



Object Lessons: The Life of the Woman and the Poet in Our Time

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Eavan Boland beautifully uncovers the powerful drama of how these lives affect one another; how the tradition of womanhood and the historic vocation of the poet act as revealing illuminations of the other.

Object Lessons: The Life of the Woman and the Poet in Our Time Details

Date : Published July 17th 1996 by W. W. Norton Company (first published 1995)

ISBN : 9780393314373

Author : Eavan Boland

Format : Paperback 272 pages

Genre : Poetry, Autobiography, Memoir, European Literature, Irish Literature, Feminism, Nonfiction, Womens

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From Reader Review Object Lessons: The Life of the Woman and the Poet in Our Time for online ebook

heather says

A stunning look at the experience of an Irish woman poet that simultaneously examines the human quest for identity, the complications of nationhood, and the limits of language. One of those life-changing books for me...read at exactly the right moment.

Paul says

A poets biographical journey of how she came to find her poetic voice within the context of her own experiences as a woman, being Irish, an immigrant, and an object within the male Irish poetic tradition.

Even non-poets who enjoy biography will find her perspectives intriguing as we all struggle to find our way, especially artists, within the prevailing norms.

Cynthia says

This is a luminous book about women poets. I liken it to "The Artist as a Young Man" and also love her poetry. The only drawback is that you need to be very familiar with Irish history. Nation, heritage, womanhood, and poetry is seamlessly interweaved and there are often no handy gloss of a certain historical event. Even so, an intelligent reader can gather what they need from context and enjoy the book.

Kate says

I did it! This was very slow going for me. It had the tendency to be quite repetitive (which I believe the author is well aware of as she mentions that she will come back to the same moments frequently early on in the book). There is a complexity in the writing that meant I had to read carefully, and oftentimes more than once through. However, there were countless illuminating and magnificent passages, containing nuanced and impressive images and ideas. Much of the writing is absolutely five-star quality, but certain parts were quite dense (or perhaps beyond my reach intellectually) and detracted somewhat from my full enjoyment of this book.

Antonio Delgado says

Arguably, Boland's text is one the best ever writing on the poetical experience. She challenges the traditional scope of what is to be a poet, and the poet's place in history. Noticing that these two are defined by patriarchal notions, Boland turns down the veil and lets the lights go through.

Skye says

I absolutely devoured this book. I met Eavan Boland at an event at Boston College last year, and when my friend gave me this book, I figured I'd pick it up here and there, reading a chapter when I felt in the mood. I was wrong! The book sweeps you along so quickly and I underlined constantly, because there were so many powerful quotes. I especially loved the section on what it is like to learn Latin as a woman, since women were excluded from Latin literature. Since I teach Latin, I was moved by the description of her mastering Latin grammar and seeing the power of language. This is a must-read for any poet, and a must-buy for any friend. I usually go through my library when I move, giving away books which I don't feel like lugging from place to place. Something tells me this one is going to make it into the "keep" pile every time.

Denise says

Eavan Boland spoke my mind and my feelings as she described the inner struggles of her two paths in life. I began this book sitting in a Irish lit class, and kept looking around the room to see if others felt that shocking sense of connection. Ever since that day, I am a huge Eavan Boland fan.

Vicki says

"But already I knew--from a few mysterious moments of writing--something about form. Already I sensed that real form--the sort that made time turn and wander when you read a poem--came from a powerful meeting between a hidden life and a hidden chance in language. If they found each other, then each could come out of hiding" (Boland 116).

Julia says

Funnily enough, I don't particularly care for several of the poems that Boland is most famous for. However, this is one of those rare cases where the quotes on the outside of the book from reviewers are spot on...in particular, the one that mentioned "its serpentine strategy of memoir lifted into epiphany." How true! Take the care poets give to each word in a poem, and multiply that into a novel. Some of the prose is just fantastically beautiful. Of course, Boland's struggles with reconciling her gender's history as the object of Irish poetry with her own attempts to create new poetic objects is also incredibly interesting from a feminist standpoint. It always makes me hopeful to read about intelligent women who truly own their feminisms.

Less stars because, sometimes, it is a little slow. I wished the parts where I felt absolutely engrossed in the beauty of her musings were closer together via some careful editing. Still, if you have any interest in feminism, poetry, or Ireland, a thought-provoking read.

Lis says

This was veeeeery slow but most likely worth it because of all of the wisdom she's able to impart. I just wish that there was less time spent describing eeeverrythinggg about Ireland that she sees.

Sandra says

I finally found someone who articulates how confused I used to feel as a young girl trying to relate to the history of my country--sexuality got in the way. I also appreciate that Boland discusses how one might struggle with the inscription of one's self into a place when one, such as she, such as I, have moved away from and then back to a city, a region, a country, so that, at least speaking for myself, she feels she is in the place but not of it. This sense of location/dislocation comes across in a number of her poems.

