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Eavan Boland – In Her Many Images

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Editors
Mariana Bolfarine
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Special Issue

Guest Editors
Gisele Wolkoff
Manuela Palacios

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Editorial Address

ABEI (Associação Brasileira de Estudos Irlandeses)
Universidade de São Paulo – FFLCH/DLM
Av. Prof. Luciano Gualberto, 403
05508-010 São Paulo – SP – Brasil
Tel. (0055-11) 3091-5041 or 3091-4296
Fax: (0055-11) 3032-2325
e-mail: journal.abeibrasil@gmail.com

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Victor Augusto da Cruz Pacheco

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Introduction
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The passing of Eavan Boland caused us deep sorrow and made us immediately think of the impact her works have had on the way we have been developing Irish Studies in Brazil, in the Lusophone world, particularly in what concerns the writing of Poetry and Translation, and worldwide. At that very moment we felt we needed to pay tribute to one of the most important writers of the twentieth century as we were deeply aware of the influence of her work, her poetics, as much as her attitude as a woman of the second half of the twentieth century, having been born in Ireland and raised in a transatlantic, multicultural, and interartistic atmosphere.

The fact that Boland's writings weave the past, history and myth with contemporary daily life signals the depth of her works. Furthermore, discussions around nationhood, belonging and being a woman writer who departed from a traditionally male-oriented literary environment are at the core of her aesthetics. Transposing such crucial discussions provides us with a lifetime and thought-provoking career.

The dialogues that Boland's writings establish not only with tradition, the past, but also with other geographies and arts have guided the present selection of essays with the aim to render the poet's many images – an allusion to her 1980 collection *In Her Own Image*, but also a reference to the miscellaneous facets of Boland's writing before and after that collection. Boland's plural voices reflect her many selves, her ideas on women's writing, on poetry and poetry's relations with the other arts through time. Her sustained dialogue with other poets, with the past and with myth, as well as her reflections on the condition of women when this was an unwonted claim, have created space for much debate on the theory of women's writing. Themes such as the invisibility of women in the public space and the lack of female voices in the national literary history of Ireland have led many academics from all over the world to examine these same issues, in comparative terms, in their own countries, thereby changing the map, as the cartography of the poem is no longer written by men or away from the domestic space. All too soon, it seemed necessary to bring this universe up as a tribute to all the new horizons Boland's work has laid out for us, allowing us to think beyond the traditional patriarchal structures of literary society. In a double sense, then, poetically and theoretically, we propose looking into other vast

territories, which are those created by our contributors in dialogue with their particular interests, the places from where they speak and the voices with which they have chosen to collaborate here.

This special issue aims to provide readers with a twofold approach: on the one hand, a number of theoretical and critical debates around the most groundbreaking aspects of Boland's work and, on the other, a collection of poems in honour of Boland that other poets have kindly provided to the *ABEI Journal*. To all contributors, academics and poets, we want to express our immense gratitude. To the translators into Galician, Portuguese and English, too. Translating culture has been part of Boland's aesthetics. And we hope to pay homage to that as well.

A writer's reception necessarily changes as time passes, and monographs, collections of essays or journal special issues like the present one attest to the new readings and sensibilities of the present moment. The ecological awareness precipitated by the Anthropocene has raised debates on categories such as the human subject and the nonhuman object, as well as on human and more-than-human nature that inform several articles in this issue.[1] Furthermore, aspects like bodily experience continue to stimulate fresh reflections on human identity due to the body's liminal position between culture and nature. On the other hand, a good number of articles in this issue delve into Eavan Boland's engagement with public history and its discrepancies with the intimate past, to the extent that one frequent focus of attention in the analyses to follow is the unspeakable, secrecy and silence. Another centre of attention in these articles is intertextuality and Boland's interrogation of the construction and impact of the literary canon, which has guided contributors to trace connections, agreements and disagreements not only between Eavan Boland and other Irish poets like W.B. Yeats and Patrick Kavanagh, but also international poets like Rhian Gallagher. Finally, this selection of articles is also concerned with the way Boland's writing travels, through translation, to other countries and languages.

Catherine Conan's "Objects Matter: an Object-Oriented Reading of Eavan Boland's *Object Lessons*" explores the tensions between the configuration of a feminine subjectivity and the concomitant objectivization of the remaining beings or entities. By following the methodologies of new materialism and object-oriented ontology, Conan provides new readings of Boland's *Object Lessons* that foster ecological sensibility. Along a similar line, Maureen O'Connor's "'Single Out the Devalued': The Figure of the Nonhuman Animal in Eavan Boland's Poetry" emphasizes Boland's valorization of nature writing, which invites new readings of the poet's recourse to literary animals in her poetry. Indebted to current debates in animal studies and ecocriticism, O'Connor provides a

critique of logocentrism and forefronts the importance of nonverbal communication. Inspired by Sara Ahmed's *Queer Phenomenology*, Aubry Haine's article titled "Queer Phenomenology and the Things Themselves in Eavan Boland's *In a Time of Violence*" analyses Boland's imagistic attention to the world of objects. The poet's scrutiny of significant, but often overlooked, objects allows Poulin to identify a queering process of both traditional phenomenology and Irish poetic tradition that entails a vindication of the marginal and the feminine.

Pilar Villar-Argáiz's "Past, Secrecy and Absence in Eavan Boland's *The Historians*" has recourse to recent research on secrecy and the unknowable, as in the work by Derek Attridge, and examines Boland's use of formal devices to convey those silences, absences and deferred disclosures that abound in so many narratives of the past. Silence is also the main focus of the article by Marcos Hernández titled "Staring Inward: Eavan Boland's Archive of Silences in Domestic Violence", which delves into the tensions between voice and silence, as well as the public and the domestic poem, through the analysis of stylistic features that encode those tensions and open a chink to new, unexpected readings.

The study of the intertextual relations between Boland's poetry and that by other Irish and non-Irish writers begins in this issue with Hitomi Nakamura's article "'An Example of Dissidence': A Reflection on Eavan Boland's Reading of Patrick Kavanagh", which earnestly delves into the paradoxical attraction and resistance that Boland felt with regard to Kavanagh's poetry. Nakamura pays attention to these writers' poetic projects to reconfigure the national literary tradition by introducing their personal experience and perspective. Similarly, Marcel De Lima Santos' "Boland and Yeats: Poetical Irish Dialogues" establishes an imaginative dialogue between these two seemingly antagonistic poets in order to identify Boland's innovations regarding not only configurations of masculinity and femininity but also traditional themes such as love and sexuality.

Attention to the body is a connecting thread in the following two articles. Caitríona Clutterbucks's "Bodily Vulnerability and the Ethics of Representing Woman and Nation in the Poetry of Eavan Boland" puts the main focus on Boland's acknowledgement of vulnerability as an ethical force that contests the damaging legacy of colonialism. Clutterbuck maintains that renewed attention to the vulnerable and marginalized body is bound to heal the fracture between woman and nation. Along a similar line, Emer Lyons' article "Bodies of Water in the Poetry of Eavan Boland (IRE) and Rhian Gallagher (NZ)" applies a comparative perspective to both poets in order to identify those liminal spaces that only tropes of fluid bodies can traverse so as to recuperate lost or alternative bonds.

The American poet and essayist Adrienne Rich was an inspirational figure for Boland, as the next two articles convincingly argue. Virginie Trachsler's "'Priestess or sacrifice?' Domestic tasks and poetic craft in Eavan Boland's poetry" analyses Boland's early work in her collections *In Her Own Image* and *Night Feed*, and argues that the domestic realm and its accompanying housework proved to be a fertile and enabling topic in Boland's poetry. In "Expressing the Source: Eavan Boland and Adrienne Rich" the Irish writer Máighréad Medbh's similarly turns to the American poet for the discussion of the poetic, and concomitantly political, configurations of pain and uncompromising observation in the two poets' renderings of personal experience.

The section of articles in this special issue fittingly ends with attention paid to the dissemination of Boland's writing in other literary systems by means of translation. In this particular case, Mario Murgia dissects, in "The Space Between the Words: A Brief Mapping of the Translation of Eavan Boland's Poetry in Mexico", Spanish-language translations of Boland's poetry in Mexico, even if his first observation concerns the urgent need of more translations of Eavan Boland's books or single-author anthologies of her work. Murgia, thereby, provides an insightful commentary of Eva Cruz Yáñez's translations of Boland's poetry in her *Anthology / Antología*.

Our issue also brings three stimulating reviews by Antía Román-Sotelo, Vanesa Roldán Romero, Michelle Alvarenga and Sven Kretzschmar. Also included is a whole session of poems in translation, poems that have been generously sent by contemporary poets who dedicate them to Eavan Boland for this special issue.

To all poets, translators, academics, we want to express our immense gratitude for their inspiring contributions that evince the prolific directions in the contemporary reception of Eavan Boland's work. Translating cultures has been part of Boland's aesthetics and we hope to pay homage to that as well.

We hope readers enjoy this journey into Eavan Boland's many images!

Gisele Wolkoff and Manuela Palacios

Notes

1 Manuela Palacios wishes to acknowledge the grant for the project *The Animal Trope: An Ecofeminist Analysis of Contemporary Irish and Galician Culture*, of which her work of co-edition of this special issue is part (PGC2018-093545-B-I00 MCIU / AEI/ ERDF, EU).

Articles

ABEI Journal – The Brazilian Journal of Irish Studies, v. 23, n. 2, 2021, pp. 17-34.

Objects Matter: An Object-Oriented Reading of Eavan Boland's Object Lessons

Objetos importam: Uma leitura orientada pelos objetos de Object Lessons, *de Eavan Boland*

Catherine Conan

Abstract: *This article argues that although Eavan Boland's* Object Lessons *has reached considerable achievements in terms of the visibility of women poets in the Irish literary landscape, her project expressed and reinforced the Mary Robinson moment of the early Celtic Tiger. The present ecologically endangered era calls for a critical reappraisal and a questioning of the subject-object dichotomy that lies at the heart of its argument. Many, if not most of the difficulties pointed out by Boland's readers and the criticisms levelled at her work have as their point of departure the constitution of a feminine poetic subjectivity and the subsequently problematic nature of objects and nature created by the very gesture. While attributing subjectivity, and therefore agency, to women in poetry was certainly an indispensable breaking away from various forms of political and religious authority, new conceptual frameworks such as the new materialisms and object-oriented ontology have emerged since, that de-correlate agency from subjectivity, thus re-thinking altogether the status of objects. Drawing mostly from Timothy Morton's application of object-oriented ontology to environmental matters, I show how reading* Object Lessons *without the subject-object distinction addresses some of the criticisms directed at Boland and highlights the ecological value of her poetic and prose work.*

Keywords: *Eavan Boland;* Object Lessons*; ecocriticism; object-oriented ontology; Timothy Morton.*

Resumo: *Este artigo argumenta que, embora o livro* Object Lessons *de Eavan Boland tenha alcançado grandes conquistas em termos da visibilidade das poetas no cenário literário irlandês, seu projeto expressou e reforçou o momento Mary*

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Robinson do início do Tigre Celta. A presente era, ecologicamente ameaçada, é um chamado para a reavaliação crítica e o questionamento da dicotomia sujeito-objeto que está no cerne de sua argumentação. Muitas, senão a maioria das dificuldades apontadas pelos leitores de Boland e das críticas dirigidas à sua obra têm como ponto de partida a constituição de uma subjetividade poética feminina e, posteriormente, a natureza problemática dos objetos e da natureza criada pelo próprio gesto. Enquanto a atribuição da subjetividade e, portanto, agência, às mulheres na poesia foi um rompimento indispensável de diversas formas de política e autoridade religiosa, novas estruturas conceituais, como os novos materialismos e ontologia surgiram desde então, que descorrelacionam a agência da subjetividade, repensando completamente o status dos objetos. Apoiada principalmente na aplicação da ontologia orientada a objetos de Timothy Morton para questões ambientais, eu mostro como a leitura de Object Lessons *sem a distinção sujeito-objeto aborda algumas das críticas dirigidas a Boland e destaca o valor ecológico de sua prosa e obra poética.*

Palavras-chave: *Eavan Boland;* Objective Lessons*; ecocrítica; ontologia orientada a objetos; Timothy Morton.*

Eavan Boland's 1995 collection of essays offers a deconstruction of the subject-object relationship within the Irish poetic tradition that constitutes the expression of a particular moment in the history of Irish society and culture. Building her own literary subjectivity through the practice of poetry and essay writing enabled Boland to realize that she could not hear the voice of her gendered self in her poetic forebears, who had nonetheless contributed to her vocation and style. Making Irish poetry a hospitable place for women past and present has become Boland's main project, achieving notably the recognition of the political role of women poets in Ireland and a powerful critique of nationalist iconography. It gave a literary expression to the Mary Robinson moment in Irish history, when the rigidities of the immediate post-colonial identity, based on the necessities of nation-building, began to dissolve.

However, many changes have intervened since Boland wrote *Object Lessons*, or rather, many seismic shifts that were only at their inception point on the cusp of the Celtic Tiger have become fully apparent. These include the Tiger itself and its subsequent demise, the peace process and devolution in the North, economic and environmental crisis, a decline in the power of Catholic institutions following the revelation of physical and sexual abuse and leading to a rapid ideological change in attitudes towards women's bodies and motherhood. Societal evolution since 1995 has tended to increase a postmodern sense of defiance towards authority, leading as Boland had called for to more agency for women and

better control over their bodies and their lives. However, the rise and fall of the Celtic Tiger have also highlighted a number of issues with the economic and political orders in Ireland that had largely fallen under Boland's radar in *Object Lessons* but have become impossible to ignore. While Ireland's participation in global capital could go unquestioned while it brought material progress to the vast majority, its social and environmental consequences now define the lines of the Irish landscape. Incidentally, but crucially for the understanding of *Object Lessons* in an ecologically endangered era, an awareness of the entanglement of humans with the rest of the living and non-living world has come with a more fluid, performative understanding of gender, as various youth movements today show.

The quarter of a century that has elapsed since the publication of *Object Lessons* enables us to define the significance and participation of the book in its particular historical moment but also to continue (not necessarily in a straight way) the lines that it has traced in order to make its central concern with objects relevant to post-Tiger, post-Catholic Ireland. This is not so much an exercise in prediction, as it gives very different results from Boland's own later collection of essays *A Journey with Two Maps*, as a thought experiment: what if the concept of objects, and women as objects in relation to poetry, were examined with more recent conceptual tools, adequate to the crises of the present? Key to this project is a critique of the subject-object relationship as Boland sees it, which entails a number of limitations to her political vision, notably regarding ecological issues. What I propose to do is to substitute a "flat", object-oriented ontology, notably in its application to ecological issues by Timothy Morton, to the subject-object dichotomy as constructed by Boland in *Object Lessons*. The overall aim is to reassess the contribution and relevance of Boland's art to ecological living now, that is, the consciousness of being related to and penetrated by all kinds of non-human influences, beyond and despite the subject/object distinction, whose historical moment is passing in the current era of generalized crisis.

1.

The central argument made by Eavan Boland in *Object Lessons* is well-known, and has become an indispensable realization of Irish cultural studies: within a patriarchal, bardic poetic tradition, women feature only as objects, motifs or symbols in poems that in so doing establish the male poet as the sole subject of the act of representation and contribute to deprive women of agency both in the text and in the world. Given the importance of poetry and the figure of the poet in Irish culture, this has had far-reaching consequences for Irish society, both before and after the creation of the Free State: Irish nationalism,

using feminine symbols such as the Shan Van Vocht or Cathleen Ni Houlihan for the projected nation, has tended to maintain women in passive, subaltern positions. *Object Lessons* describes how Boland gradually became conscious of her identity as both Irish and a woman, and the contradictions between the two terms that hampered her self-realization as a poet of national and international stature. Her method in this enterprise is autobiographical, but also imaginative as she uses the silences of the incomplete historical data at her disposal to create a chain of solidarity with both real and imaginary Irish women.

This mode of investigation leads to the second of Boland's important intuitions, an idea that structures much of her poetry and prose, namely that the past and history are radically different things. As she explained later in an interview given to Pilar Villar, "history is an official version of events . . . a constructed narrative", while "the past . . . is a place of silences and losses and disappearance" (Villar 53). This is the place where women, but also other forms of the subaltern, are banished by the dominant narrative —in *Object Lessons*, Boland establishes clearly that Patrick Kavanagh, as a member of the rural working-class, shares much the same fate as she does, being extracted from a group considered as emblematic of the nation, and therefore deprived of subjectivity (*OL* 197). The loss generated by Boland's exclusion and objectification as a woman within the poetic tradition that had inspired her vocation provides her with the creative impetus to make this place inhabitable for Irish women in her poetry. A central component of this project is to "alter, for [herself], the powerful relations between subject and object which were established [in the Irish poem]" (*OL* 184).

This critique of the objectification of women within the Irish poetic tradition came at a very particular moment in the history of Irish society and culture, which it contributed in turn to define and to push further, notably thanks to the warm friendship between Boland and Mary Robinson, then President of Ireland. Boland was aware that by the time she was writing the book, the situation had evolved so far, including in the literary field, that "the woman poet [had become] an emblematic figure in poetry . . . because . . . she internalizes the stresses and truths of poetry at a particular moment" (*OL* 235). Indeed, beginning in the 1970s, a number of societal changes had altered the condition of many women for the better. However, the nature, or the mode, of these changes and the issues on which debate focused – divorce, abortion, contraception – contributed to keep the definition of femininity firmly stuck in patriarchal grooves, with the feminine linked to the body, family and reproduction. This led an exasperated Mary Cummins to exclaim in *The Irish Times* that to some foreign journalists "Irish women equals the X case, condoms, abortions, the Kerry babies, Granard and Mary Robinson. Not all Irish women

spend their weekends having abortions or burying their babies" (qtd. in Ferriter 724), a declaration that ironically objectifies Robinson as the figurehead of the public visibility given to a certain kind of women's issues.

The feminist movement of the 1970s was part of a larger postmodern intellectual framework that questioned received ideas about power and authority, whose influence was felt in academic Irish studies and to which *Object Lessons* contributed. From the late 1980s, nationalist interpretations of Irish literature were complicated by the adjunction of postmodern tropes, notably hybridity, and Patricia Coughlan notes "some reciprocal influence" between "this perspective and the Robinson version of Irishness" (Coughlan 180). Nationalist critics adapted a postcolonial theoretical framework to the study of Irish texts, which gave rise to a rich body of critical work, notably through *Field Day*, to which Boland's insights on the object status of women contributed a dissonant note. What is especially valuable is Boland's warning that the colonizer/colonized dichotomy should not be superimposed on the gender divide, the colonizer equated with the male principle and the colony feminized. The colonial relationship is thus liable to be refracted within the colony by nationalism itself: "at the end of the colonial nineteenth century, the national tradition operated as a powerful colonizer" (*OL* 197). Even though for some revisionist critics such as Edna Longley Boland does not go far enough in destabilizing the nation (Longley 173, 187–188), she offers a powerful corrective to postcolonial visions of Irish modernity and can be credited with creating a central position within Irish culture from which Irish women poets could express themselves.

However, this re-centring of women as the subjects of their own discourse in the postmodern Irish nation carried with it a number of difficulties, contradictions and logical flaws that have been identified by critics as diverse as Clair Wills, Gerardine Meaney, Denis Donoghue and others (Wheatley 104). Though the criticism levelled at Boland can take issue with her work for very different, sometimes contradictory reasons (Kilcoyne 93), its root cause is always the hiatus between women represented as silent, repressed victims of history, and the very existence of Boland's text, whose effect is to claim the opposite. Different ways of conceptually bridging this gap between woman-as-object and woman-as-subject within the poetic text have been offered, with Kilcoyne propounding "strategic memory" (Kilcoyne 89) and Wheatley highlighting the crucial role of the "figure of the poet" (Wheatley 105). In a way, these critics, by focusing on auctorial intentionality, are still working within the subject-object distinction. They demand a form of control and consistency on the part of the artist that limits the effect of the work of art as autonomous from the artist's intention. My reading of *Object Lessons* will steer closer to Daniel Train's

and explore further his concluding remark that "the best of [Boland's] poems and the objects she attends to in them always exceed, rather than simply elude, her audience's comprehension, including her own" (Train 133). Before detailing the conceptual framework that explains how an object always "exceeds" our "comprehension", and how this forms the basis of the aesthetic experience, I will go through some of the difficulties raised by maintaining the subject-object distinction, both in Boland's text and in most of its critical analyses.

2.

The first difficulty has to do with the definition of gender identity and gender roles. Even though *Object Lessons* is explicitly about the woman poet, the understanding of what exactly constitutes a woman remains implicit and forms the object of a unexamined consensus between author and reader, thus reinforcing conventional, or even conservative visions of gender identities. Autobiographical elements in *Object Lessons* impressionistically record how Boland's sense of her femininity was awakened and therefore by implication her definition of the woman on behalf of whom she speaks. One of the two images she retains of her life in Dublin before she left for London at the age of five is of boys diving into the canal (*OL* 36). The memory is so cherished that she makes the scene a central component of her recreation of the Irish childhood that she never had (*OL* 56). The overwhelming impression is of a sharp distinction between the feminine and the masculine, with the former as passive spectator and the latter as actively caught in a pleasurable engagement with the world. The consequence of this gender gap is the awakening of heterosexual desire, another key element of Boland's discovery of her femininity. This comes with an objectification of the male body as the young Boland "looked with increased interest at the faces and shapes of boys" (*OL* 67). Given Boland's achieved status as emblematic of the woman poet, her use of the first-person pronoun has a strongly prescriptive value and the risk is of generating a sense of exclusion in physically active, not to mention lesbian or trans women. Boland locates the feminine within the objectified body and the universally human (but colonized by the male perspective) in the mind (*OL* 26), thus repeating the patriarchal superposition of the male/female divide onto the mind/body dualism.

Isabel Karremann reminds us that Boland's poems show a keen awareness of the constructed nature of gender in poems such as "Making Up", "Mimic Muse", "Mastectomy" or "Anorexic". Indeed, *Object Lessons* records how Boland's sense of her feminine identity revealed itself in the desire for consumer objects marketed for women, namely skirts and

lipstick with "blue tones in a certain shade of it" (*OL* 106). Karremann argues that Boland's poems "anticipate the rhetorics of Haraway's 'A Cyborg Manifesto'" (Karremann 114), characterized by "a transgression of boundaries such as human/non-human, natural/artificial, male/female" (Karremann 115) and undermines "the certainty of what counts as nature" (Haraway, qtd. in Karremann 115). However, merely recognizing "the construct character of all social identity" (Karremann 117) as the speaker of "The Mimic Muse" does, falls short of cybernetics and misses an essential component of cyborg identity according to Haraway, namely the constitutive entanglement of the human with the non-human. Without this essential continuity and interpenetration between human and non-human, there is no deconstruction of binaries because there is always a transcendent subject that identifies herself as an a priori woman doing the deconstructing. There is always-already, to use a Heideggerian phrase, a woman-as-subject who exerts control over the skirts or lipstick shades that she chooses in order to construct her social self. Of course the woman is overrating her free will in the matter as these choices are guided by the consumer order and the advertising industry. The consequence is that the "ordinary", in this case the definition of the feminine, not only "is a category of debate . . . [whose] truth-value is taken for granted by Boland and above all conceptual probing" as Wheatley notes (114) but it appears as the symptom of a strongly prescriptive bourgeois social order. Thus rigidly contained by a number of practices that define her identity as a (middle-class) woman within Irish society, Boland as reader actively resists the "troubling androgyny" (*OL* 65) needed to incorporate the "male" experience of the world. She looks in vain for a female figure to identify with as the gender divide appears impossible to bridge, and her teenage dreams leak out repressed desire and guilt: "The fact is that teenage dreams of action and heroism are filled with exciting and impossible transpositions of sexuality. In those dreams I would wear the green tailcoat or crop my head or carry a revolver." (*OL* 65)

The constitution of the woman as subject involves a powerful repression of contacts with and influences of the other (i.e. the masculine, but also the non-human other, the tailcoat and revolver, and the strangeness of her own body as conveyed by the feeling of a cropped head) and the inhibition of ways of interacting with the world that, though pleasurable in themselves, are deemed inappropriate. Constituting the woman as subject in this case demands a powerful refusal of empathy and hybridity, which the woman represses because she considers them as an erasure of her self: "for those empathies, those androgynies to exist, I had to make myself available for reconstruction" (*OL* 65). In other words, there is a degree of violence and (paradoxically) self-denial needed to constitute a subject: "subjects are created when they force themselves to think that they are not made of

abject stuff" (Morton, *Dark Ecology* 133). The creation of a subject, which simultaneously generates an objectified "nature", is according to Timothy Morton incompatible with ecological living, which demands an awareness of the essentially symbiotic nature of the real (Morton, *Humankind* 14).

The "ordinariness" that Boland posits as a central element of her poetic discourse is given the spatial embodiment of the suburb. This ordinariness, and what she perceives as her exclusion from Irish political life, is expressed in the paratactic "I was married; I lived in a suburb; I had small children" (*OL* 190). Moreover, the suburb shares with women, and motherhood, the fate of being "a devalued subject matter": "It has given me an insight into the flawed permissions which surround the inherited Irish poem, in which you could have a political murder, but not a baby, and a line of hills, but not the suburbs under them." (*OL* 204)

The effect of this is to render ideologically neutral, or even necessary, a relationship to the land that is historically recent as well as environmentally disastrous. Yet Boland is a perceptive observer of the suburb and of her own causal entanglement within the phenomenon ("before our eyes, and because of them, a village was turning into a suburb" 157). She describes how cars as *a fait social* organize life in the suburbs: the line of headlights on the road leaving in the morning and coming back at night (OL 192), the streets deserted except for the annual *garage* sale. The suburb as it developed in the 1950s and 60s in Europe is highly dependent on car ownership as it is disconnected from both work and leisure places. On a global scale, cars can be understood as what Morton calls a hyperobject, "massively distributed in time and space relative to humans" (Morton, *Hyperobjects* 1). Jane Bennet, after Deleuze, refers to such phenomena as assemblages (Bennet 23–24) of concrete and abstract elements, all endowed with a form of agency. In this case, the assemblage includes oil drills and pumps, assembly lines, roads and parking lots, but also political decisions and state subsidies, or ideas about how long it should take to go from A to B. Rather than being a convenient tool, a car is best considered as the extended phenotype (Dawkins 1982) of many modern humans, an expression in the environment of the human genetic capacity for technological invention that influences in return the physical abilities of human bodies and their perception of the world. It is her journey by car from her home to Clonmel workhouse on the steps of her great-grandfather that encourages Boland's statement that "there is a duality to place" (*OL* 154): the car has erased everything in between and the abject idea of in-betweenness, which encouraged dichotomies such as subject and object.

A suburb, which is the spatial consequence of widespread car ownership, can be understood as "ordinary" only if one refuses to take the long view historically, geographically or technologically and this short view is encouraged by the suburb itself. Suburbs promote a form of engagement with the world that is inherently correlationist and dualistic. Correlationism is defined by Morton as "the Kantian (and post-Kantian) idea that a thing isn't real until it has been formatted by the Subject" (Morton *Being Ecological* 156), who is therefore both at a remove from and more real than the world that he or she (a transcendental subject being necessarily human) realizes. "It treats things . . . like blank sheets or screens" (Morton *Being Ecologica*l 156). The inhabitants of the suburb are divided from each other by hedges, fences and roads or shut off within the insulated bubble of their cars: according to Rebecca Solnit, "the history of suburbia is the history of fragmentation" (Solnit 250). This encourages the subject/object division as suburbians become spectators and the world a show that they view from their window, gate or windscreen. Suburbs generate a false sense of security by hiding the reality of ecological involvement beyond the hedge of individual property, so that the realization of environmental damage always comes too late. Jody Allen Randolph identifies an environmental turn in Boland in *Domestic Violence* (2007) and describes "a local community witnessing the power of local corporations to deterritorialize place, to weaken the ties between a culture, its place and its history" (Allen Randolph 60) with the creation of the Dundrum shopping centre that is denounced by the speaker of "In Our Own Country". The irony is that the real environmental catastrophe had already happened several decades earlier with the creation of the suburb, which is already an offshoot of consumerism: in *Object Lessons*, Boland remembers that when she arrived "the farriers at the corner of the village had been gone some twenty years" and "a shopping centre was in the process of replacing [a mink farm]" (*OL* 157). A suburb is not so much ordinary as *unheimlich*, familiar and strange at the same time, "incomplete and improbable" (*OL* 156), as Boland discovers when she moves into her unfinished estate. This uncanniness has to do with the way in which the suburb is a historically contingent phenomenon that profoundly modifies the link between human bodies and space. This feeling is echoed by Rebecca Solnit when she claims that because of suburbanisation, "something very odd has happened to the very state of embodiment, of being corporeal, in recent decades" (Solnit 256).

The final difficulty for the newly-constituted woman as subject of her poetry lies in the simultaneous objectification of the world around her: once she has become a subject, what can the object of her poetry be, and how is she going to create an ethical relationship with it? Boland is aware of her responsibility to "reinscribe certain powerful

and customary relations between object and subject" (*OL* 234–235) but she has been criticized for failing to do so and objectifying, silencing women in her turn, notably in her ekphrases of Chardin and Degas (Wheatley 108) or in "The Achill Woman" (Wheatley 113, Kilcoyne 93, Longley 178). Ethically failing the object of her poetry means effectively cutting access to it for the reader and using the objectified other as a means not an end for a speaking I who is really speaking about herself. The subject/object dichotomy makes it very difficult to go beyond self-referentiality and access the world in its uncanniness, which is a condition of both the aesthetic experience and ecological being according to Morton (*Being Ecological* 41). Objectified things, that is, the world minus the speaking subject, can never be seen as and for themselves, but they have to be included within a symbolic system, as stand-ins for abstract concepts in the mind of the transcendental subject. This is particularly evident of Boland's reading of her own poem "The War Horse". The poem's starting point is the transgression of the borders of suburban private property by a horse, probably a traveller's horse. Her initial reflex is to make the non-human into a symbol "of nature – the horse – menacing the decorous reductions of nature which were the gardens" (*OL* 176). The horse cannot be just a horse, and must be appropriated as a symbol by the speaker's subjectivity, and this is a feature of Boland wanting to constitute her poetic self as subject. The case is very different in Elizabeth Bishop's "The Moose", where the large herbivorous mammal who barges into the human group "resists the idea that it stands for something. Rather, it is something. . . . It is hardly a metaphor at all. (Or a symbol, for that matter.)" (Tóibín 22). However, with hindsight, Boland understands that the publicly sanctioned form of the political poem that she has adopted for "The War Horse" not only silences the object, making the subject "all-powerful" (*OL* 178) but that she herself also exists at some level as a symbol in the poem: "What I had not realized was that I myself was a politic within the Irish poem" (*OL* 179). She has more in common with the horse than she initially realized.

3.

Constituting the woman poet as a subject comes at a conceptual and environmental price that has become hardly sustainable. Deriving enjoyment and meaning from Boland's poetry in a time of averred environmental crisis means reading her from the perspective of a different, non-dualistic ontology. I believe that a flat ontology "that initially treats all objects in the same way, rather than assuming in advance that different types of objects require completely different ontologies" (Harman 54) is best suited to the task. This

involves changing the way in which objects are considered, or to take *objects* seriously, just like Daniel Train wants to take lessons seriously (Train 116) and refraining from thinking that "the worst possible fate of a human subject [is] being turned into an object" (Morton, *Being Ecological* 133). Instead, "OOO [Object-Oriented Ontology]'s use of *object* is a mirror in which you see reflected your own prejudices about what objects are" (Morton, *Being Ecological* 149). OOO does not distinguish a priori between human and non-human, sentient and non-sentient objects. What they all have in common is that they are both present and withdrawn at the same time: they can be perceived (accessed) but no perception is going to exhaust what they are: the real object always exceeds the sensual object. In a sense OOO goes one step further in the direction taken by Jean-Luc Marion's phenomenology of excess (what he calls "saturated phenomena") that Train uses in his reading of *Object Lessons* and is also quoted by Morton in *Dark Ecology*. What Marion and Morton have in common is the idea that the world is given, it is not constructed by the perception of the subject. However, while Marion de-centres the subject to create a dialectical relationship between object and viewer (Train 123–124), OOO does away with the subject/object dualism altogether. All objects may access other objects according to their own modes of "interpretation". As I type this sentence on my computer, I access the computer but the computer also accesses me, determining the movement of my eyes and fingers and influencing the flow and structure of my ideas. Perception is not restricted to a certain kind of "subject" (human, or male, English, white, straight, etc.) who has a privileged access to reality and gets to decide what it is made up of. No mode of access is inherently superior to another, and in this it is easy to perceive the value of OOO for environmental studies, but also for feminism, post- and decolonial studies, queer studies, etc. In addition, it solves quite a number of difficult philosophical and political problems: "The result of living as though you believe in subject-object dualism, which is our usual mode of thinking about the world, . . . is that it becomes hard to accept what is in fact more logical and easier on the mind in the end." (Morton, *Being Ecological* 73).

A clear illustration of this is the dilemma of the modern Irish woman as described by Patricia Coughlan. She argues that Irish women, and "those just gaining a tentative agency" cannot afford to join in the "joyful abandonment of subjectivity [...] so relished by the soi-disant floating selves of the mandarin postmodernists" (Coughlan 179), which becomes a perverse sign of their political superiority. "On the other hand", Coughlan continues, "must such emerging subjects be denied, or deny themselves, the pleasures of such play and the enabling aspects of the indeterminate?" If you accept that you do not need to be a subject to have agency, which is what new materialists such as Karen Barad or

Jane Bennet do, and if you strip the "mandarin postmodernists" of their a priori subjectivity and superior mode of access to everything else, the problem disappears. Women as (OOO) objects can enjoy accessing and being accessed by other objects, in an ethical relationship that does not preclude political action, which consists precisely in taking down self-proclaimed subjects from their pedestals.

Another difficult question of immediate relevance to Boland's work that is made considerably simpler by a flat ontology is that of representation, the very act that constitutes the subject and the object. However, representation simultaneously entails considerable shape shifting between subject and object. Judith Butler, as part of her critique of representationalism, has noted for example how "the feminist subject turns out to be discursively constituted [i.e. represented] by the very political system that is supposed to facilitate its emancipation" (qtd. in Barad 47). Boland appears uneasy with the concept: according to Molly O'Hagan Hardy, "Boland's relationship to [Mary] Robinson demonstrates that she possesses a keen understanding of the power of representation" (O'Hagan Hardy 52). In her 2006 interview with Pilar Villar, she comes back several times to the idea of representation, to underline its difficulty or elusiveness (Villar 58) and finally concludes that "[I have] no interest in representation" (Villar 61). This ambiguity may be due to the fact that she has been, in the words of Sarah Fulford, "trapped within the logic of representation. Once the moment of a woman's experience is inscribed within the aesthetic space of the poem it risks becoming a frozen trope rather than living and breathing." (qtd. in O'Hagan Hardy 55) But this risk is only present if an ontological difference is made between a "living and breathing" subject and the "frozen" (image of the) object.

OOO, as well as recent works in the fields of anthropology and animal behaviour, have suggested a radical enlargement of the ideas of representation and interpretation. For Eduardo Kohn's anthropology "beyond the human", "[w]e are not the only ones who interpret signs. That other kinds of beings use signs is one example of the ways in which representation exists in the world beyond human minds and human systems of meaning" (Kohn 31).

Kohn, mobilizing Peircean semiotics, gives the example of the evolution of anteaters, whose snouts are signs interpreted by future generations as being about the shape of ant tunnels, which they represent (Kohn 74). Morton concurs by viewing evolution as "design without a designer" but while Kohn draws a line between living and non-living objects, Morton, recognizing that science makes them ever harder to distinguish properly, extends this view of intentionality, interpretation and representation to all objects (Morton *BE*

162). Representation happens whenever an object is affected by another, it goes both ways and is not necessarily a conscious process. Defamiliarizing the anthropocentric concept of representation (Kohn 2) by viewing it as a form of encounter opens new possibilities of understanding aesthetic representation as experience (Morton *Being Ecological* 143).

Art features prominently in OOO, because the nature of objects in general is particularly apparent in the art object (for instance, the fact that it is not exhausted by its author's intentionality, or by any interpretation of it) but also for the truth-value of the aesthetic experience. The viewer of a painting or the reader of a poem realizes in a very vivid way how much she is affected by and related to a non-human, non-sentient object, which paves the way for a more ecological way of living: "the experience of relating to art . . . makes it difficult—sometimes impossible—to sustain the valley across which we see other entities as 'other'" (Morton *Being Ecological* 178). The autonomy and inexhaustibility of the artwork, as well as its power to affect readers independently of the author's intentions, is very rarely explicitly present in *Object Lessons*, where Boland seems to be trying to maintain absolute control over her poetry as the practice whereby her subjectivity is constituted. There is only one mention of the reader of a poem, whose reception remains dependent on "the authority of the speaker" (*OL* 186), and who therefore seems to be denied a role in the constitution of meaning within the work of art considered as a network of inter-object relations.

One possible explanation for this reluctance on Boland's part to acknowledge the inaccessibility, autonomy and thereby inalienable freedom of artworks and readers could be a powerful urge to repress desires that are unacceptable because they are deemed incompatible with the subject that is being constituted, and therefore induce a strong feeling of guilt. Kilcoyne and Wheatley, as well as Longley before them, have both recognized the central importance of guilt in Boland's poetry (Longley 178, Wheatley 113, Kilcoyne 93), and its source can be traced in her formative experiences as a reader, which are recounted in *Object Lessons*. The first "resonant" (in the sense explored by Hartmut Rosa 2019) encounter between Boland and a poem happens upon her reading of "The Fool" by Patrick Pearse, which she felt "included her" (*OL* 53). Because her teenage self is still trapped in the representational logic of trying to locate an accurate image of herself in the work of art, the outcome is disillusionment at seeing herself and her newly found nation misrepresented:

> And so the continuum between poet and patriot, between language and action was not what I had thought. . . . [It] was a soft and flawed connection, where

> words undid actions and actions could never be free of their consequences in language. (*OL* 61)

"Words" and "actions" are (OOO) objects that while irremediably entangled, can never totally exhaust each other: in this sense, no representation is ever accurate. It nonetheless remains that the emotion felt by the teenage Boland is authentic: she was truly moved by the poem, which entered and affected her. How is she to avoid the guilt caused by the realisation that she has been somehow cheated upon by the poem? The situation is similar in the case of poems that according to the 1990s Boland objectify women by turning them into erotic objects subjected to the poet's sexualized gaze. She thus recalls in *Object Lessons* how she had initially been "charmed and troubled" by "Upon Julia's Clothes" by Cavalier poet Robert Herrick, before analysing its "appropriation of the erotic by the sexual" where "the erotic object—those silks turning to water and light—is fixed in relation to the more volatile parts of the poem" (*OL* 214) She cannot avoid the frustrating feeling that as a woman reader she had been taken in by a poem that objectified her both as reader and motif by its "eloquent and forceful" "seamless music". However, intellectually framing this trouble does nothing to alleviate the guilt, on the contrary, because it "does no justice to the way [she] first read a poem such as this", and therefore she senses that she is creating an inauthentic, unethical relationship with her younger self. This guilt is an inescapable consequence of the creation of a subject-object dichotomy: "Guilt is intimately connected to reification. You have a rigid, crystallized thought about yourself. You try to banish it. This never works" (Morton, *Dark Ecology*, 132).

It offers a means of accounting for the troubling, or queering feeling generated by the work of art that preserves, even treasures it, and abolishes the necessity for guilt-ridden self-examination. Graham Harman argues that metaphor enables the reader to encounter the work of art by supplying the absent qualities of the vehicle. Drawing upon José Ortega's discussion of Lopez Pico's likening of a cypress to a flame, Harman establishes that metaphor gives us access to one aspect of the real object, the thing-in-itself (here, the cypress) by associating it with unexpected qualities (the flame). Not only does metaphor reveal the divided nature of the object, it involves the reader's kinaesthetic perceptions in order to do so:

> For if the real cypress is just as absent from the metaphor as it is from thought and perception, there is nonetheless one real object that is never absent from our experience of art: namely, *we ourselves*. Yes, it is we ourselves who stand in for the absent cypress and support its freshly-anointed flame qualities. (Harman 82–83)

Thus a new compound cypress-flame object is born and incorporated by the reader, who is kinaesthetically affected by it. Returning to Boland's reading of Herrick's poem, his metaphor "the liquefaction of her clothes", whereby silk is likened to a liquid, requires in order to be understood that the reader supply the liquid quality, from her own sensory vocabulary, to her understanding of what silk really is. She must incorporate, "act out" (Harman 74 emphasizes the theatricality of metaphor) a new silk-as-liquid object. The feeling is intensely pleasurable, and powerfully repressed if one considers, as Boland does, that the object is "fixed", at a remove from both poet and reader, by the metaphor. Objects in poetry, by means of metaphor, are much more powerful than Boland here allows them to be. A woman who, having read Herrick's poem, has interiorized silk-as-liquid is sensorially richer, happier, and possibly stronger, and may use this new energy as her intellect directs her, including against patriarchy.

Boland contrasts Herrick's description of her mistress with that of Carol Ann Duffy in "Warming her Pearls", a poem that she sees as an evocation of "power and desire between women". Once more, she is so focused on the speaker's subjectivity at the expense of the autonomy of the object that she misses the strong suggestion in the poem that the true object of desire does not actually exist, or is hopelessly out of reach. "Warming her Pearls" is spoken by a maid who is given the task of warming her mistress's pearl necklace before she wears them for dinner. The two women never meet in the flesh in the course of the poem, much less have any form of intercourse, and the maid fantasizes about her employer as she goes about her daily tasks. There are clear hints in the poem that the object of desire is not so much the body of the other woman as her social status: as she looks at herself in her mistress's looking-glass, the speaker sees the real object of her fantasies, who is less the actual employer than the woman who resides "in [her] head" and who is herself. This is not so much a homoerotic poem (although it is that also, of course, on the superficial or manifest level) as an example of René Girard's mimetic desire (Girard 217): both women desire the same thing, social status materialized by the pearl necklace, but the desire is so unacceptable on the part of the maid that in order to prevent the tragic violence and social chaos that would procure it for her, she displaces it onto her rival. The truly unspeakable, scandalous feeling is not lesbian desire, quite explicit here and so acceptable that it becomes the mask of a darker desire for wealth, whose cause and sign is the exploitation of other living beings, whether humans or oysters.

The fact that the desire for social status is expressed in (homo)erotic terms confers a strongly subversive value to Duffy's poem, which was published during the Thatcher era. Boland edits the class dimension out of her reading, speaking only of individual power

relations between the women, thus repressing her social superiority as daughter of a first-rank ambassador and friend of the President, as appears on several occasions in *Object Lessons*. (For instance, she remembers being taunted at school for her Irish roots, but does not consider the privilege that enabled her to attend St Mary's convent in Hampstead in the first place). Like Bishop's moose, Duffy's pearl necklace is first and foremost just that: the external tissue cells of a bivalve mollusc reacting to an irritant from its environment, which have been excised from its body. It is potentially more subversive, and certainly more ecological, to see it as such, as an object connecting humans to non-humans and revealing desires beyond, or beneath, human subjectivity.

* * *

Of course Boland's spoken I in *Object Lessons* is also, within an OOO framework, itself an object that remains out of the reach of any critic, and that no interpretation will ever exhaust. It is a textual construct that takes shape as it encounters a reader's sensibility. What this analysis has sought to encourage is a re-reading of Boland's poems that considers the objects in them not as signs or symbols but as and for themselves. Artworks according to Morton are subscendent: they are less than the sum of their parts, i.e. the objects that they contain. They are infinitely bigger on the inside than on the outside as each object within them possesses a "world". There is nothing in Heidegger, according to Morton, that warrants his reduction of the concept of world to humans (Morton, *Being Ecological* 84–85). Thus the black lace fan or the war horse have a life and a power of their own: endowed with sensual qualities, they affect readers and may hopefully promote a more caring, ethical, ecological attitude to the non-human of which humans are made.

Forgoing the all-too-human distinction between subject and object also makes it possible to reclaim and transcend guilt. Kilcoyne claims that Boland's guilt is caused by the inaccessibility of the other's subjectivity, especially the under-privileged other, and alleviated by creative memory, which "frees her from the restrictions of her privilege" (Kilcoyne 100). Middle-class guilt is a very common feeling in the present ecologically endangered era. For Morton, while it is valuable as the first step of ecological awareness because it comes from realizing that one's actions may have an adverse effect on others, it is still too tied in with the notion of individual subjectivity (Morton, *Dark Ecology* 131-132). Realizing how enmeshed we are with other humans, but also with the non-human world, is the beginning of a journey that leads from guilt through anxiety, melancholy and horror to joy, and the aesthetic experience is a key factor in bringing about this realisation. Read

for themselves, the objects in Boland's poems, the poems-as-objects, and the object that is Boland's subjectivity as constructed in her body of work all make this possible: therein lies their ecological value in post-Tiger Ireland.

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"Single Out the Devalued": The Figure of the Nonhuman Animal in Eavan Boland's Poetry

"Ressalte o desvalorizado": A figura do animal não humano na poesia de Eavan Boland

Maureen O'Connor

Abstract: *Boland has argued that "good nature poets are always subversive" and, though she did not identify as a nature poet, she compares her praxis to theirs: "their lexicon is the overlooked and the disregarded. . . . They single out the devalued and make a deep, metaphorical relation between it and some devalued parts of perception." Boland's engagement with the "natural" rarely provides a focus for analyses of her work, which predominantly attend to the poet's own frequently identified preoccupations: her relationship to history, especially Irish history, and her role as an Irish woman writing within and against a largely male-dominated tradition. However, both of these issues of ambivalent and insecure identification and situatedness are implicitly connected to cultural constructions of the "natural." This essay traces Boland's negotiation with a legacy of Irish women's silence by considering the appearance of the nonhuman animal in her verse, which evolves from traditional metaphor to a figure that challenges representational norms and expectations, thereby transvaluing the signifying power of silence and questioning the status of language itself, particularly as a uniquely human construct.*

Keywords: *Irish women's writing; Irish poetry; ecofeminism; new materialism; animal studies.*

Resumo: *Boland argumentou que "poetas de boa índole são sempre subversivos" e, embora não se identifique como poeta da natureza, ela compara sua práxis a deles: "seu léxico é o esquecido e o desconsiderado. . . . Eles ressaltam o desvalorizado e estabelecem uma relação metafórica profunda entre ela e algumas partes desvalorizadas da percepção". O envolvimento de Boland com o "natural" raramente fornece foco para análises de sua obra, que estão voltadas a preocupações frequentemente identificadas como sendo da própria poeta: sua relação com a história, especialmente a irlandesa, e seu papel de mulher irlandesa escrevendo*

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de dentro e contra uma tradição dominada por homens. Contudo, ambas as questões de identificação insegura e ambivalente, bem como de localização, estão implicitamente conectadas às construções culturais do "natural". Este ensaio traça a negociação de Boland com um legado de silêncio das mulheres irlandesas ao considerar o surgimento do animal não humano em sua poesia, que evolui da metáfora tradicional para uma figura que desafia expectativas e normas representativas, transvalorando, assim, o poder de significação do silêncio e questionando o próprio estatuto da linguagem, particularmente como construção exclusivamente humana.

Palavras-chave: *Escrita de mulheres irlandesas; Poesia irlandesa; Ecofeminismo; Novo materialismo; Estudos sobre animais.*

In "How We Made a New Art on Old Ground", a poem from Eavan Boland's 2001 collection, *Code*, the speaker claims never to have perceived nature's connection to the history of human violence (the "famous battle" that "happened in this valley"), or to have "understood the nature poem. / Till now." The revelation emerges after following "this / silence to its edge" where "you will hear / the history of air," written by "the crispness of a fern / or the upward cut and turn around of / a fieldfare or a thrush" (*New Selected* 189). While central to this poem and many others, Boland's engagement with the "natural" rarely provides a focus for analyses of her work, which predominantly attend to the poet's own frequently identified preoccupations: her relationship to history, especially Irish history, and her role as an Irish woman writing within and against a largely male-dominated tradition. However, both of these issues of ambivalent and insecure identification and situatedness are implicitly connected to cultural constructions of the "natural." In a 1996 interview with the American poet Linda Pastan, Eavan Boland rejects the label of nature poet, as such, but admits to having become "a sort of by default indoor nature poet." She situates the "natural" firmly within "cultural" constructs—particularly history, politics, and trade—when she claims to come from "a country where there has not been nature poetry . . . for complicated historic reasons." The reason Boland offers for the relationship Irish poetry has had to nature, which she suggests is atypical of poetic praxis in the western tradition, is "the fact that the land was a powerful and sort of rather broken-hearted place." The broken-heartedness to which Boland refers here is the trauma of Ireland's experience of empire and occupation, another recurring theme in her work. As Karen Kilcup observes, "many marginalised writers write about nature as part of a matrix of struggle, against colonialism war or racism, for example, and, hence, may be silenced by normative expectations about nature writing" (61). This essay will trace Boland's negotiation, as an

Irish woman poet, with a legacy of silence by considering the appearance of the animal in her verse, which evolves from traditional metaphor to a figure that challenges representational norms and expectations.

"How We Made Art on New Ground," is an example of the late work, a poem of expressive, creative silences, which suggests it is not only the silenced woman or worker of history whose stories have gone unheard—stories Boland worked to retrieve over the course of her career—but also the unacknowledged "wounds" and "torments" endured by the supposedly static, ahistorical natural world. The elements of the environment considered to be "animate," ferns and birds, as well as the abiotic features of the natural world, in this case, air, have their own histories, written in languages all but opaque to us, even if we often play a part in those histories. The speaker is immersed in an ongoing aesthetic production that erases distinctions between "nature" and "culture," and comes to "know that the nature poem /is not the action nor its end ," but "in / its own modest way, an art of peace" (190). The attempt to impose language onto the scene only creates a spreading silence, and toward the conclusion, the speaker concedes that "what we see / is what the poem says: / evening coming – cattle, cattle-shadows –" (190). The poem is a collaborative act in which every inscribed word is "unwritten," the space of language filled with a dynamic natural beauty as day becomes night. The birds writing history in the bright air early in the poem make way for the cattle and their lengthening shadows that provide the poem's closing image.

The poem offers an ostensible counter to the assertion made by the title of an earlier Boland poem, "We Are Human History. We Are Not Natural History" (1990); however, "a swarm of wild bees" opens and closes the 1990 text, appearing as implicit co-creators of the work of art: like the poet, they are "making use of" history, that is, "the stashed-up debris of old seasons" (*New Selected* 102) The poem is one of the examples Stephanie Boeninger uses to demonstrate the ways "Boland levers seasonal rhythms against the human desire for historical particularity" (45). The body of the poem rebuts its own title, itself a ventriloquizing of the kind of binarized thinking that insists on seeing "nature" and "culture" as separate, an always implicitly gendered opposition. "We Are Human History" appears in the collection *Outside History*, a collection Boeninger argues which demonstrates "Boland's awareness of the historical tendency to equate women with nature and men with culture" (46). Boeninger argues that this poem in particular insists on the inseparability of human and nonhuman history: "There is a kind of history, the poem suggests, that the poet cannot and perhaps should not try to escape, the memory of the ways in which human beings have interacted with nature" (48). Many of the poems

in *Outside History* point to an ongoing evolution in how Boland deploys the figure of the nonhuman animal, a process that reflects Mark Fisher's contention that "an enquiry into the nature of what the world is like is also inevitably an unravelling of what human beings had taken themselves to be" (83), a humbling lesson in the "modest way" of the "nature poem" as Boland came to understand the form.

Boland recalls her own early apprenticeship in Irish poetry as a time when "as a teenager" she was "writing moody poems about swans and bridges" (qtd. in Randolph, "Interview" 105), in other words, modelling her praxis on a romantic, Yeatsian version of Irish versifying. In a 1974 *Irish Times* article, "The Weasel's Tooth," the mature poet regrets being led to believe in "arid rhetoric" by Yeats, the writer she has "admired and loved most in my life" (88). Of the poetry produced in her eighteenth year, Boland says she believed the way to fulfil a "poet's vocation" was "to develop some precocious maleness which would carry me towards it" ("In Search of a Language" 57, 59). When she was "young and studying poetry at university," she says, "I had a very orthodox, nineteenth-century view of the nature poem" ("Poets' Q & A" 134). Yeats's evocative nature imagery tends toward the emblematic, functioning primarily, if not exclusively, as projection and reflection of the poet self, especially in contemplations of diminishing powers, such as the "dolphin-torn" sea of Byzantium, "the nine-and-fifty swans" of "The Wild Swans at Coole," or the creatures symbolizing the poet's literary creations in "The Circus Animals' Desertion." In Boland's first significant collection, *New Territory* (1967), the nonhuman world, including animals, also functions allegorically or furnishes ornamental detail in the retelling of myths, such as the birds and fish in "Athene's Song" in which the goddess plays a "pipe of bone / Robbed and whittled from a stag" (*Collected* 3). Retellings of Irish myth use the nonhuman animal as texture, contributing to the authenticity of a setting for the more "important", arresting human action, such as the opening stanza of "After the Irish of Aodghan O'Rathaille": "Without flocks or cattle or the curved horns / Of cattle, in a drenching night without sleep / . . . I cry for boyhood, long before / Winkle and dogfish had defiled my lips" (*Collected* 5). The speaker in "The Pilgrim" compares the plight of ever-journeying birds to the female pilgrim who "shares their fate" (*Collected* 10), a parallel even more structurally important to the poem "Migration," which names various birds, swallows, swifts, the "cuckoo and operatic nightingale," as well as "sandpiper, finch, and wren." Here, birds appear as symbols of the anonymous hordes of human travellers over the seas and centuries, driven by hope and necessity, lost to history. "Huddled together without name and burial," history's human wanderers are likened to birds dying at sea "without sanctity" (*Collected* 11). Birds, specifically swans, are also central in the collection's

"Three Songs for a Legend" sequence, in which the metamorphosis of the children of Lír represents the merging of the human and nonhuman as tragedy.

Animal metamorphosis will move from the mythological to the contemporary over the course of Boland's oeuvre, though still often connected to classic poetic tropes and reminiscent of Yeats's late work, which represents the humiliations and disappointments of old age as a descent into loathsome animality. In Yeats, the body—traditionally associated in Western culture with mortality, nature, and the feminine—becomes a terrifying prison threatening to undermine hopes of immortality to be achieved through the creation of undying art. In Boland's work, poems addressed to the "muse," in particular, make recourse to negative images of female aging that represent the process as one of increasing animalization, implicitly and explicitly revolting and diminishing, similar to the experience of feared irrelevancy and impotence in Yeats. One of the mythical retellings in the early collection *New Territory*, "The Winning of Etain," anticipates this pattern. For Etain, transforming into an animal, in this case a dragonfly, is a process not just of change but of "quick and violent decay" (*Collected* 16). When the dragonfly, having fallen into "the bright wine of another queen" is swallowed, she magically impregnates the queen, and the child born of this transformation "grew to hate the forest" (*Collected* 19), without understanding the source of her dread of the wilderness. Knowledge and memory are not carried forward into her reincarnated form; all that links the newly born Etain to her former self is physical beauty.

Issues of female embodiment, including cultural expectations of youthful desirability with which "Etain" engages—the re-born Etain is wooed by the much older Aengus, her lover before her first metamorphosis—provide the central themes of the 1980 collection, *In Her Own Image*. The opening poem, "Tirade for the Mimic Muse," addresses the muse as a "ruthless bitch," a "fat trout" whose advanced age is evident in "the lizarding of eyelids" and "the whiskering of nipples" (*Collected* 55), in other words, the animalization of those elements of the body prominent in erotic representations of the female body. In a later poem, "Tirade for the Lyric Muse" (1987), the muse undergoes plastic surgery to combat the abhorrent signs of aging: "They've patched your wrinkles / and replaced your youth." Again, the figure is animalized, with "mongrel features" (recalling "mimic Muse's" "bitch") and a "snout" (*Collected* 130). In the western tradition, the muse is a goddess who inspires the always-male artist, in later eras a beautiful human woman who silently, unobtrusively enables male genius, a woman reliably nurturing, inspiring, and self-effacing. The gendering of this artistic relationship to the forces of inspiration presents challenges to the woman artist, who has had to bear the burden of traditional

expectations of femininity as well as excessive critical scrutiny and scepticism regarding her right to claim artistic credibility. As noted by the Irish novelist Edna O'Brien, Boland's contemporary, these two sources of pressure and assessment conspire to undermine the woman creator, as the personal and the professional collide: "If you happen to have your hair done, well then you can't be a serious writer" (qtd. in Carlson 73).

