



## Lillian Boxfish Takes a Walk

*Kathleen Rooney*

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## **Lillian Boxfish Takes a Walk** Kathleen Rooney

It's the last day of 1984, and 85-year-old Lillian Boxfish is about to take a walk.

As she crosses the unpredictable landscape of a run-down Manhattan, a city anxious after an attack by a still-at-large subway vigilante, she encounters bartenders, bodega clerks, chauffeurs, security guards, bohemians, criminals, children, parents, and parents-to-be—in surprising moments of generosity and grace. As she strolls, Lillian recalls a long and eventful life that included a brief reign as the highest-paid advertising woman in America, cut short by marriage, motherhood, divorce, and a breakdown.

A love letter to city life--no matter how shiny or sleazy--**LILLIAN BOXFISH TAKES A WALK** by Kathleen Rooney paints a portrait of a remarkable woman across the canvas of a changing America: from the Jazz Age to the onset of the AIDS epidemic, from the Great Depression to the birth of hip-hop.

## **Lillian Boxfish Takes a Walk Details**

Date : Published January 17th 2017 by St. Martin's Press

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Author : Kathleen Rooney

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## From Reader Review Lillian Boxfish Takes a Walk for online ebook

### Brina says

Kathleen Rooney is a goodreads' friend of mine, and over the past few months I have noticed a number of other goodreads friends reading her debut novel, Lillian Boxfish Takes a Walk. I was drawn to the lovely cover and to the fact that Rooney lives in my home city of Chicago and that she has been named one of the city's up and coming writers during the past year. That the subject is an often forgotten pioneering woman reminiscing on the events in her life has been an added bonus. Reading about Lillian Boxfish's trip down memory lane has been an enjoyable experience that will stay with me for awhile.

Rooney's inspiration for Lillian Boxfish was the real life Margaret Fishback, an accomplished advertiser for Macy's as well as a poet during the 1930s. In this charming debut, the reader encounters the classy, octogenarian Boxfish as she sets out for a walk through Manhattan on New Year's Eve 1984. At each stop along the way, Boxfish reflects on milestones in her life, while sharing her charm with younger New Yorkers who she feels would benefit from her wisdom. We meet a melting pot of New Yorkers who Boxfish feels contribute to making the city a great place to live, while learning about the woman who was once a New York institution.

Boxfish and her best friend, illustrator Helen McGoldrick, attempted to break through the glass ceiling at Macy's long before women's rights picked up steam. Although these women helped make Macy's famous through their witty ads, when they worked, if a woman had a child, her career ended. Yet, Boxfish desired to keep working, and she freelanced at home during the baby boom era when most women were content as housewives. Her verse rivaled Ogden Nash and her volumes of poetry sold almost as well. By these respects, Boxfish was well ahead of her time.

The older Boxfish encounters ageism throughout her contemplative walk as well as in her memories about a taped public television appearance about the history of women in advertising. In both cases, Boxfish is initially disregarded as old until people get to know her better. Rooney has touched on a timely subject as many older citizens are viewed as feeble-minded despite having the wealth of a lifetime of knowledge to offer younger generations. Rooney's prose mirrors Boxfish's wit as she shares the wisdom of a lifetime during stops at New York landmarks such as Delmonicos, Chelsea Piers, Penn Station, and, of course, Macy's. Boxfish's charming story held me captivated as I read to its conclusion.

For a debut author, I found Kathleen Rooney's writing to be exquisite. I enjoyed reading about Lillian Boxfish as I uncovered the history behind trail blazing Margaret Fishback. Perhaps, as Rooney points out in her prose, most people can not appreciate Fishback's wit, but I found her poetry as well as the story she had to tell both humorous and intelligent. Lillian Boxfish merits a 4.5 star rating, and I look forward to reading Rooney's future work, whenever that may be.

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### Carol says

**The Hook** - Overwhelming praise from my GoodReads friend Elyse sent me quickly to Netgalley to request the e-galley of [Lillian Boxfish Takes A Walk](#). You may read Elyse's Review [here](#).

