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Eavan Boland's career as a poet explored a multitude of topics ranging from motherhood to oppression. Her story as an Irish emigrant is told through different voices of her poems, and she tends to explore the Irish identity and challenge gender role norms of the twentieth century. Because of her determination to address the dissipation of Irish culture and challenge societal norms, Boland earned the title of "one of the foremost female voices in Irish literature" (Poetry Foundation). Her exploration of certain themes create a complex idea of what the identity of a twentieth century feminist Irish woman looks like.

Throughout her career, Boland made it evident that she was adamant about manifesting her perspective of the Irish identity through her poetry. Her life story as an Irish emigrant is uniquely portrayed throughout her various collections, and one piece that is particularly telling of her experiences is "Outside History." This poem explores the perspective of third and first person subjects. In summary, the piece discusses how there is always a group "outside history," and although this group may have been vital to understanding crucial aspects of cultural history, it is often too late when these outsiders are acknowledged. This specific third person party is alternatively referred to as "these stars" (Boland). These "stars" that the speaker is referring to are those who are seen as "outsiders, always" (Boland). Boland's choice of comparing these outsiders to stars creates a sense of immense physical distance between the audience and the subject, as stars are about as far "outside" as it gets. This is a really interesting comparison because as humans, we are constantly aware of the presence of stars and their energy, yet they are eternally outside of our atmosphere. We have no way to connect with stars, just as we have no way to physically connect with people from the past. As this poem creates distance between audience and subject, it simultaneously connects the speaker and the subjects with the use of first person perspective. The speaker mentions "our history," (Boland) likely

referencing the dark history of the Irish people that was filled with colonization, famine, and economic hardships. The tone of morbidity persists through the conclusion of the poem as the speaker states “and we are too late. We are always too / late” (Boland). Preceding these lines is “how slowly they die / as we kneel beside them” (Boland), another particularly dispirited line. A slow death in any case is unfortunate, and here, the speaker is referring to “they” once again, meaning the stars of those from history who have died. These concluding lines solidify the despondent tone, though it was evident throughout the poem.

Despite the overall negative tones that are present in “Outside History,” there is a bit of irony that prevails throughout the piece. That irony being the fact that Boland is placing herself *inside* history by writing this poem and by contributing to the literary world. She realizes that in the past, people have been “too late” to act on their role once it is realized, and she takes a stand by bringing this to light. Her words make her vulnerable, and still she chooses to write for those who couldn’t, for those whose stories will never be told. This courage is an important underlying piece of this poem, and it should not go unnoticed.

Eavan Boland created an identity for herself that surrounded reinventing the role of women in literature and smashing the patriarchy. She is quoted as saying, “In my generation, women went from being the objects of the Irish poem to being the authors of the Irish poem, and that was very disruptive in a literature that probably wasn’t prepared” (Boland). She makes a powerful statement here, noting that the once male-dominated field of poetry is evolving to include the female voice. “Mise Eire” is one piece that powerfully reflects this female voice and perspective that Boland tirelessly worked to represent. The speaker immediately states “I won’t go back to it —” (Boland) starting the piece with an ambiguous subject of “it.” This seemingly mysterious subject can be assumed to be the country of Ireland, as Boland considered herself “A Woman Without A Country,” according to one of her collection’s names. Her refusal to return to Ireland is based on the irreversible cultural changes that the country has undergone. The speaker insists that the country of Ireland that

she once knew is a “scalded memory” where “time is time past. / A palsy of regrets” (Boland.) The woman narrator here, “a sloven’s mix,” refuses to return to her country of origin due to unpopular cultural amendments. The speaker’s disheartened attitude towards her home country contributes to how the role of women in literature shifts with Boland’s poetry — women are stereotypically docile and delicate, but Boland challenges that notion with strong feminine narrators who are prepared to speak out against what they find uncomfortable or unjust.

Language is largely significant in “Mise Eire,” the title is written in what is now a mostly dead language, but was once a rich part of Irish culture. There is an underlying tone of anguish in “Mise Eire”, making the title appear as a play on words when read aloud in English, sounding like “misery.” The title translates to “I am Ireland” in Gaelic, a tongue that Ireland has mostly lost due to colonization. Language is undeniably a crucial aspect of culture, and upon taking that away, one’s heritage suffers an irrecoverable loss. The poem states “a new language / is a kind of scar / and heals after a while / into a passable imitation / of what went before” (Boland). This comparison of a new language to a scar is notable because it accurately portrays the sense of hurt that the speaker feels after losing something so vital to the country’s culture. The idea of the original language becoming “a passable imitation / of what went before” (Boland) implies that the way that Gaelic is used now is inauthentic and cannot possibly accurately represent the rich history and heritage of the Irish people.

Ireland’s rich history is deserving of diverse representation, and Eavan Boland provides that as a female Irish emigrant. She pursues writing poetry knowingly at a disadvantage, not being a man, and is largely successful because of the unique perspective she is able to provide. Her determination to tell her story is rewarded with world-renowned poetry that represents the experience of Irish emigrants while simultaneously shedding light on the lost history of Ireland.

Works Cited

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