



Cat Power: A Good Woman

Elizabeth Goodman

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How Chan Marshall, aka Cat Power, Survived Herself—and Became the Indie Rock Queen.

Chan Marshall's stark lyrics, minimal arrangements, and wounded, smoky vocals, were an instant indie hit in the nineties—but her mental instability nearly derailed her career. How this sensitive but headstrong Georgian daughter of an unstable mother and a relatively unknown musician father—managed to make it big, burn out, and rise up again to become not only the darling of the indie music scene but also a fashion and Hollywood icon is the fabric of this irresistible story.

Covering her musical beginnings in the south and her booze-soaked rise to fame in New York City to her eventual breakdown and subsequent reclamation of herself and her music, *Cat Power* delves into the soul of this fragile but ferociously gifted young talent. With seven albums behind her, the hottest designers clamoring to dress her, and perpetually sold-out venues, Marshall is at the height of her career—a perfect vantage point from which to look at her notorious and intriguing history.

From interviews with her family, musicians such as Thurston Moore, Nick Cave, Dave Grohl, and Jack White, past loves like Bill Callahan and Vincent Gallo, and current friends such as Karl Lagerfeld and Wong Kar-Wai, Elizabeth Goodman gives us the real Chan Marshall—the little girl, the woman, the artist.

Cat Power: A Good Woman Details

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From Reader Review Cat Power: A Good Woman for online ebook

Ines says

I felt very bad about reading this book in the beginning, since it's an unauthorized biography. Having finished it now, I still feel bad, though the fact that the author didn't do a very good job in my opinion (Chan should not spend a second worrying about this book, it's not worth it) makes it a little bit better.

The introduction instantly made me dislike Elizabeth Goodman. A pathetic and stubborn try to defend sticking her nose into someone's personal life. Saying that Chan doesn't know what she wants may be right in many situations, a letter from her lawyer trying to stop this project seems very clear though.

Besides Goodman being way too biased, the book is also badly written. Very repetitive, and most importantly, full of contentual errors! I'm not an expert on Chan, but even I recognized quite a few mistakes. It surely is very hard to pin down all the things Chan has done throughout her life, especially because she kind of likes to tell every story in five different versions, but if you decide to write a goddamn unauthorized biography about a musician, you should make sure you get all the facts right. So, I wouldn't take this book as a reliable source for anything to be honest.

Overall, it's an interesting, light read about an undoubtedly great personality. (Oh here speaks the fangirl.)

There are few things I love more than Chan Marshall and her music, she deserves all the happiness in this world.

Juliette says

I am pretty certain that this book will really only be enjoyed by long time fans of Cat Power. I started listening to Cat Power around 1996. I was really into Sonic Youth, and heard that Steve Shelley, Sonic Youth's drummer, had a new record label with a band called Cat Power. This was my introduction to Chan Marshall. Her music is strange, haunting, depressing, and sometimes addicting. I saw her live several times, both in Minneapolis and Albuquerque, and she was usually pretty terrible and/or strange. This book is interesting because even though it is an unauthorized biography of Chan, the author was able to interview many friends, collaborators, family, and other people in the music and fashion industry who know Chan. This book chronicles her childhood, career, sub careers in fashion and film, and her mental breakdowns. I finished the book feeling like it was sad in two ways: sad in that her struggles with alcohol and mental illness have impacted her life in lonely and terrifying ways, and sad that this woman has access, talent, money, fame, and several homes, but seems to be on the brink of losing it all. Or not? Sometimes it seems like Chan Marshall may be playing fame games with her fans and critics.

Eric says

I didn't realize how much I liked Cat Power until I read this book. I mean, my God, I must be interested in her to have finished this awful book. (To be fair, I did read it in an afternoon; it's that kind of book. As Nick

Cave said when Elizabeth Goodman mentioned to him she was writing a book about her: "You're doing a book on Cat Power? An entire book? I mean, I could see a pamphlet.") So the two stars are for the tidbits of info I didn't know about her, which frankly wasn't that much since Goodman takes most of her information and all of her Chan Marshall quotes from other published interviews, since Chan wouldn't talk to her. And why should she? Goodman is a perfect example of the hackneyed, cliché-ridden pop culture writer that clogs music magazines and websites today. I don't expect everyone to be on the level of a Nick Tosches or even Richard Meltzer(!), and a little superficiality is to be expected when talking about indie rock, but she shows bad taste and her editors terrible judgment in allowing her to speculate at length on the mental health of Marshall and members of her family, and especially in including some fairly patronizing quotes about schizophrenics by some doctor she happens to know. Ew. The whole book is passive-aggressive in classic celebrity-worship-mingled-with-catty-bitterness mode, which is great for a Madonna or Princess Di bio, but Cat Power doesn't really rate that kind of fame and icon status, so it just comes off as petty or bitchy, like she's mad Chan wouldn't talk to her. I was really looking forward to finding out more about Moon Pix, which I still think is a weird masterpiece that found Chan Marshall punching above her weight, but there was very little info about it. So a 33 1/3 book on it is not out of the question.