I cannot thank the author, Kathleen Rooney or St. Martin's Press enough for granting my early access to this book, which publishes January 17, 2017.

**The Line** - Per the publisher's request no part of the text may be quoted until the book is published. Paraphrasing a sentence that gave me pause for thought is one that states that you surely will lose what you love most when you are not ready to give it up.

**The Sinker** - Eighty-five year Lillian Boxfish takes a walk and quite the walk it is. As 1984 gets ready to roll over to 1985, Lillian's walk starts as a tour through familiar territory in her Manhattan neighborhood but quickly becomes something more as her steps take her on a journey of remembrance of career, life, love, family and friends. Kathleen Rooney has written a breath-taking novel that blends the prose and poetry of real life ad woman Margaret Fishback who worked for R.H. Macy's with the spirited, elderly Boxfish. Beautifully rendered *Lillian Boxfish Takes A Walk* is the perfect way to start the New Year out with hope.

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## Margitte says

### WHAT'S IN THE NAME?

Before I knew that this book was inspired by the true story of Margaret Fishback, I was wondering how the last name 'Boxfish'(and even Fishback for that matter) came about. It reminded me of the joke names chosen in the previous centuries when people were forced to choose a surname and many of them did it under great protest.

Names such as Obadiah Cockswinger and Chastity Goodtime resulted from it. Others were chosen for a different purpose and could easily be changed. For instance, Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, was originally named Sutton; when they acquired the Dudley lands and title, most family members began using Dudley as their surname.

Sometimes, if there were several Jeremys in the area and one was especially tall, short, red-haired, disabled, etc., or came originally from elsewhere, he might be called Jeremy Little, Jeremy Red, or Jeremy Bristol.

The sources from which names are derived are almost endless: nicknames, physical attributes, counties, trades, heraldic charges, and almost every object known to mankind. Tracing a family tree in practice involves looking at lists of these names - this is how we recognise our ancestors when we find them.

It was in the this context that I smiled at the last name Boxfish and Fishback. *Smile* is actually not accurate. I was first dumbfounded, then amazed, then laughing and then curious beyond belief! I could not imagine that someone with a name like that can become famous, but that's what Lily did and did so with aplomb. She effortlessly defied her mother and the world by turning the tables on the establishment.

### ABOUT THE BOOK

Lily Boxfish, an eighty-five-year old *grande dame* of the New York advertising world started a love affair with her newly adopted city, as a young unmarried woman, which lasted till the end of her days. By walking wherever she wanted to go, she embraced her 'new family' and home, as she regarded the city and its people. On New Years Eve of 1984, she donned her priced mink and riding boots and set off on a walk down memory lane, recalling her life in the city. She meets people on her way, visiting old haunts, and attended a party of young people, describing the city's old and changed ambiance.

This is not a biography. It is a novel in biographical form. I can't remember when was the last time I wanted

to jump up and down with excitement while making my way through the prose of a book. It happened from the very first words I encountered on my way through this tale. Apart from meeting a fiercely independent woman, a poet and ads-writer for Macy's, who made her way in a male-dominated society, often using creative ways to do so, it was also the love affair with a city that brought smiles and tears to my eyes. Her loyalty was unwavering; her love nonnegotiable; her humor original.

Like the city, she went through the good and bad times of a New York, where the inhabitants were much like the pigeons: *dirty and murmuring, greedy and abundant, flocking in a corpus of such shit and weight that one's feathers they may permanently deface or crush whatever they congregate on.* Her lunch poetry was her elegant way of screaming. Yet, so Lily believed, there was always this underbelly of brightness, hope and romance that played out everywhere, depending if you were willing to look for it. She was known as *the Girl Poet made flesh; ... the cool and composed sweetheart of the smart set.*

Lily was a scoffer at convention, cheery and bright when people during the Depression found repose in her prose. But then, when she ended up alone and recovering from a breakdown, she had her own demons to address. Her failed marriage; her relationship with her son; her husband's new wife, Julia, who was everything Lily did not aspire to, yet had to admit was doing the right things for her former husband, the only man she always loved. Her message to the world was undercut by all the things she wanted, all the people she had been. On this walk through New York on the last day of 1984, Lily was forced to take a ringside seat watching her own life and believes playing itself out down in the arena. And what a stack of memories waited in all the familiar places she visited that night!