In other poems from *In Her Own Image*, "Anorexic" and "Mastectomy," the desexualized female body is fragmented and examined like a medical specimen, or an nonhuman animal subject of experimentation. The anorectic speaker of "Anorexic" disassociates from her own body, a "witch" whose "curves and paps" the speaker will burn in self-denial until the "bitch" of her own body is "curveless." This "bitch" will be subdued, finally "caged" (*Collected* 58-59). Randolph characterizes the poem as a "rejection of female selfhood altogether," in which "female sexuality is described as a fall from (the) grace of the male body" ("Écriture" 52-53). The minimizing of the female form is conducted externally in "Mastectomy," in which the speaker's body is ransacked, "looted," like a vivisected specimen, reduced to "a brute site" (*Collected* 61). "Exhibitionist" and "Making Up" reverse this trajectory of minimization, but, as they close the collection, acts of augmentation are just as compromised as those of violent reduction. The "Exhibitionist" is a practitioner of "dark" arts, a sculptor who "subverts" the old mode. The speaker undresses in a paradoxical act of stripping that is the same time a shaping of the self to inspire desire: "I dimple clay, / I flesh, / I rump stone" (*Collected* 68). These images, as well as the language of "curves" and "paps" found throughout the collection, will recur in Boland's next collection, *Night Feed* in the poem "The Woman Turns Herself Into a Fish," discussed below.

One of the themes that Boland is credited with bringing into mainstream Irish poetry is the experience of female embodiment, specifically as an often painful, unmediated ordeal, rather than Irish womanhood represented as earthy, narrowly maternal, or idealized. As the work becomes increasingly personal and bodily, a revised connection to the natural also emerges, a change Boland has often attributed to becoming a mother, which repositioned her from outside to inside, from "romantic-poet" observer to "a participant in the whole world of change and renewal" (qtd. in "Poets' Q & A" 134). In a 1993 interview, Boland objects to the by-then familiar characterization of her work as "domestic," arguing that she has always had a "subversive relation to what was nominated—by tradition, by superstition, by criticism—as being a proper subject for poetry." She goes on to note that "good nature poets are always subversive" and compares her praxis to theirs: "their lexicon is the overlooked and the disregarded. . . . They single out the devalued and make a deep, metaphorical relation between it and some devalued parts of perception" (qtd. in Randolph,

"Interview" 108). By the early 1990s, the work has moved away from deploying the animal as Yeatsian emblem, as in "The War Horse" from the 1975 collection of the same name, in which horse and hills function as "private emblems" (Boland, "Subject Matters" 81), or from the self-lacerating performance of the material female body as derogated through its association with the nonhuman animal, as in "The Woman Turns Herself Into a Fish" from the 1982 collection, *Night Feed*. In poems like "Daphne with Her Thighs in Bark" and "The New Pastoral," this collection gestures to classic sources and newly complicated gendered representations. Daphne's metamorphosis offers an ironic lament, advising sexual surrender, while in "The Woman Turns Herself Into a Fish," the changes wrought by menopause are experienced as a series of desexualizing animal transformations. The harsh monosyllabic language of female embodiment found in earlier poems, like "rump" and "flank," words that evoke cuts of butchered meat, or "pap," a word usually referring to an animal's teat, recur here to be echoed by terse descriptors and verbs eliciting repulsion and unease, including "scaled," "chill," "slack," and "slap" (*Collected* 83-84).

"The New Pastoral" has inspired some ecocritical readings, such as Oona Frawley's contention that, Boland's fraught relationship to "nature" and the nature poem must be positioned within an Irish "tradition that saw nature as the site of exclusion from culture, a sign of marginal existence" (150). The suburbs, in this analysis, comprise a middle ground between these polarized constructions of "culture" and "nature." Donna Potts reads the poem as confronting that binary directly in an ecofeminist gesture, drawing "parallels between the exploitation of earth and women" (16). The pastoral names a particular relationship to the landscape and domesticated animals, traditionally being set in a fantasy of controlled and sanitized "nature." Potts notes, however, in contrast to the expected idyll of a pastoral, in the lines, "'Can I make whole/ this lamb's knuckle, butchered from its last crooked suckling?'", the speaker encounters "the lamb only after it has been butchered and thus has no other choice but to be conscious of death, of deterioration, of loss, of chaos. Boland's 'new pastoral' is thus also post-pastoral in its attentiveness to nature's cycles of birth and decay, life and death" (108), a specifically materialist relationship to the creativity inherent in destruction. The poem is one of many in Boland's oeuvre that stages a struggle with poetic form, voice, history, and authority.

As noted, Boland considered disrupting received ideas about the "proper" subject of poetry to be her responsibility as a woman poet, and it is significant that she presents the totemic animal of a venerable literary mode, the pastoral, as dead and dismembered, bringing to discomfiting awareness the exploitation and death of a tender young "suckling" creature, a reality of the brutality of our casual mistreatment of the nonhuman, a reality

usually occluded. The connection between exploitation of the animals foregrounded in a poem like "The New Pastoral," and violence against women is echoed in the later poem, "Violence Against Women" (2007), which refers to "shepherdesses in the English pastoral" who are instrumentalised by the male poet who writes of them "gathering their unreal sheep / into real verse for whom no one will weep" (*New Selected* 219, 220). Why this parallel signifies specifically in an Irish context is suggested by Val Plumwood's observations about the "hegemonic accounts of agency can be seen most clearly in the context of colonising relationships." The function of "hypersepration" she locates in "Eurocentric and anthropocentric erasures of agency" is "to mark out the Other for separate and inferior treatment through a radical exclusion the colonisers may exaggerate differences, and deny relationship, conceiving the subordinated party as less than human, the colonised may be described as 'stone-age' 'primitive' 'beast'" (128). While the simianization of the Irish is a well-documented historic phenomenon, Marian Scholtmeijer contends that for women writers this bestialization of the othered can provide oppositional strategies: "animals offer an ideational model for ontological defiance. The radical alienation of animals from culture is not just ideationally but politically advantageous to feminism" (234, 236). As Boland's confidence and success in establishing an alternative, independent tradition for Irish women's poetry grows, the nonhuman animal in her work gains independence from the traditional snares of metaphor. This move away from a "representationalist" mode of figuring the animal is connected, in feminist new materialism, with a rejection of the kind of foundational hyperseparation Plumwood describes. As Karen Barad argues:

> If we no longer believe the world is teeming with inherent resemblances whose signatures are inscribed on the face of the world, things already emblazoned with signs, . . . but rather that the knowing subject is enmeshed in a thick web of representations such that the mind cannot see its way to objects that are now forever out of reach and all that is visible is the sticky problem of humanity's own captivity within language. (*Meeting* 137)

In a later poem like "An Elegy for my Mother in Which She Scarcely Appears" (2007), which privileges nonhuman animals that have died and "inanimate" objects over human subjects, this almost entirely invisible enmeshment gestures to possibilities of expression beyond the representational.

The butchered animal as an indicator of feminist defiance and transgression appears again in "Domestic Violence" (2007). The first stanza sets a wintry scene that includes this detail: "*Pleased to meet you meat to please you* / said the butcher's sign in the window in the village" (*New Selected* 199). Jody Allen Randolph describes the collection

Domestic Violence as "opening a large set of questions as to whether the nature poem itself is not an escape into a historical pastoral which has proved infirm" ("Ecocritical" 58). Other contemporary Irish women poets similarly challenge the traditional masculinist "nature" poem. For example, in Mary O'Malley's "The Poet's Fancy" (2001), the male poet's instrumentalist approach to nature is rendered as physical violence. The animals warn each other of the poet's approach, afraid "they'll end up – / in a trap, at the end of a hook / or dead on some godforsaken road." The making of poetry out of nonhuman animal resources is a form of butchery: "They could even lose their pelts, / skins, feathers" (52). In the collection *Domestic Violence*, as much as Boland problematizes the nature poem "by suggesting at least some of its premises were false," according to Randolph, the form is nevertheless recognized as one with political and societal significance, "the locus of an almost continuing crisis since the nineteenth century" ("Ecocritical" 59), that is, environmental degradation in the name of economic progress and capitalist accumulation.

The pastoral's connection with death and destruction also appears in "Object Lessons," from *Outside History*. The speaker is unnerved by her husband's coffee mug, specifically the "cruel theatre" of the hunting scene that decorates it. The poem reads in the painted scene the history of an equivalence assumed between the hunted animal and the domesticated woman, between the "captured" wife and the exploited landscape: "A lady smiling as the huntsman kissed her: / the way land looks before disaster." The disaster hinted at in the coffee mug's decoration and in the poem's domestic setting is presaged by the mug, which shatters:

> the details of
> this pastoral were merely
> veiled warnings
>
> of the shiver
> of presentiment with which
> we found the broken pieces of
> the sparrow hawk and the kisses of
> the huntsman. (*Collected* 139)

The sentimental rendering of "cruel theatre" as kitchen-ware embellishment ironically telescopes the perceived historical distance between a model of heterosexual marriage in which the woman is herself is quarry, an ornamental prize, and the modern companionate marriage, revealing potential cracks beneath the decorous surface. As Potts suggests, Boland "relies on the pastoral tradition to explore personal history and to accommodate women's history . . . to imaginatively restore women's real presence in landscape" (16). Boland's

"domestic" poetry brings into focus "the overlooked and disregarded," as she observes all effective nature poetry does. "The project of a nature poem is a revised way of seeing" (qtd. in Randolph, "An Interview" 108), according to Boland. Her "indoor nature poetry" brings to our attention the usually unnoticed blurring of the distinctions between "nature" and "culture" in the typical suburban kitchen. As she says of "Domestic Violence", "I wanted the cut flowers on the table to show the wound of their break with the natural" ("I Only Escaped" 86). Deracinated flowers provide visual pleasure at an unacknowledged price. Plumwood's observation that "Nature can be used to hide human contribution especially those of non-privileged groups" (131) makes clear the implications for women's history of contributing to culture in a tradition that relegates the female to the "natural" as well as to the hidden, irrelevant domestic.

According to Randolph, Boland's admiration of the work of Sylvia Plath was significant in the younger poet's evolving conviction over the course of the 1990s regarding the unsuspected radical possibilities in a poetics that attended to both the domestic and the natural. In Randolph's account, Boland was inspired by Plath's "courage in writing about children" and by "her use of the nature poem to do so," a mode for representing "a new alignment with the natural world" generated by the experience of motherhood (Eavan Boland 72). Randolph characterizes this development as a reaction against an Irish tradition of nature writing in which the land functions almost exclusively as a source of national identity. As Plumwood has noted, "Landscape so framed draws on a colonial as well as an androcentric model which frames land as passive, visually captured, something to distance from, survey, subdue" (123). In contrast to this alienated, objectifying representation of the natural, the intimacies of the domestic nature poem, in which a sleeping or stalking pet cat, for example, as in the 1996 poem, "Ode to Suburbia," paradoxically grants the work a global, timeless reach. "[T]his creature drowsing now in every house" is "The same lion who tore stripes / Once off zebras" (*New Collected* 66). In "Prisoners" (1989) a similarly multiple, mobile feline appears, seen first "lost in the lion cages/ Of the zoo," later glimpsed "at the hearth," as well as "in a school annual tamed in type, / In a screen safari." The speaker does not expect the irony of finding this fabulous shape-shifting creature "alive and well in our suburban / World," even as in the Leo constellation overhead, he is captured in "his stars" (*Selected* 23). While the poem suggests parallels between the humans and nonhumans who appear in the work, the cat is not functioning as a metaphor; he is presented as an independent being with a rich history and lineage, retaining connections and iterations that not only span the globe but even reach into the cosmos. In the poem's concluding upward gaze, it appears to answer affirmatively the question posed by Anna

Lowenhaupt Tsing, "Might it be possible to attend to nature's collaborative origins without losing the advantages of its global reach?" (95). As when Boland places bees at the opening and closing of "We Are Human History," the cats in these poems embody an instance of "acknowledge[ing] the creativity of earth others" (Plumwood 117). Boland has argued, the "good nature poet ... becomes the agent in the poem for a different way of seeing" (qtd. in Randolph, "An Interview" 108), a core perceptual difference in this case being a revised understanding of nonhuman agency, its active contribution to the making of what we call "culture."

Liam Young has argued for a trajectory similar to the one I see in Boland's work, a movement away from unproblematic confidence in cultural mastery over the natural in Yeats's late verse when faced with death, a "softening" of the poet's "symbolist stance on the author's ability to wield his theme" (158). In Young's account this "rethinking of the author" is a disturbing experience for the poet rather than the kind of revelatory, even comforting, disruption of delimiting "certainties" that emerges in Boland's work; however, the ways in which Young analyses the role of the nonhuman animal in this disruption for Yeats is useful for thinking of the animal's appearance in Boland's work. While Young concedes that in the early work nonhuman animals serve entirely human-centred functions—the "poet wields control over the outer world" (158)—Yeats later deploys the "silent" animal as a figure for the "problem of indeterminacy of linguistic structure," a problem potentially undermining of "authorial agency and human subjectivity" (151). The dissolution of the self, attendant on the discovery that the poet has been "caught up in a semiotic system that is seemingly [as] indifferent to [his] intentions" as it is to those of nonhuman animals (159), that Young observes in Yeats's late textual encounters with nonhuman animals, as in "The Cat and the Moon," entails a foundational challenge to male poetic authority. Yeats experiences what Barad calls the "sticky problem of humanity's own captivity within language." Never having enjoyed the same claim to such authority, the Irish woman poet's encounter with the silent animal figure is distinctive. While "the presence of animals in literature always poses dangers to the symbolic order, potentially refuses legibility . . . the self-conscious deployment of the animal in [Irish women's] texts, . . . as a figure for the productive 'failures' and fragile silences of women's writing, engages with the limits of representation and language, the inherent violence of metaphor" (O'Connor 947).

The "silence" attributed to the nonhuman is a self-congratulatory illusion. Barad questions the power we have granted what is understood as "language" when she argues, "Statements are not the mere utterances of the originating consciousness of a unified subject; rather statements and subjects emerge from a field of possibilities. This field of

possibilities is not static or singular but rather is a dynamic and contingent multiplicity" (*Meeting* 146-147). In "Anna Liffey," from *A Time of Violence*, the historical figure for whom the river Liffey was named, concludes the poem by reminding us that "In the end / It will not matter / That I was a woman" and that "the body is a source. Nothing more," of no more significance than a river. She also acknowledges the ocean's iterative capacities:

> When language cannot do it for us,
> Cannot make us know love will not diminish us,
> There are the phrases of the ocean
> To console us.
> Particular and unafraid of their completion.
> In the end
> Everything that burdened and distinguished me
> Will be lost in this:
> I was a voice. (*New Selected* 145)

The human voice here is just one among many, in Barad's words, part of "a dynamic and contingent multiplicity."

Jane Bennett maintains that we need to cultivate "the idea that human agency has some echo in nonhuman nature—to counter the narcissism of humans in charge of the world" (xvi). The nonhuman in Bennett's discussion does not comprise solely "animate" beings, like animals, but also those elements of creation that are considered "inanimate," a category coming under pressure in the recent work of feminist new materialists, like Bennett and Barad, who explain that

> [A]gency is not something possessed by humans, or non-humans for that matter. It is an enactment. And it enlists, if you will, 'non-humans' as well as 'humans'. . . . Agency is not held, it is not a property of persons or things; rather, agency is an enactment, a matter of possibilities for reconfiguring entanglements" (Interview 54, 55).

Boland has always demonstrated tenderness towards and heightened sensitivity to the particularities of beloved objects, but in the poems around the time of and after her mother's death in 2002, a loss addressed both obliquely and directly in the 2007 collection *In a Time of Violence*, the nonhuman, both animate and inanimate, occupies an intensified vibrancy in a constellation of signification. In these poems we find some of the most potent suggestions of not only the possibilities of poetry re-imagining and even reconfiguring our understanding of human agency—its limits as well as its expansive potentialities—but also

the artist's responsibilities to both the living and the dead, who trouble distinctions and distances between the animate and inanimate.

"Elegy for My Mother in Which She Scarcely Appears" offers an especially vivid example of the poem as comprising multiple agencies and unattended voices. It opens with an acknowledgement of our "strange human duty," that is, "to grieve for the animals / . . . weep for them, pity them." The speaker suddenly turns to contemplate the silenced, disregarded domestic objects, "dumb implements," which "have / no eyes to plead with us like theirs, / no claim to make on us like theirs." This disregard resists the potentially endearing ways that the objects are figured in animal terms: the "singing kettle" with its bird-like "rising shriek in winter"; the "brass firedogs which lay out / all evening on the grate"; "a wooden clothes horse, absolutely steady / without sinews, with no mane and no meadows / to canter in" (*New Selected* 209). Every nonhuman element of the domestic scene where the speaker places her mother's memory is eulogized, including the lively, fragile, independent "beast," language. In trying to recreate a memory of her mother, the poet is left "with nothing to assist me but the last / and most fabulous of beasts—language, language—." Language is aware of its own mortality; it "knows as I do, that it's too late / to record the loss of these things but does so anyway, / and anxiously, in case it shares their fate" (*New Selected* 210). As Fisher observes, "the subject who speaks" is "composed out of the undead, discorporate stuff of language" (109), an observation that suggests language itself necessarily challenges the oppositional binaries of material and immaterial, organic and inorganic, past and present, life and death.

Boland has maintained that the experience of maternity inaugurated a new relationship to the natural world. The loss of Boland's mother inspired poems that once again revise the subject's experience of the body—that which connects us all to the disavowed nonhuman—representing it as a more disperse and corporate entanglement. In another poem about her mother's death, "And Soul," rushing to her dying mother's bedside, the poet recalls hearing "once that the body is, or is / said to be, almost all / water." This leads her to suspect that "coast canal ocean river stream and now / mother / ... could be shades of each other, / the way the body is" (*New Selected* 211). Similarly, in "Amber," the speaker holds a piece of amber given to her by her late, "absent" mother, noting that according to "Reason ... / the dead cannot see the living. / The living will never see the dead again" (*New Selected* 210). However, the elements captured in the resin "seem as alive as / they ever were" (*New Selected* 211). According to Fisher, a "certain darkness hangs over the possibility of life, it surrounds the difference between the organic and the inorganic" (52), a darkness that Boland's poetry can enlighten. "Amber" holds out the possibility that the

past and the present can occupy the same space, "memory itself / a Baltic honey" (211). The poem, like a drop of amber enclosing seeds and feathers "inside a flawed translucence" can illuminate for us the possibilities of "just how much can be kept safe" (211), when we embrace our "strange human duty" to understand ourselves as one animal element in a much greater enmeshed whole.

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Queer Phenomenology and the Things Themselves in Eavan Boland's In a Time of Violence

Fenomenologia queer e as coisas em si em In a Time of Violence*, de Eavan Boland*

Aubry Haines

Abstract: *Situating Eavan Boland's In a Time of Violence in dialogue with Sara Ahmed's* Queer Phenomenology, *this article contends that Boland's ekphrastic portrayals of physical things queers both traditional phenomenological conceptions of being-in-the-world as well as numerous conventions in Irish poetry. Eavan Boland's concern for objects throughout the volume undermines widespread literary depictions of Irish women as essentialized, mythologized, or emblematized figures. Her preoccupation with physical things allows her to reject acts of reductive, discursive violence so often perpetrated by past male Irish authors and poets. Boland chooses to focalize upon quotidian, pedestrian, and overlooked objects, thus naturally aligning her poetry with Sara Ahmed's* Queer Phenomenology. *Both Boland and Ahmed rescue marginalized perspectives from the darkened corners of existence. Boland's poetry demonstrates an acute awareness that returning to "the things themselves" (Husserl 18) provides avenues for reclamation, multiplicity, and autonomy in the face of hegemonic, anonymizing narratives of Irish femininity.*

Keywords: *Eavan Boland; Poetry; Queer Phenomenology; Sara Ahmed; Ekphrasis.*

Resumo: *Situando* In a Time of Violence *de Eavan Boland, em diálogo com* Queer Phenomenology *de Sara Ahmed, este artigo afirma que retratos ekphrásticos feitos por Boland de coisas físicas queerizam tanto concepções fenomenológicas tradicionais sobre estar-no-mundo, bem como numerosas convenções da poesia irlandesa. A preocupação de Eavan Boland com objetos em todo o volume mina representações literárias de mulheres irlandesas difundidas como figuras essencializadas, mitificadas ou emblemáticas. Sua preocupação com coisas físicas permite a rejeição de atos de violência redutiva e discursiva tão frequentemente perpetrados por homens irlandeses – autores e poetas – do passado. Boland opta por focalizar objetos do cotidiano, corriqueiros e esquecidos, alinhando assim naturalmente sua poesia com* Queer Phenomenology, *de Sara*

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Ahmed. Tanto Boland quanto Ahmed resgatam perspectivas marginalizadas dos cantos escuros da existência. A poesia de Boland demonstra uma consciência aguda de que o retorno "às coisas em si" (Husserl 18) fornece caminhos de recuperação, multiplicidade e autonomia diante de narrativas hegemônicas e de anonimato sobre a feminilidade irlandesa.

Palavras-chave: *Eavan Boland; Poesia; Fenomenologia Queer; Sara Ahmed; Ekphrasis.*

In her 1996 essay, "Outside History," Boland demonstrates her acute awareness of the Irish literary canon's predominately male perspective—one which tends to essentialize and mythologize femininity, thus robbing female Irish subjects of their sovereignty, individuality, and agency:

> the majority of Irish male poets depended on women as motifs in their poetry. They moved easily, deftly, as if by right among images of women in which I did not believe and of which I could not approve. The women in their poems were often passive, decorative, raised to emblematic status. This was especially true where the woman and the idea of the nation were mixed: where the nation became a woman and the woman took on a national posture. (134–35)

As Irish scholar Jeanette Riley aptly notes, Boland's verse "hopes to diffuse the impact of nationalism upon women's identities" (24), unveiling the subjugation concomitant to emblematization. However, as Boland's verse attempts to dismantle harmful representations of femininity, thereby granting female Irish subjects vocality and autonomy, several critics levy stark criticisms against her work. Put briefly, some critics portray her work as a constraining, essentializing space for explorations of Irish femininity. Thus, I focus on Eavan Boland's *In a Time of Violence* (1994) to argue two main points: firstly, that Boland's poetry destabilizes such criticism; and secondly, that the volume establishes a language of representation that renders women active subjects and agents in poems rather than mere adornments, objects, or emblems, all the while.

Violence has been dissected from numerous angles—post-colonial, feminist, and politico-historical—and critics generally agree that the collection continues Boland's oft-noted endeavour of subverting the male-dominated tradition of Irish poetry by redressing historical depictions of women as either idealized muses or Mother Ireland figures (Cory 960). See, for example, Collins (2015) for female Irish identity in Boland or Walter (2013) for the femininity as allegory for the nation. While those who laud Boland's poetry

typically point to and celebrate her diverse and rich representations of Irish femininity, her more reproving critics claim she naively replicates the very oppressive, stereotyping structures she critiques. Irish scholar Stef Craps notes that, according to Boland's detractors, "rather than truthfully [represent] the previously excluded, she appropriates and falsifies their experience in much the same way as her male predecessors did" (166). While individual poems throughout *Violence* may corroborate charges of regressive essentialism or a prejudicial penchant for objects over human experiences, consideration of the volume as a whole resists any such rigid readings. What these critics fail to take into account are Boland's queering of the traditional poetic subject, the commentary she offers on female essentialism through the overall trajectory of the collection, as well as the significant role physical objects play in both of these artistic ventures. Indeed, it is this last element of objects' status in the volume that brings me to the assertion that Boland's *Violence* demonstrates a natural affinity with Sara Ahmed's *Queer Phenomenology* (2006).

Just as Boland's writing undermines male-centric poetic configurations of Irish femininity, Ahmed, a scholar of phenomenology, queers a historically male-dominated philosophy and interpretive methodology. Phenomenology famously concerns itself with the status of physical things—Edmund Husserl defines phenomenology as "a return to the things themselves" (18)—interrogating the manner in which subjects orient their consciousness towards objects, thus revealing the subjective perceiver's biases and presuppositions concerning said object's purpose and meaning. Ahmed queers this traditional methodology by focusing on things—or even individuals—often relegated to the margins of perceptive acts. Rather than orient consciousness towards objects in the perceiver's purview, Ahmed encourages subjects to consider peripheral phenomena. She asks what operations occurring in the background allow a subject—in particular, subjects who have historically held privileged positions—to perceive the objects in front of them in the first place? Boland and Ahmed shift our focus to these nooks and crannies, urging readers to consider how the shadowy, neglected corners of existence contribute to lived experience. *Violence* assiduously concerns itself with the status of such physical objects and provides particularly fertile ground for a queer phenomenological reading. Considering *Violence* in conjunction with *Queer Phenomenology* highlights how Boland speaks *to* Irish femininity without speaking *for* it, as well as how the simple, unornamented constitution of things throughout Boland's verse is to be reconciled with their prodigious importance. By shifting focus from essentialized or mythologized female figures to discarded objects and overwritten histories, *Violence* infers a deeper philosophical project, one that queers traditional Irish structures, whether they be gendered, political, representational, or

poetic. Boland's ekphrastic absorption with physical things thus not only functions as the basis for phenomenological being-in-the-world, but also serves a crucial poetic and political function: her predilection for physical objects upends historical configurations of essentialized femininity without falling prey to the same trap of mythologization. Things espouses multiplicity rather than totalization.

The Prison of Essentialism

Boland addresses the pervasive issue of harmful essentialism in "Outside History," writing, "Once the idea of a nation influences the perception of a woman then that woman is suddenly and inevitably simplified. She can no longer have complex feelings and aspirations. She becomes the passive projection of a national idea" (Boland, *OL* 135). Literary representations of women that rely upon essentialized or mythologized configurations of femininity inevitably become prisons. Riley affirms as much, contending that "traditionally, women are only acted upon in Irish literature; they never act themselves. Irish women are never portrayed as being able or as having the opportunity to determine their own identities, to reach full subjectivity in a poem or novel" (25). *Violence*'s "What Language Did" beautifully illustrates this dilemma, apprising readers of the rhetorical violence immanent within depictions which exalt—or rather, adulterate—femininity as an emblem or a myth. The speaker of "What Language Did" immediately situates herself in the realm of the quotidian, telling readers, "The evening was the same as any other. / I came out and stood on the step." (Boland, *Violence* 63). The abrupt, static nature of these first two clauses establishes the poem's general sense of mundanity, further cultivated by the following lines: "The suburb was closed in the weather / of an early spring" and "the shallow tips / and washed-out yellows of narcissi / resisted dusk" (63). Suburbs, gardens, and spring weather evoke the tedium associated with ordinary life. These details lead to the speaker's ruminations upon the inescapability of old age, for she experiences the "melancholy / of growing older in such a season" where "whatever else might flower before the fruit, / and be renewed, I would not" (63). In the midst of these thoughts, though, she is overcome by "a presence" (63).

This "presence" reveals itself in the form of "a shepherdess, her smile cracked, / her arm injured from the mantelpieces / and pastorals where she posed with her crook" (63). The emergence of the phantasmal shepherdess within a poem replete with dull and commonplace imagery signals the interruption of the mythic—of the emblematic. Accompanying the shepherdess is "Cassiopeia trapped" in the "spaces / of the night sky

constellations" and "a mermaid with invented tresses, / her breasts printed with the salt of it and all / the desolation of the North Sea in her face" (64). Figures normally associated with mythology or nobility are instead portrayed as decrepit, imprisoned, and tormented. These folkloric beings address the speaker, telling her that they *"languish in a grammar of sighs, / in the high-minded search for euphony, / in the midnight rhetoric of poesie*" (64, italics in original). For these feminine figures, literature is not a space of self-actualization, but rather a prison. Language functions as an instantiation of epistemic violence, capturing them "in time and space, wounding and silencing them. These women, preserved as they are by the 'rhetoric of poesie', are not allowed to live . . . they are an 'element of design' rather than subjective, active individuals" (Riley 29). The poem's rigid structure further emphasizes this, for the strict three-line stanzas that make up the entirety of the poem effectively trap the women within verse. Through the plight of these female *objects*, for this is what writing and mythologization render them, Boland's abhorrence for the ornamentation of femininity is evident.

"What Language Did" deftly illustrates the perniciousness of female essentialism, as the shepherdess, Cassiopeia, and the mermaid never attain true subjectivity or authority in the poem. They entreat the speaker to "*Help [them] escape youth and beauty*" for within poetry their "*skin is icy*" and their "*wombs are empty*" (65, italics in original); the women repeatedly lament their unfulfilled desires, indicating that they are inarguably and inexorably incapable of autonomous activity. Their status as literary emblems prohibits expression or action, for they can only be *acted upon*. The domain from which each figure hails also signals totalization's considerably oppressive reach, as "The shepherdess represents land, Cassiopeia the sky, and the mermaid the sea. The objectification of women as emblems, ornaments and icons pervasively covers all three planes of existence" (Riley 29). Boland's verse ultimately contends that univocality, homogeneity, and a lack of autonomy are ineluctable consequences of the emblematization of femininity—consequences which possess only one possible remedy: "*Write us out of the poem. Make us human / in cadences of change and mortal pain / and words we can grow old and die in*" (65, italics in original). This last line gains further significance when considered in conjunction with the title, for the past tense of "What Language Did" indicates that despite the historical misuse of language on the part of male authors—a misuse that imprisoned women—language need not perpetuate this brand of adulteration; language can function as abolition and liberation when utilized properly, illustrated by the emblematized women's pleas to be written "out of the poem" (65). "What Language Did" thus reveals that the mundane existence of the speaker, the reality that she will eventually "grow old and die" (65), is

preferable to the mythologized status of feminine icons; Boland offers readers a stark denunciation of female essentialism. However, a condemnation of this representational violence does not necessarily translate to actual *speech* or *action* on the part of Irish women.

Despite the immured women's pleas, Boland's poem ends on an inconclusive note. While their despondent invocations draw attention to the intrinsic violence of mythologized femininity, "What Language Did" ends before the speaker can write the women "*out of the poem*" (65); the emblematized figures do not attain true subjectivity or vocality. However, this restraint is intentional. Boland resists speaking *for* the women, since this would effectively replicate and perpetuate the very issue she seeks to address in her work. Thus, as articulated by Irish poetry scholar Stef Craps, Boland "does not so much perform an act of ventriloquism . . . as interrogate [silence] and bear witness to an experience that remains fundamentally irrecoverable" (165). Boland acts as a careful surveyor and inquisitor, for "it is important that [she] be sensitive to the opposite extreme and steer clear of presenting a kind of monumentalized 'women's experience', avoiding the pitfall of essentializing female identity" (Cory 962–63). Rather than oversimplify Irish femininity through the use of monolithic terms, Boland's verse searches, instead, for a language of "self-determination" (Riley 25). She seeks to establish multiplicity in place of univocality and totalization.

This venture, while admirable and valuable, still leaves Boland with a difficult task: how is she to speak *to* Irish femininity without speaking *for* it? How does she avoid committing the very act of discursive violence she condemns? In *Violence*, Boland successfully articulates these disparate and diverse experiences of Irish women through meticulous and intentional consideration of physical objects. She, in Raschke's words, "rescues the physical world from the dung heap . . . to revise notions of what sustains" (135)—she uses "the concrete to create spiritual sustenance" (136). A number of critics agree, highlighting the manifold ways Boland addresses and challenges notions of Irish feminine identity by examining tangible things. Textiles, fabrics, material objects, and physical places proliferate throughout *Violence*, effectively answering Gayatri Spivak's notorious question, "can the subaltern speak?" (Spivak 21). Boland does not create a language of expression *for* subaltern Irish women, but rather invents "a mode of writing that bears witness to its own incapacity of recovering what lies outside history" (Craps 165). She voices the multiplicity associated with Irish female experience without committing the same sullying act of unification or "hegemonic ordering" perpetrated by male writers (Riley 24).

While these critics perceptively and effectually draw attention to Boland's focalization upon physical things, they side-step the greater philosophical project inferred

by this preoccupation. Things in *Violence* are not mere vehicles for figurative meaning or abstract investigations. They are not pure metaphor, allegory, nor prosopoeia that, through circuitous means, grant speech and authority to subaltern Irish women. Boland's objects undoubtedly *enable* and *facilitate* this latter eventuality, but their significance extends further. As Boland rummages in and around Irish rooms, corners, and lives—exhuming, inspecting, and prospecting for gubbins that divulge particular female experiences—things become more than clever rhetorical devices. Things are not mere implements; they are integral to her ethical and representational concerns—they are the foundation of her inquiry. And yet, things in *Violence* truly are just things. So, readers may ask, how might the simple, unornamented constitution of things be reconciled with their prodigious importance? One answer lies in the tenets of phenomenological inquiry and practice.

Edmund Husserl famously argued that the perception of "things" comprises the basis of consciousness, cognition, ontology, and epistemology in all possible collocations of the terms: "Judging rationally or scientifically about matters...means orienting oneself to the things themselves, or, more precisely, it means returning from talk and opinions to the things themselves, questioning them as they are themselves given, and setting aside all prejudices" (Husserl 34–35). In his contemporary overview of phenomenology, Walter Hopp states that "Scratched car hoods, numbers, meanings, sensations, and mental acts are all 'things themselves' with which we can and do come into contact" (305), indicating that "things" are not solely physical objects, but rather *anything* that contributes to the construction of consciousness—to one's "being-in-the-world" (238). Despite this inclusive definition of "things," phenomenologists tend to ground their investigations in the analysis of concrete, tangible sensations and objects' overt corporeality, since physical things constitute the basis of experiential reality (Kearney & Semonovitch 15). So, for example, when the speaker of "Story" tells readers their tale is "set in that nowhere which is anywhere" (Boland 61), their description still relies upon particulars to establish the universality of this story's setting. Thus, they tell readers, "the wood is full of sycamore and elder" (61), substantiating phenomenological assertions that the bedrock of both perception and cognition is one's concrete environment. When subjects perceive "sycamore and elder," however, these *things* are not ascertained as hermetic, non-associative entities. Subjects *always* interpret objects as existing *for* something. Kearney and Semonovitch summarize this dynamic rather eloquently in *Phenomenologies of the Stranger*, stating,

> phenomenology appreciates the interpretive nature of 'knowing'—for every intuition (or direct awareness) of a given object there is already a framework

> of prereflective intentions shaping the disclosure of that object. This does not mean that the 'meaning' of the coffee mug, for example, is intrinsically adrift in a sea of subjective prejudices, but rather that the mug is perceived as a coffee mug on the basis of its cooperation with the transcendental structure of cognition. (273)

Thus, when I read that "the wood is full of sycamore and elder" in Boland's "Story" (61), my background in Irish literature tells me sycamore and elder are symbols—that they evoke the island of Ireland literarily due to their cultural and historical significance. In this instance, as with all acts of perception, meaning is culturally and habitually derived from a pre-existing referential web, for "Mental acts such as judgments and beliefs color the way things appear for us" (Kearney & Semonovitch 273). What phenomenology allows subjects to do is to question *why* and *how* this particular meaning or experiential modality—this iteration of the object's "*givenness*" (121)—comes into existence. When a subject becomes aware of the existing web of meanings colouring their interpretations of discreet phenomena, they can then question why this particular meaning is at the forefront of their cognition and whether they ought to re-evaluate the subjective value they assign to it. As stated earlier, I read *Violence* as a "web of meanings" and argue that the poems in the collection, taken together, offer the most robust understanding of Boland's feminism and poetic phenomenological vision.

Things, Intentionality, and the Collapse of Meaning

Eavan Boland's "The Parcel" serves as a paradigmatic example of intentionality's vital importance within phenomenological inquiry. Before the poem's initial line, readers already form impressions concerning the *givenness* of a parcel. For one subject engaging in the act of perception, a parcel could prompt reflection upon the role of the local government, while yet another may connote parcels with livelihood (these are two examples, but innumerable others exist). These disparate intentionalities inevitably occur, for "sensible qualities are experienced in different ways corresponding to the changing situations of environments and perceivers" (Murata 171), thus rendering "their ontological status relative, unstable, and subjective" (171). Intentionality—the meaning subjects attribute to any given phenomenon—is essentially the story individuals tell themselves concerning a thing's significance. The speaker, therefore, possesses her own impression of a parcel's ontological worth—an impression revealed in her remark, "There are dying arts and / one of them is / the way my mother used to make up a parcel" (Boland 44). For the speaker, a

parcel is not only an art-form, but it is also intrinsically linked to memories of her mother and notions of domesticity.

The speaker's instantiation of this particular givenness leads to an ontological and epistemological dilemma for Boland's readers: how are subjects meant to reconcile disparate intentionalities or grasp why discordant impressions form to begin with? Here, readers must consider phenomenology's crucial qualifier when returning to the things themselves: subjects must "question things as they are themselves given, and *set aside all prejudices*" (Husserl 35, emphasis added). In order to encounter the world with as few constraining influences as possible, individuals must set aside their presuppositions and attempt to encounter things anew; rather than defamiliarize reality, as Viktor Shklovsky would have artists do, phenomenologists ask that subjects to *re*-familiarize themselves with the world. Husserl terms this process a suspension of "the natural attitude" where "The social and familiar character of objects is bracketed" (45). This must occur in phenomenological analysis, for "The natural attitude does not 'see the world', as it takes for granted what appears; what appears quickly disappears under the blanket of the familiar" (Kearney & Semonovitch 44). Ultimately, subjects must rekindle a wonder for the world and its manifold phenomena.

Boland's "The Parcel" thus requires that readers suspend their understanding of a parcel's givenness and attempt, instead, to experience it as *pure phenomenon*, for this instantiates novel modes of orienting oneself towards the things themselves. Phenomenologists admit that experiencing a thing in its *original* givenness is impossible, yet simply engaging in the exercise lets perceiving subjects expand their epistemological and ontological horizons. Bracketing the familiar allows readers to ascertain "a parcel" in the same manner as the poem's speaker, widening capacities for empathy and understanding. Thus, the ekphrasis of Boland's poetry is not merely description in service of imagery, tone, or symbolism, but rather a strategic *return to the things themselves*, an effectuation of the phenomenological reduction, and a revitalized experience of worldly phenomena.

Near the beginning of "The Parcel," material details are clear, concise, and meticulously documented. The speaker relays how the paper is "Mid-brown and coarse-grain as wood" (Boland 44), while the scissors used to cut it are "the colour of the rained- / on steps a man with a grindstone climbed up / in the season of lilac and snapdragon (44). She recounts how "The ball of twine was coarsely braided / and only a shade less yellow than / the flame she held" (44), and that her mother uses "Crayon and fountain pen" for the "Names and places" with the "town underlined once. The country twice" (44). These ekphratic passages help readers encounter parcels as the speaker does: by returning

to the things themselves, parcel-making's artful nature becomes apparent, demonstrating the fundamentally pluralistic, inassimilable, and multiperspectival nature of phenomena. Perception of the things themselves intrinsically and infallibly resists totalization. The existential implications of "The Parcel" do not cease with the mere assertion of objects' multiplicity, though. Boland's meditation upon things becomes more fascinating and edifying when the thing in question—the parcel—is shuffled from view. This relegation of the poetic object to a state of obscurity—its disappearance "into the burlap sack for collection" (44)—is also similar to Sara Ahmed's queering of the phenomenological concept of "bracketing" which will be discussed in further detail later on (40).

As the poem nears its end, the speaker of "The Parcel" remarks that the art of parcel making died out "among doomed steamships and outdated trains, / the tracks for them disappearing before our eyes, / next to station names we can't remember on a continent we no longer / recognize" (45). Boland's absorption with physical things and phenomenological subjectivity allows her to fruitfully analogize the demise of this "dying art" with transience and incognizance, evincing experiences of dispossession or disappearance suffered by many, particularly female, Irish subjects (44). The near rhyming of "died," "eyes," and "recognize" in this section also produces a sense of congruity associated with the careful and intentional consideration of physical phenomena, yet this peace is tenuous. Harmony accompanies an experiential modality grounded in the things themselves, but this harmony collapses as the poem's object of inquiry, the parcel, fades from view. Following the parcel's disappearance into the "burlap sack for collection" and the speaker's ruminations upon its obsolescence as an expressionistic activity (45), the poem closes with three stunted, fragmentary clauses: "The sealing wax cracking. / The twine unraveling. The destination illegible." (45). The earlier harmony of "The Parcel" devolves into arrant dissonance, disillusionment, and disorientation. The disintegration of mellifluence, perspective, and clarity in Boland's poem speaks to the irrecoverable nature of particular experiences of Irish femininity, as the actions and behaviours of the speaker's mother are lost to society and history, effectively marginalizing, displacing, and erasing the mother as a subject.

The syntax of the poem's closing lines also cleverly illustrates that as subjects lose their connection to the things themselves, reality unravels in much the same way as the parcel's twine. The three final clauses of "The Parcel," "The sealing wax cracking. / The twine unraveling. The destination illegible." (45), all omit their lexical verbs, effectively rendering them incomplete sentences. However, the pretermitted verb in question merits further examination. The lexical verb implied by these three lines is "*is*": "The sealing wax

[*is*] cracking, The twine [*is*] unraveling, and The destination [*is*] illegible" (45). Thus, since *is* is the present participle of the verb to be, readers can intuit that as the parcel is removed from sight—as subjects abandon experiential reality founded upon tangible objects and sensations—*beingness* and being-in-the-world shatter in the same manner as Boland's verse. When individuals and collectives ground meaning in abstractions or platitudes, meaning inevitably collapses, resulting in the erasure of certain experiences—in this case, diverse experiences of Irish femininity. To combat this brand of discordant disorientation, subjects must intentionally and steadfastly return to the things themselves.

Eavan Boland's ekphrastic absorption with things in *Violence* undoubtedly operates as an ingenious rhetorical device in service of literary, political, and feminist aims, but it also functions as the basis for subjects' being-in-the-world. Readers must not consider Boland's focalization upon physical objects a mere feature of her poetry, but rather an ontological and epistemological directive. If subjects can change the way themselves and others perceive phenomena, they can effectively change the world—they can stop Irish femininity from being relegated to the margins, thus subverting hegemony, totalization, and univocality. Boland's "language of expression" that refrains from "emblematization" is therefore a language of phenomenology (Riley 27)—a language that draws attention to the plight of marginalized or wholly ignored voices by self-reflexively reconsidering one's relationship to things. Her poetry urges subjects to question what forms of givenness are shunted to the side when individuals do not interrogate their own intentionality: what perspectives and voices do we violently erase or assimilate by perceiving things in the manner we do? Boland's *Violence* is thus an exemplum of Sara Ahmed's "queer phenomenology" (Ahmed 36).

Queering Boland's Ireland

In *Queer Phenomenology*, Sara Ahmed affirms the conceptual framework adopted by prior phenomenologists, stating that "Perceiving an object involves a way of apprehending that object. So it is not just that consciousness is directed toward objects, but also that I take different directions toward objects" (39). When a subject orients their consciousness towards an object, in much the same way that readers orient their consciousness toward things in Boland's poetry, Ahmed writes, "[they] might like them, admire them, hate them, and so on. In perceiving them in this way or that, [individuals] also take a position upon them, which in turns gives [them] a position" (39). This position is both literal and figurative, for "Orientations involve directions toward objects that affect what we

do and how we inhabit space" (39), thus moulding the significance we attribute to said objects, as well as the meaning we produce within any given space. This state of affairs is evident in the poems discussed thus far, and the suspension of the natural attitude is what allows readers to ascertain why a poem's speaker may ascribe unanticipated meaning to a particular phenomenon. In contrast with existing phenomenological methodologies, however, Ahmed muses that "A queer phenomenology might be one that faces the back, which looks 'behind' phenomenology, which hesitates at the sight of the philosopher's back" (40). With reference to Husserl's earlier assertion that phenomenology "[brackets] the social and familiar character of objects," Ahmed's queer phenomenology asks, what exactly is bracketed in this process? What relocation to the margins—what discursive diaspora—must occur for the philosopher, the perceiving subject, or the individual in power to carry out the operations they so wish? A queer phenomenology, much like jazz music, concerns itself with the notes that are not played: it involves a further suspension of the existing suspension of the natural attitude—it is a fundamentally self-reflexive phenomenology. Ahmed contends that "a queer phenomenology is involved in the project of 'turning the tables' on phenomenology by turning toward other kinds of tables" (63). By turning toward objects that have long been sequestered to the margins of philosophical and literary interest, queer phenomenology allows us to return, "a loving return we might even say" (63), to disparaged voices, experiences, and histories.

Nowhere is this inversive—and, by extension, subversive—orientation more evident than in Eavan Boland's "In a Bad Light." Midway through the poem, the speaker remarks how upper-class —namely those who benefit from colonial practices (Cory 974)— reside in "oil-lit parlours" while Irish seamstresses, with whom the speaker identifies, toil away in "the gas-lit backrooms" (Boland 12). Much like Husserl's "relegation of unseen portions and rooms to the background" (Ahmed 43), "the leisured lifestyle of one group" in the poem "rests upon the labor of the other" (Cory 976). Queer phenomenology thus encourages the perceiving subject to reverse their field of vision, for when a subject orients themselves toward the "oil-lit parlours," toward spaces suffused with status and privilege, they violently omit or subjugate others. When considered through Ahmed's analytical framework, "In a Bad Light" consequently draws attention to concealed or erased experiences of subaltern Irish women. Yet Boland once again refrains from speaking *for* these Irish seamstresses who operate behind the scenes; awareness of this orientational violence results from careful attention to material things, such as various fabrics which "communicate the complexities of different women's circumstances while allowing the poet to avoid essentializing all women's experiences as similar" (Cory 966).

Textiles such as "crepe sleeves," "a satin apron," "suede," and "silk," proliferate throughout "In a Bad Light" (Boland 12), firmly situating readers within the things themselves. However, in order to articulate the multiplicity of experiences intrinsic to Irish femininity, "In a Bad Light" requests that readers not focus upon the amalgamated whole of these things—that they move beyond the "woman on a steamboat / parading in sunshine in a dress" who "laughs off rumours of war" (13). Instead, Boland's verse asks that readers turn away from the proverbial writing table to the "feminine space behind our backs dedicated to the work of care, cleaning, and reproduction" (Ahmed 42). As readers turn toward this feminine space, toward the Irish seamstresses buried in labour-intensive work, the speaker tells them,

> . . . We are bent over
> in a bad light. We are sewing a last
> sight of shore. We are sewing coffin ships.
> And the salt of exile. And our own
> death in it. For history's abandonment
> we are doing this. (Boland 13)

Perceiving the poem's various fabrics without presuppositions elucidates the dispossession, marginalization, and obnubilation experienced by countless Irish women—women who, despite "surviving the 'coffin ships' of post-Famine emigration to the United States" (Cory 976), are resigned to death and erasure, for the Irish literary canon solely concerns itself with women as emblems, icons, or themes (Kidd 37). In response to this degrading essentialism, the Irish seamstresses can only express their "fury" (Boland 13), emphasized by recurring "f" sounds in "frost," "follows," and "fern" (13). Having long been lost to history, the labourers themselves are powerless, and all that remains are the fabrics—the *things*—which only offer tattered threads of expression and recognition.

Despite its despairing tone, though, "In a Bad Light" possesses slivers of hope. In addition to the obvious phenomenological injunction which instructs subjects to orient their vision to that which exists behind them—to essentially adopt a Janus-faced perception—Boland's verse also extolls, if unintentionally, the merits of phenomenological practice. She writes, "See how you perceive it" (13), referencing the speaker's earlier statements that "this is a button hole. / This is a stitch" (13). While this could serve as a rhetorical question or a mere aside, it convincingly functions as an ontological directive: subjects must understand *how* and *why* they perceive things as they do. Thus, when the poem concludes with the comment that the upper-class woman's dress "traps light on the

skirt" and "is, for that moment, beautiful" (13), Boland's verse implores readers to ask why. Is the skirt beautiful due to its aesthetic value? Is it only beautiful because of its ability to trap light? Or, is its beauty merely the result of social norms and classist values? The poem offers no clear answer here, but each of these questions suspends the natural attitude and helps establish a phenomenological reading practice. Returning to the things themselves, refusing to essentialize Irish women, and concerning ourselves with what is "bracketed" by traditional philosophy may not recover the female experiences Boland mourns throughout *Violence*, but these gestures undoubtedly contribute to the subversion of a pattern of hegemonic oppression.

Boland's poetry persistently demands that readers re-experience their concrete surroundings, examine their presuppositions, and self-reflexively interrogate why they ascribe meaning to the world in the way that they do. She does this to upend a firmly rooted representational paradigm which stalwartly denies women agency and subjectivity—to bridge the "terrible gap in Ireland between rhetoric and reality" (Villar-Argáiz 474). Villar-Argàiz argues that "in this sense, Boland's language of representation is defined by what has always been unheard rather than by what has been heard" (489); Boland's poetry thus exemplifies Sara Ahmed's queer phenomenology, for it fundamentally concerns itself with the margins. *Violence* demonstrates that what is often "bracketed" in Irish literature is femininity itself: Irish women are rendered subordinate—mere adornments in service of some greater artistic goal. Boland deftly illustrates this destructive reality in "A Woman Painted on a Leaf."

The speaker of the poem tells readers she found a "woman painted on a leaf" among "curios and silver" in "the pureness of wintry light" (Boland 69). This initial verbiage instills within the poem a sense of regality and splendour, invoking archetypical language associated with the Irish literary tradition (Gonzales 146). The parallels drawn between "A Woman Painted on a Leaf" and the Irish literary canon is further substantiated by numerous references to nature, such as "a leaf falls in a garden. / The moon cools its aftermath of sap. / The pith of summer dries out in starlight" (Boland 69). The woman "inscribed there" on the leaf serves as a metaphor for the tendencies, habits, and traditions associated with Irish literature. However, this analogy brings with it the same trap of essentialism Boland discusses in each poem thus far, for the speaker says of the woman painted on a leaf, "This is not death. It is the terrible / Suspension of life" (69). The woman is trapped within tradition, trapped within verse, and trapped within mythologized or emblematized notions of feminine nature.

In recognition of this violent and tortuous imprisonment, the speaker confesses to readers, "I want a poem / I can grow old in. I want a poem I can die in" (69). In this instance, Boland's verse levies an uncompromising criticism against Irish literary history: rather than elevate Irish femininity to iconic status, write poems about women that constitute an accurate lived experience—a brand of subversive Irish lyric that Boland achieves by returning to the things themselves. When contemplating the essentialized woman's plight, the speaker of "A Woman Painted on a Leaf" remarks that she desires to return the woman to her rightful domain just as one "[takes] a starling from behind iron" and returns it "to its element of air, of ending—" (69). The speaker wishes the woman's features could be "a crisp tinder underfoot" (70), for only then can the woman die (70). Essentially, Boland longs to return the mythologized woman to the realm of tangible objects—to the world of concrete things. She cannot save the women who have already been brutalized by literature and history, but *returning to things* in her poetry forces readers to reconsider how they conceive of Irish femininity. Queer phenomenology, therefore, is not sequestered to the domain of the theoretical, but rather possesses a worldly end: once subjects shift the meaning they ascribe to things, thus altering their relationship to the physical world and the abstractions which ensue from this situated existence, hegemonic totalization of Irish femininity becomes impossible.

Things in *Violence* are more than a circuitous route to meaning. Boland's subversive, gender-affirming poetics are grounded in physical objects because concrete existence constitutes the basis of perception, and thus the foundation of the world itself; the material reality which moulds identities, opinions, and worldviews is necessarily constructed by things. Thus, if one can shift the manner in which subjects encounter, perceive, and engage with things, one can effectively change the world. This shift is the epistemological and ontological objective of Boland's poetry. She seeks a language of representation that resists totalization and emblematization, but she also wants subjects to interrogate their presuppositions—to ask why Irish femininity has been bracketed throughout literary history. Boland's poetry thus parallels and validates Sara Ahmed's subversion of traditional metaphysics in *Queer Phenomenology*; her verse demonstrates that shifting focus from centre to the margins is not only productive, but necessary—a trend that must continue in both continental philosophy and Irish studies. Boland's *Violence* and Ahmed's *Queer Phenomenology* challenge readers to suspend their natural attitude and experience things anew—to pay attention to things as they are rather than as subjects believe them to be. *Violence*, therefore, is nothing short of a dare: *I dare you to change the world*.

Notes

1. Hereafter, In a Time of Violence will be referred to as Violence.
2. Gerardine Meaney (1993) and Edna Longley (1994), in particular, exemplify this latter brand of criticism.
3. Aside from a thesis by Tawny Leboueff, very little work has been done to put Eavan Boland's poetry in dialogue with phenomenological criticism.
   In her 1988 essay, "Can the Subaltern Speak," Spivak contends that "ideological construction of gender keeps the male dominant" (287), assuring that "the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow" than her male counterparts (287). In the first iteration of this essay, Spivak concludes with the bold assertion that "The subaltern cannot speak" (308). This polemic, as articulated by Craps, insists that despite the benevolent impulse of critics and artists who seek "to represent and speak for disempowered or subaltern groups" (173), these same writers risk "[appropriating] the voice of the subaltern...thereby [silencing] them" (173). Boland, however, does not silence subaltern women by expropriating their voices. "Being-in-the-world" is a phrase coined by Martin Heidegger in Being and Time (Heidegger 49). Heidegger writes that "The compound expression 'being-in-the-world' indicates...a unified phenomenon" (49). This refers to the complex reality that consciousness both exists in the world and constitutes reality for the subject at the same time. Existential identity and subjectivity are inexorably intertwined with the materiality of the world and its varied phenomena.
4. Givenness refers to the manner in which an object is constituted in cognition—how things are given to consciousness. It is essentially the iteration or version of a particular object that depends upon the presuppositions (or lack thereof) of the individual engaging in orientation and perception (Husserl 26).
5. In the field of phenomenology, "intentionality" refers to the condition of consciousness whereby consciousness is oriented or directed towards something (Merleau-Ponty 159-60). However, a subject's presuppositions, experiences, and personal biases inform the nature of this orientation (intentionality), thus influencing the manner in which we engage with the diverse phenomena of existence.