Update: At last finished reading this book after a long hiatus; I bogged down on the difference between the public and the political poem in the essay "Subject Matters." After a period of grappling with the "I" in my own writing, a tendency to lose the "I" in the "we," I understand the difference relates to the issues of exerting personal authority and that might be more a struggle for women poets.

I feel this book of essays is a wonderfully unassuming and illustrative discussion of considerations for any poet who wishes to resist the objectification of their particular cohort by tradition, history, geography, or any other force that can be used to silence a voice.

Sonja says

I probably shouldn't call this a "read" book because I only read the first half and lightly skimmed over the second half. Poetry is not my cup of tea but this book is more like a memoir - or started out that way. I always find people's lives interesting - their families, how they grew up, etc. But the author kept reiterating all about her "nation, language, sexuality, womanhood" in about as many different ways as possible and, frankly, half of them were so convoluted that it left me in a fog. I got her point and could understand her position but being told that once or twice was enough. I'm sure she's very intelligent and does a good job at her craft but this book just wasn't for me.

Y.Z. says

It's doing something to me.

Catherine Ayres says

Amazing book

Cher says

Boland is one of my favorite poets of all time and reading this memoir is like reading an extended poem. She can't seem to escape her prose style but her story is one of haunting cultural displacement. I would really only use this in the upper high school grades as reading her prose can be a bit difficult plus many of her reflections are ones they could better identify with. I also would probably not use this in its entirety but instead find clips and segments to use for a more focused lesson plan. But as an adult reader I can clearly identify with her struggle to find her self in her new role as student, then writer, then wife, then mother, and finally as a writer/mother/wife combination. Her search for individuality as a young woman is a universal experience yet Boland is able to provide fascinating insight into displacement from Ireland and its tumultuous past. And in her writer capacity she searched for her own voice, one that reflects and rejoices domesticity and suburban life, a voice that is female, not objectifying the body, utilizing it as a symbol or monicker but representing her mind, body and soul.

Julie Christine says

[O]ver a relatively short time--certainly no more than a generation or two--women have moved from being the subjects and objects of Irish poems to being the authors of them. It is a momentous transit. It is also a disruptive one. . . . What is more, such a transit . . . is almost invisible to the naked eye. Critics may well miss it or map it inaccurately.

Eavan Boland crafts a luminous memoir in the form of literary criticism, examining the coming-of-age of an Irish woman poet. Beginning with the lonely, anonymous death of her maternal grandmother in a Dublin hospital at the age of thirty-one, Boland shows the silenced, the struggling, and finally, the emerging voice of the Irish woman. *Object Lessons* is a meditation on identity: what it means to be Irish, a notion Boland feels she missed, living her early childhood in London and New York, the daughter of a diplomat; what it means to be a poet, a calling Boland felt early, yet explored as an intellectual pursuit, rather than an emotional one; and what it means to be a woman, which becomes this book's ellipses.

Boland was born into post-war Ireland, came of age in the paradigm-shifting 60s, and found herself a young wife and mother during Ireland's violent, turbulent 70s. Throughout it all, she circles in and around her national, artistic, and sexual identities, working to bring them together and give them voice through her poetry. She challenges the myth of the Irish poet and the objectification of the Irish woman as symbol of national identity, reduced to the role of crone or angel.

Although *Object Lessons* is very specifically about the Irish cultural, political and domestic experience, it is a graceful treatise on poetry and feminism. She opens the door to the poets who influenced her thought, including Paula Meehan, Adrienne Rich, and Sylvia Plath, and speaks with quiet authority about form and theme.

The more I thought about it, the more uneasy I became. The wrath and grief of Irish history seemed to me, as it did to many, one of our true possessions. Women were part of that wrath,

had endured that grief. It seemed to me a species of human insult that at the end of all, in certain Irish poems, they should become elements of style rather than aspects of truth.

Having so recently read Lyndall Gordon's excellent *Vindication: A Life of Mary Wollstonecraft* and of course, Virginia Woolf's incomparable *A Room of One's Own* I believe Boland's comment could extend to nearly any society at any age, including the present. And poetry could extend to prose, to politics, to the family.

Eavan Boland's clear and lovely poetic voice translates well into her essay prose. This was a inspiring, perceptive read.

Rebecca says

Interesting for its first person perspective and historical importance (women finding their voice in a male-dominated poetry market), but not a page-turner. I wish the prose was more gripping. I wanted to like this book a lot more than I actually did.

Sara Lamers says

This is more nonfiction (craft theory) than memoir, but it reads like a poem.

Holly says

Prose in poetry...each word of this was poetry. A reflection on nationhood, history (my favorite part) and her connection to it as an Irish woman and poet. Reading this was similar to looking at photos of the past, the countryside, or a study of close-up portraits of faces from the past. Going to dive into her poetry next.

Yvonne says

With her trademark adept use of language and metaphor, Boland presents a series of prose pieces meditating on her own development into one of the major poets writing in English. Famous both for her talent and her courage in confronting the male literary establishment in Ireland (and the English speaking world at large), Boland's work is an essential read for any writer or student of writing in English.
