Code

an ode to Grace Murray Hopper 1906–88
maker of a computer compiler and verifier of COBOL

Poet to poet. I imagine you
at the edge of language, at the start of summer,
in Wolfeboro New Hampshire, writing code.
You have no sense of time. No sense of minutes even.
They cannot reach inside your world,
your grey workstation
with *when yet now never* and *once*.
You have missed the other seven.
This is the eighth day of creation.

The peacock has been made, the rivers stocked.
The rainbow has leaned down to clothe the trout.
The earth has found its pole, the moon its tides.
Atoms, energies have done their work,
have made the world, have finished it, have rested.
And we call this Creation. And you missed it.

The line of my horizon, solid blue
appears at last fifty years away
from your fastidious, exact patience.
The first sign that night will be day
is a stir of leaves in this Dublin suburb
and air and invertebrates and birds,
as the earth resorts again
to its explanations.
Its shadows. Its reflections. Its words.

You are west of me and in the past.
Dark falls. Light is somewhere else.
The fireflies come out above the lake.
You are compiling binaries and zeroes.
The given world is what you can translate.
And you divide the lesser from the greater.

Let there be language –
even if we use it differently:
I never made it timeless as you have.
I never made it numerate as you did.
And yet I use it here to imagine
how at your desk in the twilight
legend, history and myth of course,
are gathering in Wolfeboro New Hampshire,
as if to a memory. As if to a source.

Maker of the future, if the past
is fading from our view with the light
outside your window and the single file
of elements and animals, and all the facts
of origin and outcome, which will never find
their way to you or shelter in your syntax –

it makes no difference to us.
We are still human. There is still light
in my suburb and you are in my mind –
head bowed, old enough to be my mother –
writing code before the daylight goes.
I am writing at a screen as blue
as any hill, as any lake, composing this
to show you how the world begins again.
One word at a time.
One woman to another.

Eavan Boland. Originally published in *Against Love Poetry* (2001)