

UNIVERSIDAD DE GRANADA

DEPARTAMENTO DE FILOGÍAS INGLESA Y ALEMANA



NEW TERRITORY FOR THE IRISH WOMAN IN EAVAN

BOLAND'S POETRY:

A FEMINIST AND POSTCOLONIAL APPROACH

PILAR VILLAR ARGÁIZ

GRANADA, 2005

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Tesis presentada para la obtención del Grado de Doctor (con la mención de “Doctorado Europeo”) por D^a Pilar Villar Argáiz, Licenciada en Filología Inglesa por la Universidad de Granada, bajo la dirección de la Dra. Encarnación Hidalgo Tenorio.

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Tutora y Directora de la Tesis Doctoral

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Autora de la Tesis Doctoral

Granada, 2005

“[W]e were outsiders using someone else’s language, fighting our way through someone else’s history, finding ourselves in the space between exclusion and possession, [...] women have been outsiders within an outsider’s culture.” (Interview with Allen-Randolph 1999b: 304)

A Jose

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1. INTRODUCTION

1. Introduction

This study was born out of my initial contact with Ireland back in 1998. My interest in Eavan Boland's poetry started when I had the possibility of spending an academic year in the National University of Ireland (NUI), Galway, as an Erasmus student. There, I attended a seminar on contemporary Irish poetry, a seminar which focused almost exclusively on male poetry. Out of twenty lessons, only three of them were devoted to women's poetry, and one of those lessons concentrated on that by Eavan Boland. This imbalance did not surprise me. For years, I was accustomed to hearing about English literature with writers such as William Shakespeare, John Milton, Samuel Johnson, William Blake, William Wordsworth, John Keats, Charles Dickens, Walt Whitman, some of them of Irish origin, such as W. B. Yeats, James Joyce, and Samuel Beckett. With some exceptions (Mary Wollstonecraft, Elizabeth Barret Browning, Emily Brontë, Virginia Woolf, Emily Dickinson, and Sylvia Plath), my knowledge of English and American literature (there is not a single subject dedicated exclusively to Irish literature in the degree of English Philology at Granada University) was mainly based on the well-known andocentric literary canon of prominent poets, playwrights, and novelists. When I first read Eavan Boland's poetry at NUI, I discovered that women's poetry was an exciting field of studies which was waiting to be explored. Boland's poetry had awakened my interest in poetry in general. There is something about her poems, her anxieties as a woman, her 'unliterary' concerns (which I was not used to reading in literary texts) and her reaction towards the exclusion of women from historical and literary fields, that increased my curiosity to read more about her poetry and find out the source of her anguish, or the extent to which that reaction was justified. Needless to say, my love for Boland's country of birth, Ireland, for its people and the few pieces of literature I had read until then, also increased my interest to know more about the culture and literature of this nation. Thus, during my stay in Galway, I bought one of Boland's volumes of poetry, *Night Feed* (1982), a book which I read and reread several times before coming back to Spain.

Once I finished my degree, and with the unconditional help and constant encouragement of Dr. Encarnación Hidalgo Tenorio, I started to investigate an area I find fascinating. In September 2001, I was awarded a grant by the University of Granada, which allowed me to start my research into Boland's poetry. Five months later, I received an FPU (beca predoctoral de Formación de Profesorado Universitario) by the Spanish Ministry of Education. These two scholarships increased my motivation and secured me the necessary funding for more profound investigation. During the summers of 2001 and 2002, I went back to Ireland to do research in the most outstanding libraries of the country, University College Cork and University College Dublin. Furthermore, I attended two summer courses ("Turning Points in Irish Identity" at University College Cork and "Myth and Reality" at University College Dublin), where I had the possibility of

meeting writers such as Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill, Theo Dorgan, and Gerry Murphy, and discussing Irish poetry with prominent scholars such as Declan Kiberd, Anne Fogarty, and Eibhear Walshe. By then, I had already defended my MA Thesis, entitled "New Territory for the Irish Woman in Eavan Boland's Poetry: Feminine, Feminist, and Female Phases in the Evolution of an Irish Woman Writer". In this preliminary study of Boland's work, my intention was to analyze her poetic career from a feminist perspective exclusively. But it was during my stay at King Alfred's College, Winchester, from February to June, 2003, that the germ of my work started to flourish. Under the invaluable supervision of Prof. Andrew Blake, and after attending the master's course "Postcolonial Fiction and Theory", conducted by Dr. Mick Jardine, I redirected the course of my investigation, and I confirmed my decision to approach Boland's work from a postcolonial, and not merely feminist, perspective. Therefore, my decision to entitle my thesis "New Territory for the Irish Woman in Eavan Boland's poetry: a Feminist and Postcolonial Approach" is not whimsical, as the perspective I am adopting to analyze the formation of a more confident female voice in Boland's literary production is dual. In June 2004, and during my attendance at the 19th International James Joyce Symposium celebrated in the National College of Ireland, Dublin, between the 12th and 19th June 2004, I had the privileged opportunity of arranging a meeting with Eavan Boland, with the prospect of talking to her just for a few minutes. What was initially conceived as a rather informal coffee-time meeting turned out to be a captivating and exciting two-hour conversation. Her overpowering charisma, as well as her essential comments, have not only strengthened my relationship with her poetry, but infused me with the necessary courage and energy to finish the course of my thesis and to believe in what I was doing. During the summer of 2004, I went back to Ireland, to do research at the University of Limerick, under the generous supervision of Dr. Carolina Amador, where I finished compiling the biographical material necessary for my work.

As a Spanish researcher distant both geographically and culturally from Ireland, I began my study on the Irish woman poet Eavan Boland with some limitations.¹ I am an outsider dealing with a subject which is still very controversial. The conflict for women writers in establishing their own literary tradition, and their exclusion from the literary history, seem to have been more problematic in Ireland than in other countries (Fogarty 1994: 92). The country's particular cultural and political conditions have reinforced the hostility of Irish society towards women writers even

¹ In this study, I will employ the category 'woman writer/poet' to refer to Eavan Boland. I acknowledge, nevertheless, that some Irish women, such as Katie Donovan and Ruth Hooley, have seen this nomenclature as dangerous and problematic, because it aggravates the problem of marginalization, by concentrating on an "isolating spotlight" (Haberstroh 1996: 7, 12). Eavan Boland herself has no problem with the compound 'woman writer': "historically I knew I would have to pick up the tab as a woman writer [...], to be effective and useful as an Irish woman poet you have to be able to pick up the tab" (interview with O'Malley 1999: 255). Therefore, and relying on Boland's words, from here on I will use this label.

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as late as in the last decades of the twentieth century. In his preface to *Heathcliff and the Great Hunger*, Eagleton (1995: ix) claims: “For an Irish writer to intervene these days in debates over Irish culture and history is always a risky business; for an outsider it is well-nigh suicidal”.

Accepting the risk, I intend in the present study to deal with some issues which have not been treated as they deserved, probably because the Irish literary tradition has been regarded as the ‘untouchable’ foundation on which this nation is built. I will focus my study on the work of Eavan Boland, who is considered the most important contemporary woman poet in Ireland (Gelpi 1999: 210). Boland has influenced a whole generation of women writers who recognize women as active authors of their own texts, and not merely decorative emblems or passive objects, as some traditional national canons have advocated. It is my hope that my foreign perspective will open new insights into a field of study that has not been sufficiently explored, and that it will enrich some excellent research on this subject now being done in Ireland, the United States, and Spain as well (Haberstroh 1996; Praga 1996; González Arias 2000b; García García 2002; Hagen & Zelman 2004).

I am particularly disposed towards a reading of Boland’s poetry as determined by Ireland’s status as a postcolonial country. The assumption upon which this study is based is similar to that which underlines Gerry Smyth’s *Decolonization and Criticism* (1998: 9): due to the colonial relationship between Ireland and England, much of contemporary Irish literature can be usefully read as a strategic cultural activity of decolonization. It is difficult to postulate when Ireland became postcolonial. What is clear is that there are three significant moments when the country enters a new stage of political independence: the Anglo-Irish Treaty accepted by the Dáil in January 1922, which created an Irish Free State of twenty-six counties; Eamon de Valera’s constitution of 1937, which more explicitly declared Ireland’s sovereignty; and the declaration of the Republic of Ireland and its disaffiliation from the British Commonwealth in April 1949. Probably because of the recent history of these events, Irish writers such as Eavan Boland are still concerned with the colonial legacy. The general belief held by postcolonial critics is that colonialism does not finish with the withdrawal of the foreign rulers from Ireland. For many Irishmen and women, the post-independence period did not bring liberation, but reinforced encoded forms of imperialism (Lloyd 1987: x; Lloyd 1993: 113; Deane 1994: 84; Kiberd 1996: 32; Smyth 1998: 92-93). The reasons put forward to justify this are the following: (1) the national bourgeoisie has perpetuated many power structures of the colonial government; (2) the postcolonial subject has found difficulty in imagining new modes of thought beyond those which structured the dominant discourses of imperialism and nationalism; (3) the persistence of British rule over six counties of Northern Ireland makes the decolonizing programme even more difficult,

mostly for those writers of Northern descent. In this sense, some Irish (postcolonial) critics widely believe that the effects of cultural dependency are still palpable long after the departure of the British military power from the Republic of Ireland, and that this is observed in contemporary Irish literature. As Smyth (1998: 94) argues, Irish identity in the “‘postcolonial’ epoch still depend[s] on its colonial history for a sense of its own reality”; or as Kiberd (1996: 6) puts it, it is “less easy to decolonize the mind than the territory”.

As we will see, the postcolonial debate has awoken the interest of more than one literary critic in Ireland. With their reading of Fanon (1990, 1991), Said (1994, 1995), Bhabha (1995), Spivak (1988a; 1990b; 1993; 1994; 1999), and other postcolonial voices, they have attempted to arrive at an understanding of Irish literature as a postcolonial cultural production. In this thesis, I intend to follow this trend in the Irish academia, embracing postcolonial theories and critiques, inside and outside the Irish academic debate. A reading of such texts is clearly helpful for a comprehensive approach to the work by Eavan Boland. It is my intention to reveal the persistence of decolonialist modes of thought in a poetry which I consider to be effectively postcolonial. Eavan Boland's poetry takes on another perspective if read in the light of postcolonial discussions. The work (its language, subject matter, and address) of this woman poet is infused with an awareness of the historic impact of her own specific kind of colonial- and hence postcolonial-inheritance.

Nevertheless, the postcolonial approach is not sufficient for a comprehensive analysis of a poetry that is certainly shaped by gender issues. As Wilson (1990a: xii) has noted, women in Ireland represent a special complexity, a complexity which is “twofold”, for it encompasses both “their female and national identities”. In fact, women in Ireland have been doubly colonized, both by imperialism and also by a restrictive nationalism which has been fused to Catholicism. As Praga (1996: 243) notes, this colonialism becomes more apparent if we bear in mind the fusion of the feminine and the national in the Irish literary tradition. Irish women's simplification by colonialist and nationalist texts is a constant preoccupation for Boland. In one of her interviews, the woman poet addresses this issue: “[w]e are a postcolonial country. We now have a further postcolonial problem in the way women are perceived” (Consalvo 1992: 98). In a later interview, Eavan Boland defines the reality of Irish women as follows: “we were outsiders using someone else's language, fighting our way through someone else's history, finding ourselves in the space between exclusion and possession, [...] women have been outsiders within an outsider's culture” (Allen-Randolph 1999b: 304). Boland's poetry clearly exposes the consequences of the dual colonialism she sharply criticizes. By virtue of determinant factors such as gender, nationality, and ethnicity, Boland finds that she has been excluded, both as an Irish citizen and also as a woman,

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from the subject position available in the dominant culture. In this sense, the construction and reconstruction of categories such as ‘Irishness’ and ‘womanhood’ become a pressing issue throughout a career as prolific as hers. That is why a postcolonial reading of Boland’s poetry necessarily needs to be complemented by a feminist approach.

In adopting such a joint perspective, it is important to bear in mind that Boland perceives both forms of colonialism (imperialist and patriarchal) as analogous movements. The woman poet has explained her belief that the oppression of women under the powerful impact of nationalism and Catholicism in Ireland is very similar to the oppression the Irish themselves experienced under British rule: “Womanhood and Irishness are metaphors for one another. There are resonances of humiliations, oppression, and silence in both of them and I think you can understand one better by experiencing the other” (interview with Wilson 1990b: 84). This quotation serves to illustrate how Boland unites under the same descriptive procedures both sorts of colonialisms, patriarchal victimization and colonial subordination. In fact, her poetry shows how colonialism is, and can only be, one. The union Boland establishes between women’s and Irish people’s oppression can only be understood if one bears in mind her definition of colonialism. Boland views colonialism as a cultural movement whose damaging effects can be clearly traced through art: firstly, Irish culture has been negatively affected and reshaped by British imperialism; and secondly, Irish poetry has functioned, in its reliance on feminine iconography, as another form of colonialism for women. In an interview with Allen-Randolph (1993b: 125), Boland has argued that “power has just as much to do with a poetic sphere of operation as any other [...], power has operated in the making of canons, the making of taste, the nominating of what poems should represent the age and so on”. In this sense, and as Atfield (1997: 173) notes, colonialism for Boland is defined as “the establishment of ruling power systems by imposition” and how this is reflected in the cultural terrain. Consequently, Boland’s concern with colonialism is with how it has affected artistic representation. By the same token, decolonization for Boland is going to be carried out through the artistic medium: to find freedom as a speaking voice in poetry is the ultimate decolonization she looks for.

With the exception of Meaney (1993a), Atfield (1997), and Fulford (2002a; 2002b), there are no studies which focus on Boland’s poetry from a feminist postcolonial approach. Here and there we find comments such as Reizbaum’s, who notes “the attempts to marginalize Boland’s poetry within an arguably marginalized literature” (1989: 472). Apart from these brief remarks, Boland’s work is never considered within a dual feminist and postcolonial framework. Her work, in this sense, still needs to be regarded as a result of the different amalgams of colonialisms (patriarchal, imperialist, and nationalist) that have affected and still affect contemporary Irish

women. In her essay "Daughters of Colony", Boland (1997e: 18) calls for a "gender-conscious postcolonial critique", a critique that takes into account how Irish women have been colonized in two different ways, by distorting and simplifying images in imperialist and nationalist discourses. It is this form of gender-oriented postcolonial critique that I intend to adopt in my study of Boland's poetry.

In order to assess the configuration of an Irish female identity in her work, I will look into the theorization of identity-formation in the fields of postcolonial and feminist studies. In this sense, in analyzing Boland's work, I will oscillate between theory and its application to her poetry. On the one hand, I will apply the postcolonial postulates by prominent voices such as Albert Memmi (1990), Frantz Fanon (1990, 1991), Edward Said (1994, 1995), Homi Bhabha (1995), Gayatri Spivak (1988a, 1988b, 1990a, 1990b, 1993, 1994, 1996, 1999), and Stuart Hall (1990, 1996a, 1996b, 1997), as well as by other outstanding figures within the Irish academia (e.g. Richard Kearney 1985a, 1985b, 1988a, 1988b, 1997; David Lloyd 1987, 1993, 2003; Colin Graham 1994a, 1994b, 1995/6, 1997, 1999; Gerry Smyth 1995, 1998, 1999, 2000; Luke Gibbons 1996; Declan Kiberd 1996; Sarah Fulford 2000b). On the other hand, I will use the theories proposed by American feminist Elaine Showalter (1999), and also by Hélène Cixous (1981, 1994), Luce Irigaray (1985, 1991), and Julia Kristeva (1981, 1986a, 1986b, 1986c, 1986d), whose work is representative of the main trend in French feminism. Whereas American feminism is more formalist, as it is more concerned with literary discourse and literary analysis, French feminism pays more attention to language as such (with its manifold discursive manifestations), and it is highly influenced by psychoanalysis. In different ways, these postcolonial and feminist theorists advocate hybridity, boundary crossing, and fluidity as the best option to adopt for the postcolonial/gendered subject. Their theoretical perspectives and their interest in questions such as marginalization, resistance, power, nationality, language, culture, place, and identity, can provide useful insight into the political and aesthetic concerns of Boland's poetry.

The first section of this thesis provides an introduction to postcolonial studies. I offer a comprehensive overview of the development of postcolonialism throughout the twentieth century, and I focus on the possibility of approaching Ireland's history and its literature from a postcolonial theoretical perspective.

The second section offers an exhaustive account of the feminist movement as perceived internationally. Focusing on the specific case of Ireland, I also address the social and cultural conditions which have affected women in the twentieth century, and how feminism has evolved at intervals in this country. Understanding Irish women's relegation is essential for gaining insight into Eavan Boland's difficulty in carving an established niche for herself as a poet.

1. Introduction

The third section aims to analyze in broad terms the points of contact between feminist and postcolonial studies. There are strong parallels between both fields of criticism, mainly because they are concerned with how subjects have been marginalized and defined as subordinated 'Others' by colonialism and/or patriarchy.

The fourth section deals with Irish women's position as authors of poems. First of all, I explain how literature, in particular poetry, has been an expression denied to women, an andocentric field that has discouraged some women from expressing themselves through the artistic medium. Secondly, I offer a systematic account of the images of women as developed in the literary tradition, particularly focusing on the Irish national tradition. This section is essential for understanding Boland's revision of the stereotypes of women she views as oppressive and damaging. Last, I also focus on Eavan Boland in relation to other Irish women poets in the twentieth century, and I discuss the difficulties they have encountered in winning acceptance in the national literary panorama, by mentioning some publishing companies and anthologies which have closed their doors to work done by women.

In the fifth section, the scope of my analysis narrows. After introducing the different theoretical formulations as regards those defining features that constitute a text as 'minority' and 'postcolonial', I will explain the different ways in which Boland's work can be labelled 'minor' and 'postcolonial' within the Irish literary tradition.

Finally, I develop what is at the heart of my study: a comprehensive analysis (from a feminist and postcolonial perspective) of Boland's poetry from her initial collections of poetry to her latest ones. I intend to demonstrate that her poetic career follows a certain evolution, from an initial imitation of the main tenets that have shaped the (Irish) literary tradition, to a gradual rejection and subversion of them. Accordingly, I will try to see the extent to which the critical mode developed by Showalter as regards women writers can be applied to Boland's poetry. Showalter (1999: 11-13) defends the existence of three phases in the literary work of a woman artist whose aim is to achieve self-assertion. These three phases, she explains, are applicable to all kinds of subcultures: the 'Feminine' phase, the 'Feminist' phase, and the 'Female' phase. Surprisingly enough, the evolution Showalter traces in the feminine literary tradition is almost identical to that analyzed by Franz Fanon (1990: 31-149) and Albert Memmi (1990: 168-205) in their study of the colonial subject affected by race. Both anti-colonial intellectuals coincide in identifying three phases in the colonial subject's journey towards a satisfactory (cultural) decolonization: a phase of 'Occupation', a phase of a constraining 'Cultural Nationalism', and a final phase of 'Liberation'. I will show that the similarities of these theoretical models indicate that the gendered subject and the colonial subject share in many ways not only the nature of their

oppression but also the methods employed to overcome their marginalized status. Showalter, Memmi, and Fanon's theoretical premises are crucial for an understanding of Boland's decolonization process both as a woman poet, and as an Irish citizen. Even so, I am not proposing here any notional easy fit between their models of decolonization and Boland's poetry. As we will see, Memmi and Fanon neglected salient issues like feminism and, as the example of Eavan Boland immediately demonstrates, their work needs to be viewed critically from a feminist perspective.

Eavan Boland's poetic career is an exemplary illustration of the hesitations and difficulties that haunt and have haunted women poets in Ireland. At the beginning, Boland produces a 'masculine' poetry, hiding her womanhood out of fear of being rejected by Ireland's poetic community. Her initial work takes for granted notions such as 'Irishness' and 'Irish poet'. Boland writes within well-defined parameters that dictate what and how the Irish poem has to communicate. In her intermediate phase, Boland becomes a radical feminist. The main focus at this stage of her literary career is to protest with energy against her own oppression as a woman in a patriarchal and sexist culture, and to defend her own distinctive reality as a gendered subject, previously ignored in her initial poems. Now, Boland takes for granted notions such as 'womanhood', and engages in a revolutionary project according to which this category is defended as a whole and unitary concept. It is not until her mature phase where 'Irishness' and 'womanhood' will be understood as social constructs and not as transcendental and universal notions. As Showalter, Memmi, and Fanon imply in different ways, moving beyond 'gender' and 'race' impositions are the ultimate means how the individual can find (artistic) decolonization. Similarly, Boland's career gradually undermines the (presumably authentic) representations of 'woman' and 'nation' she has inherited. In this sense, the woman poet will scrutinize the foundations upon which imperialist, nationalist, and feminist ideologies have been based in order to justify their claims. Her mature poetry dismantles the belief that the poet has to become a public political figure, a spokesperson who speaks on behalf of an oppressed community. In this sense, and in contrast to her previous two phases, Boland subjects all forms of knowledge and privilege to a process of unravelling: notions such as 'place', 'nation', 'home', and 'womanhood' cannot be defended in essentialist terms, for these notions are not only largely human fictions, but also changeable, relative, and heterogeneous categories. By bringing together Showalter, Memmi, and Fanon's premises with other postcolonial and feminist theorizations of identity, I will demonstrate how gendered and national identities are represented in Boland's mature poetry in terms of fluidity and hybridity. Boland achieves ultimate artistic liberation by crossing gender and national boundaries.

1. Introduction

I do not claim to have a definite reading of Boland's poetry. For me, understanding her poetry in all its complexity is a lifelong work in progress. The effort to probe deeply into its meaning is rewarding, because once we penetrate beneath the superficial level of her poems we can discover the different ways by which an Irish woman poet moves subversively among authoritarian discourses that, in their different ways, have attempted to define the two constituent aspects of Boland's identity: her 'Irishness' and her 'womanhood'.

The more I have studied, the more encouraged I have felt and the fewer limitations I have encountered as an outsider. As Boland (1997e: 10) has claimed, "[t]he attempt to define a colony and its aftermath is as much the property of those who experience it as those who analyze it". More recently, Boland has asserted in an interview the following:

I don't accept that Irish critics are entitled to the final say on an Irish poet, or British critics on a British poet and so on. If they were, if they were the custodians of the final meaning of their own writers, then we wouldn't have Ellman's biography of Joyce, to start with. That's just one example where the outside perspective became a benchmark. There's no way that a local critic can comment definitively on anything but the Irishness or the Britishness, and that may actually obscure the work. [...] Sometimes the critic who doesn't read the local exactly is able to extract some of the essentials more quickly. (Allen-Randolph 1999b: 301-302)

In this dissertation, it is my intention to "extract [...] the essentials" of Boland's poetry, though by no means omitting "the local" element of it.

2. POSTCOLONIALISM AND IRISH STUDIES

2.1. Introduction

This section aims to offer a general overview of the development of postcolonial theory and criticism, and how they have become increasingly popular but, at the same time, controversial within the Irish academic field. Firstly, I will start by defining what the term ‘postcolonial’ has come to signify in current debates. Secondly, I will offer a brief account of the emergence and development of postcolonial debates in the international arena. Thirdly, I will focus on the general objections to postcolonial theory made by critics who view its application to Third World contexts with suspicious eyes. The fourth section aims to analyze the possibility of approaching Ireland’s history from a postcolonial theoretical perspective. Finally, in order to specify what kind of postcolonial approach I am applying in my study of Eavan Boland’s poetry, it is my intention to summarize the main postcolonial strategies of decolonization proposed by different postcolonial theorists and critics.

2.2. Emergence and development of the term

The term ‘postcolonial’ emerged after World War II, when historians and political scientists employed it to identify the post-independence period of former colonies (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin 2002a: 197). The first use of this term is recorded in 1959 when a British newspaper referred to the independence of India (Walder 1998: 3). In the last decades of the twentieth century, it started to be used by academics to investigate the various cultural effects of colonization. Therefore, its original meaning has been expanded to include a wide variety of heterogeneous colonial and postcolonial experiences. The reason why the term maintains its relevance nowadays is due to the critics’ generalized acknowledgement that the colonial experience continues despite the withdrawal of the imperial power (Walder 1998: 3).

The word ‘postcolonial’ has been applied to so many different kinds of historical experiences and geographical regions that it is not surprising that critics like Shohat (1992: 101) and Ahmad (1992: 17) complain that the universal tendencies of postcolonial theory override the heterogeneity of the Third World. A definition of a concept such as ‘Third World’ might be useful here. Boehmer (1995: 9) explains how this term is of European coinage, initially used analogously with ‘third estate’, which meant the dispossessed. The ‘Third World’ came to designate those states distinct from the West (the First World) and the Second World (the Soviet bloc), in the context of the Cold War (ibid). From a strictly geographical point of view, the Third world is constituted by the nation-states of Latin America, the Caribbean, Sub-Saharan Africa, South and Southeast Asia, China, South Africa, and Oceania (Mohanty 1991a: 5). In addition, Latino, Asian, black, and indigenous peoples in the United States, Europe and Australia, also define themselves as

'Third World' people (ibid). Therefore, this collective term, sometimes used interchangeably with 'postcolonial', is often employed without considering geographical parameters. Unsurprisingly, then, critics such as Shohat (1992: 101) and Ahmad (1992: 17) have argued that it is misguided to speak of the 'Third World' and/or the 'postcolonial' world as unified, due to the heterogeneous realities that these terms refer to. As the example of Ireland will suggest, colonialism has been a multifaceted movement, acquiring throughout history many different degrees and forms and, therefore, postcolonialism cannot be perceived homogeneously. Because the term 'postcolonial' as such embraces so many different stories, it is difficult to find a definition that encompasses all its heterogeneity.

Moore-Gilbert (2000: 203) offers a generalizing definition of 'postcolonial' as that field engaged with "the cultural legacy of imperialism". In fact, most critics employ the term to refer to all cultures affected by imperialism from the moment of colonization to the present day. This is the case of Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (2002a: 195), who assert that postcolonialism "is a process in which colonized societies participate over a long period, through different phases and modes of engagement, with the colonizing power, *during* and *after* the actual period of direct colonial rule". I find this definition helpful because, even though Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (2002a) do not include Ireland in their analysis, their employment of this term encompasses diverse cultural productions by colonized people rather than a single and unifying response to colonization. One drawback in their definition, nevertheless, is the fact that they do not analyze those literatures which are not written in English or which are written in indigenous languages. Walder's work (1998) presents a similar deficiency, defining postcolonial as "recent writings in English which have come into being as part of the processes of decolonization" (1998: xii).

Another problem that we can find in current definitions of the term lies in the prefix "post". The problem with this prefix is that it seems to imply that the aftermaths of colonialism in the present context can no longer be perceived (Walder 1998: 189). Smyth (1998: 1), for instance, argues that the appellation of 'post' is inopportune in the Irish context because, even after 1922, Ireland remained locked within imperialist discursive practices and modes of thought. While the proposed new 'Free State' would be self-governing, the retention of a British Governor-General, the requirement for the new body to take an oath of loyalty to the Crown, and the recognition of the existence of Northern Ireland as a separate state make the application of 'post' to Ireland's political independence from the UK problematical. In a desire to avoid these objections, some postcolonial theorists and critics emphasize that this prefix does not have historical connotations that would involve a beginning and an end to the colonial process. This is the case of Bhabha (1995: 4), who asserts that, "if the jargon of our times [...] has any meaning at all, it does not lie in

2. Postcolonialism and Irish studies

the popular use of the ‘post’ to indicate sequentiality – *after*-feminism; or polarity – *anti*-modernism”. Hall (1996b: 253-254) expands the argument by asserting that the ‘post-’ in the ‘postcolonial’ does not merely mean ‘after’ but ‘going beyond’ the colonial, and that it does not refer to the fact that “the ‘after-effects’ of the colonial rule have somehow been suspended”.

Nevertheless, due to the obvious connotations of this prefix, the term ‘postcolonial’ is always haunted by the very chronological development that it seeks to dismantle (McClintock 1995: 10-11). Metaphorically, postcolonialism highlights the historical stages from ‘the pre-colonial’, through ‘the colonial’, to ‘the postcolonial’. In order to overcome this historical imposition, critics have tended to distinguish between ‘postcolonial’ and ‘post-colonial’. The use of the hyphen is intended to emphasize the historical experience of colonialism, to focus on a lineal development that can be perceived diachronically (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin 2002a: 198). In this sense, the hyphenated term means after the colonial period, indicating something that happened after the end of formal colonization. On the other hand, the omission of the hyphen intends to treat this phenomenon more synchronically, and not only focusing on material historical facts. As I am concerned with colonialism in so far as it is still perceived and resisted by certain kinds of Irish subjects (in particular Eavan Boland), I will employ the term without the hyphen. The hyphenated form puts too much emphasis on the notion of historical development, and runs the risk of suggesting that colonialism is over and that the postcolonial individual cannot experience its effects anymore with the same intensity as in the imperial epoch.

2.3. Brief overview of the development of postcolonial studies

Postcolonial theory and criticism, as Walder (1998: 58-59) explains, were part of the decentring movement of post-1960s thought in the West, marked by a general suspicion of familiar liberal humanist conceptions of the individual and society. In this sense, one of the most important features of postcolonial studies is its critique of the Western dominant ideology of humanism and its consequent deconstruction of core concepts like ‘subject’ and ‘identity’ (Moore-Gilbert 2000: 172, Hall 1996b: 248). This deconstruction is prompted by an initial questioning of the pattern of binaries (West/East; Europe/Third World; colonizer/colonized) that has been identified as fundamental to Western thought. Therefore, in its critique of essentialism, postcolonial studies intersect with postmodernism and poststructuralism. Whether in linguistics, literary theory, or philosophy, postcolonial theories seek to dismantle received assumptions in European theories. Slemon (1994: 15) identifies this subversion of Western traditional humanities as the most important academic objective of postcolonial studies.

Although postcolonial studies as an academic field is generally thought to have begun in the second half of the twentieth century, some anti-colonial intellectuals in the beginning of the century attempted to postulate the way for the 'colonized' to evade the cognitive patterns by which their world has been structured. As Hooper (2002: 4) explains, postcolonial theory and writing begins as early as 1939, with the West Indian Aimé Césaire's *Cahiers d'un retour au pays natal*. Césaire's study on the negritude movement of the 1930s and 1940s served as a prelude to later works such as Albert Memmi's *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (1957), and Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) and *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961).

Franz Fanon was born in the French Caribbean island of Martinique in 1925, and studied medicine and psychiatry in France (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin 2002b: 99; Moore-Gilbert 2000: 5). He is well known as a liberationist of the Third World, in particular the Algerian cause. Fanon is such a relevant figure within postcolonial studies because he is one of the first intellectuals to criticize the dual categories of colonizer and colonized, showing their artificial and destructive construction. In *Black Skins, White Masks*, Fanon used his personal experience to explain the feelings of dependency and helplessness of black people in a white world. In analyzing the different ways in which racial discrimination was practiced in the heart of imperial France, Fanon revealed how black people came to share the myths of inferiority created by their white oppressors. His main thesis revolves around the fact that the construction of identity is built on the figure of the 'Other'. He describes the relation between the black and white races, undertaking a psychological analysis very much influenced by Césaire, Adler, Hegel, Freud, Lacan, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Karl Marx (Young 1992: 156). Fanon's theoretical premise is that the category 'white' depends for its stability on its negation 'black' (1991: 231).¹ He characterizes the colonial dichotomy colonizer-colonized as the product of a "manichaeism delirium", which results in the radical division into dual oppositions such as good-evil, true-false, white-black. Fanon shows that this system of binaries is intrinsic to Western (and imperialist) thought. As he explains, 'blackness' is an artificial category created by the white man, and therefore, oppositions such as colonizer and colonized must be deconstructed in order to achieve decolonization. Breaking race boundaries means the ultimate freedom and liberation for the individual. As Fanon (1991: 138) believes, assertion of negritude is not sufficient in itself. When quoting Sartre (1948: xl), who asserts that "negritude is the root of its own destruction, it is a transition and not a conclusion, a means and not an ultimate end" (p. 113), Fanon confesses that Sartre reminded him that his blackness was only "a minor term" (p. 138). In this sense, Fanon starts advocating a new form of politics that moves

¹ My source is the 1991 edition of Fanon's *Black Skins, White Masks*.

2. Postcolonialism and Irish studies

beyond national boundaries and nativist claims of a pure and authentic race that must be preserved at all costs.

Fanon's desire to move beyond ideologies such as imperialism and nationalism is made more explicit in his following work, *The Wretched of the Earth*, where he continues describing the situation of the oppressed, the struggle for decolonization, and how this process has to be premised on new identities. When Fanon moved to Algeria in 1956 in order to work in a hospital, he passionately identified with Algeria's armed struggle for independence. This led him to write this second study, which became a political manifesto for the Third World. It has had so huge an impact that contemporary postcolonial critics such as Walder (1998: 73) have praised Fanon's work as follows: "Various anti-colonial critical theories have been influential among the oppressed people in the world, but *The Wretched of the Earth* has spoken more directly, profoundly and lastingly than any other anti-colonial work on behalf of the colonized". In fact, Fanon has become a key figure for much current postcolonial debate and he is considered by some postcolonial scholars, such as Young (1995: 161), to be "the founding father of modern colonial critique". The importance of Fanon within later postcolonial studies mainly results from the fact that he showed that the impact of colonization is not only perceived externally, but also psychologically by the colonized subjects, who internally collude with the objectification of the self produced by the colonizer. His interest in showing the internal traumas of identity associated with colonization unites his theories with Albert Memmi's.

Five years after the publication of *Black Skin, White Masks*, Memmi publishes *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (1957). The landmark theme of this work is to develop the destructive and artificial nature of those categories imposed by colonization. His description of the relationship which bonds colonizer and colonized complements Fanon's in many ways. Like Fanon in *White Skin, Black Masks*, Memmi (1990: 152) implies that the construction of the 'Other' is an indispensable part for the colonizer.² Writing in the context of the 1950s anti-colonial movements, he explains colonial forms of oppression and domination in the twentieth century by analyzing real human and personal experiences. As a Tunisian Jew, Memmi (1990: 14) describes himself as "a sort of half-breed of colonization, understanding everyone because I belonged completely to no one". Educated in Europe, he is neither Arab nor French, neither colonizer nor colonized. Because he is a Jew, he has more privileges than the Moslems, but he is nonetheless still a "native" at the basis in the hierarchical pyramid of the colonial society (Memmi 1990: 12).³

² My source is the 1990 edition of Memmi's *The Colonizer and the Colonized*.