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Past, Secrecy and Absence in Eavan Boland's The Historians

Passado, segredo e ausência em The Historians*, de Eavan Boland*

Pilar Villar-Argáiz

Abstract: *This paper draws on Eavan Boland's final volume of poetry,* The Historians*, published posthumously in October 2020. By examining in detail some poems taken from her first sequence in the collection, I will investigate how Boland returns to previous concerns in her work, particularly the tensions between revelation and concealment, veiling and unveiling, a transparent history and an obscure past. As I intend to show, when imagining the past, Boland incorporates constant ruptures and interruptions, revealing that there are details in her act of poetic reimagination which resist being incorporated into a lineal, continuous narrative. In order to study this aspect, I will rely on prominent scholars such as Abbott (2013), Brooks (1992), Calinescu (1994), and Attridge (2021), who have examined the role that mystery, secrets and the unknowable play in the construction of narrative sequences. In particular, I will examine various formal techniques employed by Boland: 1) the deliberate use of plain, non-ornamental diction, and short verse lines, highlighting even further the presence of absence; 2) her disruption of lineal narratives by the widening and narrowing of poetic perspective and scope, and 3) her delayed disclosure of 'secrets'. By means of all these formal, stylistic devices, Boland shows that secrecy is an intrinsic quality of the past.*

Keywords: *Past; present; secrets;* The Historians*; Eavan Boland.*

Resumo: *Este artigo baseia-se no último volume de poesia de Eavan Boland,* The Historians*, publicado postumamente em outubro de 2020. Examinando em detalhes alguns poemas retirados da primeira sequência de sua coletânea, investigarei como Boland retoma antigas preocupações presentes em seu trabalho, particularmente as tensões entre revelação e ocultação, velamento e desvelamento, uma história transparente e um passado obscuro. Como pretendo demonstrar, ao imaginar o passado, Boland incorpora constantes rupturas e interrupções, revelando que há, em seu ato de reimaginação poética, detalhes que resistem a*

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ser incorporados em uma narrativa linear e contínua. Para estudar esse aspecto, baseio-me em acadêmicos reconhecidos, como como Abbott (2013), Brooks (1992), Calinescu (1994) e Attridge (2021), que investigam o papel que o mistério, os segredos e o incognoscível desempenham na construção de sequências narrativas. Em particular, debruço-me sobre diferentes técnicas empregadas por Boland: 1) uso deliberado da dicção simples e não-ornamental, destacando ainda mais a presença da ausência; 2) ruptura de narrativas lineares pela ampliação e estreitamento da perspectiva e escopo, e 3) divulgação tardia de "segredos". Por meio de todos esses dispositivos formais e estilísticos, Boland mostra que o sigilo é uma qualidade intrínseca ao passado.

Palavras-chave: *Passado; presente; segredos; Eavan Boland.*

1. Literature as secrecy. The silent, obscure past of Boland's work

Literature constitutes an exemplary space of secrecy. As Derrida claims in his essay "Passions" (1995 28) and in *Given Time* (152), a literary text is always open to different interpretations, and thus the immediate context of reading is never exhausted. In the latter text, Derrida draws on Baudelaire's story "Counterfeit Money" in order to theorize the idea of the secrecy of literature; he particularly focuses on the secrecy which defines the protagonist, who never actually reveals his real intentions and thoughts. Derrida asserts that the interest of this text "comes from the enigma constructed out of this crypt to be read that which will remain *eternally* unreadable, *absolutely* indecipherable, even refusing itself to any promise of deciphering or hermeneutic" (152, emphasis in the original).

This Derridean view of literature in terms of secrecy has clearly influenced a number of prominent critics, particularly J. Hillis Miller, Derek Attridge and H. Porter Abbot. In *Others* (2001), Miller analyzes the "radical otherness mediated in multiple ways by literary texts" (2). Miller's interest in the secrecy of literature is also palpable in his latter study *On Literature* (2002), where he claims that "literature keeps its secrets" (39), and that "the whole meaning of the works in question" may emerge from "what is forever hidden from the reader's knowledge" (40). A similar view is defended by Attridge (23-35), who, in his recent study of Ali Smith's novel *How to Be Both*, shows how the formal properties of a literary text exert a significant role in its impenetrability. For Attridge (2001: 39), "what is primarily at issue is the unanswerability of the questions raised by the content of the work". Unlike other discourses, literature thus "often remains silent on the very questions it raises and the very enigmas it creates" (López 2021 1). This is the "singularity of literature", as Attridge (2004) has defined it.

In *Real Mysteries: Narrative and the Unknowable*, H. Porter Abbott (2013) also puts forward a convincing argument in favor of the secrecy of literary art. As Abbott (6) claims, all literary texts have a certain degree of "cognitive darkness", an obscurity also enhanced by the fact that the "process of interpretation" has no end (7). As he argues, "The insight acquired is a lack of sight, the revelation of an inescapable condition of unknowing that is unacknowledged or pasted over in conventional texts, as it is in our lives outside the text" (*ibid*). In his book, Abbott analyses the way in which "readers . . . of narrative can be made not only to know that they don't know, which is a matter of understanding, but also to be immersed in the condition of unknowing, which is a matter of experience" (3).

This conception of literature as something essentially tied to secrecy is particularly helpful when examining Eavan Boland's poetry, as the "condition of unknowing" is an intrinsic quality of her poetic texts, particularly in their exploration of what constitutes the Irish past. Boland's work is usually mediated by a powerful distinction: for the poet, one thing is what is narratable and easily representable, and another thing is what is experienced and lived. These two modes—representational and experimental—correspond respectively to the different categories of "history" and the "past". History is inherently narratable, exposable and understandable. It can be researched and it thus involves transmissible cognition. The past, by contrast, cannot be so clearly narrated. It cannot be easily known, and it can only be witnessed or experienced temporally by an act of imagination or by the unreliable source of memory. The unknowable is thus a condition of the past, and it is here where the erased stories of women and the unrecorded stories of famine victims and emigrants are located. Representing the unknowable constitutes a challenge for Boland, ever since her initial collections, and particularly, since *The War Horse* (1980).

This distinction between past and history becomes crucial in Boland's posthumous collection, and is clearly perceived in the first section of the book, "The Historians". Her poem "Anonymous", included in this section, is particularly illustrative in this respect. Boland was driven to write the poem after Jody Allen-Randolph's revealing discoveries in her archival research of the poet's aunt, Margaret Kelly (her mother's eldest sister). As Allen-Randolph puts it, this woman only "briefly emerges from the mist of history", despite her courageous tasks as courier for Cumann na mBan and her later success as fiction writer, with the pen name of Garrett O'Driscoll (Allen-Randolph 69; see also her 2006 chapter). While Jody Allen-Randolph is able to unearth rich details of her life, Boland's act of recovery and re-memory is only exemplified in terms of shadows, mists and mystery. Her aunt is for her still an enigma to be comprehended, an embodiment of the unknown. The title "Anonymous" actually refers to this fact, as Boland refuses to include the name of her

aunt neither in the title nor in the rest of her poem. Indeed, her family relative is described as a mysterious trope on the opening two lines, where Boland focuses on an impenetrable female character who is hard to get access to:

> She was a closed book,
> a near relative. (12)

The poem thus presents us with an important contradiction: at the extratextual level, Boland has access to knowledge (through Jody Allen-Randolph's exhaustive archival research); at the intratextual level, the poem conveys the quality of unknowing. It seems that Boland openly refuses to possess and own that source of archival knowledge. Even though Jody Allen-Randolph restored the presence of this figure in history, Boland still refuses to adopt an appropriative role as narrator, because she does not want to exert any interpretative control over her subject. This ethical act of non-appropriation is observed as we proceed reading the poem, where the speaker perceives herself simply as a recipient of a story she "once heard":

> I once heard
> she carried messages,
> communications, worn-
> out documents,
> ferrying revolt
> to the far corners
> of Haddington Road
> and O'Connell Street. (12)

Any act of interpretation, Boland suggests, can be constraining and dominating, as thus, what is added in her written poem runs the risk of being an act of essentialist appropriation. That is why her experience of remembrance can only happen as a conjecture, in vague terms, in an aura of "mist". Furthermore, she has not the certainty that she sees her, as she openly states she can only "*think* she sees her" (emphasis mine):

> On cold nights
> when mist rolls in
> from the ocean
> somewhere near Clontarf
> I think I see her strolling,
> holding on
> to a folded message,
> a dispatch order. (12–3)

This poem follows the narrative structure put forward in Boland's 1990 poem "We Are Always Too Late" (*New Collected Poems* 186), where the poet directly stages the process of gradually entering the past: "Memory/ is in two parts. /// First, the re-visiting. . . Then /// the re-enactment", and finally the speaker's failure "And she never even sees me". Boland never loses the impulse to try to understand the past, to establish empathy with past figures, but her attempt always ends with failure. This is reflected in the ending of "Anonymous", where Boland openly exhibits a willing immersion in the experience/condition of cognitive failure:

> Then I ask myself,
> what is it I know?
> The evening mist unfolds.
> It is empty. That
> is history. This
> is only poetry. (13)

These lines exhibit clarity and syntactic order, which are indeed defining features of Boland's language in this last collection and overall, in her mature work. The sparse and unadorned language of Boland's poem deviates from the ornamental language of much previous work. Her movement towards clarity and *readability* in her mature work may indicate her increasing desire to make clear her idea that the past is eventually *unreadable*, full of hidden, elusive images. The break between the past and history is symbolically illustrated by the sharp enjambments of the last two verse lines, which break the sentences between the subjects ("That", "This") and the main verbs ("is", "is"). As Boland suggests, history and poetry are like oil and water, indicating the incompatibility of these two separate spheres. Boland's imaginative act (her poetic re-enactment of the past) can never achieve the assurance of official historical records. The illusion of transparency that history exhibits (which is also symbolically signaled by the use of clear language) is debunked completely by the mist which unfolds at the end of the poem. This female figure of Boland's past is not transparent but surrounded by shadows, by an inscrutable enigma which will never be solved. This is Boland's own way to accommodate the story of her aunt without falling prey to any constraining act of interpretative domination.

In chapter 5 of his study *Real Mystery* (107–122), Abbot develops in length what he terms "gap theory", those literary "gaps the reader must be constrained not to fill, yet to feel their quality of unfilled unfillableness" (Abbot 31). This is what he calls "egregious gaps", "gaps that we cannot fill but that, at the same time, require filling

in order to complete the narrative" (112). Abbot suggests readers to "leave this gap as empty as its author most definitely left it" because "there is wisdom in accepting with a full cognitive embrace the fact that there are things we simply do not and cannot know" (114–5). In "Anonymous", as in the poems studied below, the past is deliberately presented in Boland's poetry in terms of these unfillable gaps. These void spaces in her version of the past keep her narratives from closure, and indeed she leaves the ending of her poem deliberately open. What emerges from the mist and silence that surround her female characters in her poems is the singularity of women in the past, women whose difference cannot be appropriated, reified or misrepresented any more, as nationalist, religious and literary texts have often done.

Secrecy thus appears as an intrinsic quality of Boland's poetry, in line with Derridean approaches to literature as an inscrutable terrain. In "The Lamplighter", another poem from the initial sequence, "The Historians", Boland openly reifies secrecy as a desired state which allows privacy and permits, in this particular case, two lovers to enjoy "the gift of shadows" (11). The speaker in the poem sees in the old task of the lamplighter a reflection of herself as a writer. Like this figure from the "old lithographs/ and situational drawings", Boland longs "to lift" her "words high", to hold "up a long pole" and "brighten" obscure spaces in the streets of history (10–11). Nevertheless, her task is not only faced with failure ("How/ often nothing is raised/ and nothing brightens", 11), but also with her willingness to leave these clandestine spaces in darkness. Like the lamplighter who refuses to shed light into the lovers, and who thus opts for respecting the others' privacy ("the silence of illicit kisses"), Boland deliberately creates and fosters an aura of mystery in her poems, thus immersing readers in the experience of unknowing.

In his insightful review of *The Historians*, Taylor-Collins (2020) offers an interesting reflection of this poem, concluding that Boland's intention is to reveal the idea "that the answer to darkness is not light, but continuous (re-)interpretation of the darkness in language". Indeed, the obscure spaces that Boland highlights compel us to look closer, to make an effort and carry out a continuous re-interpretation (an effort on our behalf which would not be carried out if there were total transparency). Secrecy is thus presented as a desirable essence of the past. The past always emerges as a place of uncertainty and unknowingness. Full disclosure is barely possible, but this is part of Boland's ethical involvement with the past. It is in this acknowledgement of uncertainty where truth lies. Umberto Eco (1992 30) has indeed commented on the long-standing relation between truthfulness and secret knowledge in Western thought: "truth becomes identified with

what is not said or what is said obscurely and must be understood beyond or beneath the surface of a text".

The title poem of the collection, "The Historians", also clearly illustrates Boland's typical view of the past as inherently secret and obscure. This poem, as others in the collection, begins self-reflexively in the present imperative. The imperative form indicates Boland's yearning for a genuine, clear narrativity (although this eventually leads into failure, as we will see). On the other hand, by means of this imperative, the author implicates readers in the process of engaging into the past; she demands from her readers sharp attention, if only to lead them into this space of darkness and uncertainty:

> Say the word *history*: I see
> your mother, mine.
> The light sober, the summer well over,
> an east wind dandling leaves, rain stirring at the kerb.
> . . .
> Now say the word again. Summon
> our island: a story that needed to be told (16).

The imperative form (repeated three times in the poem) signals a narrative situation in which there is a teller and a listener, a narrator and a narratee. Boland's poem is visualized as an exchange which is dynamic, transformatory, while at the same time fragile and vulnerable. In another poem from this collection, "The Light We Lost", Boland also begins abruptly with the imperative form "Repeat the word *sainthood* and we are/ in an old Ireland", if only to finish with an obscure scene: "savage azures/keeping out the light of/ a small country" (9). Similarly, in "The Historians", the speaker begins by commanding readers to "Say the word *history*" (16), and eventually leads them to a place of recognition where memory distances from history, where words are not allowed to "heal what should not be healed" (17). Jody Allen-Randolph has convincingly examined this poem from the perspective of Boland's central argument in her career (Allen-Randolph 70). As she claims, the poet is complicating her approach to history, by drawing on the complicity of women into the erasing of the past. The poem is based on the "composite image" of women Boland knew who burnt family papers on her backyard, in particular Kevin Casey's mother and Mary Robinson's mother (*ibid*). Instead of blaming the men for the creation of heroic history and the omission of women's real stories, Boland puts the spotlight on these women, who are burning their family history: "Each of them puts a match to the paper. Then/ they put their hands close to the flame" (17). Boland depicts two worlds in the poem: the male world

(treated this time with vehemence and respect; "Those who wrote that story/ labored to own it") and the female world, responsible this time for the separation between memory and history. In contrast to Ireland's male patriots, women are not represented as good record-keepers because they actually destroy the evidence of many stories from the past.

2. Highlighting the *presence* of *absence*: The disruption of narrative sequences in Eavan Boland's *The Historians*

As we have seen, secrecy is for Boland a distinctive quality of the past, and, as a result, it appears as the "essence" of her imaginative recreations in poetry. Following this logic, poetry is for Boland *secret*, inherently obscure, an art which lacks the transparency of history. This section deepens on this topic by underscoring how secrecy is not only a quality of her poetry, but also a motif that she deliberately underscores at the textual, stylistic level. In other words, secrecy is embedded formally in her poems by means of structuring and organizing narrative sequences in a particular way. Influenced by Derrida's (2008 12) thoughts on "the secret *of* literature and secrecy *in* literature" (emphasis in the original), I thus analyze the trope of secrecy not only as a distinctive quality of Boland's poetry, but also as a trope signaled formally in her texts at the narrative and structural levels.

In order to analyze how secrecy is underscored at such a formal level, I will rely on series of critics who have examined the role that secrets play in the construction of the narrative sequence of literary texts, particulary Calinescu (1993, 1994), Kermode (1980), Attridge (2021), Abbott (2013) and Brooks (1992). In *Rereading for the Secret*, Matei Calinescu (1993) offers an interesting discussion of secrecy in relation to the processes of reading and rereading. He focuses on the role of the reader in the interpretative process. The process of reading is a revelation; re-reading what was read in order to search for hidden textual or intertextual patterns (14). The reader, thus, only needs to go back, in order to look carefully at the sequential construction of the story and disclose the presence of textual and intratextual secrets. As he claims in "Secrecy in Fiction", "the very structure of narrative – as a sequential game of make-believe – is analogous to the structure of hiding/ disclosing a secret or a series of secrets" (448). Even though Calinescu mainly focuses on fiction, the poetic text also appears sporadically in his discussions (i.e. W.B. Yeats, William Blake, or Oliver Goldsmith, among others), and indeed, as I intend to show, an application of his theories to Boland's poetry is plausible.

Calinescu's theories bear remarkable resemblance to Frank Kermode's thesis in "Secrets and Narrative Sequence" (1980); in this study, he focuses on the conflict between

"the illusion of narrative sequence" and the presence of "secrets", a dialectical interaction he illustrates by the example of poetry (in particular Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn", 85). As he claims, narrative is "the product of two intertwined processes": the "presentation of a fable" (a process which tends towards "clarity and propriety") and its "progressive interpretation" (a process which alters the first one, by means of "secrecy" and distortions) (1980: 86). Like Calinescu and Kermode, Derek Attridge has also studied how the secret is manifested by a sequentality which is interrupted. In his recent critical engagement with Ali Smith's novel *How to be Both*, he examines the relationship between Derridean secrecy and what he calls "ergodic" texts, that is, those works where there is "a formal arrangement that challenges the linear reading we normally expect of a narrative" (30). These formal properties play a crucial role in the text's impenetrability, as Attridge shows.

In line with these theorists, H. Porter Abbott (2013) has also studied carefully the production of mysteries of non-knowledge in literary texts. He examines in particular some texts where the writer intentionally moves readers into induced states of unknowing (ex. *Beloved* by Toni Morrison and Beckett's *The Unnamable*). As Abbott convincingly reveals, secrecy is perceived at the narrative level, because there is a rupture in how conventionally the narrative mechanism is running: "The palpable unknown . . . is a place where the narrative motor stops, where there not only is no narrative but no way for narrative to get in" (22). Abbott's theories are particularly helpful when explaining Boland's disruption of narrative coherence in some poems, as we will see.

A typical technique of Boland's poetry is to deliberately break and interrupt a narrative sequence, creating a gap in the middle of the story. It is in this middle part where Boland immerses herself into the past, through an act of imaginary recreation. In "Listen. This is the Noise of Myth" (*New Collected Poems* 152–154), Boland creates in the middle part of her poem a "sequence of evicted possibilities", with "shifts and fluencies" which are "infinite" (154). This same technique is perceived in two poems from her latest collection, "Eviction" and "The Fire Gilder". They both begin by presenting events as sequentially related and then offer a digression into the past through the speaker's act of imaginative recreation, in her attempt to offer a deeper reflection on the events presented at the beginning. The ending goes back to the beginning, in a kind of circular structure. In both poems, the past which is recreated in the middle is presented in terms of obscurity and secrecy, in order to signal that there is something "beyond the representational discourse of narrative" (Abbott 37). These two poems—"Eviction" and "The Fire Gilder"—can be analyzed from the perspective of the above theorists and also bearing in mind the work of Peter Brooks, who theorizes around the "absent middle" of literary works.

In his 1992 study of plots and plotting, Brooks raises a number of issues concerning repetition and the transaction of narratives which are useful in the context of understanding Boland's process of narrating the past in her poems. In chapter 4 of Brooks' study, this scholar focuses on how meaning is conveyed in the middle part of literary narratives, between beginning and end. Brooks thus analyses narrative as structurally divided by origin, middle and end, and —as he shows—all narratives complicate in the middle part both the origin and the ending. He gives importance to this middle part, because—as he claims—this intermediary space between beginning and end has usually remained "obscure" in narrative theories (1992 96). Brooks then poses a theory influenced by Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* and Barthes' *S/Z*. From Freud's model, he takes the idea of the middle part as "detour", full of repetitions and repressions (139). In *S/Z*, Barthes identifies this part as a "dilatory space", or "the space of suspense", a place of detour, "temporary blockage" or only "partial unveiling" which anticipates the eventual resolution and revelation of meaning at the end (Brooks 18). But this "dilatory space" of narrative, as Barthes calls it, which is the space of "retard, postponement, error, and partial revelation", is according to Brooks also "the place of transformation: where the problems posed to and by initiatory desire are worked out and worked through" (92). According to Brooks everything happens in the middle part, because it is here where meaning is complicated and deviated from origin and end. In other words, what happens in the middle complicates the revelation which occurs in the ending. This is usually done by "repetitions, oscillating between blindness and recognition, between origin and ending" (108). This core, for Brooks, ultimately signifies "the haunting force of absences" (286).

Brooks' theories are particularly relevant for an analysis of how secrecy is formally embedded in the narrative structure of the poems "Eviction" and "The Fire Gilder", a device Boland uses in order to underscore "the failed mediation" (294) between history and the past. In both poems, Boland creates a necessary detour in the middle to incorporate the past, no matter how hypothetically she does so. The first of these poems, "Eviction", as the previously analyzed "Anonymous", gains wider significance in the context of Jody Allen-Randolph's biographical research, this time of the 1904 eviction of Boland's grandmother in Drogheda. Archive thus plays an important role in the poet's widening of historical consciousness, as her mother's line was rather mysterious and obscure to her (unlike her father's family history). The historical record that Allen-Randolph finds in the archives of the National Library in Dublin provides the armature, or outline, of the whole poem. While the initial and final parts are articulated around official documents (her grandmother finding "an eviction notice on her door") and historical sources ("the

page of the *Drogheda/ Argus and Leinster Journal*, 1904"), the middle part is constructed around the poet's imaginative recreation of such an event.

A detailed analysis of this circular structure offers interesting revelations of how poetic thought functions in Boland's aesthetics. The initial verse lines of the poem resonate with the reassurance of solid historical evidence, in their use of clear syntactic arrangements and the deployment of verbs in the simple present:

> Back from Dublin, my grandmother
> finds an eviction notice on her door.
> Now she is in court for rent arrears.
> The lawyers are amused.
> These are the Petty Sessions,
> this is Drogheda, this is the Bank Holiday. (14)

The lines that follow correspond to the middle part of the poem, and here Boland moves from narrative reporting to narrative invention. The story of the eviction of her grandmother is then revisited now through the subjective lenses of the imagination. For Boland, this process is necessary if the speaker is not to be caught by rigid historical versions. In this "illusory middle", as Brooks defines it, readers "are condemned to repetition, rereading, in the knowledge that what we discover will always be that there was nothing to be discovered" (142). Indeed, as Boland enters the terrain of the past, she faces a number of enigmatic issues that failed to be answered in the poem: "Was the notice well served?/ Was it served at all?/ Is she a weekly or a monthly tenant?/ In which one of the plaintiffs' rent books / is she registered?" These questions remain unanswered in the poem because they are unanswerable for Boland in the first place. Boland senses that there is a story to tell but she lacks sufficient details to tell it and she only knows the ending: "The case comes to an end, is dismissed". This middle part then proceeds with a significant succession of –ing verb forms. The use of such grammatical forms gains significance here. As is typical in her poetry, the present participle appears prominently to emphasize stages of fluidity, movement and in-betweenness which defy any form of artistic solidification. This is what was called, by using Kristevean theory (Villar-Argáiz 235–242), a circular, mythic time, an unfolding time which remains outside linear time. While historical time is chronological, unidirectional, irreversible and inflexibly linear, the temporal consciousness of the past—of the unpredictable world of memory and remembrance—reads differently, openly challenging conventional-historical ways of thinking. Boland incorporates three anaphoric lines starting with the –ing phrase "Leaving behind", which apart from enhancing

movement and fluidity, binds the previous historical event of the eviction notice and the legal court ("the case comes to an end, is dismissed") with an act of imaginative recreation in which her grandmother leaves the courtroom in tears:

> Leaving behind the autumn evening.
> Leaving behind the room she entered.
> Leaving behind the reason I have always
> resisted history.
> A woman leaves a courtroom in tears. (14)

A few things in terms of language are noted here. First, the repetition of anaphoric –ing sequences illustrates Boland's effort to understand the story as a sequence of events. The past appears as an unfolding narrative that has no end, that continues forever in its fluidity and movement. The implication is that, for Boland, the past is essentially dynamic, and as such, it refuses any act of solid artistic representation. Secondly, the deliberate omission of the subject: who is leaving the evening and the room? Is it the grandmother? Is it the poetic speaker? Is it the author herself? Is it the multitude of women in history who left the room in similar circumstances? Such ambiguity and openness broaden the poem's impact beyond the figure of the grandmother and the author herself. Boland seems to be removing all signs of authority in the telling of the story, and the suggestion is that no one can achieve mastery over the narration of her grandmother's life. There is a deliberate blurring of boundaries between self and others, which indicates that the author herself is entering the non-defining terrain of the past. Third: while time is set in motion with the succession of –ing verb forms, it is suddenly suspended by the use of the simple present, which indicates a short action happening now, so short that it is finished almost as soon as we read the sentence: "A woman leaves a courtroom in tears". While the previous 'ing' verbs represent the events after the case is dismissed as unfolding in time, when it comes to focusing more closely on the woman, the verb transforms into a more "static" mode ("A woman leaves"), as the speaker centers on the expression of a single emotion ("in tears"). The narrative fluidity is suddenly interrupted as Boland focuses closely on this woman and her experience of suffering. Curiously enough, Boland can only visualize, in her imaginative recreation, her grandmother as "A woman", an indeterminate, anonymous character, with no name. Indeed, what emerges is the absence of a narratable identity of this figure in historical records:

> A nation is rising to the light.
> History notes the second not the first. (14)

The middle part thus stages what Abbot has theorized as "the breakdown of narrative in the face of the inexpressible" (28); and indeed, as Brooks has also claimed, the middle part of narratives often stage "the unnarratable" (103). Boland creates a micronarrative in the middle to complement the historical version, and this is mainly composed of rhetorical questions and anaphoric statements which enhance active movement and fluidity. Hers is only a hypothetical representation of what might possibly have happened, interspersed with evidence in the form of documented facts. The end goes then back to the beginning, in a circular structure. This corresponds to what acclaimed literary critic Jody Allen-Randolph has identified as the typical widening of scope in Boland's poetry. In a conversation with De Groot (2020), Allen-Randolph claims that one of the achievements of this poem lies in its widening of scope, which allows perspective to open up. Indeed, the poem begins in a journalistic way, and then it expands in order to incorporate a past of shadows. The ending changes perspective again, by going back to the beginning, in order to set the speaker's failure to exert "agency":

> Nor does it know the answer as to why
> on a winter evening
> in a modern Ireland
> I linger over the page of the *Drogheda*
> *Argus and Leinster Journal*, 1904,
> knowing as I do that my attention has
> no agency, none at all. Nor my rage. (15)

At the end of the poem, Boland deploys in a deliberate way the trope of defeat: her act of reimagination has no agency, no effect on things. Once again, there is failure; while her grandmother's existence is verified as a historical source, this only happens beyond the extradiegetic narration (through Jody Allen-Randolph's research) and not within her poem. In Boland's imaginative act, the particularities of her grandmother's life get lost, become unknown.

The implication of this structure in "Eviction", with a beginning and an end encircling a middle part, is that history is haunted by this void at the center, a void which exemplifies mystery and secrecy. It is in this enigmatic "dilatory space" of narrative where "transformation" occurs (Brooks 92). Boland forces us to acknowledge gaps in history which cannot be properly appropriated or repaired. In line with authors such as Abbot, the poet intentionally directs her readers to states of unknowing, thus putting forward "the recognition that the other is 'absolutely other'", and that, as such, it cannot be

possessed in terms of the self's own understanding and knowledge (141). In other words, she drives us to consider mysterious literary characters "in a full acceptance of their insistent unreadabilty" (146).

The opening poem of *The Historians*, "The Fire Gilder", is also constructed around Barthes' "dilatory space" of transformation. As in "Eviction", Boland disrupts the chronological sequence of events indicating a gap in her memory of her past. The poem has been considered as "the crowing glory" in the collection (Theo Dorgan 2020), and indeed, it exemplifies masterfully Boland's approach to art, history and the past, dominant themes in her work. Once again, secrecy is of paramount importance in the poem, and it is manifested formally both in its structure and in its content. As Calinescu claims, secrets can be perceived in the way "narrative information is withheld, hidden, retracted and finally revealed", or "*not* revealed" (Calinescu 448, emphasis in the original). Boland's poem follows the logic of concealment of knowledge and the eventual revelation of this, and this theme is also interspersed with the circular structure commented above.

The poem begins with the memory of her mother, the painter Frances Kelly, a powerful presence in her earlier poems who, as Paula Meehan (2020) puts it, has nurtured many of her artistic inspirations. Frances Kelly is describing to her daughter the process of gilding by melding gold with mercury. The tone of assurance which characterized the beginning of "Eviction" is also observed here, an assurance observed in the directedness of language, the repetition of words and syntactic structures, and the shortness of lines:

> She loved silver, she loved gold,
> my mother. She spoke about the influence
> of metals, the congruence of atoms,
> the art classes where she learned
> these things (3)

This assurance leads into a more hypothetical tone. As is typical in her work, the speaker is moved by memory into the past, and this entry into the past is described by an atmosphere which increases in uncertainty and hypothesis. Suddenly she inserts her mother's voice in italics: "*think of it*/ she would say" (*ibid*). Boland remembers her mother explaining to her how the master craftsman melded gold with mercury; "*The only thing*, she added— but what came after that I forgot" (*ibid*). This piece of information which is forgotten is deferred to climactic position to the end of the poem, so we have to wait a bit to discover the content of her mother's story. Instead, Boland deviates our attention as she engages in the ambiguous terrain of memory and the past.

It is here where the middle part of Boland's poem begins, and where, we perceive, once again, an enigmatic "dilatory space", a "bracketed core" structure at the center of the narrative (Brooks 256), indicating the speaker's gap in her memory recollection. This change in perspective and mood is signaled as the poem moves on to a different stanza, a visual space between verse lines which mirrors a rupture in the cohesive bond between her mother (teller) and herself (listener), as Boland forgets the words of her mother. Nevertheless the repetition of the work "forget" between these two separated verse lines (". . . what came after that I *forgot*. /// What she spent a lifetime *forgetting* . . .") indicates a vestige of inheritance which survives (and which, as we will see, is resurrected at the end). Indeed, Boland inserts her voice clearly, initiating her role as story-teller. Now, she is not only the receptor of her mother's story, but also an active producer this time, inheriting the agentive role of her mother. The speaker admits acquiring a different 'learning' from that of her mother:

> What she spent a lifetime forgetting
> could be my subject:
> the fenced-in small towns of Leinster
> the coastal villages where the language
> of the sea was handed on,
> phrases bruised by storms,
> by shipwrecks. But isn't. (3-4)

Boland's immersion into the past is signaled by spatial metaphors of the landscape of her mother's childhood in the "small towns of Leinster". This poem, as "Eviction", follows the structure of what Brooks identifies as "framed narration", a "bracketed core" structure in the middle between the opening and closing frames (256). The hypothetical tone of the poem signaled by the modal ("could") indicates suspended temporality, indefinable time. This is a past outside history, a space of shadows, absences and gaps, an "unknowable" space of mystery. As Dorgan (2020) claims, "There in the half-attention of a childhood afternoon, or in the memory of that moment, the great theme announces itself: absence. What is elided, forgotten erased, marginalised". This past can only be imagined, and it suddenly fluctuates as Boland tries to capture it graphically in the poem:

> My subject is the past wishing plays in
> the way villages are made
> to vanish, in the way I learned
> to separate memory from knowledge,
> so one was volatile, one was not (4).

As the speaker claims, memory is "volatile" and thus unstable, in contrast to official knowledge which is unchangeable. While official knowledge belongs to history, the past belongs to "memory" and cannot be subjected to verifiable cognitive knowledge. Consequently, this past lacks a solid narrative. As in "Eviction", the middle part disrupts a simple or lineal plot of exposition, a coherent "inner frame" structure (Brooks 257). This part of incoherence and ambiguity is the space of transformation in the poem. As Boland puts it in subsequent lines, it is in the space in-between, in the space of intersection between historical certainty ("*it happened*") and the impossibility of the past ("*it never did*"), where poetry and creativity happens. Boland suggests that there are elements of the past that can only happen in a context of uncertainty:

> and how I started writing,
> burning light,
> building heat until all at once
> I was the fire gilder
> ready to lay radiance down,
> ready to decorate *it happened*
> with *it never did* (4)

As Taylor-Collins (2020) notes, the poetic I then moves from "learner", to "writer", to "gilder". The duality narrator/listener (mother and child) signaled at the beginning is fused at the end, as Boland becomes both recipient of her mother's story and active agent of her own. Indeed, the voice of the mother, signaled in italics, enters at the end of the poem:

> all at once I remember what it was
> she said: *the only thing is*
> *it is extremely dangerous*. (4)

In a circular structure, the ending goes back to the beginning, as the speaker suddenly remembers her mother's words. This sentence in italics (it is extremely dangerous) is highlighted in the text as a secret on the surface, which suddenly emerges as the poem reaches its final part. As in typical Romantic poetic imagery (ex. Blake's "The Tyger"), fire is indicative of dangerous knowledge and religious purification: it empowers by a process of burning and destruction. Boland is a goddess, a creator, a blacksmith working with her poems. In contrast to previous poems, she reveals herself as a sure, strong voice, and it is this quality of her work that younger poets such as Paul McCarrick in Ireland value most. As Maria Hummell claims, Boland always believed "firmly in the power of poetry" (2021),

a power that is reflected here. The end of "The Fire Gilder" describes poetry as a powerful, ferocious tool, which allows Boland to enter the terrain of real (unofficial) "knowledge", by giving free reign to the volatile role of memory, of imaginative recreation of the past.

In this sense, Boland restores the sense of closeness and intimacy between mother and daughter reflected in the opening lines. Furthermore, this intimacy is also enhanced by the fact that, not only the information is successfully passed on (and remembered by the poet), but also by the fact that both are creative artists themselves. The daughter has inherited the role of the mother. The threads and connections mother-daughter were not entirely broken and oral transmission seems to be successful at the end, although the presence of the dilatory middle part suggests it is highly fragile and easily violated. Furthermore, it is thanks to the transformation of the dilatory space in the middle that Boland's voice is enabled in the poem. It is in this middle part of imaginary recreation where the speaker discovers "the dangers of artistry and memory" (Cohen 2020).

In this sense, the poem ends in a more assertive way than others such as "Eviction". Transmission is successful at the end. Boland is presented as an artist, assuming the power that such an act entails. The boundaries between fire-gilding and writing poetry, between the act of telling and the art of remembering, seem to be temporally resolved here. The secret is revealed at the end, by the returning voice of the mother; thus the promise that the past can be recuperated within the present becomes a possibility. In any case, Boland's poetry is not so much about exposing and revealing the content of a particular secret, but more about drawing the readers' attention to the fact that there was a secret in the first place, and that this past which she strives to bring to memory is defined by this experience of obscurity and mystery, which needs to be highlighted in the present.

3. Concluding remarks

Eavan Boland's posthumous collection *The Historians* powerfully draws our attention to the erasure of past lives. Recovering the past through the dynamics of memory constitutes a pressing, challenging task for Boland. The poems analyzed here underscore her belief that there are important things about the past we will never know, and questions we will never answer. As we saw in "Anonymous" and "Eviction", the poet experiences failure when trying to make the life of her female relatives narratable. In contrast to archival historical research, which leads to transparency and clarity, the past can only be identified by secrecy, fluidity, dissolution, and shadows.

Although Boland shows her limits of artistic recreation of the past, her poetry celebrates this constant act of remembering and re-enactment as an ethical gesture of great

importance. Indeed, the past is never laid to rest in her work, as the poet insists that her imaginative recreation must be told and heard. The cognitive darkness that Boland faces when revisiting the past is highly effective as it directly leads readers to this inescapable *presence of absence*. As Roísín Kelly puts it in reference to Boland in the tribute on the year of her death: "Although we cannot change the past, the past lives" in her work (27th April 2021).

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Staring Inward: Eavan Boland's Archive of Silences in Domestic Violence

Exame interno: Arquivo de silêncios em Domestic Violence, *de Eavan Boland*

Marcos Hernandez

Abstract: *The critical revision of the ways in which literature represents the conflict between voice and silence has traditionally led to the consideration of poetry as a genre in which this contrast acquires a deep resonance. From the distribution of its formal pauses to the gaps in meaning between the explicit and the implicit levels of language, silence and the unsaid can be defined as fundamental components to perceive the literary text. In the case of the Irish poet Eavan Boland, her position in relation to this antagonism has been critically studied according to her desire of giving voice through her poetry to all those Irish women who have been historically silenced. In doing so, the contrast between these two extremes has been frequently connected to her distinctions between history and the past and the public and the domestic poem. This essay will analyse the conducting thread joining these oppositions through a close reading of two poems from her compilation* Domestic Violence *(2007). Additionally, it will explore Boland's silences not only as an act of giving voice to the unvoiced but also as a formal expression of the layers of meaning hidden underneath the poem.*

Keywords: *Eavan Boland; Contemporary Irish Poetry; Irish History; Silence in Literature.*

Resumo: *A revisão crítica das formas como a literatura representa o conflito entre voz e silêncio tem tradicionalmente levado a considerar a poesia como um gênero em que esse contraste adquire uma ressonância profunda. A partir da distribuição de suas pausas formais às lacunas de significado entre os níveis explícito e implícito da linguagem, o silêncio e o não dito podem ser definidos como componentes fundamentais para perceber o texto literário. No caso da poeta irlandesa, Eavan Boland, sua posição em relação a esse antagonismo tem sido criticamente estudada de acordo com seu desejo de, por meio de sua poesia, dar voz a todas aquelas mulheres irlandesas que foram historicamente silenciadas. Ao fazê-lo, o contraste entre esses dois extremos tem sido frequentemente ligado à distinção que ela faz entre história e passado e entre o poema público e o doméstico.*

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Este ensaio analisará o fio condutor que une essas oposições por meio da leitura atenta de dois poemas de sua coletânea, Domestic Violence *(2007). Além disso, serão explorados os silêncios de Boland não apenas como ato de dar voz ao mudo, mas também como uma expressão formal das camadas de significado escondidas sob o poema.*

Palavras-chave: *Eavan Boland; Poesia Irlandesa Contemporânea; História Irlandesa; Silêncio na Literatura.*

Introduction

The mere act of reading these introductory lines creates an inner echo. A voice appears in the back of the mind, breaking the silence of a blank paper. The written text is no other than a visual analogy for the opposition between voice and silence. Every punctuation mark, every pause between segments of speech, every space between words may open a room for a silence to be interpreted, offering a brief hint of the way in which this conflict pervades our everyday life. This apparently inoffensive idea evokes two dimensions of silence. In the first one, physical and explicit, silence could be defined as something tangible: either a "blank presence" or "an abyssal emptiness", in this case, the presence or absence of sound (Gould 3). In the other, silence acquires a broader sense when assuming its condition as that "immeasurable beyond" hidden underneath language (3) or, in other words, all those layers of meaning that can be deduced from any text, either written or oral.

The starting point originated by this idea points to poetry as the literary genre in which both typologies of silence find a fertile landscape to extend their possibilities of expression. Bearing this perspective in mind, the Czech critic Daniela Theinová opens one of the chapters of her volume on the limits of language in contemporary Irish women's poetry by offering a preliminary definition in which she addresses both its physical and its metaphorical dimension:

> Silence in poetry is not to be understood simply as voicelessness (although it may refer to this); the lyric, with its compact forms, formal restrictions and emphasis placed at the end of the line, not only calls for considerable verbal reticence and economy but is favourable to metaphorical expressions of silence. Yet silence, even if it is integral to the poem's structure and subject matter, can never be its sole dimension or the poet's objective intention. (137)

The application of the previous quote to the research field in which Theinová develops her study finds one of its most prominent instances in the works of the Irish poet Eavan

Boland. Yet considering the weight of the assertion, Boland's poetic production has always been particularly associated to a reformulation of one of the typologies offered by Theinová, through what could be defined as "reverse voicelessness", or the act of giving voice to those women who have been historically silenced. A process that can be read in the light of the emergence of new stylistic and thematic standards in modern Irish literature during the twentieth century.

Bearing those standards in mind, the German critic Alessandra Boller reflects on the appearance of a new stream of Irish novelists in the 20th century by accentuating three predominant aspects that can be transversally applied to a wide selection of modern Irish poets, including Boland. In the first place, as Gerry Smyth suggests, there is a concern "to narrate the nation as it has been and is, rather than how it should be or might have been" (qtd. in Boller 122). Secondly, its "wider processing of social and historical issues" entailing the creation of new literary voices. And thirdly, the movement of oppressed collectives and minorities "from the margins to the centre of attention" (122).

Accordingly, these elements converge in Boland's poetry through her treatment of the conflict between voice and silence. A dimension that, following a parallelism with the previous characteristics, has been mainly analysed by examining a sequence of binaries such as her distinction between history and the past (first aspect), the tensions between the public and the private and domestic social spheres (second aspect), and, especially, the historical and social struggle in Ireland between men and women (third aspect).

Consequently, an extensive bulk of critical studies on Boland's poetry has been focused on the way in which she re-reads the past by endorsing all those women who have been "othered" and silenced through the vindication of the domestic poem as a genre. In a revealing passage of the section "Domestic Violence", from *A Journey with Two Maps* (2011), Boland describes the long process of discovering her poetic voice through the domestic poem by underlining its connection to her views on the past:

> This is, after all, a personal piece. I was an Irish woman poet in a bardic culture. The political poem and the public one had been twined together in Ireland since the nineteenth century. There was little dialogue with the domestic. My growing belief—that there was a distance between history and the past in Ireland—was strengthened by this disconnect. History was the official version; the past was an archive of silences. (100)

The intention of recovering this "archive" has gradually placed the emphasis of her critics on reading her silences merely considering its physical dimension. Hence, retaking the

typologies that introduce this section, the aim of this paper will be to call the attention on the unsaid layers of meaning by examining, as indicated by Theinová, the metaphorical space opened by these silences through the individual reading of formal and rhetorical aspects in two significant poems from *Domestic Violence* (2007), namely, "Silenced" and "Indoors". Additionally, this formal analysis will be methodologically based on the considerations on poetic metre made by the linguist Geoffrey Leech and the critic Mary Kinzie.

In a parallel reading of both *Domestic Violence* and the homonymous chapter in *A Journey with Two Maps*, the reason behind the choice of this collection attends not only to the chronological proximity between both publications but also to their resemblance in terms of poetic perspective about the idea of silence. In the light of this reasoning, in the same chapter, Boland defines a poem as "a subtle system of references . . . (that) codifies, suggests, infers . . . (that) gestures outward while staring obdurately inward . . . (and) can reveal a history of evasion" (*A Journey* 117). Thus, the subtlety of these silences seems fundamental to initiate the journey of going inward the poem to decode what it can be inferred from the reading of the linguistic surface.

Joining this primary aim to the dichotomies present in Boland's works and the comments made by Alessandra Boller on the features of new Irish fiction, the paper will additionally deal with the interpretation of these silences as the past obscured by history and as the private and the domestic concealed by the public sphere. To develop this distinction, the analysis will consider the metaphorical premise of *A Journey with Two Maps*:

> I try to explain exactly what these so-called maps meant to me personally: how at various times I looked at conflicting ideas of a poetic self and an inherited craft and was bewildered at how to balance my obligations to a poetic past with my need to write in the present tense, and out of my own life. And how in the end, for all the inherent contradictions I found, I determined to keep both maps; and to learn from both. (xiv)

This conflict between the poetic self and the craft of Irish male poets can be defined as the key idea of this volume, that stands as a detailed narration of how she found her own poetic voice. At the same time, it illustrates how she inverted and balanced the poetic conventions in Ireland in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Conventions that relegated women's poetry to otherness and equated her voice to silence. Consequently, the journey to find the balance between these two maps will be the conducting thread lying at the core of the present study.

1. Past and history: recovering the archive of silences from the past

Any detailed reading of Eavan Boland's *Domestic Violence* accentuates the poem "Silenced" as one of the most thoughtful illustrations on the interrelation of the conflict between history and the past, and the contrast between voice and silence. In it, Boland recovers the mythical story of Philomel, the princess of Athens who was brutally raped by Tereus, king of Thrace and married to her sister Procne. After that atrocious crime, Tereus cuts Philomel's tongue to prevent her from telling the truth to Procne, relegating her to a forced silence.

Although the myth has been recurrently explored by several authors, the structure of the story presents some distinctive changes depending on the source. In Book VI of the *Metamorphoses*, Ovid continues the story with Philomel weaving a tapestry to reveal the truth to her sister. Once they are aware of the whole account, Procne kills her son Itys and serves him to his husband as a meal. After escaping from Tereus' watch, Procne and Philomel ask the gods to be transformed into birds, who accept their petition (143–152).

The essential narrative lines of this tale are questioned in Robert Graves' *The Greek Myths*. The first noticeable fact when consulting Graves' volume is that Philomel's myth appears as a secondary storyline in the entry titled "Tereus". In this version, it is Tereus who falls in love with Philomel. Later, he conceals Procne in a rustic cabin to fake her death and marry Philomel. The second remarkable difference comes when their roles are interchanged: it is Procne the one who is mutilated by Tereus and the one who weaves the message to his sister (63).

This striking contrast between two versions of the same myth underline some appealing questions of interest for the analysis of Boland's poem. Firstly, they can be distinguished as noteworthy instances about the degree of unreliability of mythical accounts. Secondly, from Ovid's depiction of the rape to the devaluing of Philomel to a minor role in Graves' version, both tales metaphorically resemble the way in which history has displaced women from the focus of attention.

This premise is present in Boland's re-reading of the myth as a subtle symbolic parallelism between Philomel's story and the process of writing Irish history. In an interview with the critic Pilar Villar-Argáiz, Boland quotes "Silenced" to complement this parallelism by adding: ". . . that's what happened in Ireland too: a succession of brutal silencings and restating of the story. The new poems are experimental—and for me this is also a new way of revisiting the domestic poem" ("The Text of It" 61). Accordingly, as she emphasizes her re-reading of the domestic poem from the perspective of "the untold and the untellable" (61), she offers a two-fold reading of the piece by linking a reconstruction

of Philomel's past in Greece to the moment in which Boland conceived the poem from a domestic setting in Ireland.

In the first of these chronological extremes, the speaker sets the tone by resembling the narrative style used in mythical accounts, proposing a deconstruction of historiography as a meta-narrative. This approach is complemented by the stanzaic structure of the poem with two from four-line heterometric stanzas in which both "the threshold of the line . . . in tension with that of the sentence" (Kinzie 49) and the use of enjambments and lineation reinforce the creation of formal silences. A close reading of the first three stanzas accentuates several of these elements:

> In the ancient, gruesome story, Philomel
> was little more than an ordinary girl.
>
> She went away with her sister, Procne. Then
> her sister's husband, Tereus, given to violence,
> raped her once
>
> and said he required her silence.
> forever. When she whispered *but*
> he finished it all and had her tongue cut out. (*Domestic Violence* 16, lines 1-8)

The introductory line of the poem ends with an enjambment that highlights and "tugs" (Kinzie 54), through a first silence (as opposed to Robert Graves' version), the name of the protagonist, Philomel, whose story seems to be suspended before continuing with the reading. This first pause leads the reader to Philomel's ordinariness in the second line, that closes the stanza with a full stop.

After this first section, the speaker introduces the rest of the characters in the second stanza, completing an inversion of the order predisposed by history. The reader witnesses how Tereus is relegated to a minor role (not the king of Thrace, but "her sister's husband"), strengthening the cruelty of his acts. The atrociousness of these acts had been traditionally devalued by reducing the description of the rape to a concise reference (just a brief sentence both in Ovid and in Graves' tale).

It is in this stanza where Boland powerfully underlines another silence. Apart from another enjambment in the third line of the poem that gives prominence to Tereus' belittlement, the fifth line suddenly interrupts the metric pattern used from the beginning of the poem (pentametric lines from eleven to twelve syllables) and it is considerably reduced to a shorter line of three syllables.

The enjambment at the end of the stanza lengthens the previous pauses as it deliberately marks a deeper silence (Kinzie 56) both to process the rape and to fully address its weight and importance. This effect recalls what the linguist Geoffrey Leech coined as "defeated expectancy", or "a disturbance of the pattern which the reader or the listener has been conditioned to expect" (119). Although the verse form in this case is less rigid than a conventional iambic pentameter, the pattern of lineation introduced from the beginning of the poem defines this line as a turning point in the rhythm.

The formal silence stressed by the conclusion of the stanza and the blank line separating both sections through an enjambment gives way to the thematic silence of the sixth line, marking "a tension between the expected pattern and the pattern actually occurring" (Leech 123). The period that ends the seventh line remarks the atypical beginning of the new syntactic unit. The word "forever" constitutes a full sentence without capital letters, focusing the attention on the assumption of Philomel's silence as a fixed and unalterable circumstance.

This abrupt pause leads to the italicization of "but" as Philomel's last act of resistance using audible words. The conclusion of this third stanza suggests a first turning point in the reading of the poem. Despite these formal silences being still present, the reader acquires a wider insight of the unstated layers of meaning hidden underneath the text in the transition from the third to the fourth stanza:

> Afterwards, she determined to tell her story
> another way. She began a tapestry.
> She gathered skeins, colours.
> She started weaving. (*Domestic Violence* 16, lines 9-12)

From a formal perspective, the structure and lineation of the stanza parallel the alternative ways of communication used by Philomel. Lines become shorter as her words give way to tapestry. The first line of this stanza stresses another pause through the use of an enjambment. This silence alludes not to history but to "her story" and the reader ruminates, without being aware of it, Boland's distinction between history and the past (and how to recall it 'another way' through poetry). The pronoun now weaves an interconnected web in which 'she' receives different readings. She is Philomel. She is Eavan Boland's craft as an Irish woman poet. She is every woman othered by Irish history.

The unsaid layers intertwined within the formal silences now address Tereus as a human embodiment of Irish history, illustratively described by Maria Luddy and Cliona Murphy as the "narrative account of the doings of men, largely carried out by men, written

by men and taught by men" which has been constructed over the "symbolically central and materially peripheral" silence of women (qtd. in Clutterbuck 99). Accordingly, this perspective leads the reader to reconsider the possible interpretations that can be deduced from formal silences such as "forever" as an isolated sentence in low-case letters and the italicized "*but*". "Forever", as the intention of preserving the status quo associated to history perpetually. "*But*", as every act of resistance perpetrated by women throughout time.

As Philomel's particular act of resistance is forcibly reshaped through tapestry, the speaker finds a second turning point to connect her own story with Philomel's past: "She was weaving alone, in fact, and so intently / she never saw me enter" (*Domestic Violence* 16). The conclusion of this stanza evokes the gesture of entering a room, a scene, a memory stealthily.

From this line onwards, the speaker addresses the stimuli behind the remembrance of Philomel's myth: the wintry colours of the Irish sky and, especially, an old radio that arouses the relation between both stories. The nature of this relation is described by Eavan Boland by stressing the exercise of imagination adhered to it: "Writing about the lost, the voiceless, the silent. And exploring my relation to them . . . feeling my way into the powerlessness of an experience through the power of expressing it. This wasn't an area of artistic experiment. It was an area of ethical imagination" (qtd. in Collins 26).

Her imagination resizes its ethical component through the words coming out the radio "telling its own unregarded story of violation" (*Domestic Violence* 16). On that account, the speaker establishes another parallelism between the aggressiveness and brutality in Philomel's rape and the identification of violence as a "truly Irish" sign of identity (*A Journey* 99). This parallelism stands as the thread connecting the different types of silences as the gaps left by the past deduced from what is not said in the historical version of the events, rather than what is (*A Journey* 53-54).

The ending of the poem reinforces this idea as it concludes with other threads: those weaving her chronological reconstruction of the events with "greenish silks" and tainting both surfaces in crimson. A metaphorical conclusion that unfolds the double reading of the title of the collection. Domestic violence both as the euphemism used to hide violence against women and as that identitarian sign defining Ireland. In relation to this double meaning, Michael McAteer offers an insightful reflection on the historical reasons associated to this idea:

> Violence towards the feminine figure in this instance arises not from the forces of modernization breaking up traditional forms of Irish society. It is, rather, the

> opposite: the oppressive force of patriarchal control of women—underwritten in Ireland by the authority granted to the teachings of the Catholic Church in the Irish Constitution of 1937. (McAteer 9-10)

Thus, this final act of giving prominence to the violent outcome interrelating both stories leads the reader to reconsider the contribution of the formal silences to the understanding of those hidden beneath the content of the poem, and the ways in which these two types emanate from the imaginative reconstruction of the past as the silences concealed behind history.

2. The public and the private: silence as the domestic

In his *Letter to M. D'Alembert on the Theatre*, the Genevan philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau develops one of his multiple allusions to the respective distribution of men and women according to their roles in the public, and the private and domestic social spheres. One of the most appealing passages explaining Rousseau's thoughts on the matter details his views on the duties associated to women:

> Is there a sight in the world so touching, so respectable, as that of a mother surrounded by her children, directing the work of her domestics, procuring a happy life for her husband and prudently governing the home? . . . Whatever she may do, one feels that in public she is not in her place (87–88).

As Rousseau expanded this germinal division in most of his works, the quote can be read both as a sign of its times and as an illustrative example of the way in which the ideas adhered to it have pervaded every political, social, and cultural layer of our globalized world both before and after its publication. In this regard, the hierarchical and patriarchal conception of this gender distinction stands as an insightful starting point for the analysis of Eavan Boland's "Indoors".

The first two lines of the poem constitute a concise and revealing declaration of intentions in the light of the previous idea: "I have always wanted a world that is cured of the outdoors. / A household without gods" (*Domestic Violence* 37). This initial statement endorses a subversion of the previous distinction. Accordingly, it seems to address the implicit presence of an unsaid layer of meaning: the indoor world desired by the speaker is formulated in terms of a world "cured of the outdoors" and what it represents. Her household is not inhabited by (male) gods but "without" them.

These introductory lines not only reformulate the contrast between the public and the private social spheres, but they also underline the expressive value of the silences implied by the linguistic surface, or those suggested by the content of the poem. Additionally, the consequent tension derived from these silences can be read as a continuum that can be joined to the subject matter of the previous section: the public social space of power, reason, history, and voice as notions traditionally related to men and the past, the private, subjectivity, and silence as ideas associated to women (Kennedy 8).

In the light of the re-examination of the boundaries adhered to the previous continuum in the final stages of the twentieth century, Boland's poetry finds her style by discussing "the place women have been traditionally inserted in Ireland, their premeditated absence, their compulsory mutiny and their invisibility in the public world" (García-García 125). To fulfil this enterprise, Boland vindicates the domestic poem as the genre supporting her perspective of the past as a method to explore a "counter-history" (*A Journey* 99). Complementing this idea, she further elaborates on this definition of the domestic poem:

> The domestic poem, traditionally barred from the public world, confined to a set script had been drained of meaning. Yet the meanings were there for the taking. The elements of that poem —intimate, uneasy, charged with a relation which is continuous and unpredictable between bodies and the spaces they inhabit— seemed perfectly set up to register an unwritten past. It was an opportunity for Irish poetry. And yet there was no welcome for it anywhere that I could see (*A Journey* 101).

The articulation of the domestic poem as a "register of the unwritten past" leads to the latent question of determining the way in which this genre fulfils that role by retrieving the spectrum of elements traditionally silenced by history and the public sphere. Elements associated to interiors that, in Boland's words, are felt like "an absence" in the poems of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries: ". . . there were cities, bridges, meadows, machines, even skylines. But not interiors. Not, that is, the interiors in which people actually lived" (*A Journey* 105).

To perform this movement from the exterior to the interior, Boland fills "Indoors" with constant references to acts of transition from one place or state to another from the beginning of the poem. Thus, the outdoor world, after being cured of its own inherited condition, gives way to a household with ". . . entrances taking shape, verticals meeting / horizontals: a where fetching a now" (*Domestic Violence* 37).

As a result, the tangibility of the entrance as a symbolic threshold evokes the careful disposition of liminal spaces present in the poem. In relation to the significance of liminality as a factor to conceive the poem, the Spanish critic Marta Miquel-Baldellou adds:

> Many of Eavan Boland's poems appear to be located at transitional or liminal moments. The women that populate her poems often tend to make their appearance at dusk, or during the twilight that is formed when the day gives way to the night. This atmosphere of ambiguity and of blurring of certainties seems to be particularly voiced through her poetry, and in a way, it reflects the uneasy position that the author felt compelled to occupy in relation to the traditionally male-dominated Irish poetry and provided a way to establish her own identity as an Irish woman poet. (129)

This "uneasy position" occupied by Boland's poetry disrupts the antagonistic relation between voice and silence conventionally associated, respectively, to "male-dominated" and female poetry, as it subverts the power relations—in the Foucauldian sense of the term—between men and women by using silence as a form of linguistic violence (Olsson 5). Consequently, the identification of the domestic poem as a genre not only "barred from the public world" but also relegated to the category of minor sub-genre parallels this antithetical connection. It is within that continuity where Boland's liminal spaces acquire their significance as silences in a transition to be voiced. This transition is mirrored in the poem in the third and fourth stanzas:

> There is always a place where a fable starts – where a god
> proves he is a god by adding
> not simply wings and sinews to his shoulders
>
> but the horizon swinging up – rivers, mountains, headlights
> only slowly
> righting themselves as he rises to find
> the first signs of day becoming night. (*Domestic Violence* 37, lines 9–16)

The consolidation of this god as a male entity achieves a component of reaffirmation through the elements located above the horizon. Rivers, mountains, and headlights are carefully ordered establishing a transition from natural to artificial constructions leading to another transition from day to night. The interdependent relation joining the horizon as a perceptive threshold, the gradual enumeration of the natural elements, and the signs of day becoming night can be analysed as liminal moments in which the male god not only

exhibits his power to create and depict the nature of the outdoor world but also his ability to erase the life of the private and domestic sphere. In the light of this idea, the horizon swings up with the intention of hiding what lies underneath its boundaries. Words that, despite being silenced, are still there.

