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Think Piece: Voice of the People

When reading Rita Ann Higgins poems, I was reminded of the poems by Eavan Boland. Eavan Boland's poetry gave a voice to the ordinary woman, and Higgins poems seem to give a voice to a certain group of people as well. Though, where Boland's poems gives a voice to the everyday woman, Higgins poems seem to give a voice to the everyday person, recognizing the "unpretty" aspects of the average person's life. She provides a place for stories that haven't been heard in Irish poetry in the past.

Higgins' poems bring attention to the lives of "real" people in Ireland, people who are financially unstable, people who are in the working class, people who are abused, and many others. In her poem "Sunny Side Plucked," Higgins puts a spotlight on a everyday human problem: cheating. In this poem, two people meet at a market and the woman is told to be "very married," but the narrator says that she wanted to "scramble [the man's] eggs" and that the guy wanted to "pluck [her] chicken," implying that the two wanted to have intimate relations with each other (188). By the end of their conversation they have made "an agreement written by the eyes," solidifying their desire to have sex with one another (188). This poem is Higgins way of trying to bring everyday issues into the Irish poetic sphere. She does this in another one of her poems called "She is Not Afraid of Burglars." This poem is Higgins way of bringing domestic violence into Irish poetry. The poem starts off with a dog being trained by and obeying his master. The man uses a "cross voice" to train the dog, and it reports that he "forgets to leave his cross voice" behind when he goes home to his wife (190). Here it starts to become apparent that the man is most likely abusive to his wife, and as the poem goes on this becomes even more obvious. The wife claims that she "would never be afraid of burglars with [her] husband in the house" (191). She explains that when the dog disobeyed her husband, he "beat him across the head" (191). This is the reason, she says, she would not be afraid of burglars with her husband in the house. What this means is that her husband is the only one she has to be frightened of. Higgins digs even deeper into the people's suffering in her poem "Some People." In the poem, she describes how some people face hardships and "other people don't" (200). She gives examples of people who "know what it's like" to face being "called a cunt in front of their children," being "short on rent," and being "second class" among a numerous amount of other things (200). This poem seems to point out that people who don't have to experience these issues are probably people who don't have to face class issues and such that Higgins herself has faced, or it could be Higgins pointing out that people who haven't faced these issues have perpetuated keeping the people who "know what it's liked" out of Irish poetry.

Higgins uses poems of hers such as "Sunny Side Plucked," "She is Not Afraid of Burglars," and "Some People" to give a voice to the people who have been left out of Irish poetry: the average person. Higgins seems to be a poet that writes for and about everyday people and the challenges that they face.