four volumes of poetry, starting with *Nine Horses*, as well as 83 pages of new poems. Some believe that he "jumped the shark" with *Nine Horses*, but there are still some favorites to be found in these newer collected poems, like "Litany" and "The Lanyard". The brand-new poems have some gems as well, like the hilarious "Lesson for the Day" (in which he imagines Marianne Moore being run over by a steamroller!), "Here and There", and the moving 9/11 tribute "The Names". Collins is still a master of the *ars poetica*, as evidenced by poems like "Drinking Alone" (the epigraph "after Li Po" is in itself enough to elicit a chuckle from any experienced poet); "Irish Poetry", and "The Suggestion Box". Collins has acquired a bad rap for being too "popular" and "accessible" over the years, but he deserves credit for his visibility, his entertaining "stand-up" reading style, and his projects like "Poetry 180", all of which have helped make poetry enjoyable again for the average American. And I, for one, don't mind reading a poet who doesn't make me work too hard, yet presents me with often unexpected, even profound, rewards.

Since the release of his collection *Nine Horses* and the massive success Billy Collins has engendered, perhaps no other poet I'm aware of (except for John Ashbery) has caused such a stir within the poetry community. Some detest him as being poetry lite, like *Cool Whip* for the soul, and others see him as an accessible voice in an otherwise cryptic and elitist field filled with frauds who hide behind non sequiturs. I am in the middle. Genuinely engrossed by some of the poems in this collection ("Writing In the Afterlife") and not too excited or stimulated by others ("Foundling"), I think of Collins as a sort of everyman's poet who should be viewed as a primer for other sorts of poetry. Perhaps the best analogy: a warm, glowing anti-syllabus that is meant to push the reader forward. What I enjoy, sometimes, about his work is the simplicity: "Envoy" Go, little book, out of this house and into the world. carriage made of paper rolling toward town bearing a single passenger beyond the reach of this jittery pen and far from the desk and the nosy gooseneck lamp. It is time to decamp, put on a jacket and venture outside, time to be regarded by other eyes, bound to be held in foreign hands. So off you go, infants of the brain, with a wave and some bits of fatherly advice: stay out as late as you like, don't bother to call or write, and talk to as many strangers as you can. "While I won't say that this poem is going to change my life, I like it. It is sincere, has a certain purity to it, and the images come clear as some very thin air. If you like what Collins does, you do. If you don't, you don't. I say, read it if you like it.

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