

**The Language of Two**  
by Jean Flanagan  
(Finishing Line Press, 2026)

*reviewed by Lee Varon*

Jean Flanagan's latest collection of poetry "The Language of Two" brings us breathtaking poems of remembrance, loss, acceptance, and paying homage. Her finely crafted lyrics help us see how to live a rich and fulfilling life, despite intense moments of grief.

Several poems in the collection illuminate the lives of women lost to history such as Clover Adams, the wife of historian Henry Adams ("In the Shadow of Suicide") and in the title poem ("The Language of Two") which is written in the voice of Ada Lovelace, the daughter of poet Lord Byron. I had never heard that Ada was credited, by some, as the world's first computer programmer.



But it is Flanagan's deeply honest and moving personal poems that had the most lasting impression for me. These poems are rich with stunning and memorable details. "Your Letter Fell into the Trash" depicts a letter from a former lover mixed with trash, stained by mayonnaise—in which the only still legible phrase is: "I love you but—".

In "Ballad of Goodbye at Ardmore" the poet writes:

*"I hear you hum this old love song/ and wonder if you know the words/ of our first good-bye".*

Some of Flanagan's poems felt like an arrow piercing the heart: the exquisitely detailed images of a wedding that never took place in "Blue Wedding Dress" where the poet writes: "The dress was royal blue lace/ ankle length with diamond sequins./ Perfect for a second wedding" and then the poem goes on to tell us, "I was to wear it to St. Jerome's Chapel/ at the end of Lake Street/ for the mass." It is the specificity of this poem that makes it so heartbreaking as the narrator tells us exactly how the wedding would have taken place but never did.

In "My Sister's Foot" the poet begins jauntily: "I am obsessed with shoes, / smooth red suede heels/ 3 inches high. /Navy blue leather flats.../ Sandals with diamond and gold bling/ Sneakers for tennis. /I hate Mary Jane's/ the unsightly strap. No style there." But after this cheerful beginning, in the second paragraph we are suddenly gobsmacked by the lines: "My sister asks me to put a gold flat shoe/ on her titanium black mechanical foot." The shoe the narrator struggles to put on doesn't fit and she is forced to return it to the closet full of shoes her sister will never wear, "steps she'll never take."

Peppered among the many permutations of loss which Flanagan so

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masterfully portrays, there are transcendent poems of lightness and joy as in the three short stanzas of "I Am Startled by This Love." How beautifully the poet shows us her wonder and joy at new love: "as faithful as snow/ as curious as the hawk/ that lands on /the antenna across the way."

The Language of Two is available from Finishing Line Press, Amazon, and can be ordered from your local bookstore.