³ 'Native', as Boehmer (1995: 8) explains, is a collective term designating the indigenous inhabitants of colonized lands. During the imperial conquests, the term 'native' was loaded with pejorative connotations. Brah (2003: 623) notes how in the British Empire, the word 'native' became synonymous with subordination and 'Otherness' in contrast to the term 'British', which immediately indicated a position of superiority. Although it was once a diminishing label

As Sartre (1990a: 20) observes in his introduction to Memmi's study, this theorist is "the best of witnesses", because his ambivalent situation as both colonizer and colonized allowed him to understand "everyone at once". Memmi's (1990: 130) main argument is that economic privilege lies at the heart of the colonial relationship. He describes the bond between colonizer and colonized as one of economic, moral, and social interdependence, or as Sartre (1990a: 26) puts it, one of "relentless reciprocity". Both subjects are joined in a reciprocal but mutually destructive relationship. In his analysis of this interdependence, Memmi (1990: 155) shows how colonization has a harmful effect not only on the colonized, but also on the colonizer. First of all, the colonizer is transformed into an oppressor, worrying only about 'his' privileges.⁴ Simultaneously, the colonized becomes an oppressed and defeated creature, whose social and human development is broken. It is the figure of the colonizer that attracts Memmi's highest attention, a figure constantly confused by multiple contradictions. The colonizer realizes that his privilege is based on an imminent "usurpation". In other words, that his status is illegitimate (p. 75). In the face of this discovery, the colonizer attempts to compensate his blame by finding justifications that transform his oppressive image. In order to do so, he dehumanizes and devalues the figure of the colonized (p. 119). Racism symbolizes the fundamental union between colonizer and colonized. The colonized is always degraded as lazy, weak, evil and backward so that the colonizer finds justification for rejecting and dominating his subjects. Furthermore, the colonizer finds the need to annihilate the colonized in order to cease becoming his oppressor, but he realizes that this is ultimately impossible, for then he would cease to enjoy his privileged status (p. 132). Memmi (1990: 123) explains that neither racism nor the desire to destroy the 'Other' are sufficient in themselves for compensating the colonizer's sense of guilt and usurpation. In this sense, Memmi presents us with a figure of a colonizer which is mutually created and destroyed by the process of colonization.

By showing the constructed nature of categories such as 'colonizer' and 'colonized' which lie at the heart of Western humanism, both Fanon and Memmi advance later deconstructions of ideologies such as imperialism and nationalism and their defence of pre-established identities. Both anti-colonial intellectuals advocate a form of decolonization that moves away from a nativist activism, and offer a very similar tripartite pattern of decolonization that will be helpful for an approach to Eavan Boland's poetry. Their theories were launched in a period of great international

for colonized people, the word 'native' has in recent years been reclaimed by postcolonial critics to refer to those who "belong to a particular place by birth" (Boehmer 1995: 8). This term should not be misidentified with 'nativist', which refers specifically to an early form of nationalist writing (p. 9).

⁴ I use the masculine pronoun in order to refer to Memmi's and Fanon's writings because both anti-colonial intellectuals addressed almost exclusively the male colonized subject in their discussions of the colonial process. As we will see in section 4.3., their omission of the female colonized subject will prompt a wide controversy.

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tumult. The astounding number of almost 100 newly independent states emerging throughout the 1960s consequently initiated a great amount of critical work concerned with the history of the expansion of the British empire overseas (Hooper 2002: 5). With the creation of the Commonwealth, the category of Commonwealth literary studies became institutionalized in the 1960s. Some of its representative pieces are John Press's *Commonwealth Literature: Unity and Diversity in a Common Culture* (Hooper 2002: 5) and William Walsh's *A Manifold Voice: Studies in Commonwealth Literature* (Walder 1998: 62).

The 1970s brought about important developments within the field of postcolonial theory and criticism (Moore-Gilbert 2000: 31-32). First, there was a broad reassessment of the history of colonialism and a questioning of the supposed benefits of imperialism to the former colonies. Secondly, there was a reevaluation of the early formulations of Commonwealth literary studies, now interpreted as "a neo-colonial attempt" to reintroduce Western cultural authority.⁵ There was a subsequent decline in prestige of the academic field of Commonwealth literary studies, and a concern to include a wider range of texts within the term "Literatures of the World in English" (Walder 1998: 63). Whereas previously postcolonial critics tended to approach mostly subjects such as anthropology, history, linguistics, and art history, this period witnessed a greater proliferation of postcolonial works approaching more explicitly literary studies. It is in this period when Edward Said's *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* (1978) appears. Said's ambitious study on imperialist cultural productions becomes a landmark text which prompted literary critics to consider postcolonial issues and incorporate non-canonical writings in their discussions. Although Said has later contributed to the postcolonial field mainly with *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), it is his seminal work on imperialist and Orientalist discourse that has been the most influential. Its importance is recognized by well known postcolonial critics such as Young (1995: 159), who argue that, although the study of colonialism was initiated well before the publication of *Orientalism*, this book prompted scholars to consider the discursive operations of colonialism. A large debt is also acknowledged by Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Spivak (Moore-Gilbert 2000: 35), and even by Ahmad (1992: 13), one of Said's most fierce critics, who considers *Orientalism* "the grandest of all narratives between Western knowledge and Western power".

Like Fanon and Memmi, Edward Said has also explained how the hierarchical relationship between colonizer and colonized is established. In *Orientalism*, Said develops Fanon's theoretical premise in *Black Skin, White Masks* that the category 'race' is a social construct by arguing that

⁵ The term 'neo-colonial' was originally coined, as Boehmer (1995: 9) explains, by economic theorists in order to signify the continuing economic control by the West of once-colonized nations. This term has been expanded by contemporary critics in order to criticize postcolonial theorists, and by extension postcolonial writers, of perpetuating Western hegemonic power.

the two categories, 'West' (colonizer) and 'East' (colonized), are deeply artificial and that they come into being at the very moment of imperial conquest. In order to do so, he develops a whole theory around the concept 'Orientalism'. If we want to understand how Said dismantles this binary division, it is essential to bear in mind his indebtedness to poststructuralism. Said's work can be categorized within the anti-humanist shift led by French philosophers, who reject that the traditionally liberal humanistic knowledge is 'pure' and 'disinterested'. As Said (1995: 3) admits, he is influenced by Gramsci, and his ideas on hegemony; and in particular by Foucault and the French poststructuralist model of the interdependence of discourse, knowledge, and power. Foucault (1980: 196) showed that the establishment of knowledge and disciplines is never innocent, because it is impossible for knowledge not to engender power.

In *Orientalism*, under Foucault's influence, Said shows how language, the academic forms of knowledge, and the institutions of power of colonialism and imperialism are intrinsically connected. In this sense, he is one of the first to show how imperial ideology depended on apparently apolitical cultural disciplines in order to justify its colonial practice. Said's main thesis is that colonialism operated not only as a form of military rule, but simultaneously as a discourse of domination (Said 1995: 23).⁶ In order to justify this point, in his ambitious analysis, he examines not only scholarly works but also works of literature, political tracts, journalistic texts, travel books, and religious and philosophical studies. Said is fully conscious of the importance of institutions and culture in colonization. Out of this interdependence, Said coins the term 'Orientalism', in order to signify several things, all of them interrelated. Firstly, Orientalism is an academic designation for "anyone who teaches, writes about, or researches the Orient", and it especially connotes "the high-minded attitude of nineteenth century and early twentieth century European colonialism" (p. 2). Secondly, Orientalism is also "a style of thought", based upon the epistemological and ontological distinction between the East and the West, the "Orient" and the "Occident" (p. 12). The relationship between Orient and Occident, colonizer and colonized, is hierarchically established; theirs is a relationship of power, of domination. Thirdly, Orientalism is examined as a discourse, "an enormously systematic discipline with its own style, figures of speech, setting, narrative devices and historical and social circumstances" (p. 3). Finally, Said defines Orientalism as a historical category (he takes the eighteenth century as the starting point), in order to designate the discourse of power used by the West in order to advance confidently upon the Orient (p. 73).

This explanation about how Orientalism is established and gains hegemony helps Said (1995: 332) conclude that the development of every culture requires the existence of another

⁶ My source is the 1995 edition of Said's *Orientalism*.

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different and “competing *alter ego*”. Cultural formation “involves establishing opposites and ‘others’ whose actuality is always subject to the continuous interpretation and re-interpretation of their difference from ‘us’” (ibid). Thus, the Orient becomes “a European invention”, an ideological representation which finds no correspondence in reality. It is “a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences” (p. 1). The Orient helps to define Europe, as its opposed image. Thus, it is only in contrast to an undervalued Orient, described as being irrational, “different”, depraved, childlike, eccentric and dangerous, that the rational, virtuous, mature and “normal” Occident can emerge (p. 40). Although at times, Said continues, some Orientalist texts overvalued the Orient for its “pantheism, spirituality, stability, longevity, and primitivism”, those qualities were immediately followed by a counter-response: “the Orient suddenly appeared lamentably underhumanized, antidemocratic, backward, barbaric” (p. 150). In this sense, Said dismantles the dual notion of “Oneself” vs. “the Other” intrinsic to all identity-formation. As he asserts at one point in *Culture and Imperialism*, “while identity is crucial, just to assert a different identity is never enough” (1994: 257).

Although Said obviously criticizes the binary system (Occident/Orient; colonizer/colonized) which is at the base of the Western discourse of Orientalism, his work has been widely criticized on the grounds that he exclusively focuses on the colonizer’s culture. While Fanon and Memmi provided a model of revolutionary change for the colonized, Said’s is a voice which does not seem to offer a suitable position of resistance. At the beginning of *Orientalism*, Said (1995: 12) makes the following controversial remark: “The scientist, the scholar, the missionary, the trader, or the soldier was in, or thought about, the Orient because he *could be there*, or could think about it, with very little resistance on the Orient’s part”. Said here implies that all power resides in the colonizer, and consequently, he offers no place for counter-discourse. Orientalist discourse seems to be so powerful that the voice of the native lacks the power of speech and resistance. Unsurprisingly, his position has been widely attacked by Young (2001: 391), who argues the following:

If Orientalism has been a misrepresentation, as Said asks at the end of the book, ‘how does one *represent* other cultures?’ [...] This perhaps also explains why, if the representations of Orientalism were so false, as Said continually insists, he does not offer a method that enables a counter-representation that allowed the [colonized] to speak [...] – a task which he admits his study leaves ‘embarrassingly incomplete’.

Walder (1998: 71) similarly criticizes Said for his disregard of the many possibilities of resistance that “oppositional” writings of the colonized exemplified.⁷ It will not be until *Culture and Imperialism* that Said will make room for the colonized.

After Said's *Orientalism*, and throughout much of the 1980s, the field of postcolonial studies became more specialized. It is in this decade when Homi Bhabha became an authoritative voice, complicating colonial discourse and bringing a broader range of theoretical options. His essays “The Other Question” (1983), “Of Mimicry and Man” (1984a), “Representation and the Colonial Text” (1984b), “Sly Civility” (1985a) and “Signs taken for Wonders” (1985b) (later edited in *The Location of Culture*, 1995), as well as his contributions in *Nation and Narration* (1994a, 1994b), have exerted great influence on literary critics, especially in Ireland. Whereas Said focuses almost exclusively on the colonizer (i.e. the construction of empire) and colonial discourse, Bhabha emphasizes the interactions between colonizer and colonized (Moore-Gilbert 2000: 116). This theorist revises Said's implicit assertion that colonial discourse is fixed, homogenous, and successful. In this sense, Bhabha changes Said's model of domination to one of negotiation. Although in *Culture and Imperialism*, Said (1994: xxii) recognizes the “overlapping experience of Westerners and Orientals, the interdependence of cultural terrains in which colonizer and colonized co-existed and battled each other”, this is done in response to criticisms like Bhabha's and, therefore, it was Bhabha who initiates the discussion on the ambivalence of colonial discourse.

Part of Bhabha's concern has been to indicate the ways in which the hierarchical division between ‘self’ and ‘Other’, colonizer and colonized, is dismantled by the colonized people themselves. His argument is that Orientalist discourse did not always obtain its intended effects when put into practice. Colonial power relations produce hybridization and, as a consequence, authority can never be absolute. Like Memmi, who offered a complex vision of the colonizer, Bhabha also describes the troubling contradictions involved in any discourse of power. Drawing on psychoanalytical theory, he constructs a theory of colonial discourse based on conflicting emotions such as ‘desire for’, as well as ‘fear of’, the ‘Other’. This ambivalence is described by means of concepts which denote the instability of power relations between the colonizer and the colonized.

One of these concepts is “mimicry”, a distorting mirror that fractures the identity of the colonizing subject. Bhabha (1995: 87) explains how the production of mimic (Indian) Englishmen is disorienting for the colonizer. The mimic man appears to be an ‘inappropriate’ colonial subject,

⁷ As regards this point, Moore-Gilbert (2000: 49) argues that the main reason why Said overlooks colonized resistance is because he abandons “the materialist method [of Gramsci]”, and embraces a “Foucauldian *pessimism*” on the question of resistance to power.

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“almost the same, *but not quite*” (p. 86). The partial and incomplete resemblance of the colonizer disrupts the authority of colonial discourse. As the identity of colonizer and colonized becomes suddenly blurred, so do colonial authority and power. As Young (1990: 147) explains, “[t]he imitation subverts the identity of that which is being represented and the relation of power [...] certainly begins to vacillate”.

Another concept that Bhabha (1995: 66) employs to explore the instability of colonial relations is that of the “stereotype”. He believes that stereotyping is a complex and paradoxical mode of representation. In its ideological construction of ‘Otherness’, the stereotype is based on the need to repeat what is already known and fixed. In this sense, as a discursive strategy, the stereotype is ambivalent, for it connotes “rigidity”, “an unchanging order”, as well as “disorder, degeneracy and daemonic repetition” (ibid). The ambivalent nature of the stereotype is observed in the image of the native as always “both mysterious and known”, both savage and noble (p. 79). This ambivalence at the heart of stereotypes has already been analyzed by Memmi (1990: 149), who has argued that the attributes ascribed to the colonized are at times incongruous with one another. According to Bhabha (1995: 79), stereotyping, although initially a form of assuring authority, eventually becomes potentially subversive and disruptive.

Another strategy which illustrates the ambivalence of colonial discourse is “translation”, which Bhabha illustrates with the native’s reception of the Bible in India. This “English book” read by the Indians, Bhabha (1995: 113) explains, is a mixed and split text. The natives, in their resistance to accept the miraculous equivalent of God and the English, transformed the Bible into an Indianized Gospel (p. 118). In this sense, translation is used by the colonized as a form of resistance to the colonizer’s authority.

Mimicry, stereotype, and translation are strategies which involve a “productive ambivalence” that threatens the basis of power and discrimination. In this sense, Bhabha highlights the native’s ability to subvert the system. According to Young (1990: 145), it was precisely the unsteadiness of the colonial discourse’s power Bhabha analyzes that made anti-colonialist resistance possible.⁸

Together with Said and Bhabha, the 1980s witness the arrival of another outstanding voice in postcolonial studies: Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Spivak is perhaps the postcolonial theorist who was to carry out the fiercest deconstruction of identity-categories such as colonizer/colonized. True to the spirit of deconstruction, Spivak believes that traditional assumptions about identity

⁸ For the Irish critic Carroll (2003a: 7), there is a danger in stressing the ambivalence and mutual interactions when talking about the history of colonialism, for this might obliterate the power relationships involved in imperialism. On the other hand, Young (1992: 152) and Moore-Gilbert (2000: 132-133) argue that it is difficult to work out if modes of resistance such as mimicry and translation are used by the colonized subject unconsciously or intentionally.

(‘self’ vs. ‘Other’) must be called into question (interview with Rooney 1993: 5). Spivak’s theoretical formulations are founded on Derrida’s concept of the decentred subject (Moore-Gilbert 2000: 85). Spivak rejects all definitions of identity which are based on essentialist notions of ‘origins’ and ‘belonging’.

Spivak’s interests are various and, thus, her work is heterogeneous. She deals with a wide range of themes, such as the critique of imperialism, colonial discourse and nationality; the social position of the immigrant; and the relation between feminist, deconstructive and Marxist perspectives on capitalism and the international division of labour (Landry & Maclean 1996: 3). Nevertheless, it is for her formulations as regards the position of the Third World subaltern that Spivak is best known. The term ‘subaltern’ was first coined by Gramsci in the *Prison Notebooks* (1996) [1947], in order to refer to those groups in society who are subjugated to the hegemony of the ruling classes. This category is somewhat flexible, as it includes peasants, workers, and other oppressed groups who are denied access to power (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin 2002b: 215). The term has become especially relevant in postcolonial studies mainly due to the work of the Subaltern Studies Group. This group of South Asian historians, mostly Indian and Pakistan scholars, aims to highlight the complicities between the postcolonial state and the intellectual nationalist elite. The idea behind their work is that orthodox and authoritatively national historiography tends to consolidate highly contestable versions of history into official identities (pp. 216-217). Their project is therefore to recover omitted stories from official historical accounts.⁹ Some representative members within this group are Partha Chatterjee (1986) and Ranajit Guha (1997). When in 1988, Spivak published her controversial essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?”, the notion of the subaltern became a pressing issue in postcolonial theory. In this essay, Spivak (1994: 80) criticizes the assumptions of the Subaltern Studies Group, by arguing that their project is “essentialist” just for their attempt to grasp a category which is characterized by diversity and heterogeneity.¹⁰ On the other hand, she argues that these scholars cannot represent a culture whose history has been so irreversibly damaged by the colonial encounter. Because of this, no subaltern as such can be heard by the privileged of either the First or Third Worlds (p. 84). Furthermore, Spivak (1994: 78) believes that the subaltern community cannot criticize what they inhabit intimately, because if they ever managed to do so, they would move from the margins to the centre and they would no longer occupy a subaltern status. In this sense, her main thesis is that there is no possible way from which the subaltern can make themselves known to anyone and to

⁹ This work has also been carried out by dissenting writers in Eastern Europe, and many Caribbean intellectuals and artists whose heritage is traced to C.L.R. James (Wilson Harris, George Lamming, Eric Williams, Derek Walcott, Edward Braithwaite, the early V.S. Naipaul) (Said 1994: 379).

¹⁰ My source is the 1994 edition of Spivak’s essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?”.

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themselves. Spivak justifies her argument by looking at the situation of Indian women, those gendered subjects who have suffered more than others the consequences of colonialism and patriarchy. The female subaltern, as this theorist argues, “cannot speak” for herself, because she is “more deeply in the shadow” (p. 83). In my analysis of Boland’s poetry, I intend to analyze more deeply Spivak’s interesting assertions in “Can the Subaltern Speak?” (see section 7.4.5.3.1.).

It is difficult to express in a few words Spivak’s main theoretical formulations, because her work offers no ideological position that can be quickly summarized. As Young (1992: 157) explains, “in the most sustained deconstructive mode, she resists critical taxonomies, avoids assuming master discourse”. This challenge is increased by Spivak’s constant reformulation of her arguments. *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* (1999), for instance, contains a revision of her original essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?”. It is not by accident, then, that critics such as Moore-Gilbert (2000: 97) complain that “[o]ne of the problems in assessing Spivak’s achievement as a critic is that there are very considerable changes of position and direction in the course of a career as long as hers”. The heterogeneity of her formulations, together with the difficulty of her academic style, make Spivak a challenge for any critic approaching her work.

In an attempt to describe Spivak’s complex theoretical affiliations, MacCabe (1988: ix) argues that she is best catalogued as a “feminist Marxist deconstructivist”. In fact, her work embraces the fields of feminism, Marxism, and deconstruction, although in a series of multiple contradictions. Spivak uses such theories in subversive ways, and her work is a constant challenging rereading of Marx, Derrida, Foucault, and Freud (Landry & Maclean 1996: 8).¹¹ What is important to note is that her emphasis on deconstruction and poststructuralism has placed postcolonial studies within the bounds of high theory (Moore-Gilbert 2000: 152-184).

Throughout the 1980s, the theoretical assumptions of theorists like Said, Bhabha, and Spivak were applied to the reading of particular texts or cultures. Walder (1998: 66) dates the arrival of proper postcolonial literary theory with Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin’s *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* (2000a) [1989], a study which covers the literatures of Africa, the Caribbean, India, and other postcolonial countries. As Hooper (2002: 8) reminds us, there were also other important contributions, such as Abdul JanMohamed’s *Manichean Aesthetics: The Politics of Literature in Colonial Africa* (1983), which interpreted African texts; Peter Hulme’s *Colonial Encounters* (1986), an assessment of Caribbean representations; and Patrick Brantlinger’s *Rule of Darkness* (1988), dedicated to the Oriental and African colonial case.

¹¹ See, for instance, Spivak’s critique of Freud in her essay “Echo” (Spivak 1996).

As we can see, postcolonial studies have come to mean many things and to embrace multiple critical practices. Hooper (2002: 8) has affirmed that studies on postcolonialism are as “multiple as the very experience of colonialism itself”. The proliferation of voices, with their many forms of engagement and ideological positions, has not only enriched the postcolonial debate, but it has also created heightened tensions as to what can be considered ‘postcolonial’ and how it should be addressed. Moore-Gilbert (2000: 11) has argued that postcolonial studies monopolize so many heterogeneous topics that they threaten to disrupt it “as a coherent field of practice”. It is in this context that Slemon (1994: 30-32) advocates a more tolerant attitude towards methodological difference, asserting that he remains “suspicious of ahistorical and [...] intolerant calls for homogeneity in a field of study which embraces radically different forms and functions of colonialist oppression and radically different notions of anti-colonialist agency” (p. 31). It is this controversial debate about the term ‘postcolonial’ which I intend to address in the following section.

2.4. Problems with postcolonial theory: postcolonial theory vs. postcolonial criticism

Moore-Gilbert (2000: 152-184) has highlighted the distinction between postcolonial theory and a growing postcolonial criticism. Postcolonial theory is mainly represented by Said, Bhabha, and Spivak. Their importance is of such relevance that critics like Walder (1998: x) and Young (1995: 163) consider them to be “the Holy Trinity” of the field. Their work is characterized by a methodological reliance on French ‘high’ theory, mainly Derrida, Lacan, and Foucault (Moore-Gilbert 2000: 1).¹²

The theoretical parameters set up by these theorists pose significant problems in their articulation of colonial and postcolonial issues. This has led Moore-Gilbert (2000: 17) to distinguish the sub-field of postcolonial criticism, which emerged in the 1980s with JanMohamed's “The Economy of Manichean Allegory” (1986) in order to launch objections to some of the assumptions made by postcolonial theorists. JanMohamed's essay was later followed by the work of Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka and Wilson Harris, Stephen Slemon, Anne McClintock, Arif Dirlik and Helen Tiffin, among others (Moore-Gilbert 2000: 17, 188). Ahmad, Parry, Shohat, and Walder are also representative figures within this trend. Although Moore-Gilbert (2000: 2) asserts that postcolonial theory and postcolonial criticism are not so divorced

¹² In his preoccupation with contemporary continental European cultural theories, Young (1990, 1995) would be included within this field. The editors of *The Empire Writes Back* are also considered by critics such as Walder (1998: 60) as theorists within the postcolonial field.

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from each other (as they share some concerns and issues), it is possible to summarize the numerous challenges posed to the theories of “the Holy Trinity” and its followers.

One of the objections postcolonial critics usually make about postcolonial theory is that it is complicit with the neo-colonial order because it is located within Western institutions and is mainly consumed by the metropolitan elite (Moore-Gilbert 2000: 153). Slemon (1994: 16), for instance, has highlighted that, because most postcolonial theorists are exiled intellectuals from former colonized countries now living in the West, postcolonial studies stand nowadays “as a cultural marker of non-residency for a Third World intellectual cadre”. In fact, Edward Said (1995: 25) has described himself as an “Oriental”, born and educated in two former British colonies (Palestine and Egypt) and living in New York until his death in 2003. Like Said, both Bhabha and Spivak are exiled intellectuals who were born in India and are now living in the United States. By residing in the West and being educated within Western universities, these postcolonial theorists have faced the charge of unconscious neo-colonialism. Dirlik (1994: 109) attacks the “ubiquitous academic marketability” of the term postcolonial, and asserts that postcolonial critics are “unwitting spokespersons for the new global capitalist order”. Walder (1998: 80) expands this argument by suggesting that Said and his colleagues are “a group of well-paid, literary high-flying academics”, whose celebration of “their own multiple pasts and identities too easily becomes a self-regarding expression of their own, rather than others’ lives”. Similarly, Ahmad (1992: 13) understands that Said and his colleagues’ location within the Western academy betray their contemporaries in their native nations. This Marxist critic suggests that postcolonial theory is simply a medium through which the authority of the West over the formerly imperialized parts of the world is currently being presented. For Ahmad (1992: 298), real decolonization must take place in those countries actually imperialized, and not abroad, because

[i]n this sort of formulation, the ‘contest over decolonization’ becomes mainly a literary and literary-critical affair, and the elite academic intelligentsia claims for itself, in an amazing gap between fact and self-image, the role of the world’s revolutionary vanguard.

Ahmad’s main argument is that, by leaving the country, one loses the anger necessary for revolution and change. As postcolonial theorists belong to a privileged class accommodated within the Western academy, they are cut off from the material realities of their native nations and, therefore, cannot offer suitable theoretical parameters for decolonization (Ahmad 1992: 13-15).

All the above postcolonial critics question Said, Bhabha, and Spivak’s right to act as spokespersons for the Third World. Nevertheless, and despite these strong accusations, they seem to ignore the fact that they are, to some extent, Western-based as well. Walder (1998: ix) for

instance, is another exiled intellectual, "an ex-colonial (South African) long based in the UK, with particular links in Southern Africa, India and South East Asia". On the other hand, Moore (2000: 155) reminds Ahmad that he has taught in the West himself (at Rutgers University), that many of his books were first presented as papers to Western audiences, and that he belongs to "an elite fraction of the same national bourgeoisie which he accuses of acting as the local agents of contemporary international capitalism". We should also note that *In Theory* is published by the London firm Verso. Therefore, Ahmad himself has had difficulties in avoiding the Western 'contamination' he accuses Said of having.

Another outstanding critique made of postcolonial theorists such as Bhabha, Said, and Spivak is based on the belief that by privileging discourse as a form of resistance, they seem to ignore more active forms of resistance (Moore-Gilbert 2000: 156). The modes of cultural analysis on which their theories are based are deeply postmodern and, by extension, Eurocentric. Their use of French 'high' theory prevents them from offering any reactionary politics. An exemplary objection is Benita Parry's attack on Bhabha and Spivak. Parry (1987: 29) exerts a fierce critique of what she considers to be their lack of political commitment. Their methodological affiliation to deconstructivist theory constrains the development of anti-imperialist critique and leaves no room for active resistance outside the discursive level. Parry argues that Bhabha's theories are apolitical, or ineffective from a political point of view. This theorist locates native agency at the level of discourse, textuality, or semiotics (i.e. mimicry and translation), at the expense of direct action. Furthermore, Parry (1987: 29) asks what sorts of politics is that "which dissolve[s] the binary opposition colonial self/colonized other, encoded in colonialist language as a dichotomy necessary to domination, but also differently inscribed in the discourse of liberation as a dialectic of conflict and a call to arms?". Parry criticizes Bhabha on the grounds that his theories are intended to satisfy more the needs of Western academy than those of actual decolonizing societies.¹³ This attack is perhaps most clearly observed in Aijaz Ahmad's *In Theory*. Ahmad (1992: 173) attacks Bhabha for his "arcane" style. Nevertheless, his critique is particularly addressed to Said. Ahmad (1992: 173) roots Said's work in his humanistic training, and criticizes him for taking a Western perspective and ignoring varied forms of resistance to colonial/capitalist power. By addressing postcolonial issues within the terms of the Western discourse, in particular Western poststructuralism and postmodernism, Said is unable to theorize resistance to dominant discourse. Ahmad (1992: 36) argues that his theories produce a world in which "everything becomes a text",

¹³ Parry (1987: 30) invokes Fanon as an alternative model for decolonization, for he stands "in unmitigated antagonism to the oppressor". Here, this critic seems to ignore that Fanon advocates the deconstruction of identity-categories such as 'colonizer'/'colonized', invoking, in a similar way as Bhabha has done, the dissolution of Western binary oppositions.

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in which “the dismissal of class and nation as so many ‘essentialisms’ logically leads towards an ethic of non-attachment”.

Both Ahmad and Parry disparage the whole discourse-oriented trend of postcolonial theory as a Western imposition. Like them, Norris (1992: 119-120) and Shohat (1992: 101) are other outstanding voices that accuse postcolonial theory of postmodern, theoretical, and political ambiguity. For critics such as these, as Hall (1996b: 242) remarks, the postcolonial does not offer a politics of resistance, as it “posits no clear domination and calls for no clear opposition”. Walder (1998: 70) also criticizes postcolonial theorists, in particular the authors of *The Empire Writes Back*, on the grounds that they treat power as a matter of discourse, under the ‘false’ assumption that it is only through discourse that resistance can be carried out. Against these objections, Moore-Gilbert (2000: 165) argues that these critics’ “hostility towards some postcolonial theory for domesticating the material struggle against (neo-) colonialism is itself expressed at a discursive level and depends on similar institutional outlets to those on which their opponents rely”. In this sense, those critics who argue against the treatment of the ‘postcolonial’ merely at the discursive level ignore the extent to which they also participate in the same process. On the other hand, it is important to bear in mind that Said, Spivak, and Bhabha do not simply absorb European critical theory, but subject it to fierce criticism (Moore-Gilbert 2000: 161). Furthermore, as Fulford (2002b: 208) notes, it is not “the postmodern formulations of Bhabha [and his colleagues] that are imperialist and [E]urocentric, but modern assertions of a homogeneous national identity upon which imperialism first depended”.

Another objection made by postcolonial criticism is that postcolonial theory exclusively pays attention to a particular kind of postcolonial literature, mostly that produced by exiled writers, rejecting other important and enriching forms of cultural productions. Ahmad (1992: 124), for instance, has accused Said and Bhabha of assuming that writers like Salman Rushdie are representative of the ‘authentic’ voice of their countries of origin. According to Ahmad, the failure of Rushdie’s vision of the Third World is due to an “aesthetic despair that issues from his overvalorization of unbelonging” (p. 127). He wonders “[h]ow oppositional would these kinds of texts, so celebrated in the counter-canonical trends of the [Anglo-American] academy, then turn out to be?” (p. 12). The privileging of texts like *The Satanic Verses*, Ahmad argues, ignores and neglects those literatures which are independent of metropolitan influences (i.e. postmodernism), such as those texts written in regional Indian languages (p. 124).

Another important critique of postcolonial theory is that its obscure style and language make it not easily accessible to the most subaltern of all, restricting it to the consumption of the metropolitan elite (Moore-Gilbert 2000: 166). Walder (1998: 80), for instance, has argued that

Spivak's "greatest weakness is her obscurity". Similarly, the Irish scholar Graham (1994b: 33) has characterized Bhabha's work as "opaque and tortuous". Although there is some truth in these assertions (both Spivak and Bhabha's style are sometimes almost impenetrable), postcolonial theorists are now recognizing this problem and they are trying to make their recent contributions easier to read (Moore-Gilbert 2000: 167).

Finally, critics have accused postcolonial theory of not engaging sufficiently with issues of gender and class (Moore-Gilbert 2000: 168). As I will show in due course, this is the contention of many feminists who criticize postcolonial theory on the grounds that it omits the reality of Third World women.

2. 5. Ireland in postcolonial studies

When dealing with the specific case of Ireland, the postcolonial debate becomes complicated. Bery and Murray (2000: 1-4) and Innes (2000: 22) note the tendency, now in decline, to exclude Ireland (together with the other two constituent parts of the British Isles, Scotland and Wales), from the study of the postcolonial. The most outstanding theorists in the postcolonial arena have generally ignored Ireland in their discussions. Nonetheless, as we will see, Edward Said is an important exception, as his *Culture and Imperialism* includes a long section discussing Yeats as a nationalist poet who can be understood in the same context as Aimé Césaire, Franz Fanon, and Pablo Neruda (Said 1994: 271-283).¹⁴ Postcolonial feminist critics such as Boyce (1994: 95) and Smith and Watson (1992: xiii) have also included Ireland in their discussions, viewing the Troubles (the violence emerging in Northern Ireland since 1969) as a colonizing operation still taking place, comparable to all those continuing struggles that are going on in the Netherlands Antilles, Puerto Rico, Palestine, and South Africa. The postcolonial critic Robert Young (1995: 70-113) also mentions Ireland in his analysis of colonial racism, focusing on Matthew Arnold's racist views on the Celtic race. Nevertheless, the general tendency is to omit the Irish case from postcolonial discussions. Whereas India, Africa, and the Caribbean have prompted extensive discussion, very little attention has been paid to Ireland. Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin's *The Empire Writes Back* (2002a) (first published in 1989) is an illustrative example of the omission of the Irish case, a fact that Kiberd (1996: 5) widely criticizes. Although the authors of *The Empire Writes Back* focus on those peoples formerly colonized by England, they strictly mention the literatures of African countries, Australia, Bangladesh, Canada, the Caribbean, India, Malaysia, Malta, New Zealand, Pakistan, Singapore, South Pacific Island countries, Sri Lanka, and even Canada and the United

¹⁴ As Carroll (2003a: 187) explains in a footnote, it was Declan Kiberd who first stimulated Edward Said to write about Ireland from a postcolonial point of view when he invited him to speak at the Yeats Summer School in Sligo.

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States. Their later edition of *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader* (2002c) contains only one essay on Ireland by David Cairns and Shaun Richards. Boehmer's *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature: Migrant Metaphors* (1995) also exemplifies this omission of Ireland within postcolonial theory and criticism. At the beginning of her work, this critic accepts the fact that Ireland (together with the US) is generally excluded in studies of postcolonial writing, "because its history has been so closely and so long linked to that of Britain" (Boehmer 1995: 4). The same silencing of Ireland occurs in Walder's *Post-colonial Literatures in English* (1998), which exclusively addresses literary productions in India, the Carribean, and South Africa.

Innes (2000: 22-27) understands this lack of attention to Ireland as a consequence of the academic origins of postcolonial studies in Commonwealth literature and Third World/ Black Studies. In fact, the category 'Commonwealth' is problematic for a postcolonial approach to Ireland. Although the Free State formed in 1921 was defined by its constitution as a dominion of the British Commonwealth, in 1949, with the declaration of the Republic, the country left the Commonwealth. The development of Commonwealth literary studies into the 'postcolonial', marked most prominently by the publication of *The Empire Writes Back* in 1989, renamed 'Commonwealth Literature' as 'postcolonial literature', exclusively referring to that literature written in English within the Commonwealth. This definition discriminated not only against literature in indigenous or European languages other than English, but also those (Irish) cultural productions produced outside the Commonwealth. To make matters worse, Commonwealth literature, as Innes (2000: 22) explains, reintroduced white/black divisions, leaving no place in this schema for the Irish colonized. This critic places Fredric Jameson's 1986 essay as one of the most influential examples that reinforce oppositions such as those between 'First' and 'Third' Worlds. The category of the 'Third World' makes the insertion of Ireland within postcolonial studies problematic because it exclusively includes all non-white people, whether African or Asian. As Innes (2000: 24) complains, "we might wonder where Irish men and women placed themselves with regard to such dichotomies between the West and the Orient".