Like Lily, her New York was everything but perfect, her slip was hanging out. But like Lily, her city had a sweetness, a grace and elegance which could never be passed by, or be forgotten, or ignored. Lily, and her deeply-admired abode, were larger than life itself.

I immediately compared this experience of New York in *Lillian Boxfish Takes a Walk* to a less digestible one in *Rise and Shine* written by Anna Quindlen, and closed Kathleen Rooney's book, due for publication in January 2017, with a dance in my step, a song in my heart. It was just that good!

Perfect in this genre. Historical fiction combined with biographical details. Just an amazing experience. I walked away a totally new person. My love for New York just became a genetic suspicion, and my status as a human pigeon completely, and happily, confirmed! A *joie de vivre* bubbled over in my soul.

My heartfelt thanks to Netgalley and St. Martin's Press for allowing me to accompany Lily on her walk on New Year's Eve 1984. It was a true privilege. Congratulations also to Kathleen Rooney for presenting Lily Boxfish through this eloquent tale to the world. It was done brilliantly.

(view spoiler)

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### **Elyse says**

THANK YOU \*St. Martin's Press\*!!!! A BIG TIME THANK YOU!!!! Had I not received their sweet email recommendation --- I may have missed this doozy-knock-out-smashing-whopper-pistol of a WONDERFUL novel!!!!

It's funny... I read most of this in bed -on my Kindle ebook - during the dark sleepy hours listening to the pouring rain outside my window, but I had never seen the book 'cover' until now. The cover perfectly captures the image of our leading lady. "Lillian Boxfish". Its exactly how I imagined her. Paul, my husband, says, "that's going to be me at age 85". I could only wish! (we do share a passion for walking). lol

I have such a soft spot for Lillian Boxfish and her storytelling, ha: THANK YOU, Kathleen Rooney! If I wrote all that I'd like to really say-- this review would be 10-20 pages long.

There are so many interesting and inspiring aspects about our main character,...that I find myself thinking about new possibilities in the ways I perceive myself and other people. Lillian was committed to living her life from truth, love, and joy. Her "physically impeccable" health-- in her 80's,-- in 1984, was a reflection of the way she lived!!!

Right from the start --this novel comes 'ALIVE'. Lillian sets the stage by sharing a memory from when she was 5 years old. (While reading this novel.....I went back to that beginning early memory - when she was still a child - before coming to New York and read it twice more). I could see her little mind in action --Lillian was not 'only' taking inspiration from two strong independent women who came before her: (Sadie who lead her to Manhattan.... and Phoebe who led her to poetry and advertising), it seemed to me...that Lillian was most happy when she didn't allow herself to be contaminated with other people's life agenda. Lillian was a woman who simply was committed to her own inner truth. There was a scene early in the book when she binged on a package of Oreo cookies. She noticed what she did... ( wasn't her most proud moment, but also not a big fricken deal either. I'm thinking... "wow...what lesson can I take from this?" I'm serious... "what lesson can I take from this scene"? Hell... I could write a book! Haha!!!!

Short point is: I'm sure Lillian did not binge on sugar daily, but at the same time, other than go for a walk to burn off a few of those calories -- only because it was New Years Eve and she was going to dinner in a few hours....she didn't beat herself up about it. Nor did I ever get the feeling that this woman assigned 'false cause' reasons

about anything. She wasn't a women to sit around to bitch and blame others or herself.

