There are several literary techniques Boland uses to portray multiple themes within her poem, *It’s a Women’s World*. The general tone and literary techniques however support the theme of feminism, and though other themes are present, this is the main one.

In the first two stanzas of the poem, Boland describes the historical context of her poem. Society’s view of women has “hardly changed”, and this immediately introduces the main theme of the poem. So what is the historical context of women in the Irish society? It is a love-suppress relationship. As she also mentions later in her poem, Boland describes how women are valued for keeping quiet and doing their household duties, and also implied in this is how they are important for sex. However, they are also valued for “what [they] forget”, which shows how they are suppressed by males. These examples are not from the first section of the poem, however, Boland uses a literary device to portray the same idea. The rhyme scheme of the stanzas is ABCA DEFD. This ‘partial rhyme’ indicates how at some points the relationship is positive, and at other times frictional.

Another idea Boland portrays in the first two stanzas of the poem her criticism of how the society is not likely to change. Stating “wheels are steadier” she is implying the technological advances in our society have not had an impact of this primitive social standard. She is disappointed by this and shows this by stating that we have “hardly changed” multiple times throughout the first two stanzas; “we’re the same”. This indicates the use of irony, as we, as humans, are getting smarter whilst our social view of women hasn’t changed. This irony is also seen in the title, where Boland states “It’s a Woman’s World”, whilst she is implying it is not. This supports the central theme of the poem. Another literary technique Boland uses in her poem is symbolism. The “flame” in the first two stanzas signifies the development of the technology and also the passion of mankind to move forward, and this again leads into the use of irony as it is contrasting how mankind (or should I say womenkind?) is moving forward in many areas, but is lagging behind regarding female social values.

In the poem, Boland conveys the theme that women are forgotten amidst their simple lifestyle. In lines 9 – 17 she uses the repetition of rhymes in the poem to emphasize
the repetitive life of a woman. This repetition also gives the reader a sense of the never changing lifestyle of women. Furthermore, the repetition of the word “left” gives the reader a feeling for the theme of the poem. The word “left” is usually related to forgetting things such as the “washing powder” or the “loaf”. From the line “the wash left wet”, the reader could infer that the women is the wash being left and forgotten by men. All of this encompasses the tone of the poem, which is misery. The reader, especially housewives, could relate to this miserable repetition of a simple, even boring lifestyle.

Men are portrayed to be at the top. This can be seen by Boland’s use of the word “milestone”. The word is given a verb form, which emphasizes the role of men, which is to command the woman. The rhyme of “oversights” and “lights” emphasizes how men view women. Men only choose to look at the mistakes that women make and women are forced to live by only having their mistakes noticed. Anything else they do is completely ignored.

Boland’s use of repetition and rhyme are the driving forces of emphasizing a woman’s role in a society dominated by men. It is also used to demonstrate the tone of misery. Women are made to suffer and be ignored. This directly translates into the society that Boland is living in. She, being a woman in a male dominated country, expresses her outrage at the situation.

The following ten lines from lines 18-28 highlight the inferior status of women in society through precise descriptions of their sufferings. This is achieved through the use of irony, metaphors and litotes. Lines 18 to 23 “we [women] are defined / by what we forget, // by what we never will be- / star gazers, / fire-eaters” explains how men identify women. Boland explains to the readers that women are remembered for what they forget and for what they'll never be. The word “star-gazers” is used to symbolize the profession of astronomers. Boland’s use of this word helps emphasize the dreamful tone from women who dream of a better role in society rather than being housewives. Additionally, the “risk taker” metaphor in the next line further suggests the dreamful tone that women yearn for. Lines 23 to 28 “It’s our alibi // for all time: / as far as history goes / we were never / on the scene of the crime” explains the insignificance of women in society. Boland emphasizes the inaccuracy of leaving
women off the historical record. She states that women are so insignificant in society that by being a woman, that itself is an alibi for a crime. They are almost non-existent, thus they are seen to be “never on the scene of the crime”. The phrase “for all time” and “as far as history goes” suggests that women have been oppressed since the beginning of time, showing Boland’s anger for the lack of change in the treatment of women.