In order to simplify the heated debate about the reasons for including/excluding Ireland from postcolonial discussions, I need to start by describing the possible answers to the essential question 'Is Irish life/ politics/ culture and literature determined by its status as a postcolonial country'?

The answer is not as simple as it may seem. On the one hand, the specific case of Ireland differs from other former colonies. Unlike most other colonies, Ireland was located within close proximity to England. Its geographical location in Western Europe, and, at the same time, "marginal to it and historically of the decolonizing world" (Lloyd 1993: 2), complicates the

adoption of a comparative postcolonial framework. On the other hand, there were affinities of climate, temperament, and culture between Ireland and England. As Butler (2001: 14) explains, “the Irish could not be distinguished from their imperial rulers by the colour of their skin. They were ‘proximate’ rather than ‘absolute’ Others, a disturbing mixture of sameness and difference”. Moreover, the history of English colonialism in Ireland is unique in the sense that it was discontinuous, unstable, and partial (Smyth 1998: 10). In the nineteenth century, with the 1800 Act of Union, Ireland became constitutionally integrated with the United Kingdom. This legislative link between Ireland and the United Kingdom was an intentional imperial policy to achieve cultural and political assimilation, in reaction to the rebellion by the United Irishmen in 1789 (Smyth 1998: 64). In this respect, Britain's relations with Ireland became greatly different from those the Empire maintained with Indian or African colonies (Butler 2001: 2-3). Ireland sent MPs to Westminster, something that not even the British white colonies did. Furthermore, Irish citizens were often implicated in the colonial enterprise, reinforcing the ideology and practice of imperialism in their own ways: while some Irishmen enlisted in the British army, other Irishmen and women emigrated to the British colonies, and to London, the very centre of the Empire (Hooper 2002: 14). In British overseas territories, Irish became settlers, soldiers and, sometimes, administrators. As O'Dowd (1990: 49) explains, through missionary activity, Irish Catholics even attempted to create “an alternative ‘spiritual empire’ of their own”. Moreover, Ireland's obsession with the past is understood by some critics as one of its anomalies as a postcolonial nation, and not “the logical condition” of any decolonizing country “whose history is yet to be made” (Lloyd 1993: 10). The argument may be that, whereas Ireland might have been *once* a colony, it ceased to be so after gaining independence in 1921, and should have recovered by now from the cultural effects caused by British imperialism.

This sceptic view of Ireland as a postcolonial country is upheld by the so-called ‘Revisionist historians’.¹⁵ Roy Foster's *Modern Ireland 1600-1972* (1989a) is one of the most influential studies within this school. His work has been followed by other scholars like Bartlett (1988), Comerford (1988), Howe (2002), and Kennedy (1996). Bartlett (1988: 47), for instance, argues that Ireland cannot be considered a colony because the Irish did not use the language of colonialism. Instead, their opposition to British domination was articulated on constitutional grounds, by claiming that the country had the rightful status as a separate kingdom. As this critic

¹⁵ Together with revisionist historiography, the advocates of “modernization theory”, as Cleary (2003: 19) explains, also react against postcolonial explanations of Ireland's history. Based on the dichotomy between ‘traditional’ and ‘modern’ societies, modernization discourse tends to locate Ireland alongside other Western European countries, as a ‘traditional’ society which has ultimately ‘caught up’ with the more modern capitalist economies. In adhering to the notion of economic progress, modernization theorists, like revisionist historians, refute the claim that Ireland has undergone the experience of colonialism and may therefore be considered a postcolonial nation.

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puts it, “few Irishmen – Protestant or Catholic – accepted that Ireland was a colony with the attendant attributes of inferiority and subordination”.¹⁶ From a revisionist point of view, Comerford (1988: 12) has argued that the Irish have participated in almost every phase of the British colonial and imperial enterprise, and that, therefore, Irishmen and Irishwomen (both Catholic and Protestant) have devoted “far more blood and sweat to empire-building than to empire-breaking”. Kennedy (1996: 169) also writes against those postcolonial interpretations of Ireland, arguing, from an economic point of view, that there is a discontinuity between the Irish and other colonial experiences. The statistics show that Ireland was in a considerably better position in relation to other underdeveloped Third World nations at the beginning of the twentieth century. In this sense, Ireland should be compared with small European nations, rather than with postcolonial countries like India, Congo, or Nigeria. Agreeing with Kennedy, Howe (2002: 33) argues that Irish backwardness cannot be attributed to British colonialism. This scholar further stresses from an economic and cultural point of view, the inconsistency, ambivalence and complexity in British-Irish relations, rather than “the more traditional nationalist narratives of ‘8000 Years of Crime’” (p. 76). Generally speaking, the Revisionist school tends to attack nationalism as fundamentally sectarian and even racist. They usually deny the British presence in Ireland as colonial and imperial, reconsidering it instead as well-intentioned and rarely malevolent. In this sense, Revisionists are, in general, uneasy with postcolonial theories which postulate that the Irish past and its contemporary reality are adversely affected by British imperialism. As a consequence, they refuse to countenance a postcolonial analysis of Ireland, or a comparison of Irish people with other communities which sought to decolonize their minds or their territory. Howe (2002: 153), for instance, prefers to analyze contemporary Ireland within the European context, comparing Irish history with those stories of new European states emerging in the aftermath of the First World War, such as Czechoslovakia, Finland, Poland, and the Baltic Republics. Similarly, the Northern Irish critic Edna Longley (1994: 61), reflecting on the difficulties involved when using the term ‘postcolonial’ in relation to Ireland, has compared Ireland and its religious conflicts with Bosnia. Contesting postcolonial analyses of Ireland, revisionists argue that Partition was not a British fault: it was Irish Unionists who insisted that the Northern part had to remain a part of the United Kingdom. Some intellectual and moral arguments have been put forward to deny the colonial dimension to the Northern Irish conflict. One of these arguments is to consider the Troubles “an Irish tribal quarrel”, and not a postcolonial struggle

¹⁶ The difficulty with this argument, as Lloyd (2003: 52) has pointed out, is that it takes for granted the existence of a concept which only came into being gradually through the nineteenth and into the twentieth centuries. As this critic maintains, “a concept [...] can only function [...] a posteriori, at the point when the phenomena it designates and unifies have emerged in their full material reality”.

(Butler 2001: 2). The surge in economic prosperity Ireland is currently experiencing, and which has been labelled as the 'Celtic Tiger' period, evidences that the country is moving out of tradition into modernity and globalization (ibid). On the other hand, revisionists contend that postcolonial versions of Irish history might be used as propagandist fictions, in order to justify Anglophobia and anti-Unionism. Comerford (1988: 12) and Longley (1994: 30), for example, warn that most historians would embrace the postcolonial model for specific purposes, specifically to refer to the contemporary political situation of Northern Ireland.¹⁷ Ireland's oppression in the past, Comerford (1988: 12) believes, is a "political myth" that serves to justify the political actions or postures of Northern Irish nationalists. This denouncement is clearly made by Stephen Howe (2002: 1), who, in *Ireland and Empire: Colonial Legacies in Irish History and Culture*, implicitly associates supporters for postcolonial criticism in Ireland and IRA's sympathizers. This revisionist scholar analyzes how colonial models were employed in the Northern Ireland conflict since the 1920s, especially since the outbreak of violence in 1969 (p. 4). According to Howe, their employment of the colonial model is due to the fact that the Ulster crisis coincided with the high tide of Third World 'anti-imperialist' armed insurrections.

Contesting revisionists, the so-called 'postcolonial theorists' argue in favour of a comparative model between Ireland and other former colonies. This school finds in Said a helpful point of reference in its postcolonial analysis, for he was one of the first to write about Ireland in relation to Franz Fanon and Aimé Césaire's writings on decolonization. In *Culture and Imperialism*, Said (1994) includes Ireland when discussing the relationship between culture and imperialism. This is very significant, for it means the recognition of the Irish case within postcolonial studies by one of the most prominent voices. Said (1994: xvii) justifies this inclusion by saying that in Ireland we find another kind of apartheid, apart from racial apartheid, which is social discrimination. Though not geographically, Irish people "morally [...] inhabit the realm beyond Europe" (p. 127). In this way, Said equates Ireland with the 'Orient', and this enables him to establish a comparative postcolonial framework. Throughout this study, Said constantly establishes a connection between Ireland and former colonies in the Caribbean islands and the Far East, noting that Europe's ways of representing these places bear important similarities. Although Said recognizes that the geographical connections between England and Ireland are closer than between England and other colonies, he argues that "the imperial relationship is there in all cases. Irish people can never be English any more than Cambodians or Algerians can be French" (p. 275). Said even remarks that the colonial legacy is more present in Ireland than in any other

¹⁷ In any case, even though Longley remains sceptical of postcolonial comparisons between Ireland and other cultures, she proposes that if critics wish to undertake a postcolonial reading of Ireland, they must follow Bhabha's poststructuralist approach rather than Said's Foucauldian method (Hooper 2002: 17).

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colony, for the problem of Irish liberation not only has continued longer than other anti-colonial struggles, “but is so often not regarded as being an imperial or nationalist issue; instead it is comprehended as an aberration within the British dominions” (p. 284).¹⁸ In his comparative analysis, Said parallels, for instance, British views on Ireland and Australia, asserting that both have been considered by scholars and scientists like Georges Cuvier, Charles Darwin, and Robert Knox as ‘white’ colonies made up of inferior humans (p. 162).

Said’s comparative framework has been continued by a great number of Irish academic critics. Hooper (2002: 14-15) explains that the postcolonial school began to be shaped with the emergence of several critics who, although “not strictly postcolonial in outline”, sought in their works affiliations between Irish and other postcolonial literatures. This is the case of Lee Perry Curtis (1968) and Ned Lebow (1976). Nevertheless, it is not until the 1980s that postcolonial criticism begins to be directly addressed by the work of the Field Day Theatre Company. The Field Day Group was founded in Derry by Brian Friel and Stephen Rea in 1980 to launch Friel’s play *Translations*. As Cleary (2003: 16) explains, it was the staging of *Translations* that prompted this new interest in postcolonial issues, for the play dealt with important concerns such as the replacement of Irish by English, the creation of colonial maps, and the imposition of a foreign system of education. In the following years, the Field Day Company moved from its initial theatrical role to a wider cultural intervention. An editorial board was founded by Seamus Deane, Seamus Heaney, and Tom Paulin, publishing a series of pamphlets in the 1980s by internationally celebrated cultural theorists such as Edward Said, Frederic Jameson, and Terry Eagleton,¹⁹ and a three-volume anthology of Irish writing in 1991. These theorists, especially those from the Field Day collective, argue that the colonial legacy retains an enormous cultural and psychological force in Ireland. Their analyses derive from the conviction that, as Deane (1990: 6) puts it, the Northern Irish conflict, is “above all, a colonial crisis”. Nevertheless, their task is not explicitly political, but cultural. Their main intention is to analyze from a postcolonial point of view Ireland’s literary productions, something to which Revisionist scholars have “paid no serious attention” (Deane 1990: 7). Hooper (2002: 14), a self-declared postcolonial theorist, summarizes Deane’s and his colleagues’ main reasons for considering Ireland within a postcolonial framework as follows: (1) Britain’s reluctance to allow Catholic emancipation; (2) the incompetence with which British authorities responded to the Famine; (3) its unwillingness to grant a form of Home Rule; (4) the brutality of the coercion applied against nationalist dissidents during the Easter Rising and

¹⁸ In one of his latest essays, Said (2003: 177) studies the Northern Irish problem with reference to the persistent struggle over Palestine, analyzing connections such as “prolonged military occupation, obdurate settlers, and a serious asymmetry of power”.

¹⁹ Whereas Jameson (1988) and Said (1990) particularly focus on two Irish writers, Joyce and Yeats, Eagleton (1990) analyzes the radical contradictions of Irish nationalism as a decolonizing movement.

especially throughout the War of Independence; (5) the wretched state in which many Irish peasants lived throughout the nineteenth century; and (6) the way emigration was the only possible choice to have access to employment.

The Field Day Group's historical justifications have exerted such a tremendous influence that many Irish critics have embraced a postcolonial approach nowadays. Innes (2000: 26), for instance, argues that Ireland should be considered within a postcolonial framework because its history prior to the twentieth century, and well into the twentieth, is a history of social, political and economical discrimination, in which those who spoke Irish, clung to Irish culture or dress, or married an Irish person "were driven 'beyond the Pale' or, at a later date, disenfranchised". Kiberd (1996: 135) expands the argument by asserting that Ireland has great analogies, especially as regards culture, with the decolonizing world. Ireland suffered dislocations of culture, language, and identity similar to those experienced by colonized people in India and Africa. The arguments about language revival at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, like the debates about nationality and cosmopolitanism in literature, anticipated those which would later occur in Africa and Asia (*ibid*). Kiberd (1996: 197) claims that the "Irish were, if anything, ahead of their time" preparing the road for the political emancipation of India, Egypt, Nigeria, and so on. This theorist establishes connections between Irish nationalism and Third World decolonization, an endeavour continued by Innes (2000: 27), who asserts that Irish nationalism has served as a model for African, Caribbean, and African-American cultural nationalists and activists.

Embracing this postcolonial standpoint, and mostly under Kiberd's influence, Butler (2001: 4) emphasizes the colonial influence in the perpetuation of current struggles in Northern Ireland. In this sense, this critic argues that literary critics cannot ignore history, the historical role of Ireland as a colony and its consequences in the contemporary political situation of the country (*ibid*). O'Dowd (1990: 30) expresses his belief that some elements of the relationship between colonizer and colonized Memmi (1990) describes in North Africa survive in the Northern Irish conflict. The Troubles are read as an instance of the colonial relationship Memmi analyzes. In Northern Ireland, this critic proceeds to argue, religion rather than race is the insignia of difference (p. 46). In this sense, the conflict is not read as a tribal quarrel, but as an instance of a "long and tortuous [...] process of decolonization" (p. 47). Arguments such as these have led critics to situate Ireland on the margins of post-imperial Europe, as a country, as suggested by Coulter (1990: 1), "between the first and third world", first world in geography and third world in history. Crotty (1986: 36-37) has noticed that Ireland is "unique" as an European country in that it shares with all those underdeveloped countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean colonization by

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metropolitan capitalist powers. In this sense, Ireland is paradoxically Britain's oldest colony, but Europe's only capitalist colony.

In conclusion, and in order to clarify this heated debate, there are two main schools of thought within the Irish academy which view England's legacy over Ireland in different ways:

(1) The revisionist school of history, with figures such as Foster, Kennedy, Bartlett, Howe and in some respects, Longley;

(2) The postcolonial school, with figures such as Deane, Kiberd, Hooper, and Butler. The number of postcolonial scholars in Ireland has increased in the last decades of the twentieth century. The 1980s and 1990s witnessed the advent of a growing school of Irish postcolonial studies with David Cairns and Shaun Richards's *Writing Ireland: Colonialism, Nationalism and Culture* (1988) and Lyn Innes's *The Devil's Own Mirror: The Irishman and the African in Modern Literature* (1990) (Hooper 2002: 15). David Lloyd's (1993) intervention is worth mentioning here. In *Anomalous States: Irish Writing and the Post-Colonial Moment*, Lloyd embraces Bhabha's notion of hybridity in order to locate four Irish canonical writers (Yeats, Joyce, Beckett, and Heaney) in the context of (postcolonial) minorities' discourse. More recent exchange on Ireland's place within postcolonial studies has been carried out by Carroll (2003a, 2003b), Cleary (2003), Deane (2003), Graham (1994a, 1994b, 1995/6, 1997, 1999), Kirkland (1999), Maley (1996, 2000), O'Dowd (1990), Smyth (1995, 1998, 1999, 2000), and Whelan (2003), to name some representative scholars. All these critics have begun to invoke Memmi, Fanon, Said, Bhabha, and Spivak as useful perspectives from which to view the relationship between Irish and British cultural history. O'Dowd (1990: 29-66), for instance, relies on Memmi's (1990) analysis of the relationship between colonizer and colonized to describe the contemporary Northern Irish conflict. Others such as Graham (1994b: 31-33) call on scholars of colonial and postcolonial culture in Ireland to follow the example of the Indian Subaltern Studies Group and to employ Bhabha's theories by exploring "liminal" or "subaltern" positions of resistance or "ambivalence".²⁰ The work of these critics has been expanded by critics such as Bery and Murray (2000), Innes (2000), and Harte and Pettit (2000), who defend a parallel reading of Irish literature and other postcolonial literatures.

Before participating in this debate, I would like to stress the fact that the so-called postcolonial school in Ireland does not escape the critiques postcolonial theorists have received in the last decades. David Lloyd (1993), for instance, can be easily accused, following Ahmad's argument (1992: 13), of taking up temporary posts in the Western academy, and automatically becoming part of the system of neo-colonial domination. As Lloyd (1993: 1) himself recognizes,

²⁰ In a later essay, Graham (1995/6: 34) also advocates using Fanon, on the grounds that he was the first anti-colonial critic to remain suspicious of nationalism and the ideological restrictions it implies.

he works most of the time in the United States. Gerry Smyth (1998: 4) is also another postcolonial critic of Irish background but of English education; as he admits, "I am an Irishman interested in Irish history and literature but trained in certain methodological techniques and cultural assumptions at a number of English universities". The stance of critics like these, as we have seen, is viewed reluctantly by those who see in the metropolitan training of the postcolonial intellectual a new and covert form of exerting a politics of neo-colonialism.

On the other hand, Irish critics' engagement with 'high' theory might be viewed as problematic by those who, as explained before, reject Eurocentric modes of cultural analysis in the treatment of postcolonial issues. Smyth (1998: 3) acknowledges that much contemporary Irish critical debate is characterized by its reliance on modern Anglo-American theory. As Lloyd (1993: 1) recognizes, he is profoundly marked "by metropolitan circuits of theory", in particular by Mikhail Bakhtin, Benedict Anderson, and Antonio Gramsci. He defends himself against all possible charges asserting that their use might offer "a positive critique" to a postcolonial analysis of Ireland (p. 151), and that their influence is, in any case, unavoidable (p. 124). Smyth's work (1998) similarly exemplifies the use of Western methods and theories by Irish criticism. As he himself declares, he is profoundly influenced not only by postcolonial critics in Ireland such as Lloyd and Kiberd, but also by other postcolonial theorists belonging to the Anglo-American discourse, mostly Said and Bhabha (Smyth 1998: 2).

As we have seen, the exclusion of Ireland from the postcolonial debate has occurred mostly among those who argue that, although the Irish people have been affected by the colonizing process, they cannot be considered postcolonial on the grounds of the numerous affinities between the Irish and the English. Although this argument serves as a reminder of the danger of facile identifications between Ireland and Third World colonial situations, I think that their attempt to define 'the postcolonial' in restrictive terms contradicts the very nature of postcolonial studies. As Said (2003: 179) argues, "[o]ne of the main strengths of postcolonial analysis is that it widens, instead of narrows, the interpretative perspective". Putting barriers between that which might be labelled 'postcolonial' and the rest denies the capacity of postcolonial theories to demonstrate the artificiality of binary oppositions (black colonized vs, white colonizers; Third World vs. the West), and the complexity of the operation of imperial discourse. On the other hand, I would like to argue, following Stuart Hall's (1996b: 246) line of argument, that although Ireland is certainly not postcolonial *in the same way* as Australia, Canada, Nigeria, India, and Jamaica, to give but a few examples, this does not mean that Ireland is not postcolonial *in any way*. As Smyth (1998: 9) explains, there is no such thing as a standard colonial experience, "an ideal or stable or 'real' colonialism against which an aberrant Irish history must be measured". The 'abnormal' situation

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of Ireland as a colonial and postcolonial country does not entail that a history of colonialism and a subsequent experience of postcolonialism cannot be measured.

Leaving aside the dispute of whether Ireland can be considered postcolonial or not, what is true is that its history is unquestionably influenced by its proximity with Britain, and therefore determined by its relationship with this country. In order to justify this point, I will briefly overview Ireland's history since the initial Norman invasions. In the process, I will establish some parallelisms between Ireland's history and other (post)colonial nations in Africa, Asia, and South America. In spite of the existence of analogous situations between historically very different cultural situations, one has to bear in mind, nevertheless, that there is no one-to-one resemblance.

(1) A territory conquered by force: imperialism and colonialism.

Perhaps the most obvious feature shared by all postcolonial nations is their experience of imperialism and colonialism. A definition of both terms is necessary here. Imperialism is understood as that kind of authority and political hegemony assumed by a state over another territory. As Said (1994: 8) defines it, imperialism is "the practice, the theory, and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan centre ruling a distant territory". Its effects can still linger "in a kind of general cultural sphere, as well as in specific political, ideological, economic, and social practices" (ibid). In this sense, the term 'imperialism' describes the seizure of land from its owners and their consequent subjugation, not only by military force, but also by cultural imposition. The term 'colonialism' is more specific than 'imperialism'. It is described as a consequence of imperialism, because it involves the consolidation of the imperial power, by "the implanting of settlements on distant territory" (Said 1994: 8). Boehmer (1995: 2) explains that colonialism is manifested not only in the settlement of territory, but also in the exploitation of resources, the fostering of the occupiers' trade and culture, and the attempt to rule the indigenous inhabitants. Colonial practices around the globe have been of the most varied and heterogeneous kind. Although imperialism has worked idiosyncratically depending on the colonial situation, its policy remains the same. In other words, the economic and political hegemony British imperialism has exerted over Ireland by means of territorial acquisition and cultural effacement is similar to the one carried out in other former colonies.

Although the high age of imperialism is said to have begun in the late 1870s, Said (1994: 266) explains that in "English-speaking realms it began well over 700 years before" with the invasion of Ireland. After the conversion of Ireland to Christianity with the arrival of St Patrick in 432, Ireland's history has been characterized by successive invasions, first by the Vikings in 795 and a few centuries later by the Normans (González Arias 2000b: 48). After the death of Brian

Boru in 1014, there was no national unity in the island, and the middle of the twelve century was characterized by the war between two rival kings: Dermot Mac Murrough, King of Leinster, and Roy O'Connor, King of Connacht (ibid). In 1166, O'Connor was formally crowned High King of Ireland in Dublin (McCormack 2002: 18). Because of this, Mac Murrough fled to Bristol to seek the help from the King of England, Henry II. In reality, Henry was more French than English; during his long period as a king of England, he spent most of the time in France and never spoke the English language. Henry agreed to help Mac Murrough and allowed him to recruit any of his soldiers to give him assistance. One of Henry's knights was the chief Norman baron in Wales, Richard FitzGilbert of Clare. This knight, popularly known as Strongbow, supported Murrough's campaign (p. 19). In this sense, what is sometimes called the 'English' invasion of Ireland was, in reality, an enterprise carried out by the knights of a French King, Henry II, many of whom were French-speaking Normans, and also half-Welsh and Flemish mercenaries (p. 21). On May 1169 the first Normans arrived in Ireland, and after months of fight, Dublin finally fell into the hands of Dermot Mac Murrough. When he died, Strongbow declared himself King of Leinster, an action that annoyed King Henry II, afraid that his knight might establish an independent kingdom in Ireland (pp. 25-27). In 1171, he arrived in Ireland with a large army to claim the homage of all the chieftains of the country. Henry II based his right on a document supposedly given to him by Pope Adrian IV in the 1150s, which granted all of Ireland to him. Since then, colonialism took various forms in Ireland: political rule from London through the medium of Dublin Castle; economic expropriation by new settlers who came in various waves; and the resulting decline of the native language and culture, linked with the loss of economic and political power. Nevertheless, this process was gradual. As time passed, the initial Norman colonists, later known as the 'Old English', were easily absorbed in the Gaelic civilization. They began to be assimilated into the native population, adopting the Irish language, customs and laws (p. 30). The English forces grew gradually weaker, and almost the only part of the settlement to remain loyal to the Crown was the district around Dublin (an area which became known as the Pale) (p. 35). This prospect of assimilation of the English in Ireland was interrupted in the seventeenth century. Although since the beginning of the fourteenth century England tried to prevent all contact between the colonists and the native 'Irish enemies', it was in 1609 when King James I, then King of England, most successfully achieved this project (p. 80). A large part of Ireland was re-colonized with English and Scottish settlers, in the so called 'Plantations' that took part in a large part of Ulster and Munster.²¹ This state-sponsored policy meant a landmark event in Ireland's history. Unlike the previous colonizers, these new migrants were distinguished from the indigenous majority and also

²¹ For a deeper insight into the sixteenth and seventeenth century plantations, see Brandy and Gillespie (1986).

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from the 'Old English' in religion as well as language and culture. They insisted on the distinction between themselves and the Gaels, based on their boasted superiority in civilization. With the Reformation in 1560, when Henry VIII assumed the title of Head of the Church, and the new invasion of Protestant settlers, by the late medieval period British overrule in Ireland was consolidated. The Catholic Rebellion in 1641 was followed by ten years of war climaxing in Oliver Cromwell's terrifying campaign of 1649-50 (pp. 86-90). Cromwell exerted very harsh politics against the Catholic population with devastating effects: the Irish and the Old English were completely dominated by the new English, the Catholic religion was abhorred and its possessions were reduced. The final defeat of Irish Catholics in the Battle of the Boyne in July 1690 finally confirmed Protestant ascendancy in Ireland. Between 1691 and the 1720s, a wide range of 'penal' laws discriminating against Catholics were passed (p. 129). Their aim was to exclude Catholics from landholding, political power, education and religious practice. The country became a politically dependent kingdom with a subordinated Dublin parliament from which Catholics and all kinds of dissidents were excluded. Within a few more decades, Protestant landholding expanded to 85-90 % of the total. One of the most important impacts of these events was cultural, with the Irish language starting its long retreat, and the religious faith of the majority discriminated and subordinated. At the start of the eighteenth century, the Irish Catholics were considered to be second-class citizens, and only Protestants had the right to vote. Although their rights were slightly improved throughout the years, the desire of the English to control Ireland was translated into the 1800 Act of Union, by which the Irish parliament was dissolved and the United Kingdom of Britain and Ireland was inaugurated (pp. 178-181). Even though at a constitutional level the 'colonial' status of Ireland had ended, the country's position as a subordinated part of the British imperial system was intensified. The Great Famine of 1846-51 had tremendous cultural effects, hastening the decline of Gaelic rural culture by depopulating the very regions where it remained strongest. After two centuries of continuous uprisings (the 1798 Rebellion, the 1916 Easter Rising and the 1919-21 War of Independence), the island eventually gained legislative independence in 1922, although not full formal sovereignty until 1949.

(2) Relationship between imperialism and culture: racial stereotypes

As Said (1995: 23) explains, culture is highly important in preparing the way to imperialism, and also in modifying the idea of overseas domination. In Ireland, imperialist conquest required some sort of moral justification. By racist definitions of the native population, colonialism itself was justified. Revisionist scholars such as Howe (2002: 31) have argued that Ireland's history does not offer a "Manichean opposition of colonizers and colonized", because in

contrast to other colonial contexts, these patterns in Ireland “were always complex and contested”. In contrast to arguments such as this, it is unquestionable that the duality of Englishness and Irishness was reinforced by mid-seventeenth century discourses about ethnicity and religion. A substantial body of writing has demonstrated how British colonial discourse stereotyped the Irish in ways directly analogous to those employed against Africans or Indians (Jones & Stallybrass 1992: 157-171; Said 1994: 266-268, Young 1995: 70-113; Kiberd 1996: 29-30; Carroll 2003a: 3). The Irish community, though white, were constructed as racially ‘Other’. From the very moment that Henry II occupied Ireland, a persistent cultural attitude existed toward the Irish as a barbarian and degenerate race. English discourse represented the Irish, though European and Roman Catholic, as non-European in origin and Pagan in custom. Writers such as Edmund Spenser, Barbane Rich, Fynes Moryson, David Hume, and Matthew Arnold insisted upon the absolute difference between the English and the Irish, in order to justify conquest through military plantation and repression. Spenser’s *View of the Present State of Ireland* (1596) boldly identified the Irish as barbarian Scythians, and proposed that most of them should be exterminated. One reason for developing this theory of national origins was to defend that the Irish, like the Scythians, were nomads and therefore they had no right to possess the land. Two centuries and a half later, Matthew Arnold published his *Irish Essays* (1882). Although Arnold offered a more benign interpretation of the Irish community than Spenser’s, nonetheless he viewed the Irish as a race incapable of political progress. By the 1860s, anti-Irish prejudice was widely accepted in Britain, and the Irish were usually defined as simian or black. The colonizer’s feelings about the Celtic ‘Other’ were quite ambivalent: the stereotypical Paddy could be both charming and threatening. These negative stereotypes were equally attributed by English colonizers to other native communities. English colonizers in India or Africa, for instance, would impute to the “Gunda Dins” and “Fuzzi-Wuzzies” those same traits already attributed to the Irish. In this sense, Said’s Orientalist paradigm can be easily transposed to Ireland. As Kiberd (1996: 30) argues, the notion of Englishness was formed through ‘not-Irishness’: “Victorian imperialists attributed to the Irish all those emotions and impulses which a harsh mercantile code had led them to suppress in themselves”. The modern English saw themselves as “secular, progressive, and rational”. In this sense, Irish people became, to their eyes, ‘not-English’: “superstitious, backward, and irrational” (ibid).

(3) Racism and sexuality

Postcolonial critics such as Katruk (1992: 13) and Young (1995: 152) have highlighted the link between racism and sexuality as observed in colonial discourses about India and South

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Africa.²² As the Indian political philosopher Ashis Nandy (1983: 3) notes, a history of colonization is one of feminization. Colonial power has tended to identify subject people as passive, in need of guidance, romantic, passionate, indifferent to rules, barbaric, and above all, feminine. The conventional link between the native races as feminized (and between the colonized landscape and woman) has been observed in imperialist views of Africa and India (Boyce 1994: 12). This gendering of the native population is also made explicit in Ireland's colonial history. British writers came to view the land and by extension the people of Ireland as feminine, with the implications of something to be possessed and even violated. From the sixteenth century, English writers like Luke Gernon, in *Discourse of Ireland* (1620), developed an image of Ireland as a virgin welcoming "penetration by virile explorers" (Jones & Stallybrass 1992: 164). In the eighteenth century, this image was still maintained. Matthew Arnold's 1866 *On the Study of Celtic Literature* developed an image of the Celtic race as a feminine race with no political effectiveness (Young 1995: 70). Conversely, this gendering of the Irish landscape and its people will be employed by the Irish themselves. As I will show in due course, the Irish nationalist discourse that emerged from the early 1840s imagined Ireland as a woman.

(4) Control over the native language: loss and attempt at recovery

Anti-colonial intellectuals such as Memmi (1990: 173-174) have discussed the effects of colonial bilingualism, the co-existence of two languages in the colony (the colonizer's language and the native tongue), and the "linguistic drama" the colonized finds with the threatening annihilation of the mother language. In fact, one common feature of imperialism is its attempt to dominate the native language. As Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (2002a: 7) put it, "[l]anguage becomes the medium through which a hierarchical structure of power is perpetuated, and the medium through which conceptions of 'truth', 'order', and 'reality' become established". Economic and political control can never be completed without intellectual control. Therefore, one of the common objectives of most imperial enterprises since the eighteenth century was to destroy and undervalue the native's culture, and consciously establish the supremacy of their own language. Ngũgĩ (1994: 13) has explained how the colonial education system as established in Nigeria, Uganda, Ghana, Sierra Leone, Kenya, and Tanzania, served two main objectives: firstly, the systematic destruction of the native languages and their literature; and secondly, the promotion of English and European literature and history. This attempt to impose the colonizer's language over the native one is also observed in Ireland. According to Lloyd (1993: 122), there is a clear resemblance between the Irish and other postcolonial nations (in particular he mentions the Latin

²² This association between the discourses of racism and sexuality has already been identified by Fanon (1991: 164), when arguing that the notion 'blackness' evokes an "attractive but dangerous sexuality".

American experience) as regards the displacement of the 'original' language by that of the colonizing power. Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, there was a prohibition to use the Gaelic language. This fact, together with the Great Famine and emigration, motivated the rapid decline of the number of native Irish-speakers. Thomas Davis, in his 1843 article "Pap for the dispossessed", addressed the problems raised by the loss of a national language (Lloyd 1993: 44-45). Under the realization that to speak another language was "to lose one's identity", "to live as an exile", Davies was one of the first to make language (together with culture) essential to the concept of national identity (ibid). To this purpose, Davies, together with Charles Gavan Duffy and John Blake Dillon, founded *Young Ireland* in 1842, one of the first romantic nationalist groups in Ireland. As Davis and the Young Irelanders were mostly educated in English, the Gaelic language represented for them a sublimated ideal, 'a lost mother tongue' which stood for a culture which was past and primitive. Their attempt to recover the Irish 'essence', therefore, was based more on their reliance on translation of the Irish language into the English language. It wasn't until the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth that there was a more urgent desire to revive the native language. Several organizations were created for this purpose, such as the *Society for the Preservation of the Irish Language* founded in 1876 and the *Gaelic Union* of 1880. These organizations advanced the formation of the *Gaelic League* in 1893. Its founder-president, Douglas Hyde, stood out as an ardent advocator of the Irish-language revival. On 25 November 1892, Hyde delivered the lecture "The Necessity of De-Anglicizing Ireland" before the Irish National Literary Society in Dublin, in which he promoted the need to return to the Irish language to legitimize eventual Irish autonomy (Smyth 1998: 76-77).