I loved her philosophical ways of looking at life: "things are the way they are". Criminals and muggers in the city? So be it! Didn't stop Lillian from walking!

I LOVE HER! I love her I love her!!!

We learn much about Lillian: her job with R. H. Macy's as the highest paid female writer in the advertising dept., her marriage to Max, ( he divorced her), her children and grandchildren, her poetry, her clothes ( she likes to think that she does not dress like a typical old woman), her lunchtime poems, ( people didn't always hate pigeons in the city), the spirited people she meets in the city, and the many places Lillian takes us while walking around New York a city!

I hope they make a movie of this book -- HAM IT UP GOOD TOO!!!

Oh... when I told Paul that my new heroine, \*Lillian Boxfish\*, once bought 25 "Helena Rubinstein Orange Fire lipsticks-- '25'.....BECAUSE she heard they were going to discontinue her favorite lipstick... Paul said, "sounds just like something I would do".

NOTE: I would not!!!! NOT LIPSTICK.....

But.... shhhh, I did once buy 10 pair of Dr. Scholl's wooden sandals... when they were on a 'sell-out' sale. I, too, heard they were being discontinued. I've been wearing these shoes since I was about 10 years old. I still love them. I now have a lifetime supply. So... I say... "enjoy your lifetime lipstick, Lillian Boxfish"!!!

Last....A WOMEN WHO WALKS..... is a woman after my own heart!!!! Walkers share a special love together -- in the same way readers do!

It's so damn REFRESHING to read a novel that inspires humanity!!

Totally enjoyable!!! Another years favorite!!!!!!

Thanks again, St. Martin's Press, Netgalley, and 'hats off' to Kathleen Rooney!!!!  
A readers Treat!!!!

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### **Diane S ? says**

Lillian at the age of eighty five takes a walk through Manhattan. As she walks she meets many people and remembers the past. Based on an actual person, Lillian has led an interesting life, loved, lost, and reached the pinnacle of success.

I really wish I could have loved this like some of my friends here did, not sure why I didn't. Maybe it was the tone that basically stayed the same throughout the novel or the fact that in many books in the past few years the elderly have walked with varying success. I did like seeing the history of New York City through her eyes and memories but since it is a place I have never been it wasn't enough. It is well written and future readers may enjoy this more than I did. I liked it but didn't love it.

ARC from Netgalley.

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### **Fabian says**

In a walk her life. Her entire life. No. Not Virginia Woolf, nor her formidable creation Clarissa Dalloway. Instead, this is a figure that's less oppressive, much more chipper. Though not any less literary & monolithic.

Never once in the company of this prolific, successful, mega charismatic woman do you feel betrayed--it contains the certainty of biography, with details so concrete & rich; you never fall out of her immediate orbit. She's irresistibly graceful & dignified to a fault.

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### **Karen says**

It's New Years Eve 1984, and 85 yr old Lillian Boxfish takes a long walk through Manhattan and reminisces about her life as a wife, mother, grandmother, and top paid advertising agent for Macy's in the 1930's. Her main destination is Delmonico's steakhouse where she last had a dinner with her dead ex husband Max, though she makes many stops along the way and comes in contact with many different people. Lillian has had quite a life, is a true lady and she loves to walk, walks everywhere, and says "I am not going

to stay off the street. Not when the street is the only thing that still consistently interests me, aside from maybe my son and my cat. The only place that feels vibrant and lively. Where things collide. Where future comes from."

This story is based on the true story of ad woman Margaret Fishback the highest-paid female advertising copywriter in the world during the 1930's.

This was more of a 3.5 read for me, but I love stories based in New York, hence the 4 star review.