Additionally, the succession of enjambments and the noticeable contraction of the second line of each section denotes a sequence of formal silences highlighting elements of this natural and public landscape. Hence, the reader is compelled to contemplate the fable —a myth, a legend, a fictitious tale— of "a god"—which is not the only one— that must handle over his shoulders the weight of elements that do not belong to his body to claim for his space of power.

Reading these stanzas as a metaphorical allusion to the conflict between the domestic and the public poem, the fable of this god parallels the work of the author that writes about elements he cannot control. As a result, these elements right themselves "only slowly" and the silence adhered to this line points to the composition of the "public" poem as a laborious and time-consuming activity that leads the poet "to find the first signs of day becoming night." The pause created by the full stop concluding the fourth stanza accentuates both this liminal transition and a change from a natural to a suburban setting:

> So it was above our neighbourhood, the world straightening
> under wings, the noise of discord
> clearly audible, the hinterland reaching to the sea,
> its skin a map of wounds, its history a treatise of infections. (37, lines 17–20)

The beginning of the stanza helps the reader to retake the idea of a household without gods. At the same time, it reveals the neighbourhood as a suburban location for this household underneath the horizon that divides the outdoor world straightened under the wings of the gods and the indoor world inhabited by mortals.

Again, the formal silence reinforced by the enjambment in the second line points to a situation of political and social discord as it waits to describe it as "clearly audible." The territory of the gods, the hinterland, expands itself as it reaches the sea while the speaker explores the wounds of the land through a map and describes its history as "a treatise of infections." In relation to these allusions, the line recalls the distinction between history and the past exposed in the previous section as it highlights its contaminating nature and addresses cartography as another inadequate and unbiased science to represent reality.

While the stanza confronts the social and geopolitical division in Ireland in the twentieth century, it foregrounds three crucial factors. Firstly, the climate of violence and

upheaval traditionally associated both to Irish history and its public sphere. Secondly, the reflection upon the constant presence of blind spots, or silenced realities, in theoretically objective and exact sciences such as history and cartography (Thoss 73). And thirdly, the metaphorical presence of the map as one of the two maps in Eavan Boland's journey: the inherited craft of Irish poetry written by men.

In opposition to the climate generated by the gods of the outdoors, the last two stanzas mark a turning point, another transition, in the reading of the poem:

> But I was an indoor nature poet,
> safe in my countryside
> of handles and entrances, my pastoral of inland elements,
>
> holding against my face the lured-in aftermath
> of ocean, atmosphere: the intimate biography of damp
> in the not-dry feel of a child's cardigan. (*Domestic Violence* 37, lines 21–26)

The concluding stanzas settle the resolution of the thematic lines opened in the previous sections by exposing a counterpart for each one of them. The climate of violence of the outdoors is questioned by the safety of the indoor world. The rivers, mountains and headlights created by the outdoor gods are reformulated by an indoor nature poet. Her entrances seem more manageable than a whole horizon. The succession of inland elements at the core of her poetic craft allude to the pastoral not only as a genre that celebrates the virtues of rural, and in this case domestic, life but also as its traditional depiction as an escape from the public sphere (*The Making of a Poem* 207).

As these stanzas condense the audibility of the elements unnoticed by the public poem, their composition still opens a room for the consideration of some silences under its surface. The "lured-in aftermath" of the ocean leaves an intimate trail of dampness in the cardigan of a small child as a representation of what is hidden beneath the horizon and what remains after its path. The cardigan is not wet but "not-dry" and the sensorial perception associated to the object is formulated in terms of an opposition. All the power of her poetry is concentrated on a piece of cloth as a way of questioning the public poem and "the traditional division between home and history" through a household object (García-García 126). In doing so, Boland constructs an analogy of the power of creation of the outdoor poet by reducing its scope as it finds a way of balancing this set of oppositions between history and the past or the public and the domestic. After being asked about these contradictory views, she stated:

> Maybe that's simply because in writing poems generated by those tensions I found some way of balancing them. The poem you mention here, "Indoors", isn't so much a poem seeking to resolve these contradictions. It's more a way of noting them. When I write in the poem that I'm "an indoor nature poet" that really is a way I once thought about my writing. And, for that matter, still do. ("Poetry as a Humane" 115)

Boland's reaffirmation of these contradictions is condensed in the "not-dry" feel of a child's cardigan as a way of noting that she cannot get rid of the rivers and mountains, of the inherited map, but she can subvert the form from within by finding her own map, her own voice, and refreshing "that relation between what goes into the poem and what remains outside it" ("On The Journey" 188–189).

Concluding remarks

The journey with two maps finds its common ground to embrace the alternation between voice and silence. As the official maps of history and the public have traditionally omitted stories and places from the official version, the poetry of Eavan Boland discovers her own map by voicing the alternative version.

The two dimensions of silence explored in this study intertwine themselves with the objective of inverting the conventional relation between voice and silence. However, as it has been suggested in the last section, Boland does not seek to resolve this contradiction but to note it and, in doing so, to build a balance between the two extremes.

As a result, in the process of inverting the relation between the continuing history/public/voice and the past/the domestic/silence both the use of the voicelessness and its reverse and the silences denoted by the poetic form are still symptoms of the fact that Boland does not intend to reject the inherited forms but to subvert them from within ("On the Journey" 188).

Her household inhabited by mere mortals. Her domestic interiors cured of what the outdoors entails. The inner echo of the reading still sounding as the voice in the back of the mind breaks the silence of a blank paper while Philomel rinses the distances with greenish silks and touches the not-dry feel of a child's cardigan.

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"An Example of Dissidence": A Reflection on Eavan Boland's Reading of Patrick Kavanagh

"Um exemplo de dissidência": Uma reflexão sobre a leitura de Patrick Kavanagh por Eavan Boland

Hitomi Nakamura

Abstract: *This article provides insight into the creative and intellectual nexus between Eavan Boland and Patrick Kavanagh, one of the many Irish poets referred to in Boland's critical and autobiographical prose. While acknowledging that her intellectual relationship with the older poet, in some respects, is "an example of dissidence," Boland found that it was her earlier intimacy with him that made her an object-becoming-author. Additionally, in terms of poetry composition, this article sheds light on Boland's interest in Kavanagh's use of the sonnet form in "Epic" and discusses her updated version of the historical form. Their encounter, examined in the article, reveals that both poets sought to redefine the "tradition" from within and rearticulate it in their own circumstances.*

Keywords: *Eavan Boland; Patrick Kavanagh; A matter of tradition; Sonnet form.*

Resumo: *Este artigo fornece uma visão sobre o nexo criativo e intelectual entre Eavan Boland e Patrick Kavanagh, um dos muitos poetas irlandeses referidos na prosa crítica e autobiográfica de Boland. Embora reconhecendo que sua relação intelectual com o poeta mais velho seja, em alguns aspectos, "um exemplo de dissidência", Boland descobriu que foi sua antiga intimidade com ele que fez dela um objeto-tornando-se-autor. Além disso, em termos de composição poética, este artigo lança luz sobre o interesse de Boland no uso que Kavanagh faz da forma do soneto em "Epic" e discute sua versão atualizada da forma histórica. Esse encontro é examinado no artigo, e revela que ambos os poetas buscaram redefinir a "tradição", partindo de dentro, e rearticulá-la em suas próprias circunstâncias.*

Palavras-chave: *Eavan Boland; Patrick Kavanagh; uma questão de tradição; forma do soneto.*

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Introduction

Eavan Boland's poetry is part of various contemporary critical contexts that transcend nationality, language and place. Many critics and literary scholars have unravelled potential influences, both technical and intellectual, on her poetry, based on her broad references to other poets. Jody Allen Randolph names a few; not only William Butler Yeats, but American women poets such as Sylvia Plath and Adrienne Rich also find mention in her writing. Boland's progress indeed transcended "the unconfined horizons of the transnational, the diasporic, the Anglophone, and the international" (168). Yet, as the present article does, her encounters with earlier Irish poets, especially Patrick Kavanagh, are worth exploration.

Elizabeth Jennings, in her much-accessible book for aspiring poets, wrote that the most important and influential poets belong to either one's own or the previous generation, maintaining that "[e]very age has its own poetic speech, or poetic diction as it is sometimes called" (44). This might have been true for poets like Boland and Kavanagh, who met in Dublin in the mid-sixties. As Boland recalls, Kavanagh was then a poet whose presence was somewhat intelligible and "an enormous number of people claimed to be intimate with him" ("Memories of Kavanagh" 10). However, there are few comparisons between Kavanagh and women poets of the next generation, with the exception of Eithne Strong.[1] Boland's repeated references to Kavanagh are equally noteworthy and, moreover, quite discernible throughout her career, as noticed by Heather Clark (330). Till the year before her death, Boland was as an editor for the *Poetry Ireland Review*, to which she also contributed an essay to mark the fiftieth anniversary of Kavanagh's death in 2017.

This article recaptures Boland's occasional reflections on Kavanagh, to explore how she found both common and uncommon ground with his life and work. She first found him "an example of dissidence" (*Object Lessons* 99), which could be attributed to the literary conventions permeating the earlier generation's male-oriented Irish poetry. However, she identified herself with him as a marginalised, object-becoming-author in the early phases, as revealed in some of her autobiographical writings. Her fascination with his use of a sonnet in "Epic," Kavanagh's most oft-quoted poem in Boland's writings, attracts attention, since she too had continuously explored the form's possibilities. Highlighting a particular moment in late twentieth-century Irish poetry, this article discusses the creative and intellectual nexus between Boland and the older poet.

"An example of dissidence"

The first encounter between Boland and Kavanagh occurred in the mid-sixties, when they met at Roberts on Grafton Street, Dublin, as written by Boland in retrospect ("Memories

of Kavanagh" 10). Thereafter, her references to Kavanagh were continuous, yet dispersed, such as in "The Irish Woman Poet: Her Place in Irish Literature," "Gods Make Their Own Importance: The Authority of the Poet in Our Time," two collections of prose, that is, *Object Lessons* and *A Journey with Two Maps*, an essay in tribute to Kavanagh in the *Poetry Ireland Review*, as well as small citations in her interviews and writings elsewhere (such as in the *Irish Literary Supplement*, 1988).

Boland remarked that she sensed "dissidence" after they finished lunch that day—". . . I had touched something which would return to me later: an example of dissidence. Kavanagh was a countryman; I was a woman" (*Object Lessons* 99). This sense of "dissidence" might have been revisited two decades later, when she embarked on a critical reading of the works of male poets of the earlier generation. In "The Woman Poet in a National Tradition," her autobiographical essay in *Studies* in 1987, she writes:

> Most Irish poets depended on women as motifs in their poetry. Most used women to explore their own ideas about Irishness. The fusion of the national and the feminine, the interpretation of one by the other, was common practice in Irish poetry. Cathleen Ni Houlihan and Dark Rosaleen come quickly to mind. (152)

Boland then quotes "Pygmalion," one of Kavanagh's earliest poems, and Francis Ledwidge's "The Blackbirds," as older examples. While declaring that "although necessarily my discussion of them is shorthand" (154), she singles out the woman depicted in "Pygmalion" as "the degraded pastoral, an inversion of the myth of Romantic Ireland" (154). The poem, composed in Shakespearean sonnet structure, illustrates "a stone-proud woman" (1), "a stone Pygmalion" (11) found in a field:

> Her lips were frozen in the signature
> Of Lust, her hair was set eternally,
> No Grecian goddess, for her face was poor,
> A twisted face, like Hardship's face, to me. (5-8)[2]

Although Kavanagh, in his usual manner of addressing Ireland's small farm milieu, succeeds in assimilating a mythical figure into the localised realism, the poem portrays an objectified, one-dimensional entity. Boland claims that "[t]he problem is that the woman, who should have been the subject of the poem, is reduced to being its object; a mere projection," "Kavanagh, after all, showed over and over again in his work... that he could realize women with warmth and rapport" ("The Woman Poet in a National Tradition"

153). Consequently, the stone Pygmalion convened in the pastoral setting, turns out to be a "degraded pastoral"[3] woman who is only used as a metaphor.

As real women were the inspiration for Kavanagh's love poems, consequently, poetic inspiration and creativity are mostly represented as "female" in his poetry. The speaker in the sonnet "God in Woman," first published along with "Epic," in *The Bell* in 1951, acknowledges that "[s]urely my God is feminine" (9), expecting its spirit to caress a poet's soul (14). It was in *Collected Pruse* published in 1967 that Kavanagh noted an idea of the Comic Muse: "There is only one Muse, the Comic Muse . . . Great poetry is always comic in the profound sense. Comedy is abundance of life" ("Signposts" 25).

With respect to the figure of the "muse," Boland's poetic defiance of the traditional image was an important practice in her early work. As Randolph suggests, Boland's "bitter attack on the traditional female muse" is seen in "Tirade for the Mimic Muse" in *In Her Own Image* (72). *Night Feed*, the following volume, describes the muse as "The Muse Mother," a domestic woman dandling her child. The speaker expects "she might teach" her "a new language" (28-29)[4], to enable her to speak her "mother tongue" (36). By not creating an alternative, the poet chose to counter the old mythic image primarily because ". . . the invention of a male muse would have been a separatist initiative. The holding to a female one would be a subversive one," as stated in her interview with Deborah Tall (39). For the sake of reconciling her "early love for the tradition of poetry" with her "later anger at it" (39), Boland uses the female image to, in turn, destabilise it. The speaker in "Envoi" declares:

> My muse must be better than those of men
> who made theirs in the image of their myth.
> The work is half-finished and I have nothing
> but the crudest measures to complete it with. (5-8)

Imagining the muse who "must know" (12) about everyday scenes in the suburb, the speaker claims: "I need her to remain with me until / the day is over and the song is proven" (15–16). In the last few lines of the poem, the muse is expected to "bless the ordinary" and "sanctify the common" (25–26), in order to lend voice to the ones silenced in history.

For Kavanagh, in many cases, receiving a poetic vision from a woman or mother figure was necessary. Referring to the poet's prose, such as "Parish and the Universe" and "The Irish Tradition," Edward Larrissy writes:

> Kavanagh certainly believes in distilling truth from fact, and the fact and the truth must be one's own and nobody else's. But distillation is not possible

> without the assistance of Woman, and the Mother is essential to the early nurturing of 'the poetic mind.' (98)

Even in Kavanagh's poem "Auditors In," the figure of Mother Earth is superimposed as a phenomenal being and depicted as a caregiver. Inspired by Stephen Dedalus's diary entry, the end of the second sonnet in part II reads as[5]:

> Away, away on wings like Joyce's,
> Mother Earth is putting my brand new clothes in order,
> Praying, she says, that I no more ignore her;
> Yellow buttons she found in fields at bargain prices, (II, 15–18)

Kavanagh thus employs the archetypal personification, casting the speaker in a supporting role, in a kind of mother-and-child relationship. In sheer contrast, Boland's first-person speaker in "Mother Ireland" speaks:

> I rose up. I remembered it.
> Now I could tell my story.
> It was different
> from the story told about me. (16–19)

The poem's irregularly indented lines instil a sense of Mother Ireland's breath and enlivened presence while telling her story.[6] It is thus possible to discern the "dissidence" between Kavanagh and Boland, in their handling of certain subjects and imageries.

However, in her interview with Tall, Boland recounted that "Kavanagh in a sense was the key poet for my generation of poets. Both men and women can take different things from his work" (39). According to her, the mention of Kavanagh was common, and necessarily positive, in literary conversations in the mid-sixties: "References to him [Kavanagh] were always familiar and sometimes...exasperated" (*Object Lessons* 91). Her following remark on Yeats and Kavanagh hints at their different directions of influence on her: "Yeats had made a literature. Kavanagh had made the single, daring act of protest which pointed the way forward" (91). It is necessary then, to extend this discussion, for rearticulating her reflections on Kavanagh's attempt in Ireland's post-Revival literary scene.

Kavanagh as a "deeply serious man"

"Memories of Kavanagh," published in the *Irish Times* on 20 November 1981, is an autobiographical record of Boland's meetings with Kavanagh in his last years. She recollects

the older poet's comments on his contemporaries, such as Louis MacNeice, whom he called a "king," while being "scornful" of other poets (10). Another time, at the unveiling of Henry Moore's sculpture at St. Stephen's Green, she remembers Kavanagh stating, "in a wheezy, roaring [and] perfectly audible voice," that "The Fiddler of Dooney" is Yeats's best poem (10). In fact, some of his poems, such as "If Ever You Go to Dublin Town" and "Lines Written on a Seat on the Grand Canal, Dublin," convey that Kavanagh was often conscious of how he wanted to be remembered or commemorated publicly.

In her memoir, Boland highlights Kavanagh as an object-becoming-author, a circumstance which also applies to the outset of her literary career as a woman poet in the sixties. Gregory A. Schirmer, who discusses Boland, as well as Seamus Heaney, as poets indebted to Kavanagh, sums this up as: ". . . for Boland, who was seeking to establish her own specifically feminine voice in a tradition with a history of excluding, marginalizing, or co-opting women poets, Kavanagh represented an inspiring model" (306).

In her last essay dedicated to Kavanagh, published in the *Poetry Ireland Review*, Boland conclusively discusses him as "a deeply serious man," borrowing from Anthony Cronin's *Dead as Doornails*. Cronin had met Kavanagh through Envoy, and described him as a man "with an intellect which was humorous and agile, as well as being profound and apparently incorruptible" (Cronin 69). Following this manner of description, Boland remarks:

> It is that 'deeply serious man' this half-century anniversary allows us to consider. It is that Kavanagh I want to remember here. He has seemed to me not only a signature writer of the Irish twentieth century, but something more as well: a figure creating a revelatory momentum within Irish poetry, and—wider than that—the history of poetry. But the context for all this requires a small detour ... ("Patrick Kavanagh: Fifty Years On" 40)

She then takes up Chinua Achebe's article, based on his 1977 lecture, in which he condemned "the misrepresentations of Africa" in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (40–41). To draw a parallel with Kavanagh's case, she asserts that "the meaning of Achebe's argument goes beyond a single fiction" and begets the question: "What happens when a person once objectified in that literature walks out of those tropes and becomes an author, able to shift and change what once held them in stasis? What, in summary, happens when the objects of a literature become the authors of it?" (41). She then embarks upon revisiting Kavanagh's "Epic," to "track" his journey (41).

In "Self-Portrait," as is well-remembered, Kavanagh describes himself as a poet who was once "installed as the authentic peasant" (312). He moved to Dublin in 1939, and as illustrated by Quinn, "[f]or nearly thirty years he [Kavanagh] was Dublin's best-known *flâneur* and, partly because of his countryman image, he soon acquired the status of a local 'character'" (Introduction x). His 1954 essay, "Return in Harvest," records his disdain of "[m]ediocrities" and warns, perhaps acknowledging his public image described above: "Beware of anyone who sees you as picturesque, as a character" (104). "Not caring" ("Self-Portrait" 313) was an attitude he developed in response to not being culturally consumed the way he wished to.

In "The Irish Woman Poet: Her Place in Irish Literature," Boland had recalled Kavanagh as someone who would refuse such a rendering: "But in my time, as a young poet in Dublin, I saw and was moved—and I think was also influenced—by the way in which other poets refused different but similar simplifications. I am especially thinking of Patrick Kavanagh" (33-34). In Boland's eyes, Irish poetry in the forties and fifties was "emerging from a bruising struggle with the aftermath of Yeats" (40), who thought "the Irish poem" existed, whereas "for the poets who followed him, the poem they inherited as a model was an out-of-focus snapshot" (41). Referring to Padraic Fallon, Austin Clarke and Kavanagh as "lost figures in the unfocused background" (41), she summarises: "The dark side of all this was that Irish poets after Yeats were regularly screen-tested for their supporting roles in this pastoral" (42). The word "screen-tested" is re-used for Kavanagh in *Object Lessons* (198), to imply the assessment of a person's suitability for a particular role in the established "tradition."

Kavanagh's "deeply serious" side is apparent in his incisive writing during the *Envoy* period, when he increasingly became preoccupied with socio-cultural criticism. Considering the pitiful state of post-Independence Ireland's cultural scene for its "decline in vitality" ("Victory of Mediocrity" 1), he later wrote in *Kavanagh's Weekly* that "there is practically no literary public in this country and there has never been a literary tradition" ("Literature" 7). His sporadic criticism continued through the fifties and he specifically wrote of poetry in "From Monaghan to the Grand Canal": "I cannot help saying that as far as I can see and as far as I have experienced, there has never been a tradition of poetry in Ireland" (275). If this manner of speaking appears exaggerated, one must note that, for Kavanagh, the afore-mentioned "tradition" in a country emerges from the collective vision of those who support artists. In "Portrait of the Artist Among Barbarians," published in the *Weekly*, Kavanagh discusses Yeats and Joyce as the "two men of high talent and perhaps genius in this country" in the past half-century, while mentioning "the barbarism of Irish

society" as a "negative merit" that worked in their favour (7). He continues, "[i]n the long run the negative attitude will not do. We require a positive tradition . . . Up to the present there has been no such tradition, and during recent years the movement has been in the opposite direction." (7)

This challenging attitude later found several followers, including Seamus Heaney, who perceived him as a tide changer in a period of conflicting traditions. He wrote: "he [Kavanagh] had contributed originally and significantly to the Irish literary tradition, not only in his poetry and his novel, *Tarry Flynn* (1948), but also in his attempts to redefine the idea of that tradition" (115).

Boland remained a quiet witness to the "living stream of talk" (*Object Lessons* 95) in the sixties and, as Randolph observes, "the confusions and contradictions she experienced at this time would become a rich source of debate and argument for her later work" (51). Moreover, in the period between Kavanagh and Boland's time, Irish poets' practice of poetry became transnational, including that of Boland herself. Her encounters with several poets and poems on both coasts of the Atlantic made her intermittently seek to re-position herself in the context of Irish literary tradition, by taking a retrospective critical look once in a while. Here, one could recall her deliberate redefinition of "the Irish Poem" in the nineties, as "a changing interior space," comprised of "[t]he poetry being written by women in Ireland today" ("The Irish Woman Poet" 45–46). As a woman poet, she felt it was important to speak this out, which she did. In this, she was much like Kavanagh, who was an object himself, before becoming an author who challenged the idea of "tradition" in his time.

A dialogue on the sonnet form

In the context of poetry composition, Boland is distinguishable from other poets who commemorated Kavanagh, by her illuminating account of his use of the sonnet form in "Epic." In "Discovering the Sonnet," an essay in *The Making of a Sonnet: A Norton Anthology*, Boland dedicates a few pages to "Epic," suggesting to readers that the essay's title could be indicative of Kavanagh's sonnet itself.

"Epic" is, as Boland states, a sonnet that successfully eliminates the cultural discrepancy between Irish and Anglophone poetry. For seventeen-year-old Boland, who thought, "I wanted to belong to Irish poetry; I wanted Irish poetry to belong to me" ("Discovering the Sonnet" 43), the sonnet form was not integral to writing poetry: "I was sure that it was un-Irish, un-local, too courtly for a new republic, too finished to

ever find a new beginning in the literature I was trying to understand" (44). As Tara Guissin-Stubb observes, Boland's language of "struggle" and "resistance" deserves special attention (9). In "Discovering the Sonnet," she acknowledged that the following fact regarding "Epic" moved her: ". . . when a marginal—in historical terms, at least—and powerless Irish poet looked for expression, what came to his aid was the swift-footed, fourteen-line strategy that had bent to empires and loitered in courts" 45). Boland's encounter with "Epic" had convinced her "that a great form can discover a poet just as much and as often as a poet discovers a form" (45). Her discovery of the sonnet as "a form of true power—malleable, nomadic, humane" (48) is noteworthy, especially when considering her several uses of the form.

In his article on Kavanagh's last poems, John Goodby refers to the fact that Kavanagh "had often used the sonnet, and taken liberties with it," and it was relatively "preponderant" at that stage of his career (145). Kavanagh's unique intimacy with the forebearers of the sonnet shows, for instance, in the titling of "On Looking into E. V. Rieu's Homer" as an allusion to John Keats' "On First Looking into Chapman's Homer."[7] Even before "Epic," he had published several sonnets in literary magazines and attempted such sonnet sequences as "Temptation in Harvest" and "The Defeated."[8] He once attributed his fondness for the form chiefly to its rules, which are strict yet liberating.

> I am very fond of the sonnet form, and not merely because it has been the most popular vehicle for the expression of love but because its strict rules, which like other rules Shakespeare broke so wonderfully, forces [sic] the mind to moral activity but is not itself forced. ("Extracts from Ten Lectures" 65)

Among his sonnets, "Epic" is not the only one that carries a transcendent, liberating potential outside of its historical context. Dillon Johnston commends "Canal Bank Walk" as "worth thousands of Kavanagh's prosaic summons to forget Irishness and to celebrate one's place and moment in appropriate poetic forms" (137). "The Hospital," a sonnet first published in 1956, is no exception. Terence Brown writes: "That the poet should have chosen the sonnet, that European and English form, to write a poem that transcends the conditions of his own bitter, difficult Irish experience is a cultural fact of intriguing significance" (220).

However, it cannot be ignored that England—the country from which the form was transferred to Ireland—is referred to by Kavanagh as "parochial." In his paradigm-shifting passage on the contrast between parochialism and provincialism, published a year after "Epic," the English are listed as a "parochial" civilisation, along with the Greek and

Israelite. It is even underscored, that "[t]he most parochial of modern civilisations is the English" ("Mao Tse-Tung Unrolls His Mat" 2). Such a regard of the English mentality —"never in any doubt about the social and artistic validity of his parish" (2)—lead him to contrast it with Irish literature and its lack of the "parish myth" ("Nationalism and Literature" 248). Although "Epic" was written earlier, the somewhat "parochial" overtone lies at its heart, with its final epiphanic lines much admired by Boland ("Discovering the Sonnet" 47–48). As she informs, "Epic" is a sonnet which transplants the form in an Irish local setting, dissociating it from its generic origin and according it both a transpiring and meditative capacity.

In tracing Boland's creative trajectory of the sonnet form, one must note that her early poetic style seemed to reflect that of Yeats. Stephen Regan, in *The Sonnet*, comprehends that she "both registers the formidable influence of Yeats and shows her determination to move beyond it" and examines her "Yeats in Civil War" in *New Territory* (215–216). "Heroic" in *The Lost Land* and "On Renoir's The Grape Pickers" in *Night Feed* are also part of his discussion, where Regan remarks: "Boland . . . has helped to refashion the political sonnet by dissolving and defusing images of violence" (217). Similarly, in the sonnet titled "Ready for Flight" in *The War Horse*, Boland expresses a reconciliatory moment in a desolate land, through the speaker's meditation with an unspecified other:

> Then I would come at once my love with love
> Bringing to wasted areas the sight
> Of butterfly and swan and turtle dove
> Their wings ruffled like sails ready for flight.
>
> In such surroundings, after the decease
> Of devils, you and I would live in peace. (9–14)

In contrast to her earlier sonnets discussed above, Boland's tone became more personal and reflective after the 2000s. An example is "Is It Still the Same" in *Code*, published in 2001, where the object "she" is embraced by the subject-speaker, overlooking the past: "I wrote like that once. / But this is different. / This time, when she looks up, I will be there." (12–14)

Published in 2007, a year before *The Making of a Sonnet*, "Atlantis – A Lost Sonnet" in *Domestic Violence* inaugurated a new dimension in her process of creating sonnets. It opens with a question cast by the speaker:

> How on earth did it happen, I used to wonder
> that a whole city – arches, pillars, collonades,
> not to mention vehicles and animals – had all
> one fine day gone under? (1-4)

While attempting to provide a sense of the past, that is, Plato's time, the poem shifts its focus to the modern cityscape that the speaker is missing: "white pepper, white pudding, you and I meeting / under fanlights and low skies to go home in it" ("Atlantis – A Lost Sonnet" 8–9). With regard to the myth, the poem ends with a speculation, that "the old fable-makers" (11) might have rephrased "their sorrow" (14) as Atlantis:

> ...Maybe
> what really happened is
>
> this: the old fable-makers searched hard for a word
> to convey that what is gone is gone forever and
> never found it. And so, in the best traditions of
>
> where we come from, they gave their sorrow a name
> and drowned it. (9-15)

Unlike Kavanagh's "Epic," this poem does not convey a strong linkage between the speaker's present and ancient times. Moreover, it neither affirms nor validates any specific locality, by means of imageries of the mythic past. Rather, it meditates upon the fragile relationship between the past and present, the individual and world and the human memory and faculty of imagination. This is achieved by employing the historical form subtly yet unconventionally, as the end result is a tailed sonnet which retains little of the traditional stanza structure or rhyme scheme. Boland was innovative, in that she opened up the sonnet as a form that allows contestation, as well as engagement with the past. The result was a body of work that further expands the possibilities of the sonnet form.

Conclusion

This article explores Eavan Boland's critical and intimate reading of Patrick Kavanagh's poetry, from among other Irish poets of the preceding generation. The "dissidence" that she sensed in her first meeting with him—"Kavanagh was a countryman; I was a woman" (*Object Lessons* 99)—is partly attributable to certain imageries of the earlier generation

which can be observed in his poetry. While retaining the female representation of the muse and the country, Boland bestows them with subjectivities that subvert the older formula.

However, both poets felt somewhat marginalised by the established mainstream, thus enabling their identification as object-becoming-authors. Her loose association with the older poet would lead Boland to comment on his poetry as an inspiring model, and on him as "a deeply serious man." Her reading of Kavanagh's "Epic" as a sonnet reminded her of the possibilities of the poetic form. In tracking Boland's sonnet creation, "Atlantis—A Lost Sonnet," deserves particular attention as an innovative example of her late sonnets. It is posited as an interaction with the past, a meditation upon the past and present and the individual and world, to explore the mechanisms of human imagination and mythmaking.

While this article could only highlight limited points, there are many more thematic concerns that require further exploration and comparison, such as the sense of "place" or exploration of "return," in the later poems of both poets. Irish poetry in the late twentieth century was blessed by a number of creative individuals, and reflections on the past could give rise to a liberating momentum, as was the case with Kavanagh and Boland.

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Notes

1. See Haberstroch 49–52.
2. Patrick Kavanagh, "Pygmalion," in *Collected Poems*. Ed. Antoinette Quinn. London: Penguin, 2005. p. 28. All subsequent references to Kavanagh's poems in this article are cited from the collection and are given parenthetically in the text.
3. For Boland's continued discussion on the representation of the feminine and the national in Irish poetry, see *A Kind of Scar: The Woman Poet in a National Tradition* (pamphlet) and *Object Lessons* 123-153. These references are also mentioned in Randolph 19.
4. Eavan Boland, "The Muse Mother," in *New Collected Poems*. Manchester: Carcanet, 2005. p. 103. All subsequent references to Boland's poems published before 2001 are cited from the collection and are given parenthetically in the text.
5. See Quinn's notes in *Selected Poems* 176.
6. For further discussions on Boland's use of the trope of Mother Ireland, see Clark 335–339.
7. See Quinn's notes in *Selected Poems* 177.
8. The sonnets in "Temptation in Harvest" were published separately in different venues. See Quinn's notes in *Collected Poems* 273. "The Defeated" was first published as "A Sonnet Sequence for the Defeated" early in the same year as "Epic." See *Collected Poems* 278.

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Boland and Yeats: Poetical Irish Dialogues

Boland e Yeats: Diálogos poéticos irlandeses

Marcel De Lima Santos

Abstract: *The present text aims at revisiting key poems by Eavan Boland and William Butler Yeats in order to bring together the apparently politically antagonistic voices of their authors, so that one can possibly understand the poetical dialogues that pervade such aesthetic representations and their complexities in dealing with themes such as love, legend, death, myth and womanhood. As if writing to remind one of the subject that should not forget her previous existence as object, Boland delivers her poetic achievement as a way to possibly disrupt the old patriarchal territory in which the sexual had overwhelmed the erotic for so long. And hence the black lace fan her mother gave her unsettles the male oriented land of Irish poetry and transcends it, not like the golden Yeatsian bird of Byzantium but like "the blackbird on this first sultry morning" until she can finally find a voice to fully express her Irish womanhood.*

Keywords: *Poetry; Boland; Yeats; Womanhood.*

Resumo: *O presente texto tem como objetivo revisitar poemas-chave de Eavan Boland e William Butler Yeats a fim de reunir as vozes aparentemente antagônicas de seus autores, para que se possa compreender os diálogos que permeiam tais representações estéticas e suas complexidades ao tratar de temas como amor, lenda, morte, mito e a condição da mulher. É como se ao escrever para lembrar o sujeito de que não deve esquecer sua existência anterior como objeto, Boland entregasse sua realização poética possivelmente como uma forma de romper o antigo território patriarcal em que o sexual houvesse, há muito tempo, dominado o erótico. Desse modo, o leque de renda preta que sua mãe lhe deu desestabiliza a terra orientada para o masculino da poesia irlandesa e a transcende, não como o pássaro dourado Yeatsiano de Bizâncio, mas como "o melro nesta primeira manhã abafada", até que ela finalmente possa encontrar uma voz para expressar plenamente sua condição de mulher irlandesa.*

Palavras-chave: *Poesia; Boland; Yeats; condição da mulher.*

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Don't be surprised
If I demur, for, be advised
My passport's green.
No glass of ours was ever raised
To toast The Queen. S. H.

"[I]t is good to find an Irish woman writer who is not consumed by guilt for being in search of her own aesthetic. *The Journey* by Eavan Boland is a search undertaken by her, out of the freedom which allows certain questions to go unanswered and the privilege of being cushioned from hard choices others have had to make. With privilege, however, came the pain of exile" (Rowley 1987). These words, which belong to Rosemary Rowley's review of Boland's work, epitomize the late poet's wide scope of lyrical representations, towards the understanding of her highly complex, sensitive and intricate rendering of her native land. Unlike Rowley's though, not all criticisms have been as benevolent at Boland's brave departures from patriarchal rules. Writing about Boland's *Object Lessons*, Donald Davie found the book neither "the clear narrative of a life" nor "a sequence of essays" and as a result was "not sure I know what to do with her confidences" (Davie 39). Like all great poets, Boland was as far from unanimity as one of her poetical ancestors, in the figure of William Butler Yeats, whose life and work also inform the workings and obscurities in the attempt at building his aesthetic representations of Ireland.

Born into the Anglo-Irish Protestant minority that had ruled over the political and cultural life of his native Ireland for centuries, Yeats would notwithstanding often declare himself, much on the contrary of his own roots, an Irish nationalist. In fact, the poet would remark in a comment to his 1908's *Collected Works in Verse and Prose*:

> When I first wrote I went here and there for my subjects as my reading led me, and preferred to all other countries Arcadia and the India of romance, but presently I convince myself for such reasons as those in 'Ireland and the Arts' that I should never go for the scenery of a poem to any country but my own, and I think that I shall hold to that conviction to the end. (Yeats xi).

In Yeats's poetry one is to find—from his early Romantic sketches like "The Lake Isle of Innisfree", "The Fiddler of Dooney" or even "The Song of the Old Mother" to more elaborate mystic poetic achievements such as "Sailing to Byzantium"—an unremitting search for the symbolic language that would translate the mystic landscape of Ireland into a mirror of the world's emblematic historical gyres.

Likewise, despite her upper-class background—her father was a diplomat and her mother a painter—Eavan Boland is also a poet dedicated to her native ordinary people's representations of womanhood. As she called attention to her early years as a poet and the difficulties thereof, Boland remarked:

> I began to write in an Ireland where the word 'woman' and the word 'poet' seemed to be in some sort of magnetic opposition to each other. . . . I wanted to put the life I lived into the poem I wrote. And the life I lived was a woman's life. And I couldn't accept the possibility that the life of the woman would not, or could not, be named in the poetry of my own nation. (Boland 2016 web).

In Boland's poetic achievement one is also to witness—through her subverting traditional representations of womanhood to be found in "Night Feed" or "The Black Lace Fan my Mother Gave me" and her equally complex rendering of Irish history and mythology in "The War Horse"—the same sort of attempt at finding an idiom that might show the joys and domesticity of her native Ireland.

The present text thus aims at revisiting the aforementioned poems in order to bring together the apparently politically antagonistic voices of their respective authors, so that one can possibly be au fait with their aesthetic achievements, which pervade such poetic representations and their complexities in dealing with themes such as love, legend, death, myth and motherhood.

Ahead of his digression from the more conventional nineteenth-century aesthetics and its Romantic musicality, Yeats did in fact write such pieces as "The Lake of Innisfree", whose poetic persona yearns to escape the grind of an urban setting only to be surrounded by nature's thriving. Whereas the uninhabited island of Innisfree is geographically located mainly in County Sligo and partly in County Leitrim, in Lough Gill, it lives most vividly in readers' imaginations out of Yeats's longing to revisit his father's reading to him from Henry David Thoreau's *Walden* when he was still a child, perchance in their natural explorations of the Slough countryside, along with his youthful memories of his visits to the land with his cousin Henry Middleton, when they would have ventured into the lake often at night to brave the wilderness. Those trips certainly contributed to Yeats's contrasting images of the urban and rural areas to be seen ever so candidly in his poem.

This twelve-line composition published in 1890 is divided into three quatrains. During the first two stanzas the speaker revels on his desire to be surrounded by the peace and quiet of nature, only to contrast it with his actual standing to be revealed in the last one. Pressing after a Romantic hanker to seize the moment and embrace the Rousseaunian

bon sauvage lifestyle, the speaker states his urge to "arise and go now, and go to Innisfree," where he will "a small cabin build . . . of clay and wattles made;" as if possibly reappraising Thoreau's enterprise out of the land the latter had borrowed from his master and much more affluent good friend William Wordsworth. Once there, the persona will feed out of the "nine bean-rows" he will have along with "a hive for the honey-bee," just as he feeds the reader with both assonant and alliterative verses out of his inner open space to "live alone in the bee-loud glade."

In the second quatrain, the reader, or the poetic persona's second self for that matter, is told that once there in the midst of natural elements he will "have some peace" for it "comes dropping slow". Such peace will come "from the veils of the morning to where the cricket sings;" so that the colors and sounds of nature's boom little by little become one with him in their atemporal lack of articling: "there midnight's all a glimmer, and noon a purple glow,/and evening full of the linnet's wings."

As the poem comes to an end, the first urging lines reappear: "I will arise and go now" as if to suit the speaker's redundant calling "always night and day", in order to encourage both the speaker's and the reader's imaginative longings for the lulling "lake water lapping with low sounds by the shore;" against the onslaughts of the urban grind and its dull materialism while standing "on the roadway, or on the pavements grey" so that together they can at last embrace the ultimate Romantic ideal to "hear it in the deep heart's core."

By 1890 Yeats's interest in things occult and mystical had moved him from being an enthusiast of Madame Helena Blavatsky's secret theosophist doctrines to joining the Golden Dawn, a secret society that indeed practiced ritual magic. Fascinated by the possibility of becoming a magus, the poet, who achieved the sixth out of the coveted ten grades of membership, remained an active practitioner at the Golden Dawn for thirty-two years. Despite his involvement in both the world of politics, in which he fought for Irish independence and was eventually appointed to a six-year senate chair in the Irish Free State in 1922, as well in the world of arts, getting involved with the Irish National Theatre and becoming a main figure in the so called Irish Renaissance, not to mention his Nobel prize for Literature in 1923, Yeats never abandoned his exploration of mystic themes, which he condensed in *A Vision*, a book that began with his putting down his wife's more than four hundred automatic writing sessions eventually leading up to four thousand pages in which Yeats formulated his theories of the *gyres*, namely the overlapping conical figures that represent mixtures of opposites of both personal and historical cycles. Even though providing important background to many of his later literary production as both poet

and playwright, Yeats's theories of mystical unions and interpenetrating *gyres* had certainly been in the making as one may observe even in his earlier and often considered more naïve poetic representations.

Hence, in yet another of his early poems written in the turn of the century, "The Fiddler of Dooney", Yeats gives way not only to celebrating his love for Ireland and its rural landscapes but also to his Romantic considerations of the poet as sacred politician and of art transcending religion in the representation of the divine. Once again depicting the rural areas surrounding Sligo, this five-stanza poem is set literally in Dooney Rock, a small hill overlooking Lough Gill, only to move symbolically from the pastoral hills of Ireland to the gates of Heaven. In spite of their dwelling the Irish land, from the very start one is told of the different nature between the poetic persona and his next of kin, since the former not only plays on his "fiddle in Dooney" but has accordingly "folk dance like a wave of the sea" whereas the latter are both priests "in Kilvarnet" and "in Mocharabuiee".

In high Romantic fashion, after for instance William Dean Howell's ideas on an ethical literature that would replace religious apprehensions at large (Howell 126), as well as Terry Eagleton's considerations of religion being superseded by English studies, after losing its ideological grip over Victorian society from the mid-nineteenth century onwards (Eagleton 20), Yeats wants to make clear how art is to overwhelm religion in the representation of the sacred as one finds the lyrical persona's brother and cousin reading "in their books of prayer" as opposed to the fiddler's "book of songs" in which the plural noun yields but one plea contrasting with the singular one that becomes many in its artistic substance. And so, when they "come at the end of time" and they meet "Peter sitting in state", the one who is the rock of Christianity "will smile on the three old spirits" but "call [the one who is the rock of Ireland] first through the gate". Ireland's complex religious structure and conflicting struggle between Catholics and Protestants is to be transcended by means of artistic celebration in order to ensure the national union since "the good are always the merry . . . and the merry love the fiddle,/and the merry love to dance". No longer can religion provide the adamantly sought-after prosaic nationalism of Ireland but art alone in its mystical unification of the folk's differences and in its representation of the autochthonous land in terms of music, kinship, landscape and song can ultimately have it done, albeit its—Yeats's concept of art that is—possibly all too Romantic and hence naïve rendering. As the poem comes to the last stanza the figure of the fiddler transcends altogether the role of the priest and will have "all [the folk] come up to [him]" cheering "Here is the fiddler of Dooney!" while Yeats repeats his early simile as if to reassure all the folk in Ireland that only then will they finally "dance like a wave of the sea."

Yeats's turn-of-the-century poetry also anticipates one of his major themes, soon to flourish in his later works, related to the mysteries of ageing. In "The Song of the Old Mother" the persona is an old Irish peasant woman whose ordinary daily chores are interrupted by her own wandering thoughts on the matters of youth, sexuality and their waning thereof. Written in pentameter couplets, as if to represent the supposedly controlled and experienced voice of motherhood, the poem notwithstanding seems to give voice not only to the old peasant's rantings but also to the clash of generations in their often-misunderstood interactions.

The old mother refers to the early grueling labor chores, in which there would be hardly any space for wandering thoughts, by way of her making use of present simple tenses: "I rise in the dawn, and I kneel and blow/till the seed of the fire flicker and glow" only to announce her all-day routine: "and then I must scrub and bake and sweep/till stars are beginning to blink and peep". One could even say that, symbolically speaking, through the references to the low fires both in the hearth and in heaven, the poem alludes to her declining sexuality.

In the succeeding verses though, as if aroused by the very blows that still come from within her body, the old mother's thoughts wander from her reality to the contrasting view of her little offspring who "lie long and dream in their bed/of the matching of ribbons for bosom and head". The young girls' prime sexuality seems to carry the old mother back to her own youth through past longing memories of the anticipation of sex, and hence "their days go over in idleness,/and they sigh if the wind but lift a tress".

In due course the poetic persona's memories also vanish and the old mother is brought back to the present that embraces her now: "I must work because I am old,/and the seed of the fire gets feeble and cold." The very same fire that once befell upon her emerging sexuality is now about to be smothered in the relentless passage of time, but even though the form of the fire may vary from flicker to glow the seed that carries it remains the same in the old mother's song.

Yeats's poetry was thus aiming more and more concerned at the quest for metaphysical matters that would help him come to terms with the mysteries of ageing that involve the ultimate choice between either rational materialism or transcendental idealism. Accordingly, in "Sailing to Byzantium" Yeats writes about the state of his own soul because, in view of that "when Irishmen were illuminating the Book of Kells, and making the jeweled croziers in the National Museum, Byzantium was the centre of European civilization and the source of its spiritual philosophy, so I symbolize the search for the spiritual life by a journey to that city." (Jeffares 217). Even though it looks like the poet

seems to favor spirituality over materialism if one is to follow his commentary to the letter, Cleanth Brooks considers that "Yeats chooses both and neither. One cannot know the world of being save through the world of becoming (though one must remember that the world of becoming is a meaningless flux aside from the world of being which it implies)." (Brooks 17).

Written in ottava rima form, "Sailing to Byzantium" was published in 1928, and it counts four stanzas with eight lines apiece in which the poetic persona at first appears as if veiled in the third person's present simple assertions only to rise out of the usual statements into the bare imperatives that foreshadow the timeless forms of artistic achievement. For this reason, the use of "that" as the very first word of the poem renders it its distance in both time and place since the speaker's present setting is only to reappear in the last two lines of the second stanza: "that is no country for old men", introducing a set of testimonials related to the clash of generations and to the naïve apprehensions of the "young in one another's arms, birds in the trees/ – those dying generations – at their song". Yeats's alliterative verse reinforces not only nature's cycles of sound and silence: "the salmon-falls, the mackerel-crowded seas,/fish, flesh, or fowl commend all summer long/whatever is begotten, born, and dies", but also man's entrapment in the palaces of sensation: "caught in that sensual music all neglect/monuments of unageing intellect."

Perchance in line with the recurring modernist imagetic trope of the scarecrow as a representation of mankind's spiritual dearth, despite rejecting the excessively erudite use of literary and cultural traditions by the likes of Eliot and Pound, Yeats's keen awareness of old age ponders that "an aged man is but a paltry thing, a tattered coat upon a stick". These allusive considerations, albeit berating utterances, are meant as contrastive references to elude the entrapment of the body since they can only exist "unless soul clap its hands and sing, and louder sing/for every tatter in its mortal dress." Aesthetic achievement becomes thus the fertile ground for immortality and the poetic persona's quest is finally announced: "and therefore I have sailed the seas and come/to the holy city of Byzantium."

In the last two stanzas the poet is to be found, after sailing and coming to the ancient capital Eastern Christendom, actively addressing the mystic savants whose spiritual cleansing fire he craves: "O sages standing in God's holy fire/as in the gold mosaic of a wall,/come from the holy fire, perne in a *gyre*,/and be the singing-masters of my soul." The poetic persona is about to be hurled into the spinning gyres of history as it is metonymically consumed by the mortal sickness of the flesh: "consume my heart away; sick with desire/and fastened to a dying animal." Only after being purged in the holy fire of everlasting wisdom will the one whose heart has fallen ill rise out of ignorance into the "artifice of eternity."

The last stanza finds both the poet and his artistic achievement immortalized beyond the grasp of time's natural cycles: "once out of nature I shall never take/my bodily form from any natural thing". By means of reappraising his simile, Yeats offers the representation of the artificer and the artifice as one and the same: "but such a form as Grecian goldsmiths make/of hammered gold and gold enameling/to keep a drowsy Emperor awake". Such capitalization might indeed suggest the poet's modernist concern with the divine indifference at man's neglecting his potential. Finally transfigured into an out of time tableau of gilded shimmering the poem/poet/prophet will now be forever singing "upon a golden bough ... to lords and ladies of Byzantium/of what is past, or passing, or to come", if only to convey their ultimate mystical union between language and landscape as a means to translate the sacredness of art.

Yeats indeed conveyed his aesthetic achievement through such mysterious union, and Boland likewise aimed at representing the boundaries of a new vision of history by means of reading it through the poetic arrangements of space. According to Clair Wills, Boland "is a master at reading history in the configurations of landscape, at seeing space as the registration of time. If only we know how to look, there are means of deciphering the hidden, fragmentary messages from the past, of recovering lives from history's enigmatic scramblings." (Wills 3). As a matter of fact, in "The War Horse", published in the troubled times of 1975, Boland becomes the spectator of a scene she would later describe in her *Object Lessons*:

> I married in my mid-twenties and went to live in a suburban house at the foothills of the Dublin mountains. . . . The weather was cold; the road was half-finished. At night the street lamps were too few. And the road itself ran out in a gloom of icy mud and builder's huts.
> It was early '70s, a time of violence in Northern Ireland. . . .
> One evening, at the time of the news, I came into the front room with a cup of coffee in my hand. I heard something at the front door. I set down the coffee and went to open it. A large dappled head – a surreal dismemberment in the dusk – swayed low on the doorstep, then attached itself to a clumsy horse and clattered away.

As the poet reminisces on her ghostly memories of such eerie mutilation, she tries to rationalize it, possibly musing over the improbable scene and trying to come to terms with it through its poetic depiction out of the sway of language to somehow withstand the onslaughts of a violent reality:

> There was an explanation. It was almost certainly a traveler's horse with some memory of our road as a traveling-site and our garden as fields where it had grazed only recently. The memory withstood the surprises of its return, but not for long. It came back four or five times. Each time, as it was started into retreat, its huge hooves did damage. . . .
> Some months later I began to write a poem. I called it 'The War Horse'. Its argument was gathered around the oppositions of force and formality. Of an intrusion of nature – the horse – menacing the decorous reductions of nature that were the gardens. And of the failure of language to describe such violence and resist it. (Boland 176).

This the 30-line poem written in rhyming couplets is an onomatopoeic representation of the horse's clip-clopping down the road/page: "This dry night, nothing unusual/about the clip, clop, casual/Iron of his shoes as he stamps death/like a mint on the innocent coinage of earth." The poetic persona then informs the reader of her witnessing the animal's movement through run on lines and short sentences that uneasily parallel war and a child's toy:

> I lift the window, watch the ambling feather
> Of hock and fetlock, loosed from its daily tether
>
> In the tinker camp on the Enniskery Road,
> Pass, his breath hissing, his snuffling head
>
> Down. He is gone. No great harm is done.
> Only a leaf of our laurel hedge is torn –

As she contemplates the menace of violence in her garden, the speaker refers symbolically to the reader's "distant interest like a maimed limb" in the plants whose elusiveness will no longer offer resistance in the subtlety of their "screamless" death, conceivably denoting the fear of those seeking shelter from the onslaughts of war:

> Only a rose which now will never climb
>
> The stone of our house, expendable, a mere
> Line of defence against him, a volunteer
>
> You might say, only a crocus, its bulbous head
> Blown from growth, one of the screamless dead.

After contemplating the threat of war and violence, the poetic persona shifts her gaze from observation to self-awareness and poses the critical question in the safe hearth of those unharmed:

> But we, we are safe, our unformed fear
> Of fierce commitment gone; why should we care
>
> If a rose, a hedge, a crocus are uprooted
> Like corpses, remote, crushed, mutilated?

An ill at ease want of concern for the victims of war is thus presented in a simile that honors those remote corpses which had been trounced out of the very absence of others' fierce commitment. The following lines portray the return of the horse, now to be seen symbolically as both physical presence and metaphorical representation of war connected by the threat of imminent violence:

> He stumbles on like a rumour of war, huge
> Threatening. Neighbours use the subterfuge
>
> Of curtains. He stumbles down our short street
> Thankfully passing us. I pause, wait,

The war horse now is the full-grown personified dominant force to be watched fearfully by those hoping it will pass them by unaffectedly. When he is gone, we can go out to pick up the pieces and see what he has done. The speaker, unlike her neighbors who have hidden behind their curtains, seems to be an attentive beholder of the blows of war, albeit realizing that beholding is not such an active role, in her use of the plural pronouns.

> Then to breathe relief lean on the sill
> And for a second only my blood is still
>
> With atavism. That rose he smashed frays
> Ribboned across our hedge, recalling days
>
> Of burned countryside, illicit braid:
> A cause ruined before, a world betrayed.

In spite of a certain measure of tension, the poetic persona seems to find comfort now that the (war) horse has passed on and she leans on the windowsill, as if stilled in time, as if to somehow bond to her Irish precursors who had themselves experienced the predicament of war. The rose that was trudged is now a metonymical image for Ireland herself, and the horse's braid weaves unlawfully recalling the oppressor's ferocious onslaughts upon the land and its people. The poem ends not so much as fierce criticism of those who hid behind the curtains but rather as an acknowledgement of the pain and distress of a people whose world had been historically betrayed and destroyed.

As Boland grew into more complex poetic achievements, her representation of suburban life also underwent significant growth accordingly. In line with Sara Sullivan, "the suburb is no longer a place that traps its female inhabitants in a state of limbo or shuts down the creative artist." (Sullivan 341). And so, in her "Night Feed" Boland is to find new ground to tackle the issue of motherhood, and, by means of a mother's interior monologue, she can cast a sensible thoughtful glance upon the hearth and history of her native Ireland.

"Night Feed" is a five-stanza poem, carrying seven lines apiece, which describes poignantly how a mother advises her new-born daughter on the early hour's nourishment: "This is dawn./Believe me/This is your season little daughter." The at first literal image soon develops into Boland's symbolic search for a new dawn to commend womanhood from a female perspective out of the imposed alienation of a century-old male dominated cultural environment: "The moment daisies open,/The hour mercurial rainwater/Makes a mirror for sparrows./It's time we drowned our sorrows." The mother wants to make sure her next of kin will indeed find ways leave behind the alienation of modern suburban life, in order to attain new connections between the mythology and history of Ireland, as if awakening from the dark night of oppression, in order to finally represent a mother's ordinary chores as the ground for the rise and celebration of womanhood: "Yes, this is the hour/For the early bird and me/When finder is keeper." Boland makes sure the poetic persona is represented in her love-grounded duty of motherhood: "I crook the bottle./How you suckle!" which is also to be seen in all of its anxious vulnerability: "This is the best I can be,/Housewife/To this nursery", so that she eventually seems to address both her daughter and life itself in an ambiguous apostrophe that shows both the (lingering) frailty and the (much needed) strength of motherhood: "Where you hold on,/Dear Life".

In her ritualizing the female experience of a night's feed, Boland seems to be searching for myths that will challenge traditional male perspectives in order to celebrate the essences of womanhood:

A silt of milk.
The last suck.
And now your eyes are open,
Birth-coloured and offended.
Earth wakes.
You go back to sleep.
The feed is ended.

From hearth to history, these short verses come to depict the mother's loving ritual of nurturing her offspring and allowing her eyes to behold the world of myth only to fall back up into it all over again. As the poem comes to its concluding stanza, so do the elements of the night, as if to announce the new nestling life:

Worms turn.
Stars go in.
Even the moon is losing face.
Poplars stilt for dawn
And we begin
The long fall from grace.
I tuck you in.

Long is the night of looking after her daughter's life as likewise will be the struggling journey for the poetic persona's planting the seeds of a new ground to represent the values and ideals of Irish womanhood out of the oppression and alienation imposed by male stereotypes for centuries old.

Boland's attraction to the twilight hour can be seen as an attempt at representing the concept of time to be found in many of her poems. In "The Black Lace Fan my Mother Gave me" the poet meditates on the heirloom that might take her back to the past from which her personal history would be mystically transcended. Possibly musing on her parents past love story, which comes to be symbolized by the lace fan, the poetic persona goes back in time when "it was the first gift he ever gave her" setting the recollection "in pre-war Paris" during summertime: "It was stifling./A starless drought made the nights stormy." The story is portrayed in short sentences, like snapshots from the film of memory, as if meant to evoke not only the experience of life, but to further extend it into the perennial representation of art: "They met in cafes./She was always early./He was late./That evening he was later . . . She ordered more coffee./She stood up./The streets were emptying./The heat was killing."