(5) Anti-imperialist surge

In its struggle for national independence, Ireland is analogous to many other colonial nations. It is well documented that many countries from "the emerging world", such as India, Egypt, and Nigeria, looked at times to the Irish for guidance (Innes 1993: 125; Boehmer 1995: 106; Kiberd 1996: 197). Irish political resistance to English domination started well into the eighteenth century, a century of popular unrest which reached its climax in the 1798 rebellion led by Wolfe Tone. In the first half of the nineteenth century, Irish political mobilization focused around the figure of Daniel O'Connell, (popularly known as the "Liberator" and "King of Beggars"), the hero of the struggle for Catholic Emancipation. In 1807, O'Connell tried to finish with the Act of Union, but he never achieved the dissolution of the union of parliaments in London. In the second half of the nineteenth century, there was a proliferation of rebellions against the British power. Two military uprisings, one by the Young Irelanders (1848-9) and the other by

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the Fenians (1867), though eventually unsuccessful, helped create the terms of future Irish political mobilization (Foster 1989b: 162-173). They established the ideological nationalist base for later generations, which had as their main aim Ireland's independence (or Home Rule). Charles Stewart Parnell and Michael Davitt founded in 1880 the *Land League*, with a view to reacting against agricultural depression and landlordism (Fitzpatrick 1989: 180-181). One of its main aims was to transfer the property from the landlords to the tenants (its historic slogan was "the Land for the People") (Welch 2000: 187). In 1877, Parnell achieves the alliance of the main nationalist Irish groups. His political strength prompted the possibility of Home Rule for Ireland. In 1916, about 1,800 members of the Irish Volunteers and the Irish Citizen Army seized possession of various buildings in central Dublin. This event, known as the Easter Rising, advanced many other anti-imperialist rebellions happening in India and several African countries. At the outset of this uprising, one of the founders of the Irish Volunteers, Patrick Pearse, proclaimed the Irish Republic. Although the insurrection was eventually unsuccessful, and most of the nationalist rebels were executed, this precluded an eminent national (although incomplete) independence. 1918 witnessed the victory of Sinn Feinn candidates in the general election, and a separatist Irish parliament was established in Dublin in 1919, on behalf of which the IRA fought the Anglo-Irish War, also called the War of Independence. In 1921, the Anglo-Irish Treaty was signed, which set up an Irish Free State of twenty-six counties, and six northern counties as the state of Northern Ireland, establishing the partition of the island.

The importance of the event of the Easter Rising should not be underestimated. As Boehmer (1995: 106) asserts, "[t]he 1914-18 period and its aftermath, in particular, brought cataclysmic changes". This surge is observed in the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917; in India, where revolutionaries involved in the Ghadr movement attempted to strike off their British bonds; and in Africa, where students organized a number of Pan-African congresses on European territory during the inter-war period (pp. 106-107). The 1916 Easter Rising represented for all these movements a model of invincible nationalism. Indian nationalist radicals began to establish links with their Irish counterparts, and also Ireland found in the example of African, African-American, and Indian activists the inspiration for its struggle for independence. Lady Gregory was one of the first, according to Kiberd (1996: 68), to make a link between the Irish case and other anti-colonial movements. She sympathized with dissidents in Egypt and India. Her husband, Sir William Gregory, wrote letters to *The Times* in support of the Arabic and the Egyptian cause (p. 85). Maud Gonne also established comparisons between Ireland, India, and other areas colonized by the British (Innes 1993: 125). These connections between English colonized nations intensified in the years of 1919 and 1920. The Irish and Indians allied themselves in the United States in order to

react against the deportation of Indian nationalists (Kiberd 1996: 254). On the other hand, Irish sailors acted as messengers between Indian nationalists at home and abroad (p. 255). Nevertheless, despite these multiple interactions between colonial India and Ireland, India was more open to declare its support for the Irish than vice versa (p. 259).

(6) Cultural nationalism

As Smyth (1998: 35) notes, the “struggle for culture is perhaps the one common factor to all the disparate histories of decolonization”. Culture plays an indispensable role for the achievement of political independence. Nationalism and literature are strongly linked, because the idea of the nation is founded on stories of national origins, such as myths of founding fathers and heroes (Bennington 1994: 121; Brennan 1994: 48). In order to create an ‘authentic’ culture, the colonized community begins questioning its own roots and identity in order to dismantle previous negative stereotypes.

In Ireland, political nationalism was often accompanied by an arduous defence of the virtues of the native culture. Due to the feelings of inferiority and dependency that colonialism, with its racial prejudices and stereotypes, had produced, the notions ‘Irishness’ and ‘Irish nation’ became compelling issues to the various nationalist groups of the end of the nineteenth century (Hidalgo Tenorio 2005). At this stage, Irish cultural politics is marked by consistent aspirations to achieve a true identity and nationality. This cultural renaissance has its origins in the eighteenth century German belief that the pure essence of a native community lies in its culture and those ‘authentic’ values inherited from antiquity and even pre-historic times (Hurtley et al. 1996: 68-69). In Ireland, cultural nationalism was understood as justifying political nationalism: cultural independence necessarily leads to the political independence of Ireland (ibid). The link between culture and politics has been so strong in Ireland that critics like Smyth (1998: 36) have argued that both realms are “to all intents and purposes one and the same thing”. In fact, Irish literature and Irish nationalism have been so firmly enmeshed that they can be viewed as symbiotic categories.

In his exhaustive study, *Nationalism in Ireland*, David George Boyce offers a clear classification of the multiple nationalist manifestations throughout Irish history. After speaking about ‘political’ and ‘cultural’ nationalism, Boyce (1991: 228-258) summarizes the three most important forms of cultural nationalism that operated in Ireland from 1882 onwards. It is quite significant how these Irish movements which attempted to create a national cultural unity reflected disunion in their different advocacies.

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The first group Boyce identifies is the “Literary Patriots”. One ardent representative of this group is Sir Samuel Ferguson, a member of the Anglo-Irish professional middle class. Ferguson’s main interest was to encourage all Irishmen, especially Protestants, to become concerned with the history and antiquities of Ireland, in order to lay the foundations of a worthy national literature. His effort was directed towards fostering Irish literature for literature’s sake, and not for nationalist aims.²³ The Irish literary Revival, as Boyce (1991: 233) explains, followed the steps of literary patriots like Ferguson. This revival was inspired by a concern that the Irish identity (its art, culture and language) was in danger of disappearance. In this sense, their project was to promote the study of the legends, folklore, and literature of Ireland. One clear exponent of this Revival was Yeats, a profound admirer of Sir Samuel Ferguson, whom he described as “the greatest poet Ireland has produced, because the most central and most Celtic” (quoted by Boyce 1991: 234). Yeats and his colleagues (Lady Gregory, George Moore, and Edward Martyn, for instance), wanted Ireland to make a distinctive contribution to the common European cultural heritage. The first organization to embrace this Celtic revival was the *Gaelic Athletic Association* (1884), with the aim of promoting traditional Irish games such as hurling and Gaelic football (Welch 2000: 126). Other associations to follow are the *Irish Literary Society* (founded by Yeats and Douglas Hyde in 1891) and the *National Literary Society* (also founded by Yeats in 1892), both of them with the objective of revitalizing Gaelic literature (Jaime de Pablos 2000: 278). A year after the creation of the *National Literary Society*, the *Celtic Literary Society* and the *Irish Literary Theatre* were founded. The second one (later called the *Irish National Theatre*) was co-founded by Lady Gregory, George Moore, Yeats, John Millington Synge, and Edward Martyn, and it aimed to represent plays, if possible in Gaelic, which reflect the rural and mythological Ireland of Cuchulain, Finn, Conchubar, Deirdre, Maeve, Brigid, and Fheas, for instance (Hidalgo Tenorio 1997a: 87).

The second group Boyce distinguishes is the “Literary Nationalists”. The leader of this form of cultural nationalism was the Irish protestant Thomas Davis. In contrast to the literary patriots, this romantic nationalist group used language and literature for nationalist ends. Art was only justified as a medium to promote and foster a sense of nationality among the people. According to Davis, the Irish nation was to be defined by its culture, by which he meant its literature, history, and above all, its language. The *Young Irelanders* were fervent supporters of education, and approved strongly of a school system that taught Irish children all their glories of their past, as well as Irish language and literature. Because literature was only conceived as a means of teaching nationalism and national self-awareness, inevitably, “the nationalistic aspect of

²³ This form of cultural nationalism is labelled by Maley (1996: 34) as “colonial nationalism”. Within this group, this critic also includes Jonathan Swift and Mary Edgeworth.

such literature dominated and shaped its artistic content. *The Nation's* poems, ballads and stories were charged with feeling rather than style" (Boyce 1991: 162). As most of the *Young Irelanders* were Protestants, they tried to ignore religious divisions. They defended a national literature that integrated differences and united the Irish people. Their notion of cultural nationalism was revitalized later by Fenians, Sinn Féin, and Home Rulers.

These two cultural movements, literary patriotism and literary nationalism, encouraged Irishmen and women to discover their common heritage, to link contemporary Ireland with a romantic, heroic, and bygone age. Nevertheless, as Boyce (1991: 231) explains, their intentions were quite different:

The literary patriots were anxious to save and preserve the heritage, and to secure for Ireland a place in the European tradition. The literary nationalists wanted to preserve the heritage, not for primarily literary purposes, but because it might advance the cause of Irish nationality. The patriots were not necessarily nationalists; and the nationalists were not necessarily patriots.

Finally, Boyce (1991: 235) identifies a final group, formed around the *Gaelic League*, which includes those members who advocated the revival of the Irish language. Whereas Yeats insisted on the validity of Irish literature written in English, these cultural nationalists believed that the only true national literature was that which found expression through the medium of the Irish language. The three most significant figures in this new movement were Father Eugene O'Crowney, Eoin MacNeill and Douglas Hyde, the first president of the *Gaelic League* in 1893. Like literary nationalists, the driving force behind the Gaelic Revival was nationalism. Hyde resembled Davis in that both believed that the only way to save Irish culture was to destroy English culture (p. 239). Nevertheless, there was an essential difference between both movements. The form of nationalism the Gaelic Union advocated became rather exclusive, in its reliance on "the Irish Ireland" (p. 242). The journalist D.P. Moran, one of the promoters of Hyde's *Gaelic League*, expressed the belief that, to be a member of the nation, the Irishman must also be a member of the "distinct and wholly superior" Gaelic race (p. 251). "Irish-Ireland" nationalism highlighted the rural and Catholic nature of Irish society. In this sense, the national narrative they promoted was narrower: 'Irishness' was equated with Catholicism, the Gaelic language, ruralism and anti-modernism. The Ireland they envisaged was rather different from Davis's more inclusive "Anglo-Ireland".

What these three different forms of cultural nationalism had in common was their attempt to overturn the pejorative images fabricated by the English. As several critics have argued, colonialism and nationalism in Ireland have been very similar in the sense that both movements

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intended “to perform versions of Irishness and Englishness to one another” (Lloyd 1993: 123; Deane 1994: 84; Kiberd 1996: 54). In its reliance on Celticism, for instance, Irish cultural nationalism inverted the value but retained the terms of Celtic stereotypes first promulgated by Edmund Spenser and then by Matthew Arnold. Ireland became “not-England” for the Revivalists and later nationalists. Their project can be summarized as follows: “for bad words substitute good, for superstitious use religious, for backward say traditional, for irrational suggest emotional” (Kiberd 1996: 32). In this way, Irish nationalism accepted the terms of colonial discourse, differing only in transforming negative stereotypes into positive ones. On the other hand, it maintained the allegory of Ireland as a woman that British discourse used to justify its imperial enterprise. In submitting to the images the English had constructed, the ‘Ireland’ that cultural nationalists envisaged was largely an English invention. Therefore, the general problem with cultural nationalism is that it is a mere extension of imperialism (Lloyd 1993; Deane 1994; Smyth 1998), and that in its yearn for roots, it falls back into a utopian past, “drunk in remembrance”, as Fanon (1990: 135-136) would describe it, and with no future pretensions. Against this predominant view of cultural nationalism as an atavistic movement, Kiberd (1996: 134) offers a very interesting critique, arguing in more positive terms that the nationalist return to the source was, at a deeper level, a way to “modernize” Ireland: “to be Irish was to be modern in the sense that the Irish were seeking to find a home for themselves after a period of chaos and disruption”. He argues, for instance, that the methods of the *Gaelic League* were anything but conservative, and that the 1916 nationalist rebels rather than being “fixated on the past”, tended to reinterpret the past with a future project in mind (pp. 293-294).

Like these various forms of Irish cultural nationalism, the movements in other colonies sought at first what has been viewed as an inversion of imperial values, with a view to defending an authentic native identity that will guarantee the achievement of political independence. Irish cultural nationalism, with its debates about language revival, nationality and cosmopolitanism in literature, anticipated those discussions later conducted in Asia and Africa. The Irish Revival was followed by Indian writers such as Mulk Raj Anand and Tagore, in their attempt to go back to Indian legends and myths, and to forge an image of traditional India (Boehmer 1995: 114). Yeats would also exert a tremendous influence on other African nationalist movements in the 1960s, with Nigerian writers like Chinua Achebe, Elechi Amadi, Flora Nwapa, Nkem Nwankwo, and Onuora Nzekwu (p. 187).²⁴

²⁴ Irish writers have also been interested in those books emerging in what would later be called the ‘Third World’. Yeats and Pearse, for instance, used the Abbey Theatre to produce Tagore’s *The Post Office* (Kiberd 1996: 272).

(7) Nationalism as a restrictive ideology

The varied nature of Irish society, Boyce (1991: 20-21) argues, is nothing that nationalism, whether political or cultural, can succeed in hiding. The differences between Catholic native Irish and Catholic Anglo-Irish, between Protestant New English and Protestant Ulster Scot, are incremented within each 'sub-group': between landowners and tenants, farmers and landless labourers, small-town middle classes and the workers of Dublin city. Irish nationalist leaders, therefore, had to mobilize very different kinds of people, and in the process, they had to create, at least fictionally, a unity which would justify their claims of nationhood. This clash between nationalism on the one hand and the reality of multiple religious and cultural divisions is well analyzed by Lloyd (1993: 125-162). This critic explains how the agrarian movements of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (such as the organized campaigns by rural secret societies through the 1770s and 1780s, and the 1798 Rising) conflicted with the interests of nationalism. Contrary to nationalism, these uprisings did not represent a transcendent idea of nation, and tended to be based on "a principle of contiguity" rather than on "centralized organization and uniform identity" (p. 146). The agrarian movements represented the "local" and "regional" as opposed to the "national" (p. 149). They meant a menace for the larger project of nationalism and the State: to produce an "imagined community", as Anderson (1983) puts it, where particular differences are homogenized (Lloyd 1993: 147). Consequently, nationalists read peasant disturbances as instinctual and irrational movements, which would be of no help to the achievement of political independence.

This nationalist pull towards homogenization and centralization has been well analyzed by Memmi (1990) and Fanon (1990, 1991), the first theorists to discuss how nationalism functions in decolonizing contexts. For Memmi (1990: 201), postcolonial nationalism, although necessary in the process of decolonization, runs the risk of falling into chauvinism and exclusionism, "of sticking to the most narrow principles". The main problem Memmi (1990: 195) finds in the struggle for national freedom is that the colonized fights by the authority of the same values of the colonizer and 'he' inherits "his techniques of thought and his methods of combat". The colonized believes that it is his difference from the colonizer that constitutes his true identity. Previous negative attributes are turned into positive ones.

Similarly, Fanon's (1990: 38-39) main argument is that anti-colonial nationalism remains trapped within Western imperialist modes of thought, and therefore, it offers no liberation for the colonized subject. As Fanon (1990: 38-39) explains, even after the struggle for national freedom has succeeded, there are certain features of the former colonial power which are still maintained in the national governments. The reason for this is that the economy of the new independent nation is

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not set on new grounds (ibid). Consequently, the postcolonial society is divided into an incompetent native bourgeoisie in power, which is still influenced by the essential qualities of the West and is therefore slightly different from the colonialist bourgeoisie, and “the mass of the people”, the peasants, the real revolutionary ones, who are mainly inspired by the ideal of “Bread and land” (ibid).²⁵

Ireland conforms as well to the model of bourgeois nationalism that Fanon detected in certain newly-independent African states. Independent Ireland was in many ways an extension of imperialism. The institutions of the Irish Free State in the period immediately after independence were very similar to those of the English colonial state. This fact is well examined by Lloyd (1987: x), who views nationalism as a repressive political movement “by virtue of its obsession with a deliberately exclusive concept of racial identity and, more importantly, by virtue of its formal identity with imperial ideology”. Lloyd (1993: 54) has explained how bourgeois nationalism in Ireland maintained the same ideology of the colonizers, for it reproduced, in its very opposition to the Empire, the aesthetic and developmental theories current in the major European imperial states. Irish nationalism based its ideology on the unification of all Irish citizens. In the process, however, severe inequalities in class, community, and gender relations were reinforced.

Postcolonial scholars such as Rajan (1993: 6) have explained that, in contrast to Western European states, nationalist victory in a former colony does not mean national unification, but rather institutionalized racial and sectarian divisions, as well as strong inequalities of social structures. After winning political independence, Ireland was divided into two main class sectors: the bourgeoisie and the working class (Lloyd 1993: 18). This segregation was also observed ideologically. As Boyce (1991: 22) explains, the Ireland that won independence in 1922 was not even “a united, three-quarter nation”: it was divided between “incorruptible” republicans and those who accepted British dominion status; middle class farmers and businessmen who feared that their social status might diminish with the revolution; the Protestant and Unionist community, who although a minority were influential in position; and Gaelic cultural fanatics who wanted to make Ireland not only politically independent but also Gaelic. It was this lack of political and ideological cohesion that, according to Lloyd (1993: 18) delayed the introduction of capitalism. Like other postcolonial countries such as India, Ireland found itself with economic underdevelopment after the independence. The resistance to modernize that Ireland experiences in the post-independence

²⁵ Later postcolonial discussions have also highlighted the fact that postcolonial nationalism tends to reinstate colonial polity and uncritically adopt its system and modes of thought. See for instance Nandy (1983: 3), Rajan (1993: 6), Said (1994: 276), and Young (1990: 169). In particular see Bhabha’s interesting deconstruction of nationalism in his essay “Dissemination” (1994b: 291-322). This dismantling of nationalism has also been recently carried out in Ireland with critics such as Deane (1994: 84), Kiberd (1996: 32), Graham (1994b: 35; 1995/6: 35), and Lloyd (1987: 113). For an illuminating discussion of the different aspects of nation and nationhood in varied historical and cultural contexts see Blake and Nyman (2001).

period reflects an attempt to forge an alternative future for Ireland. When Eamon de Valera won the 1932 election, he proceeded with a Republican agenda founded on traditionalism, as opposed to Britain's cosmopolitanism/modernization. De Valera identified with the rural areas as a source of authenticity: rural and Catholic Ireland was 'real' Ireland. His conservative stance parallels Gandhi's, for instance, who envisaged India as a pre-industrial and pastoral homeland (Boehmer 1995: 119-120). With the decision to remain officially neutral in War World II, life in Ireland consequently became even "more inward-looking" (Kiberd 1996: 471). Ireland tried to formulate a foreign policy quite independent from Britain. But at the cultural level, it isolated Irish intellectuals internationally (p. 472).

In this sense, the cultural isolation and political lethargy that Rajan (1993: 6) identifies in postcolonial nations is put to manifest in Ireland. The 1929 Act of censorship, for instance, tried to prevent innovative thought (Smyth 1998: 96). It was a symptom of a wider censoriousness which attempted to keep a whole culture uncontaminated by foreign influence. Like in its African and Indian counterparts, the postcolonial education system in Ireland was still reminiscent of the English colonial system of education, which was starting to become outdated (Kiberd 1996: 553). This cultural isolation was enhanced by the Censorship of Publications Act in 1946, which aggravated censorship practices (Smyth 1998: 148). The decade between 1948 and 1958 was characterized not only by this social and cultural stagnation, but also by economic decline. Ireland's economy was predominantly agricultural, and it had very few industries (Kiberd 1996: 476). It wasn't until the 1960s that Ireland started slowly to recover from this economic underdevelopment and cultural lethargy.

(8) Postcolonial women: doubly colonized subjects

As several critics have pointed out (Katrak 1992: 13; Meaney 1993b: 233; Rajan 1993: 6; Boehmer 1995: 119-120; Balzano 1996: 93; Fulford 2002b: 21), nationalism has reiterated the colonial structures of oppression in its legislation towards women. In order to react against imperialist stereotypes, the colonized people, in claiming independence and sovereignty, also reinforce gender divisions, declaring their 'masculine' power. In India, like in Ireland, women are relegated to a strictly domestic space, and they are allowed no participation in public affairs (Boehmer 1995: 119-120). As Katrak's account (1992: 13) shows, Gandhi sought to use the myth of the Indian woman's obedience, "her ability to suffer silently", as an image of the political resistance necessary for a nationalist struggle. Gandhi's symbols of female submissiveness became useful in the end but they were also repressive social instruments for women. Singh (2000: 122-133) examines how contending Hindu, Muslim, and Sikh nationalisms employed in their rhetoric

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women's bodies, and how their versions of history silenced the actual experiences of women, in particular "the everyday torments of migrating populations [...] of women" (p. 123). Similarly, Boehmer (1995: 224-225) explains how African literature after independence marginalized women in their nationalist discourses. In the work of Peter Abrahams (*A Wreath for Udomo*, 1956) or Wole Soyinka (*A Dance of the Forests*, 1963), for instance, women are widely regarded as icons of national values, or idealized custodians of tradition. The sexual conservatism of postcolonial India and Africa parallels that in Ireland. As I will analyze more comprehensively in section 5.3., it was the Irish poets themselves who glorified women in their works, with the emblematic image of the nation as a woman and the woman as the nation. As Meaney (1993b: 242) has asserted, "[i]f we look for analogies to the position of Irish women, it might perhaps be to the Arab nations where, as in Ireland, women are too often the scapegoats of national and religious identity". In fact, Irish women have suffered Third World women's double colonization. The Irish Free State repeated "the master/slave' dialect" according to which, in order for the new nation to build a stable sense of identity, "women become "the 'others' of [...] society" (Fulford 2002b: 21). Their attempt to rediscover their female identity has been, in this sense, eclipsed not only by the 'otherness' of Ireland but also by the edicts of patriarchy. Balzano (1996: 93) defines Irish women's situation as follows: "On the one hand silenced and marginalized by patriarchal power as a woman, on the other devalued and minimalized by British imperialist culture as [...] Irish".

Irish women's political and cultural emancipation has been complicated due to their country's colonial and nationalist background. Whereas in the West women's movements militated against the inequalities behind the dream of a "common" nationhood, in anti-colonial struggles feminist programs have been delayed by the fight for national liberation and, in the aftermath of independence, women have been resigned to their formerly "domestic" roles (Parker et al. 1994: 7). Irish feminism, as that feminism flourishing in formerly colonized nations, has been sacrificed to the nationalist cause. As we will see in section 3.3., Irish women's movements end by forming alliances with the State.

(9) Diaspora, exile, and emigration

One consequence of imperial domination is the drastic displacement of the colonized population due to slavery, oppression, and the economic disproportion between postcolonial countries and the rest of the world (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin 2002a: 217). Large scale emigration has been a constant of Irish culture at least since the time of the Great Famine. Critics such as Innes (2000: 27) even draw analogies between the brutal transportation of Africans to North America, South America, and the Caribbean, and the history of Irish emigration. As this

scholar explains, after the 1798 Rebellion in Ireland, nine shiploads full of Irish convicts were sent to Australia, arriving in 1800. In the four decades preceding the eve of independence in Ireland, emigration was the only viable alternative for almost a quarter and a million Irishmen and women, in order to survive economic and cultural devastation (Lloyd 2003: 57). But emigration continued to be an obvious choice in the post-independence period. As a result of the economic recession, and the religious, patriarchal, and conservative ideologies of the newly independent postcolonial state, the number of people leaving the country rose considerably. By the end of the 1920s many artists and intellectuals (George Russell, Daniel Corkery, James Joyce, and Samuel Beckett, among others) left Ireland because they realized that the country was using old imperialist mechanisms in the name of a nationalist revival (Kiberd 1996: 264-265). These figures are emblematic of thousands of Irish emigrants who felt the need to leave the newly independent nation. It is interesting to see the increase of Irish emigration figures after the proclamation of the Irish Free State. As Rossiter (1993: 188) explains, whereas in the period between 1901 and 1921 a total of 510,400 men and women left the 32 counties of Ireland, from 1926 to 1961 the net figure for those leaving the 26-county independent State was 882,149. Exile reached crisis proportions in the 1950s due to a widespread rejection of the conditions of rural life (Brown 1985: 183). This emigration trend even went higher in the 1980s, due to economic reasons. Although London was specifically their destination, there was a minimum of 150,000 Irish people that have emigrated illegally to the USA since 1981 (Rossiter 1993: 192). The existence of illegal emigration is one of the features of postcolonial underdeveloped nations, in their difficulty to recuperate economically after independence.

Despite these common features which operate similarly in all colonial and postcolonial nations, one has to bear in mind that not all societies are 'postcolonial' in the same way. As Young (1995: 164-165) has argued, we must be careful not to be easily drawn into the presupposition that colonialism operates indistinguishably across all spaces. Indeed, it is necessary to pay attention to "historical and geographical particularities" (ibid). The Caribbean example, for instance, distances a great deal from the experience of colonization in Ireland. The European imperial enterprise in the Caribbean exemplifies the worst features of colonialism: the literal extermination of the native population of Caribs and Arawaks, the unlawful seizure of land and goods by the European powers, the brutal savagery of the slave trade and plantation slavery, and the subsequent systems of oppression of exiled Chinese and Indians in the Caribbean (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin 2002a: 144). On the other hand, it is my belief that, with the economic bloom the country has been experiencing after the 1970s, Ireland certainly cannot be equated with other postcolonial countries

such as South Africa or India. Ireland's complex position within postcolonial studies has been well summarized by Graham (1999: 15), who argues that Irish culture "at once Western and colonized, white and racially other, imperial and subjugated, became marginal in the sense of existing at the edge of two existences". Therefore, when analyzing Ireland as a postcolonial country, one must take into account the historical and cultural differences that distance it from Third World countries, while still understanding that there are homogenizing effects in colonialism throughout space and time. Only by doing so, as Young (1995: 165) puts it, can we "do justice to both levels".

2.6. Postcolonial strategies of decolonization

The most argumentative debate in postcolonial theory and criticism concerns the question of agency and resistance: how individuals and groups can struggle for release from colonial subjugation. As Smyth (1988: 18) notes, "the possibility of recovering forms of resistance, as well as imagining future politico-cultural formations" which bring about an ultimate decolonization for the subaltern subject are key areas of continuing concern in this field. One of the most important issues in postcolonialism is what 'decolonization' implies and how it should be achieved. Because colonialism has taken many different forms across time and geographies, decolonization has been theorized in similar multiform and complex ways.

This section aims to show the different ways in which colonial and postcolonial theorists and critics have formulated a discourse of resistance. After mentioning the different models of decolonization proposed by postcolonial theory and criticism, I will choose the predominant paradigms of decolonization for my study of Eavan Boland's poetry. There are some current trends which I am going to employ in my analysis, insofar as they strike me as relevant. In an attempt to address the particularity of this Irish woman poet's work, I am using the theoretical premises developed by Memmi, Fanon, Said, Bhabha, and Spivak, without ignoring the contributions of other postcolonial critics and theorists.

The importance of theory for an understanding of postcolonial literature is exemplified by Ngũgĩ in his book *Decolonizing the Mind* (1994: 63). In one of his lectures, Ngũgĩ informed his Kenyan student audience that, in order to understand African writing, they had to read two books, Lenin's *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism* (1975) [1916] and Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (1990) [1961]. Indeed, an insight into some of the most important postcolonial theorists is highly important for analyses of postcolonial literature, as they place the cultural (including literary) aspect of colonial and postcolonial history at the centre of their discussions.

Before focusing on the theoretical paradigms of decolonization that I am going to apply to Boland's poetry, I will briefly mention those other trends which I am omitting from my analysis.

In *Decolonization and Criticism*, Smyth (1998: 9-34) summarizes the dominant theories of decolonization as they pertain to Ireland. Smyth asserts that the wide range of responses since the eighteenth century to the question of Ireland's identity gives rise to two different and specific models of decolonization: a 'radical' mode of decolonization and a 'liberal' mode of decolonization. Apart from Smyth's analysis, I will briefly make a comment on the existence of Marxism as a possible mode of decolonization defended by some postcolonial theorists. Finally, I will develop what has generally been accepted as a more liberating mode of decolonization: the adoption of hybridity.

(1) 'Radical' mode of decolonization: nationalism

Historically, one of the most widespread anti-colonial movements has been, and still is, nationalism. The defence of nationalism as the most viable means of agency for the subaltern subject is defined by Smyth (1998: 17) as "Radical Decolonization". This strategy of decolonization involves the subordinate subject using his/her different status as a starting point from which to move away from metropolitan values (understood as imperialistic) and to celebrate a national identity identified as "unique" and "authentic" (Smyth 1998: 54). Decolonization in this sense is "concerned with what is imagined as different and unique about national identity" (p. 17). It entails a repudiation of imperial discourse, a celebration of distinctiveness, and a reversal of the status of the colonial subject as inferior (ibid).

This form of "radical" decolonization has been taken to extreme degrees in the case of Ireland as a colonial and postcolonial country. As we have seen, a distinctive national identity was strongly defended in the writings and activities of Douglas Hyde, who argued in favour of an "Irish Ireland" in which the Gaelic element was what truly defined the nation-people. According to Smyth (1998: 71), figures like Hyde and Davis, were "radical decolonizing intellectual[s] confronting head-on the difficulties of constructing Irish identity in the terms made available by the colonial power". This radical form of nationalism succeeded after the foundation of the Irish Free State (p. 83). In the years after 1922, the conservative State promoted a national identity whose foundations were "racial exclusivity, individual repression, and fear of difference" (ibid).

This mode of decolonization continues to be relevant as a modern decolonizing practice. For many critics, such as the contributors to *After Europe* (Slemon & Tiffin 1989), nation and nationalism as 'master' narratives of emancipation are legitimate means of reacting against colonialism. During (1994: 139) also defends using nationalism as an effective political action, arguing, from the perspective of an Australian citizen, belonging to what he calls a "First World Colony", that "one ought to be a nationalist" in order to organize resistance to all forms of

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imperialism. This is also the case of Ngũgĩ (1994: 27), who stresses the need to return to African languages if full cultural and political independence is to be achieved. In *Decolonizing the Mind*, Ngũgĩ (1994: xiv) announces “his farewell to English”, and his decision to write in Gikuyu or Kiswahili. He puts forward the argument that the only way to transcend what he calls “colonial alienation” is by writing African literature in African languages (p. 28), for “the borrowed tongues” can never entirely bear witness to African experience (p. 7). In order to bring “the total liberation of all the black people”, decolonization must involve a much more radical movement away from European values and modes of thought (p. 98). Ngũgĩ’s project, then, resembles the Gaelic Revival’s desire to deanglicize Ireland, in order to liberate Irish people from the colonial oppressive influence.

(2) ‘Liberal’ mode of decolonization

A second model of colonial resistance Smyth (1998: 15-6) identifies in Ireland is “Liberal Decolonization”, which refers to “a form of resistance in which subordinate colonial subjects (whether native or settler) seek *equality* with the dominant colonialist identity”. This tendency towards a “benign universalism” is, in the Irish context, most notoriously observed in those intellectuals from the Anglo-Irish community (identified by Boyce (1991: 230) as “literary patriots”), who sought to elevate the status of Ireland to that of England, even as they attempted, in the process, to preserve their prominent status as a privileged fraction of society (p. 16). According to Smyth (1998: 66), Samuel Ferguson’s discourse represents a form of ‘liberal’ decolonization. Yeats’s task resembles Ferguson’s, as he attempted to guarantee Anglo-Irish inclusion in the Irish nation by constructing a worthy culture that could compete on equal terms with metropolitan culture (p. 75). Nevertheless, Yeats’s situation within ‘liberal’ decolonization is somehow ambiguous, for he also defended a ‘radical’ Celticism, in his attempt to create an ‘authentic’ Irish identity uncontaminated by English influence (p. 58).

Both modes of decolonization, radical and liberal, have been defined as necessary but limited responses to the fact of colonial domination. As Smyth (1998: 18-19) has argued, these two anti-colonial practices, dominant in Ireland throughout the last two centuries, did not manage to articulate a fruitful narrative of decolonization, for they uncritically operated within the discursive and psychological limits imposed by colonial discourse. In other words, they were constructed upon notions from the colonial power such as “tradition, authenticity, and sovereignty” (p. 18).

(3) Marxism as a mode of decolonization

Several postcolonial critics nowadays defend Marxism as a practice of resistance to colonialism and neo-colonialism. This is the case of Hartsock (1990: 26), Parry (1987: 24), and Ahmad (1992: 140). All these critics defend the construction of a socialist society, and argue in favour of Marxism as the best means to achieve the liberation of the colonized subject. Hartsock (1990: 26), for instance, argues that current postcolonial (and postmodernist) theories, with their critique of identity, are dangerous approaches for any marginalized group. This critic advocates a reconstructed Marxist theory that preserves notions such as identity and, instead of reinstating the structures of power, allows a positive transformation of marginalized groups (pp. 34-36). Similarly, Ahmad (1992: 140) believes that Marxism offers a suitable narrative for liberation movements. He argues in favour of what he calls a "One World" theory, according to which liberation is achieved by the allied struggle of the working classes around the world. The problem with these Marxist advocacies, as Moore-Gilbert (2000: 200) explains, is that, in focusing on class as the determining context in which liberation must be carried out, ethnic, religious, gender, or cultural differences run the risk of being ignored.

(4) Interrogating Identity: hybridity as a decolonizing discourse

An ultimate model of decolonization is comprised around the notion of 'hybridity'. In contrast to the former postcolonial models that defend essentialist conceptions of identity, that is, the notion of the centred subject and an homogeneous view of the nation, this model of decolonization is considered to be the most influential in postcolonial criticism and theory (Moore-Gilbert 2000: 192). In several different ways, the authors I am going to discuss here view hybridity as the most active and resistant strategy to break the circle of colonial domination.

I will particularly focus on the theoretical parameters set up by Memmi and Fanon, whose work is intrinsically grounded in the experience of colonization. Both intellectuals yearn for a decolonization which moves away from 'nativist' goals. They argue that the freeing of the colonized subject from his/her disabling position is found in the construction of new liberating narratives, narratives which surpass national and race boundaries. In this sense, Memmi and Fanon were the first theorists to articulate a new mode of decolonization different from those which emphasize 'authentic' conceptions of identity. Although their call for humanism and universalism brings them close to Parry and Ahmad's advocacy of Marxism, their rejection of pre-established identities such as 'colonizer' and 'colonized' advance later deconstructions of both terms. Memmi and Fanon have established the grounds for an emerging theory that seeks to move away from what Smyth (1998: 15) has called "radical" and "liberal" modes of anti-colonial discourse and that

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finds in hybridity a suitable form of resistance. It is then unsurprising that Fanon becomes a model for later postcolonial critics such as Said and Bhabha. The theoretical parameters proposed by these two figures and complemented by Spivak are acknowledged to be central to the field (Young 1995: 163). As explained above, their location within the Western academy has been understood by some critics as betraying their contemporaries in their native nations. Although it is true that Said, Bhabha, and Spivak belong to formerly colonized nations, and that they are currently based in the West, such geographical factors do not in themselves automatically disqualify their theories. Although their work, in Ahmad's eyes (1992: 13), might be viewed as 'contaminated' by Western institutional affiliations, their theories are nonetheless highly significant for an understanding of much postcolonial literature nowadays.