Thank you for the ARC to Netgalley, St.Martins Press, and Kathleen Rooney

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### **Esil says**

3.5 stars. I liked a lot of things about Lillian Boxfish Takes a Walk, but I didn't love it. Lillian is 84 years old in 1984. It's New Year's Eve, and she's walking across Manhattan reminiscing about her life. In her prime, she was the highest paid female advertising copy writer and she was a poet. She had a failed marriage, a son she adores and a stint with serious mental health issues. Alternating chapters take us on different parts of her New Year's Eve walk and through her earlier years. Oddly, I enjoyed the late night walk through Manhattan most of all. Perhaps unrealistic, but it was fun to see Lillian speak so fearlessly to all the people she met on her walk, and to see Manhattan in the mid 1980s. Lillian's recollections of her earlier life were interesting, but felt a bit disjointed and incomplete. 84 year Lillian came into focus more sharply than the younger Lillian. Still, this makes for a good read and I expect many people will really enjoy it. Thanks to Netgalley and the publisher for an opportunity to read an advance copy.

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### **Carol says**

**REALLY enjoyed the journey! Thank you NetGalley and St. Martin's Press for the ARC.**

Alternating between past and present, Lillian Boxfish revisits her very interesting and long life via a five mile nostalgic trek thru The Big Apple as one year ends and another begins.

During the walk, we learn first and foremost that Lillian has a natural gift of gab with an ability to influence and negotiate with even the toughest of opponents. Determined to be a spinster for life, she has a strong work ethic and loves her job writing advertisements via poetry for R. H. Macy's more than anything in the world (*except for Phoebe the cat of course*) **and** until she makes purchase of an expensive carpet (*with her BIG salary*) getting the surprise of her life.

Lillian has no fear of the streets, not even the subway vigilante can deter her in the dark of night as she walks us through the Jazz and Depression eras, shares her trysts as a young woman, eats at a soup kitchen and stops by a speakeasy. She is helpful to those in need, unjudgemental, often generous and kind, and makes those who meet her feel good about themselves no matter what their station in life.

But all is not perfect in Lillian's world as she discovers a **shocking secret** that leads her to *finally* disclose to the reader the circumstances behind "*the incident*" that takes her away from her beloved streets and in a direction this reader did not see coming.

**LILLIAN BOXFISH TAKES A WALK** was a solid 4 Star read for me, my favorite stop being the do-over dinner at Delmonico's Restaurant that began with an act of kindness, continued on with interesting

conversation that made me laugh and ended giving Lillian a huge dose of just plain happiness.

Interesting to note that this remarkable character and memorable work of fiction that brings New York City to life is based, in part, on the life of Margaret Fishback, the highest paid female poet and advertising copywriter of the 1930's who actually worked for R. H. Macy's. Great read!

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## Iris P says

Lillian Boxfish Takes a Walk

★★★★★ 5 Lovely Stars!

*I received a free advance e-copy of this book from the publisher via NetGalley in exchange for an honest review, thank you!*

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For centuries poets have used walking as a conduit to meditate, drive inspiration and find a path to enlightenment. For 85 year-old Lillian Boxfish, the zany, clever protagonist of this novel, her years as a *walking poet* might be behind her, but she's still someone who has the energy to enjoy a good walk.

The year is 1984, Manhattan, New Year's Eve. As the last hours of the year elapse, Lillian takes a long 10-mile walk and brings us right along with her. While she encounters old acquaintances and makes new ones, she reminisces on her life, past and present. Observing the dramatic changes that have taken place in the city she has called home for more than 50 years, brings a certain level of nostalgia and sadness.

It wasn't until after I finished the novel that I realize that Kathleen Rooney's inspiration for this character was a real person. Like her fictional counterpart, Margaret Fishback was a poet and copywriter for R.H. Macys during the 1930's, becoming highly successful in both roles.

If poetry and advertisement sound to you like two incongruously ways to make a living, keep in mind that America in the 1930's & 40's is a different world, one in which there's a market for poetry. Lillian uses her light verse poems to tell stories that entice customers while at the same time promote what she calls her "*Girl Poet*" persona.

When we first meet Lillian, her son Johnny has been trying to convince her to come live in Maine, closer to him and her grand kids. He is concerned because New York is engulfed in a crime spree. In spite of this, she is determined to stay in the city she loves.