Despite delving into the erotic nature of its poetic sign: "These are wild roses, appliqued on silk by hand,/Darkly picked, stitched boldly, quickly", the piece seems to presently remind the poet of its current state of a "worn-out, underwater bullion and it keeps,/even now, an inference of its violation." Boland herself declared that she "was aware of [her] own sense of the traditional erotic object as a sign not for triumph and acquisition, but for suffering itself" (Boland 230). Therefore, revolving around the paradoxical nature of love and the action of time thereof, the poem seems to blend memory and nature into a synesthetic representation of experience: "The past is an empty café terrace./An airless dusk before thunder./A man running." Drawing on the poetical to turn the past into a permanent experience, the speaker addresses the reader and relies on the latter's sense of invention: "And no way to know what happened then—none at all—unless, of course you improvise". As if writing to remind us of the subject that should not forget her previous existence as object, Boland delivers her poetic achievement to possibly disrupt the old patriarchal territory in which the sexual overwhelmed the erotic for too long. And hence the black lace fan her mother gave her unsettles the hitherto male oriented land of Irish poetry and transcends it, not as the golden Yeatsian bird of Byzantium but rather like "the blackbird on this first sultry morning" until she can ultimately find a voice to fully express Irish womanhood as she "suddenly puts out her wing—the whole, full, flirtatious span of it."

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Bodily Vulnerability and the Ethics of Representing Woman and Nation in the Poetry of Eavan Boland

A vulnerabilidade corpórea e a ética de representação da mulher e da nação na poesia de Eavan Boland

Caitriona Clutterbuck

Abstract: *This essay argues that for Eavan Boland, all genuinely life-enhancing social, cultural and political engagement depends on our capacity to respond to the exposed and vulnerable condition of the human body in time. In the Irish context, such alertness to the historically-situated suffering body has a particular bearing on the ethics of representation in art. Boland's output diagnoses the legacy of colonialism as authorizing a dangerous three-way intersection between the heroization of territorial and racial violence, the normalization of gender and class injustice, and the sanctioning of an exclusivist aesthetics in the poetry tradition—all three of these outcomes demanding denial of our common fate of mortality. For Boland, this toxically-clamped nexus can only be released through focusing on corporeal vulnerability as a primary human condition: one which binds the marginalized first and foremost to each other but also to those who perpetrate or perpetuate their exclusion. For Boland, openness to the flux of change leading towards bodily dissolution is particularly crucial for understanding the vexed relationship between woman and nation in Irish culture, and to renewing that relationship on creative terms.*

Keywords: *Eavan Boland; Body; Mortality; Woman; Nation.*

Resumo: *Este ensaio argumenta que, para Eavan Boland, todo engajamento cultural e político que envolve uma melhoria genuína da vida depende de nossa capacidade de responder à condição de vulnerabilidade e exposição do corpo humano no tempo. No contexto irlandês, tal atenção ao sofrimento do corpo historicamente situado tem uma particularidade sobre a ética da representação na arte. A produção de Boland diagnostica o legado do colonialismo como se autorizasse uma perigosa interseção de três vias entre a heroicização da violência territorial e racial, a normalização do gênero e injustiça de classe, e a sanção de uma estética*

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exclusivista na tradição poética—todos esses três resultados exigindo a negação de nosso destino comum de mortalidade. Para Boland, esse nexo toxicamente preso só pode ser liberado por meio do enfoque à vulnerabilidade corporal como uma condição humana primária: aquela que liga os marginalizados, antes de tudo, uns aos outros, mas também àqueles que perpetram ou perpetuam a sua exclusão. Para Boland, a abertura ao fluxo de mudanças levando à dissolução corporal é crucial para o entendimento da relação vexada entre mulher e nação na cultura irlandesa, e para renovar essa relação em termos criativos.

Palavras-chave: *Eavan Boland; Corpo; Mortalidade; Mulher; Nação.*

Through nearly six decades of work as poet, essayist and teacher, Eavan Boland obeyed one consistent imperative: to "take what we've marginalized and pull it into the centre and make it what sheds light on everything else" (Boland, *A Journey* 100). For Boland, mortality itself as disavowed human fate is the hidden trigger of most other forms of marginalization. Conversely, recognition of our given condition of transience—that reality which the mutability and vulnerability of our flesh insists upon our attention—opens space for flourishing based on our participation in authentic human community. As a result, Boland's poetry and prose teaches us that the absent history of the subject can best be retrieved through the body in its link to time. For example, in her 1994-collected poem, "Anna Liffey" (Boland, *New Selected Poems* 139-145 [henceforth abbreviated to *NSP*]), the woman speaker in middle age links her present life to the river in the city of her birth so as to come to terms with the dispossessions enforced by her own changing body. Since bodies, like rivers, "are always en route to / Their own nothingness" (*NSP* 145), Boland extends this metaphor to confront her own future absence of individualized, knowable identity: as the Irish sea absorbs the Liffey, so death must one day "takes / The names you made, the names / You bestowed, and gives you back / Only wordlessness" (*NSP* 144). Yet it is only through this ongoing evacuation of self that the poet-speaker is able to position herself as "A woman in a doorway" (*NSP* 140) between inside and outside, private and public, known and unknown worlds, and thereby reclaim herself as a meaning-making subject. In other words, it is because she must go through the exile of ageing and beyond it into oblivion, that she can anticipate with confidence that "Everything that burdened and distinguished me / Will be lost in this: / I was a voice" (*NSP* 145).

Eavan Boland began to establish her own voice in the 1960s, '70s and '80s as a citizen in a post-colonial culture where, typically, the body was at once fetishized

—commodified as a symbol— and repressed as site of inadmissible pain. Such pain was anesthetized through violent self-definition in forms of authoritarian fixity imposed through gendered political and religious systems and through exclusivist ideologies of art. The outcome—all too evident in the course of twentieth-century Irish history—was a destructive pattern whereby the mishandling of loss led to more loss as this absent body, representing the silenced history of the invisible colonial subject, continued to haunt the body politic. Hence a crucial element of Eavan Boland's long-term legacy is her work's call upon us to recognize that one of the main "elements of manipulation" in poetry as in broader culture, is the "failure to surrender to types of suffering and the attempt to organize it [suffering] into types of control" (Boland and Tall 40). Her poetry advocates the opposite: once surrendered to in its complexity, suffering illuminates vital human truths of our interdependence, acknowledgement of which is indispensable to tackling the root causes of injustice.

For Boland, this process demands specific recognition of the marginalized voices of living Irish women, past and present—those whose absent presence remains "an aching silence at the centre of [Ireland's] national literature" (Boland and Villar-Argáiz). Boland was alert to this connection from the outset: in her career-direction setting 1967 poem, "From the Painting *Back from Market* by Chardin", she "think[s] of what great art removes: / Hazard and death, the future and the past, / This woman's secret history and her loves" (NSP 5). Such gendered denial of time was an extirpation affected by the canon which would lead Boland, like so many other female artists, into a place of conflict between her identity as woman and her vocation as poet. Recognizing the prevalence of women being fetishized into fixed positions in the literary tradition, Boland recalls of her early career, "As a woman I felt some mute and anxious kinship with those erotic objects which were appropriated; [yet] as a poet I felt confirmed by the very powers of expression which appropriated them" (*Object Lessons* 237–8).

The issue at the heart of this matter, was the (non) admissibility of mortality. Boland records her journey in poetry as one of recognizing that the female erotic object functions as "a trophy of the forces which created it", mainly because it constitutes "a concealed boast, a hidden brag about the powers of poetry itself: that it could stop time. That it could fend off decay" (*Object Lessons* 212–3, 233). In the well-known terms of Boland's mid-nineties poem, "A Woman Painted on a Leaf" (*NSP* 148), such artefacts inscribe women who signify "the terrible / suspension of life", but Boland instead needs "a poem / I can grow old in . . . a poem I can die in." Hence, a woman seeking to find a reflection in poetry of her life journey as one that involves unashamed ageing and death

—processes that are close-up, natural, and (un)terrifying—needs "the erotic object [in the art tradition, to] be rescued and restored: from silence to expression, from the erotic to the sensory"; this in turn "offers a radical and exciting chance to restore time in the poem." (*Object Lessons* 234).

This poet's developing awareness of the cycle of life as it insists itself in her own body, animates a core principle in Boland's aesthetics: meaning in poetry is only possible because it is always in a process of dissolution and reformation through re-reading. Such a self-reflexive principle has direct implications for textual form. The carefully modulated irregularity of Boland's verse enacts a process whereby language deliberately breaks the smoothness of the poem's surface of meaning. Hence, her poems typically signal their own acts of artistic framing and construction by highlighting various sign systems—labels, notices, pieces of writing, other artworks, etc. Such strategies are advanced by textual lay-out: note the way that the pace of a Boland poem tends to shift, as the lines speed up or slow down via punctuation, spacing on the page, and abrupt end-stopped lines combined with enjambed colloquial flow. The ideal of aesthetic order is likewise challenged by her varied stanza lengths, indentation and unusual organization of white space around text. Taken together, such disjunctive formal effects attune Boland's readers to be alert to the terms upon which all artworks—including poems—are received: her poetics reminds us of the counter-intuitive truth that the authority of a poem "grows the more the speaker is weakened and made vulnerable by the tensions he or she creates" in the text (*Object Lessons* 186).

Yet the world of Irish letters too often has refused this vitalizing state of tensity. Boland particularly highlights the fact that it is through their denigration of the domestic poem that literary gatekeepers have resisted the retrieval of women from their fixed position as 'perfect' erotic objects into the flux and flaws of time. She has recorded this critical resistance in the poetry tradition to the world of experience from which, following her marriage and the birth of her children, her own creative work was emerging in the 1970s and '80s: as a reader, Boland says "I wanted to see my new life in the old art. I wanted some recognition of the kettle I had just boiled, the sound of rain in the garden—and that they had come with me to the poem. I wanted to see their shadow . . . I couldn't" (*A Journey* 20). Such prohibitions cut across her basic permission as artist: "How could I be original, if I couldn't even provide the name for my own life in poetry?" (*A Journey* 8). This roadblock between her voice as artist and the source of her vision, was normalized in a poetry tradition where the domestic poem was designated as "a lesser genre . . . a code for something a poetess was likely to write. A short, soft lyric of unearned sentiment . . . a label

of contempt and condescension" (*A Journey*, 100). Such literary critical gatekeeping is exemplified by William Logan's remark in his 1991 review of Boland's poetry of the 1980s: "Poems of quiet desperation in the kitchen do not form an original aesthetic" (Logan).

However, that kind of de-validation flushes into the open constraints against submission to the needs of the everyday as generated by the body in time, and as attended to through our most quotidian tasks of caring and self-care. These needs are recognized in a particular way in the domestic poem. Boland's work suggests that the domestic poem is likely to be disparaged in any literary critical culture which itself serves an establishment politics in which social inequality is maintained. This is because the domestic poem points to an alternative politics in the manner in which it testifies to the dignity of the everyday as generating ordinary people's transcendent meaning: Boland sees that "the bias against the dailyness of an ordinary neighbourhood, in terms of art or ideas, was a sort of extension of a colonial attitude" (Boland and Meehan, 329). For Boland, the domestic poem is subversive because it is "charged with a relation which is continuous and unpredictable between bodies and the spaces they inhabit [and as such] it seemed perfectly set up to register an unwritten past" (*A Journey* 101).

This conclusion is vividly illuminated in Boland's 1987-collected poem "The Women" (*NSP* 70–71)—a text replete with consciousness of bodies in inhabited spaces, rendering fluid and permeable the boundaries between past and present, myth and reality, and "higher" and "lower" life purposes: "I do my work best, / going up the stairs in two minds, / in two worlds, carrying cloth or glass, / leaving something behind, bringing / something with me I should have left behind." Here, Boland affirms the power of "shape-shifting instabilities" in a modern suburban home. This space is one where a woman can summon to her side mythic women who "fell" and "healed" into figures who outstep their function as erotic objects, including the woman poet herself at her desk—a woman who exercises power over poetic form, authorizing her own identity as a creator through a domestic role where housework can speak compellingly for the process of creating art. Hence, by the end of "The Women", the ordered ironing in the hot press "neatened flat, stoving heat and light" suggests the achieved poem on the page—the cloth symbolizing all that may be stored in ordinariness.

For Boland, "the 'domestic'"—leading as it does "into the kitchens and rooms and windows and lives of thousands upon thousands of people"—thereby "led by a number of underground passages directly back into Irish history" (Boland and Mills Harper 98). In her early poem, "Suburban Woman" (*NSP* 14-17), Dublin's expanding suburbs of the 1970s, then mainly occupied during the day by women and children, at once disturb and confirm

the binary upon which modern Irish public life had been founded. Illuminating the fact that "Women . . . carry the culture's more widespread fear of the loss of boundaries, of the uncontrollable" (Waugh 203), Boland's poem highlights suburban women as scapegoats paying the cost of ideological conflict between tradition and modernity, in the form of opposition between "ideal" rural and "real" urban life in Ireland. Here, suburbia itself is the symbolic result of that violent rape of political identity and agency in Ireland, which has been acted out on the bodies of women in this country for generations: a key site of their invisibility in modernity. Yet as such, suburbia also offers itself as a locus of subversive agency for the woman who is both homemaker and creator: "Defeated we survive, we too, housed //together in my compromise, my craft. / Who are of one another the first draft" (*NSP* 17).

In this and many other poems, Boland suggests that individual and collective identity alike only comes together from *within* the human subject's (and nation's) experience of incompletion and brokenness, retaining the signs of that imperfection and woundedness within our ongoing life. In brief, a poetry is needed which reflects the reality of the Fall. "The Latin Lesson" (*NSP* 92–3) explores Boland's coming to consciousness of this fact through encountering the underworld of human longing in the face of death. Here she goes back to her convent-boarding school days in the late 1950s, when, learning to read *The Aeneid* Book VI in Latin, she first discovered that literary traditions can actively explore the dilemma of entering underworlds of loss. Virgil's text prompted Boland to ask a question which would become foundational in her aesthetic: how to "cross the river" from this underworld with the voices of the lost in her care, "and still / keep a civil tongue / in [her] head" as she addresses the need for truthful yet communicable witness. Interrogating the basis of claims by historians, politicians and writers to speak on behalf of those without power, Boland's work has remained directly concerned with how the "civil tongue" of any art may refuse to take into adequate account, the secret histories of unacknowledged lives and of the inadmissible past. This is a lesson which would find its most famous expression in Boland's 2001-collected poem, "Quarantine" (*NSP* 178–9), in which the witness to human attachment offered in the record of one destitute famine couple's death by starvation, calls the whole Western lyric tradition of love poetry to account.

One of those secret histories with most immediate personal resonance for Eavan Boland has become central to her aesthetic. In a poem published in *The New Yorker* on the day she died (April 27th 2020), "Eviction" (*The Historians* 14–15), the poet explores an iconic moment in the almost un-known history of her own maternal grandmother, who within five years of the events related here, would die at age thirty one in a fever

hospital, leaving five young children behind (*Object Lessons* 3–4). This poem imagines the story behind a rare piece of concrete evidence of her grandmother's lived everyday reality: a regional newspaper's report from 1904 of this woman being taken to court following an eviction notice for non-payment of rent. Here, mapping the shadows of this woman's shaming, Boland unflinchingly makes clear the fact that her grandmother was a woman to whose existence (had she lived) the Irish Free State and Irish Republic, would have remained indifferent—just as that nation's imperial predecessors had dismissed her. A "nation . . . rising to the light" had no room in its official story—before or after independence—for the private history of economic degradation and gendered abjection suffered by one of its nameless citizens. Such indifference was coded in the mockery of this woman and her fate enacted by the amused lawyers and sycophantic reporters in court that day in 1904, and demonstrated in the details of the local newspaper's account, detailing and multiplying her humiliation. Yet Boland's present-day anger on her grandmother's behalf can make no difference to the woman haunting her consciousness—the poet testifies, "knowing as I do that my attention has / no agency, none at all. Nor my rage." The poem "Eviction" exemplifies later Boland's poetic strategy of "mixing elegy with micro-history and [exploring] what effect that has on the speaker I'm setting up in the poem" (Boland and Villar-Argáiz). Here in one of her final pieces, Boland remains directly impacted by the action being described in the poem through her acute consciousness that, from the perspective of the lost grandmother described in this text, Boland's intervention as an heir taking up her own pen on this women's behalf remains entirely ineffectual.

Yet, such testimony to powerlessness itself *does* have agency. For Boland, by virtue of moving from being spoken about in Irish poems to becoming speaking agents in their own right, women in Irish poetry engage with key "questions . . . about voice and the self, about revising the stance of the poet, not to mention the relation of the poem to the act of power . . . questions which are at the heart of the contemporary form" (*Object Lessons* xv). In her view, their misrepresentation and exclusion from the centres of cultural and political power have granted women a unique vantage point in relation to other kinds of exclusion which intersect with sexism and gender oppression: "Being a woman in Ireland touches on a strange adventure of powerlessness... she becomes a key witness to the geology of secrets and exclusions that are an important part of Irish literature and the culture around it" ("Daughters of Colony" 10). In particular—as "Eviction" has indicated—Boland's work diagnoses the exclusion of unheard voices who are "outside history" (*NSP* 108) as perpetuating colonial violence in new forms in this country and elsewhere. It is unsurprising, then, that one of her most sustained objectives has been to

chart the limitations of a post-colonial heroism which is founded on under-interrogated gender constructs.

In particular, Boland has tackled the legacy of an Irish national poetry tradition which relied uncritically on the women-as-Ireland symbol as mythic convention—one deployed in the eighteenth-century Aisling genre and its heirs in the nineteenth-century political balled, the Revivalist figuration of the feminine ideal as typified in the Yeatsian mystic Rose, and subsequent deployments of archetypal devouring sexual women as authorizing mediators of masculine subjectivity. For Boland, "In availing themselves of the old conventions, in using and reusing women as icons and figments, Irish poets were not just dealing with emblems. They were also evading the real women of an actual past, women whose silence their poetry should have broken." (*Object Lessons* 152–3). Such exclusions mean that the poetry tradition as handed down, has bandaged up Irish history so as to conceal rather than heal the country's infected wounds – an accusation Boland most famously levels in her 1987-collected poem, "Mise Eire" (*NSP* 59–60). However, when they take up an active speaking role, Irish women embody the Mother Ireland figure "come to life" (*Object Lessons* 184). On the basis that all living Irish women are already implicated in the idea of woman-as-Ireland and it in them, Boland in "Mise Eire" claims the authority of Mother Ireland in order to challenge the use of this same female figure to deny the reality of Irish historical defeat and loss. By this means, she can "disrupt [and revise] the allegory of nationhood which had customarily been shadowed and enmeshed in the image of a woman" (*Object Lessons* 184).

But this revision is never complete: the poet of "Mise Eire" uncomfortably concludes that her "new language / is a kind of scar / and heals after a while / into a passable imitation / of what went before". Read now more than thirty years after its time of writing, Boland's "Mise Eire" here seems to forewarn us that when it comes to women's agency, practical change is achieved only to reveal how much more still needs to be done, and therefore the past is never truly past. The mid-1980s is recognized as a nadir-point of the fruits of misogyny in modern Irish history, when, within three years, an anti-abortion referendum passed which was used to strip women of basic rights of citizenship, the tragedy of the Ann Lovett case and the travesty of the Kerry Babies case had occurred, and a divorce referendum had failed. By 2021, abortion has been legalized and the injustices done to women by a punitive Irish cultural and political establishment largely have been acknowledged in the public domain. Yet our present moment of relative enlightenment is shadowed by discomfiting overlaps with that previous dark era: in Spring 2021 alone (that is, at the time of writing), the increases in violence against women in the home recorded

during the Covid pandemic, the denial of witness statements within the official report of enquiry into Mother and Baby Homes in Ireland, and the constraints on basic independent movement of women in public spaces through fear of assault as exposed in the wake of the murder of Sarah Everard in London, give plenty of pause for thought.

The power of women's voices in Ireland today functions as a "kind of scar" —a mark of a wound which cannot be forgotten, for a scar can never return to a pure, unblemished state. That is its purpose: the more the wound it signals is disavowed, the more that wound is liable to reopen. Hence the paradox that Ireland's history of gendered loss can be encoded effectively in the same myth which itself has perpetuated that loss, whereas if women deny the mythic figure, they only compound their own invisibility. Instead, women must take the gendered political symbol of the Irish sovereignty goddess, and alter it from within by reorienting the "laws of metaphor" through which that symbol functions (*Object Lessons* 148). So, in "Mise Eire", the Mother Ireland figure is turned inside out as her understudies take over: the twinned forms of the garrison prostitute and emigrant mother in this poem—types of women who suffer in time, not outside it—suggest the manifold truths of hidden Irish lives in history. In "Mise Eire", therefore, the true "emblematic relation" which Mother Ireland encodes, is no longer between the conventional passively pure woman and the triumphant nation, but rather "between the defeats of womanhood and the suffering of a nation" (*Object Lessons* 148). As a result, "Irishness and womanhood . . . [can] at last stand in for one another" (*Object Lessons* 148).

For Eavan Boland, the "defeats of womanhood" extends to the lived experience of all Irish people whose voices remain unheard in a triumphalist heroic cultural ethos. Hence, in the poem "Unheroic" (*NSP* 158–9)—appropriately collected in the year of the transformational Good Friday Agreement in 1998—she challenges gender determinism on behalf of Irish men, and likewise draws upon the power of a talismanic icon to do so. In this poem, a quiet-mannered manager in a city-centre hotel who had an unhealable wound rumoured to be located "deep in his side"—a wound which he had to clean and re-bandage nightly himself—is contrasted with O'Connell Street's "street of statues: / iron orators and granite patriots / Arms wide. Lips apart. Last words". By virtue of this man's bodily association with the iconography of stigmata which carries authoritative association with sacrifice, the private history of loss represented by the hotel manager radically qualifies the public history of triumph represented by the statues outside, thereby challenging the inheritance of Irish political ideology with its gendered fictions of national wholeness. For Boland, Ireland's is a literary tradition which "at its best", demonstrates "power . . . unswervingly confronted and its myths plucked apart to reveal the resilience of the

powerless" ("Daughters of Colony" 19). This poem extends that tradition at its best, as in it, Boland invites us to consider whether witness to and sharing in the suffering of others may be the truer calling of Ireland's independence movement.

Not only their moral bankruptcy, but the futile, self-defeating nature of exclusivist tribal identity systems is explored in Boland's 1994-collected poem, "In a Bad Light" (*NSP* 121–2). Here Boland deals with the traumatic underside of Irish history still resonating in a United States museum exhibit of a beautiful dress once worn by a Southern Belle just before the American Civil War. This artwork of intricate stitching and shaping creates a thing of light and beauty which conceals a much darker underside: the makers of the dress were Irish immigrant seamstresses escaped from post-famine Ireland, to whom the New World guaranteed little or no hope of flourishing. The "fury" and "nightmare" of their suffered history has gone into this dress, which on the surface represents a world of impossible innocence—an Eden before the Fall—but whose deeper layers connect the Irish famine in the then-recent past to the conflagration about to ensue of the Southern American way of life founded on slavery. Powerfully annotating how the privilege of one social grouping is guaranteed by the grinding down of another, this poem spotlights how class division between women remains a key element of such inequality. It suggests that insofar as women allow themselves to function as props upholding a world view which refuses to face its own complicity with the darker sides of history and therefore its responsibility to intervene in injustice, the immenent destruction of that 'upper' world of privilege remains lying in wait.

This poem exemplifies Boland's contention that "Ours is a tradition where the power of expression exists in a subtle relation to the narrative of silence each Irish person is word-perfect in to this day" ("Daughters of Colony" 19). But how can this silence be heard as an urgent form of speech? Boland warns that the writer must guard against privileging the act of talking *for* others over opening a channel through which the voices of those others can be heard. This is the case most especially when all that can be so registered of those voices, is the echo of their silence in history. Hence, Boland reminds us to be especially wary of that instant when, as a working writer, one at last achieves what feels like adequate expression: "At that split second . . . all the rough surfaces give way to the polish and slip of language. Then it can seem that the force is in the language, not in the awkward experience it voices" (*Object Lessons* 77). For Boland, this demands bringing one's own contexts of silence and speechlessness into the foreground of one's effort to represent the silence of the Other. In practical terms, this means the poet must guard against "The temptation . . . to honour the power of poetry and

forget that hinterland where you lived for so long, without a sound in your throat, without a syllable at your command." (*Object Lessons* 77).

Boland's famous mid-eighties long poem, "The Journey" (*NSP* 73-76), charts the pilgrimage of understanding this involves. Having just experienced her own child's brush with death through meningitis, the poet's personal situation impels her dream vision, recorded in this text, of a guided visit to the underworld. Here, in her dual role as poet and mother, she encounters the desperation and loss suffered by women in plagues throughout world history. This poem centres on the fact that those countless women in the past who did lose children, were people who once had as full a subject identity as Boland herself, and who are linked to the poet through the love they too bore their sons and daughters. This common experience of everyday love remains the only means of now connecting with those who have succumbed to such horrific ordeals.

The simultaneous helplessness, necessity and guilt of affirming such a bond in the context of unequal experience of suffering, generates a dilemma of representation that remains beyond the reach of the formalist analytical mode for poetry, as practiced in the Iowa university program which she and her husband were attending at the time her child fell ill (Note to "The Journey"). For Boland, poetry constrained to such terms evades this foundational dilemma of self-other relations, by "wasting" itself on "the obvious // emblem instead of the real thing", with the result that "every day the language gets less // for the task and we are less with the language" (*NSP* 73). In contrast, the poet-speaker is urged to "remember" her own vision of a much greater shared humanity of creative potential and familial communion which is subtended by exposure to utter vulnerability: "the silences in which are our beginnings, / in which we have an origin like water" (*NSP* 76). In the process of learning this lesson, the speaker of "The Journey" moves from the bitterness of literary politics to emphasizing the importance of direct witness to what is at stake in those politics—the people at the heart of the experience under representation. Thus, Boland's journey is an arc towards a primal empathy in concrete rather than abstract terms—a lesson in con-joined humility and response-ability, that she and all writers must learn. As such, "The Journey" both theorizes and exemplifies self-reflexive aesthetics in a poetry which opens up its own processes for interrogation. Crucially, rather than the poet-speaker being an omniscient controller of the lyric action in such texts, Boland includes herself—the figure of the woman poet—as a distinctive persona in the poem who is in relationship with other personae there, and likewise subject to the poem's events (often, as in "The Journey", through use of split-time-frame narratives). In this way, Boland demonstrates how the poet can "enter the interior of the poem and reinscribe certain

powerful and customary relations between object and subject. And be responsible for what we did" (*Object Lessons* 235).

In her 2007-collected poem, "Still Life" (*NSP* 202–3), Boland illuminates what such responsibility may entail. The title of this poem is brought into stark relief as in it, she traces the dark background subtending the work of a famous Irish-American still-life painter, William Harnett, who was a master of trompe l'oeil verisimilitude (National Gallery, "William"). Harnett was born in 1848 in Clonakilty, Co. Cork, where his parents experienced the ravages of the famine before emigrating to America when he was a baby. One of his most famous paintings is "The Old Violin" (1886)—an image of a violin hanging on a dark wooden door (National Gallery). In "Still Life", Boland frames an account of Harnett and the quality of his realism in this painting with a brief description of a very different visual artefact: an iconic famine-era etching, "Begging at Clonakilty" which shows a mother pleading for money to provide the child she holds in her arms with a coffin for burial (Mahoney). Boland's poem proposes that the visual artefact of the famine etching functions as the underside of the painting of the violin, by juxtaposing their descriptions with the simple statement, "I believe the surface of things / can barely hold in what is under them".

Harnett's painting, in Boland's words, is full of surfaces "no light could escape from". Her poem suggests that this opaque still life with its mysterious flat matt surfaces was his form of transgenerational witness to the horrors of the Irish famine, which he had experienced at first hand as an infant and survived, when so many other children from his home town did not live—in other words, one still life speaks back to another. At the same time, Boland checks her own hubris of interpretation, challenging presumptions of the accessibility of such underworlds through historical overview by including in the poem an account of her own personal pilgrimage to Clonakilty. During this trip, the literal atmosphere of the place seems to simultaneously reveal and veil its traumatic past, as the poet-witness is offered only "the air extracting / the essence of stillness from the afternoon" of her own present moment in history. The vacuum thus implied, paradoxically allows the speaker's presence to be wrapped into the underlayers of the past—her own attempted yet failed witness to trauma is necessitated through her choice to bring the two other artworks into this same space of the poem: a drama of historical layering both sparingly and vividly delineated in this haunting text.

Boland's equivocal agency-cum-powerlessness to adequately represent the condition of human bodily vulnerability, surfaces again and again as the core driver of the action of her poems. Her poetry's exploration of her own participation in exposure to loss—far from

presuming equivalence of painful experience with the victims of history she represents—is the only authentic means of establishing connection with those others, notwithstanding painfully clear differences of circumstance. Therefore, her work invites us to live with the moral discomfort of making such a necessary link to the Other, whereby the objects of our attention remain in a position to stare us out, yet call for our attention all the more because of this: they too have (had) as rightful a claim to fullness of life in this world.

In conclusion, through teaching us that insistence on the stability of any form of identity undercuts its claim to living force, Boland's focus on bodily vulnerability liberates us to believe that the letting go which is involved in mortality, allows our ideals of completion in this world the space to be re-embodied in new terms. Only by means of such yielding can a creative relationship be enabled between powerlessness and power, shadow and solidity, ignorance and knowledge, truth and fiction, and hurt and healing. Therefore, by means of such dissolution, the lost land (to use the title terms of Boland's 1998 volume) becomes a free gift offered back to all of us. The poetry of Eavan Boland reminds us that "we have an opportunity to move forward with all our myths turning back from bronze to molten metal and all our carefully selected pasts turning into volatile and unpredictable futures" (Boland, "The Veil" 16). Coming to terms with the body in time is what enables this possibility—no less than this sustains the hope expressed in the final lines of this liberatory poet's final volume: the promise of "Justice no longer blind. / Inequity set aside. / And freedom re-defined" ("Our Future Will Become the Past of Other Women", *The Historians* 67).

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Bodies of Water in the Poetry of Eavan Boland (IRE) and Rhian Gallagher (NZ)

Corpos de água na poesia de Eavan Boland (IRE) e Rhian Gallagher (NZ)

Emer Lyons

Abstract: *In the poetry of Eavan Boland and second-generation Irish poet Rhian Gallagher, bodies of water are summoned to enact the ritual or vocation towards embodiment in the lyric. In this article, I argue that a Catholic upbringing influences how a poet treats the subject in lyric poetry, particularly bodies of women. Boland travels towards the body of her dying mother in "And Soul", permeating every drop of water she encounters with the possibility of enlivening her mother. In "Gaze", Gallagher searches for "something" missing in the view outside her window, something she finds in the gaze and body of her lesbian lover. Both poems are set in liminal spaces, allowing for the ritual of lyric embodiment with subjects seeking immortality through bodies of water.*

Keywords: *Irish; Diaspora; Poetry; Catholic; Lesbian.*

Resumo: *Na poesia de Eavan Boland e do poeta irlandês de segunda geração Rhian Gallagher, corpos de água são convocados para realizar o ritual ou vocação para a incorporação na lírica. Neste artigo, defendo que uma educação católica influencia a forma como um poeta trata o assunto na poesia lírica, particularmente os corpos das mulheres. Boland viaja em direção ao corpo de sua mãe moribunda em "And Soul", permeando cada gota de água que ela encontra com a possibilidade de reanimar sua mãe. Em "Gaze", Gallagher procura por "algo" faltando na vista do lado de fora de sua janela, algo que ela encontra no olhar e no corpo de sua amante lésbica. Ambos os poemas se passam em espaços liminares, permitindo o ritual de corporificação lírica com sujeitos que buscam a imortalidade por meio de corpos de água.*

Palavras-chave: *Irlandês; Diáspora; Poesia; Católica; Lésbica.*

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Introduction

Being socialised and educated through a Catholic lens (in West Cork, Ireland) has impacted how I read and write poetry and I believe the same to be true of Eavan Boland and Rhian Gallagher's work. If the bible is one of the first books you read or hear read, then narrative becomes a stronghold in your literary craft. If you are socialised into an environment with more rules than liberties, than form becomes a safe haven. If you learn prayers and hymns by rote from birth both repeated multiple times a day, then a compulsion towards an oral vernacular tradition, towards a song-like rhythm, and towards repetition cannot help but seep into your poetics. I believe a religious upbringing alters a poet's way of being and knowing in the world regardless of whether they are still practicing. My own poetry circles back to Catholicism with feverish regularity. Elements of my indoctrination can be found in the comfort I find in form, in my ease with oral poetic presentation, in my reliance on song-like sonic patterning and narrative arcs, and in my confessional language. Or as American lesbian punk poet Eileen Myles writes, "Sometimes I'm just ashamed to block the sun."[1]

The lyric appears an obvious choice of poetic expression for Boland and Gallagher, and for myself, as it provides a framework from within which to examine how our sense of self and our bodies, both social and poetic, develop outside of the indoctrination of Catholic and heteropatriarchal ideology while also acknowledging the ways in which that ideology remains internalised, how women remain part(s) of the (w)hole. The lyric when employed by women poets of the Irish diaspora offers a new testament to love, grief, and the body with a view to undoing the historical narratives of elimination, and cultural and poetic erasure.

Eavan Boland's "And Soul" pays homage to the body of her mother, and the immortality of her soul which lives on in the "weather" of the poem. Rhian Gallagher's poem "Gaze" embodies lesbian recognition using reoccurring imagery, location, and the body to expand the sphere of the lesbian love poem inside out. Both poets treat the lyric as a poetic vocation of embodiment, using their surrounding environments as a mirror for the bodies and souls of women, enlivening the capacity for transformation.

And Soul
My mother died one summer—
the wettest in the records of the state.
Crops rotted in the west.
Checked tablecloths dissolved in back gardens.
Empty deck chairs collected rain.
As I took my way to her

through traffic, through lilacs dripping blackly
behind houses
and on curbsides, to pay her
the last tribute of a daughter, I thought of something
I remembered
I heard once, that the body is, or is
said to be, almost all
water and as I turned southward, that ours is
a city of it,
one in which
every single day the elements begin
a journey towards each other that will never,
given our weather,
fail—
    the ocean visible in the edges cut by it,
cloud color reaching into air,
the Liffey storing one and summoning the other,
salt greeting the lack of it at the North Wall and,
as if that wasn't enough, all of it
ending up almost every evening
inside our speech—
coast canal ocean river stream and now
mother and I drove on and although
the mind is unreliable in grief, at
the next cloudburst it almost seemed
they could be shades of each other,
the way the body is
of every one of them and now
they were on the move again—fog into mist,
mist into sea spray and both into the oily glaze
that lay on the railings of
the house she was dying in
as I went inside.
(Eavan Boland, *Domestic Violence* 25).

Boland begins "And Soul", a single stanza poem, with an em dash on the first line and ends the next four lines on full stops. The punctuated beginning interrupts the poem's flow, with each full stop creating a statis in reading. This statis mirrors the poem's content as in the first line the speaker's "mother died", she "rotted" like the crops, "dissolved" like the tablecloths, "collected" rain like an "empty" deck chair. Boland embodies the poetic compulsion to lyrically language death. New Zealand poet Jenny Bornholdt attempts to

describe the image of her father's cancer on an x-ray in her poem "Confessional" in her 2008 collection *The Rocky Shore* (VUP),

> When I saw the X-rays of my father's cancer —all of us
> with him in the room while the surgeon pointed to the dark
>
> smudges that meant maybe three of four more months
> of life –I tried to think what those marks looked like,
>
> whether they resembled anything but no, they remained
> what they were –dark patches marring a lit screen, changing
>
> everything (14).

Boland makes no attempt to language her mother's death besides "she died", "was dying". Instead, she details her voyage towards death as an attempt to language her grief. On the fifth line, Boland uses the verb "took" to describe her journey towards her mother, "As I took my way to her". The primary definitions of "took" are to, (1) lay hold of (something) with one's hands; reach for and hold and/or, (2) remove (someone or something) from a particular place. These two definitions of "took" connect Boland's line "I took my way to her" to the lines "I thought of *something* / I remembered / I heard once, that the body is, or is / said to be, almost all / water" (italics added for emphasis). The speaker removes the body of her mother, "I took" from the particular place, "the house she was dying in", to hold her in the lyric as (a body of) water. She uses a memory, "something", to re-member her mother as alive, or "almost all / water". This moment of re-membering is followed by lyrical travel as the speaker "took" her way "through" traffic, "through" lilacs, "behind" houses, and "on curbsides". The poem follows a course towards "the house" from "west" to "southward" to "the North Wall". The contemporary postcolonial scholar Jahan Ramazani writes how travel in the lyric often occurs at the micro level, "swift territorial shifts by line, trope, sound, or stanza that result in flickering movements, oscillations, and juxtapositions" (2007, 284). From the sixth line of "And Soul", the poem is one sentence punctuated by three em dashes over thirty-four lines, with one line indentation (line 21). The structure of the poem keeps the action of the poem moving. Boland intentionally limits punctuation so as to allow the poem to make "swift territorial shifts." The last line reads, "as I went inside", the speaker/the poem goes "inside", and thus, stop moving. In a video interview for the series *Rambling*, Eileen Myles speaks about knowing a poem is

finished when it's stopped moving. Myles will often "write something out of a transition of some sort" which for them can be "coming" into their apartment, crossing a threshold, which for Boland is going "inside".[2]

> I heard once, that the body is, or is
> said to be, almost all
> water and as I turned southward, that ours is
> a city of it,
> one in which
> every single day the elements begin
> a journey towards each other that will never,
> given *our* weather,
> fail—
> (italics added)

In the above section, Boland uses the pronoun "ours"/ "our" to refer to both the city and the weather, creating an intimate connection with the landscape both urban (city) and natural/elemental (weather). Throughout the poem, Boland is not only creating a traveling lyric but also what Lauren Thacker refers to as "a multimobile poetics," "one that privileges movement through space over place; it is one that features speakers practicing and linking physical mobility (i.e. travel, commuting) and temporal, spiritual mobility (i.e. slipping between the worlds of the living and dead)" (2016, 131). Boland links the physical mobility of the speaker driving, "I drove on", with temporal, spiritual mobility through the image of the body as water (as "the elements", as "weather"). Boland writes the specific location of "the Liffey", a river that flows through the centre of Dublin, imbuing the river with the capacity of 'summoning' water towards its body from the sky, thus privileging movement in space rather than in the specific place of Dublin city.

The body is absent from the very beginning, from the title "And Soul", into the first line "my mother died" and ending on the lines, "the house she was dying in / as I went inside." There is a violent separation of the body and soul formed by the initial em dash. In Catholicism, at death the body ceases to exist, is mortal, while the soul continues to exist, is immortal: "But whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life" (John 4:14). Boland enforces in her language her vocational attitudes towards embodiment. The poem pulses, "dripping", "reaching", "summoning", the body of the mother back to that "one summer" when she was "dying" not yet dead. The eternal pursuit of Catholicism is immortality and as a poet Boland writes immortal her mother engaging the pursuit of

eternity in Catholicism, casting a vatic "ring structure" over the poem leading from the title, "the return at the end of the request of the beginning" (Culler 2015, 16). I return to the image in the first line of the poem of the mother's dead body "one summer". In that "one summer" her body died, but her soul is otherwise alive in many bodies of water that populate the poem. The apostrophe remains forever within the constant "now" of vatic lyric time (Culler 2015), the occurrence happening within the moment of the poem only, just as the death of the speaker's mother means the death only of her body, and not her immortal soul which lives on in a "spring of water welling up to eternal life." The mother is now only, "And Soul".

Apostrophes invoke elements of the universe as potentially responsive forces, which can be asked to act, or refrain from acting, or even to continue behaving as they usually behave. The key is not passionate intensity, but rather the ritual invocation of elements of the universe, the attempt, even, to evoke the possibility of a magical transformation (Culler 2015, 215).

The mother is metonymically connected to the coast, canal, ocean, river, stream in both form (through italics and line breaks) and content. The mother's soul lives "inside our speech—", speech in this poem is something to inhabit or occupy.

> as if that wasn't enough, all of it
> ending up almost every evening
> inside our speech—
> *coast canal ocean river stream* and now
> *mother* . . .

Speech for Boland has an "inside" just as Catholicism is inside the speech of Irish people, in every involuntary *God bless*. The "they" of the rain water and the river water are written by Boland as 'shades' of each other. "Shade" is defined as (2) a colour, especially with regard to how light or dark it is or as distinguished from one nearly like it. One is nearly like the other, nearly like each other like the body. "They" transformed, "fog into mist, / mist into sea spray" like her mother transforming into water.

> So, poetry replaces the body (*liko*) with something whose form (*liko*) is like it, though not identical to it: more vulnerable, or less subject to decay, or harder to read, or easier to read, or more attractive (more likeable) than what we already have (Burt 2014, n.p.).

Boland does not use personal markers for the house, "the house she was dying in", it was not the speaker's home but merely "the house". Up until the final moments of the poem, "And Soul", is not a specifically interior poem as it takes place in the liminal space of the car. The poem elides the body and bodies of water from inside that liminal space. Daniela Theinová, a researcher on contemporary Irish poetry, makes the point that, "the historical marginality of women in literature accounts for the prominence and the beneficial use of metaphorical representations of the liminal (such as windows, doorways and various other borderline locations) in contemporary women's poetry" (2020, 164). She believes the liminal is employed as a metaphor for time and space, for external inspiration and the self. From within the liminal space of the car, Boland can perform the poetic ritual of the lyric, she can overcome the limitations of time and space, of the oppressive patriarchal environment. The poem up until the last line is constructed entirely from within a liminal space, betwixt and between the body and soul, the external world and the self. Boland writes in a "Letter to a Young Woman Poet," (2000) of how words were agents rather than extensions of reality, "they made my life happen, rather than just recorded it happening" (339) and she writes of "how time might become magical" (344). Through Boland's belief in the magical quality of time in the lyric and the potential agency of language, she ritually invokes the elements of the universe. Boland does not seek to resolve her grief in regards the death of her mother but rather to embody her in the language of the poem acknowledging the journey of grief, the embodied experience.

> Irish women's poetry therefore intimates that elements of elegy's more conventional focus on consolation, as found in traditional poetry of remembrances of the dead, should be retained *alongside* this genre's attention to the impossibility of resolving grief (Clutterbuck 2016, 242; italics in original).

Gaze
Morning carries into the room
sounds of you
wrapped in the shower
as I watch the lines re-ink with light,
mountains so close and vast
as the sea is vast.
Ice a-shine with early sun. The view
. . . something to tell you
as I cross the floor, calling your name.
You're standing, towel at your hair, curtain back,
wet in a gravity of tracks

> — shoulder to clavicle;
> breasts and belly are a sheen.
> I gaze and you
> reply to my gaze
> as the mountains have never replied
> nor the sea.
> (Rhian Gallagher, *Shift* 34).

Rhian Gallagher is a second-generation Irish poet born in 1961 and raised Catholic in Timaru, on the South Island of Aotearoa/New Zealand. In 2006, Gallagher returned to Timaru after eighteen years in London. "Gaze" featured in her second collection *Shift* published in 2011. The poem is constructed of five tightly wound sentences across seventeen short lines. This brief poem incorporates the use of repetition in the words "you," "mountains," "vast," "sea," and "gaze," which drifts down from the title to appear twice in the body of the poem. Throughout the poem, the body and the landscape are swiftly enjambed, as Gallagher toys with the reader's conception of what constitutes the body of the poem and the body of her lover as her internal and external gaze drift between the two, connecting her sensual erotic relationship with her lover to nature, creating an eroticism of natural imagery in the poem, eroticising the lyric—"Would I ever be able to eroticize this tradition, this formidable past, stretching back and reaching above, so that I could look up confidently?" (Boland 338). The dissolving line into line structure and the poem's narrow shape suggests the shape of the lover's body and the journey of the speaker's gaze which moves from the "mountains so close and vast" to wrap her lover "wet in a gravity of tracks."

The momentary slice of life depicted in "Gaze" conveys unsolidified particulars, we are unsure where we are but know it to be "morning." The body of the speaker's lesbian lover delicately awakens the speaker's gaze away from the view outside to carry the poem towards the naked female body inside. There is a tension between the lesbian body as it operates in the public sphere (outside), and in the intimate public (inside). I use this term intimate public after the work of Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner, both prominent fore figures in Queer theory.

> Intimate life is the endlessly cited elsewhere of political public discourse, a promised haven that distracts citizens from the unequal conditions of their political and economic lives, consoles them for the damaged humanity of mass society, and shames them for any divergence between their lives and the intimate sphere that is alleged to be simple personhood (Berlant and Warner 1998, 553).

The way in which the lesbian body is identified, reflected, and recognised operates differently in both spheres because of the hegemonic gaze operating in the space. In the public sphere lesbians are minority figures dominated by the discursive power practices of the heteropatriarchy whereas in the intimate public of the poem even the form on the page reflects the prioritisation of the lesbian body.

The sea appears as a simile, as an imagined view to gaze at, and represents the world of the poem formulating in the speaker's unconscious mind. The mountains are vast *like* the sea that is not physically present in the moment captured in this poem. The truth of the view, of what the speaker can see, is not the only thing that appears in the poem, the poet replaces the real with the poetic, or as Stephanie Burt theorises, that which is *like* the real. When Gallagher writes, "Ice a-shine with early sun. The view / . . . something to tell you," the ellipsis represents what is not seen in the view, "the sea," which prompts the speaker to remember "something" to tell her lover. The watery image of the ice shining in the view prompts the speaker to think of her lover in the shower, the lover becomes intimately connected to the imagery of water, the non-existent sea becoming like the body of her lover. The speaker is prompted to cross the physical interior of the poem, a pseudo domestic space, "as I cross the floor." I say pseudo, because the space appears to be unfamiliar to the speaker; it is a liminal or transient space (home for her lover, a hotel room). This can be read in Gallagher's use of generic terms for the interior and exterior space of the poem, "the room," "the shower," "the view," "the floor." The two mentions of the sea suggest that the speaker is more accustomed to a view of the sea rather than the mountains which read like unfamiliar terrain. The sea reminds her of an elsewhere, another time and place, which functions as both a real place, and a place in her unconscious. Gallagher highlights the agency of language, of punctuation, and its ability to create an event, cause a happening. Even though the rhyming couplet ending in "view" and "you" is interrupted by the ellipsis, the rhyme scheme allows the poem to flow past the punctuated pause for thought. The view also acts as an excuse to move the speaker's gaze through the physical space of the poem towards the lover in the shower. The speaker's gaze moves from outside in, from the act of viewing something in the range of her vision, to the act of regarding her lover's body: the "view" becomes *like* "you."

The lover enters the poem through sound. First, she "carries into the room" through the sound of the shower, and secondly when the speaker calls her, "calling your name." The lover's name, which is never learnt, is the only moment of (reported) speech in the world of the poem. Gallagher moves between the use of metaphor and metonymy as the layered processing of the poem continues to build. The lines of the poem "re-ink"

to become the mountains, reminding the speaker of the elsewhere sea, the sea prompts the memory of "something," this something becomes the lover's name, and this becomes the image of the lover's "wet" body. Gallagher calls on the sea to reflect the lesbian body with sound repeating through "laughing." Light "carries" in "with early sun" engaging the senses from sound to light.

> You're standing, towel at your hair, curtain back,
> wet in a gravity of tracks
> — shoulder to clavicle;
> breasts and belly are a sheen.

The intimate use of "you" and "your" in reference to the lover also allows the reader to insert themselves in her place. Gallagher could be addressing the reader, or the poem directly. Her language choice also makes the reader conscious of the poetic form of the lyric by using words like "clavicle," a word chosen for its poetic merit, a word rarely spoken off the page. Shoulder to collarbone is not nearly as poetically effective. Using the female body as subject allows for this kind of word play, language can be musical like "clavicle," or simple and sensuous like, "breast and belly." Gallagher's gaze is distinctly feminist, and woman centred, with the erotic communication between nature and the body. In Ben Lerner's article about the poetry of Claudia Rankine and Maggie Nelson, he references Gillian White's theoretical work on lyric shame. Lerner writes that White tries:

> . . . to refocus our attention on lyric as a reading practice, as a way of 'projecting subjectivity onto poems,' emphasizing how debates about the status of lyric poetry are in fact organized around a 'missing lyric object': an ideal—that is, unreal—poem posited by the readerly assumptions of both defenders and detractors of lyric confessionalism (Lerner 2017, n.p.).

It could be read that in "Gaze" the sea represents the ". . . something" missing, or the ideal, and in the last four lines of the poem Gallagher positions the lover's gaze as this ideal.

> I gaze and you
> reply to my gaze
> as the mountains have never replied
> nor the sea.

The replied gaze shows the "gravity" of longing between these two women and of the endless possibilities to "re-ink" new "tracks" using the subject matter of the body and same-sex

desire, possibilities never achieved using the natural imagery of "the view." Elizabeth Grosz builds on the work of Foucault who describes the body as an inscribed surface of events, to identify the body "as the 'threshold' between nature and culture; it is both material body and cultural inscription" (quoted in Brush 1998, 25–26). Gallagher propels the body beyond simple subjectivity into action by writing about the existence of bodies navigating complex desires. Here, I can sense a move away from the sublime metaphorical thinking of traditional lyric poetry and towards a woman-centred intimate epistemology of the body. To incorrectly paraphrase Wordsworth, Gallagher's love of nature leads her to love of [wo]man.

In reference to Elizabeth Bishop's poetry Margaret Dickie writes that, "Bishop has been able to write a double-voiced discourse that is both disarmingly revelatory about her secret knowledge and most explicit about her open knowledge" (Dickie 1997, 88–89). Gallagher also writes "a double-voiced discourse" in tone and form she assimilates to the traditionally patriarchal lyric while also providing a powerful process of identification for lesbian readers, the "you" she is addressing with her gaze. Gallagher toys with the blazon tradition in "Gaze," yet, her lover is not just like the mountain or the sea but is superior, "as the mountains have never replied / nor the sea." Her creation of intimate publics in her poems through identification, reflection, and recognition for Gallagher, her lover, and the reader, ensures that the objectification of the blazon tradition is absent. Dickie considers the creation of a "lesbian public lyric" out of "private passions and needs" and the challenges that lesbian poets like Gallagher may face "in response to a potentially hostile environment" (1997, 197). Gallagher re-inks the imperatives of lyric poetry and challenges the reader's conceptions of who is behind the 'I' and who is the intended "you." Revealing her private passions in "Gaze" Gallagher challenges her patriarchal Catholic indoctrination using the lesbian public lyric.

Conclusion

Could I make the iron breathe and the granite move?
Eavan Boland, 'Letter to a Young Woman Poet'

Boland and Gallagher write lyrics that seek to embody both the internal and external worlds of the poem, the speaker, and the poet. The external, natural world seeps into these poems like a fog to, "shift old anomalies" (Boland 42). Both poets avidly search for "something"— "something / I remembered" ("And Soul") or ". . . something to tell you"

("Gaze") — with the lyric completing once that "something", or the "missing lyric object," is discovered (for Boland the body of her mother and for Gallagher the "gaze" of her lover). In writing with a language of the self, with an epistemology rooted in the body, Boland and Gallagher create space in the lyric for narratives of maternal death and lesbian love that are often interrupted, distorted, shamed, or silenced.

> Taken collectively, the Catholic Church taught young girls like myself to be ashamed of our bodies and of our sexual desires, to submit to male authority despite its cost to our own integrity, and to minimize if not deny our own needs and desires (Russo 2001, 187–88).

Catholicism trained young girls to confess our impure thoughts to male priests within the confessional, literally placed in a dark box devoid of eye-contact to seek absolution for impurity. One of the most notable characteristics in Boland and Gallagher's poetry is their celebration of women's bodies, their poetics are rooted in matriarchal ideology. The repeated use of bodies of water are significant in their work as they provide readers with a mirage of reflective surfaces, mirrors. Boland and Gallagher contribute to the Irish public lyric voice, creating a mirror for lesbian, women and diasporic readers, and a sense of value and completeness that can often be lacking in their lived experience. The heteropatriarchy daily strives to further the feminisation of poverty on the bodies of women and lesbians. This poverty leaks into poetry with the body disappearing in readings that wantonly abolish it.

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"Priestess or sacrifice?" Domestic Tasks and Poetic Craft in Eavan Boland's poetry

"Sacerdotisa ou sacrifício?" As tarefas domésticas e o ofício poético na poesia de Eavan Boland

Virginie Trachsler

Abstract: *This article looks at the relationship between housework and poetry in Eavan Boland's poetry. Like many other women poets of her generation, Boland had an ambivalent relationship to the domestic, as she was well aware of the dangerous tendency to confine women's poetry to the domestic realm. My intention in this article is to show how she modified the woman's poet relationship to the "domestic muse". Drawing on poems taken mainly but not exclusively from her two collections published in the early 1980s,* In Her Own Image *and* Night Feed*, and placing her poetry in dialogue both with her critical writing of the time and with two of her main American influences, Sylvia Plath and Adrienne Rich, this article argues that Boland considered domestic routine as enabling her poetic craft rather than hindering it. Housework provided a model for poetic work and allowed the poet to bridge the gap between poetic craft and other crafts, such as painting, which was linked to her artist-mother. Eavan Boland's aim was to make the domestic poem political and, by doing so, she changed the landscape of Irish poetry and women's poetry.*

Keywords: *Eavan Boland; Poetry; Housework; Painting.*

Resumo: *Este artigo analisa a relação entre o trabalho doméstico e a poesia de Eavan Boland. Como muitas outras poetas de sua geração, Boland tinha uma relação ambivalente com o ambiente doméstico, pois bem sabia da perigosa tendência de confinar a poesia feminina a esse espaço. Minha intenção neste artigo é mostrar como Boland modificou a relação da mulher poeta com a "musa doméstica". Com base em poemas retirados principalmente, mas não exclusivamente, de suas duas coleções publicadas no início dos anos 1980,* In Her Own Image *e* Night Feed*, e colocando sua poesia em diálogo tanto com sua escrita crítica da época quanto com duas de suas principais influências americanas, Sylvia Plath e Adrienne Rich, este artigo argumenta que Boland considerava*

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a rotina doméstica como possibilitadora do seu ofício poético ao invés de um impedimento. O trabalho doméstico forneceu um modelo para o trabalho poético e permitiu à poeta preencher a lacuna entre o ofício poético e outras artes, como como pintura, que estava ligada à sua mãe-artista. O objetivo de Eavan Boland era tornar político o poema doméstico e, ao fazê-lo, mudou a paisagem da poesia irlandesa escrita por mulheres.

Palavras-chave: *Eavan Boland; Poesia; Trabalho doméstico; Pintura.*

As 1980 dwindled to a close, Eavan Boland was asked about her New Year's resolutions for a feature in *The Irish Times*. Boland is quoted as saying that

> one of her resolutions for 1981 is that she will set aside a time in which to work and not blame her children for being a source of distraction to her when she can't work. She is quick to point out that, of course, they are not a distraction, but when you are suffering from mental block, you have to blame someone. (Smyth and Ahlstrom 13)

While Eavan Boland eloquently articulated this concern in many critical texts, it is worth noting that this comment was made between the publication of *In Her Own Image* (1980) and *Night Feed* (1982), two collections in which the poet dramatized the tensions arising from her position as both a woman and a poet. These lines from "Monotony" (*New Collected Poems* 101) seem to capture the same ambivalence towards domestic routine and chores:

> am I
> at these altars,
> warm shrines,
> washing machines, dryers
> with their incense of men and infants
> priestess
> or sacrifice?