The clearest way in which Said, Bhabha, Spivak, and Hall are influenced by Memmi and Fanon is in their challenge to imperialist and nationalist ideologies. Their theories have served not only to deconstruct Western and imperialist ideologies, but also to implement strategies of decolonization that move away from nationalist demands. Said, for instance, shares with Fanon the possibility of a new humanist conception of decolonization. Said is concerned with a reconstructed 'humanism' as an alternative way to move beyond the dual opposition between the West and the non-West (Moore-Gilbert 2000: 193). This theorist, together with Bhabha and Spivak, can be defined as "syncreticist", using Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin's coinage (2002a: 29). They locate decolonization in the reconciliation or fusion of the different elements, colonial and postcolonial, and stress the plurality of identity through various versions of the concept of 'hybridity'. 'Hybridity' involves cultural syncretism, and the possibility of occupying a non-essentialist liminal stance that disrupts colonizer and colonized binaries. For Said, Bhabha, and Spivak, the diasporic subject is the decolonizing subject par excellence, because he or she moves more easily beyond imperialist and nationalist ideologies (see section 7.4.4.2.1. for a more comprehensive discussion of the concept 'hybridity' as formulated by these theorists). It is my contention that their defence of crossing cultural and national boundaries can be understood as a reformulation of Memmi's and Fanon's models of decolonization.

In contrast to theorists like Ngũgĩ, these 'syncreticist' theorists believe that decolonization can be achieved by the employment and transformation of the colonizer's language. They seem to embrace Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin's (2002a) celebration of the subversive nature of 'english' versus 'English', (see section 6.3. for an explanation of this distinction). Nonetheless, although these theorists seem to ignore the larger body of ex-colonized 'subjects-in place', those who still live in their postcolonial country and continue to employ their native language (a fact that Ahmad energetically criticizes), I will apply their model of analysis to Boland's work, for the woman poet

personifies, as an exiled intellectual living and working in the US, and writing in English, their view of the postcolonial subject. As we will see, the theoretical assumptions of these theorists are highly relevant for an understanding of a poetry that shares the experience of migrancy and unbelonging of postcolonial texts like Salman Rushdie's. On the other hand, Boland's poetry exemplifies Said's, Bhabha's, and Spivak's syncretism: her poetry is not a pure reconstruction of traditional values, but a complex and hybridized formation. As we will see, she constantly intermingles classical sources (in particular Greek and Latin myths) with English and Irish literary traditions. That is why I employ these models of analysis, and not Ngũgĩ's 'radical' model of decolonization, for instance, which seems to be addressed merely to the colonial 'subject-in-place'.

In locating Said, Bhabha, and also Spivak after Memmi's and Fanon's analyses, I intend to show that, although separated by time, geographical and cultural circumstances, their theories can be linked to those of these liberationist thinkers. In doing so, I disagree with Walder (1998: 72), who distinguishes between two opposing and irreconcilable trends in postcolonial theory: "a *materialist* wing", mostly exemplified by Fanon, and "a *textualist* wing", carried out by Said, Bhabha, and Spivak. Whereas the first trend conceptualizes agency by means of social and political revolution, the second one articulates subaltern agency only through discourse. This dichotomy is not entirely acceptable because Said, Bhabha, and Spivak do not ignore social and historical realities, as Walder implies, and their theories are, in fact, a continuation and reformulation of Memmi's and Fanon's models of decolonization. Said, for instance, has been engaged with crucial political issues, as his outstanding role in the Palestinian cause has demonstrated (Moore-Gilbert 2000: 164). On the other hand, by considering the work of Said and Bhabha as greatly indebted to Fanon, I disagree with Ahmad's and Parry's attack on these postcolonial theorists for ignoring Fanon's colonial criticism, and for not offering any suitable form of reactionary politics (Ahmad 1992: 172; Parry 1987: 30). First of all, it is my contention that Fanon has had great influence on the work of these critics. As we will see, he is constantly referred to in Said's and Bhabha's theories. Young (1992: 156) even acknowledges Fanon to be the precursor of Said, Bhabha and Spivak, naming *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) as the text which initiates their attempt to decolonize European philosophy and historiography. Secondly, I believe that Said's, Bhabha's, and Spivak's theories offer important examples of mobilization against colonization. Their arguments have a great relevance for decolonization in the cultural terrain. Oppression is not only mediated in material forms, as Ahmad (1992: 172) and Parry (1987: 29-30) seem to imply, but also aesthetically. As Fanon (1990: 179-198) argues, decolonization cannot be fully achieved until literature and other forms of cultural manifestations are incorporated in the struggle for political emancipation. In this sense, all the critics I mention in this work try to

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accomplish the project set up by Fanon by offering the liberation of culture from colonialism. From this perspective, their theories are, as Moore-Gilbert (2000: 164) notes, “a form of political praxis”. Increasingly, more academic scholars are calling into question the implied divisions between theory, literature, and practical politics (Fulford 2002b: 10; Moore-Gilbert 2000: 165). Similarly, I do not accept the generally accepted assumption that there is a division between pure theory, as carried out by Said, Bhabha, and Spivak, and political praxis. In this respect, JanMohamed and David Lloyd (1990b: 10) challenge scholars to develop “a mutually complementary work of theoretical critique and practical struggle” (quoted in Moore-Gilbert 2000: 165), and it is with this perspective in mind that I will assess the work of the five postcolonial theorists under discussion.

3. IRISH FEMINISM

3.1. Introduction

In her article “Defining Feminism: A Comparative Historical Approach”, Offen (1988: 152) asserts that three criteria are necessary to define an individual as a feminist. The first two focus on the recognition and consciousness of the injustice exerted on women. The third concerns the political consequences of this understanding of oppression: consciousness must lead to action. Accordingly, Offen (1988: 152) explains that a feminist is one who:

advocate[s] the elimination of that injustice by challenging through efforts to alter prevailing ideas [...], the coercive power, force, or authority that upholds male prerogatives in that particular culture. Thus, to be a feminist is necessarily to be at odds with male-dominated culture and society.

This definition coincides in its main tenets with Marks and de Courtivron’s definition (1981a: x): “we define feminism as an awareness of women’s oppression-repression that initiates both analyses of the dimension of this oppression-repression, and strategies for liberation”. These general definitions are helpful points from which to begin an analysis of Irish women’s repression and their consequent attempt at liberation. In order to fully comprehend the origins and evolution of feminism in Ireland, we should take into account the prejudices towards women held by the State, the Church, and other social institutions. The following section is aimed at tracing the different stages of Irish feminism, and how this movement, rather than following a straightforward linear progression, has experienced progress and setbacks, successes and failures, due to the complexities of Ireland’s colonial and nationalist experience. Secondly, I will investigate the specificity of the Irish national experience, for nationalism and feminism in Ireland have been, at times, exclusive categories. Finally, I will offer a general overview of Irish women in the twentieth century, in order to observe more clearly their social and political relegation under the government of the Irish Free State.

3.2. At odds with culture and society: first and second waves of feminism

A great deal has been written on the public activism of Irish women from the late nineteenth century onwards. Margaret Ward (1997, 2001) is perhaps one of the most important Irish historians on this matter. In order to trace the development and different phases Irish feminism has undergone in the last two centuries, I will especially rely on Jaime de Pablos’ (2002) analysis of this movement in her thesis on George Moore, and on Hill’s (2003) recent study on Irish women’s fight for a proper social and political role from the nineteenth century.

Traditional approaches defend a society divided into “two spheres”: a private (domestic) sphere, assigned to women in their exclusive roles as mothers and housewives; and a public sphere, reserved to men, for they are supposed to be better equipped, both physically and intellectually, to carry out tasks in the social, political, economic, artistic, and work terrains (Jaime de Pablos 2000: 6). Male thinkers, in their different disciplines, have tried to justify the submissive role women were supposed to adopt. Jaime de Pablos (2000: 36-37) mentions some male philosophers who have coincided in denying the female access to three basic areas in modern civilization, science, state and economy: Kant, Hegel, Kierkegaard, Schopenhauer, Weininger, Nietzsche, and Freud; nonetheless, it is Jean-Jacques Rousseau the most influential philosopher who justifies women's marginal position more belligerently. Rousseau's theories would generate in the eighteenth century a sexist philosophical stream denominated “Sensualism” (or “Sexual Romanticism”), and which would exert tremendous influence in Great Britain and Ireland throughout the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth (p. 55). Rousseau's view of women's role in society, made explicit in *Émilie, ou de l'éducation*, had a great effect on the mentality of a great sector of the privileged classes in Great Britain and Ireland. According to Rousseau, women had to be virginal, modest, reserved, decorous, patient, gentle, kind, affectionate, sensitive and virtuous, and also had to know how to maintain their reputation, honour, and religious beliefs (ibid). As determined by this stream of thought, women's main objective in life was to find a husband who would support them economically. In response, women's main concern would be to take care of their physical appearance, in order to appeal to men. Marriage becomes, therefore, a mere commercial transaction/exchange between a feminine aesthetic ‘capital’ and a masculine economic ‘capital’. The secondary role of women was also justified by scientific treaties. Jaime de Pablos (2000: 37) mentions the theories of Herbert Spenser and Charles Darwin, who locate men in a superior evolutionary stratum. As regards the ecclesiastic institution, this researcher (2000: 125-168) argues that, based on the Old Testament, Catholicism has propagated a vision of women as ‘fallen Eves’. Since Eve offered the forbidden fruit to Adam, from the very beginning, women are marked by a painful maternity and by irrepressible carnal desires. Because women are viewed as sinful by nature, their independence must be restrained in case they could exploit it in a way counterproductive to the divine plans. Their only possible way of obtaining salvation is by blindly believing in the Holy Word: religious precepts are expected to be followed in a stricter way by women than by men (p. 124).

In the face of all these sexist prejudices, a debate emerges in the 1880s and on to the first decade of the twentieth century, around the so-called “Women Question”, with voices in favour and against the fact that women achieve comparable or equal status to men. It is in this period

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when we should locate the “first wave of feminism”, which aimed at redefining women’s social roles (pp. 6-7). This movement will not only be perceived in Ireland, but also internationally. In France, Germany, and the United States, the movement acquired great vigor, with feminists such as Charles Fourier (p. 39). Fourier’s disciple, Pierre Leroux, and George Sand will have a considerable impact on Great Britain and Ireland during this period.¹ This international feminist movement, as Jaime de Pablos (2000: 52) explains, is highly heterogeneous, for it has adopted various channels to give answers and solutions to the inequities suffered by women. Thus, we can distinguish between the Marxist feminism in Germany, the ‘avant-garde’ feminism of the United States (with prominent figures such as Abigail Addams, Amelia Bloomer, Susan Anthony, and Elizabeth Stanton) and the psychoanalytic feminism (which focuses on reformulating Freudian theories, as in the case of Karen Horney, Sherry B. Ortner, and Nancy Chodorow) (pp. 39-47). In the second half of the nineteenth century, England (together with US, France, Germany, Italy, or Russia) is one of the countries where the feminist associations set stronger and were better organized. Jaime de Pablos (2000: 41) explains that the main fight of Anglo-Saxon feminism focused on two aspects: feminine suffrage (backed by the *National Society for Women’s Suffrage*, with Lydia Becker as president), and the regulation of prostitution (with Josephine Butler as founder and leader of the *Ladies’ National Association*). Simultaneously, journals and magazines such as the *Englishwoman’s Journal* (edited by Elizabeth Sharples) emerged with a view to propagating the demands of these feminist organizations (pp. 41-42). Their advocacy of women’s rights were anticipated by two outstanding English figures, who raised their voices in defence of the feminist ideology: Mary Wollstonecraft with *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792), where she criticizes Rousseauian ‘sensualism’, and John Stuart Mill with *On Liberty* (1859) and *The Subjection of Women* (1869), which highlighted him as one of the first males to align his strengths to the women’s cause (pp. 39-40). Of extreme importance is also William Thomson, who in his *Appeal of One Half of the Human Race, Women against the Pretensions of the Other Half, Men, to retain them in political, and thence in civil and domestic slavery* (1825), will make a call for women to rebel against the injustices done to them (ibid).

In Ireland, early feminists tended to follow Thomson’s political and socialist perspective. Although in previous periods women had already united their forces in political and social campaigns, their public participation during 1880-1920 was particularly significant (Hill 2003: 51). The interests of Irish feminists in this period are varied, and it is common to come across the

¹ French feminists such as George Sand and Rosa Bonheur initiated a cross-dressing trend and also the so-called “romantic friendships”, the cultural form to denominate those women who wished to exploit lesbian contacts (Jaime de Pablos 2000: 46).

same names (Mary Sheehy-Skeffington, James Connolly, or James Larking) within suffrage, pacifist, trade-union, and nationalist, or unionist societies (p. 52).

Like in England, the fight for winning women's votes will be the main concern of Irish feminism in the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth century (Jaime de Pablos 2000: 42). Its importance emanates from the fact that, with the exception of the Labour Party, no mainstream political party defended their suffragist campaign (Hill 2003: 53). Its advocates were mainly Protestants and non-conformists, due to the fact that the Church asked the faithful to remain at a great distance. The most important suffragist associations in Ireland were the *North of Ireland's Women's Suffrage Committee* (founded in Belfast in 1872 by Isabella M.S. Tod), the *Dublin Women's Suffrage Association* (founded in 1876 by Thomas J. Haslam and Anna Haslam), the *Conservative and Unionist Women's Suffrage Organization* (founded in 1909), and the *Irish Women's Reform League* (founded in 1911) (Jaime de Pablos 2000: 43). Other suffragist organizations are the *Church League for Women's Suffrage for Anglican Women* (1913), the *Munster Women's Franchise League* (1911), and the *Irish Catholic Women's Suffrage Association* (1915). With the help of prominent figures in the Irish feminist arena, such as Hanna and Francis Sheehy-Skeffington, and Margaret and James Cousins, two important achievements were accomplished: *The Women's Poor Law Guardian Act* (1896), which gave women power in the local governments, and the *Representation of the People Act* (1918), which gave women the right to vote on the condition that they were older than thirty, landowners, or university graduates (ibid). The gradual inclusion of women in the political arena is further exemplified when Sinn Féin proposed two women as candidates in the 1918 election: Countess Markievicz and Winifred Carney (Hill 2003: 79). Of these two, Markievicz was elected as Minister of Labour, becoming the first woman holding a cabinet post (p. 80).

As regards the pedagogical demands, Irish feminists in the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth requested the improvement of the educational system, so that women could have the same opportunities as their male counterparts. They demanded a similar curriculum for both sexes, as well as women's access to secondary education and universities. As Jaime de Pablos (2000: 43-44) explains, this demand was justified by feminists in two ways. Some of them argued that women, in order properly to fulfill their role as mothers and teachers of their children, must receive the same educational opportunities as men. This form of feminism made use of the traditional dichotomy of private (female) sphere and public (male) sphere in order to make its claims. On the other hand, we find those feminists who maintained that, in order to gain economic emancipation, women must receive adequate education. In Ireland, the most important figures demanding educational rights were Anne Jellicoe, Margaret Byers, Isabelle Tod, and Alice Olham,

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all of them members of feminist organizations such as *The Association of Irish Schoolmistresses and Other Ladies Interested in Education* or *The Ulster Head Schoolmistresses' Association* (p. 44). With the *Intermediate Education Act* (1878) and the *Royal University Education (Ireland) Act* (1879), women were finally able to access to secondary education and universities in Ireland, although separated from male students (p. 267). In 1880, Irish feminist organizations eventually achieved the admission of women to those universities, which had been, until then, exclusively for men. Queen's College Belfast was the first one to open its doors to women, followed by Queen's College Cork (1886) and Queen's College Galway (1888). Trinity College Dublin did not permit women's access until 1904.

Other important demands of the Irish feminist agenda were the right to administer the wife's personal property (eventually achieved in 1882 with the *Married Women's Property Act*), the defence of self-ownership (the acknowledgment that women are the only owners of their bodies), and the abolition of a system which divided tasks and jobs in terms of sexist prejudices. Louie Bennet stands out in her defence of work as a means for women to achieve personal fulfillment. Whereas the pacifist Bennet defended the existence of trade unions exclusively for women, Cissie Calahan promoted unisex trade unions. Other Irish feminists who contributed to women's emancipation in work were Helena Moloney, Constance Markievicz, and the socialist James Connolly (p. 224).² On the other hand, Irish feminists also declared war on the *Contagious Diseases Acts* (CDAs), promulgated by the State in 1864 in order to prevent any sexual encounter with prostitutes serving as channel of transmission of venereal infections (p. 35). The CDAs stipulated that humiliating and denigrating medical controls should be carried out on these prostitutes, but, strangely enough, not on men. Names such as Josephine Butler, Harriet Martineau, Florence Nightingale, Isabelle Tod, and Anna Haslam united their struggles, both in England and Ireland, to repeal this act. The pressures the *National Association for the Repeal of the Contagious Diseases Act* and *Ladies National Association* exerted on the government from 1869 onwards, achieved the desired goal: the CDAs were finally suspended in 1883 (p. 45).

Feminism in Ireland (as in Great Britain), was not an isolated movement, but a crusade which aligned its cause with socialists (in order to achieve workers' protection and education), liberals (out of political and economic pretensions), reformists (with a view to solving problems as regards prostitution), syndicalists (in order to achieve improvements in the work terrain), and anarchists (with a view to enhancing the control over the birth rate). This alignment with different ideological groups, as Jaime de Pablos (2000: 42) points out, would be of no benefit for feminists,

² The first Irish feminists trade unions were *The Textile Operatives' Society* (founded by Mary Galway in Belfast in 1893) and *The Irish Women Workers' Union* (1911) (Jaime de Pablos 2000: 44).

for they would eventually give priority to their sectorial interests. Furthermore, although in this first period of feminism much in the women's cause was achieved, conservatism strengthened from the First World War onwards, due to social and political reasons. As we will see, after achieving political independence from Great Britain, the women's movement went into decline, due to the repressive climate in the Independent Irish State (Daly 1997: 107). Irish feminists saw their struggles defeated on several occasions. This is the case of the *Conditions of Employment Bill*, introduced by the Irish Ministry of Industry and Commerce in 1935, according to which women were officially excluded from several jobs in the industrial sector (Hill 2003: 100). Although some of their aspirations failed, these suffragist and pacifist women were an inspiration for future generations of feminists in Ireland. Their demands for their voting rights and a living wage, amongst other claims, established a solid ground for later activists.

The Irish feminist movement was revitalized again in the 1970s, mainly by the problems emerging from the publication of the liberal feminist Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* in 1963 (1974) (Jaime de Pablos 2000: 48). This second wave of feminism, a century after the beginning of the first wave, is also characterized by heterogeneous movements. Socialist feminism (which makes use of Marxist, psychoanalytical, and liberal theories) stands out with prominent figures such as Juliet Mitchell, with her *Women: The Longest Revolution* (1966), and Alison Jaggar, with her *Feminist Politics and Human Nature* (1983). In contrast to Marxist feminists who give priority to the 'class' factor as a discriminating element, socialist feminists, such as Juliet Mitchell and Alison Jaggar, take into consideration the issue of 'gender' (p. 48). On the other hand, postmodernist feminism is developed in France by well-known voices such as Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray, and Julia Kristeva, deeply interested in issues concerning psychoanalysis, semiotics, and existentialism. These women defended that the feminist experience must agglutinate difference, for it does not constitute a single reality (p. 49). Finally, another trend of this second phase of feminism is radical feminism, which aims to overturn not only the patriarchy's legal and political structures, but also its social and cultural institutions (especially the family and the Church). Radical feminists proposed, in turn, replacing the patriarchal society for a female one, on the grounds that women's true emancipation would not be achieved until women control their own sexuality and fertility (ibid). Among the different trends within radical feminism, we may distinguish "ecofeminism", which advocates the close bond between women and nature, and "cultural feminism", so-called because it celebrates "women's culture" (p. 50). In short, the second wave of feminism is characterized by the debate about whether men and women are similar (liberal and socialist feminists), or whether both sexes are different (radical feminism postulates that women are superior to men).

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Another important goal of this second-wave feminist movement, as Hill (2003: 8) explains, was to rewrite and reread women's involvement in terms of history and literature. From the 1970s onwards, there have been innumerable volumes of feminist critique, from cultural, political, historical, and sexual perspectives. Among the most important feminist studies, we find Mary Ellman's *Thinking About Women* (1968), Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics* (1969), Germaine Greer's *The Female Eunuch* (1970), O'Faoláin's *Not in God's Image* (1972), and Sheila Rowbotham's *Hidden from History* (1973). On literary grounds, feminist critique has attempted to recuperate marginal voices of the past, investigating those texts produced by women. Elaine Showalter denominates this practice "gynocritics" (O'Brien Johnson & Cairns 1991: 1). Valuable contributions to this field are Patricia Meyer Spacks' *The Female Imagination* (1975), Ellen Moers's *Literary Women: the Great Writers* (1977), Elaine Showalter's *A Literature of Their Own* (1977), and Gilbert and Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979).

As we will see, writings such as these, in particular Millet's and Greer's, together with other international influences, laid firm intellectual foundations upon which the new generation of Irish women began to question and react against their traditional social and political roles. The Irish feminism of the 1970s, in contrast to the earlier feminism, was more interested in women's individual experience, "bringing into open debate issues such as domestic violence, divorce, birth control and abortion" (Hill 2003: 242). Feminists invited women to enjoy their own sexuality, a sexuality which they demanded to be not only reproductive (they defended for instance the use of contraceptive methods), but also pleasant. Some feminist groups in this period are the *Irish Women's Liberation Movement* and *Irishwomen United*, associations which advocated a self-determined sexuality and which offered a forum for lesbians and radicals (pp. 153-156).³

3.3. Nationalism and feminism in Ireland in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries

As Parker et al. (1992: 5) explain, the relationship between nationalism and feminism has, more often than not, been ambivalent, if not contradictory. The uneasy combination of these two ideologies is illustrated by the fact that, whereas minority groups have often resorted to the rhetoric of the nation in order to launch their claims as political (as in the case of the so-called "black nationalism" in the US, or the "Queer Nation"); feminism has never appealed to national values (p. 8). The notion of a "Feminist Nation" is a contradiction in terms, and it is less likely

³ Feminist movements in Northern Ireland were more complicated. With the breaking out of the Troubles in the 1970s, women in the North usually held conflicting loyalties, whether to follow their own cause, or the nationalist or loyalist struggle (Hill 2003: 185).

actively to inspire women's political movement. Radhakrishnan (1992: 78) has summarized the ambivalent relationship between feminism and nationalism by wondering:

Why is that the advent of the politics of nationalism signals the subordination if not the demise of women's politics? Why does the politics of the "one" typically overwhelm the politics of the "other"? Why could the two not be coordinated within an equal and dialogic relationship of mutual accountability? What factors constitute the normative criteria by which a question or issue is deemed "political"?

This Indian critic complains about the fact that, whereas nationalism manages to be ideologically effective as "an inclusive and putatively macropolitical discourse", feminism can only establish itself as a form of "micro-politics" (pp. 78-80).

This ambivalent relationship between feminism and nationalism is clearly observed in Ireland's history. Irish women in the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth have always faced the dilemma of whether to align themselves with the feminist struggle or to establish an alliance with the nationalist cause. As Jaime de Pablos (2000: 276) explains, nationalism in Ireland demanded from women an absolute commitment to the national cause, and this implied the postponement of other ideals (like the feminist ones) for the political ones. The reason why feminism experienced such an ideological clash with nationalism is obvious. First of all, Irish nationalists presupposed that women's issues would delay the achievement of political independence. They feared that suffragist debates could hinder the passing of Home Rule, the desire to establish a separate Irish parliament in Dublin, independent from Westminster (Hill 2003: 58). Secondly, Irish nationalists maintained a very traditional view on gender roles. As Hill (2003: 59) explains, "women's major contribution was seen to be in the private domain, sustaining and nurturing family life and thus perpetuating the race". On the contrary, feminism attempted to surpass national boundaries, in order to form an alliance with other women worldwide "in matters such as birth control, education and employment", and combat the conventional dichotomy between public and private domains (ibid). It emerges, therefore, a tension between nationalism and feminism, a tension which raises much debate even nowadays. In order to analyze the conflicting loyalties of Irish women pursuing nationalist and feminist aspirations, I must analyze the way both ideologies have been interrelated.

As I have shown in the previous chapter, there was a very strong cultural renaissance in Ireland (the so-called Irish Revival or Celtic Revival) at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth which aimed to make mythology, folklore, and language central to the concept of national identity. The multiple organizations and nationalist societies which were founded in this period were at times reluctant to accept women as their members. The *Celtic*

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Literary Society and the *National League* (successor of the *Land League*, with Tim Harrington as a leading figure), closed their doors to women (Jaime de Pablos 2000: 280). One of these women who resented their exclusion was Maud Gonne, a revolutionary who founded in October 1900 *Inghnidhe na hÉireann* ('Daughters of Ireland'), and a few years later *Bean na hÉireann* (1908), a journal supporting militancy and feminism with Helena Moloney as editor (Welch 2000: 134).⁴ Prominent women, together with Maud Gonne, were on the executive board of the 'Daughters of Ireland': Annie Egan, Anna Johnson, and Jenny Wyse Power as vice-presidents; Maire Quinn, Elizabeth Margan, and Dora Hackett as secretaries; and Margaret and Sarah White as treasurers. All these women were not only convinced feminists, but also highly committed to the national cause.

Inghnidhe na hÉireann had a great impact on Irish society in the first decades of the twentieth century. Some of their main objectives were to give women a public role in the struggle for national liberation and to construct an alternative culture, properly 'Irish', and different from "the imported popular culture of theatre and music hall" (Quinn 1997: 41-42). In their attempt at countering colonial popular entertainment, *Inghnidhe* experimented with inventing an Irish popular theatre, and thus, it involved itself with the *Irish National Theatre Company*. In 1902, Maud Gonne remarkably personified the spirit of Ireland in the title-role of *Cathleen ni Houlihan*, a play written by Yeats in collaboration with Lady Gregory, and performed in the *Irish Literary Theatre*. As Hill (2003: 59) explains, the 'Daughters of Ireland' saw as their first priority the political (or rather cultural) independence of Ireland, and their secondary aim was to fight against women's oppression. This order of priorities is evidenced when this feminine association breaks bonds with the *National Theatre Company* because its members disapproved of the society's "anti-nationalist", as Hidalgo Tenorio (1997a: 70) puts it, female representation of Synge's *In The Shadow of the Glen* (1968).⁵ The play focuses on the unhappily married Nora Burke and it voices this peasant woman's confrontation with sexuality, aging, physical decay, and death. *Inghnidhe* saw this portrayal of the peasant woman untruthful and inappropriate for a nationalist theatre and they defended, instead, nationalist political allegories such as Mother figure, Cathleen ni Houlihan, and the youthful victim of the *Aisling* tradition (Quinn 1997: 48-53). In contrast to the members of 'Daughters of Ireland', contemporary feminists generally decry this nationalist female icon (p. 47).

⁴ Interestingly enough, those associations which closed their doors to women admitted Maud Gonne on their committees, for her contribution and enthusiasm to the national cause. With William Rooney and Arthur Griffith, she writes the draft of the newly born *Cumann na nGaedheal*, an association which attempted to draw together all nationalist societies. Similarly, she contributed to write the constitution of the *National Literary Society* in 1892 (Jaime de Pablos 2000: 281). Maud Gonne also showed her courage in the defence of nationalist ideals when she rejected the Anglo-Irish treaty in 1922, and worked for Republican prisoners and their families (because of this, she was imprisoned in 1923) (Welch 2000: 134).

⁵ For a deeper insight into the negative feedback that Synge's plays received at the time, see Hidalgo Tenorio (1997b).

They find in the image of Mother Ireland, for instance, an exemplification of how Irish women have suffered a double colonization: they have been arguably colonized by Irishmen at the same time as they were colonial subjects of England. Whereas contemporary feminists would not agree on the national female icon (they would prefer a more realistic image of women, like Synge's women), the 'Daughters of Ireland' privileged the national cause over the claims of feminism. This is also manifested by the fact that in May 1914, *Inghinidhe* becomes *Cuman na mBan*, a feminine association linked in its struggle with the nationalist militants *Irish Volunteers* (Hill 2003: 60). This agglutination meant a backward movement for the emancipation of women, for the 'Daughters of Ireland', before an independent entity, became subject to the decisions of a basically male organization. *Cuman na mBan* was conceived as "an auxiliary of the male movement", offering a supportive role in "advancing the 'cause of Irish liberty'" (ibid).

Irish women's role within the nationalist fight becomes particularly intense in the armed rising of 1916. As Hill (2003: 72) explains, "with many of the male leaders under police surveillance, women played a crucial role in passing messages and information even before the rebellion began". When the rising erupted, around thirty-four women helped the republican headquarters in Dublin's General Post Office, by preparing and organizing food (p. 73). Others, such as Countess Markievicz ("second-in-command at St Stephen's Green"), were more openly involved in the fighting (ibid). Women such as Markievicz, as those members of the 'Daughters of Erin' and *Cuman na mBan*, prioritized nationalism over the emancipation of women. Other nationalists, such as Jennie Wyse-Power, Mary McSwiney, Mary Colum, Kathleen Lynn, and Katherine Tynan also decided to leave aside feminism for the sake of nationalism (Kirkpatrick 2000: 1-4). On the other side of the scale, suffragists such as Hanna Sheefy-Skeefington "put feminism first in the feminist-nationalist equation" (p. 2).

It seems that, as one of the members of the *Irish Women's Franchise League* (anonymous in the original source from which this reference is taken) argued, "it is our conviction that feminism and [nationalist] militarism are natural born enemies and cannot flourish on the same soil" (cited by Jaime de Pablos 2000: 295). Therefore, it appears that the defence of the independence of Ireland and the struggle for women's emancipation have been, at times, if not a contradiction in terms, two ideals which have converged with difficulty. Ward (1997: 61) tries to simplify this tension by distinguishing within the Irish feminist movement two dominant strands: "nationalist feminism" and "essentialist feminism". The first one establishes a link between the fight for women's emancipation and the struggle for national liberation, whereas the second moves away from the external political conflict by merely focusing on "the essential qualities of feminism" (ibid). Ward (1997: 80) argues that actual feminism in Ireland has been shaped by

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salient examples from the first wave of feminism in Ireland. Her essay focuses on two significant suffragists: Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington, a “national feminist”, and Louie Bennett, an “essential feminist”. Although Sheehy-Skeffington always defended women’s equal status within the nationalist cause, the political independence of Ireland was also one of her main aspirations. On the contrary, Bennet called for an international alliance, and advocated pacifism across national boundaries. Their parallel careers exemplify the dilemma confronting Irish feminists, whether to engage with the nationalist movement, or to exclusively focus on women’s issues, leaving aside any involvement with Irish political life.

3.3. The Irish woman after gaining independence in 1921

When finally nationalism was fruitful in the creation of the Irish Free State, women did not experience any improvement in their status. The social and cultural advantages of an independent Ireland that the leaders of the Easter Rising envisaged were barely put into practice in the first decades of the Irish Free State (Brown 1985: 13). Instead, the emancipation from the United Kingdom meant for Ireland an overwhelming social and cultural conservatism which perpetuated women’s oppression under a highly patriarchal society (p. 18). As envisaged by “essential feminists” such as Louie Bennet, those women who had defended the national cause leaving aside the fight for women’s oppression were highly disappointed (Jaime de Pablos 2000: 298). The politicians of the new Free State militated against women’s involvement in party politics. As we have seen, the 1935 Act restricted the participation of working-class women in paid employment (Hill 2003: 100). Legislative measures such as this progressively eroded their position in public life, consolidating women’s role as domestic. Because of this, in the first decades after independence, women did not organize themselves in successful women’s groups. Their official political participation was confined to the offices of local government. After 1922, women continued to have an active role within *Sinn Fein*, probably “in their fidelity to the memory of dead heroes” (Daly 1997: 108). Nevertheless, their activity was more prominent in lesser bodies, such as Boards of Guardians and Urban and Rural District Councils, mainly because, as traditionally ‘caregivers’ par excellence, society encouraged them to participate exclusively in public health and welfare. Furthermore, as Daly (1997: 119) explains, the increased fertility rate hindered women’s involvement in public life:

Irish feminists found it difficult to replace the pre-war focus on equal rights with an ideology that might have been more in keeping with the culture of the independent Irish State. The high level of marital fertility

reduced the political dividends from pronatalism and probably meant that most Irish women lacked the leisure to engage in political or social activities outside the home.

The difficult life of Irish women made it difficult for them to join political campaigns and social organizations. Irish nationalism, fundamentally at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, attempted to create military and cultural unity by advocating stereotypes of ideal men and women. Frazier (1997: 10) explains that, after the French Revolution, some movements within European nationalism, Irish nationalism included, attempted to control sexuality, "to establish 'national' norms of sexuality and to create a sexual dimension of its own". This may be so because the French Revolution brought with it a wave of feminist texts written by women and encouraged the advent of numerous feminist movements (Marks & de Courtivron 1981b: 3). Countries such as Ireland tried to prevent this upheaval by establishing its own conservative regime. The first decades of the Irish Free State, following the Treaty of 1921, meant deeper attempts to reinforce and maintain gender stereotypes. The Catholic Church played a vital role in this process. As Hill (2003: 95) notes, the "Church, which had little influence over political matters under British jurisdiction, was now concerned to assert its authority and stand firm behind the State government". Its religious precepts and its beliefs on women's ideal role as 'virginal' and submissive mothers exerted a tremendous influence on legislative measures. Its impact on the State and mainstream society is observed in the government's concern with sexual morality in the area of birth control. The *1929 Censorship of Publications Act* (in particular sections 16 and 17), forbade the public distribution of texts which supported abortion or contraception (p. 104). A few years later, section 17 of the *1935 Criminal Law Amendment Act* banned the importation and sale of contraceptives (p. 105).⁶ It is in this context where McDiarmud's (1997: 152) assertion must be read: "Irish society has been traumatized around sexuality as it exists in a national field; as it is defined, organized, and controlled by national institutions – the State, the Church, the law".

This sexual repression and women's invisibility in the public and political arena was reinforced when Eamon de Valera became President of Ireland and Fianna Fáil leader. Ireland became an inward-looking, isolated, rural, conservative Catholic country in which its citizens lived under a culturally repressive atmosphere. With the 1937 Constitution, the role of women was further restricted and idealized. Articles 41 and 45 offered a narrow and specific view of womanhood. The Irish woman was immediately associated with motherhood and domesticity:

⁶ The government in Northern Ireland also attempted to control sexual and moral behaviour through criminal law legislation. A case in point is, as Hill (2003: 103) explains, the *1923 Northern Ireland Criminal Law Amendment Act*.

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Article 41

2-1. In particular, the State recognizes that by her life within the home, woman gives to the State a support without which the common good cannot be achieved.