### **Kathleen Rooney - The Author (Photo: Joe Mazza/BraveLux)**

Lillian decries some of the changes society has been undergoing. Her complaints range from the fairly mundane (TV sets have now become staples in some of her favorite establishments), to the more consequential (the loss of civil discourse, what she sees as the lack of creativity in the advertising industry).

Criticisms notwithstanding, Lillian hasn't completely lost her ability to appreciate new cultural trends. In fact, she is fascinated by an emerging style of music called "*Rap*". This actually makes total sense since

there is a strong connection between the metric and rhyme schemes used by hip hop artists and poets, or as she remarks the rappers "*joyful mastery of language, its sounds and its rhythms*".

In alternating chapters, our protagonist recalls her highlights: the publication of her first book, meeting Max (the man she eventually marries), giving birth to her son. And her challenges: struggling to adjust to married life, (view spoiler). Throughout the novel, Rooney plants enough landmarks that help frame Lillian's memories within the proper historical context.

It seems to me that Lillian's secret to success had a lot to do with her ability to observe and read people well. I so appreciate how she makes a point of calling everyone she meets by their first name and takes time to really listen to what they have to say.

Watching a character grow old is so interesting because it underlines the fact that getting older doesn't erase the essence of who we are. That's why, experiencing Lillian's zest for life, her sense of curiosity and sharp mind, and seeing how consistent those traits remained throughout her life, was so very refreshing.

Rooney's writing is witty and illuminating and I admire her ability to write a novel so intimate that at times it almost reads like a memoir. Lillian Boxfish belongs in the canon of characters representing a generation of women so ahead of their times, they became feminist icons before that was even a thing.

Now, I must admit to possess a weak spot for charming old ladies, so perhaps I am bias here, but Lillian Boxfish, non-conformist, fiercely independent woman, scoffer of love, poet extraordinaire, it was splendid getting to know you, such a smart girl!!

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#### **Audio Book Review:**

I became a fan of Xe Sans listening to her narration of *Euphoria* and *The Diver's Clothes Lie Empty*. Sands seem to have found a niche narrating strong female characters.

After you've been listening to audiobooks for a while, you can tell when a narrator has done her homework and prepared well to perform a story rather than just "read" it. I think Sans's evocative, sultry voice was the perfect match for this novel. The conversation between the author and the narrator at the end of the audio, was a unexpected but wonderful bonus.

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#### **Liz says**

This book, told in Lillian's voice, is pitch perfect. It captures the times, the place and the woman perfectly. It just felt like I was right in Lillian's head. Lillian and I were born 50+ years apart, but so many of the issues were the same for both of us, like being one of the few women in our profession and fighting for equal pay. It also struck me that I'm reading this on Equal Pay Day in 2017, so some things still haven't changed.

But the message here is to enjoy life no matter what it throws at you. As Lillian says "...she had it backwards. It wasn't that happiness led to humor, but more that humor could lead, perhaps, to happiness - that an eye for the absurd could keep one active in one's despair, the opposite of depressed: static and passive." And it's not as if Lillian had an easy life. She has to quit her beloved job when she gets pregnant, suffers a breakdown and goes through a divorce. But she is a survivor.

I love that at age 85, Lillian is able to walk more miles than most women half her age. She is a strong character in so many ways. It lent a whole new level of appreciation when I learned Lillian was based on a real person, Margaret Fishback.

Highly recommend this book.

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### **Kathleen says**

I wrote it so I think it's pretty good.

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### **Will Byrnes says**

Arriving in a Roaring Twenty  
at a time of hope and plenty  
Full of vim and *joi de vivre*  
Aimed to stay and wouldn't leave

Lilly made her mark with Macy  
writing rhymes to make the case he  
needed to attract the shopper.  
Many tried, but none could top her.

Used her wit to publish books  
of poems with a jaundiced look  
At romance. And with each edition  
earned more cash and recognition.

