Personal Responce to the poetry of Eavan Boland

Eavan Boland is my favourite modern poet. There are many reasons for my positive response to her poems. What I love about Boland’s work is how revolutionary it is. Jody Allen Randolph, the American critic, once said that Boland “*single-handedly challenged what was a heavily male-dominated profession*”. What really appeals to me about Boland’s work is how she offers me fresh insight on old topics. In particular I like her reflections on love and relationships, the polemical/political dimension to her work and also the unique voice she has in Irish poetry: lending fresh input on old Irish topics, such as the Famine. Although I thoroughly enjoy Boland’s diverse range of themes, it is also the way in which she presents these themes to the reader which appeals to me. I find her poetry has an evocative, warm and lyrical quality with an impressing economy of language. I love how she uses banalities as symbols for emotions and ideas that otherwise would be completely ineffable. I also find her poetry contains suspense and tension of the best narrative.

Boland’s reflection on relationships is one of my favourite aspects of her poetry. In the poem “*Love”,* Boland chronicles the deep elemental love between her and her husband, Kevin. This poem is incredibly personal: “*I am your wife” “I see you as a hero in a text” “We love each other*”. This poem really has an impact on me. When I read it, I really couldn’t get over its power. Boland really emphasises the deep, elemental and transcendent love between them: “*It offered us ascension*”. I find these lines incredibly powerful. In “Object Lessons” Boland says “*when you write about love, you begin by writing about people and end up writing about time*”. The poems beauty in my view is augmented by how Boland blends tenses in this poem. She uses the present “*Dark falls*”, the past: “*love had*”, past participles which can act also as adjectives “*touched*” and the future “*Will we ever love so intensely again*”. I believe this aspect of Boland’s “Love” creates a beautiful and transcendent poem which is, in my view among Boland’s best. Also in “The *Pomegranete”*, Boland shares another deeply personal relationship, the story of “a daughter”. However, what I really love in this poem is how Boland takes a personal relationship and lends it universal relevance by employing icons of youth culture *“her can of coke”, “teen magazines”.*

W.H. Auden once praised Adrienne Rich for poems that “speak *quietly but do not mumble*”. However, in my view, this quote would be truer of Boland’s work. I just love how Boland writes poetry with a political flavour. I think “*The War Horse*” is a prime example of this trait. In this dual-narrative, Boland charts the journey of a horse which escaped “*from the tinker camp on the Enniskerry Road*” However, I am led to believe the underlying current in this poem is a reflection on the apathy and almost disinterest of people in the Republic to the “*Troubles”* in the North. “*Neighbourhoods use the subterfuge of curtains”, “only a leaf of our laurel hedge is torn*”. This is one of the key aspects of Boland’s poetry for me. Boland writes poems that speak, speak without shouting.

Boland’s voice really makes me listen. The message in “*The Famine Road*” really interests and horrifies me. Although there has been a myriad of poems and a wealth of literature produced on this topic, Boland gives a different view on this issue. Boland takes two situations in this poem and junxtaposes them marvellously. One deals with the flippant attitude of the English oppressors: “*These Irish/ Give them no coins at all”, “could they not blood their knuckles on rock, suck April hailstones for water and for food?”.* I find this poem shocking. It is also a unique perspective on the Irish situation. Another detail here which haunts my memory is “*I saw bones out of my carriage window*”. However, the most shocking image in the poem occurs when Boland writes “*Each eyed, as if at a corner butcher, the other’s buttock”*. This, in my view, amounts almost to a Swiftian allusion and really highlights the horror of this incredibly clever poem. If I was to make one cricism of this poem it would be that the shift in tone which is symbolized by italicised stanzas is perhaps too forced, too obvious. However, this didn’t detract from or diminish in any way my enjoyment of the poem.

Although I can engage easily with Boland’s themes, it is also her unique craft that has am impact on me. One of the reasons Boland’s poems appeal to me is their warm, lyrical and evocative quality. This, I feel is best illustrated in Boland’s fantastic lyric, “*This Moment*” which is in fact my favourite Boland poem of all time. I just love how evocative the opening is: *“A Neighbourhood. /At Dusk*. ”. My favourite image would have to be the warm image of domestic life that Boland presents: “*One tree is black / One window is as yellow as butter*”. There is in my opinion a wonderful, lyrical quality to this image which renders it one of the most quotable of Boland’s poetry. “*Love*” appeals to me on a similar level. The opening lines are for me, astonishing for the sheer economy of language “*Dark falls on this mid western town, Dusk has hidden the bridge*”. These lines have the effect of brining me into the word of the poem, into Boland’s world. This is why Eavan Boland is my favourite modern poet,

I also feel that there is a universal appeal to Boland’s work because of her use of banalities to lend a distinct relevance to her own personal concerns and experiences. Boland makes excellent use of symbol in “*The Black Lace Fan My Mother Gave Me*”. Boland views the fan as a manifestation of the love between her parents: “*It was stifling*”. Boland once noted in “*Object Lessons*” that “*Ordinary Objects seemed to remind (Boland) that although the body may share this world, it does not own it”.* The description of the fan is wonderful “*These are wild roses, appliquéd on silk by hand /darkly picked, stiched boldy, quickly*”. The detail here is unbelievable. This is why Boland’s poetry is special to me: her ability to describe objects and to invest them with universal relevance and significance.

Finally I love Boland’s poetry for its suspense and tension. It has a unique narrative quality which renders it unforgettable in my view. The ending of “*The Pommegranete*” is brilliant for these reasons. “A*nd to her lips/ I will say nothing*” This caesura is absolutely wonderful for its tension and suspense. In fact, in this context I believe this particular poem to be the best narrative poem on my course. “*The only story I have ever loved / is the story of a daughter lost in hell”, “I can enter it anywhere” ”If I defer the grief, I will diminish the gift*”. Boland here comments on her role as a mother and I believe it is the honesty at the core of the poem that speaks to me. It is wonderful for its suspense and tension and really in my view is an epithet for the beauty of Boland.

In conclusion, Eavan Boland’s poetry appeals to me for a plethora of different reasons: It’s reflections on relationships and love, its fresh voice and its polemical/ political dimension appeal to me. Boland presents wonderfully evocative poems which really speak to me. I feel there is an economy ion her language. I really enjoy how Boland invests small objects with significance and finally, most of all, I love how Boland writes poems which contain the suspense and tension of the best narrative. I find her narrative enthralling. If I was to sum up what Boland’s poetry means to me, I would make use of that quote of Keats’ “*Poetry should be great and unobtrusive, a thing which enters into one’s soul, and does not startle or amaze itself with itself, but with it’s subject”.*

Posted by Admin at [9:05 AM](http://leavingcertnotes.blogspot.ie/2011/05/personal-responce-to-poetry-of-eavan.html)