2-2. The State shall, therefore, endeavour to ensure that mothers shall not be obliged by economic necessity to engage in labour to the neglect of their duties in the home.

Article 45

4-2 The State shall endeavour to ensure that the inadequate strength of women and the tender age of children shall not be abused, and that women and children shall not be forced by economic necessity to enter avocations unsuited to their sex, age, or strength.

These articles declared the family as the basic social unit, and women's primary role as that of wife and mother. This idealization of family, marriage, and motherhood was associated with traditional symbols of nationhood (i.e. Mother Ireland) and the Catholic religion (the Virgin Mary). As Shannon (1977: 258) puts it:

The acknowledgment of women in the 1937 Constitution as the guardians of public morals and sound family life, and [de Valera's] utopian vision of comedy maidens dancing at the crossroads preparatory to their destiny as devoted mothers living in frugal comfort in cozy rural homesteads brought little practical benefit to the majority of Irish women.

Whereas Brown (1985: 164-165) notes that in the 1937 Constitution there is a clear influence of the Catholic religion, other critics, interestingly enough, suggest that de Valera was influenced by female historian writers. Daly (1997: 107) claims that de Valera inserted article 41.2 of the Constitution after reading Ivy Pinchbeck's pioneering *Women Workers and the Industrial Revolution: 1750-1850* (1930), concerning the negative effect that the industrial revolution had on women's lives. By reassuring mothers not to be "obliged by economic necessity to engage in labour to the neglect of their duties in the home", de Valera supposedly tried to prevent women from suffering the "detrimental" consequences of the industrial revolution (ibid). This reinforced women's relegation to the private sphere. Shannon (1997: 258) describes well enough the social consequences suffered by women: they were nearly inactive in the public arena,⁷ they had limited educational and employment opportunities, and consequently their only aspiration was to get married. The concept of marriage barely changed from its conception in the nineteenth century: it continued to be an unequal relationship "between "provider [the husband] and dependent [the

⁷ Patriarchal discrimination of women in the public (political) sphere was evidenced by the limited number of women ministers in the cabinet: only two, Countess Markievicz and Mrs James MacNeill. On the other hand, the only feminine publication which survives to criticize the government is the journal *Prison Bars* edited by Maud Gonne MacBride. Its pages record the disillusionment of those prominent women who, naively, believed that, after defeating the invader, men and women could enjoy Ireland's independence on equal terms (Jaime de Pablos 2000: 299).

wife]” (Coulter 1997: 288). Male dominance in marriage resulted from being the person who economically sustained the family, but also from his usually older age with respect to his younger wife (Shannon 1997: 260). On the other hand, the authority of the Roman Catholic Church tended to inculcate passive attitudes among Irish women, who were viewed as their husband's property (p. 261). The harsh conditions under which Irish women lived prompted a high emigration of young rural women not only to urban cities, such as Dublin and London, but also to foreign countries, mostly North America.

With the social and cultural changes experienced by Ireland from the 1970s onwards, the Irish women's movement has been rejuvenated. According to Shannon (1997: 263-266), five factors prompted this change. First, the transmission of the international feminist upheaval, through television and print media, has encouraged Irish women to manifest their anger over “the second class status” that the Church and State policies imposed on them. Secondly, the 1972 publication of the report of the first *Commission on the Status of Women* promoted women to a more active participation in the political arena.⁸ Third, the entrance of Ireland into the European Union in 1973 forced the government to tackle issues concerning the discrimination Irish women had to face. Fourth, the increasing industrialization and urbanization of Ireland expanded women's job opportunities, subverting their traditional roles of mothers and housewives. Last, the growth of educational opportunities has enabled women to fulfill a career or degree. Daly (1997: 119) agrees with Shannon's explanation (1997: 263-266) of this rebirth of feminism in Ireland. This critic highlights the importance of the Irish transition to a more modern urban and industrial economy which opened up new job opportunities for women, and a significant decline in fertility which allowed them to engage in political movements more freely. Other critics have stressed other factors of equal importance: the repeal of the marriage bar, which prohibited the employment of married women, and the passing of the *Anti-discrimination Pay Act* in 1974 and of the *Maternity Act* in 1981 (Fogarty 1999: 265).

Although Ireland in the late 1980s was still backward as regards women's rights (in 1987, the results of abortion and divorce referenda in the Republic reinforced conservative socio-cultural ideologies),⁹ all these socio-cultural developments have had important implications as regards gender and sexuality. Progressive legislative measures have challenged the authority of the

⁸ Interestingly enough, Adrienne Rich's “When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision” (1979) was published, along with other papers from the forum and workshops, in the report of the *Commission on the Status of Women* in 1972. This essay will exert a great influence on Eavan Boland's volumes of poetry after *New Territory*. In these volumes, as in her critical prose (gathered in the collection *Object Lessons: the Life of the Woman and the Poet in Our Time*, 1996), Boland shows the clear influence of the Women's movement of the seventies. Her writings after *New Territory*, as I will explain in section 7.3., seem to respond to the “awakening consciousness” Rich advocates (1979: 34).

⁹ As Clutterbuck (1999: 275) explains, women could not have access to contraception, and there was a large-scale immigration and high corruption in the government's economic affairs.

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Catholic Church. As Hill (2003: 5) notes, with the “realignment of the relationship between the Church, state, and civil society [...], the Church’s authority, particularly on sexual matters, was gradually diminishing”. In the past twenty-five years, Irish society has experienced a drop in religious observance and a general secularization, due to some disturbing incidents.¹⁰ This increasing critical attitude towards the Catholic Church has paralleled the recent reform of laws affecting divorce, abortion, and the availability of contraception. The issue of divorce, for instance, which was subject to a constitutional ban from 1937, was finally removed on 24 November 1995 (Hill 2003: 190).¹¹

The range of opportunities opened to late twentieth-century Irish women would have been unimaginable in the early 1990s. Women have gained a more equal position in the political and work terrain. This is clearly observed in the fact that two women have become Presidents of Ireland at the end of the twentieth century. Mary Robinson, elected president on 9 November 1990, has been considered by critics such as Clutterbuck (1999: 275) and Hill (2003: 234), as one of the most influential Irish women politicians of the twentieth century. For the first time in Irish history, a woman was the Head of State in a country where national politics had been traditionally a male domain. On the other hand, Robinson has not only been a female, but also a feminist President, bringing to the Irish political arena modernizing and liberal ideas about women and Irish minority communities such as gays and lesbians. Her highly successful presidency was perceived as a result of “the strengths of her sex rather than [...] her personality” (Hill 2003: 237). Therefore, it is not surprising that the winning candidate that substituted Mary Robinson on October 1997 was another woman, Mary McAleese, the current President of Ireland.

With all these social and cultural changes, women are more prepared and determined to challenge Irish political life, to date a predominantly male sphere. As Hill (2003: 5) reminds us, even at the end of the twentieth century, Irish women still experience inequality in the workplace, and their jobs seem to be generally part-time and low-paid. Although the election of Robinson and later of McAleese as Presidents of Ireland reflect a growing willingness to embrace progress, in reality, this critic explains, masculinity is still equated with public power. Ward (1997: 80-81) names some of the most important organizations of the current Irish women’s movement: the *Women’s Coalition*, which sets its agenda against predominantly male political parties; *Clar na mBan*, an organization of republican feminists; the *Women’s Support Network* and the *Women’s Information Group*, a coalition of working class women. With all these political, social, and cultural changes in Ireland, de Valera’s vision of Cathleen ni Houlihan has been gradually

¹⁰ In 1993, for example, there was a scandal concerning a priest, Father Brendan Smyth, when it was proved that he had abused several children (Coulter 1997: 296).

¹¹ For further insight into the issue of the divorce referendum, see Coulter’s essay (1997).

changing into a less abstract and victimized image: a more truthful portrait which can bear witness to the contemporary Irish woman. Now, a new representation of her has emerged, "an image being shaped and defined this time by Irish women themselves and one which promises to secure respect and dignity for all the citizens of the nation" (Shannon 1997: 272). As Bradley and Valiulus (1997: 2) explain, these socio-cultural developments have been accompanied by a growing intellectual awareness of the extent to which gender has been a cultural construct.

Consequently, it is not surprising that all the demands for political, social, and economic changes made by Irish women in the political and public arena have been echoed by Irish women writers who, in their poetry, prose, and drama, reflect their growing consciousness to confront the social and cultural injustice women face. Women artists such as Nuala ní Dhomhnaill, Mary Leland, Marina Carr, and Rita Duffy are currently attempting to "liberat[e] Irish women from the patriarchal constraints of the past, while simultaneously preserving the best of Irish communal values" (Shannon 1997: 271). It is here where we must place Eavan Boland. In an interview, Boland admits that in 1971 she had joined the women's movement (Allen-Randolph 1999b: 295). Interestingly enough, this was the period when Boland started writing most of the poems of *In Her Own Image*, not published until 1980. Her involvement with feminist politics will be reflected in this volume, which I will later include in the 'Feminist'/ 'Cultural Nationalist' phase'. Nevertheless, her more mature poetry rejects separatist stances (such as radical feminism) and develops an aesthetics that attempts to truly bear witness to the reality of Irish women. As Boland has declared, she considers herself a feminist, but not a radical separatist feminist poet:

Poetry begins where the certainties end. I would have to say as someone who has benefited from, and is honoured to consider themselves a feminist, that literature must not be bent out of shape to accommodate an ethical position. Freedom is single [...], it is crucial to prevent the literary discourse of a small country from becoming a higher form of exclusion. (Interview with Battersby 1988: 2)

Thus, Boland's mature feminism coincides with former president Mary Robinson's articulation of what is at "the core of true feminism": a "tolerant and compassionate" demand for equal human values, both for men and women (Shannon 1997: 271). Boland is a voice among many others to demand women's rights within Irish society, and in particular, their legitimacy to freely express themselves by means of literature.

4. A FEMINIST POSTCOLONIAL APPROACH

4.1. Introduction

In this section I intend to analyze the points of contact between feminist and postcolonial studies. There are strong parallels between both fields of criticism, mainly because they are concerned with how subjects have been marginalized and constructed as subordinated ‘Others’ by colonialism and/or patriarchy. First of all, I will explore the ways in which various feminist critics have drawn a parallelism between women’s oppression under a patriarchal culture and the colonized community’s subjugation under imperialist practices. Secondly, I will analyze the extent to which issues of gender have been at times omitted from postcolonial studies. The third section is aimed at highlighting the main problems which usually arise in any attempt to unify within a single approach the fields of feminist theory and postcolonial analysis, and how contemporary ‘feminist postcolonial’ critics attempt to solve these difficulties. Finally, it is my intention to specify the feminist and postcolonial perspective I adopt in my study of Eavan Boland’s poetry.

4.2. Gender and colonialism

Feminism has often employed colonial and postcolonial discourse in its analysis of women’s oppression. Both patriarchy and imperialism can be seen to exert analogous forms of domination over those they render subordinate. Hence, the experiences of women in patriarchy and those of colonized subjects can be paralleled. When discussing the marginalized situation of women, feminist critics have usually resorted to the metaphor “man as colonizer” and “woman as colonized”. As Donaldson (1992: 5) explains, there are indeed common features in the marginalized situation of women and the colonized subjects. Western culture has often defined women as different from men in kind; in this sense, it seems very plausible to apply Said’s Orientalist paradigm to the patriarchal culture. Women become everything men are not, or do not want to be seen to be: whereas men are rational, women are emotional; whereas men are active, women are passive; whereas men are politically effective, women are not prepared to fulfil prominent public roles, and whereas men have economic rights, women are deprived of them. Under this rationale, which consigns women to the negative side in the binary scale, these are denied equal access to the public realm as well as cultural representation.

This relationship of equivalence between patriarchy and colonialism abounds in feminist criticism. Hélène Cixous (1981: 247), in “The Laugh of the Medusa”, develops the image of the feminized body as a colonized territory: “as soon as women begin to speak they’re taught that their territory is black; because you are Africa, you are black, your continent is dark. Dark is dangerous”. Cixous gives an image of woman as a (dark) continent that can be penetrated, violated, and colonized, just as colonization did to Africa or America. Feminist studies in the last

decades have drawn precisely on this analogy. Rowbotham (1972: 201), for instance, asserts that “certain similarities exist between the colonization of the underdeveloped country and female oppression within capitalism”. On the other hand, Donovan (1987: 100) argues that women as a group “share certain awareness that are common to oppressed groups”. French (1985: 130) puts it this way: “if we transpose the descriptions of colonized and colonizer to women and men, they fit at almost every point”.

Donaldson (1992: 10) asserts that this analogy can also be found in women's literature. She offers the example of Virginia Woolf's *Three Guineas*, where the writer links sexism and racism, both of them oppressing almost identically women and nonwhites. Fergurson (1993) agrees with Donaldson, recognizing the parallelism between gender and colonial relations in her discussion of British and Caribbean writers of the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries. Juxtaposing the work of women writers such as Mary Wollstonecraft, Jane Austen, Anne Hart Gilbert, Elizabeth Hart Thwaites, Jean Rhys, and Jamaica Kincaid, Fergurson (1993: 7) highlights the link between women's struggles and colonized struggles: “The continuum of their writings further suggests that during 150 years of slavery, emancipation, and postcolonialism, recognition of the link between gender and colonial relations became commensurately more clear”. This critic, for instance, mentions how in *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792), Wollstonecraft engaged with both issues, establishing a parallelism between colonial slavery and female subjugation, and using slavery as an analogy when discussing women's rights (p. 2). Doris Lessing, Toni Morrison, Paule Marshall, and Margaret Atwood have also exposed in their work the similarities between gender and imperial relations, and how these have been traditionally based on power and hierarchy (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin 2002a: 30).

4.3. The absence of the female subject in postcolonial discussions

Probably because of these similarities between women and the colonized subjects' subordinate status, the position of the gendered colonial individual has often been taken for granted, to the extent that her special status as doubly colonized (by virtue of her sex and her ethnicity) has been ignored. Postcolonial theory has tended to elide gender differences in constructing a single category of the colonized. Memmi's writings, for instance, mainly refer to the male colonized subject, and he employs the pronoun ‘he’ throughout all his formulations. Similarly, very few times, does Fanon focus on women in his theorization of the imperial process, to the extent that critics such as Gopal (2002: 41) and Miller (1990: 122) accuse him of not engaging with how women might have experienced colonization, or with how they might have reacted against their oppression. Except for his chapter “Algeria Unveiled”, Fanon (1965: 35-67) hardly focuses on

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women's ability to subvert the system. This essay is one of his few statements on women's role in the liberation struggle, and how they embraced mimesis as a strategy of subversion. Fanon explains how women used their veiling in order to challenge colonial rule. The veil becomes, in this sense, a symbol of resistance and not of patriarchal submission. Like Memmi's and Fanon's work, Said and Bhabha pay little attention to female agency and to postcolonial women's writers. Walder (1998: 79) notes how other influential voices, such as Abdul JamMohamed, with his *Manichean Aesthetics* (1983), also adopt this tendency.

This lack of interest in women's issues acquires certain consistency within Irish postcolonial debates. As we will see, The Field Day project has aroused intense controversy among Irish women writers, because of its inattention to questions of gender. On the other hand, Lloyd (1993), for instance, omits the experiences of Irish women as colonial and postcolonial subjects. In his discussion of Irish literature from a postcolonial point of view, he exclusively focuses on male writers, such as Beckett, Joyce, Yeats, and Heaney, paying no attention to how Irish women, through writing, have similarly resisted, and are in fact still resisting, imperialist and nationalist ideologies. Although in his discussion of Irish novels he briefly mentions Maria Edgeworth and Lady Morgan (1993: 135), the perspective he adopts is in broad terms limited and andocentric. Kiberd (1996) similarly fails to develop an exhaustive account of the gendered postcolonial subject. In *Inventing Ireland*, this critic briefly dedicates two chapters to discussing women writers such as Somerville and Ross and Lady Gregory (1996: 69-95). On the contrary, Kiberd's long analysis mostly focuses on male Irish writers such as Wilde, Shaw, J.M. Synge, Joyce, and Flann O'Brien.

Taking into account all this, it is not surprising to find that critics such as Lewis and Mills (2003: 2) and Walder (1998: 79) have sharply denounced the fact that there is a clear omission of women's experiences from postcolonial discussions. In *Black Women, Writing and Identity: Migrations of the Subject*, Boyce (1994: 80) has examined some of the ways in which women of colour have been speaking *outside* of the postcolonial. This critic asserts that, although there are growing numbers of postcolonial feminist discussions, it seems that the discourse of postcolonialism is not, so far, "overly populated by postcolonial women" (ibid). Boyce criticizes postcolonial studies on the grounds that, as a theoretical invention of Western academy, it is not concerned with those realities which stand outside Western formulations (p. 82). In its "totalizing and reductive discourse", this field of study particularly ignores the situation of subaltern women (p. 81). Gayatri Spivak has been perhaps the only important postcolonial theorist who has articulated the relationship between feminism and the discourse of postcolonialism. As a self-declared feminist (Spivak 1993: ix), issues of gender have been central to Spivak's writing

throughout her long career. Nevertheless, the theoretical implications of her formulations are everything but promising for the gendered postcolonial subject. As we will see in "Can the Subaltern Speak?", Spivak finds problems when articulating female agency. Critics such as Boyce (1994: 92) understand this difficulty as a proof of the existing gap between gender and postcolonial studies. Women, this author argues, are "outside the postcolonial", in other words, the main tendency among postcolonial theorists is to construct women as silent and absent subjects (ibid).

4.4. The problems of adopting a feminist postcolonial approach

Due to the lack of interest in gender issues within the postcolonial debate, a growing number of scholars are starting to find the need to include in their discussions the experiences of Third World women and women belonging to former colonies. These women are viewed as victims, not only of patriarchy, but also of colonialism – today often called "double colonization" (Young 1995: 162).¹ Within these so-called 'feminist postcolonial' critics we find some representative names such as Spivak (1990b, 1990c), Ang (2003), Carby (2003), Davis (2003), Donaldson (1992), Gilliam (1991), hooks (2003), Lorde (2003), Minh-ha (1989), Mohanty (1991a, 1991b, 2003), and Rajan (1993). All these scholars argue that colonialism operated very differently for women and for men, and that both the general discrimination women experienced as colonial subjects and their specific discrimination as women must be taken into account in any analysis of colonial oppression. Nevertheless, feminist postcolonial critics, rather than carrying out an easy fit between women's and postcolonial issues, tend to stress the often conflicting and ambivalent points of contact between gender and colonialism, and the problems when "excavating a genuinely postcolonial space for feminism" (Donaldson 1994: 7). They argue that pursuing feminist agendas in the context of slavery and colonialism complicates as well as omits different important issues. First of all, feminist postcolonial critics such as Donaldson (1992: 6) assert that an examination of women's actual historical experience within colonialism makes the metaphor "man as colonizer" and "woman as colonized" problematic. Whereas the dual category 'colonizer'/'colonized' is ambivalent and hybrid, sexual identities such as 'man'/'woman' are not so inconsistent. Furthermore, this critic argues, imperialist women have themselves exerted colonial domination, taking for granted the colonized subject's fundamental submission and exclusion. The second objection critics tend to identify is that women and the colonized community do not react in the same way when resisting their subordinate status. Donaldson (1992: 7-9) and Minh-ha (1989: 106) believe that, whereas nationalism becomes a viable and powerful movement for challenging

¹ For a comprehensive discussion of women as doubly colonized see Petersen and Rutherford (1985).

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colonialism, this ideology has never been a suitable site of resistance for feminist agendas. The idea of the nation has often resolved the question of identity for the postcolonial subject. Women, on the contrary, have usually found that nationalism does not offer a suitable basis for their search of identity. As mentioned above, their emancipation is usually sacrificed to the cause of national liberation, and their oppression is reinforced by nationalism's tendency to repeat the gender stereotyping of imperialism. The main reason for this is that feminism and nationalism have different socio-political goals. The object of feminism is to enfranchise a community of women beyond the limits established by cultural and geographic boundaries.² On the other hand, for nationalism, these boundaries are essential in order to challenge hegemonic occupation. The clash between both ideologies is so strong that, as Minh-ha (1989: 106) explains, adopting a feminist attitude is immediately identified as rejecting the precepts of nationalism.

The third broad problematic of postcolonial feminist criticism is its disagreement with Western feminist agendas. In the 1980s, feminist postcolonial critics began to acknowledge the fact that feminist movements can, in their universalizing tendencies, omit the reality of Third World women. In contrast to her earlier radical feminism of the 1970s, Rich (2003: 33-34) starts to realize a decade later that white-centred feminist theory can become as constraining to Third World women as patriarchal ideology. Rich's formulations have set out the tone to later feminist attacks against those collective movements that attempt to speak "to all women all the way through" (p. 37). As Boehmer (1995: 225) explains, the last decades of the twentieth century have witnessed not only the resurgence of women's movement in Europe and the United States, but also the political and cultural challenges posed by Third World women, and women of colour in the First World, to redefine their relationship with Western feminism.

One outstanding voice at the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s is Gayatri Spivak. Throughout her career as an academic critic, Spivak constantly accuses Western feminism of obliterating women's realities, in particular Third World Women (interview with Threadgold & Bartkowski 1990: 118). Western feminism creates an image of women of the Third World as an homogeneous group, she argues, eliding specific cultural, historical, and economic contexts. Spivak believes that Western feminism assumes that women are united cross-culturally by their subordination. This monolithic approach to gender issues privileges the values of Western feminism, and unconsciously reproduces imperialist discourse. In particular, Spivak's attack is focused not so much on French feminism³ but on American gynocritics with its ideals of

² Donaldson (1992: 11) exemplifies this point by mentioning Virginia Woolf, who in *Three Guineas* (1998) [1938], stated: "As a woman I have no country. As a woman I want no country. As a woman my country is the whole world".

³ Nevertheless, and although Spivak praises the work of Irigaray and Cixous, she admits to "be repelled by Kristeva's politics" and her sense of "women's time" (Spivak 1993: 17).

individuality and identity.⁴ Spivak attempts to change feminists' concerns with female 'subject-constitution', because she believes that any attempt to retrieve a female 'essence' is impossible, due to the historical, geographical, and cultural distance that separates women from each other.

Following this line of thought, feminist postcolonial theorists such as Davis (2003: 353) have argued that any campaign which attempts to speak on behalf of all women runs the risk of disregarding structural differences such as those imposed by race and class. In this sense, this critic exposes the fact that white feminist campaigns for abortion rights, for instance, ignores the fact that not all Afro-American women desire legal and safe abortion, as some of them equate birth-control with genocide (p. 354).

Rajan (1993: 1-2) also exerts a fierce critique against that kind of Western feminism which omits the actual realities, experiences, and needs of Third World women. This critic explains how, although they share a similar political motivation, the position of Eastern (Indian) feminists differs from Western feminists' (ibid). On this point, Mohanty (1991a: 11) asserts that, although it is difficult to generalize about Third World feminism, it usually does not agree on Western feminism's singular focus on gender as a basis for equal rights, and it tends to focus on the relationships between gender, race, and/or class.⁵ In a later essay, Mohanty (2003: 50) argues that Western feminism's tendency to make generalizations about Third World women is akin to those homogenizing movements of colonialism and imperialism that ignore the heterogeneity of the subject(s) in question.

In this sense, it is not surprising to find that black feminist theorists such as hooks (2003: 214), Carby (2003: 223), Donaldson (1992: 1), Gilliam (1991: 219), and Lorde (2003: 25) have expressed their belief that Western feminist theory needs to realize its implicit racism and racial stereotyping.⁶ Donaldson (1992: 1), for instance, explains how sometimes "predominantly white, middle-class feminism" exposes a mode of behaviour that "passively colludes with a racist culture". This fact is also criticized by Gilliam (1991: 219), who argues against what she refers to as the "sexualism" of certain Western feminist perspectives on women's liberation.

In order to overcome this pitfall, current trends within feminist postcolonial studies tend to stress the danger of defining womanhood under a common emancipating programme, and the need to recognize the diversity of women's life experiences. Adrienne Rich's (2003: 32) advocacy for women to see themselves and their experiences in relation to race and ethnicity has been greatly

⁴ In particular, see her essay "Feminism and Critical Theory", in Spivak (1988a, 72-92).

⁵ For a discussion of the problems involved in setting a common agenda for "First" and "Third" world feminists, see Johnson-Odim (1991).

⁶ In order to reject this Western narrow form of feminism, some Third World women have decided not to use the term 'feminist' at all. This is the case of the Afro-American woman writer Alice Walker, who has chosen to use the term 'womanist' (1984: 231).

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influential. Feminist postcolonial critics are starting to emphasize nowadays the need to consider the heterogeneity of women's experiences according to determinant factors such as geography, history, culture, and class. This is the case of Spivak (1993: 17), who defends a form of feminism which takes into account the variety of subject positions which each female individual adopts depending on their temporal and geographical context. The prime task of feminism is, according to Spivak, not to retrace the figure of the woman, for femaleness is not an essential quality. Its main concern must be, as she explains in an interview, "the recognition of the heterogeneity of the field, instead of positing some kind of woman's subject, woman's figure" (Adamson 1990: 58). Nevertheless, Spivak (1993: 19) acknowledges that this is not an easy task for the postcolonial feminist critic, and that she must "think through the limits of one's power". She maintains that the feminist academic, instead of attempting to speak for women of the Third World,

must learn to learn from them, to speak to them, [...] in order to learn enough about Third World women and to develop a different relationship, the immense heterogeneity of the field must be appreciated, and the First World feminist must learn to stop feeling privileged *as a woman*. (Spivak 1988a: 135-136)

Spivak (1988a: 15) changes the question from "who am I?" to "who is the other woman?". She emphasizes the importance of trying to understand the 'Other' woman in her social and cultural particularities, "even if this involves, quite literally, learning *her* language" (Moore-Gilbert 2000: 112). In a conversation with Grosz (1990: 9), Spivak implies that the only possible way to speak for, or on behalf of, other women is by "un-learning our privilege as our loss". Landry and MacLean (1996: 4-5) explain Spivak's assertion as follows:

Our privileges, whatever they may be in terms of race, class, nationality, gender, and the like, may have prevented us from gaining a certain kind of Other knowledge: not simply information that we have not yet received, but the knowledge that we are not equipped to understand by reason of our social positions. To unlearn our privilege means, on the one hand, to do our homework, to work hard at gaining some knowledge of the others who occupy those spaces most closed to our privileged view. On the other, it means attempting to speak to those others in such a way that they might take us seriously and, most important of all, be able to answer back.

Rather than assuming that Third World women can be represented by Western feminists, Spivak argues that women in other cultures need to be taken into consideration when setting the agenda for political action. She rejects the insertion of the Third World woman into Western values and modes of thought, drawing attention to the fact that there is no universal situation. In such a way, Spivak attempts to register the heterogeneity of the postcolonial female subject. She

praises, for instance, Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* (1988), for its celebration of plurality (1993: 219) and "his anxiety to write woman into the narrative of history" (p. 223); and the work of Kalpana Bardhan, for her pluralization of the reality of women (p. 17).

Spivak's formulations on Third World women have played a significant part in the explosion of feminist postcolonial practice which has marked the last twenty years. Critics such as Ang (2003: 191), Boyce (1994: 85), Donaldson (1992: 138-139), Kaplan (1990: 364), and Mohanty (1991b: 74) follow Spivak's deconstruction of Western feminist discourse and her attack on those ideologies which rely on a shared common experience, and in the process, reduce and misunderstand women's realities. Their main thesis is that, if feminism is to be effective as a revolutionary movement, it must understand the asymmetry of women's experience. The acknowledgment of the heterogeneity of lived experience seems to be crucial for all these feminist postcolonial scholars. In this sense, their approach is postmodernist. They defend what it usually described as a "politics of position", "politics of partiality", or "solidarity in multiplicity", a form of politics that enables Third World women to complete their journey to a postcolonial liberation (Rich 2003: 32; Ang 2003: 191; Donaldson 1992: 139).

Through the work of influential critics like Alice Walker (1983), Tillie Olsen (1980), Trinh T. Minh-Ha and Sara Suleri in the USA, Dorothy Driver in South Africa, Vrinda Nabar in India, and Jane Miller and Sara Mills in the UK, issues of gender are starting to be acknowledged within postcolonial discussions (Walder 1998: 80). In broad terms, the most important concerns of contemporary feminist postcolonial criticism could be summarized as follows. First of all, it aims to rediscover the agency of Third World women in struggles against slavery and oppression. This concern has prompted works such as Carby's (2003: 222-237), which focuses on Black feminist theory, Brah's (2003: 613-634), concerned with how the contemporary global realities of diaspora and displacement affect postcolonial women, Sandoval's (2003: 75-99), which stresses the need to acknowledge the political and intellectual influence of Black Civil Rights Movement in the white feminist movement of the 1960s and 1970s, or Lewis and Mills (2003: 1-21), which offers an overview of recent feminist anti-racist political writing. Secondly, another important concern within this field is to analyze the hierarchical relation of power between Western women and, broadly speaking, indigenous women. Zemon Davis's (2003: 135-149) and Marangoly's (1996: 130-137), for instance, are some illustrative examples. Both critics compare the position in the colonial encounter of white women with Iroquois women and Indian women respectively. Finally, an important concern of contemporary feminist postcolonial criticism is the evaluation and analysis of postcolonial women's literary productions. Davies's (1994) work on African-American women's texts, Green et al.'s (1996) study on Francophone women writers, and Smith and

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Watson's (1992) analysis of autobiographical texts by Indian, Chicano, Caribbean, Australian, African, and Egyptian women writers are some representative texts of this new trend. All these feminist postcolonial critics focus on how those texts written by postcolonial women record their dual oppression as subjects affected by gender and colonialism.

4.5. A suitable feminist postcolonial approach

In my study of Boland's work, I intend to use jointly different feminist and postcolonial approaches. Their focus on gender and colonial oppression, and their theories of resistance to conventional patriarchal and imperial discourses will be very helpful for an understanding of how Boland attempts to construct and reconstruct her identity upon categories such as 'womanhood' and 'Irishness'. My approach is very similar to the one adopted by feminist postcolonial critics such as Donaldson (1992: 138-139), Mohanty (1991b: 74) and Spivak (1993: 17). As we have seen, all these scholars stress the need to negotiate the meaning of female identity in relation to categories such as race, class, nationality, culture, and religion. They defend a form of politics that draws upon all these elements, because, faithful to deconstructive beliefs, they argue that there is no such a thing as a "transparently universal ground of being" (Donaldson 1992: 137).

In order to study Eavan Boland's poetry from a feminist and postcolonial perspective, I am going to complement Memmi, Fanon, Said, Bhabha, and Spivak's theories (together with other less known postcolonial critics) with those postulates proposed by the American literary critic Elaine Showalter and by French feminists. In *A Literature of Their Own* (originally published in 1977), Showalter studies the work of women writers since the nineteenth century under the premise that, as a minority group, it has always had to fight against its exclusion from a male-dominated literary canon.⁷ Accordingly, she divides female literary history into three phases, 'Feminine', 'Feminist', and 'Female', phases which bear witness to the advent of a more confident and independent female literature (Showalter 1999: 13). Her tripartite structure evinces important similarities with Memmi's and Fanon's model of (artistic) decolonization for the colonized subject. The theoretical premises posed by this feminist scholar and by anti-colonial intellectuals such as Memmi and Fanon will be very useful for an understanding of Boland's evolution as a poet. In order to trace more accurately this evolution I will make use of French feminist theories. French feminism refers to various feminist writings which were produced in France from the student revolt of May 1968 onwards (Gamble 2001: 235). Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray, and Luce Kristeva are the best-known theoreticians of French feminism outside France.

⁷ My source is the 1999 edition of Showalter's *A Literature of Their Own*.

The most important point of contact between contemporary postcolonial theory and French feminism is mainly their project for deconstructing Western thought. De Beauvoir's famous statement in *The Second Sex* that "[o]ne is not born, but rather becomes a woman" (1997: 295) epitomizes the mid-twentieth-century idea that femininity is a social construction, an assertion that became central to the subsequent feminist postulates of Cixous's, Irigaray's, and Kristeva's. In different ways, as we will see, these feminist critics have striven to avoid perpetuating a patriarchal logic which defines woman as man's 'Other'. Although they will find problems when ultimately undermining the very oppositional polarity between masculinity and femininity, their critique of the paradigm of binary thought links their theories with the deconstructive moves of postcolonial theory. Like Said, Bhabha, and Spivak, these French feminist critics are deeply influenced by postmodernism and poststructuralism.⁸ Jacques Derrida has a particular repercussion in their work. Derrida defies a system of binary oppositions which positions the male as the legitimate and standard principle, the norm "against which truth and value are measured", a process he defies as "phallogocentric" (Gamble 2001: 215). His theories become a starting point from which Cixous, Irigaray, and Kristeva attempt to displace the subject – the individual (bourgeois white male) subject – of Western humanism (Mohanty 1991b: 73).

Secondly, French feminism resembles postcolonial theory in its concern with the idea of agency and resistance, how the gendered and/or post(colonial) subject resists patriarchal and/or imperial power. Like Said, Bhabha, and Spivak, the three French feminist critics under discussion agree on the fact that, in order to achieve liberation, women must move beyond the patriarchal binary opposition of the 'self' and the 'Other'. Their idea of 'decolonization', in this sense, is achieved by means of concepts almost identical to the ones developed by Said, Bhabha, and Spivak. As we will see, Cixous (1994: 44) and Irigaray (1985: 244-245) develop an image of a new woman in terms of fluidity, ambivalence, and instability, as a category which is able to surpass masculine representations. Their strategies of bisexuality are very similar to the cultural syncretism postcolonial theory advocates. On the other hand, in Julia Kristeva's "Woman's Time" (1986c: 189), we come across a powerful critique and redefinition of the concept of the 'nation' very similar to the one carried out by Bhabha in "Dissemination" (1994b: 291-322). Her call for a "third attitude" as the most efficient mode of resistance is almost identical to Bhabha's advocacy of a "Third Space", a liminal position from which to counteract authoritarian ideologies (Bhabha 1995: 25). The similarity of their approaches stems from the fact that both feminist and

⁸ Connections like these have led Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (2002: 153) to argue that the European movements of feminism, poststructuralism, and postmodernism have functioned "as the conditions of the development of postcolonial theory in its contemporary form".

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postcolonial schools attempt to move beyond essentialist identity-claims that base their premises on fixed definitions of 'man'/'woman' and 'colonizer'/'colonized'.