This ambivalence towards the speaker's role within her household and the possible hindrance domestic tasks represent for her creative work encapsulates the many other tensions around which Eavan Boland started to reconstruct the figure of the poet. While it is stating the obvious to say that she was "more than a poet of pots and pans" (McElroy 32), I would argue that even in collections such as *In Her Own Image*, Eavan

Boland considered domestic routine as enabling her poetic craft rather than hindering it, because it allowed her to bridge the gap between poetic craft and other crafts. It also tied in with her preoccupation with painting, linked to her interest in domestic scenes and to her relationship to her artist-mother. As Boland was aware of the dangerous tendency to confine women's poetry to the domestic realm, my intention in this article is to show how she modified the relationship to the "domestic muse". In fact, Boland's intention was to make the domestic poem political and, by doing so, she changed the landscape of Irish poetry and women's poetry.

The "domestic muse" in Boland's poetry first appears in *The War Horse*, with poems which start to evoke life in the suburbs, then in *In Her Own Image* and *Night Feed*, where it appears *en creux*, in contrast with the other muses whose truth and existence it challenges and shatters. Here again, the importance of household chores is paramount. Traces of domestic labour threaten the Mimic Muse: "In a nappy stink, by a soaking wash / Among stacked dishes / Your glass cracked", the speaker tells this traditional poetic figure (*NCP* 71). The reality of domestic tasks to accomplish belies the truthfulness of the Mimic Muse, who will not "mimic" what she is surrounded by. The Epic Muse, in turn, is threatened by the domestic appliances that recognise her "for their own" and denounce her falseness:

> In my kitchen, in my epic,
> Wretch, find peace. You won't notice
> My machines. They mist and wink.
> But how they'll know you for their own! (*NCP* 112)

While the Epic Muse is invited into the kitchen, she loses her powers to transform and inspire if she refuses to make room for the domestic world. This engagement with the domestic realm and its frustrations was shared at the time with many other women poets who used the domestic muse as a figure enabling the domestic space to also become a poetic space.[1] It is striking to see in the reception of Eavan Boland's work in the 1980s a tendency to overshadow the poems which make a radical and confrontational use of domestic images and to focus only on poems which point to a reconciliation of the poetic and the domestic. However, it is in the ambivalence towards the domestic sphere and towards domestic tasks and routine that Eavan Boland reconfigured the role of the poet.

Although *In Her Own Image* did not get much attention on publication, *Night Feed*, also published by Arlen House, earned Eavan Boland the Irish-American Cultural Institute Award in 1983.[2] The institute director stated that they felt it was important that

Eavan Boland was "not withdrawn from life", while Boland herself was pleased to get the award for Night Feed, "which was about the point at which poetry and the family converged" (Walsh 6). Although Thomas Kilroy, for instance, praised the subversive potential of the collection, whose poems answer back to centuries of traditional female images, the majority of reviewers were content to see *Night Feed* as an appeased counterpart to the perceived violence of *In Her Own Image*, although "Monotony", quoted above and published in *Night Feed*, already belies this critical narrative. In *The Times Literary Supplement*, the poems of the third section of the collection were brushed aside as "obsessed by gender-conditioning, role-playing, inner emptiness" (O'Neill 516) and in general, the more overtly confrontational poems were not paid a lot of attention on publication.

Reviewers and fellow poets alike pointed out the deafening silence around the publication of the volume *In Her Own Image* with illustrations by Constance Short. *The Times Literary Supplement*'s review of *Night Feed*, quoted above, dismissed the collection as "bitter": "the bitterness of Boland's previous collection, *In Her Own Image*, has largely given way to a more controlled intensity". Thomas McCarthy, who devoted a review in *The Irish Times* to the collection, made this point in another review: "When I think of the silence that has greeted the very difficult but important collections by Eavan Boland and Eithne Strong, my blood boils; the new female poetry is as important an event as the growth of Third World consciousness" ("Recent Poetry" 13). Thomas Kilroy, reviewing *Night Feed*, enjoined readers to "witness the virtual silence before her remarkable last book" blaming the ambient sexism of literary criticism: "Change but the subject (the female figure) and the sex of the author and the sheer brilliance of the writing would have had our literati agog" (Kilroy 12). Douglas Sealy famously described the poems as "curiously unpleasant and at times offensive", though we should note that his group review of "Irish poetry during the last decade" contains very few words of praise (Sealy 80). Other reviewers such as William Logan in the *New York Times* confirmed this overall dismissal of the collection even a decade later, when stating, for instance, that "poems of quiet desperation in the kitchen do not form an original aesthetic" (Logan), although it is perhaps significant of a recent shift that *In Her Own Image* was chosen in 2016 as the work of art for the year 1980 in *Modern Ireland in 100 Artworks*, registering the historical importance of the collection. What this overview of contemporary reviews tends to show is a reluctance to acknowledge the importance of the shift the two collections represent for Irish poetry. In those years, Eavan Boland was beginning to answer questions that preoccupied her throughout her career: who gets to write the Irish poem and what can earn its rightful place in it? These questions are often explored—and answered—through poems which make room for domestic tasks,

as they served as a metaphor for the poet's labour, but also as a possible model for it. What role does housework play in Eavan Boland's poetry? Is it seen as enabling poetic craft or hindering it? What narrative of poetic craft is built around it and upon it?

* * *

The literary reviews and articles written by Eavan Boland for *The Irish Times* in the early stages of her career, before and around the time *In Her Own Image* and *Night Feed* were published, often betray her interest in finding and defining literary models, especially female models. Central to this quest is her early interest in the American poet Sylvia Plath, in whose work she sees the tensions between woman and poet at work. "The Unknown Sylvia Plath", a review from this period, explores the way in which Sylvia Plath the poet got lost, for those who belonged to her generation, behind or below the wife and mother she also was. Eavan Boland writes that she failed to gather meaningful accounts of the poet from the people who had known her: "one poet who had driven her back from Galway to Dublin carried away little else from the conversation with her except her enthusiasm for her two little children." Unable to reconcile what she is told with the poems she reads and admires, Eavan Boland implicitly points to the irreconcilable tension between a woman's "brittle competences in cooking and housemaking" and the image of the visionary poet ("The Unknown Sylvia Plath" 10).[3] Her engagement with Sylvia Plath, as we will see later, is very much at the core of her interrogation on the tensions between woman and poet, and this central questioning is intrinsically linked to the idea that the identity of the housewife is incompatible with that of the poet.

This fracture was also made visible in the creative writing workshops which she started directing the year after, in 1982, and which were mostly aimed at women poets. In a later interview, she recalled a remark made by one of her workshop participants: "'If I called myself a poet, . . . people would think I didn't wash my windows.' This was a piercingly acute remark on the fracture between the perception of womanhood in a small town in the southeast of Ireland and the perception of the poet." (Wright and Hannan 10) These are only two examples of how the question of "housemaking" in relation to poetry preoccupied her and became central to the development of her later reflections about woman and poet.

In her last collection *The Historians*, the poem "For A Poet Who Died Young" (21) addresses Sylvia Plath without naming her, and recognises the importance the poet had in shaping this preoccupation early on in her career. In this poem, the personified poems of

Sylvia Plath spring out of the closed book "propped on the kitchen table" and invade the domestic space, "roam[ing] the house." The pronoun "they" is repeated throughout the central stanzas, and thus the poems retain an agency until the final stanzas where the poem concludes on a direct homage to the American poet: "Your words helped me live." Plath's poems remain confined to the domestic space, but their revelatory power has cosmic implications: "They looked into the sly double vowels of Ursa Mayor and Lyra . . . Your words disturbed my earth." Unable to reconcile the "dead poet" and "the living woman", the poet nevertheless studies the impact of Sylvia Plath's work on her own domestic space. The reference to constellations might gesture towards the stars that stud Sylvia Plath's poetry, but also to the use of constellations as images in Boland's own early poetry.

Tracing the image of the constellation of the lion in Boland's early collections *New Territory* and *The War Horse*, for instance, usefully highlights a progressive shift in her aesthetics. In a poem from her first volume *New Territory*, the poets are first described as lions: "they are abroad: their spirits like a pride / Of lions circulate" (*NCP* 7).[4] But the wild animal soon morphs into the constellation that bears its name: the poets' spirits "are desperate, just as the jewelled beast, / That lion constellate, / Whose scenery is Betelgeuse and Mars, / Hunts without respite among fixed stars." While the spirits eventually "prevail", the double comparison with the lions (first as animals then as constellation) suggests a certain fixity and lack of freedom in the poets' labour. The poem ends on the image of the sun as "absentee landlord of the dark", accommodating "a tenant moon". This adds another layer to the evocation of the night sky as a space where the poets' spirits evolve, as it introduces a masculine element and a feminine one watching over the process of creation. In an interview with Jody Allen-Randolph, Eavan Boland said that "The Poets" and many other poems in her first collection were flawed because they were written "by a poet. That's the lens I used almost all the time. I never did that again." (Allen-Randolph 120) The late poem "For a Poet Who Died Young" indeed reveals how the example of Sylvia Plath helped Boland switch lens by making her aware of the poetic potential of her domestic surroundings. The sexless and archetypal poet figure gave way to that of the woman poet.

First tempted to erase her lived experience to construct a literary persona who would be able to inhabit her poems, the young Boland then reworks the image of the lion, both as animal and constellation, in her next collection *The War Horse*, in the poems "Prisoners", "Suburban Woman" and "Ode to Suburbia". In "Prisoners" (*NCP* 45), the lion is, from the beginning, trapped not among "fixed stars" but within his cage at the zoo. It is compared to a "bored socialite / With her morning post" and offers a weak display of his hunting skills: "I saw him slit / A rabbit open like an envelope". This image paves the

way for the subsequent taming of the lion, whose fate is mirrored by other elements in the house, such as the acanthus "domesticate[d] in a bowl". In "Prisoners", the lion slides into the domestic world as a parodic version of himself, first through the comparison with the bored socialite, then by taking the form of a "jet cat", or seen in a school annual in a "screen safari". Yet this poem contains more than the ironic domestication of the lion, as the corresponding constellation also moves from the outside to the inside realm. Despite the images of entrapment, the lion is still "alive and well in our suburban / World", watching over the speaker as she performs her daily tasks: "present as I garden, sweep // Wring the teacloth dry". As in "The Poets", the lion in "Prisoners" is still unable to "flee . . . his stars", but in his watchful presence, the domestic space can be arranged as a universe. The final task evoked is that of "orbit[ing] each chair / Exactly around our table", creating through repetitive domestic chores a microcosm in which the constellation can be accommodated. The lion as animal and constellation becomes associated with routine. This is also the case in both "Suburban Woman" and "Ode to Suburbia".

"Ode to Suburbia" (*NCP* 66) draws on the fairytale of Cinderella to describe the personified Suburbia as "an ugly sister" under the light of dusk. The suburb is marked by repetition, routine and a certain loss of individuality: the windows function as mirrors,

> which again
> And again show the same woman
> Shriek at a child, which multiply
> A dish, a brush, ash
> The gape of a fish
>
> In the kitchen, the gape of a child in the cot

The repetition of sibilants creates a chain of hushed actions and noises repeated both day after day and from house to house with limited variation. The poem closes on a detail, the image of a cat, "the same lion who tore stripes once off zebras, who now sleeps / Small beside the coals and may / On a red letter day / Catch a mouse." The cat is more than a reductive and tamed parody of the lion. It is, more importantly, an animal freed from its hunting obligations and its "fixed stars". This image concludes a poem otherwise marked by routine and repetition with an image of relative freedom, a freedom that can be attained within the domestic space. Even though the poem states that there is "no magic here" and that the fairytale metamorphosis of Suburbia is impossible, the final detail is indeed a metamorphosis, a transformation of the lion into a cat. In the first section of "Suburban

Woman" (*NCP* 63), the pride of lions of "The Poets" re-emerge as a term of comparison for the sectarian violence that invades even the suburban space: "like a pride / of lions toiled for booty, tribal acres died // and her world with them." In the fourth section, the lion reappears as the "cat burglar" the sunlight is compared to, already domesticated, but again freer than the lion constrained by his stars. In this poem, the woman seems at first assaulted by household duties: "The chairs dusted and the morning coffee break behind, she starts // pawning her day again to the curtains, the red / carpets, the stair rods, at last to the bed". The final section hinges around a dissociation of speaker-poet and suburban woman, but running counter to the separation between "she" and "I", the poem concludes with the pronoun "we". This pronoun suggests the possibility of a reunion between these two identities: "now she will shrug // a hundred small surrenders off as images / still born, unwritten metaphors, blank pages // and on this territory, blindfold, we meet / at last." The speaker and the suburban woman find a common ground in the repeated actions of the day, whether it is the repetition induced by domestic routine or that which seems necessary to improve poetic craft.

What the distance travelled by the lion, even in the disguise of the tamed cat, seems to show is the possibility of finding poetic material not only in suburban life, but also in domestic routine. "The images still born, unwritten metaphors, blank pages" become themselves the second term of a comparison with the "hundred small surrenders" which make up the suburban woman's day. These images of poetic barrenness and writer's block turn out to be productive because they enable the poet to meet the woman on this common ground. "Woman in Kitchen" (*Night Feed; NCP* 109) revisits this conflicting view of domestic chores. The opening of the poem ("breakfast over") echoes the beginning of the third section of "Suburban Woman" ("the chairs dusted and the morning / coffee break behind"). Where the reader might expect the writing activity to begin, once the morning chores are done, in the earlier poem, the woman is described as having yet to accomplish more domestic tasks. In "Woman in Kitchen" (*NCP* 109), a poem composed of four six-line stanzas, the woman is surrounded by noisy machines and whiteness. The noise of the machines seems preferable to silence, because silence signals the end of their work and equals the return to work for the woman: once the dryer has stopped, "she turns to spread a cloth on the board and irons sheets". As long as she is "islanded by noise", the woman can stop to observe the transformative power of the machines. Her horizon seems more open: unlike the machines, the woman has "nowhere definite to go". The whiteness that surrounds her is not only suggestive of the mortuary the room is compared to in the final stanza. It also serves as a metaphor of the blank page, and of the expressive possibilities that

surround her. The domestic space, the rooms inhabited by the woman, are transformed into stanzas by the work of the poet. They start to be seen as a potential poetic resource.

Another poem in *Night Feed*, "Monotony", with its characteristic short lines arranged into quatrains, uses another constellation, the Virgo, this time to frame the speaker's ambivalence towards domestic routine. The speaker's "late tasks / wait like children: / milk bottles, the milkman's note". The comparison personifying the tasks doubles the woman's responsibilities: the chores linked to children require as much attention as children. The "winter constellations" that appear in a rinsed glass of milk mirror the speaker as she performs her domestic tasks: the line "my arms sheafing nappies" in the second stanza echoes the Virgo's "arms / sheafing the hemisphere, / hour after frigid hour" towards the end of the poem. While the tone of the poem is certainly informed by anger, frustration and a sense of confinement, the parallel between speaker and feminine constellation encapsulates both the idea that the poet has the power to arrange her own microcosm and the idea that her chores connect her to a universal experience that even constellations personified as female characters can be related to. It is no longer the lion unable to escape his "fixed stars" who watches over the poet, but Virgo who provides an answer to the question quoted above: "am I . . . priestess or sacrifice?"

Moreover, the image of the constellation suggests that domestic chores can provide an access to an unrecorded and universal female past. This is what Eavan Boland expressed when, in an interview, she nuanced Adrienne Rich's vision of woman's domestic role as constraining:

> [Adrienne Rich] has an interesting passage where she speaks about the traditional roles of women being oppressive to the imaginative function. But I think there's another way of looking at that. I don't for one moment deny that what she calls the traditional roles have been agents of oppression and distraction to a lot of gifted women. But they do also have a strong, tribal relationship to the past. Nothing has changed in them. No industrial revolution has wiped them out. The advent of the washing machine doesn't change certain things that are constant and enduring and simple. By doing them you restore your continuity with those feelings, those emotions. You can't participate in them and not have a wider sense of connection with the whole human experience. (Wilson 83)

This "wider sense of connection" is what the collective "we" of the poem "It's a Woman's World" (*NCP* 110), for instance, creates from its very first stanza: "our way of life / has hardly changed / since a wheel first / whetted a knife." Through time, it constructs a

community of women excluded from history ("as far as history goes / we were never / on the scene of the crime") but nonetheless united by their common domestic tasks and the age-old similarities between their everyday lives.

More than Adrienne Rich, it seems that Sylvia Plath had a lasting influence on the way Boland saw the relationship between craft and domestic tasks. Indeed, in an essay first published in 2003, Eavan Boland defined the main achievement of "the other Sylvia Plath"—echoing the "unknown Sylvia Plath" of her earlier review's title—as having redefined the nature poem and thus changed the course of poetry. Sylvia Plath's experience of motherhood, she argues, helped her appropriate the tradition of the nature poem, and gave rise to what she considers the best poems in *Ariel*. In an earlier interview with Jody Allen-Randolph, Eavan Boland had described herself as an "indoor nature poet", a phrase she then used to define Sylvia Plath's aesthetic in her later essay, suggesting that the American poet was indeed the one who gave her "the grand permission"[5]:

> After a while, I came to think of myself as an indoor nature poet. And my lexicon was the kettle and the steam, and the machine in the corner and the kitchen, and the baby's bottle. These were parts of my world. Not to write about them would have been artificial. These objects were visible to me. They assumed importances. They crept out of their skin and turned into something else. I felt about them, after a day spent in the house or with little children, exactly the way the nature poet feels after talking the same walk for several days and seeing the same tree or the same bird. So I had something of the agenda of the nature poet in all that. (Allen-Randolph 124)

In this comparison with the nature poem, one starts to see how routine can enable poetry. The "outdoor" or traditional nature poet is enabled by his or her experience of routine. Domestic routine and repetitive tasks can also be sources of poetry, as they allow for a language to surface. "Woman in Kitchen", discussed above, provides a good example of the "indoor nature poem". The woman surrounded by her machines reaches a contemplative state that transforms the machines around her. The heritage of the nature poem becomes visible in the naturalisation of the machines through successive metaphors. The traditional framework of the nature poem enables the poet to create a domestic cosmos: the "tropic of the dryer" and the "round lunar window of the washer" provide the scenery and prepare the transformation of the kettle into "a kingfisher / swooping for trout above the river's mirror". The vocabulary of the natural world transfigures the domestic world, inserting this poem within the tradition of the nature poem. If the nature poem provided Eavan Boland with a poetic tradition that she could divert to make room for the domestic world

in her poems, the creative potential she discovered in domestic tasks is also linked to her preoccupation to visual art, and specifically to painting. Eavan Boland was able to see, in the example of this other craft, whether still live or genre painting, a gesture similar to the one she wanted to accomplish.

Eavan Boland's engagement with painting is tied to the figure of her mother, who was a painter. The opening poem of *The Journey*, entitled "I Remember" (*NCP* 127), evokes a memory of her mother painting in their house in London. The sitter for a portrait has left and the young poet walks into the room her mother has been working in. It is not the mother's painting that is described in detail, but the way she has reconfigured the space to prepare it for the act of painting. The room is transformed by these preliminary arrangements: "the room had been shocked into a glacier / of cotton sheets thrown over the almond / and vanilla silk of the French Empire chairs". The mother as an artist stops the furniture from moving or altering, freezing the room in time. The practice of her craft has a powerful transformative impact on the domestic space, which is in turn transformed into an "indoor nature poem". It is this same impulse to transform the domestic space, and thus to reconfigure the domestic poem, that seems to drive Eavan Boland.

Many critics have identified "Athene's Song" in Eavan Boland's first collection *New Territory* as foreshadowing what were to become her main themes and aesthetic concerns. However, the early poem "From the Painting Back from Market by Chardin" (*NCP* 17) also epitomizes her poetic concerns. As in the later poems "Degas' Laundresses" or "Growing Up", the poem focuses on the male artist's gaze on his female subject. The place the speaker occupies, as an outsider who empathizes with the subject in the painting but does not identify with the male artist, foreshadows Eavan Boland's reflections on the marginality of the female poet. In this ekphrastic poem from *New Territory*, the woman is first a passive presence, possessed by the artist and eternally fixed by his art: "Chardin's peasant woman / Is to be found at all times" on the canvas. The painter has fixed the woman's subjectivity and her story within the painting. In the second stanza, the speaker wonders about "what great art removes", in other words, the dimensions of the woman's everyday and inner lives that are erased by the artist. Boland first wrote about this painting's influence on her poetry in an article entitled "Suburban Struggles", in which she also linked it to her suburban experience:

> But here was a new world. Suburbia has, until the present, been more or less a term of collective satire, . . . a portrait of an environment depersonalised by its domestic tasks, like a village where the men have gone soldiering. Yet, at best, it seemed to me to be a world hovering on the edge of celebration, like the jugs

> and kettles and domestic utensils of van Eyck's painting before they became the beloved themes of Jean-Paul Chardin. ("Suburban Struggles" 12)

Suburbia is depicted as an exclusively female world. The poet inscribes herself within a visual tradition in order to re-personalise this world, which is often seen by artists as "depersonalised by its domestic tasks". But rather than working counter to domestic tasks, she chooses a tradition which celebrates the everyday world, domesticity and the ordinary. In this article, she then traces back her poetic engagement with her surrounding to this painting, *Back from Market*. Her experience of the painting allows her to see her own surroundings as a potentially rich resource for poetic engagement. Significantly, the suburban struggles of the title are aesthetic and poetic struggles. From there on, representation becomes irreversibly tied to lived experience, through the medium of painting: her poems will no longer be written from "the point of view of a poet". In a later interview, she identified completely with the woman in Chardin's painting: "Somewhere underneath it all she has she says—without wanting to sound pretentious—always seen herself like a woman in a Chardian painting who is secretly terribly well suited by the routine that others would find irksome." (Walsh and Boland 14) Her "suburban struggles" seem to dissolve and be resolved into this reconciliation with the routine of domesticity.

Night Feed opens on an ekphrasis of another painter mentioned in this same article, Van Eyck. "Domestic Interior" (*NCP* 91) is inspired by the *Arnolfini Portrait*. Pondering again on "what great art removes", by the end of the poem, the speaker takes from the painter "the sort of light / jugs and kettles / grow important by." Both Chardin and Van Eyck seem to give the poet permission to create her domestic poems, though she distances herself from them both by revealing how they fix their female subjects within their art ("she will stay / burnished, fertile, / on her wedding day"). The painting by Van Eyck is referred to again in the later poem "Mirror. Memory" (*A Woman Without A Country* 50). Like Chardin's woman, the couple is sublimated by the artist and his craft, but they are not the figures the poet wishes to build her memory on. She prefers to see them in the light of the ordinary and the daily, as a possible mirror of her own experience:

> winter provincials listening for infant cries,
> boiling a kettle in the predawn,
>
> their faces misted and revealed
> in the steel of it

The kettle provides another kind of mirror, one that can both conceal and reveal. Domestic utensils therefore become an alternative to the painting's famous mirror. This poem can be connected to "In His Own Image" (*NCP* 74), which contains the same image of the kettle and utensil as a mirror:

> and my cheek
> coppered and shone
> in the kettle's paunch,
> my mouth
> blubbed in the tin of the pan —
> they were all I had to go on.

What the speaker sees in the kettle here is nothing but the meagre, deformed proof of her existence. In the later poem, the same image is an appeased revelation of the power of her art to remain true to the complexities of lived experience. Through painting, she was able to reappraise the domestic poem, and to reconfigure the relationship with domestic space.

* * *

This reconfiguration of the domestic poem has opened an avenue for other Irish women poets, creating the precedent of a poetry that can transform domestic chores into metaphors for poetic craft, building connections and parallels. Paula Meehan's poem "The Pattern", for example, weaves together housework and sewing (Meehan 24). It presents both, through the figure of the mother, as a heritage to claim through poetry, a sequence of gestures that can enable poetry. Both escaping and re-enacting the pattern of the title, the poet reflects on her relationship with her mother:

> As she buffed the wax to a high shine
> did she catch her own face coming clear?
> Did she net a glimmer of her true self?
> Did her mirror tell what mine tells me?

Like Eavan Boland's kettle, the polished floor has the power both to reveal and conceal the female self who performs the domestic tasks. The sequence "Triptic: Obair Bhaile"/"Homework: A Triptych" by Doireann Ní Ghríofa provides another recent example (Ní Ghríofa 36). First written in Irish then translated by the poet herself and republished in *Lies*, each of the three poems in the sequence evokes a memory or vision

which has stemmed from a different chore ("scouring the bathroom sink", scrubbing the kitchen floor and dusting). These poems hold to Eavan Boland's belief that "poetry should be scrubbed, abraded, cleared, and re-stated with the old wash stones of argument and resistance" (*A Journey With Two Maps* 117). The creative potential of domestic chores recast in poetry is fully realised here. Domestic tasks are no longer seen as incompatible with writing, rather they find their way into poetry and create in Eavan Boland's wake a domestic poem that is no longer confined and reduced to the realm of the private, the apolitical and the intimate.

Notes

1 Jane Dowson and Alice Entwistle describe the return of the domestic muse in women's poetry of that period in Britain: "authorising the aesthetic value of the traditionally feminised domestic sphere, a Domestic Muse oversees the construction of a pragmatic, exclusively female and highly self-aware creative dynamic" (126).

2 Founded by Catherine Rose in 1975, Arlen House was Ireland's first feminist press, committed to publishing new work by women and to re-publishing forgotten women writers. In 1978, Boland became associate editor. That same year, Arlen House organized the first literary competition for women in Ireland, in which Boland was one of the judges. It published three of her collections —*In Her Own Image, Night Feed* and *The Journey and Other Poems*—and republished *The War Horse* in 1980. It closed in 1987 and was relaunched by Alan Hayes in 2000.

3 Eavan Boland wrote several reviews of books about Sylvia Plath's life and work for T*he Irish Times*. See list of works cited.

4 Albert Gelpi makes the connection between the wild animal in this poem and its domesticated counterpart in later iterations (Gelpi 214).

5 Eavan Boland's essay was first published in 2003 in *The Grand Permission: New Writings on Poetics and Motherhood*, edited by Patricia Dienstfrey and Brenda Hillman. It was then reprinted in *A Journey with Two Maps*.

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*Expressing the Source: Eavan Boland and Adrienne Rich**

Expressando a fonte: Eavan Boland e Adrienne Rich

Máighréad Medbh

Abstract: *In this autobriographical essay, poet Máighréad Medbh writes about the connections between Adrienne Rich and Eavan Boland.*

Keywords: *Eavan Boland; Adrienne Rich; Source.*

Resumo: *Neste ensaio autobiográfico, a poeta Máighréad Medbh escreve sobre as conexões entre Adrienne Rich e Eavan Boland.*

Palavras-chave: *Eavan Boland; Adrienne Rich; Fonte.*

I have always been affected by Eavan Boland, though we probably appear to be opposites. At a time when I was trying to strike out for what I saw as liberation by speaking of the intimate disaffections, she spoke of diurnal femininities too, but often with a transformative acceptance or love of them. Even so, she was and still is a powerful voice for women's freedom. She wrote suburban domesticity in a way that enabled other women to live it—

> to wed our gleams
> to brute routines:
> solstices,
> small families.
> ("Monotony")

The domestic world she presented was startlingly sparse and oddly adequate, even when she spoke of its irritations and complained, as many of us did, about the demands of motherhood that seemed to arrest our feelings for freedom, tethering us to repetition and the ministrations called love. I hadn't read her work for some time when by chance I recently encountered one of her poems on a library shelf. "Indoors" begins:

> I have always wanted a world that is cured of the outdoors.
> A household without gods.

My old responses were instantly recurried. A direct honest voice, lines loaded with conceptual ramifications. The style is conversational but also lyrical. Prosaic syntax but a tone of deep contemplation. This intimate touch, the feeling of being spoken to from underskin to underskin is one of the things I value most in poetry.

> I have two daughters.
> They are all I ever wanted from the earth.
> Or almost all.
> ("The Lost Land")

It's a commonplace by now to say that the self is not a homogeneous unit. In the manner of string theory, perhaps, the perceiver is not a point but a series of effects with many dimensions. So it's always hard work to convey the most salient inner truth in written form, to make it the sphinx-voice of a poem. In Eavan Boland, the sphinx-voice is born of a careful examination of feeling, often beginning with a personal statement then broadening out to find echoes. Refer to Jung's theory of synchronicity: that many things happen at once doesn't mean they are mutually causative, just that they are relational. I experience Eavan Boland as a relational poet whose referential scope is wide, and who never embellishes for the sake of effect. She speaks to the underskin because she speaks a calm, passionate, independent truth in a disciplined manner.

I moved along the library shelf and picked up one of my own books. A poem leapt from the page in energetic display. It was mapped, musical, somewhat posed, conscious of its body. How different. Like a door swinging open to a colder climate, or two incompatible flavours. But I also intend to be true to my experience in a way that both examines and illumines. I live in my poems and they in me. Or so I thought. Suddenly a stranger to my own work, I asked myself, "Who or what is writing my poems? What is she/it trying to do?"

> For one moment when you express the source,
> when the hard chatter of your tongue
> turns to silver silk and slides you to the wind;
> for a moment when the air inhales you
> and you rest in its transparency like a
> thought you don't know you're thinking –

> wouldn't you live this jacketed life?
> ("Unified Field")

Inspirational, you might say. Declarative, you might assert. Musical, maybe. Distant? Or intimate. But does it draw you into the mind of the speaker as "Indoors" does? These lines are from "Womb" in *The Making of a Pagan*, my first book:

> The return journey is
> the only journey there is;
> from light and teeming space
> in search of the dark place,
> back.
> But there is colour here,
> treasures hung high on the walls,
> a cave that would be black,
> but they and the hint of a door
> prism it.

Again the element of declaration, almost the positing of an argument. The first five lines constitute a premise, as the first two lines of "Indoors" are a premise, but mine imply a pre-existing process leading to a position. "Indoors" is conversing.

Am I an aphorist? Do I take the journey and then offer my readers the bare map? I love aphorisms—the poetic and philosophical sort—but I intended these poems to be directly spoken experiences.

Ah. I remembered. Transported by the particular gift of Eavan Boland, I'd forgotten my home ground.

> my hands began it
> and now I love it
> my cunt is swelling
> thinking of it
> thinking of a tongue on it
> ("Coming Out")

Eavan Boland's tendency is to conceptualise the physical. Mine is to embed the concept in the body.

> . . . for intellectual creation too springs from the physical, is of one nature with it and only like a gentler, more ecstatic repetition of physical delight. (Rilke. *Letters to a Young Poet*)

I seem to constantly bring that physical delight to the forefront in my poems, regardless of subject matter. My poems have been strongly rhythmic because they emerge not just from my brain but from the other organs too, literally, palpably. I quite often search for the rhythm (or arrhythmia) of the experience first, and then hunt the words. Maybe that's the reason why I took to performance poetry. My poems were dramatic, organic monologues, songs of the underskin, conflating sense impression with fact and analysis. I've also wanted to verbalise in the raw, name events and parts of the body as they are colloquially named, instead of placing them within imposed cultural contexts. Another matter is the question of attention. I can lapse into mindmull very easily, so I've given what I wanted myself—a sense of drama. But I might be changing.

A writer who connects with Eavan Boland in my mind is Adrienne Rich. Both are very open and expert in communicating pain, though Adrienne Rich's pain was greater and more imminently political. Both poets had to battle with a resistant poetry establishment consisting of "a congeries of old boys' networks," as Rich described it in her essay "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision." The difficulties and their educational advantages engaged them, made them both confrontational and skilful at once. Scholarly and perfectly able to work in formal poetry, they devised their own individual voices bedded in uncompromising observation. I have never opened a page of Adrienne Rich without sensing an immanent integrity underwriting the lines—an integrity of style, form and expression, the poetic kind. Even in topographical sprawls like "An Atlas of the Difficult World," which defies a centre, there are vortices that keep you there.

> I don't want to hear how he beat her after the earthquake,
> tore up her writing, threw the kerosene
> lantern into her face waiting
> like an unbearable mirror of his own.

Such pain is as prevalent as ever, and our wrestling with our condition just as global to us, but reading a poem like this in 2014 feels like visiting a slightly strange literary country. Jori Graham is of a different nature, less directly personal and more atmospheric when she looks at a socio-political concern, as in "Guantánamo":

> Waning moon. Rising now. Creak, it goes. Deep
> over the exhausted continents. I wonder says my
> fullness. Nobody nobody says the room in which I
> lie very still in the
> darkness watching.

There is currently a certain resistance to the overtly ego-centric, aching voice, as if the popular impatience with earnestness and lament has suffused the arts. Are we in danger of becoming too focused on procedure, to the detriment of experience and self-exposure? There is integrity in procedure of course, but Boland and Rich were spokeswomen for their generation and for women who were not like themselves, whom they absorbed into their first person voice. When you marry style with empathic self-exposure and political intent, you reach, after a journey through a scatter of difficult landscapes, a closing stanza with lines like these, that will reach your reader in a place where she is afraid to be seen—

> I know you are reading this poem
> in a room where too much has happened for you to bear
> where the bedclothes lie in stagnant coils on the bed
> and the open valise speaks of flight
> but you cannot leave yet
> . . .
> I know you are reading this poem because there is nothing else
> left to read
> there where you have landed, stripped as you are.
> (Rich 1972)

And she weeps.

Notes

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The Space Between the Words: A Brief Mapping of the Translation of Eavan Boland's Poetry in Mexico

O espaço entre as palavras: Um breve mapeamento da tradução da poesia de Eavan Boland no México

Mario Murgia

Abstract: *Eavan Boland is without a doubt one of Ireland's most prestigious and best-known poets—her fame has transcended the geo-cultural limits of the phenomenon known as "Irish literature," and indeed, over the course of the past two decades, it has overcome, through translation, the linguistic boundaries of the Anglosphere. In spite of the considerable dissemination of Boland's work, both in prose and verse, all over the Western world, the Spanish language has been somewhat remiss in receiving and translating her oeuvre. In the Hispanophone Americas, Boland's verse has been translated sparsely for either anthologies of contemporary Irish poetry or literary magazines directing attention to her accomplishments as a writer who is "representative" of her national tradition in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. This article will trace some of the (translational) pathways that Boland has travelled in Mexico, one of the cultural hubs of Spanish-speaking America, where Eva Cruz's* Anthology / Antología *remains the only single-author volume of Boland's poetry in translation.*

Keywords: *Eavan Boland; Spanish-speaking America; Translation; Poetry; Cartography.*

Resumo: *Eavan Boland é sem dúvida uma das poetas irlandesas mais prestigiadas e conhecidas—sua fama transcendeu os limites geoculturais do fenômeno que se conhece por "literatura irlandesa" e, de fato, ao longo das duas últimas décadas, superou, por meio da tradução, as fronteiras linguísticas da Anglosfera. Apesar da considerável divulgação do trabalho de Boland, tanto em prosa quanto verso, por todo o mundo ocidental, a língua espanhola tem sido um tanto negligente em receber e traduzir sua obra. Na América hispano-falante, a poesia de Boland foi traduzida esparsamente para ambas as antologias de poesia irlandesa contemporânea ou revistas literárias que dirigem a atenção para suas realizações como escritora "representativa" de sua tradição nacional no final do*

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século XX e início do XXI. Este artigo traça alguns dos caminhos (tradicionais) que Boland percorreu no México, um dos centros da América de língua espanhola, onde a Anthology / Antología *de Eva Cruz continua sendo o único volume de um só autor da poesia de Boland em tradução.*

Palavras-chave: *Eavan Boland; América de língua espanhola; Tradução; Poesia; Cartografia.*

...let the world I knew become the space
between the words that I had by heart...

(...dejar que mi mundo conocido se volviera el espacio
entre las palabras que sabía de memoria...)

"An Irish Childhood in England: 1951"
Eavan Boland, translated by Eva Cruz

Both in English and Spanish, as in a number of other European languages, the verbs that denote the act of translation are followed by prepositions indicating movement—one "translates into", or "traduce a." These prepositions, in turn, furtherly echo the constant journeying implied in these terms' etymological ancestors in Latin: the past participle "translatus," or "carried over;" and also the present active infinitive "traducere," meaning something along the lines of "to direct from side to side." Thus, and at least in the realm of historical semantics, a translation is always a transportation, one that implies not only the lexical cruising between languages, but also the creative scouting for aesthetic and cultural directionalities in the vast territories of verbality. In the particular case of poetical translation (or, to be more descriptive, the translation of poetry and verse), such transportations, or "carryings over," strive to find their most demanding lanes and trails in the figurational, and not necessarily verbal, territories of allusion and implication.

Many a great poet of our time, and indeed of all times and climes, has been more or less aware of the aforementioned phenomenon, as well as of the repercussions of the practice in the human imagination and psyche. A good example is Octavio Paz, the only-ever Mexican recipient of the Nobel Prize for Literature. In an essay entitled "Literatura y literalidad," or "Literature and Literalness," Paz writes at length of the manner in which certain poets of great note take delight in the intricacies of geographically- and symbolically-laden language, for instance. After discussing the potential (un)translatability of Miguel de Unamuno's succint piece "Ávila, Málaga, Cáceres," Paz manages to discover its poetical

and transcultural equivalent in "Description without Place," by the American poet Wallace Stevens. The Mexican essayist and poet quotes a few lines from Stevens's lyric, and immediately after states that

> The language [of both Unamuno and Stevens] becomes a landscape, and this landscape, in turn, is an invention, the metaphor of a nation or an individual. A verbal topography where everything is interconnected, where everything is a translation—the phrases are a ridge of mountains, and the mountains are the signs, the ideograms of a civilization.
>
> El lenguaje se vuelve paisaje y ese paisaje, a su vez, es una invención, la metáfora de una nación o de un individuo. Topografía verbal en la que todo se comunica, todo es traducción: las frases son una cadena de montañas y las montañas son los signos, los ideogramas de una civilización. (69, my trans.).

It is as though Paz, as a poet and translator, believed that rather than live among objects and things, the poetry-bent individual exists between allocutions and words, in a territory that can be best mapped through the poetical function of language. In this metaphorical sense, a poem would chart the poet's mind and inventiveness. The translation of that given poem—or its interlingual rewriting—is an adventurous journey on which neighboring cultural regions, those demarcated also by the translator's mind and idiom, are charted and often imaginatively reconfigured.

It is undeniable that Paz's cartography-inspired ruminations on verse writing and poetry translation have filtered, either consciously or not, through the notions and practices of a number of other Mexican literati, poet-translators, and scholars. This seems to be particularly true of the members of the Seminario Permanente de Traducción Literaria (Permanent Seminar of Literary Translation) of the School of Philosophy and Literature at Mexico's National University (UNAM).[1] For nearly thirty years now, and by means of translation, the Seminario has explored the possibilities, in Mexican Spanish, of Anglophone poetical traditions such as those of the United States, England, and Scotland in anthologies like *Más de dos siglos de poesía norteamericana* (*Over Two Centuries of North-American Poetry*), *De Hardy a Heaney, poesía inglesa del siglo XX* (*From Hardy to Heaney, Twentieth-Century English Poetry*), and more recently, *Cardos y lluvia, antología de poesía escocesa contemporánea* (*Thistles and Rain, an Anthology of Contemporary Scottish Poetry*).[2] In the context of Spanish-speaking America, the Seminario's exploration of modern and contemporary Irish poetry has been especially significant: a dual-language volume focusing exclusively on twentieth-century Irish poetry, *Una lengua injertada* (*A Grafted*

Tongue), appeared in 2003 and was the first anthology of its kind ever to be published in Mexico.[3] In their selection of the poets and poems, the members of el Seminario were careful to underscore the age-old interconnection between the island's verse tradition and character-determining notions such as the motherland, emigration, and geographical re-placement and dis-placement.[4] The prologue to the book, penned by the late professor José Juan Dávila Sota, is quite explicit with regard to the themes and topics that the group of translators were faced with over the course of their enterprise:

> The struggle for the land [in Ireland] turned the land itself, as well as the landscape, into important topics —the rural landscape and even the urban one are present in much of the poetry of the twentieth century. Similarly, tropes retrieved from the distant past by several authors of the nineteenth century have mutated into the nostalgia and sadness expressed in an iconography that, in some cases, is still current. . . . But most of all, the problems of identity, the atrocious consequences of war, and an intense imagination are fertile territories where poetry blossoms in everyday experience and delights us with its intensity. It is thus that contemporary Irish poetry has become one of the most vital and arresting experiences of our time.[5]
>
> La lucha por la tierra hizo que la tierra y el paisaje se volvieran importantes y el paisaje del campo o incluso urbano aparece en gran parte de la poesía del siglo XX. De la misma manera, los motivos rescatados del pasado lejano por algunos escritores del siglo XIX se convierten en nostalgia y tristeza expresada en una iconografía que, en algunos casos, aún está vigente. . . . Pero sobre todo los problemas de identidad, las atroces consecuencias de la guerra y la intensa imaginación son territorios propicios para que la poesía viva en lo cotidiano y nos deleite con su intensidad. De esta manera, la poesía irlandesa contemporánea se ha vuelto una de las experiencias más vitales e interesantes de nuestros días. (14; my trans.).

As becomes evident from the focus of Dávila's comment, some of the key notions in this exploration of contemporary Irish poetry are "landscape," "iconography," "imagination," and "territory." Not only do these conceptions take us back to Paz's ruminations on the relevance of a physical and metaphorical landscape—that is, the urban prospect that becomes the landscape of the creative mind—but they are also constituents of one of the most significant leitmotifs of recent Irish, and indeed Mexican, verse (particularly in translation): a poetical construct of *being-in-the-world*.[6] And certainly, no Mexican translator of Irish poetry, as is evident from the "Prologue" to *Una lengua injertada*, could possibly remain oblivious to such defining motives and themes either.

It can be noticed that, so far in this essay, emphasis has been placed upon the use of terms such as "cartography," "map," and also "landscape." This, of course, is no chance use of vocabulary. Such an insistence has to do with the representational possibilities inherent in the poetry of a number of modern and contemporary Irish and Mexican poets. These representational possibilities articulate a chart of the imagination that, in turn, expresses itself in terms of cartographic imagery, or, in other words, the poetical (re)configuration of place. Both the poets and their translators locate themselves, their assumed identities—indeed their Irelands and their Mexicos—, in the measures and the evocative constitution of their lines. They present their poems as verbal and imagistic maps where being and world coexist, find, define, and point to each other.

In the case of *Una lengua injertada*, these interconnections are particularly momentous in the context of contemporary Mexican and Hispano-American literature not only because the volume's contributors pioneered the translation of important late twentieth-century Anglophone Irish poetry in much of the region, but also because they were careful to present to their audience the poetical work of Eavan Boland. Prior to this, the Dublin-born poet was virtually unknown to Spanish-speaking audiences of the Americas, at least north of the Equator and south of the Rio Grande.[7] The translation of Boland's verse for *Una lengua injertada* was undertaken by the Mexican scholar and translator Eva Cruz Yáñez, whose selection encompasses the pieces "Child of Our Time," "The Muse Mother," "Mise Éire," "The Women," "Outside History," and "Time and Violence." Very much in tune with the anthology's scope as outlined by J. J. Dávila in his prologue, Cruz's choices point to a concern with the translational exploration of at least two of Boland's most pressing concerns, i. e., identity (whether it be defined by gender, nationality, or both) and either personal or collective history. These topics, and their relevance in her poetical career, were voiced by Boland herself on numerous occasions. In *A Journey with Two Maps*, for instance, the poet describes—once again resorting to the language of geography and mapping—the forces that shaped her creative character at the early stages of her artistic development:

> The shadow world in which I had taken up residence when I was a young poet was more complicated than I allowed. At that time, in that part of my youth, I called it the past. I gave it boundaries and called it by the name of my own country. Ireland. Then I re-named it again and called it my mother's life.
> For all those acts of naming and re-naming, it was a complicated territory I was setting up house in. The rift between the past and history was real; but it was not simple. In those shadows, in the past, I was well aware that injustices

> and griefs had happened without any hope of the saving grace of elegy and expression—those things which an official history can count on. Silence was a condition of the past. I accepted it as a circumstance.
> But only on certain terms. That the silences were not final. They were not to be forever (12–13).

While Eva Cruz's selection and translation antedate Boland's *A Journey with Two Maps* by eight or nine years, the translator's choices already evidence her sensitivity to the poet's express need to voice the personal and topical singularities of her craft—clearly, Cruz's purpose is perceivable in terms not only of dissemination but of thematic and stylistic representativeness as well. The inclusion of a piece like "Muse Mother" in *Una lengua injertada* is an evident example of the manners in which Cruz's translational strategies function by procuring an equivalence, in the target language, to the original English.[8] The poem's opening lines are as follows:

> My window pearls wet.
> The bare rowan tree
> berries rain.
>
> I can see
> from where I stand
> a woman hunkering –
> her busy hand
> worrying a child's face,
>
> working a nappy liner
> over his sticky, loud
> round of a mouth. [9]

The speaker of the poem, easily identified with Boland's voice, presents a scene from afar—an everyday action, a motherly gesture, becomes the focus of the nearly impressionistic depiction of an unassuming event on the drizzly outside. The lines are brisk and short, but the first two images contained in them, and whose evocational complexity is only enhanced by an unusual verbalization of nouns ("to pearl" and "to berry"), announce the unequivocal expression of what Lucy Collins, in referring to Boland's imagistic capabilities, has called "the distillation of the image: the self-conscious transformation of life into art" (30). In Eva Cruz's Spanish, however, such visual "distillation" runs "backward" due to the syntactical needs of the target language. The Mexican translator's rendition avers:

La humedad perla mi ventana.
En el serbal desnudo,
frutas de lluvia.

Desde aquí
puedo ver
a una mujer inclinada:
su activa mano
restriega la cara de un niño

pasa una toallita desechable
sobre la redondez de su boca
pegajosa y gritona.

In the first line, and in morphosyntactic terms, the only full coincidence is the very poetic use of the Spanish verb "perlar," clearly borrowed from the noun "perla," which is hardly necessary to re-translate into English. Other than that, and except for its evocative constitution, the Spanish line is imagistically independent—but not referentially estranged—from that in English: the agent here is not the window, but the "wet" ("la humedad"). As for the ensuing image of the tree "berrying" the rain, Cruz decides to rid the lines of the verb altogether, thus converting Boland's fleeting act of fruition into a haiku-esque glimpse of frozen momentariness: "On the bare rowan tree, / fruits of rain" (notice the more generic noun substituting "berries"). In the second cluster of lines, spatiality is equally reversed in an almost unnoticeable syntactical conversion. Where Boland privileges the speaker's sensoriality ("I can see / from where I stand"), Cruz favors the poetical onlooker's location: "Desde aquí / puedo ver" ("From here / I can see"). Similarly, where the round shape of the baby's mouth takes imagistic precedence in English, the Spanish presents the mouth itself as the very center of the picture, with two adjectives, "pegajosa" and "gritona," qualifying it rather than its form.

In the second half of the piece, the poem's "I" travels from the outside to the inside, from the perception of the other to the (linguistic) ruminations of the self. Let us consider the lines that ensue in "Muse Mother":

but my mind stays fixed:

if I could only decline her—
lost noun

out of context,
stray figure of speech—
from this rainy street

again to her roots,
she might teach me
a new language:

to be a sibyl
able to sing the past
in pure syllables
limning hymns sung
to belly wheat or a woman—

able to speak at last
my mother tongue.

A mother, who has now metamorphosed into the memory of the speaker's own motherly figure, embodies the intricacies of language, a language that is as revelatory as it is defining of present and future self. Here, Cruz's translated lines remain closer to the original than do those in the first half. The Spanish follows, very strictly, the rhythms, the evocative force, the word order, and even the nostalgic visuality of Boland's English . . . until it reaches the closing line:

pero mi pensamiento se queda fijo:

Si tan sólo pudiera declinarla,
sustantivo perdido
fuera de contexto,
extraviada figura de lenguaje,
desde esta calle lluviosa

de nuevo hasta sus raíces
quizás me enseñara
un nuevo lenguaje:

a ser una sibila
capaz de cantar el pasado
en sílabas puras,
iluminando himnos cantados
al trigo fecundo o a una mujer,

capaz de hablar al fin
la lengua de mi madre.

Here, the translator has transformed the speaker's mother tongue into the language *of her mother*.[10] At first glance, the variation seems innocuous; however, the shift from the inescapabilty of a language acquired in a critical stage of childhood to what seems to represent an intimate linguistic heredity, actually implies a drastic modification of the speaker's evocational and poetical focus.[11] "We had a common bond; not a common language," states Boland when reminiscing about the particular relationship with her mother, a painter of considerable talent (*Journey* 6). Indeed, the Spanish translation of "Muse Mother," at its closure, has exceeded the possibilities of equivalence to lodge itself in the territory of re-presentation.[12] It is hard to determine whether Cruz has achieved this either consciously or, rather, inadvertently (is "mother's" a simple typo in the facing-page edition?), but in her rendition of the poem, the bond between mother and daughter has been strengthened, tightened. Since the boundaries between the two female figures have been blurred by the poetological mediation of (translated) language, the realms of motherhood and daughterhood, of past and present, constitute now common ground in the Spanish poem. And yet, "La madre musa" preserves and reproduces, in careful detail, the semantic associations, as well as the rhetorical nuances of "The Muse Mother": Cruz's respect for adjective placement is evident, for instance, and the powerfully rhetorical "sibyl's... pure syllables" ("sibila" – "sílabas") of the second-to-last stanza remain untouched, if interlingually transported, in their exalted place. Cruz has methodically charted, in a new language, the nooks and crannies of Boland's poetic memory.

As has been suggested, and despite some significant inversions, the carrying over conducted by Eva Cruz of Boland's five poems to the Spanish of *Una lengua injertada* is largely conservative as regards its translational scope. It might as well be ventured that Cruz here fits, with a few slight poetical licenses, the archetype of the "faithful translator," who "translates the way [s]he does out of reverence for the cultural prestige the original has acquired. The greater that prestige, the more 'grammatical and logical' the translation is likely to be" (Lefevere 50). Such authorial and translational respect is expressed in the opening lines of Cruz's groundbreaking bilingual anthology of Eavan Boland's poetry, published also in 2003 by the independent Mexican press El Tucán de Virginia:

> Eavan Boland is currently one of the most prestigious poets both in Ireland and abroad. Critics have placed her among the poets who have exerted greater influence on younger generations and who have contributed most significantly

> to the transformation and enrichment of Ireland's contemporary poetry tradition.
>
> Eavan Boland es actualmente una de las poetas de mayor prestigio dentro y fuera de Irlanda. Los críticos la consideran entre los poetas que mayor influencia han ejercido en las generaciones más jóvenes y que han contribuido a transformar y enriquecer la tradición de la poesía irlandesa contemporánea. (Cruz, *Anthology* 9; my trans.).

It is the poet's towering stature that, more often than not, determines the approaches with which translators are to tackle the texts they have chosen to rewrite, or which have been assigned to them to render into other languages.[13] Even though in her prologue Eva Cruz is unfortunately laconic about the translational concerns, perspectives, and techniques that she uses to re-present Boland in her comprehensive anthology, the ideological and poetological conditions imposed by the poet's image, as well as the certainty of being "the first," naturally have dictated her process.[14] The extensive authorial presentation of Boland which Cruz undertakes with her book of translations is clearly intended to fill a need (of sorts) in the target language and culture,[15] and, in this particular case, such need is as much literary as it is gender-driven: "Her [Boland's] poetics and her poetry were a breath of fresh air in the male-dominated panorama of Irish poetry at that time [the late twentieth century] / Su poética y su poesía fueron una bocanada de aire fresco en el panorama predominantemente masculino de la poesía irlandesa de ese momento"; (9, my trans.). This surely comes as no surprise if we are to point out that, in Irish verse of the last five or six decades—and particularly that written by women—issues such as landscape and language are almost inevitably linked with gender and identity. It follows that the aesthetic interests and choices of (female) poetry translators, as is the case of Eva Cruz herself and other members of UNAM's Seminario Permanente, should parallel these cultural and thematic tendencies.[16]

Cruz's selection for *Anthology / Antología* aptly begins with *New Territories*, Boland's first book of poetry, from 1967. The poem that lends its title to the collection, and which in Spanish reads "Nuevo Territorio," is an initial indication of the manner in which Cruz begins to part from the constraints of the almost entire faithfulness that characterized her first translations of Boland's verse in *Una lengua injertada*. [17] Let us consider the following lines:

Out of the dark man comes to life and into it
He goes and loves and dies,
(His element being the dark and not the light of day).
So the ambitious wit
Of poets and exploring ships have been his eyes –
Riding the dark for joy –
And so Isaiah of the sacred text is
[eagle-eyed because
By peering down the unlit centuries
He glimpsed into the holy boy.

De la oscuridad el hombre nace a la vida y
en ella entra para amar y morir
(por ser su elemento la oscuridad y no la luz del día).
Por eso el ingenio ambicioso
de poetas y naves exploradoras han sido sus ojos –
que cabalgan de alegría la oscuridad –
y por eso Isaías el del texto sagrado tiene vista
[de águila porque
al escudriñar a lo largo de los siglos sin luz
logró vislumbrar al santo niño.

In "New Territory," the writing of poetry is parallel to the exploration of unknown climes, as though the discoveries of the captain of a sixteenth-century galleon and the realizations of a twentieth-century poet were equivalent in their revelation of previously unimagined worlds and forms of existence. The register of "Nuevo territorio," especially in its last stanza, replicates the dramatism of the English piece by retaining the separation between speaker and poet, which results in a quasi-revelatory monologue, almost in the vein of the most insightful Browning. On the other hand, and even if the Spanish does not actually preserve the discreet and sparse rhymes of the original (e. g. "it / wit" – "joy / boy"), the translator's sensitivity to Boland's exalted imagery results in unexpected possibilities of metaphorization, which more than make up for Cruz's lack of formal equivalence. Thus, the man's eyes "riding the dark for joy," for example, in fact horseback-ride the darkness in an almost surreal instance of ultra-sensorial perception: "cabalgan de alegría la oscuridad." Similarly, Boland's "unlit centuries" have become "siglos sin luz," or literally "centuries without light," which implies, in Spanish, both impenetrable darkness and a pernicious lack of vision and sense—a duality of meaning that is not necessarily perceptible (or interpretable) in the original. While Cruz is not precisely altering meanings-senses here, she is rather expanding them in a translational move that provides the Spanish poem with circumspect semantic density.

Something analogous to this happens in Cruz's translation of one of Boland's most famous and discussed pieces, "That the Science of Cartography is Limited," where map and poem become nearly indistinguishable in metaphorical and symbolical terms. Even reading it, the poem behaves like a map—the first line, which is also its title, separates the factual certainty it contains (i. e. the science of cartography is limited) from the powerful sensory evocations if its first stanza, if indeed the cluster of lines can be called a stanza at all:

That the Science of Cartography is Limited

—and not simply by the fact that this shading of
forest cannot show the fragrance of balsam,
the gloom of cypresses,
is what I wish to prove.

The title / first line functions as both a *represented* boundary and an *indication* of continuity, of direction. The poem, from the very start, establishes its own complex frontiers (and those of one of its subjects) as it also overflows them—a clear intention is set, and yet its realization is never restricted by pre-defined metrics or measures. Even though the piece is a poem of remembrance and pain—it deals with an encounter with one of the infamous "famine roads" of Ireland—, the symbolical substance of its opening verses offers restoration: the "balsam" is a healing substance. It also provides comfort, since the cypresses represent mourning and the process of recovery after the great suffering caused by a tragedy of historical proportions. The speaker is at once an Irishwoman and all of the Irish, all together in the restricted area of a few lines, twenty-eight to be precise. These lines read as follows in translation:

Que la ciencia de la cartografía es limitada

Y no solamente porque este matiz del bosque
no puede mostrar la fragancia del bálsamo,
la penumbra de los cipreses,
es lo que quiero probar.

