



Villar-Argáiz, Pilar. Eavan Boland's Evolution As An Irish Woman Poet. An Outsider Within An Outsider's Culture. New York, Ontario, Wales UK: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2007. ISBN-13 978-0-7734-5383-8. 430 pp.

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In this book, Pilar Villar-Argáiz provides us with a thorough and detailed examination of Eavan Boland's poetry. For that, Villar-Argáiz mainly reappropriates theories of feminism and colonialism applied to her readings of the poet's writings. Given the importance of Eavan Boland, we can say that there is already a considerably qualitative amount of critical work on the poet's works, which has by and large taken into account mostly Boland's relevance in the realm of twentieth-century Irish poets, her dialogic position within an Irish literary tradition and her fundamental role as a woman writer in the reassessment of the female voice's importance. However, much of such criticism has left out that which Villar-Argáiz points out to: the association of a postcolonial, national context of production to that of the situation of being a woman. By bringing together such postcolonial critics, as well as critics of postcolonialism, that range from Albert Memmi, Avtar Brah, Edward Kamau Brathwaite, Frantz Fanon, Gayatri C.Spivak, Homi K.Bhabha, Jacques Derrida, Jody Allen-Randolph, Stuart Hall, among others, the author presents us the fundamental basis of reading poetry by means of its locality of enunciation, that is, how the poet's place of enunciation is constructed from the perspective of the reader.

In this sense, the book is divided into four sessions that outline both the approach to the poet's works and the presentation of her poetry by means of thematic and elocutionary positions assumed by the writer. In the "Introduction", Villar-Argáiz politically situates contemporary Irish women poets in the context of Ireland and its literary tradition. Furthermore, the critic argues and justifies the challenge of adequating American and European feminist aesthetics as well as theories of postcolonialism into the comprehension of the Irish literary contemporaneity. The cultural syncretism present in feminist and postcolonial approaches allows the critic to lead her readers into a hybrid, non-essentialist and non-fixed understanding of human beings as portrayed by the poet at issue in the book. The second chapter, "Boland's initial steps as a woman poet", provides us with a more particularized view of the writings of the poet in dialogue both with the Irish (male) tradition and with the contemporary artistic attempt to voice the feminine body. This is when Villar-Argáiz makes what seems to be contradictory statements about the poet, such as: "She prefers to make for herself a place among the well established (male) literary canon by adopting conventional features, rather than by

defying them, and so asserting herself as a female poet.” (2007. 33). Moreover, in this chapter, Villar-Argáiz gives us explanations on Boland’s connections with other Irish poets from William Butler Yeats to Derek Mahon, Brendan Kennelly Seamus Heaney and Patrick Kavanagh. The centre of conflict between nationalism and an Irish literary (male) tradition, following this latter’s steps, seem to create the poet’s own aesthetics. Therefore, the critic envisages Boland and the figure of the poet as a hero, apart from ordinary life, the poet as a pilgrim and her association with Nature. By the end of this chapter, we have a broad access to Boland’s complete works, by means of Villar-Argáiz’s comments on poems that metonymically represent Boland’s phases, as that of “The Winning of Etain”, the final, long poem in *New Territory*, which is the most well-known book.

The third part, “Boland’s Reaffirmation of Sexual Difference”, recuperates the previously mentioned, and apparent contradiction about belonging to a tradition and affirming oneself as a woman, speaking with a female voice and from a feminine perspective. The critic, once again embedded in French feminism and postcolonial theory, comments poems that mark Boland’s phase of female assertion that goes from the concern with anorexia to the matter of motherhood and writing, particularly in the book *In Her Own Image*.

“Boland’s artistic decolonization”, the fourth and last part of the book, is an entire work of inspiration itself for those who seek to look into an artist’s complete work from various thematic perspectives. This chapter is composed of a series of articles grouped in three sections – “A deconstruction of the poetic self”, “An ‘authentic’ Irish past which cannot be grasped” and “A more assertive ‘marginal’ writer?” – that reflect Villar-Argáiz’s main theme: decolonization. This passage is from where the reader can eventually reach a space closer to understanding the whole idea of hybridity, belonging, womanhood and poetry, with its origin in Ireland. All of the three instances of reading in this chapter are united by the aim to establish an understanding of how domination and subordination are drawn in Boland’s poetry, as well as of how the idea of elsewhere is a fundamental basis there. Villar-Argáiz manages to steer the reader into a full comprehension of how boundary crossings in contemporaneity are possible in the poetry of Eavan Boland. The conclusion reiterates such hybrid concepts of nationalism, womanhood and writing as both central leitmotifs for Boland, and tools by means of which the poet moves from marginality to centrality, without ever losing track of her origins.