One more funny quote, this one from Matador's Gerard Cosloy, about Chan quitting music to enjoy domestic life with Bill Callahan: "In my experience, somebody saying 'I'm going to move wherever and buy a house with Bill Callahan,' that's not such a strange thing. Saying 'I'm going to move to wherever and have kids with Bill Callahan,' that's happened to people I know about five times."

I will say the book as a whole and especially that kind of quote made me terribly nostalgic for '90s indie rock. But then I listened to Yo La Tengo and got it out of my system.

I probably shouldn't have expected much from book, and I'm probably being so bitter and bitchy because I'm jealous someone like Goodman gets paid to write a book like this and be an editor at a national music magazine (the now web-only Blender, but still...).

Kid says

I guess there are a few questions that come to mind when reviewing this book. . .first and most importantly - why did I read it? I'm not a fan of Cat Power, I'm barely curious about her. It just illustrates the depths of my thirst for anything related to pop music and the life of a performer. I read it in pretty much one sitting. . .so take that for what it's worth.

The bio starts with the classic journalistic ruse: "Chan Marshall does not want you to read this book." OK - so it's not official. . .and it's a few steps above a hack job. "Hack" in that the author hacks up interviews with Marshall done over the course of her career into a narrative. It also makes a big deal about her not talking about her half-brother with cerebral palsy as if she's trying to sweep a family skeleton under the rug. That strikes me as a loathsome reach for this writer who seems to have a chip on her shoulder about the fact that Chan wasn't psyched for her to do the book. I mean - umm - why the fuck would she talk about her half-brother who happens to be in a wheelchair in an interview. Yes - Marshall exploits her troubled southern childhood to no end in interviews but who the f' cares? She wants to sell records and Northern music media idiots have no bullshit detector related to the south. There also some glaring factual errors about ages of people and New York fashion culture which should have been cleaned the f' up. It's weird. Nobody gives a shit about proof reading anymore.

So what does this book do? It traces Marshall's career while managing to speak to very few principal players within it. . .but I guess now I know that she tried to become a housewife with Bill Callahan for 9 months before she recorded Moon Pix!

I have a Chan Marshall story that's better than any of the shit in the book - but did I get a call?! Noooooooooo. .

Such iz lyfe.

Vicky says

It feels "out of character" for me to pick up this book (maybe I feel weird, reading about people who are still alive who didn't approve of the book?), which I did so suddenly yesterday at the library on the same day I came across the title. Elizabeth Goodman's intro, with the whole "Chan does not want you to read this book" headline, made me especially uncomfortable. Her justification for this book, and despite Chan's protests or something, was that Chan did not warn her family members about the writing of this "bio" (like not warning them not to give Goodman any info on Chan), thus implies that Chan was indirectly communicating to Goodman that it was an ok signal/hint for her to go ahead and write the book anyway (wtf?). So Goodman seems to set out to understand Chan, to crack open how Chan is exhibitionist/prude, humble/entitled, trusting/paranoid, tomboy/glamorous, etc. and does so by creating a narrative out of interview pieces and stuff, which I guess is nice to read it all as a story. I am only part way done with this book, though. A minute ago I came upon this line from Chris Marker in Chris Marker: Memories of the Future—

People exist with their complexity, their own consistency, their own personal opacity and one has absolutely no right to reduce them to what you want them to be.

Harrison Rip says

Elizabeth Goodman didn't thoroughly check all her material, like when she misreports a song by Peter Laughner as being by Peter Lofton, but the people she did talk to are interesting all the same.

Michelle says

chan marshall is intriguing. reading this book set off an extended period of listening only to cat power. knowing her story gives more meaning to her music, i think.

Alyson Trent says

I could hardly get past the introduction. I have never read any published material that sounded more pathetic, defensive, and ridiculous as what Elizabeth Goodman writes in "A Good Woman." I recently purchased this book used from Ameoba in San Francisco, and it is an uncorrected proof version, so I would like to peruse the final version of this book and merely hope that the introduction didn't make the final cut. She explains that Chan Marshall hated her for writing this book and paints herself as a villain defeating the good guy. It is clear throughout the entire book that Goodman is defending her accusations against Chan Marshall personally, trying to do damage. Who knows how many people in high places Elizabeth Goodman had to sleep with to get this book published. Better stick with Blender magazine honey, something nobody reads.