Once again, the faithfulness that Cruz apparently lends to Boland's English is indeed deceitful. The Spanish follows almost word-for-word the original's syntax and vocabulary. And yet, the semantic nuances of a few of Cruz's equivalences actually contribute to illustrate what the Czech literary theoretician and translatologist Jiří Levý has called "the expression of the translator's creative individuality," which, in turn, constitutes "the contribution of the translator's personal style and interpretation to the resultant structure of the work" (14). The choice of "matiz" for "shading" is a case in point. While the latter refers directly in English to a cartographic symbol, the former (indeed "shade," but also "hue" or "tint") implies in Spanish the perception a fading spectrum of color, which enhances the already suggestive visuality of the poem and its implications in the cartographic motifs of the whole piece. Further on, in the fourth line, the verb "probar,"

which literally translates a "to prove," not only signifies "to demonstrate" in Cruz's translation—, but it also echoes here a need to experience and even justify the bluntness of the title / first line. Boland's memory of a painful (re)discovery, both in her own mind and on a map, has become Cruz's search for, and encounter with, imagistic sensitivity in the heightened possibilities of "spirited translation" that works as a respectful, yet highly suggestive, rewriting (Lefevere 50). Gradually, and quite unassumingly, Cruz transitions from translational conservativeness to evocative (re)inventiveness as her acquaintance with Boland's poetics develops.

But the poem's route keeps extending as its reading and translation progress. The ontological essence of what is perhaps the most significant line in the piece, that is, "the line which says woodland and cries hunger / and gives out among sweet pine and cypress, / and finds no horizon," has been separated by the speaker from its being. Even visually, it is detached from the mass of the poem by a blank space that gives it a kind of insularity when, in the end "will not be there." The line that eventually vanishes is densely symbolical —it represents the famine road, the line on a map of Ireland, and the prosodic line that projects itself, even if deprived of perceivable being, into a hoped-for future. Here is Cruz's rhythmic, polysyllabic rendition of Boland's beautifully poignant ending:

> la línea que dice bosque y grita hambre
> y desaparece entre los dulces pinos y cipreses,
> sin encontrar horizonte
>
> no estará ahí.

Have Boland and Cruz, via her translation, proved that in fact the science of cartography is limited? Yes, but cartography is limited only insofar as the map that it produces is taken literally, as a means or artifact of physical localization. Only when the map is realized as a symbol, as a conglomerate of evocative remembrances, does it fulfill its ultimate purpose— the internalization of a transcendental experience *of* the world and *in* the world: "it is *never so I can say*. . . but to tell *myself* again. . ." ("nunca es de modo que pueda decir . . . sino para repetirme una vez más . . ."). The spaces between the wor(l)ds, just like the spaces between languages, are being poetically and translationally filled here. Obviously, the few poems that have been discussed here, along with their translations-rewritings, hardly serve to characterize the expanding possibilities of the intercommunicative correspondences between the cultures and poetics represented, respectively, by Eavan Boland and Eva Cruz. Notwithstanding this, and taking the Mexican translator's reworkings as a starting

point, the mapping of Boland's verse, in Spanish-speaking America, seems a promising undertaking that still strives to reveal uncharted poetical territories.

Notes

1 The Seminario Permanente de Traducción Literaria includes authors, poets, and scholars like Nair Anaya Ferreira, Flora Botton Burlá, Charlotte Broad, Eva Cruz Yáñez, José Juan Dávila Sota, Marina Fe, Mónica Mansour, Mario Murgia, and Federico Patán.

2 These anthologies were published by The National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM), in 1993, 2003, and 2019 respectively.

3 The title of the anthology was taken from John Montague's 1972 poem of the same name.

4 In her introduction to *The Poetics of Migration in Contemporary Irish Poetry*, Ailbhe McDaid states that "as 'a nomadic art of many voices', contemporary poetry exposes the limitations of a place-privileging approach that prioritises roots over routes. Questions of influence and affiliation, and of identity and belonging, apply anew to the generation who—having fled the 'inherited boundaries' of Irish literature—inhabit a hybrid globalized world. The well-recognised synchronicity between place and poet has often provided the dominant critical paradigm of interpreting Irish poetry in the twentieth century" (xi–xii).

5 Eva Cruz Yáñez, *Una lengua injertada*, 14.

6 Even though the notion is evidently borrowed from the concept of the Heideggerian Dasein, the term is used here to characterize the processes whereby the poet conflates the identification of the self with the surrounding environment by means of the evocative and self-reflective language of verse and geographic referentiality. See also Edmunds Valdemārs Bunkše's article "Feeling Is Believing, or Landscape as a Way of Being in the World," in *Geografiska Annaler* (219–220).

7 He same can be claimed of other Anglophone Irish poets like Medbh McGuckian, Dennis O'Driscoll, and Moya Cannon, to mention but a few. It is worthwhile pointing out that, in the context of the Hispanosphere, Eavan Boland's *In a Time of Violence* had been translated, in 1997 and in Spain, by the Ibero-Spanish author and journalist and Pilar Salamanca Segoviano.

8 See Sandra Halverson's "The Concept of Equivalence in Translation Studies" (7), where she explains the notion of "approximative equivalence" in reference to the studies of the German scholar and translator Otto Kade (1927–1980).

9 In order to ensure faithfulness to the definitive versions of Boland's poems in English, this and all ensuing quotations of her originals have been taken from *New Collected Poems*.

10 It is important to point out that in both *Night Feed*, the 1982 collection where "Muse Mother" originally appeared, and *New Collected Poems*, the line reads "my mother tongue."

11 For a very enlightening discussion of the so-called "critical stage" of language acquisition, see "The Evolution of the Critical Period for Language Acquisition," by James R. Hurford.

12 Regarding this, Mark Polizzotti has suggested that "[a] good translation offers not a reproduction of the work but an interpretation, a re-presentation, just as the performance

of a play or a sonata is a representation of the script or the score, one among many possible representations" (Sympathy 53).

13 I am using here the idea of "rewriting" as one of the ultimate ends of translation, especially of poetry translation. André Lefevere has stated that "Translation is, of course, a rewriting of an original text. . . . Rewritings can introduce new concepts, new genres, new devices and the history of translation is the history also of literary innovation of the shaping power of one culture upon another" (vii).

14 Up to 2003, and apart from Pilar Salamanca's Ibero-Spanish volume, the poems of Eavan Boland had been translated sparsely into Spanish for journals, magazines, or general anthologies of modern and contemporary Irish poetry. To this day, Cruz's work remains the only Hispanophone effort to compile Boland's poetry in a single-author volume.

15 The target-system translational approach is fully discussed and re-assessed by Gideon Toury in *Descriptive Translation Studies – and Beyond*. See also the "Preface" to Susan Bassnett's third edition of *Translation Studies*.

16 A good example of this is the volume *Qué clase de tiempos son éstos / What Kind of Times Are These*, a 2014 dual-language anthology of Adrienne Rich's poetry, also co-ordinated by Eva Cruz and collaboratively translated by the Seminario Permanente de Traducción Literaria.

17 According to Eva Cruz herself, in conversation with the author, she began translating Boland's poetry much before *Una lengua injertada* and *Anthology / Antología* were first published. Cruz's first translated poems were those that appeared in the former volume.

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Poems for a Poet
In Honour of
Eavan Boland

domestic defeats

it must have been very hard
beheading eels
without cutting your fingers
twisting to avoid the scales of sea bream
escaping through the slip knot of the bed sheets

such wars you fought
in the dim nights
against the chickpeas growing monstrous in the water
and picking lentils from grains of rice
what a ridiculous task!
such helplessness
when the boiled milk overflows
unstoppable

and if the din of the frying pans
stopped you hearing music
if your French and German
were in vain against the grease on the stove
and the pipes sounded like babies
or seagulls and the potatoes stuck
to the bottom of the pot

why are you smiling in the photographs
mother?

Marilar Aleixandre

English translation by Mary O'Malley in *To the Winds Our Sails. Irish Writers Translate Galician Poetry*, edited by Mary O'Donnell & Manuela Palacios. Salmon Poetry, 2010.

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derrotas domésticas

debeu ser moi difícil
degolar as anguías
sen cortar os dedos
arrandearte para que non te cubrisen
as escamas do ollomol
liscar do nó corredío das sabas

nas noites opacas
que batallas contra os garavanzos
medrando disformes na auga que absurda tarefa
escoller lentellas de arroz
que impotencia
cando o leite férvido vai por fóra
inevitablemente

e se o batifundo das tixolas
non che deixaba oír a música
se o teu francés e alemán
eran inútiles contra a graxa nos fogóns
se os tubos de auga berran como nenos
ou gaivotas e as patacas se pegan
no fondo da tarteira

nai
¿como é que estás sorrindo nas fotos?

Marilar Aleixandre

From *Catálogo de velenos*. Sociedade de Cultura Valle-Inclán, 1999. Collected in M*udanzas e outros velenos*, Galaxia, 2017.

The Countermanding Order, 1916 *

And my young grandmother,
what of her?
Was she, too, dejected?
No documentary evidence exists.
My mother, too young, at seven months,
to remember, herself, used tell us,
she heard the horse and trap in the yard again
and could not believe her ears.

What was my grandmother doing?
Did she clear away a half-eaten Easter dinner
talking, distractedly, to her two little boys,
as she scraped jelly from a glass bowl?
Did she mix feed for hens or pigs,
or wonder about bringing cattle in for milking?
Did she pray, or take out her handwork?
Was she putting the baby down for her rest?

Only hours earlier
in the swept farmyard,
she had said goodbye
to her husband of six years,
her exiled lover of seven more,
whose letters had been carried in steamships
across Caribbean and Atlantic tides.

On this Sunday morning, had they embraced
as he headed for the muster at Dungannon?
—as he enjoined her to bring up the children
as good Catholics and good Irishmen and Irishwomen.
(My mother, in old age, was to remark, with a raised eyebrow,
Wasn't it a bit cool of him, all the same?)

Now, as the trap clattered in through the gate
and the horse, Rebel, halted in his familiar place,
did my young grandmother wipe her hands in her apron,
did she rush to the door?

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Although the rising had been called off,
although the great cause seemed lost again,
did her heart not rejoice?

Moya Cannon

From *Donegal Tarantella*. Carcanet, 2019. Reproduced by kind permission of the author and the publisher.

* The Countermanding Order was an order issued by Eoin MacNeill, Commander-in-Chief of the Irish Volunteers, and published in the Sunday Independent, Dublin, on Easter Sunday 1916. Its aim was to prevent the countrywide uprising planned by a secret military committee drawn from the Irish Volunteers and Irish Citizen Army, including Patrick Pearse, Thomas Clarke, Thomas McDonagh and James Connolly.

A Contra-Ordem, 1916*

E a minha jovem avó,
o que foi feito dela?
Deixou-se abater também?
Não há qualquer evidência documental.
A minha mãe, aos sete meses, muito jovem,
para se lembrar, conforme nos dizia,
ouvira um cavalo e a cilada no jardim de novo
e mal acreditava no que ouvia.

O que fazia a minha avó?
Teve tempo de tirar o jantar de Páscoa comido às pressas
enquanto conversava distraidamente com os seus dois meninos
e raspando a geléia de um pote de vidro?
Será que misturou a comida das galinhas ou dos porcos,
ou pensou em trazer o gado para a ordenha?
Será que ela orou ou trouxe consigo trabalhos manuais?
Será que estava pondo o bebê para dormir?

Há apenas algumas horas
no limpo curral
ela havia se despedido
do marido de um casamento de seis anos,
do seu exilado amante de mais de sete,
cujas cartas tinham sido levadas em barcos a vapor
pelas ondas atlânticas e caribenhas.

Nesta manhã de domingo, será que eles se abraçaram
enquanto ele se dirigia à concentração em Dungannon?
—e a fazia prometer cuidar dos filhos
como bons católicos e irlandeses e irlandesas que eram.
(A minha mãe, na velhice e com as sobrancelhas levantadas, comentava:
Não era simpático da parte dele, de todo modo?)

Agora que a cilada avançava portão adentro
e o cavalo, Rebel, parava em seu local familiar,
será que a minha jovem avó enxugava as mãos no avental,
será que ela correu à porta?

Ainda que o levante tivesse sido cancelado,
ainda que a grande causa parecesse perdida novamente,
não terá o seu coração vibrado de felicidade?

Portuguese translation by Gisele Wolkoff

* A Contra-Ordem foi uma determinação expedida por Eoin MacNeill, comandante-chefe dos Voluntários Irlandeses, e publicada pelo Sunday Independent, Dublin, no domingo de Páscoa de 1916. O seu objetivo era prevenir o levante nacional planejado pelo comitê militar secreto, advindo dos Voluntários Irlandeses e pelo Exército de Cidadãos Irlandeses, incluindo-se Patrick Pearse, Thomas Clarke, Thomas McDonagh e James Connolly.

Story of the Transformation

It began as disorder
hurtful restraint as a kid we were poor and had less than nothing
rickety indigence before I wanting grief
a parable of complexes a syndrome a ghost
(it is as dire to miss it as lament it)
Coral shadow shattering pearls.
It began as a slippery gill whose
passing breath left me destitute
the plainest face in the playground I matter
not a whit and I'll neither grow nor sow
you've got it or you don't renounce it comply swallow
a maelstrom raven sky of eternal cold judgement
a set westerly a private privation
(a nuns' runt like all the rest
each one a lesbian or anorexic
the letter bet into the blood the hands the head
the conscience the cunt).
I shut my eyes and hoped beyond hope
to become once and for all everything I was.

But beauty corrupts. Beauty corrupts.
Coral shadow squandering pearls.
Day breaks conquering and there's boding in its gullet.
You fool! bedevilled with box ticking
and not what they held inside.
It was an idle giddy burst of flowers in winter
The rivers leapt back to themselves in pink waterfalls
butterflies and snails born from my hair
The smile of my breasts fuelled airplanes
Beauty corrupts
Beauty corrupts
My supple belly guided by spring
whelks spilled over my tiny hands
high praise pinched my heart
and I didn't know what to do with all that light in all that shadow.

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They said: “your weapon will be your punishment”
they spat my virtues in my face in this
club we won’t have girls with scarlet lips
a vicious tide of filth gaining interest
that has nothing to do with my mascara
the mice burrowed into my room and dirtied the linen drawers
litres of scrap pitch lurking secretly litres
of control litres of mud-slingers kilos of suspicion raised
with just the arc of my eyebrows you should be hog-tied
stained grey and all trace erased with acid
renounce who I am just to write?
they skinned me alive for my long tapering neck
for the hair that springs from the nape in this
club we won’t have girls who strut
We don’t trust summer
Beauty corrupts.
Make bloody sure it’s worth it.

Yolanda Castaño

English translation by Keith Payne in *Six Galician Poets*, edited by Manuela Palacios. Arc Publications, 2016.

Historia da transformación

Foi primeiro un trastorno
unha lesiva abstinencia de nena eramos pobres e non tiña nin aquilo
raquítica de min depauperada antes de eu amargor carente unha
parábola de complexos unha síndrome unha pantasma
(Aciago a partes iguais botalo en falla ou lamentalo)
Arrecife de sombra que rompe os meus colares.
Foi primeiro unha branquia evasiva que
non me quixo facer feliz tocándome co seu sopro
son a cara máis común do patio do colexio
a faciana eslamiada que nada en nada sementa
telo ou non o tes renuncia afaite traga iso
corvos toldando nubes unha condena de frío eterno
unha paciente galerna unha privada privación
(nena de colexio de monxas que fun saen todas
anoréxicas ou lesbianas a
letra entra con sangue nos cóbados nas cabezas nas
conciencias ou nas conas).
Pechei os ollos e desexei con todas as miñas forzas
lograr dunha vez por todas converterme na que era.

Pero a beleza corrompe. A beleza corrompe.
Arrecife de sombra que gasta os meus colares.
Vence a madrugada e a gorxa contén un presaxio.
Pobre parviña!, obsesionácheste con cubrir con aspas en vez de
co seu contido.
Foi un lento e vertixinoso agromar de flores en inverno
Os ríos saltaban cara atrás e resolvíanse en fervenzas rosas
borboletas e caracois nacéronme nos cabelos
O sorriso dos meus peitos deu combustible aos aeroplanos
A beleza corrompe
A beleza corrompe
A tersura do meu ventre escoltaba a primavera
desbordaron as buguinas nas miñas mans tan miúdas
o meu afago máis alto beliscou o meu ventrículo
e xa non souben que facer con tanta luz en tanta sombra.

Dixéronme: “a túa propia arma será o teu propio castigo”
cuspíronme na cara as miñas propias virtudes neste
club non admiten a rapazas cos beizos pintados de vermello
un maremoto sucio unha usura de perversión que
non pode ter que ver coa miña máscara de pestanas os
ratos subiron ao meu cuarto enluxaron os caixóns da roupa branca
litros de ferralla alcatrán axexo ás agachadas litros
de control litros de difamadores quilos de suspicacias levantadas
só coa tensión do arco das miñas cellas deberían maniatarte
adxudicarte unha estampa gris e borrarte os trazos con ácido
renunciar a ser eu para ser unha escritora?
demonizaron o esguío e lanzal do meu pescozo e o
xeito en que me nace o cabelo na parte baixa da caluga neste
club non admiten a rapazas tan ben adobiadas
Desconfiamos do estío
A beleza corrompe.
Mira ben se che compensa todo isto.

Yolanda Castaño

From *Profundidade de campo*. Espiral Maior, 2007.

Revenant

Silence is settling on the Green,
On paths, on redolent shorn grass.
Midsummer gloaming is a pale screen
Above bordering trees heavy
With leaf, and in the houses of
The square, yellow lights, blue
Flicker of televisions. Silence.

Suburban estate fallen quiet.
Nobody out there walking a dog,
No teenagers loud in premonition
Of sex, caught in all that fizz and fall
Of the blood fever, that lovely push
And shove of the tribe, posture and
Doubt, that remembered heady mix.
None of that. Not even a car passing.
The small children all in bed.

I turn to the blue glow of night work—
e-mails to be answered, documents
Edited, the long day to tidy away.
I save, stretch, turn in my chair
And there you are, still and composed,
Looking away out at the world, hand
Flat on the blank page, the open notebook.
But you cannot see out by now, night
Has made a black mirror of the window,
All you can see is your own face staring
Back from wherever you have gone.

I know that I will not catch your eye,
That a call or shout from the street will not
Startle you, nor the cry of a hungry child,
Nor a voice raised in farewell or sudden fear.

You are beyond all that, beyond, and yet
Here you are, perfectly self-contained
As ever, a natural presence at home here
In this room your living presence never knew.

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Nothing I do or say now can disturb you,
You have gone into that dimension where
Time itself is outside history, and you with it.
Suburban estate fallen quiet. Cameo appearance
Of a poet. A fleeting visit. No narrative. No music.

Theo Dorgan

Written for "Eavan Boland — In Her Many Images", *ABEI Journal* 23.2 (2021).

Renascida

O silêncio se assenta no parque,
Na estrada, perfumada grama tosada.
O crepúsculo de verão é uma tela pálida
Acima da fronteira de árvores sólidas
Com folhas, e nas casas da
Praça, as luzes amarelas, azuis
O pisca-pisca da televisão. Silêncio.

O território suburbano torna-se pacato.
Ninguém lá fora leva o cão a passear.
Sem o presságio de jovens ruidosos
Do sexo, pega-se toda ebulição e diminui
A fervura sanguínea, impelida amorosa
E o impulso tribal, postulado e
Dúvida, lembra mistura inebriante
Nada disso. Nem um carro passa.
As crianças todas já na cama.

Volto-me ao brilho azul do trabalho noturno –
e-mails a serem respondidos, documentos
Editados, organizados ao longo dia.
Reduzo-me à cadeira, estico-me e me viro
E ali está você, parada e calma,
Ignorando o mundo, a mão
Esticada na página em branco, o caderno aberto.
Mas agora não consegues ver, é noite
E ela faz da janela um espelho negro,
Tudo que vês é tua face fixa
Voltando-se para o horizonte de onde vieste.

Sei que não entenderei teu olhar,
Que uma chamada e um grito na rua não te
Surpreenderão, nem o choro de uma criança faminta,
Nem uma voz alta na despedida ou no medo súbito.

Tu estás para além de tudo, e ainda
Tu estás aqui, perfeitamente contida em si mesma
Como sempre, presença natural aqui em casa
Neste quarto não conhecia tua presença viva.

Nada que eu faça ou diga agora pode te incomodar,
Tu foste a uma dimensão onde
O tempo está fora da história, e tu a par.
O território suburbano torna-se pacato. A aparência camaleônica
De um poeta. Uma visita breve. Sem narrativa. Sem música.

Portuguese translation by Samuel Delgado Pinheiro

Encounters

Staring at the long queue of silent people
staring at blank wounded faces who gaze
staring past grimaced facades in lifeless bodies
staring with fear that haunts look away smiles
staring into a mauve shabby purse that's almost empty
staring back at a clouded window that reflects my age
staring down at pleated bills I'm trying to pay
staring through the aloof woman in the distance
staring at those who once were friends
staring at iPhone photos of my children
staring grateful for the rich life of my handbag

Attracta Fahy

Published in *Poetry Ireland Review 127* (April 2019).

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Encontros

A olhar a longa fila de gente em silêncio
a olhar as caras feridas e vazias que atentam
a olhar as fachadas de trejeitos que passam em corpos sem vida
a olhar para uma velha bolsa cor de malva quase sem nada
a olhar para trás para uma janela de nuvens que reflecte a minha idade
a olhar para as contas bem dobradas que estou a tentar pagar
a olhar de cima a baixo a mulher distante lá ao longe
a olhar para os que já foram amigos
a olhar para as fotos dos meus filhos no iPhone
a olhar grata pela vida cheia da minha mala

Portuguese translation by Graça Capinha.

Birthright

i.m. Eavan Boland who meshed womanhood and nationhood

You often think of what you left behind.
There was your family, of course. Aunts
and uncles. In time, cousins. And for a time,
grandparents. You wonder now did those
grandparents miss you. If they did, they never
said. You know what it is to be separated
from a grandchild. You know the longing
for that small person. You think of all you might
teach her. You think that time is running out.

Your grandparents may have thought that
about time but may have been reluctant
to teach you how to survive, though you may
have learned through their example – how
to unravel parts of a cardigan that weren't
threadbare and knit them into a new garment,
how to fashion sheets from flourbags.

You remember a pedlar would call with tapers
to light the wicks in the gaslights. Others would
bring fish, fresh fruit, bottles of fizzy drinks.
Your grandmother would mix one of the cordials
with a second liquid and create a drink to build
you up. It tasted strange. You drank it,
nonetheless, not knowing it was part Guinness.

You left those days and more behind. You left
the smell of the sea. The cold of the granite
beneath your bottom as you watched the Pierrots.
The slipperiness of the moss beneath your feet
at the bathing place round the back of the quarry.

You brought with you tales of the quarry – of how
it was bottomless. How a girl you knew fell over
the edge once and her dress caught in a splinter
of rock that held her until she was rescued.

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You know that story is true. You also know
the quarry was formed when granite to build
the pier was hewn from it. A simple
explanation. One that makes sense.
More so than the other story you bring
with you: the story of your leaving.

English version of "Ceart Duchais" by Celia de Fréine

Ceart Dúchais

Is minic leat cuimhneamh ar ar fhág tú id dhiaidh.
B'ann dod mhuintir, ar ndóigh. Aintíní is uncailí. In
imeacht ama, col ceathracha. Agus go ceann scaithimh
seantuismitheoirí. Ábhar iontais duit ar airigh
na seantuismitheoirí uathu thú. Má rinne, ní dúirt siad é.
Is eol duit cén chaoi a mbraitheann sé a bheith scartha
ó gharpháiste. Is eol duit an chumha i ndiaidh
an duine bhig úd. Smaoiníonn tú ar a bhféadfá
a theagasc di. Smaoiníonn tú nach bhfuil mórán ama fágtha.

Seans gur cheap do sheantuismitheoirí é sin
faoi easpa ama ach go raibh drogall orthu tú
a theagasc cén chaoi le maireachtáil,
cé go mb'fhéidir gur fhoghlaim tú óna nósanna
an chaoi le codanna cairdeagain nach raibh
smolchaite a roiseadh is ball éadaigh nua a chniotáil astu,
an chaoi le braillíní a dhéanamh de mhálaí plúir.

Is cuimhin leat go dtagadh mangaire, fáideoga aige
leis na lampaí gáis a lasadh. Daoine eile a thugadh leo
éisc, torthaí úra, buidéil de dheochanna súilíneacha.
Mheascadh do Mhamó ceann de na coirdiail
le leacht eile chun deoch a chruthú le tú a neartú.
Bhí blas aisteach air. D'óladh tú é fós féin, gan a fhios
agat go raibh Guinness ina bhunábhar ann.

D'fhág tú na laethanta sin is tuilleadh id dhiaidh. D'fhág tú
boladh na farraige. Fuaire an eibhir faoi do thóin is tú
ag breathnú ar na Pierrots. Sleamhaine an chaonaigh faoi
do chosa ag an ionad snámha taobh thiar den chairéal.

Thóg tú leat scéalta an chairéil – faoi go raibh sé
gan tóin. Gur thit girseach a raibh aithne agat uirthi
thar an imeall lá ach gur rug scealp charraige ar a gúna
a choinnigh slán í gur tháinig fear i gcabhair uirthi.

Is eol duit gur fíor an scéal sin. Is eol duit
freisin gur cruthaíodh an cairéal am
ar baineadh eibhear as leis an gcé
a thógáil. Míniú simplí. Ceann a bhfuil
brí leis. Níos mó ná mar atá sa scéal
a thugann tú leat, scéal d'imeachta.

Celia de Fréine

Written for "Eavan Boland — In Her Many Images", *ABEI Journal* 23.2 (2021).

Direito inato

i.m. Eavan Boland que entrelaçou feminilidade e nacionalidade

Com frequência você pensa no que deixou para trás.
Tinha sua família, é claro. Tias e
tios. Em tempo, primos. E por um tempo,
avós. Você se pergunta hoje se seus
avós sentiram saudade de você. Se sim, eles nunca
falaram. Você sabe como é estar longe
de uma neta. Você conhece a saudade
daquela pessoinha. Você pensa em tudo que poderia lhe ensinar. E acha que o tempo está esgotando.

Os seus avós podem ter pensado nisso
em tempo, mas podem ter hesitado
em lhe ensinar como sobreviver, embora você possa
ter aprendido pelos seus exemplos – como
desembaraçar os fios de um cardigã que não estavam puídos e refazê-los numa nova vestimenta,
como remodelar sacos de farinha em lençóis.

Você se lembra de um mascate usando funis
para acender os pavios dos lampiões. Outros
traziam peixe, frutas frescas, garrafas de refrigerante.
A sua avó misturaria algum tônico
com outro líquido e faria uma bebida
para você ficar forte. Com gosto estranho. Você costumava beber,
porém, sem saber que era em parte Guinness.

Você deixou tudo isso e muito mais para trás.
O cheiro do mar. O granito gelado
sob seu corpo enquanto você assistia Pierrots.
O musgo escorregadio sob os seus pés
onde você tomava banho, no entorno atrás da pedreira.

Você trouxe consigo os contos da pedreira – de como ela não tinha fim. E de como
certa vez uma garota, sua conhecida, caiu da beirada e o seu vestido ficou preso
numa pedra que a segurou até que ela fosse resgatada.

Você sabe que essa estória é verdadeira. Também sabe que a pedreira surgiu quando
o granito ao píer foi de lá talhado. Eis uma explicação
simples. Uma que faça sentido.
Mais do que a outra história que você traz
consigo: a história da sua partida.

Portuguese translation by Marina Bertani Gazola

O legado

Na memoria de Eavan Boland, quen entreteceu muller e nación

A miúdo pensas no que deixaches atrás.
A túa familia, sen dúbida. Tías e
tíos. Co tempo, curmáns. E nunha época,
os avós. Agora pregúntaste se os avós realmente
te botaron en falta. Se así o fixeron, endexamais
o exteriorizaron. Sabes o que é estar separado
dun neto. Sabes do anhelo por esa crianza. Pensas en todo
o que lles poderías ensinar. Pensas que apenas queda tempo.

Poida que os teus avós pensasen igual
sobre o tempo, mais se amosasen reticentes
a ensinarche como sobrevivir, aínda que se cadra
aprendiches do seu exemplo – como
desenguedellar partes dunha chaqueta que non estaban
raídas e calcetalas para facer nunha nova prenda,
como facer sabas de sacos de fariña.

Lembras cando viña un vendedor ambulante
con mistos para prender a chama dos farois.
Outros traían peixe, froita, refrescos.
A túa avoa combinaba un dos seus licores
con outro líquido para crear unha bebida revigorante,
cun sabor alleo e, aínda así, bebíala
sen saber que levaba Guinness.

Deixaches atrás eses e moitos outros días.
Deixaches o olor a mar. O granito frío
nas nádegas mentres contemplabas os Pierrot.
O mofo esvaradío baixo os teus pés
no lugar de baño á volta da canteira.

Trouxeches contigo as lendas da canteira – de como non tiña
fondo. Como, nunha ocasión, unha rapariga que coñecías
caera da beira e o seu vestidiño ficara enganchado
nun anaco de rocha e así se sostivo até que a rescataron.

Coñeces a veracidade da historia. Tamén sabes
que a canteira se construíra para extraer o granito
do espigón. Unha explicación
ben simple. Unha que ten sentido.
Máis sentido que esa outra historia que
contigo gardaches: a historia da túa partida.

Galician translation by Yolanda López López

Poem for Eavan Boland

Born in the middle
of diplomatic words and inks,
art has been, from an early age, present.

As a child, she has crossed the world,
between London and New York accents
longing had been smoldering.

She would become
A woman without a country
but back to hers, still a teenager.

In the Ireland of Yeats and Joyce,
the student challenges standards
and writes her first poems.

At the time,
the words *women* and poets
kept extreme distances.

Her inner voice paints
In Her Own Image
poems about the female universe flourish

Faces of children
dials of washing machines, family life,
diseases, domestic violence.

Things about which poetry
rarely dared naming,
as she said.

She has never eluded from the dialogue with tradition,
she has always toasted with poets,
opening paths for the women who resisted.

Woman, wife and mother,
How to make poetry?
A journey with two maps begins.

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But *cartography is a limited science*.
and the realms of the Irish woman, of the world,
gain voice and view in her poetry.

And if you think it was easy for her,
you don't know that
she lived *In Times of Violence*

She has given us *Objective lessons*,
Against Love Poetry
she has written.

But a lot of love for life and dreams
her lines carry and teach
to those who follow her.

Time has no shadows in the mountain,
She has not been neutral
in women's war.

She has enchanted all in brave and delicate manners,
its aesthetics and poetics have demonstrated
that anyone can be whatever they want.

José Huguenin
English translation by Rafael Teles da Silva

Poema para Eavan Boland

Nascida em meio
a palavras diplomáticas e tintas,
a arte foi, desde cedo, presente.

Criança, cruzou o mundo,
entre os sotaques de Londres e Nova York
a saudade era latente.

Uma mulher sem um país
se tornaria, mas volta para o seu
ainda adolescente.

Na Irlanda de Yeats e Joyce,
a estudante desafia padrões
e escreve seus primeiros poemas.

Nesse tempo,
As palavras *mulheres* e *poetas*
Mantinham distâncias extremas.

Sua voz interior pinta,
em sua própria imagem
faz nos versos o universo feminino aflorar

Rostos de crianças,
painéis de lavadoras, vida caseira,
doenças, violência no lar.

Coisas que a poesia,
como ela dizia,
não ousava nominar.

Do diálogo com a tradição não se esquivou,
estava sempre com poetas a brindar,
Abrindo caminhos para a mulher que resistia.

Mulher, esposa e mãe,
Como poetizar?
Uma jornada com dois mapas se inicia.

Mas *a cartografia é uma ciência limitada*
e as coisas da mulher irlandesa, do mundo,
ganham voz e vista na poesia.

E se pensas que foi fácil essa efeméride,
não sabes que
Em tempos de violência ela viveu

Aulas práticas nos deu,
contra poesia de amor
ela escreveu.

Mas muito amor à vida e aos sonhos
seus versos carregam e ensinam
a quem em sua jornada a suceder

O tempo não tem sombras na montanha,
não foi neutra na guerra
da mulher.

A todos brava e delicadamente encantou,
sua estética e poética demonstrou
que qualquer pessoa pode ser o que quiser.

José Huguenin

Written for "Eavan Boland — In Her Many Images", *ABEI Journal* 23.2 (2021).

Magic Circle

She gave me a book
in the sitting-room
with light pouring in
and mountains
I've seen in all weathers,

leafless winter,
the fire banked with red coals,
air so chill our breath is
fog, and over-night snow
patching grey slopes.

Time came full circle
that afternoon in summer,
when the tortoise raced the hare
and the crab moved sideways
across an ocean floor,

the children went out,
left us to the quiet of a house,
the sun still high,
and no sign of
day drawing to a close.

Catherine Phil MacCarthy

From *This Hour of the Tide*. Salmon Poetry, 1994.

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Círculo mágico

Ela me deu um livro
na sala de estar
com luz adentrando
e montanhas
por mim vistas em todo clima,

inverno sem folha,
o fogo cercado com carvões vermelhos,
o ar tão gelado que nosso hálito é
bruma, e a neve da noite
cobrindo encostas pardas.

O tempo circulou por completo
aquela tarde no verão,
quando a tartaruga correu com a lebre
e o caranguejo se afastou
através de um chãoceano,

as crianças saíram,
deixando-nos na quietude de uma casa,
o sol ainda alto,
e nenhum sinal
do dia chegando ao fim.

Portuguese translation by Marcel De Lima Santos

In Memory of Eavan Boland

When your last book came over the sea from America
In the month after you'd died it was as if a voice
Had called from afar, or maybe not afar, but from deeper –
Deeper in that diplomatic whirl you understood,
The whirl of carpets and receptions, of men bowing
To each other in a distant country. The gilded formality
Of giving quarter graciously was not now, as it had
Never been, your way of doing business. Rather,
It was a gracious advance, an advance of women,
Of women who knew enough or were lucky in fathers:
Yes, you, patrician and dignified. Its beautiful binding and jacket,
The Norton book, I mean, it spoke of an argument settled,
It spoke of sainthood, of J.D. McClatchy and Tobias Wolff,
Of the start and finish of legends, of Ireland's azurite vowels.

It was magnificent how you could unpick the heavy lock
In the side-gate of history, the one camouflaged by heavy
Laurel leaves where a woman in a trench-coat might wait
For the moment. How does one begin, as Lois wonders
In that novel by Elizabeth Bowen; how does the mind
Remain faithful in unfinished revolutions? To write
In the light of what will be, where hope becomes law,
That was your one long journey. Where a young mother
Was disturbed in her night-feed, moving to the night-lit
Window, pen and child in hand, an aeon opened.
Reading these poems to my daughter as we catch
The early Luas in Rialto, red sunlight on Guinness cottages,
Something youthful of you illuminates our day: the light in
That voice of you from far away, your pen behind a curtain.

Thomas MacCarthy

Written for "Eavan Boland — In Her Many Images", *ABEI Journal* 23.2 (2021).

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Em Memória de Eavan Boland

Quando o seu último livro cruzou os oceanos da América
Um mês depois da sua morte, foi como se uma voz
Distante tivesse chamado, talvez não distante, mas das profundezas –
Mais profundas que aquele vórtice diplomático que você compreendia,
O vórtice de carpetes e recepções, de homens se curvando
Em um país distante. A formalidade brilhante
De doar um quarto graciosamente não era de agora, era como se
Nunca tivesse sido seu jeito de negociar. Ao contrário,
Era um passo gracioso, um avanço do universo feminino,
De mulheres que sabiam o suficiente ou que tiveram sorte ao nascer:
Sim, você, nobre e digna. Sua bela encadernação e capa,
O livro Norton, quero dizer, tinha um argumento seguro,
Falava sobre santidade, sobre J.D. McClatchy e Tobias Wolff,
Do início e do fim das lendas, das vogais azuritas da Irlanda.

Era magnífico como você conseguia destravar a aldrava pesada
Do portão lateral da história, aquele escondido pelas pesadas
Folhas de louro onde a mulher com um sobretudo deveria esperar
Pela hora certa. Como alguém começa, como Lois imagina
Naquele romance de Elizabeth Bowen; como as ideias
Permanecem fiéis em revoluções inacabadas? Escrever
À luz do que será, onde a esperança se torna lei,
Era a sua única jornada. Onde uma jovem mãe
Foi interrompida durante a amamentação noturna, se movendo para a janela
Iluminada pela luz da noite, caneta e criança na mão, uma eternidade aberta.
Lendo estes poemas para minha filha, enquanto apanhamos
O primeiro Luas em Rialto, o laranja do sol nos sítios Guinness,
Algo juvenil em você ilumina nosso dia: a luz da
Sua voz distante, sua caneta atrás da cortina.

Portuguese translation by Marina Bertani Gazola and Rafael Teles da Silva

ABEI Journal – The Brazilian Journal of Irish Studies, v. 23, n. 2, 2021, pp.232-233.

Translation of a Kind

i. m. Eavan Boland

It is the middle of the afternoon.
A girl is walking home from school
in the oldest routine of the culture I know.
She is perhaps nine years old. She is alone.

She arrives at a shop too familiar to be called
a grocer's and suddenly. There is something to see.
A woman is performing the most graceful act
of the countryside. Placing her left foot firm on the pedal

she launches from the pavement by three toeful
steps of the right. The child knows the rhythm by heart.
The cyclist's leg traverses the frame
in a confident sweep. She leans forward. The structure whirrs.

Scholars propose the self was born in ancient
Greek lyric poetry. In the moment of desire
black thunder and meadow impossibly collide
in the one being, divided by glass.

The gain of a picture the loss of a world.
She yelled I know but I can't hear it. A tension
of air spun out like the train of a missile.
Her head became a dark ball her body drained of substance.

The woman turned. The child mounted the carrier
and mother was restored. Retained by the lungs
the picture wakens to itself with a piercing gasp.

Fire and loosened limbs. But I think
the opposite of Eros.
Convex departure of a ground.

Máighréad Medbh

Written for "Eavan Boland — In Her Many Images", *ABEI Journal* 23.2 (2021).

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Tradução sem igual

i.m. Eavan Boland

No meio da tarde
Uma garota caminha da escola para sua casa
na mais antiga rotina cultural que conheço.
Talvez, tenha nove anos de idade. Está sozinha.

Chega a uma loja muito conhecida para ser chamada de
mercearia e de repente. Há algo para se ver.
Uma mulher está executando a performance mais graciosa
de toda a zona rural. Com o seu pé esquerdo firmemente no pedal

ela se alça a partir da calçada, com três completos
passos para a direita. A criança conhece o ritmo de cor.
A perna da ciclista atravessa o quadro
deslizando confiante. Ela se inclina para frente. A estrutura sibila.

Os acadêmicos sugerem que o self nasceu na antiga
poesia lírica grega. No momento do desejo,
o trovão negro e a campina colidem de forma impossível
em um ser, dividido pelo vidro.

Ganha-se uma imagem, perde-se um mundo.
Ela gritou, eu sei, mas não consigo ouvi-la. Uma tensão
do ar expelido como a trilha de um míssil.
Sua cabeça se torna uma bola escura, seu corpo destituído de substância.

A mulher se virou. A criança subiu no carrinho
e a mãe se restabeleceu. Retida pelos pulmões
a imagem desperta a si, com um suspiro lancinante.

Fogo e membros partidos. Mas penso
no oposto de Eros.
A arrancada convexa de um plano.

Portuguese translation by Mirian Ruffini

A Shadow in Her Notebook

(Helen Moloney, stained-glass artist, 1926-2011)

She sent a ten-pound note to the Poor Clares
and imagined them in their brown habits, praying
for her to find an idea. That was a start.

They sent her a fish, swimming and wavering, its head
enormous in the dark water. They sent her a lion, then a star.
She drew the lines of lead that held the sun in its place,

that funnelled the light through what was once the open air.
The clouds paused on the mountain top:
a gleam of weather somewhere else, then the storm

pounding overhead before it slid off northward,
a dark prowl. The lion raised his paw,
coloured like the sun, glowing now

against a glass curtain, such a blue
it seemed a kind of night. The darkened interior
sucked in colours. Always the voice in her head

objecting: *But could it not just be clear glass*?
No. The shadow of the bell tower, the woman
dressed in brown, a shadow behind a screen:

they gathered around her clean white page, demanding
indigo glass for the narrow tight window
and oyster white, a little off centre, for the loaf.

Just there on the border between the storm and the hush,
the fish trembled in the light from the clouded sky,
weaving like a hologram.
On her page the same tremble threw

a swimming shadow that covered the chancel floor.
Only the blind organist's daughter will ever see
how it shivers, floated safe in empty air.

Eiléan Ní Chuileanáin

Written for "Eavan Boland — In Her Many Images", *ABEI Journal* 23.2 (2021).

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Unha sombra no seu caderno

(Helen Moloney, artista de vitrais, 1926-2011)

Enviou un billete de dez libras esterlinas ao convento das Clarisas
e imaxinounas rezando, cos seus hábitos marróns,
para que ela tivese unha idea. Xa era un comezo.

Enviáronlle a cambio un peixe, en trémulo nado, de cabeza
colosal en augas enturbadas. Enviáronlle un león, tamén unha estrela.
Ela debuxou as liñas de chumbo que manterían o sol no seu lugar,

canalizando unha luz que antes fora só aire.
As nubes inmóbiles sobre o cume da montaña:
un indicio do clima ao lonxe, despois a tormenta

batendo no ceo antes de continuar cara o norte,
un axexo escuro. O león ergueu a súa gadoupa,
da mesma cor ca o sol, resplandecendo agora

contra a cortina de vidro nun azul
que semellaba noite. O interior escuro
absorbía todas as cores. Sempre a voz na súa cabeza

obxectando: *e non podería ser todo cristal transparente?*
Non. A sombra da torre das campás, a muller
vestida de marrón, unha sombra por detrás do vidro:

todas reunidas arredor da páxina en branco do seu caderno, esixíndolle
un cristal índigo para as seccións máis pequenas e estreitas
e un branco perla, algo descentrado, para o pan.

E alí, nos límites entre a tormenta e o silencio absoluto,
o peixe tremía na luz do ceo nebuloso,
cun aceno ondulante de holograma.
Na súa páxina ese mesmo vaivén proxectou

unha sombra que escorregaba ata cubrir o chan do coro.
E só a filla do organista cego poderá ver
como abanea, flotando inocente en aire baleiro.

Galician translation by Jorge Rodríguez Durán

Sustenance

"You made the noise for me.
Made it again.
Until I could see the flight of it."
E. Boland, from *Code*

She was my Mnáthan-tuirim,* keening
our language for me, showing its range,
its flight path, parsing our phrases, sloughing
off the old tropes. With a voice like the echo
of a summer song it tuned somewhere deep;
reverberating in pavements and city streets,
in the gathering shadows of granite buildings,
in the running tide of Anna Livia.

I heard the cry, saw the flight, saw noise
stitch the sky and tried to hold it
like a wayward running kite. String unspool-
ing in my hands, leaving me
raw and grounded, my back to the wind
I held on tight, but often missed
the bridle points as it pivoted
and plunged in my mind's sky.

Jean O'Brien

Written for "Eavan Boland — In Her Many Images", *ABEI Journal* 23.2 (2021).

*Mnáthan-tuirim is the Irish word for a Keener (crying); the keening women paid respects to the deceased and expressed grief on behalf of the bereaved family.

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Sustento

"Fixeches o ruído para min.
Fixéchelo de novo.
Até que puiden ver o seu voo".
E. Boland, Code

Ela era a miña Mnáthan-tuirim,* carpindo
para min a nosa lingua, mostrando o seu alcance,
a traxectoria do seu voo, anatomizando as nosas frases, desprendéndoas
dos vellos tropos. Cunha voz como o eco
dunha canción de verán, entoaba no máis fondo;
reverberando nas estradas e nas rúas da cidade,
nas sombras amoreadas dos edificios de granito,
no abalo da marea de Anna Livia.

Oín o pranto, vin o voo, vin o ruído
coser o ceo e intentei termar del
como un papaventos voando descarreirado. Corda desenro-
lándose nas miñas mans, deixándome
en carne viva, en terra, de costas ao vento
termei con forza, mais fallei decote
o punto de ancoraxe ao pivotar
e mergullar no ceo da miña mente.

Galician translation by Marilar Aleixandre

*Mnáthan-tuirim é a palabra en gaélico para a carpideira, a que facía o pranto na honra da persoa defunta e expresaba a dor en nome da aflixida familia.

A Window in South Anne Street, 1983

There are outsiders, always.
Eavan Boland, "Outside History."

We drift away from flower sellers on the corner,
bunching early tulips, daffodils.

She is confident beneath an auburn fringe,
billowing navy skirt and blouse,

a battered briefcase swinging her along.
We pause at this or that shop window

chat about poetry, the high musical
lilt now calling her to America,

Adrienne Rich, Marilyn Hacker.
At an antique jeweller she is gay and light,

pointing to a rose gold ring,
its translucent peridot, delighting

in what is found and worn again,
from histories not our own.

'We don't really know our history,'
she says, urging me to step back

from the lessons in my head,
to rummage, then retrieve

within the hidden fault-lines.
Now twice the age she was then,

I wear a peridot wreathed in pearl.
It calls me to that morning,

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and later, to the solitary probing
at old weights, to find a history

for our names, if such a thing exists.

Mary O'Donnell

Written for "Eavan Boland — In Her Many Images", *ABEI Journal* 23.2 (2021).

Unha ventá en South Anne Street, 1983

Hai forasteiros, sempre.
Eavan Boland, "Outside History".

Arredámonos dos vendedores de flores da esquina
que cinguen ramos de tulipáns e narcisos temperáns.

Séntese segura baixo o seu floco caoba,
ondeando a saia e a blusa mariñas,

randeada por un vello maletín.
Paramos neste ou naqueloutro escaparate

conversamos sobre poesía, a melodía elevada
lévaa agora ata América,

Adrienne Rich, Marilyn Hacker.
Nunha xoiería de anticuario está feliz e luminosa,

sinalando un anel de ouro rosa,
o seu peridoto translúcido, deleitándose

no que se atopa e se pon unha vez máis
e provén de historias que non nos pertencen.

"Non coñecemos certamente a nosa historia",
di ela, apremándome a tomar distancia

das leccións imbuídas na cabeza,
para remexer, logo recuperar

dentro das liñas de falla agochadas.
Agora que dobro a idade que ela tiña daquela

luzo un peridoto circundado de perlas.
Lévame a esa mañá,

e despois, á pescuda solitaria
nos vellos lastres, procurando unha historia

para os nosos nomes, se é que existe.

Galician translation by Claudia Castro

Wolf Song

i.m. Eavan Boland

Sit still now. Take up your pen.
In this space before noise begins
tigers are visiting cities
and a white leopard sits

on a lawn in Suburbia.
A wolf is walking along
an empty beach in California.
A poet sings his traces.

Now she too is becoming history.
Already the first slow movement
of the strings is parting the silence.
This is the point in the story

when shadows thin as blades
quiver in the April air.
You can see the wolf through them.
Soon he too will be gone, forgotten

This long free walk by the sea a detour.
The sea will remember him.
When he licked my hand at the hawthorn
his traces sharpened the salt air.

Mary O'Malley

Written for "Eavan Boland — In Her Many Images", *ABEI Journal* 23.2 (2021).

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O canto do lobo

i.m. Eavan Boland

Senta-te imóvel. Pega a caneta.
Neste lugar, antes do barulho começar
os tigres visitam as cidades
e um leopardo branco descansa

num gramado em Suburbia.
Um lobo caminha ao longo de
uma praia vazia na Califórnia.
Uma poetisa canta os seus passos.

Agora ela também se torna história.
O primeiro toque lento
das cordas rompe o silêncio.
Este é o momento na história

em que as sombras finas como lâminas
estremecem no ar de abril.
Através delas, podes ver o lobo
Que, mais logo, também terá desaparecido

Esta longa, leve caminhada à beira-mar, um desvio.
O mar se lembrará dele.
De quando ele lambeu minha mão no espinheiro
e seus passos aguçaram o ar salgado.

Portuguese translation by Marina Bertani Gazola

Pantheon

for Eavan Boland

"When the god had in mind the making of a world through a word —logos—
his first thought was Athena." Justin Martyr

When they tell me of your times,
your work's masculine-attended birth,
the poetry-establishment's closed rank,

I think of Zeus, so afraid his unborn child
would overthrow him, he swallowed her.

They say Athena cleaved herself from
the god's forehead fully grown.

Patron Goddess of heroic endeavour,
your armour was quiet dignity,

a woman speaking of a woman's world,
casting shy light on small details,
making our otherness matter. Like Athena

who presided over household crafts,
especially weaving, which lets me see,

now that all is done, and you have slipped
away too early like a woman
leaving a party unannounced, an Irish exit—

you were never Greek,
but of your own béloved Pantheon:

Goddess of the new spring, Brighid
weaving a threshold belt of stars,

a circular críos, to guide the next
generations in across the dark.

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The women pour through now Eavan,
you've born a library of verse,

all of us under your aegis,
whichever you were, Athena, Brighid—

I only knew you as the Cailleach—
the creatrix who shaped the landscape.

Grace Wells

Written for "Eavan Boland — In Her Many Images", *ABEI Journal* 23.2 (2021).

Panteón

para Eavan Boland

"Cando o deus estaba pensando a construción dun mundo por medio dunha palabra –logos– o seu primeiro pensamento foi Atenea." Justin Martyr

Cando me falan dos teus tempos,
o nacemento —asistido por varóns— do teu traballo,
o peche de filas dos xerifaltes poéticos,

Penso en Zeus, tan temeroso de que a criatura por nacer
o derrocase, que a enguliu.

Din que Atenea atravesou por si mesma,
completamente formada, a fronte do deus.

Deusa patroa do heroico empeño,
a túa armadura era a tranquila dignidade,

unha muller falando dun mundo de muller,
alumeando con reservada luz os pequenos detalles,
facendo que a nosa outredade importase. Como Atenea

que presidiu sobre as artes domésticas,
especialmente tecer, o que me fai ver,

agora que todo acabou, e ti desapareciches
demasiado pronto como unha muller
marchando sen avisar dunha festa, despedida á irlandesa—

que nunca fuches grega,
senón do teu propio amado Panteón:

Deusa da nova primavera, Bríxida
tecendo un limiar cinto de estrelas,

un crios circular, para guiar as seguintes
xeracións a través da escuridade.

As mulleres xorden agora a través, Eavan
fixeches nacer unha biblioteca de versos,

todas nós baixo a túa éxida
quen queira que foses, Atenea, Bríxida–

Eu só te coñecín como a Cailleach–
a creadora que deu forma á paisaxe.

Galician translation by Marilar Aleixandre

Notas da tradutora:

Bríxida (Brighid) é unha deusa pre-cristiá de Irlanda, asociada coa sabedoría, a poesía e a curación. O cristianismo converteuna en Santa Bríxida.

O crios é un cinto colorido de lá empregado nos rituais relacionados con Bríxida.

A Cailleach –que significa anciá nai– é unha deusa da mitoloxía celta.

Light in the Night for Eavan Boland

This is now too late
or too early to say,
but I try to portray

the poet to whom I owe
my own figure in the mirror
of words, in the images of the past
of my own nation
that was granted some more attention
with the translations of the poems
that were never published in the form of a book.

I think of so many artists
and their portraits
and how we all leave behind
our selves to reflect these other selves...

Yet now the only portrait that matters
is that of the Poet
whom today ascends...

God
has painted a woman
in the last Spring light

in perfect colors,
marked by the courage
of wisdom words

No distances
now matter:
whether Ireland,
or the Americas

being man, or woman
we all go further, we all go faster
than daylight

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Boland lives forever
in the words she weaved
in the fabrics of delight

Eavan Boland also lives
in the understanding
her writings have allowed

about women here and there
there and forever after

in the perfect sky
of the perfect colour

for eternity
in our hearts and minds.

Gisele Wolkoff

Written for "Eavan Boland — In Her Many Images", *ABEI Journal* 23.2 (2021).

Luz na noite para Eavan Boland

Agora é muito tarde
ou, talvez, muito cedo para dizer
mas tentarei retratar

a poeta a quem devo
a minha própria cara no espelho
das palavras, nas imagens do passado
da minha própria nação
que ganhou um pouco mais de atenção
com as traduções dos poemas
que nunca foram publicados na forma de livro

Penso em tantos artistas
e nos seus retratos
e de como todos nós deixamos para trás
os nossos próprios eus pra refletir estes outros eus...

No entanto, agora o único retrato que importa
é este da Poeta
que hoje ascende...

Deus
pintou uma mulher
na última luz da primavera

em cores perfeitas,
marcadas pela coragem
das palavras de sabedoria

Nenhuma distância
agora importa:
se Irlanda,
ou as Américas

ser homem, ou mulher
todos avançamos, todos somos mais céleres
que a luz do dia

Boland vive para sempre
nas palavras que teceu
no tecido do encanto

Eavan Boland também vive
na compreensão
que os seus escritos nos permitem

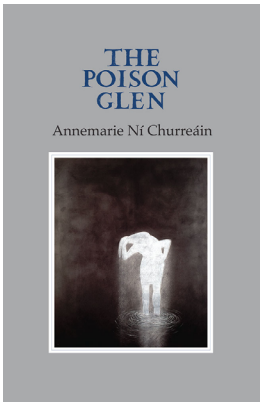
sobre mulheres aqui e ali
lá e para todo o sempre

no céu perfeito
da cor perfeita

por toda a eternidade
nas nossas mentes e nos nossos corações.

Portuguese version by Gisele Wolkoff

Reviews



Annemarie Ní Churreáin. *The Poison Glen*. Ireland: The Gallery Press, 2021. 72 pp. ISBN 978-1-91133-814-7 (paperback); ISBN 978-1-91133-815-4 (hardback)

Annemarie Ní Churreáin returns to the literary scene with *The Poison Glen*, a poetry collection which continues the thematic lines she initiated in *Bloodroot* (2017), intertwining Irish landscape, history and legend. The collection consists of forty poems in which different voices and places alternate, unearthing stories of silenced mothers, helpless poor families and their foundlings, while simultaneously exposing both the intolerance of the Irish patriarchal society that prevailed until the end of the twentieth century, and the rottenness and negligence of religious and state-funded institutions, namely Mother and Baby Homes, industrial and reformatory schools.

Ní Churreáin's collection proves to be a necessary revision of a not-too-distant past, since some of the establishments explicitly mentioned in the poems have been active until the last decades of the twentieth century. In fact, the Irish government has very recently made amends through the constitution of two commissions in charge of enquiring into the irregularities committed in places of this nature: the Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse, which published its final report—The Ryan Report—in 2009, and the Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes, whose report came out at the beginning of 2021. The conclusions reached by both recognized, among other faults, the malpractice of such institutions—frequently overcrowded and in poor conditions, which led to high mortality rates—and also, especially regarding industrial schools and reformatories, the physical and emotional abuses that went unpunished and which are now exposed and denounced by the poet in this book.

The title *The Poison Glen* refers to a valley in County Donegal, so called because according to legend, in that hollow lay the Irish mythological figure of Balor, wounded in his poisonous eye and thus killed at the hands of his own grandson Lugh. Balor, knowing his fate beforehand, had tried in vain to impede it, first by isolating his daughter Eithne in a tower in Tory Island and then by ordering to kill her three children. Thus, the title captures the essence of a collection aimed at bearing witness to concealed and violent

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aspects of Ireland's past by symbolically standing for the persistence of memory through landscape—"Memory is a curse // that keeps on flowering" (27).

The opening poem, "A Villager Speaks of Eithne", already refers to this legend by focusing on the figure of the isolated mother deprived of her children, as well as on the importance of remembrance and retelling to finally do justice, thus setting the tone of the whole work: "It is written here among the heather rocks and electric eyes: / *She was not her father's animal.* / *She was not her husband's prize*" (11). In addition to this, Ní Churreáin offers other poems versing on that Irish legend throughout the collection, giving voice not only to the traditional main characters of the story, namely Balor and Lugh, but also to the silenced female characters involved, as is the case with "Eithne's Mother Speak" and "Eithne Speaks of Her Father".