A true and very public spinster  
'till a special guy convinced her  
She should wear his golden band.  
And risk some tarnish to her brand

The street provided inspiration  
all her eighty-plus duration  
As she walks this night we see  
a passage through *our* history

On New Year's Eve 1984, 84 year old Lillian Boxfish sets out from her Murray Hill apartment on a considerable walk. In stopping at various Manhattan spots over the course of the night, she encounters prompts to memory that span her lifetime, and a major chunk of the 20th century.

Lillian Boxfish, the character, is based on a real person, Margaret Fishback, whose career and life paths

Lillian mimics. Like Margaret, Lillian hails from Washington DC, arriving in 1900, came to NYC in her 20s, and became one of the premier ad writers in the country. She penned several books of verse that earned her a reputation beyond her ad work. The poems that Kathleen Rooney uses in the book as Boxfish's are Fishback's. She presented a somewhat cynical view of romance, and had to eat a bit of crow when she succumbed to love and marriage in her 30s, taking it so far as to having a child.

#### **Margaret Fishback** - from the Poetry Foundation

In portraying Lillian's life, Rooney shows us markers for the times. In her earliest memories we see, for example, a coal-powered railroad advertising the cleanliness of their service. Those who cynically refer to "clean coal" today would have been right home in the 19-aughts. In fact the book opens with what seems a fairy tale tone, "There once was a girl named Phoebe Snow," the pristinely appealing character in the railroad's ad campaign. Lillian will follow Phoebe not just on the road of anthracite but in her fondness for rhyming sales pitches.

A nurse aunt brings mention of the Triangle Shirtwaist fire, and the Spanish flu pandemic. Other notable notes include the jazz age, the lindy-hop, break-dancing, WW II, rap, the subway vigilante, fear of crime in the city, automat, the Depression (*When I first came to the city, a line of people often helped me discover an exciting premiere or a big sale; in 1931, such a queue more often ended at soup kitchens or collapsing banks.*), construction of Battery Park City, loft-living by artists, AIDS, the changing looks and uses of city infrastructure, and plenty more. The rights of women are given considerable attention. Lillian fights for equal pay at Macy's. Pregnancy is a termination-level offense. Her publisher pushes her to take a more upbeat tone, but Lillian is no shrinking violet.

Of course, a look over any time period will not hold anyone's interest if the guide on that tour is not engaging. Not to worry. Lillian is as hearty a traveling companion as you could want, although she does suffer from some well earned blues from time to time. She is bright, witty and charming, a character we can relate to, even if we may differ from her in this view or that.

#### **Kathleen Rooney** - from Entropymag.org

I adored Lillian maybe a bit more than most for our shared love of the city. While I may have started my NYC life a fair bit later than she did, I have seen it over a lifetime, and my attachment is as strong as hers. I was here, and remember well many of the events she notes.

The form of a person traversing a physical space as a structure for recalling a life is not a new one. Serial flashbacks are common enough. But it is done particularly well here. Lillian the younger is hardly the same as Lillian the elder, yet the core voices work well. In fact, one of the great strengths of the novel is that Rooney has made Lillian, from young woman to eighty-something, entirely credible. And her latter day walkabout is rich with a sense of diverse elements of the city, interesting characters who serve to illuminate the New York City of 1984, the fading institutions, and some new trends.

Lillian Boxfish is a marvelous, entertaining and moving read. I suppose you *could* walk to your nearest book emporium to pick up a copy. But if your legs are up to it, I would run.

Review posted – January 13, 2017

Publication – January 17, 2017

===== **EXTRA STUFF**

Links to the author's personal, Twitter, and FB pages

This is her second novel

A wiki on Margaret Fishback , who was born in DC in 1900 and dies in Maine in 1985.

Kathleen Rooney wrote this profile of Fishback in the Poetry Foundation site

My favorite small poem of Fishback's, (from what little I have seen), appears in the book.

When life seems gray  
And short of fizz  
It seems that way  
Because it is.