From lines 25-41, the poem focuses on the exclusion of women throughout history, and more specifically Irish history. The tone of this section is bitter and angry, reflecting the women’s frustration for being excluded from important events due to their domestic responsibilities. The poet’s anger to women’s social limitations can be seen through lines 29-37. The poet writes about the exclusion of females in important events such as when “the king’s head/ gored its basket.” She also claims that women “were never /on the scene of crime,” which emphasizes the fact that women are always put aside and expected to attend their sole responsibility: domestic duties.

Techniques are evident everywhere in this particular part of the poem. For example, Boland uses juxtaposition. The use of this technique helps emphasize women’s frustration for being excluded. An example of the contrast is evident in lines 31 and 35, where Boland writes “gored its baskets” and “good soup”. This contrast expresses the self mocking by the poet because she is claiming that women are only important enough to make “good soup to appetize [their] gossip”. Another technique that is evident in this passage is the constant use of alliteration. The poet repetitively uses the “g” and “gr” sounds throughout her lines, which emphasizes the disgust on female treatment.

Lines 38-41 express the poet’s thoughts that nothing in history has changed to this day regarding the female role in society. Line 38 shows this clearly, when the poet writes “it is still the same.” Boland then talks about the future generations that will carry on with the exclusion of women. “Moth our children to the flame of hearth not history,” is the metaphor that Boland uses to claim that female children will be dangerously attracted to the maternal and domestic life style, represented by the hearth. To conclude, it is evident that the poet is upset about the unequal distribution of the roles and rights for women in society.
To what extent have the rights of women progressed over the course of humanity? Eavan Boland strives to answer this question with an emphatic no. Boland’s anger is conveyed within the last four stanzas over the injustice towards women and hopes to alleviate some of the oppression on women. To convey this anger she continues to figurative language, specifically metaphors and symbols.

Boland first wonders why there is still nothing to suggest the prejudice against women, as if this prejudice does not exist. This is elucidated when she obliquely writes, “All still no page / scores the low music / of our outrage”. We extrapolated this and deduced that the “low music” represents women. Boland justifies this because there is “still no music”, implying with strong exaggeration that women still have no opportunity to express their opinion and oppressive state. The connotations of “low music” sarcastically imply that women play nothing but a supporting role in society. They are not the melody; they cannot be heard completely, and therefore metaphorically they support men with their domestic roles. Finally the end rhyme of “page” and “outrage” accentuates her fury. This ceaseless gender inequality is further conveyed in the final three stanzas.

The final three stanzas suggest that there is very little progression concerning woman’s rights. In our contemporary world the layman may entirely disagree and this is because Boland suggests there is a large discrepancy between appearance and reality. While women may appear to have equal rights such as education and employment, however in reality they do not. She endeavors to clarify her argument with two examples of ordinary females. The first female, an astronomer, takes a break and “is merely getting a breath / of evening air”. While the second female returns to her home and thus her also to her conventional role within the domestic realm. The female acknowledged first is not there to satisfy her curiosity of the little known stars, instead as “[a]pparances / still reassure”, in reality the female does not desire to be there as evident with her yearning of “a breath / of evening air”. Boland incorporates fire in the second example. Fire, a leitmotif in this poem, symbolizes progress and technology. The same fire Prometheus stole from Zeus and allowed humanity to develop, is missing in the “woman’s world”. The second female is no “fire-eater”, instead she is the contrary: “frosty”. Thus Boland conveys that women are restricted
to being conservative.

Boland’s outrage of how little women have been opportune to develop is elucidated in many regions of our world today. Boland’s perspective may be biased and thus exaggerated to an extent because of her culture and upraising. The contemporary world has certainly progressed in terms of having equal rights for women, for example the current Indian President, Pratibha Patil, is female. However our world is still omnipresent with gender inequality as women are coerced into prostitution, marriage, curfew, and women in certain regions still have unequal rights in terms of education, freedom of speech, and employment. These reasons are why Bowland should acknowledge that the rights of women have progressed significantly, however not the apex and her expectations. Therefore in her perspective the world should have no “alibi”.