The poetic voice assumes therefore the role of an "eyeless witness" (21) to speak on behalf of those whose stories had been kept secret, of those women whose names were changed upon entering the institutions and of those nameless infants who were buried there in mass graves: "In their honour / I can never again be silent" (15). These inconvenient truths were hidden by religious congregations and families alike: parents confined their pregnant daughters in Mother and Baby Homes due to social prejudice and the organizations were responsible for not registering births and forging adoption signatures. In "The Peacock", a family does not even want to recover their daughter's body, dead in childbirth: "The body was a symbol they would not concede" (56).

Throughout the collection, the emphasis on seclusion and concealment is reinforced through the physical descriptions of the places, through their stone walls and darkness, "In a locked-up state, in a landlocked county" (56). It is through visiting the spaces that the author is able to delve into their hidden histories, with "The Screaming Room" serving as a paradigmatic example by referring to a specific isolated room at Castlepollard Mother and Baby Home into which the women who screamed during childbirth were secluded. Even though the walls might have concealed the sounds, as the poem points out, "It reeks in here of the secrets of the earth" (15).

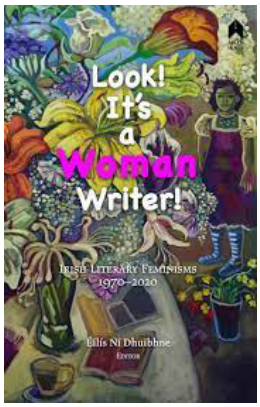
Ní Churreáin does not limit herself to disclosing dark sides of Ireland's history, but also poignantly criticises those responsible. The longest poem of the collection, "The Foundling Crib", whose title refers to a baby hatch installed in the Foundling Hospital of Dublin where around 200,000 children were abandoned, revolves around the poor economic situation of many families who could not possibly take care of their children—"They carried / dying bodies on their own dying bodies" (19)— and the hypocrisy of

some authorities and philanthropists who profited from that situation—"What obedient servants hunger makes of us in every faith" (18).

In this vein, the author also ironically underlines the maltreatment to which children and adolescents in industrial and reformatory schools were subject. The poem "Boy 462" bitterly concludes that in those places run by religious orders and aimed at educating and enlightening, "*Light was not part of the job*" (36). Furthermore, Ní Churreáin masterly presents a rich variety of poetic forms, some of which parody the structures of religious texts, thus accentuating the ironic tone. Such is the case in "Creed", where the beliefs in the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting are substituted by "the naming of sins, the resurrection / of *all the children of the nation cherished equally* / and in the eye-witness everlasting" (12).

The last poems of the collection resolutely offer a hopeful look into the future—"Say aloud, *Never again will you be stolen*" (62)—especially through the final image of a lighthouse in which the village mothers have symbolically gathered to offer light and protection: "We keep the light for safe return" (65). Therefore, Ní Churreáin, with this ending, encourages women to make themselves heard. The poet presents a well-informed and beautifully crafted work that is able both to denounce the concerned authorities and to commemorate the victims, thus serving as a powerful literary revision that condemns the past while simultaneously relieving its burden.

Antía Román-Sotelo



Éilís Ní Dhuibhne (ed.). *Look! It's a Woman Writer!* Dublin: Arlen House, 2021. pp. 349. ISBN: 9781851322510.

In *Look! It's a Woman Writer!*, Éilís Ní Dhuibhne brings together Irish women writers born in the 1950s to reflect on how gender as well social and economic changes have shaped their writing and careers. The collection is an outstanding example of how asking contemporary Irish women writers to delve into their literary experience can help us understand recent cultural developments and establish connections between different women who have worked, in the last few decades, from various standpoints and genres—poetry, fiction, non-fiction and drama—and have done so, more often than not, under Eavan Boland's influence.

As an intellectual, activist, scholar, and, most prominently, writer, Éilís Ní Dhuibhne is perhaps one of the most outstanding names in contemporary Ireland and far from a foreigner in the world of edited volumes. Not only did she co-edit *The Viking Ale. Articles by Bo Almqvist* (1991) and *Northern Lights, a Festschrift for Bo Almqvist* (2001) with Séamas Ó Catháin, she likewise edited *Voices on the Wind: Women Poets of the Celtic Twilight* (1996) and *WB Yeats: Works and Days. A Book to Accompany the Yeats Exhibition at the National Library* (2006). Besides her prolific and widely prized literary production both in English and Irish, Ní Dhuibhne regularly engages in feminist debates on women's writing; for instance, she discussed not only feminism but also Irish identity in the launch of her latest, prior to this reviewed volume, work, *Little Red and Other Stories* (2020). Her recently edited collection, *Look! It's a Woman Writer!* (2021), follows up some of the most widely known Irish women writers born in the 1950s, including herself, born in 1954. She defends that there is something specific in this generation of women writers that revolves around the role gender played in their careers. In her own words, "We were saying the woman's voice must be heard" (McPhee).

As an early Spanish researcher diving in Irish women's writing, I am dismayed by how often we tend to forget that women writers have been—and still are—silenced or at least backgrounded as a norm. Take, for instance, the syllabus of English Studies

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courses, which is still dominated by male writers both in Ireland, as denounced by several authors of the volume, and in Spain. Only exceptionally can students read women writers; additionally, there are even fewer Irish women writers in the canon and, consequently, the curriculum. In this context, Éilís Ní Dhuibhne provides an in-depth and dense recollection of testimonies of several Irish women writers whose writing careers have been developed in the last four decades. The character of the book is highly—and necessarily—political, because it seeks to give a voice to those women who managed to write and publish in an Ireland that witnessed free education in 1967, the economic depression and massive emigration in the 1980s and the Troubles from the 1960s to the 1990s.

Look! It's a Woman Writer! has a foreword by novelist Martina Devlin, an introduction by Éilís Ní Dhuibhne and an afterword by the Arlen House editor Alan Hayes, along with twenty one chapters in which recognised Irish women writers reflect on how they became writers and on the obstacles they had to face to write and publish in Ireland. The twenty one women invited to pen a chapter in free form about their own experience as writers in the volume are: Éilís Ní Dhuibhne, Catherine Dunne, Lia Mills, Medbh McGuckian, Evelyn Conlon, Mary O'Malley, Liz McManus, Mary O'Donnell, Moya Cannon, Celia de Fréine, Mary Dorcey, Anne Devlin, Mary Rose Callaghan, Mary Morrissy, Áine Ní Ghlinn, Sophia Hillan, Ruth Carr, Cherry Smyth, Máiríde Woods, Ivy Bannister, Phyl Herbert. Although there are missing names of Irish women writers born in the 1950s, the volume does offer safe space to discuss how gender and free education affected their careers.

Look! It's a Woman Writer! opens strongly with Martina Devlin's "Foreword", herself a bestseller author, award-winning journalist and novelist born in the 1960s. Here, she briefly reflects upon the changes on the publishing scene in Ireland by recalling her childhood with the other "tribe," her five brothers, separated by their gender roles and expectations. She powerfully emphasises the importance of free schooling in the Republic of Ireland, marking a pivotal juncture in Irish history and a transformative moment for women. Those women who dared to write faced obstacles, not only the rejection of their writings, but male conservative gatekeeping in literature as well.

The "Introduction" is written by the editor of the volume, Éilís Ní Dhuibhne, who briefly introduces the issues that motivate the present book: the need to not forget the women writers born in the 1950s. Ní Dhuibhne agrees with Martina Devlin's identification of free education as a decisive opportunity that opened alternative paths to Irish women. Considering the last fifty years, she suggests that, in 2021, fiction in Ireland "might seem" to be dominated by women; and yet, she was motivated to bring together the autobiographical

essays in *Look! It's a Woman Writer!* after the Waking the Feminists movement in 2015 when they protested against the poor representation of women playwrights on the Abbey Theatre's programme commemorating the centenary of the 1916 Easter Rising.

One aspect pointed out by most women writers of the volume is the creation of women-only workshops. Interestingly enough, most workshops mentioned were organised by Arlen House and, more often than not, by Eavan Boland, who seems to sew the whole Irish literary system together. Already in 1978, she contacted Arlen House to offer her support to their activities, which included being the judge in literary competitions as well as creating the foreword to the first book of Arlen House, *The Wall Reader* (1979). Not only did she participate in the founding of the Women's Education Bureau (1984) as artistic director and general editor of *The WEB journal* (1987), but she also directed writing workshops for Irish women, creating physical and metaphysical spaces for women. Boland's efforts promoted not only Irish women's writing, but also the research of their texts by bringing their literary production under the spotlight.

Look! It's a Woman Writer! closes as powerfully as it opened with the afterword by Alan Hayes, current editor of Arlen House, titled "Irish Literary Feminisms, 1970-2020." Here, Hayes provides a brief review of the editorial work on women writers of the last fifty years. He explains that post-independence Ireland became an increasingly conservative society in which the position of women was heavily disimproved, both by the Censorship of Publication Acts and by the ongoing negative attitude towards women writers. In this atmosphere, important feminist presses were founded, including Arlen House (1975), Irish Feminist Information (1978), Women's Community Press (1983), Attic Press (1984) and Women's Education Bureau (1984). Hayes likewise briefly mentions some of the biggest names of the last fifty years, including directors, editors and writers, with a special emphasis on Eavan Boland. Furthermore, Hayes explains that the publishing system in the 2010s and 2020s differs vastly from that of the late twentieth century; however, the field is not unprejudiced, as gender, age, sexuality and ethnicity among other factors remain obstacles. He argues that publishing now is about marketing and numbers rather than artistic talent and quality work.

Look! It's a Woman Writer is a most valuable addition to the longstanding inquiry into the arduous advance of Irish women writers also scrutinised in collections like *Creation, Publishing and Criticism. The Advance of Women's Writing* (2010), edited by the Spanish scholars María Xesús Nogueira, Laura Lojo, and Manuela Palacios, who similarly sought to ponder the conditions for the contemporary emergence of Galician and Irish women writers.

The broadness of testimonies, albeit restrained to the physical limits of a volume, within *Look! It's a Woman Writer* stems from the balanced selection of the writers asked to take part in it, managing to represent women authors of fiction, poetry and drama who knew they wanted to write since childhood and those who did not realise it until later in their lives; women writers who "became" authors after moving to Dublin and others who would have never dared to write and publish in Dublin; women writers who like to be categorised as "women" writers and those who feel uncomfortable with this gender label. And yet, all these writers share similar birth dates and the influence of Eavan Boland on the workshops she organised and on the Irish literary community in general. All together, Look! It's a Woman Writer constitutes an extremely rich instance of reflection upon what being a woman and an author in late twentieth century Ireland entailed, and how twenty-first century Irish writers are now reaping the fruits of their struggles.

Vanesa Roldán Romero

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"Boland: the journey of a poet" — A delicate and powerful celebration of Eavan Boland's life and legacy

Poetic might not be the ideal word to define a play that celebrates one of Ireland's greatest poets, Eavan Boland. Poetic in capital letter, under the risk of sounding unconventional, to highlight the marvelous and touching performance delivered by actress Siobhán Cullen as what she calls "a fragment of Eavan Boland" (8:01) or "an all-encompassing essence of her" (8:17) in this beautifully written monologue. It is the single word capable of contemplating the overall effect of this production of the Druid Theatre, streamed live from the Mick Lally Theatre in Galway from the 22nd to the 24th of April 2021 and available on demand from April 27th to May 2nd 2021, as part of the Druid at Home project.

This production premiered in one of the critical moments of the COVID-19 pandemic, a time when theatre companies around the world had to reinvent themselves. It is worth writing this down in this review so that a reader who might encounter it in the future can acknowledge the peculiarity of this play, for both its producers and its spectators. There is no dialogue, no interaction with the audience whatsoever.

It is surprising to learn that this was the first time the director, Garry Hynes, had worked with cameras and that she was terrified about it. It is incredible because the two of them—that represent us, the audience, to whom Cullen looks deeply and directly—are used in such a proficient and delicate manner that one thinks that both Hynes and Colm Hogan, director of photography, had been preparing this project for many years before it was launched to the world. In the post-show discussion, Cullen mentioned that working with the medium of a camera made her look down its lens hoping the gaze went "straight up the audience" (5:41). And yes, it reached us.

Throughout the fifty-minute performance, there are only two people on stage: Siobhán Cullen, as Eavan Boland, and portrait artist Debbie Chapman, who stands with her back turned to the camera as she paints a portrait of the poet. She is a sort of presence on stage, not a character, representing the expressionist painter Frances Kelly, Boland's mother. We can see a table in the background by her side, on which brushes, and painting material lay very organised, beside a mural where pencil sketches of the female body are disposed. In the foreground, there is a long table, a few chairs, a teacup and a black notebook, where Boland's poems have been carefully handwritten and from which Cullen reads.

They are just some of the everyday objects that build an intimate ambiance in which we discover an Eavan Boland in her 30's, in an earlier stage of her writing career

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and further away from the time of her most known works. These objects, far from trivial and unimportant, are extremely significant to the performance. The black lace fan, for instance, that Siobhán Cullen used on stage before reading "The black lace fan my mother gave me" was provided to the producers by the poet's family (Hynes 0:49). The black lace fan the actress touches on stage is the actual Eavan Boland's fan, the one that had previously belonged to her mother and was given to her as described in the poem. In the same way, the easel on which Debbie Chapman paints Boland's portrait was also provided to the producers by the poet's family: it belonged to Frances (Hynes 1:02). This illustrates how Boland's life experience and personal objects intertwine with her poetry in this moving production.

We accompany her from reflections of her childhood as an Irish girl in England and the US, through the time she moved to the suburbs of Dublin with her family, the upbringing of her two daughters, night feeding and becoming a wife (slash) mother (slash) poet in Ireland. Her challenge at this point, in the late '70s and early '80s, is to combine her domestic arrangements with her poetry writing. It is the critical period when she realizes that in Ireland the words woman and poet were opposites: "The poets I knew were not women: the women I knew were not poets", she says (Boland 265).

The text of the play is built with Boland's own words, with her autobiographical prose and poems, which were edited in the play's script by Colm Tóibín. It was made combining poems from different stages of her career and the prose contained in *Object Lessons* (1995) and *A Journey with Two Maps* (2011). Tóibín's script exposes Boland's descriptions of a journey that would lead to a new phase in her poetry-making, one that allows her life, the female body and women's histories into her poems, when she overcomes the "having a text but not context".

The technical aspects of the production must also be praised. In the most confidential moments of the performance, the cameras offer a close view of Siobhán Cullen's face. Something that would be impossible to achieve in a live performance, as acknowledged by the director herself (Hynes 14:33), a close-up unreachable from the distance of a theatre seat. We feel very close to her. The proximity is such that we follow her wherever she goes, involuntarily. Although the actress is sitting on a chair, the same chair throughout the performance, she moves to other places and decades through the poems, taking us by the hand. The poems are the ones that transport us from the room with table, chair, easel, and canvas to Boland's childhood, to her suburban house in Dublin, or to her journey throughout the city to embrace her dying mother. This movement is allowed

through the sounds of words, verses, and piano songs, that often accompany the poems so beautifully delivered.

This play is powerful not only because it celebrates a great female poet in the context of Irish writing less than a year after her death, but also because it does it with her very own words, praising her authorship. Many biographical plays are built based on information available in letters or interviews, written in a specific moment and addressed to a specific audience. Researchers obtain these pieces of information, analyse them carefully and put them together in a manner that is adequate for the stage. This is not what happened in this play. Colm Tóibín works with Boland's autobiographical notes, with revelations and memories voluntarily shared by her with anyone who reads her books. And they offer us a vigorous image of a woman who became a poet and then a mother and finally all three things in one body, in one potent and loud voice.

That "Quarantine" is one of the last poems to be read in the play reflects this intensity, as it demonstrates how Boland began to explore silences, and face these silences, and give them voice. It allows the play to end showing yet another phase of her writing, one that looks back into Irish history: how she showed Ireland that it is important to revisit tragedies of its past, like the Great Famine, and talk about them and let them not be forgotten.

Michelle Alvarenga

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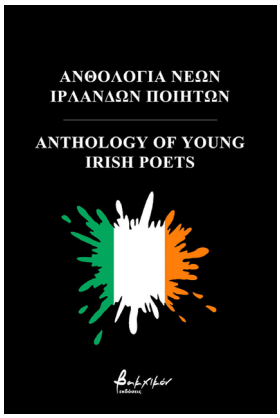

Ingrid Casey (ed). *Anthology of Young Irish Poets*. Athens: Vakxikon, 2019. pp. 124. ISBN 978-960-638-060-0

Recalling some lines of the late Seamus Heaney, Ireland's last Nobel Prize Winner in Literature to date and probably one of the island's "grand old men" of poetry, one might ask: "Since when ... / Are the first line and the last line of any poem / where the poem begins and ends?" (lines 10-12, Heaney 57). And indeed, the poems in the trilingual *Anthology of Young Irish Poets*, written and compiled by writers much younger than Heaney, often seem to have their roots in ground that predates them in one way or another. The anthology comes in three languages: Greek, English and—in the case of Doireann Ní Ghríofa's poetry—Irish. It is therefore of no surprise that some of the poems delve into history or establish a link between Greece and Ireland—a theme familiar from older Irish and Northern Irish poets like Heaney and, probably more famously, Michael Longley. To see the younger generation in this anthology make use of a variety of such traditions, each in their very own way and with their own distinctive voices, is heartening and gives the reader an idea of the vibrant literary scene on that island on the periphery of the European continent.

The anthology's editor is Ingrid Casey, who continues the aforementioned tradition in her poem "Artemisia", where the title can stand for both a strong female character in Greek mythology, who fought on the side of the Persians against Greek city states and acquired renown as a leader of several battleships, as well as for a plant genus under which several officinal plants are subsumed. Thus, Casey establishes a tension between the established image of the woman as the caring sex and the idea that women can be much more than that; she cleverly uses a literary tradition to paint a picture of a socio-cultural tradition to criticize the latter and call it into question. In "Whist", the poet Elaine Feeney employs similar criticism against pre-emptive obedience, tone policing, and the social pressure women in Ireland still have to face in our times. She speaks out against male expectations, which are never uttered as such in the poem, but come to the fore rather subtly when she creates a strain between the male farmer, up early taking care of a cow, and

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the (supposed) female speaker putting on a metaphorical mask and telling herself "to keep my powder dry" and "to hold my whist" (84). While the man is labouring hard and is going about the everyday chores, the woman seems to tend to idle cares; and being aware of living in a society that judges matters with a male gaze, the speaker decides to hide her thoughts from male individuals somewhat close to her. It is of no surprise that Feeney as an excellent poet manages to circumnavigate the description of female body parts such as breasts but writes about the speaker's lips and mouth instead. That way, she underlines the speaker's speechlessness, which, at first glance, seems self-chosen. But how much can it be a matter of free will if one is embedded in a society exercising social pressure on women? A question the poet leaves to the readers to answer.

Other poems about pressing social and political issues in Ireland are Annemarie Ní Churreáin's trademark poem "Sisters" about strong female characters in foster care and the diverse circumstances they come from and live in. Ní Churreáin masterfully manages to throw spotlights and glimpses on several girls she names, and with just a few words gives the readers a very good idea of the stories behind those names. Not to forget Jessica Traynor's three contributions taken from a suit of poems commissioned by The Salvage Press in 2016 and republished in her second collection *The Quick*. Those pieces draw on Swift's *A Modest Proposal* in a pungent and satirical manner to provide mock solutions for the housing crisis Irish governments continually seem to fail to tackle. For the anthology, Traynor has provided three out of nine poems from the suit, and they do not appear in the order of her collection. Probably the most outstanding from those brilliant pieces is "Breeders Wanted", where the poet goes about analysing that "we are evolving ourselves / out of existence" in an almost Utilitarian fashion, hence picking up the threads from Swift's days (lines 6-7, 78). The solution provided is displayed in a frighteningly unemotional way: "You have a daughter. Fourteen. Strong . . . Put her to breed" (lines 22-26, 80).

Although socio-political themes loom large throughout the anthology, the book holds much more fine verses to discover. There is the Northern Irish poet Colin Dardis with his wry "Sea Buckthorn", a poem in which the interest in and fascination for a berry seem to turn into hate and disgust once the berry is plucked and begins to ferment. It is a poem which connects nature with perceptions and emotions. It is not a static poem; its great strength lies in the movement and progress of images as the lines continue, in the interaction of humans with their environment and contemporary world. Dardis' "Fire Music", on the other hand, could be called a Troubles poem, a very timely piece about the burn of terror attacks—"calling card // explodes"—and federal forces fighting each other, with the speaker right in the middle of all that violence and not content to accept the fighting parties' behaviour and

stances – "their blazing elbows" – because it is by no means a matter of course that their respective stances would be valid for everyone involved in or affected by said violence (lines 9-12, 64). It is a poem reaching far beyond the Irish maritime borders as we can see regarding the current war-like situation in Afghanistan for example.

The poems in the *Anthology of Young Irish Poets* are firmly rooted in place, sometimes overtly, sometimes covertly, and often commingled with images of human conditions. In "Archipelago", Rob Buchanan presents us with questions of belonging (nowhere) and searching, with a conflict between the "atavistic lure for incompletion" and the want "To possess everything" (38). The search, the motion away is an ongoing process of which Buchanan writes "it is dying as it is growing" (40). Although Greek mythology is evoked here once again through the figure of Odysseus, through lines like the above, "Archipelago" seems more of a Heideggerian poem, reminding the reader of the philosopher's idea of being-toward-death, thus giving the text a reach far beyond the island of Ireland's watery boundaries.

Despite such heart-heavy moments, the anthology yields lighter themes too, wittily brought forth by Dylan Brennan for example. In "Things You Can Do with a Grasshopper", he contrasts the forced and artificial beauty in cruel human acts with the natural beauty of what can happen if nature is resurrected or remains unperturbed. It is indicative for this poem that it ends on a positive note letting on there is always something to be said in favour of the goodness in human beings. Yet, Brennan does not paint the violence potentially done to a grasshopper as something inhumane, and so, quite elegantly, avoids stereotype-laden pitfalls of demarcating the evil in us from us, as he seems very conscious of evil being part of the many complex layers of the human condition.

Complexities are often well-contrasted with simple and effective, yet evocative images, as delivered by Alice Kinsella in "Periwinkle (I)", where the poet displays for us a "shimmering summer sea surface" (34). The alliterative image sticks immediately in this poem about how the present and associations contained in the poet's words can transport the reader elsewhere. Yet, in "The Ends of It", the poet notes how first things and important moments – such as being by the summer sea – come to an end, fade out of physical existence and into memory, a theme also resonating in "First Date on Azul Street" by Doireann Ní Ghríofa as well as in Seán Hewitt's "Häcksjön". The latter comes with beautiful and vivid descriptions of taking a swim in a lake surrounded by Swedish moors. Here is an Irish writer once again going beyond Ireland's borders in almost a Heaney'eske way as his poems immediately call Heaney's bog poems to mind – and yet, Hewitt delivers his verses very much in his own well-developed voice, leaving no doubt that here is a poem

who, with regards to the craft, fits in seamlessly with this assembly of fine writers from Northern Ireland and the Republic, poets well-aware of those who came and went before them, and who seem unafraid of making their own mark in the world of writing.

Stephen Sexton is among those names to look out for in every good bookshop or library. His are what one might call memory poems too. In "Anniversary", the speaker remembers a sister who always remains unknown, remains in the realm of the unnamed. There is a storytelling quality and a narrative voice to Sexton's poetry that, with a few tweaks to his texts, could have them appear as micro-fiction as well. One can see this writer easily transcend genres should he ever wish to do so. A writer who has already proved her capabilities in that regard is Doireann Ní Ghríofa. Her "Jigsaw" presents us with one of her trademark themes, namely motherhood. It is quite interesting, but for reasons of space cannot be investigated further, that the present version of the poem is taken from her collection Lies, while an earlier different version appears in Clasp. "Jigsaw" as well as "Cusp of Autumn" are prime examples of how well Ní Ghríofa plays with language and, by doing so, can gift us with a lightness almost without equal. There is a beautiful friskiness in assonant rhyming words weaved into lines like "slip into the water's skin, / sketching concentric circles that glint, / thin edges colliding" (lines 6-8, English translation). For the sake of completeness, it must be said that Ingrid Casey has kindly provided me with English translations of Ní Ghríofa's work (by the poet herself) as her poems in the anthology are in Irish.

Much more could be said about the contents and styles assembled in the *Anthology of Young Irish Poets*, but there is never enough space. One could, of course, praise the keen eye and deep understanding of Manuela Palacios and Lucy Collins who have written the preface and the postface respectively, and who display a grasp of the poems that is at once insightful and much deeper than what I have to offer. In the book, both texts appear in Greek but are available in English on the publisher's website. One could also ask why a book that is supposed to present young poets features writers in their thirties and forties, when there are many interesting younger voices emerging from the Irish literary community, or why there is no stronger emphasis on migrant voices. My own understanding is that this is not necessarily something to criticise. Much rather, it could be an incentive for another anthology in the future, and to keep an eye on the vibrant and ever-changing Irish poetry scene, North and South. In addition, it should be noted there are always limitations making it impossible to accommodate in such a book everything one could possibly wish for to be there. It can therefore be argued that here we are presented with a well-chosen and well-curated anthology shedding a wonderful spotlight on what poetry from Ireland has

to offer in our times. The non-exhaustiveness inevitably included in such a project should be a reason to take the *Anthology of Young Irish Poets* as a steppingstone to dive into the richness and fullness of what the island's poetry invites us to experience, to make it part of our very own human condition.

Sven Kretzschmar

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Contributors

Antía Román-Sotelo holds a BA in English Studies (2018) and an MA in Advanced English Studies and its Applications (2019) from Universidade de Santiago de Compostela. She has been awarded a FPU fellowship from the Ministry of Universities of Spain (FPU19/01794) to carry out her PhD dissertation under the supervision of Prof. Laura Lojo Rodríguez and with the support of the Research Group "Discurso e Identidade" (ED431C 2019/01, Xunta de Galicia). Román-Sotelo's main research interests include trauma and postcolonial studies.

Attracta Fahy, Psychotherapist, MAW NUIG '17. Winner of Trócaire Poetry Ireland Poetry Competition 2021. Irish Times; New Irish Writing 2019, Pushcart & Best of Web nominee, shortlisted for: OTE 2018 New Writer, Allingham Poetry competition both 2019 &'20, Write By The Sea Writing Competition 2021, Dedalus Press Mentoring Programme 2021. Her poems have been published in many magazines at home and abroad, including *Poetry Ireland Review*, *Stinging Fly, Crannóg, Poethead, Abridged,* and *Banshee*. Her poems have also been published in several anthologies including *Impspired, The Blue Nib, Avalanche, Civic Leicester- Poetry and Settled Status for All,* and *Of Mouth Northern Women's Writings*. She was a featured reader at Over the Edge Reading in Galway City Library, Cultivating Voices, and read with poet Paul Muldoon and Adrian Rice at The Poetry Salon with the Irish American Society of New Mexico. Fly on the Wall Poetry published her best-selling debut chapbook collection *Dinner in the Fields*, in March '20.

Aubry Haines is currently a PhD student with the Memorial University of Newfoundland specializing in Irish poetry, Energy Humanities, and Phenomenology. His research primarily engages with poetry from the late nineteenth century to the present, and he has a particular interest in representations of Irish space, everyday objects, and sectarian violence.

Caitriona Clutterbuck is lecturer/assistant professor at the School of English, Drama and Film in University College Dublin. Her doctorate at the University of Oxford was on the poetry of Medbh McGuckian and Eavan Boland. Her research interests centre on modern and contemporary Irish poetry, modern poetry, gender in literature, and modern Irish literature.

Catherine Conan is an associate professor at the University of Western Brittany (Brest, France). Her field of research is contemporary Irish fiction and poetry read through the framework of ecocriticism, new materialisms and flat ontologies. She published in 2021 a monograph on post-Tiger literature entitled *La littérature irlandaise au XXIe siècle: matière, espace, environnement* [Irish Literature in the 21st Century: Matter, Space, Environment].

Catherine Phil MacCarthy is native of Crecora, Co Limerick, and has lived in Dublin since 1987. Her poetry collections include *Daughters of the House* (2019), *The Invisible Threshold* (2012), *Suntrap* (2007), *the blue globe* (1998), *This Hour of the Tide* (1994), and a novel, *One Room an Everywhere* (2003). She is a former editor of *Poetry Ireland Review* (1998/99) and received The Lawrence O'Shaughnessy Award for Irish Poetry in 2014.

Celia De Fréine writes in many genres in both Irish and English. Awards for her poetry include the Patrick Kavanagh Award and Gradam Litríochta Chló Iar-Chonnacht. To date she has published nine collections. Her plays and film and television scripts have won numerous awards. Ceannródaí (LeabhairCOMHAR, 2018) her biography of Louise Gavan Duffy won ACIS Duais Leabhar Taighde na Bliana (2019) and was shortlisted for the Irish Book Awards (2018) and Gradam Uí Shuilleabháin (2019). *Cur i gCéill*, her first thriller, published by LeabhairCOMHAR in 2019, was shortlisted for the Irish Book Awards (2020). *An Dara Rogha*, a young adult novel, was published in 2021 by LeabhairCOMHAR. www.celiadefreine.com

Claudia Castro is the author of three books *Adagio para unha viaxe silente* (Follas Novas 2005), *Ser, corazón e boca* (Medulia 2018), *Galicia, o país das marabillas*, which is her first poetry book for children (Galaxia 2019), and is expecting her fourth book to come out in 2022. Her poetry has been collected in anthologies such as *Letras Novas* (AELG 2007) and she has collaborated with the musician Fernando Vázquez Arias, who has composed a series of musical pieces for her poems. She has various degrees in Journalism, English Studies and Sociology. 'Claudia Castro' is the pen name of Mercedes González.

Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin was born in 1942 in Cork, she taught English Renaissance literature at Trinity College, Dublin from 1966 to 2011. She was Ireland Professor of Poetry from 2016-19. She has published eleven collections of poetry; the latest, *The Mother House*, received the Irish Times/ Poetry Now award in 2019. Her *Collected Poems* appeared in 2020 from Gallery Press and was awarded the Pigott Prize at the Listowel Writers' Week in 2021. She has published translations of poetry from several languages, most recently *Danta Antonella Anedda*, translated from Italian into Irish, published by Cois Life in 2019. *Lucina Schynning in Silence of the Nicht* (poems translated into Chinese) was published by Sichuan Ethnic Publishing Company, Chengdu, in 2020, when she was awarded the 1573 International Poetry Prize at the International Festival of Poetry and Liquor in Luzhou, Sichuan Province. She was one of four founding editors, with her late husband Macdara Woods, Pearse Hutchinson and Leland Bardwell, of the literary magazine *Cyphers*, and remains its principal editor.

Emer Lyons is a postdoctoral fellow in Irish Studies at the Centre for Irish and Scottish Studies at the University of Otago. Her critical and creative writing has been published worldwide in *Meridians, College Literature, The Journal of New Zealand Literature, Poetry Ireland Review, The Stinging Fly* and more.

Gisele Giandoni Wolkoff is an associate professor at the Fluminense Federal University (UFF) in Volta Redonda, Rio de Janeiro. Author of three solo books of poetry, she has organized and translated anthologies such as *Poem-ing Beyond Borders: ten contemporary Irish and Portuguese women poets* (Coimbra: Palimage, 2011) and *American Plural Voices* (Curitiba: CRV, 2015). Member of the Centre for Translation and Creation (NTC) at UFF, the Group for Adaptation and Translation Studies (G.R.E.A.T.) and the Group for the Study of Asian Art (GEAA). Coordinator of the project Culture and Arts in the southern region of Rio: memory and history, funded by Carlos Chagas Filho Foundation for Supporting Research in the State of Rio de Janeiro (FAPERJ).

Grace Wells was born in London in 1968, and moved to rural Tipperary in 1991. Nature, spirit of place and ecological concern have been large themes in her writing ever since the publication of her debut children's novel *Gyrfalcon* (O'Brien Press, 2002), which won the Eilís Dillon Best Newcomer Award and was an International White Ravens Choice. Her debut poetry collection *When God has been Called Away to Greater Things* (Dedalus Press, 2010), won the Rupert and Eithne Strong Best First Collection Award, and was shortlisted for the London Festival Fringe New Poetry Award. With her second poetry collection *Fur* (Dedalus Press, 2015), Wells moved more deeply into eco-poetics and eco-feminism. In 2018 Grace Wells moved to County Clare, which has informed her new work with a coastal, marine light. Many poems for her latest book, *The Church of the Love of the World* (May 2022) are accompanied by eco-poetry-films to be found on her website www.gracewellslittlesanctuary.com.

Graça Capinha teaches at the School of Arts and Humanities (Departament of Languages, Literatures e Cultures/Section of Anglo- American Studies) and she is senior researcher at the Center for Social Studies (Humanities, Migration, and Peace Studies Research Group) at the University of Coimbra. With an education background in American Studies, her most recent work focuses on contemporary poetry and poetics (namely, on Portuguese emigration literature and questions of identity), literary theory, the avant-garde and the politics of language and literature, translation studies, and creative writing.

Hitomi Nakamura received an MPhil in Irish Writing from Trinity College Dublin (2012) and a PhD in English from Ritsumeikan University (2014). She is now an associate professor at the College of Letters at Ritsumeikan University. She lives in Kyoto, Japan.

Jean O'Brien graduated on the Trinity College Creative Writing Programme and was a founding member of the celebrated Dublin Writers' Workshop. She has been involved in teaching creative writing (including poetry and short story) to both adults and children for many years, and is a tutor on the Carlow, Pittsburge College's MFA programme She has six full collections of poetry published: *The Shadow Keeper* (Salmon Poetry 1997) *Dangerous Dresser* (Bradshaw Books 2005) *Lovely Legs* (Salmon 2009), *Merman* (Salmon 2012), *Fish on a Bicycle* (Salmon 2016) and her latest just published this

February *Stars Burn Regardless* (Salmon 2022) She has won a number of awards including: The Fish International Poetry Award and the highly prestigious Arvon International Poetry Award (UK). She was awarded a Kavanagh fellowship in 2017/18. For the month of November 2021 she was poet in residence in the Centre Culturel Irelandais in Paris. www.jeanobrienpoet.ie

Jorge Rodríguez Durán is member of the group of competitive reference Discourse & Identity at the University of Santiago de Compostela, and also a member of the research group Crosswinds (NUI Galway, Moore Institute). As a poet, he was runner up the in the III Mazarelos Literary Award with the collection *O sentido común*. Since then, he has published his own texts in the poetry leaflet *Manual de estilo* (Leite Edicións, 2019), the anthology *Poesía galega novísima* (Urutau, 2020), and in literary journals such as *Dorna, Grial* and the *Sermos Galiza* literary supplement. Most recently, he has published his first poetry collection *Cosmo(a)gonía* (Edicións Fetiche, 2021) and has also contributed to the anthology *The Multilingual Mermaid* (The Gallery Press, 2021) translating poems by Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill into Spanish and Galician.

José A. Huguenin was born in Cantagalo, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. He is PhD in Physics and Associate Professor at Fluminense Federal University in Volta Redonda, where he lives. Poet and prose writer, he won several literary awards for poetry and short stories. His literary texts have been published in several anthologies. He is the author of *Vintém* (2013) *Experimentos poéticos* (2016), *Koiah* (2019) and *Poemas de tempos de cólera* (2021), *De manga a jiló provei na terra onde me batizei* (2014), *A parede & outros contos* (2015) and *Vidas sertanejas* (2021) amongst others. The selection of poems "O movimento das palavras" was published in 2015 in *Revista Brasileira*, by the Brazilian Academy of Letters. Huguenin is the current president of the Academy of Letters of Volta Redonda (AVL).

Keith Payne is a graduate of the M.Phil. in Creative Writing from the Oscar Wilde Centre for Irish Writing, Trinity College, Dublin. His debut collection of poems, Broken Hill, was published in 2015 by Lapwing Publications. He is the 2021 John Broderick Writer in Residence and was the Ireland Chair of Poetry Bursary Award winner 2015-2016. Poet, translator and editor, he has published seven collections to date of original poetry and poetry in translation and currently shares his time between Dublin and Vigo. He has set up the programme La Malinche Readings, bringing Galician poets to read in Ireland and Irish poets to read in Spain.

Máighréad Medbh has published eight books of poetry and one of nonfiction, and her work has been included in many major Irish and international anthologies. Her latest book is *Imbolg* (Arlen House, 2020), a double collection that includes a poetic *Lockdown Diary* of fifty pieces. Máighréad has been widely known as a performance poet since the 1990s, and one of her concerns is textual embodiment. Other interests are narrative and thematic sequences and, currently, poetic essay. Her prose work, *Savage Solitude* (2013), researches

and performs a solitary mind. Narrative verse includes: *Tenant* (1999), a historical fiction of the Irish famine; and *Parvit of Agelast* (2016), a verse allegory of social control and ecological collapse, informed by the art of Pauline Bewick, and shortlisted for the Pigott Prize in 2017. Other work includes writing for children, fiction (online as ebooks), a multitude of workshops, curation of events, and an online essay-blog monthly from 2012 -2020. Máighréad has an MA in Poetry Studies from DCU and is currently working on a creative-critical PhD. www.maighreadmedbh.ie

Manuela Palacios is Titular Professor of English at the University of Santiago de Compostela in Spain. She has directed five research projects on contemporary Irish and Galician literature that have been funded by the Spanish Ministry of Science and the European Union. She has edited and co-edited several books in relation to this topic: *Pluriversos* (2003), *Palabras extremas* (2008), *Writing Bonds* (2009), *Creation, Publishing and Criticism* (2010), *To the Winds Our Sails* (2010), *Forked Tongues* (2012), *Six Galician Poets* (2016), *Migrant Shores* (2017) and *Ανθολογία Νέων Γαλικιανών Ποιητών - Antoloxía de Poesía Galega Nova* (2019). Her other publications include translations of European and Arabic poetry and fiction, a monograph on Virginia Woolf's pictorial imagery, Shakespeare's Richard III, and articles on ecocriticism.

Marcel De Lima Santos is a Ph.D. in Literary Studies from the University of Nottingham, England (2003). He is currently Associate Professor of Literatures in English at the Federal University of Minas Gerais. He has experience in the area of Letters, having written diverse books, translations and scientific articles in the U.S.A., Australia and the U.K. He works mainly in the areas of Literatures in English, Religion, Poetry, Comparative Literature and Ethnopoetics.

Marcos Hernandez is an assistant lecturer and PhD candidate at the University of La Laguna (Spain). After obtaining his Master's degree in Advanced English Studies at the University of Santiago de Compostela in 2019, his research profile has focused on the symbolic representation of trauma, silence and "the unsaid" as well as the depiction of time and chronology in contemporary British and Irish poetry and drama. Following the premises posited by these fields, these thematic questions have been applied to the works of poets such as W.B. Yeats, Seamus Heaney, Paul Muldoon, Annemarie Ní Churreáin, Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin, Kimberly Campanello, and Eavan Boland, playwrights such as Harold Pinter, Tom Stoppard and Brian Friel, and topics such as the events associated to the Irish Mother and Baby Homes. He has been awarded a collaboration scholarship in the Department of English and German Studies and the Award for Excellence in Academic Performance at the University of La Laguna. He is currently working on his PhD dissertation on the typologies of silence present in the works of the English poet Philip Larkin.

Marilar Aleixandre (María Pilar Jiménez Aleixandre) has a forked tongue, split between literature and research on argumentation and critical thinking; both are feminist. She has authored poetry, full of wild thicket (*Desmentindo a primavera, Abecedario de árbores,* or *Desescribindo*), and rebellious animals (*Ovella descarreirada*), which has received awards as the Esquío to *Catálogo de velenos*, and the Caixanova-PEN 2007 to *Mudanzas*, a feminist rewriting of the *Metamorphoses*, reprinted in *Mudanzas e outros velenos* (Shiftings and other poisons, Galaxia, 2017). Her poetry is translated in several collections. Her fiction has been extensively awarded: *the Blanco Amor to As malas mulleres* (Galaxia, 2021); the *Álvaro Cunqueiro to A Compañía clandestina de contrapublicidade, or the Xerais to Teoría do caos*; short stories collection, as *Lobos nas illas* (in Spanish Lobos en las islas, 2022; Arde) about complex family relationships, and *O coitelo en novembro*: beware of novelists, you never know who is the author, who the character. She is also author of young adult fiction about conflicts: *A expedición do Pacífico* (Galician Critics Award 1995), *A cabeza de Medusa* (in English Head of Medusa, Small Stations Press, 2019), about the social rape after the physical one awarded the Caixa Galicia and White Ravens, or the Raíña Lupa to *A filla do minotauro* (2018). Since 2017 she is a member of the Real Academia Galega. twitter @MarilarAleix; www.marilar.galx

Marina Bertani Gazola has a Master degree in Letters from the Federal University of Parana. She is a translator and works as a researcher for the project "Culture and arts in the southern region of Rio: memory & history", funded by FAPERJ. She has published translations of contemporary American and Irish poets and her academic interests are Irish Studies, Translation Studies and Teaching.

Mario Murgia is a poet, translator, and full professor of English at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM). Among his publications are the books *Lines writ in Water. The Influence of Paradise Lost on Byron, Keats and Shelley* (UNAM, 2017), *Singularly Remote. Essays on Poetries* (MadHat Press, 2018), *May the World Forgive. An Anthology of Poetry* (AliosVentos, 2019), and in translation, *Do I know You? The Poetry of Ben Mazer* (UNAM, 2019). He has translated into Spanish the work of poets such as John Milton, Edgar Allan Poe, Adrienne Rich, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Eavan Boland, Alastair Reid, and James Joyce, among many others. Murgia is co-editor, with Angelica Duran, of the volume Global Milton and Visual Art (Lexington Books, 2021). Forthcoming is *The Green Leaf of Language. Contemporary Anglo-Irish Poetry*, an e-volume which he has compiled and edited for UNAM's School of Philosophy and Literature.

Mary O'Donnell holds a PhD in Creative Writing from UCC and has taught writing and literature at many institutions, including Carlow University Pittsburgh, Maynooth University, Galway University and the University of Sao Paulo, Brazil. Prose and poetry writer, her many collections include *Unlegendary Heroes* (Salmon 1998), *Those April Fevers* (Ark Publications 2015), *Massacre of the Birds* (Salmon 2020). A collection of essays on her work came out in 2018, *Giving Shape to the Moment: the Art of Mary O'Donnell,*

Poet, Novelist, Short-story Writer (Peter Lang), edited by Prof. Elena Jaime de Pablos. She has completed a new novel and is a member of Ireland's affiliation of artists, Aosdana. www.maryodonnell.com

Mary O'Malley was born in Connemara and educated at University College Galway. She lived in Lisbon for eight years and taught at the Universidade Nova there. She served several years on the council of Poetry Ireland and was on the Committee of the Cuirt International Poetry Festival for eight years. She was the author of its educational programme. She taught on the MA programmes for Writing and Education in the Arts at NUI Galway for ten years, held the Chair of Irish Studies at Villanova University in 2013, and has held Residencies in Paris, New York, Trinity College Dublin and the University of Limerick. She has been active in Environmental education for twenty years with a specific interest in the Sea and Bogland, working with a team of marine scientists and musicians. In the early 1990's, she co-organised a Province wide schools programme, arising out of her work on the organising committee of an international Conference on demilitarisation of the Ocean, held in NUIG. She has published nine books of poetry, including Valparaiso arising out of her Residency on the national marine research ship. Playing the Octopus and her latest book of poems, Gaudent Angeli are also published by Carcanet. She has also worked on poetry translation from Irish, Spanish, Portuguese and Catalan. She is a member of Aosdana and has won a number of awards for her poetry. She writes for RTE Radio and broadcasts her work regularly. She has been Writer-in-Residence at NUI Galway, and the University of Limerick, and has held the Chair of Irish Studies in Villanova University in Philadelphia. She lectures and teaches widely, in the U.S. and Europe, particularly in Paris and in various parts of Spain. She is working on a collection of essays on place, and a new book of poems. She is being awarded an Honorary Doctorate by Galway University this Summer.

Michelle Andressa Alvarenga de Souza is a lecturer in Anglo-Irish literature and culture at the University of Brasília and a PhD candidate in Irish literature at the University of São Paulo. She holds a Master's degree in Modern Languages and Literature from the University of Turin (Italy) and a BA in English Language and Literature from the University of Brasília. She is currently researching Irish contemporary theatre. michelle.alvarenga@unb.br/michelle.alvarenga@usp.br

Mirian Ruffini is a Professor of Higher Education at the Federal University of Technology in Parana (UTFPR) Campus Pato Branco, Department and Coordination of Modern Languages and Literature, DALET/COLET. She works for the Post-Graduate Program in Linguistics and Literature at UTFPR - Campus Pato Branco (PPGL). Ruffini holds a PhD in Translation Studies, MA in Modern Languages and Literature and she is a specialist in English Language and Literature. She has an Undergraduate Degree in Portuguese and English Languages and Teaching. Areas of interest: Literary Translation, Translation Studies, English Language and Corresponding Literature, Comparative Literature.

Moya Cannon is a recipient of the Brendan Behan Award and the O'Shaughnessy Award, she was 2011 Heimbold Professor of Irish Studies at Villanova University. She has been editor of Poetry Ireland Review and director of the International Writers' Course at NUIG Galway. Born in Dunfanaghy, Co. Donegal, she writes poems that depict the northwest and west of Ireland, nature and our mysterious relationship with the natural world and our past. Her 'Collected Poems', published by Carcanet Press, Manchester (2021), brings together poems from six previous collections, *Oar* (1990), *The Parchment Boat* (1997), *Carrying the Songs* (1907), *Hands* (2011), *Keats Lives* (2015) and *Donegal Tarantella* (2019). Bilingual selections of her work have been published in Spanish, Portuguese and German. She studied history and politics at University College, Dublin (B.A.) and International Relations at Corpus Christi College, Cambridge (M.Phil).

Pilar Villar-Argáiz is a senior lecturer of British and Irish Literatures in the Department of English at the University of Granada and the General Editor of the major series "Studies in Irish Literature, Cinema and Culture" in Edward Everett Root Publishers. She is the author of the books *Eavan Boland's Evolution as an Irish Woman Poet: An Outsider within an Outsider's Culture* (Edwin Mellen Press, 2007) and *The Poetry of Eavan Boland: A Postcolonial Reading* (Academica Press, 2008). She has published extensively on contemporary Irish poetry and fiction, in relation to questions of gender, race, migration and interculturality. Her edited collections include *Literary Visions of Multicultural Ireland: The Immigrant in Contemporary Irish Literature* (Manchester University Press, 2014), *Irishness on the Margins: Minority and Dissident Identities* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), *Secrecy and Community in 21st-Century Fiction* (Bloomsbury, 2021), the special issue of *Irish Studies Review* (entitled "Irish Multiculturalism in Crisis", co-edited with Jason King, 2015), and the special issue of *Nordic Irish Studies* (entitled "Discourses of Inclusion and Exclusion: Artistic Renderings of Marginal Identities in Ireland", 2016). Villar-Argáiz is currently the Chairperson of AEDEI (the Spanish Association for Irish Studies) and Member of the Executive Board of EFACIS (the European Federation of Associations and Centres of Irish Studies).

Rafael Teles da Silva is a M.A. candidate for the program on Translation Studies, he is licensed in Chemistry, Fluminense Federal University (UFF). Coorganizer and co-author of the I UFF Seminar of Teaching Experiences During the Pandemic, he also coauthored the VI Jornada de Estudos Irlandeses IRELAND ´N TRANS-LATION(S) 2017, "Para Uma Educação Sustentável: ecopoesia em transdisciplinaridade — a região sul-fluminense" published by Eduff in 2019, and "From Globalisms to Regionalisms: the poetry of the southern region of the state of Rio de Janeiro", published by Fafire in 2017. He is part of the G.R.E.A.T. (Translation and Adaptation Studies Group) at the University of Sao Paulo and has researched for the project Culture and Arts: the southern region of Rio, funded by FAPERJ.

Samuel Delgado Pinheiro has a M.A. in Literary Studies from the Federal University of Sao Paulo, he is also Bachelor of Science in Journalism, Licensed in Portuguese and Spanish Studies. With a graduate degree in Literary Theory by the Pontifical Catholic University of São Paulo, he currently develops his PhD in Linguistic and Literary Studies in English at the University of Sao Paulo, Sao Paulo, Brazil. He is the author of articles and essays on Literature and Poetry that have been published in Brazil and abroad, as well as *Album* (2019) his first poetry book.

Theo Dorgan was born in Cork in 1953 and lives in Dublin. He is a poet, novelist, prose writer, documentary screenwriter, editor, translator and broadcaster. His poetry collections include *The Ordinary House of Love* (Salmon Poetry 1991); *Rosa Mundi* (Salmon Poetry 1995); and *Sappho's Daughter* (Wave Train Press 1998). *Days Like These* (with Tony Curtis and Paula Meehan) was published in 2007 by Brooding Heron Press, Waldron Island WA, in the USA. In 2008 Dedalus Press published *What This Earth Cost Us*, reprinting Dorgan's first two collections with some amendments. *After Greek* (Dedalus Press 2010), his most recent collections are *Nine Bright Shiners* (Dedalus Press 2014) and *Orpheus* (Dedalus Press 2018). He has published selected poems in Italian, *La Case ai Margini del Mundo*, (Faenza, Moby Dick, 1999), and an Italian translation of Greek appeared as Ellenica from Edizioni Colibris, Ferrara, in 2011. From the same publisher came *Nove Lucenti Corpi* Celesti (2017), a translation of *Nine for the Nine Bright Shiners*. *La Hija de Safo*, a Spanish translation of *Sappho's Daughter*, was published by Poesía Hiperión, Madrid, in 2001. A combined translation of Orpheus and Greek was published by To Rodakio, Athens, as *Ellinika-Orfeas* in 2020. He has published three books by the Syrian poet Maram al Masri in translation: *Barefoot Souls* (Arc, UK, 2015), *Liberty Walks Naked* (Southword, Cork, 2017) and *The Abduction* (Southword, 2020). *Bailéid Giofógacha*, his translation into Irish Gaelic of Lorca's *Romancero Gitano*, was published by Coiscéim, Dublin, in 2020.

Thomas McCarthy was born in Cappoquin, Co. Waterford in 1954. Educated at the local Convent of Mercy and at University College Cork. He is the author of *The First Convention* (1978), which won the Patrick Kavanagh Award, *The Sorrow-Garden*(1981), *The Non-Aligned Storyteller* (1984), *The Lost Province*(1996), *Pandemonium* (2016), short-listed for the Irish Times Poetry Now award, and *Prophecy* (2019). He has published two novels, *Without Power* (1991) and *Asya and Christine* (1992) and a memoir, *Gardens of Remembrance* (1998). He is a former editor of *Poetry Ireland Review* and 1994-1995 Humphrey Professor of English at Macalester College, Minnesota. His poetry journals*, Poetry, Memory and the Party*, were published by the distinguished Gallery Press in 2022. He is winner of the Alice Hunt Bartlett Prize, The O'Shaughnessy Prize for Poetry and the Annual Literary Award of the Ireland Funds. He lives in Cork with his wife Catherine and they have two adult children, Kate-Inez and Neil.

Sven Kretzschmar is a poet from the southwest of Germany, and a philosopher specialising in medical ethics. He has read Analytic Philosophy and English at Saarland University,

Modern and Contemporary European Philosophy at the University of Luxembourg and Medical Ethics at University College Dublin. His poetry has been published widely in Europe and overseas, among other outlets with *Poetry Jukebox* in Belfast, in *Writing Home. The 'New Irish' Poets* (Dedalus Press, 2019), *Poets Meet Politics* (Hungry Hill Writing, 2020), *Hold Open the Door* (UCD Press, 2020), *Voices 2020* (Cold River Press, 2020), *Voices 2021* (Cold River Press, 2021) and *100 Words of Solitude* (Rare Swan Press, 2021), in *The Irish Times, Das Gedicht, Loch Raven Review, The Bangor Literary Journal, Studi Irelandesi, Culture Matters* and *South Florida Poetry Journal*. Sven is the illustrator of Grimwig and Bert Borrone's *Perpetual Motion*, both authored by Bert Hornback. Academic publications have appeared in T*hink Pieces. Food for Thought* (a festschrift) and are forthcoming in *Theoria and Praxis* and others. A former coordinator of the European Federation of Associations and Centres of Irish Studies and of the Leuven Centre for Irish Studies in Belgium, he is now working in the healthcare sector in Germany. He is the current chairman of the German-Irish Society Saarland.

Vanesa Roldán Romero is a PhD candidate currently working on her doctoral dissertation under the supervision of Dr. Manuela Palacios González and Dr. Margarita Carretero González. Roldán Romero's main research interests include contemporary Irish and American literature, ecocriticism, posthumanism, feminism, and nonhuman ethics.

Virginie Trachsler is a PhD candidate at the Université Sorbonne Nouvelle in Paris, she is preparing a dissertation under the supervision of Professor Clíona Ní Ríordáin. Provisionally entitled "Ambassadors to the silent worlds: the writing of objects in the poetry of Irish women poets", this research project focuses on the poetry of Eavan Boland, Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin, Paula Meehan, Vona Groarke, Sinéad Morrissey and Doireann Ní Ghríofa. She completed both her Bachelor's and Master's Degree at the Ecole Normale Supérieure de Lyon, while also spending a year as a Language Assistant at Trinity College Dublin and one as a French Lectrice in Oxford.

Yolanda Castaño is a poet, essayist, editor and curator, she is director of the International Writer's residence Residencia Literaria 1863 in A Coruña, Galicia. One of the most international names in Galician contemporary poetry, she has published six poetry collections in Galician and Spanish (Depth of field and Second Tongue among the last ones), she has poems translated into more than 30 different languages, but also poetry volumes in English, Italian, French, Macedonian, Serbian and Armenian. She has participated in festivals and literary manifestations all over 40 countries of Europe, America, Asia and the north of Africa. A finalist of the National Poetry Prize, she is the Winner of the National Critics Award, the Espiral Maior Poetry Award, the Fundación Novacaixagalicia Prize, the Ojo Crítico (best poetry book by a young author in Spain), the Estandarte Award (best poetry collection in Spain in 2020) and the 'Author of the Year' by the Galician Booksellers' Association. She has been awarded international fellowships including the

IWTCR in Rhodes, Villa Waldberta (Munich), the HIP-Beijing (China), Hawthornden Castle (Scotland), Valparaíso Foundation (Andalusia) and Saari (Finland). She is also the author of translations, literary editions, biographies, history of Galician Poetry and poetry books for children. She is a relevant cultural activist too, regularly organizing festivals, literary and translation workshops and the only international monthly readings series in all Spain, all of them hosting local to international poets since 2009. She has mixed poetry with music, visual arts, video, architecture, film in 360º, comic, dance and even cookery, being awarded for that too.

Yolanda López López is a poet, artist and Galician translator who was born in Ourense. She got an English Degree at Santiago de Compostela University, a Senior Technician one in Tourism and Commerce and a certificate in Arts and Painting. She was also a member of some predoctoral research projects about Northern American literature (Virginia University, Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Centro Ramón Piñeiro, Universidad Complutense de Madrid). She took part in several painting exhibitions in A Coruña. She is the authorof five poetry books in Galician language: *Verdugos impolutos* (Concello de Rábade, 2005), *Obertura sen heroe* (Follas Novas, 2006), *Moralla* (Follas Novas, 2013), *Tántalo* (Concello de Negreira, 2014), *A secuestradora de océanos* (Urutau Editora, 2019) and four poetry books in Spanish: *Grietas* (Visión Libros, 2012), *Temblor fiero* (Lastura, 2013), *Con el tambor del viento* (Huerga & Fierro, 2015) and *Madrid habita en mi memoria* (La palabra inquieta, Nuevos Ekkos, 2020). Rinoceronte House will publish a collection of Emily Brontë's poems translated by her.