Finally, French feminism is closely concerned with the specific problems raised by women's relation to language and writing. Therefore, and like Said, Bhabha, and Spivak, they focus on discourse and how it can be used as a vehicle for subverting patriarchal and imperial power. Luce Irigaray's (1991: 124) concept of 'mimesis', for instance, is very similar to Bhabha's employment of the term 'mimicry' (1995: 87). Both theorists advocate the 'appropriation' of the discourses of power in order to subvert and undermine them. What unites Cixous, Irigaray, and Kristeva is their belief that there is an area of textual production that can be labelled 'feminine', which is located below the surface of 'masculine' discourse, and which at times comes to the fore in the form of disruptions of this 'masculine' language. Although they draw on essentialist concepts in their postulation of a distinctive female mode of discourse, their usage of references to the female body and identity are highly allegorical and ironic, and, as Gamble (2001: 225) explains, does "not necessarily denote [their] belief in the existence of a fundamental female identity".

**5. POETRY: TERRITORY TO BE EXPLORED BY THE IRISH
FEMALE ARTIST**

5.1. Introduction

This section deals with Irish women's position as authors of poems, and approaches poetry as a gendered practice, in which the construction of woman as speaking subject is complicated by the traditional dichotomy of male author and female object. First of all, I will explain how literature, in particular poetry, has been an andocentric field from which women have conventionally been excluded. Secondly, I will offer a systematic collection of the images of women as developed from ancient Gaelic literature to the Irish literary Revival. Last, I will focus on the emergence of Irish women's poetry at the end of the twentieth century, and the difficulties these female poets have encountered in getting their work published and recognized within the literary panorama.

5.2. Poetry: an expression denied to women

The relationship between poet and poetry has traditionally been conceived as a relation of power between a male bard and his female muse/ emblem. As Gilbert and Gubar (2000: 3-5) explain in their study of nineteenth-century women writers, literature has been considered for long an exclusively male domain. Within patriarchal Western culture, it was traditionally believed that writing was a creative gift of male quality, especially marking off men from women: the author has been predominantly male; it is he who has owned the subjects of the text, those figures, usually feminine, he objectifies in his writings. On the other hand, women were made to think that they lacked generative literary power, and if they ever wrote, their work would be regarded scornfully as a hobby, a genteel accomplishment in the Victorian period like piano playing or needle-point, or as a manly task, inappropriate for women (p. 558). A poem by Anne Finch, Countess of Winchelsea, may give us insight into what writing literature might have meant for a woman at that time:

Alas! A woman that attempts the pen
Such an intruder on the rights of men,
Such a presumptuous Creature is esteem'd
The fault can by no vertue be redeem'd. (Quoted in Gilbert & Gubar 2000: 3)

Women have been denied their right to write literature in general, but poetry has been the most forbidden genre for them (pp. 540-541). The sonnet was originally a poem in praise of the poet's mistress, and the pastoral elegy was traditionally conceived to express the poet's grief over the death of a brother poet. It is not surprising to find in discourse positions a loquacious lover addressing his elevated, but absent, dead, or silent beloved. In this context, women had had no

freedom to be the creative subjects of poems. In her essay "A Room of One's Own", Virginia Woolf (1974: 99) considers the fact that, although the original impulse for women in the early nineteenth century was for poetry, they were all by some strange force compelled to write novels. Furthermore, Woolf tells the story of an imaginary but paradigmatic woman poet, Judith Shakespeare, the sister of the well known poet of the sixteenth century, in order to show that from the male point of view, "the very nature of lyric poetry is inherently incompatible with the nature of femaleness" (Gilbert & Gubar 2000: 541). Unlike Shakespeare, this "extraordinarily gifted sister" was not sent to school (Woolf 1974: 71). Judith was relegated to "mend the stockings" at home and she was affianced to the "son of a neighbouring wool-stapler" (p. 72). The force of her own creative gift drove her to run off to London to become a poet-playwright. Unlike Shakespeare, however, Judith quickly found out that her only theatrical future lay in the exploitation of her sexuality. In this sense, no one imagines that women can find their self-fulfillment by writing poetry (Gilbert & Gubar 2000: 543). On the contrary, a woman writing lyric poetry would traditionally be associated with insanity. Gilbert and Gubar (2000: 545) explain this point extensively, and summarize it by saying:

[...] while the woman novelist may evade or exorcise her authorship anxieties by writing about madwomen and other demonic doubles, it appears that the woman poet must literally *become* a madwoman, enact the diabolical role, and lie melodramatically dead at the crossroads of tradition and genre, society and art.

Supposedly, woman's creative potential did not only lead to madness, but also to self-destruction. The well-known Celtic legend of Boann illustrates this point. According to this myth, Boann, a peasant girl, was forbidden by the local political boss of her village to contemplate her reflection in the waters of the well (González Arias 2000a: 42). The girl, transgressing the order, looks at herself, and consequently, she causes an overflowing of the waters of the well, and she gets drowned (ibid). Therefore, according to this legend, any woman's attempt to define or explore herself (or give voice to her own creative potential), should be discouraged (p. 43). Other old Irish tales, rewritten in the Christian period, are equally hard on women. Bourke (1997: 301-302) tells the story about Nuada, a king who had become armless in battle. With the help of the physician Dian Cécht, he obtained an artificial arm of silver, and since then he was known as Nuada Silverarm. But Dian's son and daughter, Miach and Airmed, were even more talented than their father. After finding the severed arm, Miach reconnected it, following a special healing charm. Miach's intelligence made his father so jealous that he murdered him. From his grave there grew three hundred and sixty five herbs, "one from every joint and sinew of his body" (p. 302). His sister Airmed, even more skillful than her brother and father, gathered them and laid them out on

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her cloak according to their various healing properties. Again, Dian was jealous, and overturned the cloak, scattering the herbs. Therefore, Airmed's knowledge was lost. According to the legend, no one can have access to the healing properties of these plants (the secret of immortality) unless the Holy Spirit has instructed them. Bourke (1997: 302) quotes the Catholic catechism which dictates that

the Holy spirit was on the side of men, of schools and churches. 'Unless a man be born again', our catechism told us, 'of water and the Holy Ghost, he shall not enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.' So it was not enough to be born of woman. Born a girl, you had no chance at all.

Accounts in the twentieth century similarly reflect how women poets are still exposed to a similar (humiliating) alienation. French feminist Françoise Parturier (1981: 63) explains that there are two domains women are excluded from: sexuality and intellectuality. If they ever attempt to venture into them, they run the risk of losing their natural virtues. Thus, a woman attempting to conquer the intellectual domain, or at least attempting to express herself (by means of lyric poetry or fictional narrative) is likely to feel insecure or guilty for not receiving any social support. Another French feminist critic, Xavière Gauthier (1981a: 161), claims that, "in French the word 'writer' does not have a feminine form. For 'poet' there is a 'poetess', a ridiculous word, it is synonymous with foolish innocence, nature [...], or old-lady respectability". Hence, even today, the woman poet in the very act of poetic assertion and self-definition inherits the alienation imposed by the patriarchal canon. Poets such as John Keats and Walt Whitman had no problem in passionately committing themselves to their art. In *Songs of Myself*, Whitman (1995: 54) declares the enormity of his bardic powers: "I celebrate myself, / and what I assume you shall assume". In section 24 of the poem, he even proclaims himself to be "Walt Whitman, an American, one of the roughs, a kosmos" (p. 110). After a century of Whitman's poem, a woman poet has to overcome many culturally imposed barriers to make an assertion like that. She has to bridge together the words 'woman' and 'poet' in order to achieve the self-assertion and self-assurance of Whitman's lines. Moreover, she will have to face the fact that there is not a well-established female tradition in poetry. Virginia Woolf (1974: 37) points out the significance of women writing with scarcely any sisterly models:

And I thought how unpleasant it is to be locked out; and I thought how it is worse perhaps to be locked in; and thinking of the safety and prosperity of the one sex and the poverty and insecurity of the other and of the effect of tradition and of the lack of tradition upon the mind of the writer.

Although Christina Rossetti and Elizabeth Barret Browning in the nineteenth century, and Emily Dickinson and Sylvia Plath in the twentieth century, may stand as the most important foremothers of all modern women poets in Europe and America, the male poetic tradition provides us with the mythical and aesthetic roots of most contemporary literary works, either by perpetuating them or by subverting them.

In the particular case of Ireland, women have been more deeply discouraged from attempting to take the pen. As we will see, this is mainly due to two reasons: (1) this country has been strongly marked by a nationalist tradition which identified the nation with a beautiful maiden or an old woman summoning her sons to maintain her wars and recover her youth; and (2) an overwhelmingly Catholic Church and a patriarchal society (the State and other political/ social institutions) which have relegated women's domain to the house with scarcely any participation in the public events. Taking into account these factors, it is not surprising that the Irish male poet Séan Ó Ríodáin (1986: 45) has expressed his surprise at the very concept of "Woman Poet". In "Banfhile", he explores the fact that poetry is widely considered as a male activity, requiring strength and fatherhood:

Is it that the feminine turns masculine
When a woman turns into a poet?
A woman is not a poet, but poetry.

Ó Ríodáin's phrase "[a] woman is not a poet, but poetry" encapsulates Irish women situation within the Irish literary panorama. As Boland (1996a: xi) reflects in the preface to *Object Lessons*, she begins to resist the apparent splitting of poet from woman, two separate kingdoms of experience and expression:

I know now that I began writing in a country where the word *woman* and the word *poet* were almost magnetically opposed. One word was used to invoke collective nurture, the other to sketch out self-reflective individualism. Both states were necessary – that much the culture conceded – but they were oil and water and could not be mixed. It became part of my working life, part of my discourse, to see those lives evade and simplify each other. I became used to the flawed space between them. In a certain sense, I found my poetic voice by shouting across that distance.

In an implicit allusion to O'Riordain's phrase, Boland (1989b: 24) has asserted that the achievement of contemporary women's poetry in Ireland is due to the fact that the feminine emblems of the literary tradition have acquired voices, or, in her own words, "[t]hey have turned

from poems into poets”. In the following section, I will analyze the most important feminine representations in the Irish literary tradition.

5.3. Images of women in Irish literary tradition

The relationship between male author and feminine object becomes particularly evident in the Irish poetic tradition. Irish male authored texts have repeatedly dealt with the abstract female figure of the Sovereignty Goddess. In their introduction to *Gender in Irish Writing*, O’Brien Johnson and Cairns (1991: 3) elaborate the different appearances of this representation throughout three phases: the Pre-Christian phase, the Medieval phase, and the nationalist period which followed from the seventeenth century onwards. A closer look at these different stages gives us an insight into how the same image, originally conceived as strong and powerful, has evolved throughout Ireland’s literary history.

In the Pre-Christian phase, the female figure, in her varying shape from young and beautiful to old and ugly, validates the physical dominance of the land by the king, and her main concern lies in the prosperity of the kingdom. Berresford’s 1995 study on women in Celtic society and literature is very illuminating for an understanding of this phase.¹ The earliest chronicle recounting “native origin myths of the Celts” is to be found in the *Leabhar Gabhála* (‘The Book of Invasions’), which records how the first natives came to Ireland (Berresford 1995: 21). As is made explicit in this book, the original Celtic creation myth is built around the story of Danu, the mother goddess of the Celts (p. 22). Celtic people ascribed their creation to a mother goddess. As Berresford (1995: 37) notes, “[f]or the pagan Celt, the essence of the universe and all its creativity was female”. This tendency to equate womanhood to the natural world is mainly due to the cycles of fertility (p. 35). An important group of goddesses is connected with this archetypical deity. They represent sovantry, the belief that the union between the male and female is necessary to make land prosper. According to Celtic mythology, the Sovereignty Goddess must recognize the rightful king before he can be acclaimed as a just and legitimate ruler. Often, he will come across an old hag who requests a kiss or a sexual encounter. If he is the rightful king, he will accept her will and she will become a beautiful young maiden again. The main goddesses of sovantry are the three sisters Éire, Banba, and Fótla. Amergin, the chief druid of the Milesians and the founder poet of Ancient Ireland, in an encounter with them, promised to name the country after Éire, although the names of Banba and Fótla would also be used (p. 36).² Other goddesses of sovantry, fertility,

¹ For further insight into Gaelic mythology before the sixth and seventh centuries, see Condren (1989) and Herbert (1991).

² Although Éire remains the principal name, Banba and Fótla are still used in poetic reference to Ireland (Berresford 1995: 36).

and healing in Irish myth are Medb, Macha, and the Cailleach Beare, also called The Old Woman or Hag of Beara (ibid). As Berresford (1995: 265) explains, the importance of these deities should not be underestimated. In contrast to the female goddesses of the following phases, these Gaelic female deities enjoyed a higher status and powerful role than later representations of them. On the other hand, whereas most countries (such as England or Germany), emanate from 'fatherlands', the fact that in Ireland the creator deity was a mother goddess tells us a lot about women's prominent role in Celtic society. Sexuality was conceived differently in pre-Christian Ireland and Europe. As Berresford (1995: 265) notes, Celtic "men and women were not ashamed of the natural functions of their bodies and sex was regarded as pleasurable, even divine in a religious sense". Furthermore, women had a coequal role in society. Male and female tasks were assigned harmoniously and not according to the superiority of one sex over the other. Hence, early Irish myths and legends portray a wide variety of women. The very phrase 'Celtic women' suggests all sorts of imagery. First of all, we come across beautiful and romantic heroines, such as Étain and Emer, ideal figures of Celtic feminine beauty and passivity (pp. 45, 181). On the other side of the scale, we also find fearsome warriors and mythological heroines such as Connie Markievicz, Boudicca, Gwennlian, and Medb, the Queen of Connacht (pp. 42-44). Other female warriors in Celtic myths are Scota, Scáthach, Scenmed, and Aoife, the strongest of all female warriors. Of all of them, the Mórrígan (or 'Great Queen') stands out as the major goddess of war, death, and destruction (p. 32). These myths demonstrate that women went to war in ancient Celtic world and sometimes also took command of men. Women's involvement in politics and religion is also emphasized by numerous Irish accounts of wise women, druidesses, female *religieuses*, and saints of early Celtic Church. Early Irish literature, then, offers a large amount of images of strong women, goddesses, and queens who wield authority equal to or greater than that of their male counterparts. All these female images will exert a tremendous influence on nationalist discourses. They are not just "empty-headed beauties" and weak women, but also "powerful women, serious women, capricious women, vengeful women, and ambitious women" (Berresford 1995: 40). Unlike Latin and Greek literature, these feminine images are representative of the realities of early Celtic society. Berresford (1995: 75) puts it as follows: "I believe that the women of Celtic myths are a reflection of historical women of early Celtic society with all their problems, loves, heartaches, and triumphs".

In the Medieval period, with the conquests of the Saxons, Franks, and Normans, together with the influential introduction of Western Christianity, the role of women began to be diminished. This transformation was advanced by the first Celtic encounters with the Roman and Greek empire (Berresford 1995: 18). In the centuries before the birth of Christ, the matriarchy of

early Celtic society gradually changed through the introduction of patriarchal beliefs (p. 29). There was a clash of Celtic cultures, with those of Greece and Rome in the middle of 1st millennium BC. The Romans, for instance, were terrified by the status of women in Celtic society, because they were subversive to the patriarchal foundations on which their culture was based. Due to this clash, the male “began to claim a more than equal role in the previous equitable social partnership”, and the ‘hero cult’ began to emerge in Irish literature (p. 266). The symbolic beginning of this patriarchy can be observed in the large number of stories that record the rape and death after childbirth of the Sovereignty Goddess. Rape symbolizes the destruction of her powerful status, now replaced by the famous male warrior the goddess gives birth to (pp. 29-31). With the introduction of Christianity, this transformation was emphasized. All the authority of the Celtic goddess was replaced by her human counterpart, the male god. When Christianity made Mary officially the ‘Mother of God’ in the Council of Ephesus (AD 431), the Celts hailed her enthusiastically as a new ‘Mother Goddess’ (p. 37). The fertility Celtic goddess Brigid, for instance, became the Christian ‘Mary of the Gael’. By the eight century, the cult of Mary was already consolidated in Ireland. Gaelic poets such as Blathmac mac Cú Brettan, Oengus the Culdee, and Pilib Bocht Ó hÚiginn of Sligo repeatedly wrote songs and poems in praise and exultation of Mary (p. 38). Therefore, the Celtic goddess was eventually substituted by “an untouchable ideal”, an image of virginity rather than fecundity (ibid). The triumph of Christianity established a new role model for Irish women: they had to become obedient wives and asexual mothers. Mary was no longer an independent and strong Mother Goddess, but a much more passive and powerless figure, “eternally suffering vehicle through which the male God could enter the world” (p. 39)

From the seventeenth century onwards, with the reinforcement of Britain’s colonial enterprise in Ireland, a strong political poetry emerged. In this writing, a communal voice emerges speaking on behalf of an oppressed Catholic community which addresses the enemy, the Protestant English. An important Gaelic literary genre associated with this political poetry is the *Aisling* (meaning ‘vision’ or ‘dream’), constructed upon well established patterns and conventions (Welch 2000: 6). The wandering male poet suddenly meets a fairy woman of incredible beauty. He asks her name and the woman identifies herself as Ireland. Subsequently, she delivers in an eloquent manner a prediction, according to which the legitimate Stuart King (usually James II) will return and save his people from the English oppression. In this sense, the Sovereignty Goddess of early Irish myth experienced a further transformation. She was used by Gaelic poets with a political program in mind, and she became a nationalist emblem that encouraged Irishmen to turn to her in time of trouble. This female allegory of Ireland adopted names such as Spéir bhean (“sky-

woman”), Roisín Dubh, Sean Bhean Bhocht (Poor Old Woman), or Cathleen ni Houlihan (O'Brien Johnson & Cairns 1991: 3). All these female figures needed the action of a man (the hero Cú Chulainn for instance), to restore their happiness and youth.

Ireland's perception of a 'motherland' found its counterpart in the English perception of a 'fatherland' (Berresford 1995: 37). England was represented as a powerful and dominant figure, with allegories such as John Bull and the male bulldog.³ On the contrary, England conceived of Ireland as powerless and feminine, a “reclacitrant harlot who needed England's male 'John Bull' to tame and civilize her” (ibid). As Said (1995: 332) argues in *Orientalism*, the imperialist enterprise gains its hegemony by constructing an image of the 'Orient' as a “competing *alter ego*”. The Oriental is undervalued as feminine, barbaric, imprudent, childlike, bizarre, and menacing, in opposition to the masculine, civilized, rational, mature, virtuous, and 'normal' Occident (p. 40). By this process Said identifies, writers such as Matthew Arnold represented the Irish as a feminine race, insisting upon its absolute difference from England. Innes (1993: 12-13) has explained how the English magazine *Punch* consistently recurred to allegorical representations of Ireland as Hibernia, a young maiden with virginal aspect, blonde, and of pale skin. This figure acquired her identity only in her role of submissive wife or daughter of John Bull, a figure of strong virility, strength, and power. In the cartoons of this magazine, the Irish were represented as brute, dirty, uncivilized, and drunken people, in contrast to the English, who were civilized, and protective fathers or husbands of Hibernia.⁴ The male figure of John Bull paralleled the resurrection of Britannia in the eighteenth century, the British Celtic 'motherland' image. In contrast to the weak Hibernia, Britannia is represented as a strong, powerful woman, with a fighting spirit. These allegories, maintained throughout the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, served the English intention of uniting the nations of the British Isles under English domination. As the prospect of Ireland's independence become more threatening, Hibernia is not allegorized as a young maiden anymore. She becomes a mother, surrounded by indisciplined sons, while Britannia or John Bull are portrayed as giving her back the keys of her house (González Arias 2000b: 56). Now, the racial differentiation is made more apparent, and her skin is darker, in contrast to the young, beautiful, and slender Hibernia represented in the period after the 1800 Act of Union.

Funnily enough, these colonial stereotypes of Ireland as a young maiden and dispossessed mother are reproduced by the Irish literary Revival. Poetry, as González Arias (2000b: 21)

³ The character of John Bull first appeared in *The Art of Political Lying*, written by the Scottish writer John Arbuthnot in 1712 (Berresford 1995: 37). Later, G.B. Shaw wrote *John Bull's Other Ireland* (1991) [1904], a play that subverts English and Irish sentimental stereotypes (Welch 2000: 171).

⁴ As González Arias (2000b: 53) explains, the allegorical representation of 'woman' and 'nation' observed in Ireland differs from that found in other postcolonial countries. Whereas Hibernia was represented by the colonizers as virginal, young, and white, waiting for the union with John Bull, African nations are depicted as women racially different, too exotic and different for the English colonizer.

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explains, becomes the principle artistic medium used by nationalist texts. Perhaps the main difference between imperialist and nationalist representations is that Irish nationalism more openly benefits from Celtic mythology. The *Aisling* poetic genre and figures such as The Old Woman of Beare, Shan Bhean Bhocht, Cathleen ni Houlihan, and Dark Rosaleen will be recovered under political aims by poets such as James Clarence Mangan in “Dark Rosaleen”, Patrick Pearse in “I am Ireland”, and Francis Ledwidge in “Poor Old Woman” (Kennelly 1970: 149, 295, 305). In this rhetoric of nationalism, Christian allegories such as the Virgin Mary are united to pre-colonial myths. This is observed in a poem like “The Mother”, written by Pearse:

I do not grudge them: Lord, I do not grudge
My two strong sons that I have seen go out
To break their strength and die, they and a few,
In bloody protest for a glorious thing,
They shall be spoken of among their people,
The generations shall remember them,
And call them blessed;
But I will speak their names to my own heart
In the long nights;
The little names that were familiar once
Round my dead hearth.
Lord, thou art hard on mothers:
We suffer in their coming and their going;
And tho' I grudge them not, I weary, weary
Of the long sorrow – And yet I have my joy:
My sons were faithful, and they fought. (Quoted in Kennelly 1970: 296)

As we observe in this poem, the poetic speaker is a woman, specifically a sorrowful mother. She is mourning for the death of her sons, and praising their valorous attitude in their fight for national independence. Her invocation of God and religious imagery, especially blood sacrifice, are essential aspects in her discourse. Male poets such as Patrick Pearse relied on the Catholic religion and its view of womanhood, especially motherhood, as a metaphor tied up with national identity. On the other hand, they maintained the traditional Irish association between woman and land, by inscribing a female motherly voice that speaks on behalf of an oppressed community. Armengol (2001: 8-10) explains that the relationship between gender and the land is not an exclusive phenomenon of Ireland, but a universal trend.⁵ In many other countries, there is an obvious connection between women and the earth, due to their common ability to give forth life and, therefore, bring about physical transformation (p. 9). Further ideological explanations have been put forward in order to try to explain the feminization of the land in Ireland. González Arias

⁵ Ireland has experienced the same process of feminization as in other colonies. Nash (1994: 227), for instance, establishes a parallelism between India and Ireland's iconographical use of the female body in order to represent the nation. Nevertheless, it is important to bear in mind that this metaphorical representation of the land as a woman, is not only present in colonial and postcolonial countries, but it is a generalized process that goes back to Plato and his idea of the *chora* as a passive space identified with the figure of the mother (González Arias 2000b: 38).

(2000b: 45-47) explains the association of woman and landscape from psychoanalytic theories, arguing that the geographer's or male wish to designate landscape as womanly stems from a wish to overcome the loss of the pre-Oedipal mother. In any case, Armengol (2001: 9) believes that the feminization of *Ire-land* should be treated in its particular ideological and political context. Turning Ireland into a mythical, bodiless, idealized, and motherly figure is also to be seen as a direct consequence of its colonial experience, as we have seen (p. 10). Thus, Ireland assumes the role of a mother goddess summoning her faithful sons to stand up against the invader. The nation is typically portrayed as a poor old woman begging for the courageous protection of Irishmen to finally return her purity or dignity to her, of which she has been shamefully deprived by the English. England is commonly depicted as a male rapist, whereas Ireland is simply represented as "the female victim whose sexuality is never joyful, but always painfully distasteful" (ibid).

The nexus created by the interconnection of Woman/ Ireland/ Nationalism/ Catholicism continues to be strong in the period after the foundation of the Irish Free State. As we have seen, with the triumph of the conservative wing after the Treaty in 1921 and Sinn Féin's political campaign, women's subordinated status was encouraged. In real life, women were relegated to the role of full-time mother and housewife within a strict domestic sphere. The conservatism of culture and nationalism's discourse demanded women act as vehicles of transmission of 'pure' and 'authentic' Irish values (Hywel 1995: 25). On the other hand, due to the identification of nationalism with Catholicism, the triumph of the first went hand to hand with the solidification of the precepts of the second. The Catholic Church obliged women to preserve the 'natural' feminine virtues of obedience, submission, and humility, reinforcing the patriarchal values and contributing to the undervaluing of women. Women's world, as envisaged by the State and the Church, was supposed to revolve "around the twin poles of Altar and Hearth" (ibid). Their ideal model to follow was the Virgin Mary, who embodies frigidity, sanctity, and submissive suffering, and they should distance themselves as far as possible from their feminine counterpart: the subversive and sinful Eve. Therefore, women were strongly connected with spirituality, not physicality. Individual sexuality was therefore replaced by attributes of fecundity. Similarly, all those activities which could contribute to their personal, intellectual, and social fulfillment were discouraged, and the only feminine superiority widely accepted was as regards moral issues.

Even at present, the trope of Mother Ireland, as González Arias (2000b: 88) explains, continues to be deep in the national unconscious. Therefore, it is not surprising to find that contemporary male poets in Ireland still rely on this traditional feminine image. In an interesting essay, Coughlan (1991) demonstrates how two prominent poets, Montague and Heaney, perpetuate the absence of women as speaking subjects by using mythical female figures of the Irish tradition.

The mother-spouse stereotype, her identification with the land and the national spirit, her association with death and origins are repeatedly fetishized in their poetry (Coughlan 1991: 88-89). Coughlan (1991: 94) asserts that speechless and passive feminine images are used for the artist's self-definition, enabling him to "acquire sovereignty in his craft". On the other hand, these two poets also lay stress on repulsive images of old women (which have their roots in the Irish primitive hag figure who has access to hidden knowledge), in order to receive assistance to "self-discovery" (p. 99). Nevertheless, we also find contemporary male poets such as Paul Muldoon and Paul Durcan who react against the myth of Mother Ireland in poems such as "Aisling" and "Fat Molly" (Praga 1996: 181, 234). This revision becomes more particularly evident in contemporary Irish women poets such as Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill, Paula Meehan, and Eavan Boland (González Arias 2000b: 22).

For most feminists and women writers in Ireland, as O'Brien and Cairns (1991: 4) explain, mythical and nationalist figures such as the abstract sovereignty goddess are problematic. The reductive effect of the earth/body analogy and her timeless nature do not describe present-day women in Ireland. Hence, contemporary Irish women such as Eavan Boland, as I will later explain in more detail, try to put an end to all these repetitive representations of women, in order to include their private and ordinary lives. In this sense, this poet creates what González Arias (2000b: 22) calls a different "M/Other Ireland". Rather than rejecting the equation 'woman' and 'nation', what Boland does is to reject the ideology according to which present-day women have been silenced and oppressed. On the other hand, feminine iconographies such as Mother Ireland do not only simplify women, but silence a history of dispossession by only focusing on Ireland's victories, by presenting a country that has successfully seen out British colonization. Boland's poetry will attempt to subvert this, by consistently drawing us into a painful Irish history, scarred and damaged by events such as the Great Famine and emigration.

5.4. Irish women's poetry in the twentieth century

Many critics have agreed on identifying the ability of twentieth century Irish literature to redefine itself by revitalizing themes and identities that can coexist uneasily. Kiberd (1996: 7) views the Irish Renaissance as a movement dominated by the prerequisite of reinventing Ireland and reshaping the main notions which constitute the Irish identity. Hagen and Zelman (1991: 442) also point out the tendency among Irish poets from Yeats to the Celtic Revival onward to record and criticize their nation's autonomous identity; although, in the process, they tried to establish links with the Gaelic past by relying on ancient Celtic myths, folklore, and symbols. Allen-Randolph (1999a: 205) asserts that there were also overlapping "waves of renewal" brought on by the

proliferation of Northern voices in the sixties and seventies and by the “unprecedented arrival” of women writers in the eighties and nineties.

The emergence of women's poetry at the end of the twentieth century has put and, in fact, is still putting many definitions of Irish literature at stake. Therefore, it is not surprising to find that this emergence has been refuted not only by the Irish audience, but also by the publishing houses. Eavan Boland's work, for instance, has frequently put her in disagreement with a male-dominated literary consensus. She has, over the years, scrutinized, disturbed, and subverted assumptions over gendered identity and the role of the poet. This fact has prompted the great reluctance with which women's writing was treated by the Irish community. In order to understand the barriers Boland has found in the Irish literary panorama, it is essential to gain some insight into the extent to which women poets in the twentieth century have often been devalued and defined in restrictive terms.

Although Irish poetry in the twentieth century stands out for its tendency to rejuvenate itself, it has lacked the experimentalism that other poetries, such as the American genre, have had. As Allen-Randolph (1999a: 206-207) explains, whereas American poetry in the last decades of the century could be radicalized and transformed by non-canonical and marginal voices, in Ireland, this “freedom of movement” has been fraught with suspicion and fear of innovation. As regards this point, Praga (1996: 243) explains that, although throughout history, literature written by women has been devalued not only in Ireland, but in many other places, this suppression has been even more pronounced in Ireland. In spite of the notable recovery made by Kelly (1997) in her anthology *Pillars of the House: An Anthology of Verse by Irish Women: from 1690 to the present*, women's poetry in Ireland has been, until very recently, almost non-existent. Irish women have had to overcome more boundaries in order to write than their female colleagues cross-culturally: they have had to deal with the oppressive burden of a country which adopted a figure of the woman in order to express their aspirations of liberty, their national dreams, and laments. Allen-Randolph (1999a: 207) contributes to this debate, by noting that the constraints for innovation experienced in the Irish arena stem from the particular relation of Irish poets to history and the national literary tradition. Irish poets have been “more oblig[ed] to the history of their country, than most American poets ever felt themselves to be” (ibid). In an interview, Boland also provides some significant insights into the powerful, at times damaging, values in Irish poetry:

The sense of morale is strong. Irish poets probably feel a sense of community and purpose other poets would envy. But when I look around at American poetry, I so admire the sense of experiment, the sense of not knowing where the next upsetting of the apple cart is coming from. American poetry is set up for change and experiment in a way Irish poetry is not. And I don't accept it's just because of the size of the country. (Allen-Randolph 1999b: 303)

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In this context, women's poetry, attempting to revise the very system of poetic values which 'forbade' them to be poets/subjects, has suffered great resistance. As already explained, Western literary tradition has perpetuated the image of women as objects and ornaments for the (male) poet. Women poets, by the very act of writing, challenge this assumption. They tend to experiment with tone and with other techniques in their struggle to become subjects/authors.

Looking back over the poets born in the early twentieth century, a few interesting facts emerge. As Kelly (1997: 22) explains, very few Irish women wrote poetry in the age group born between 1900 and 1940. We have to wait for the forties to witness the birth of a dozen women poets, all of whom managed to receive university education "at the right period in their lives" (ibid). The reasons for the lack of Irish women's poetry at the beginning of the century are to be found, as Kelly (1997: 22-4) explains, in a series of "complex social, political, and economic factors" that affect women far more greatly than men: (1) women's supreme role continues to revolve around motherhood and childbearing; (2) religious precepts were still of paramount importance for the majority of women until the late 1960s; (3) the Censorship of Publications Acts 1929 and 1946 had an impact on all Irish artists, but married women were the most affected, for they had not such a freedom of movement as married men did; (4) until the 1960s, social and legal discrimination continued to dominate women's lives. Praga (1996: 245) also notes that, during this period, women in the Republic of Ireland had fewer rights than the majority of them in other European countries.

It is not until the latter half of the twentieth century, mostly in the late 1970s, that there is a proliferation of female voices in Irish poetry (Fogarty 1999: 261). Nevertheless, their emergence was sometimes difficult to accept. As an American scholar arriving for the first time in Ireland in 1987, Allen-Randolph (1999a: 206) admits being startled by the fragmented and resistant perception of women poets, even so late in the century. An analysis of the journals and anthologies published in this period shows how these women have been suppressed from Ireland's mainstream literature. Medbh McGuckian was the only woman amongst the ten poets included in Paul Muldoon's *Faber Book of Contemporary Irish Poetry*, published in 1986 (Hill 2003: 8). Fogarty (1999: 261) compares *The Oxford Book of Irish Verse*, edited by Donagh MacDonagh and Lennox Robinson in 1958, with *The New Oxford Book of Irish Verse*, edited by Thomas Kinsella in 1986. Surprisingly enough, the earlier volume features far more women writers than Kinsella's later selection, which only incorporates the figure of Eibhlín Ní Chonaill. Fogarty concludes by saying that this exclusion was reinforced by the advent of feminism in the late twentieth century because, by laying stress on women poets as a group with its own distinct identity, it also removed them from the patriarchal mainstream (ibid). In any case, even when women writers started to be

published in the 1970s and 1980s, there seems to be a broken line of continuity. Maurice Harmon's *Irish Poetry After Yeats*, Frank Ormsby's *A Rage for Order*, and John Montague's *The Faber Book of Irish Verse* recorded either nineteenth-century women writers (Eileen O'Leary, Lady Wilde, Emily Lawless, and Fanny Parnell) or contemporary poets such as Eavan Boland and Eiléan Ní Chilleanáin (Fogarty 1999: 261-262). Furthermore, as Fogarty (1999: 263) explains, the most important literary journals (such as *The Bell*, *Envoi*, and *The Lace Curtain*, with the exception of *The Dublin Magazine*), almost entirely ignored women's poetry in their publications. The publication of *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing* in 1991 reinforces the continuing problems women have had in getting their works published and recognized (Haberstroh 1996: 9). The little space devoted to women writers was highly controversial, because it claimed to be a comprehensive collection of Irish writing from the sixth to the twentieth century. Contributions from only a very few women were included in its 4,000 pages. It became increasingly obvious that Irish women were not going to have an easy welcome as poets. Women poets' response to the publication of *The Field Day Anthology* was instant and public. Eavan Boland starts to publish a series of critical essays, later collected in *Object Lessons* (1996a), where she deals with some issues concerning the discrimination against Irish women writers.⁶ This attack becomes more explicit in her later essay "Daughters of Colony", where Boland (1997e: 12) discusses the effect that the Irish postcolonial experience has had on literature and on subsequent literary critics. Boland accuses literary scholars, especially those from the Field Day Group, on the grounds that their 1991 anthology of Irish writing omitted a large amount of Irish women writers. According to this woman poet, examples such as this show "that in a postcolonial ethos, meanings themselves can be colonized in certain powerful and damaging ways" (p. 18). These "makers", as she defines these scholars, of the "Irish literary canon", suppress the "past" of Irish women in favour of the already known "history" of male poets, in order to satisfy "the purposes of the national agenda" (pp. 18-19). Boland's unconditional defence of contemporary women writers, as O'Malley (1999: 254-255) has put it, has ensured that such an exclusion

is unlikely to happen on that scale in Ireland again. That she refused to sink to the level of an impassioned *crie de coeur* (which might well have been branded hysterical) and opted instead to argue her case on literary and intellectual grounds is to her eternal credit. [...]. She was at the time of the publication of *The Field Day Anthology* a warrior goddess on behalf of the throng of excluded women writers.