Suzy says

I always like to learn about the events taking place in musician lives and how it parallels the music they are making at that time. There was a coverage of that in this book- Chan's love life, Chan's varying points of (in)sanity. There was a decent amount of information regarding Chan's upbringing and background. However, it needed some sort of extra oomph. I suppose that extra spark may have been received if the author had been allowed to speak with Chan and the people in Chan's life. She definitely made do without that. And, although I don't think it affected my opinion of the book, I couldn't wrap my head around what the author was trying to get across through making this book. There seemed to be a love and a hate of Chan... Anyway. Quick read, worth it if you like Cat Power and are familiar with the music.

Amanda says

2.5 stars... I didn't know before I started it that Chan Marshall hadn't consented to the biography (doesn't it usually say unauthorized biography on the cover??) and I was already invested in it by the time the author dropped that in so I kept with it. It made the book feel sleazy to me, like gossip instead of a honest portrait of the artist who likely had the most influence on my teenage years. The writing style didn't help that feeling, either.

Instead of really examining how a woman from and representative of a huge group of America (uneducated, lower-class Southerners) made it in indie rock, a genre that is mostly comprised of privileged hipsters, it's boiled down to a rags-to-riches "she went from tossing pizzas to staying at the Ritz!" with no deeper analysis. I hope this isn't the last book on Chan because she deserves a better story.

Jessica says

There are some actual obvious factual errors in the text that made me question everything else in this book. I also got this weird feeling that the author wanted to really "knock her down a peg" and expose Chan Marshall instead of treating her with respect as an artist. Elizabeth Goodman seemed to both resent and revere her at the same time, which is a scary combination. It's hard to explain but it seemed like Goodman was really just trying to deal with her own odd feelings toward Marshall. That's how I felt reading it, anyway. I ultimately just feel bad for reading the book considering it was unauthorized and seemed sort of exploitative.

Even if you don't have an "ethical" problem reading it, I would avoid the book based on how many facts were just not right. I didn't write them all down or even investigate very deeply, but some errors jumped out at me as I was reading. One error I noticed was Goodman claiming that the cover of the first Cat Power album is a picture of Marshall as a child, which is not true. It's a famous photo by Emmet Gowin taken in 1969, three years before Marshall was even born. There isn't even an excuse for that mistake because 1st) there's no reason to think it's Chan Marshall, considering at that point she wasn't the only person in the band and that the photo is never credited as being her and 2nd) the photographer is credited right on the back of the record. It took me 2 seconds of googling to figure out when the picture was taken. It's ultimately not that important of a detail, but it does make me wonder what other weird assumptions Goodman made while

writing the book due to the limited information she had.

In the last 2 pages of the book, Goodman writes: "Like Covers, Jukebox features mostly cover songs except for one of Chan's old tunes ("American Flag," originally off Moon Pix) revamped to reflect changes in the composer." The song actually covered is "Metal Heart," not "American Flag," and it seems weird that Goodman and the editors would miss such an obvious error, especially in the last 2 pages of the book. It seems nitpicky, but the least Goodman could do was get the facts right about Chan's music, especially when all it would take is a look at the back of the cd case. It also really undermined my faith in the accuracy of anything Goodman was saying.

Most of the good information in there are things you can access in interviews available on the internet.

Nukularr says

Reading this biography gave me great insight into Cat Power and her music. One would think that the lives of indie rockers aren't extensive and exciting enough for such a length biography to be written about them, but I was impressed with Goodman's thorough research and detail.

Adrienne Urbanski says

This book is pieced together entirely from past interviews and distant secondary sources, making most of it rooted in conjecture and heresay. Although a bit dry at points, I found the book enthralling at points and worth reading. However, this is due to the fact that I have a personal interest in Chan Marshall, and wonder who the beautiful woman behind my favorite albums is. Those who don't like her music/persona will most likely not like this book.

Heather says

found myself vacillating between feeling sorry for chan marshall and then angry at her, and between feeling angry at elizabeth goodman (the biographer) for intruding, and then grateful that she did...

K says

So, a lot of this book was good. I think mostly because Chan Marshall is an interesting person, and I think there were some cool ideas about identity and binaries in there. But, there could have, and perhaps should have been more of that. And I also kept finding myself really annoyed with the author's dismissal of the misogyny Chan faced as a young female artist in a community of male artists. Goodman also said a lot of really annoying stuff about Chan's "transformation" from "tomboy" to "glam indie idol". I think the few quotes that Goodman has from Chan about either of these things suggests that Chan has much of a stronger stance than Goodman on both of these things. Although, she was really good at allowing Chan's voice to be heard about her mental health status and I think that was written about with a lot of grace, which I think mental health rarely gets. An interesting read, overall. Just probably would have gotten the same pleasure (if

not more) from another author (or even Chan herself) on the same subject.
