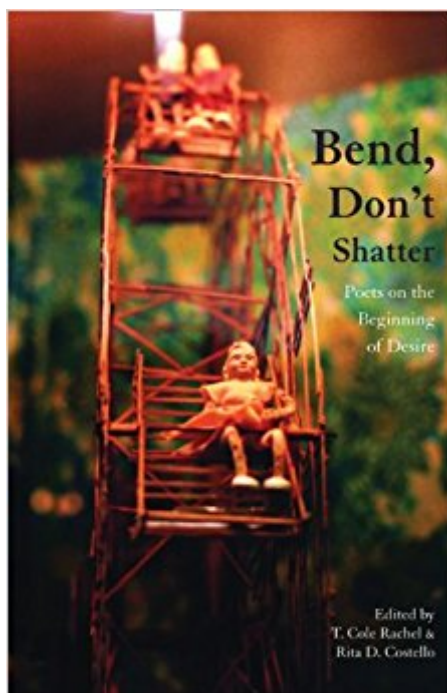


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Bend, Don't Shatter: Poets On The Beginning Of Desire



Synopsis

Bend Don't Shatter is an anthology of poetry for young adults that realistically and beautifully deals with what it means to come of age as gay, lesbian, transgender, or, as is perhaps more often the case in adolescence, totally confused. The anthology approaches the seemingly unnavigable territory of teenage sexuality and confusion with poems written by adults who keenly remember the turmoil, pain and excitement of adolescence and sexual coming of age. The poems are written with the insight and clarity of perspective and understanding that comes with years. The book shows that teenage sexuality is more nuanced and complicated than it is often given credit for. It is valuable in that it not only provides a service of sorts—giving young adults a thing with which they can identify, a thing that might comfort, console, explain, entertain, and illuminate—but also just as importantly, it brings the pleasures of poetry to an audience for whom poetry itself might seem as unfathomable as adulthood itself.

Book Information

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Best Sellers Rank: #2,307,757 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #94 in Books > Gay & Lesbian > Literature & Fiction > Poetry > Gay #3228 in Books > Literature & Fiction > Poetry > Anthologies #6777 in Books > Literature & Fiction > Poetry > Themes & Styles

Customer Reviews

Reviewed by Small Spiral Notebook: *Bend, Don't Shatter* is a joyous and heart-breaking collection of poems that examines the complexities of being a gay or lesbian teenager. The voices in these poems are heady with the strength of their newfound feelings, stark in their fear and pain, and beautiful in their depiction of first loves. There are experiences of shame and hurt in these stories, yes, but there is also hope. In "Playing for Love," Amanda R. Evans turns the language of tennis into a reflection on both the emptiness and the always electrifying chance of love: "love-love" / And still when I say it, the hollowness of that sound / comes back: love as zero, full of possibility, waiting

to be filled."No matter what your sexuality, there is no doubt you will hear the echoes of your own adolescence among these pages-who isn't confused about sex and desire as a teenager? For that matter, who has it all figured out as an adult? For many young people these poems will no doubt be a great comfort, a lifeline out of loneliness and isolation. So much of our young lives are spent struggling with the notion of what it means to be "normal." We want to fit in, but we want to be unique; we want to be "normal" but we know we are greater than that simple label. This book reminds us all of the important fact that there is no such thing-we are each of us great, complex, unique beings, and that is something to celebrate. To that end the collection captures a varied and vivid cacophony of queer voices and stories, defying stereotypes and honoring the terror and wonder of emerging sexuality. More than one poem makes reference to the butterfly as an appropriate symbol for this period of transformation from something unsure and unassuming into something fragile but miraculous.

T. Cole Rachel and Rita D. Costello (eds.) *Bend, Don't Shatter: Poets on the Beginning of Desire* (Red Rattle Press/Soft Skull Press, 2004)The most amazing thing about this collection is the folks they got to blurb it. The back cover contains high praise from poet Mark Doty ("These poems are for every young person who feels alone and full of longing...") and Academy of American Poets Associate Director Charles Flowers ("These poems find their power in a language forged by desire and survival..."). The introduction, by David Groff, promises that "The poems in *Bend, Don't Shatter* will pluck chords in you, chords so complex and resonant that you feel them in your spine. You'll hear truths so exact you can't explain them." I hear stuff like this and I expect to be blown away by what's between these covers.Honestly, I should have known better. The narrower the theme for an anthology, the more inconsistent the poetry therein is liable to be. An anthology of love poems puts you on pretty solid ground. An anthology of teen love poems (putting aside for the moment that the ratio of good teen love poems to bad teen love poems is smaller, perhaps, than any ratio of good to bad in the whole realm of art) is going to cause that ground to sift under you. When you constrict it to gay teen love poems, you're pretty much ensuring you're going to pull the rug out from under yourself. What do you think's going to happen when you confine it to poets writing about the inception of gay teen love?The reason for this is simple: the ratio of good poetry to bad poetry in the world is already so small that the restrictions are bound to find you swimming in mountains of bad poetry, while you may not find even a single piece that's actually poetic.

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