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### **Kaylin (The Re-Read Queen) says**

#### **2 Stars**

#### **Overall:**

On New Year's Eve 1984, Lillian Boxfish takes a walk. During that walk, she recounts most of the major (and several minor) events in her life, starting in the 1920s. This life was filled with a glamorous career in advertising, a crumbling marriage and stints of electro-shock therapy.

This *sounded* really exciting. But to me it felt like when your grandma pulls you aside at Thanksgiving to tell you “back-in-my-day” stories.

I received an ARC of this through Netgalley. Thank you to the publisher and author for the opportunity!

#### **Pros:**

Lillian Boxfish herself was a really fun and dynamic character. She had a level of grace and wit about her that was really delightful to read. I honestly haven't heard of the woman she was based off, but I certainly want to find out more.

This addresses several big issues in a rather lighthearted way; including homophobia, sexism and classism. I don't think all these issues were handled very well, but the different perspectives throughout the years was very interesting. Lillian was a very open-minded and sex-positive individual and it contrasted very well with stereotypes.

## Cons

This was *so repetitive*

It basically boiled down to Lillian meeting someone during her walk (who usually had a nickname “but you can call me NAME”) and that someone would discuss really personal information with this old-lady they don’t know—The Vietnam Vet discusses his difficulties accumulating back into American Society, a gay male discusses the AIDS epidemic and the Reagan administration and the unmarried Latino woman discusses how people slut-shame her for not marrying her baby daddy. These were all very interesting topics worth talking about, but none of these side characters were particularly well developed to me. All their stories only seemed to exist to remind Lillian of something that happened to her in the past.

This narrative was written with a very conversational tone, and while I think it is fairly unique and appropriate for Lillian, I just wasn’t a fan. Each sentence was made up of *several* clauses and just like when grandma pulls you aside at Thanksgiving, it seemed she would ramble and get lost before the sentence ended.

Example:

“She was struggling in all this Maine snow, when there’s none in California,” says Johnny, says Gianino, my Little John, says my son, says Gian, as he asked to be called back in junior high school, when it occurred to him that he had the wherewithal.

All those dialogue tags exist for one person, and before she finishes talking about what Gian called her to discuss, Lillian goes off talking about his name and middle-school.

## In Conclusion

Interesting premise about an interesting woman, but it felt like an old-woman telling repetitive stories.

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## Lyn says

Charming.

Kathleen Rooney’s 2017 novel about, literally, Lillian Boxfish taking a walk is enchanting mainly because of her creation of the wonderfully charismatic character Lillian Boxfish.

In an Author’s note at the end, Rooney describes how Lillian was inspired by the real life Margaret Fishback, a successful advertising copyright in the 1930s, but how beyond the inspiration Lillian Boxfish is her fictional creation.

Born in 1899 (but lying about her age for decades and saying she was born in 1900) Lillian’s walk through New York on New Year’s Eve 1984 is also a vehicle where Lillian can look back on a long and full life mainly in her beloved New York. As she walks along the sidewalks on her way to dinner and a party, Lillian recounts her first days in New York and how she as a young woman first took a job at Macy’s and how her talent for poetry and word play led her to a successful career and how for a time she was the highest paid

woman in advertising.

Rooney also describes a journey through New York and America in the twentieth century. Through Lillian's life we see how the staid Victorian age gave way to the roaring twenties, Prohibition, Depression, World War II and the 50s. Lillian's ascendancy as an efficacious businesswoman is also a story about the struggles and opportunities for women during this time.

The great accomplishment in this book, though, remains Lillian Boxfish herself. Never meeting a stranger, Ms. Boxfish is a wholly likeable protagonist and narrator, someone a reader will like instantly and want to follow. To her credit, Rooney describes Lillian in humanistic terms, with flaws and failings, but these realistic elements only serve to heighten her portrayal.

Recommended.

\*\*\* A free copy of this book was provided in exchange for an honest review

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