⁶ See also Ní Dhomhnaill's sharp criticism of women's exclusion from *The Field Day* in her essay "The Hidden Ireland: Women's Inheritance" (1996).

5. Poetry: territory to be explored by the Irish female artist

Thanks to this controversy, the eagerly awaited volumes IV and V of *The Field Day Anthology* devoted to women's writing and traditions were eventually published in October 2002 (Bourke et al. 2002).

The cultural and political changes of Irish society in the last decades of the twentieth century have opened new opportunities for women writers, as issues of gender became less edgy. In recent years, women themselves have become editors of their own journals and magazines (Fogarty 1999: 264). Salmon Press, under the guidance of Jessie Lendennie, and the literary journal *Cypers*, with two women editors, have played a major role in publishing women writers such as Rita Ann Higgins, Mary O'Malley, Joan McBreen, and Eithne Strong (ibid). Thus, women poets could finally enter the public domain. It is in this period when Boland started publishing most of her volumes of poetry, *The War Horse* (1975), *In Her Own Image* (1980), *Night Feed* (1982), *The Journey and other Poems* (1986), *Outside History* (1990), and *The Lost Land* (1998), as well as some prose work, ("The Woman Poet in a National Tradition" in 1987, "A Kind of Scar" in 1989, and "Outside History" in 1995),⁷ which have been considered as "the most important essays in Irish literary culture" (Clutterbuck 1999: 275). On the other hand, Boland has also been the co-founder of one of the most important feminist publishing companies, Arlen House (Hurtley et al. 1996: 33).

At present, women's poetry stands as a major sector within the mainstream literature of the country. Since 1980, increasing publication of Irish women's poetry has enhanced a more confident female voice, which defends now her right to speak and be heard. Together with the social and political circumstances described earlier, Haberstroh (1996: 197-198) speaks about two other factors which account for the proliferation of women poets in Ireland. Firstly, the repercussion of women's rights movements has increased the interest in Irish women's lives, with the consequent emergence of Women's Studies programs at several universities. Secondly, writing workshops have spread all over the country, giving women more opportunities to read and discuss their writings. According to Maguire (1999: 62), another factor that prompted this emergence is that the 1980s saw the "fascinating explosion" of poems written by men on domestic issues, as the 'Martian' school of poets conducted by Craig Raine and Christopher Reid exemplifies. This enabled women to write about these new topics as well, and get their work published. All these changes and expanding publishing opportunities have given rise to new voices in Irish poetry. Together with well-known women poets such as Eithne Strong, Eavan Boland, Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin, Medbh McGuckian, and Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill, other poets are starting to be acknowledged in the Irish literary arena: Susan Connolly, Paula Meehan, Chatherine Byron, Nuala Archer, Anne

⁷ All these essays have been collected in the volume of prose *Object Lessons: The Life of the Woman and the Poet in Our Time* (Boland 1996a).

Kennedy, Katie Donovan, and Angela Greene (Haberstroh 1996: 224). The Irish literary establishment is increasingly accommodating writing by women. In this context, Boland's poetry has acquired both critical respect and a large readership not only in Ireland but also abroad (particularly in the United States). Her reputation is well established at present, and she is even regarded as Ireland's preeminent female poet: Gelpi (1999: 210) calls her "the first great woman poet in the history of Irish poetry"; and other women writers, such as Mary O'Malley, Medbh McGuckian, and Paula Meehan, see her as a role model to follow.⁸

⁸ Meehan has declared in an interview with González Arias (2000b: 301) the tremendous influence that Boland has exerted in her poetry. For O'Malley and McGuckian's description of their indebtedness to Eavan Boland, see O'Malley (1999) and McGuckian (1993).

**6. TOWARDS AN UNDERSTANDING OF BOLAND'S POETRY AS
MINORITY/POSTCOLONIAL DISCOURSE**

6.1. Introduction

Eavan Boland's work has often been pigeonholed by critics such as Haberstroh (2001), Meaney (1993a), Fulford (2002a), and Atfield (1997) as "minority" discourse and "postcolonial poetry". Haberstroh (2001: 4), for instance, implies that Irish women's poetry can be considered as the expression of a "minority culture" which redefines aspects such as class, gender, national identity, religion, and sexual orientation. Her argument is that, for women poets in Ireland, the subject of "belonging, of possession, and its counteract dispossession" as Irish and as women runs through much of their poetry (pp. 7-8). According to this critic, their work makes clear, quoting Ní Dhomhnaill (2001: 49), how difficult it is for women poets to "belong oneself" in Ireland. In a more specific analysis, Meaney (1993a: 153) also locates Boland's work within that "minority discourse" and "discourse of internal exile" which challenges from the margins the configurations of cultural homogeneity in the Republic of Ireland. Similarly, Fulford (2002a: 213-214) reads Boland's poetry as one example of "minority discourse" and sees the woman poet as representative of "a more instantaneous and subaltern voice of the people" writing from a place of marginality and "liminality", a place which is opened by resisting polarizing definitions. Finally, Atfield (1997: 168) bases her study on the premise that Eavan Boland's poetry is a clear exponent of postcolonial literary productions. This critic states that postcolonialism in Boland's work "is a process of the recognition and exposure of colonialism": this woman poet begins by exposing "the denial and repression of identity" in order to carry out a "restoration and reconstruction of that identity in terms of place, history, and literary tradition" (ibid). In this section, I intend to clarify the often confusing and interchangeable terms 'minority' and 'postcolonial', in order to explain why Boland's work can be identified using these labels.

6.2. Minor literature/ Minority discourse

In "Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature", Deleuze and Guattari (1986) challenge conventional interpretations of Kafka's novels and propose a new way to read his work by means of the concept "minor literature". Although the concept "minor literature" is generally associated to Deleuze and Guattari's 1975 study, it had already been used, although in a somewhat negative sense. In Fryer's *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957: 9-10), as Renza (1984: 10-11) explains, "minor" literature is defined as that literature which only imitates the "patterns" one finds in "the profound masterpiece". The term was later employed with a similar negative bias in Harold Bloom's *The Anxiety of Influence* (1973: 5, 12-13). In this study, Bloom viewed "minor" literature as that written by "weak" writers, who merely idealize their precursors, accepting them like "godlike figure[s]", in contrast to

“stronger” writers who refuse to define their literary identity in terms of “an idealized tradition”, and who attempt to redefine or change it (Renza 1984: 11). Whereas Fryer and Bloom lower the value of minor literature, the innovation of Deleuze and Guattari's study on Kafka lies in the fact that they assign a high value and potential to it. According to these authors, the three salient features of this type of literature are the following:

(1) It is a literature written by a minority group in a “major language” (Deleuze & Guattari 1986: 16). This major language is affected and subverted from within by a strong “derritorialization” factor. Deleuze and Guattari employ this term in order to identify writers' exile and displacement in terms of language and literature.¹ Although “deterritorialization” is a negative term because it involves estrangement, it is also extremely positive, for it allows subversion of the major language. With the advent of poststructuralism and postmodernism, the one-to-one relationship between signified and signifier is put into question. The poststructuralist critics Deleuze and Guattari (1986: 28) argue that in “minor” literature, the structural relationship between content and expression becomes unstable. The very term “deterritorialization” that they coin suggests this distance between signifier and signified. Whereas in major literature, there is “a vector that goes directly from content to expression”, in minor literature expression does not necessarily lead to content. As they put it, the revolutionary literature reinvented by Kafka “begins by expressing itself and doesn't conceptualize until afterwards” (ibid). What these authors mean is that the art Kafka tried to introduce no longer aimed at expressing a particular meaning or representing something specific. It was rather, as Bensmaïa (1986: xvii) puts it, “a method (of writing)”. Deleuze and Guattari (1986: 6) mention Kafka's interest in “pure and intense sonorous material[s]”, “deterritorialized musical sound[s]” that do not necessarily signify anything. By fractionating the major language, and adopting a subversive attitude, the minor writer “reterritorializes”, as Renza (1984: 33) explains, his/her marginalized relation to it. Kafka's use of the major language's “linguistic elements”, his abuses and misuses of prepositions, pronouns, his distribution of consonant and vowels, produce a non-representational effect that both “deterritorializes” the major language, and enables the “reterritorialization” of the writer (Deleuze & Guattari 1986: 28-42).²

¹ This term “deterritorialization”, as Kaplan (1990: 358) explains, has been extended recently to signify the “displacement of identities, persons, and meanings” that characterizes “the postmodern world system”.

² The authors coin the term to refer to Kafka, who as a Jew in Prague, wrote his works in German. Nevertheless, the concept can be extended to refer, as Deleuze and Guattari (1986: 19) suggest, to Joyce and Beckett, who proposed a new way of using the English language in Ireland. This term has also been employed by other critics such as Kubayanda (1990: 250), who finds in Shakespeare's Caliban one of the clearest examples in literature of a minority subject both conquered by the language of the majority, but liberated by the creation of a “counter-discourse” (mainly composed of curses) which “deterritorializes” the English language.

6. Boland's poetry as minority and postcolonial

(2) Deleuze and Guattari (1986: 17) consider minor literature as essentially political in nature, not in the sense that it talks directly or intentionally about politics, but in the sense that each of its individual concerns is connected immediately to politics. The minor writer, just by raising his/her voice and demanding his/her right to be heard and be recognized as an agentive subject, defies the established system which confines him/her to the margins. In this sense, he or she becomes a political figure.

(3) Deleuze and Guattari (1986: 17) claim that minor literature explores communal values: "what each author says individually already constitutes a common action", a statement which becomes stronger the more the writer is on the margins or completely outside his/her community. According to these critics, this fact responds to the inactivity of collective and national consciousness in external life. In this sense, literature becomes the place where the collective, and sometimes revolutionary, role is enacted. But apart from this, Deleuze and Guattari (1986: 17) argue that the main reason for the collective nature of minority literature is its "scarcity of talent".

The concept of "minor literature" as posited by Deleuze and Guattari is readdressed and interrogated by JanMohammed and Lloyd (1990a, 1990b) through the category of "minority discourse". These critics were the first ones to propose this concept in 1986, at a conference entitled "The Nature and Context of Minority Discourse", held at the University of California, Berkeley, and which resulted in a 1990 edited collection of the same title. While praising the description by Deleuze and Guattari, these authors go a step forward, and trace the genealogy of "minor literature" to the hierarchical relation between dominant and minority groups. JanMohammed and Lloyd (1990a: ix) define "minority discourse" in the following way: "By 'minority discourse' we mean a theoretical articulation of the political and cultural structures that connect different minority cultures in their subjugation and opposition to the dominant culture". This definition is based on the premise that minority groups, in spite of their heterogeneous nature, share the same experiences of domination, marginalization, and exclusion by the majority groups (ibid). JanMohammed and Lloyd (1990b: 9) assert that minority location is "not a question of essence (as the stereotypes of minorities in dominant ideologies would want us to believe) but a question of position" determined by the interplay of categories such as race, gender, and class. On the other hand, both authors question Deleuze and Guattari's (1986: 17) argument that the main reason for the collective nature of minority literature is its "scarcity of talent". According to JanMohamed and Lloyd (1990b: 9-10), its collective nature derives from the fact that those individuals belonging to minorities have always been obliged to treat themselves generically and collectively. As all members have always occupied an "inferior" position, they share similar

political interests in their struggle: "Coerced into a negative, generic subject-position, the oppressed individual responds by transforming that experience into a positive, collective one" (p. 10).

Therefore, JamMohamed and Lloyd (1990a, 1990b) extend the meaning of "minor literature" to describe the power structures involved in the relation of minorities to the dominant group. In this sense, the term has been used, for example, by women of colour, or "Third-World" women, in relation to (Western) feminism (Young 1992: 173). It has also been employed to refer to people of colour in the US (Boyce 1994: 14), subjugated working classes, and British citizens of Asian, African, and Caribbean descent (Brah 2003: 620). Critics such as Smith and Watson (1992: xvi) have even used the term interchangeably with "discourse of the margins" and "postcolonial discourse", and define minority discourse as "the writing/language that emanates from the position of the colonial subject", a subject whose diverse modes of identity have been "irreversibly affected".

In this sense, "postcolonial discourse" and "minor/ity literature" have been sometimes perceived as one and the same. Bhabha (1995: 157), for instance, equates "minority discourse" with that "postcolonial discourse" produced by the diaspora community and by those marginal voices which have experienced some sort of "social ellipsis". Within this group, Bhabha includes the colonized population and also women, by arguing that the "critique of patriarchal fundamentalism and its regulation of gender has become a major issue for minority discourses" (p. 229). The following section will analyze the extent to which postcolonial literature can be considered as another instance of minority discourse.

6.3. Postcolonial discourse

When attempting to pin down the meaning of postcolonial literature, it is almost impossible to avoid very large generalizations and simplifications, given the wide range and variety of writings. In order to define this sometimes overused term, and in order to incorporate the different cultural productions that are considered postcolonial, I would like to start by embracing Boehmer's definition of the term. For Boehmer (1995: 3), postcolonial literature, "[r]ather than simply being the writing which 'came after' empire, is that which critically scrutinizes the colonial relationship, [...] that sets out in one way or another to resist colonialist perspectives". As we can see in this definition, Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin's (2002a) notion of 'writing back' to the imperial centre as the key aspect of all postcolonial writings has been highly influential in postcolonial criticism. In Ireland, postcolonial literature is also understood as that writing which starts at that very moment when the colonial subject uses his/her text in order to challenge imperialist practices

(Kiberd 1996: 6). This sort of cultural activity is said to have begun with Seathrún Céitinn, one of the “first counter-imperial historians”, whose *Foras Feasa ar Éirinn (A Basis for the Knowledge of Ireland)*, published in 1633, reacted against Spenser's *View of the Present State of Ireland* (1596) (p. 13).

In what follows, I will focus on the studies of postcolonial literature by Said (1994) and Bhabha (1995). In *Culture and Imperialism*, Said (1994: 230-340) dedicates an entire chapter to discussing the themes of what he calls “Resistant literature”, the literature of postcolonial writers who strive to overcome the wounds inflicted both by imperialism and nationalism. Interestingly enough, the postcolonial writers he discusses are migratory intellectuals. It is also important to bear in mind that Said, in his discussion, adopts a comparative framework, highlighting similarities between writers belonging to different countries. In *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha (1995: 151-152) also discusses the main features of postcolonial literature, a literature he defines as characteristic of marginal voices, of minorities such as the colonized and women. Like Said, Bhabha focuses on the discourses where exile, migrancy, and hybridity interact with each other in order to resist the binary politics of imperialism and nationalism. Both theorists offer a very interesting characterization of postcolonial literature which will be complemented with the analyses of other postcolonial critics in the international arena, such as Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (2002a), Boehmer (1995), Brennan (1989, 1994), Lazarus (1994), Marangoly (1996), Mohanty (1991a), Rajan (1993), Spivak (1993), and Walder (1998); and within the Irish academy, by Arrowsmith (2000), Bery and Murray (2000), Balzano (1996), Kearney (1988a), Campbell (2003), Faggen (2003), Kiberd (1996), Lloyd (1993), Sewell (2003), and Smyth (1998).

In enumerating the great amount of specific features of postcolonial literature that postcolonial theorists and critics have stressed over the last few decades, my intention is to show how Boland's poetry shares all of them. As has been suggested, Irish literature, whether in English or in Gaelic, is generally not studied within postcolonial frameworks. When written in the English language, Irish literature has often been incorporated in university syllabus and texts under the label ‘British’ (Bery & Murray 2000: 4). This trend has been contested by several Irish postcolonial critics, who contend that Irish literature must be distinguished from English literature and is representative of the writing of postcolonialism. Lloyd (1993: 8), for instance, reads three writers, who are paradoxically canonical, as Yeats, Joyce, and Beckett, in the context of minority (postcolonial) discourse. Similarly, Harte and Pettit (2000: 70-73) establish very interesting analogies between two Irish writers, William Trevor and Maurice Leitch, and the Indian novelist Salman Rushdie, suggesting that they have important points in common as postcolonial writers.

Kiberd (1996: 115) also compares Yeats with Walt Whitman, arguing that both share the same ambition as national poets. Following the argument of these Irish critics, I believe that Boland's poetry is shaped by some common features of what might be called a "postcolonial literature". It is my contention that Boland's work is no less 'postcolonial' than that writing produced in countries such as Nigeria, India, and the Caribbean islands, for instance. The reasons are listed below.

(1) As we have seen, Said (1995: 23) contends in *Orientalism* that culture plays a vital role in the colonizing process. Similarly, as it has been explained by Fanon (1990: 170-198), culture is also essential for any process of decolonization. It is generally acknowledged that postcolonial literature acts as a form of resistance, and as a plausible way to achieve decolonization. Bhabha (1995: 185), Said (1994: 261), and Smyth (1998: 35) locate this resistance in the hybrid nature of postcolonial works, and Spivak (1993: 219) in their representation of heterogeneous realities. Mohanty (1991a: 33), on the other hand, locates the resistant nature of postcolonial writing in its forging of "political consciousness"; for Mohanty, writing becomes the context through which new political identities are created, a context of struggle and contestation.

(2) There are two views among postcolonial theorists and critics as regards postcolonial literature. First of all, postcolonial theorists such as Said (1994: 261), Bhabha (1995: 185), and Spivak (1993: 219-223) tend to focus on those works characterized by an eminent anti-essentialism, anti-nationalism, and postmodernism. This sort of literature abandons cultural identity and perpetuates the Western, postmodernist notion of agency and consciousness which often implies the splintering of the subject, and favours multiplicity in the abstract. One postcolonial writer within this branch of literature is Salman Rushdie, whose *Satanic Verses* is praised by Bhabha (1995: 185), Said (1994: 261), Spivak (1993: 219-223), and Hall (1990: 212) for showing the constructed and provisional nature of identity and succeeding in overcoming binary oppositions (such as colonizer/colonized) by parody, mimicry, borrowings, and the metaphor of migrancy.³ This sort of literature that foregrounds and celebrates national and historical rootlessness, has often been accused for not engaging with the subaltern cause. Ahmad (1992: 124), for instance, has scorned Rushdie's *Satanic Verses* for its lack of political commitment. In Ireland, one illustration of this anti-nationalism and anti-essentialism is found in Samuel Beckett's work, which finds freedom in exile (Arrowsmith 2000: 64). His work has been praised by critics such as Kiberd (1996: 531), who asserts that Beckett is "the first truly Irish writer [...] free of factitious elements of Irishness".

Secondly, we come across those postcolonial critics who focus on those texts which, instead of promoting the fragmentation and the rootlessness of the subject, maintain a sense of

³ For a deeper insight into Rushdie's work, see Blake (2001).

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cultural identity and attempt to create collective selves. As Boehmer (1995: 248) notes, postmodern notions of meaning and identity as fictional and provisional can be of no use for those for whom (as women, indigenous peoples, and marginalized groups) the signifiers of nation, home, self, and history might be compelling issues. Mohanty (1991a: 36) is one of the critics who defends this type of writing on the grounds that the most subaltern of all, Third World women, need to “conceptualize notions of collective selves” in order to be politically effective. This is the way these women engage with feminism, by creating an imagined community of women who suffer as they are suffering. This notion of agency, which moves away from the postmodern one advocated by Said, Bhabha, and Spivak, has a location in history and geography, and “its consciousness is both singular and plural” (Mohanty 1991a: 37). This is beginning to be acknowledged in Ireland. As Arrowsmith (2000: 66) has explained, current ethnographic studies are demonstrating how for the Irish, home and abroad, cultural identity continues to be of paramount importance, especially “in contemporary contexts of globalization and cultural homogenization”. It seems that some Irish postcolonial writers are beginning to search for the means to construct a stable sense of cultural identity that counters the neutralizing effects of emigration, anti-nationalism, and globalization. As Kearney (1988a: 25) has explained,

it is often by journeying beyond the frontiers of Ireland – either physically or imaginatively – that we find a new desire to return and discover what is most valuable in it. Ireland has nothing to fear from exposure to alien cultures. It is often the migrational detour through other intellectual landscapes which enables us to better appreciate our own traditions.

(3) In both types of postcolonial writing, the idea of the nation is always a central narrative. As Spivak (1993: 219), Lazarus (1994: 198), and Brennan (1994: 47) contend in their own different ways, the study of postcolonial literature helps us to understand the national-centeredness of the post-colonial world. In his controversial essay “Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism”, Jameson (1986) reads all “Third World” literature as national allegories, which Ahmad (1992: 10-11, 95) and Marangoly (1996: 99-108) profoundly criticize on the grounds that Jameson uncritically classifies all writing produced in the Third World from a Western perspective which homogenizes the heterogeneous and diverse ideological positions of these literary productions. Furthermore, there is an implicit danger in Jameson's assertion, for he may induce us to think that all Third World literary works about nations are ‘nationalist’. In spite of assertions like this, what is clear is that writers from once colonized nations always make explicit their ideological position towards their own country, either with a view to praising the idea

of 'nation' or to scorning it altogether. Spivak (1993: 219) has argued that it is usual to find in postcolonial works "an aggressive central theme: the postcolonial divided between two identities: migrant and national". According to this theorist, postcolonial texts more often than not deal with nationalism and a sense of alienation from it. She highlights the importance of the nation for the postcolonial writer, who is often a migrant or an exile. When talking about *The Satanic Verses*, Spivak (1993: 235-236) says the following: "The migrant wants to redefine the nation, the postcolonial wants to identify the nation, the exile wants to explain and restore the nation and be an agent in terms of its normative and privative discourse". Brennan (1994: 63) has summarized well the postcolonial writer's antagonist attitudes towards his/her native country:

The contradictory topoi of exile and nation are fused in a lament for the necessary and regrettable insistence of nation-forming, in which the writer proclaims his identity with a country whose artificiality and exclusiveness have driven him into a kind of exile – a simultaneous recognition of nationhood and an alienation from it.

In this sense, current postcolonial writers usually treat both feelings of recognition and alienation from the nation. More than defending the nation as an essentialist entity, they usually place it under rigorous scrutiny. This noticeable pull away from separatist nationalism in postcolonial writing has been identified by Said (1994: 261) and Bhabha (1995: 251). Said observes how postcolonial writers tend towards a more inclusive idea of nationhood, "a more integrative view of human community and human liberation" (ibid). Bhabha (1995: 149) also asserts that the postcolonial writer constantly disturbs the totalizing boundaries and essentialist identities of the nation. As this theorist advocates, concepts such as nation must be reconceived liminally, because "there is no longer an influential separatist emphasis on simply elaborating an anti-imperialist or black nationalist tradition 'in itself'" (p. 251). Although postcolonial writers move away from exclusive nationalism, not all of them ultimately reject nationalism. As regards this aspect, Said (1994: 277) has asserted that criticizing nationalist claims does not involve abandoning nationalism, rather that this ideology should be based not on one single "local identity" but on different heterogeneous and contesting stories.

(4) Postcolonial writers generally try to avoid the influence of colonial and/or nationalist culture by seeking out alternative literary models. As Bery and Murray (2000: 3) make clear, Anglophone postcolonial poets tend to search for different models than those available in the English poetic tradition. One extreme case of this postcolonial technique would be found in the Irish-language poet Bidy Jenkinson, who rejects that tradition as imperialist (Balzano 1996: 94). But, as some other critics have emphasized, the Irish poets' need to find outside poetic models

might also signify that they desire to move beyond those terms imposed by their national tradition. According to Faggen (2003: 229), the reason these (Boland included) have looked beyond the Irish literary tradition lies in their “desire to establish human identity out of the tensions, debates, and violence about national traditions and national identity”. In this sense, contemporary Irish poetry often looks to American poetry and, more recently, to Latin American and non-Anglophone European poetry, such as Eastern European, French, and Greek poets. Poets such as Whitman, Williams, Frost, Dickinson, Milosz, Mandelstam, Nerval, and Seferis exert a tremendous influence on contemporary Irish poets (Faggen 2003: 229). Sewell (2003: 153) has noted how Irish women poets such as Medbh McGuckian and Eavan Boland have found other female models in the Russian and American traditions: from Anna Akhmatova, Marina Tsvetaeva, Denise Levertov, to Tess Gallagher or Adrienne Rich.

(5) Another way to avoid the influence of colonial literature is by rewriting traditional literary genres (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin 2002a: 32). By recurring to this subversive strategy, postcolonial writers question the assumptions and bases of Western metaphysics, defying “the world-view that [...] polarize[s] centre and periphery” (ibid). In their revision of traditional genres such as the novel, the lyric, the epic, and the play, their writings do not only invert the hierarchical order, but also challenge the cultural and philosophical premises on which that order was based (p. 179). One example of this is found in Third World women's use of the autobiographical genre, which, according to Smith and Watson (1992: xx), exposes the gaps and incongruities of Western literary practices and theorizing. Another example is Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1980), where the narrative structure of the novel is transformed by employing traditional Indian techniques (in particular the oral narrative tradition), constantly rotating back from the present to the past (Ashcroft Griffiths & Tiffin 2002a: 181). Traditional pre-colonial indigenous forms are used to subvert European (English) literary forms.

Perhaps the best known contemporary postcolonial subversion of literary genres is found in the employment of ‘Magic Realism’ of much postcolonial novels. As Bhabha (1994a: 7) has explained, ‘Magic Realism’, after the emergence of Latin American writers such as Borges, García Márquez, and Fuentes, becomes “the literary language of the emergent postcolonial world”. By mingling the bizarre and the plausible so that they become indistinguishable, postcolonial writers mimic the colonial explorer's reliance on fantasy and exaggeration to describe new worlds. Many postcolonial writers in Ireland have pursued a ‘Magic Realism’ that overcomes the representational politics of imperialism and nationalism. Kiberd (1996: 49) notes how in Ireland, some writers equated realism with canonical British forms of representation and also with

nationalist narratives, which made them attempt to find alternative representational forms. This rejection of realism resulted in a new form of writing that fused realism and fantasy/romanticism. Kiberd (1996: 49, 280) observes how Irish writers like Synge, Wilde, and Joyce employed this technique of 'Magic Realism'. Joyce, for instance, carries out in *Ulysses* "an unusual blend of symbolism and naturalism", Odyssean technique and Irish commonplace imagery (p. 338). The early modernism of Joyce, according to Kiberd (1996: 338-339), anticipated in many ways that of postcolonial artists like Rushdie or Márquez.

(6) Bhabha (1995: 241) and Said (1994: 254) have argued that postcolonial literature revises and rewrites those "imperial tropes" which appear in classical Western narratives. One of the tropes most often revised by postcolonial writers is the so-called 'quest' or 'voyage' motif (a motif of authority and domination), which emerged in much European literature especially dealing with the non-European world (Said 1994: 254). Here, Shakespeare's work, especially *The Tempest*, comes interestingly into play. *The Tempest* was partly inspired by the lucky escape of a group of colonizers shipwrecked in the Bermudas, and describes the power relationship established between a European ruler (Prospero) and a native slave (Caliban) (Walder 1998: 42). Many modern Latin American and Caribbean works, such as Aimé Césaire's *Une Tempête* (1969), Coetzee's *Foe* (1986), and George Lamming's *The Pleasures of Exile* (1960), have sought, in different ways, to revise the colonial relations reflected in Shakespeare's masterpiece (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin 2002a: 187).⁴

Dante's *Divine Comedy*, Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, and Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* have also been reconstructed by postcolonial writers, in their wish to criticize imperialist narratives of conquest and invasion (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin 2002a: 190). This is the case of James Ngũgĩ's (1965) revision of *Heart of Darkness* in *The River Between* (Said 1994: 254). As Said (1994: 35) explains, postcolonial writers are able to act subversively, by reading and rewriting (canonical) imperialist masterpieces, "which not only misrepresented them but assumed they were unable to read and respond directly to what had been written about them".

In Ireland, there have also been numerous readings of canonical texts. Said (1994: 254) illustrates this feature with Joyce's revision of "the quest-voyage motif" in the Library episode of *Ulysses*. Yeats also carried out a re-reading of *Richard the Second*; in order to create a "Celtic Shakespeare" who scorned England's usurpation and confiscation of Ireland (Kiberd 1996: 268-269).

(7) As Said (1984: 8) explains, an important feature of postcolonial literature is its interest in place and displacement. Postcolonial writers, whose lives have been shaped by emigration and

⁴ As Kubayanda (1990: 250) has noted, Caliban has almost been hailed as a national symbol of the Caribbean islands.

dislocation, are usually concerned with the relationship between self and place. They tend to face a crisis of identity that results from the “*dislocation*” and “*cultural denigration*” that as natives or postcolonial subjects they have experienced (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin 2002a: 8-9). Due to this alienation, postcolonial writers are concerned with the (re)construction of ‘place’ in order to find a stable sense of identity.

This necessity to feel a sense of belonging has also marked to a great extent Irish writing, as Praga (1996: 33-37) and García (2002) explain. García (2002: 33) has noted how the “sense of place” is more profoundly seen in Ireland than in any other Occidental country. This scholar argues that the relationship with the land observed in Irish literature is more spiritual and imaginary than physical, because their connection with the landscape is marked by dispossession rather than by true possession. This is mainly due to the colonial plantations of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as well as the phenomena of exile, emigration, and evictions (p. 38).

(8) Another significant feature of postcolonial literature is how it reflects the phenomena of migration and diaspora.⁵ The theme of exile usually appears in all such writing since it is one representation of its concern with place and displacement. The imminent presence of both real and imaginary emigration in postcolonial literature has led Marangoly (1996: 171) to identify an “immigrant genre” in postcolonial literature, in order to signify “the contemporary literary writing in which the politics and experience of location (or rather ‘dislocation’) are the central narratives”. This sort of postcolonial writing is usually connected with the themes of loss, distressful homelessness, and the “less-than-whole” subject who aspires to be assimilated in his/her national culture (p. 8). As Said (1994: 407) has argued, to be in exile “is predicated on the existence of, love for, and a real bond with one’s native place; the universal truth of exile is not that one has lost that love or home, but that inherent in each is an unexpected, unwelcome loss”. As we will explain in more detail when discussing Boland’s volume of poetry *The Lost Land* (see section 7.4.6.), it is relevant to note the great amount of postcolonial writers, both Irish and international, who, for different reasons, have participated in the twentieth century condition of migrancy. Within Irish criticism, the influence of exile and migration on literary productions has already been studied. Arrowsmith (2000: 61) has explained that the migrant characters’ search for identity is constructed upon “revivalist tropes of home and return to the source”. Some examples of this are found in Yeats’s early novella *John Sherman and Dhoya* (1891), or Pádraic Ó Conaire’s novel *Deoraíocht*, translated as *Exile* (1910). This concern with migration and displacement, to take “flight paths out

⁵ For an extensive account of how these phenomena are reflected in postcolonial writing, see Boehmer’s (1995) *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature: Migrant Metaphors* (especially pages 232-243).

of Ireland", is also observed in Heaney, mostly in his volumes of poetry from *Station Island* onwards and in Yeats's Byzantium poems (Fulford 2002b: 49).

(9) Apart from this sense of geographical displacement, postcolonial writers face another important removal, what Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (2002a: 10) describe as "linguistic displacement", and Lloyd (1993: 16), in the Irish context, calls "deterritorialization". As we can see, Lloyd borrows Deleuze and Guattari's (1986: 13) use of the term, which indicates the easy identification between 'minor' and 'postcolonial' literature. Both concepts, "linguistic displacement" and "deterritorialization", involve the postcolonial writer's disjunction between place and language, and his/her subsequent interrogation of the suitability and adequacy of the imposed language to describe the postcolonial experience (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin 2002a: 23).⁶ In Ireland, this displacement is particularly observed in those writers whose possession of English is indisputably 'native' (in the sense of speaking English from birth), yet who feel alienated within its practice, for its vocabulary and codes are felt to be inappropriate to describe their culture or transmit with accuracy their conditions as colonized and their experiences as postcolonial subjects. We should remember that throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries there was a widespread imperialist prohibition to use Gaelic. As we have seen, both Thomas Davis and Douglas Hyde foresaw that the primitive relation established between language and territory was at the verge of extinction, and that the Irish experience was in danger of being, in Lloyd's (1993: 16) words, "deterritorialized". The loss of the native language involves a much greater loss: a loss of a whole Gaelic culture. In this sense, the Irish poet finds that his/her past is inscribed in another language, now perished; and so he or she feels the pressure to discover this past anew. Even contemporary poets such as Thomas Kinsella, remain troubled by the traumatic loss of Irish in the nineteenth century, for this causes irreparable gaps in the continuity of the Irish cultural tradition (Praga 1996: 6-8).

In order to overcome this rift, Kinsella, alongside Seamus Heaney and many others, has tried to translate Irish poetry and prose (Kiberd 1996: 587). Other postcolonial writers attempt to overcome the loss of their native tongue by escaping from the colonizer's language. They avoid the use of the colonizer's language, something writers such as Ngũgĩ (1994: 27) have done. This decolonizing strategy has its Irish counterpart in women poets such as Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill. Ní Dhomhnaill (1992: 27) has argued that her use of the Gaelic language is an attempt to move away from an English language that internalizes patriarchy and colonization, and claims that "the use of the pre-colonial language as a creative medium – is beginning to be appreciated for the revolutionary and subversive act which it undoubtedly is". For this woman poet, the Irish

⁶ Memmi (1990: 175) has also described the ambiguous and tragic condition of the colonized writer who writes in another language rather than his/her own.

language, or “the language of our mothers”, is conceived as the only escape from the male language (ibid). Fulford (2002b: 137) problematizes the employment of Irish as a resistant strategy arguing that Gaelic cannot “be conceived of as a mother or feminine tongue when the Bardic tradition [has been] so predominantly male”. On the other hand, this critic has rightly noted that the notion of the Irish language as a resistant mother tongue excludes those Irish women who are Anglo-Irish and non-Irish speaking (ibid).

Other postcolonial writers attempt to move away from the colonizer's language by changing it. It is this distinctive use of the colonial language that Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (2002a: 8) identify as a one of the common features to all postcolonial literatures written in English. These authors distinguish between “English”, “the ‘standard’ British English inherited from the empire”; and “english”, the language used by postcolonial countries, a linguistic code which changes and disrupts the standard code. Whereas English comes from the imperial centre, ‘english’ is associated with the ‘peripheries’ (ibid). In this sense, postcolonial writing seizes the language of the centre and replaces it with another more suitable language. The two processes by which it does so, according to Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (2002a: 37), are “*abrogation*”, the process of rejecting English as a privilege language; and “*appropriation*”, the act of seizing and reformulating the language to new usages. By claiming its opposition to English and constantly questioning the privilege status of the imperial language, ‘english’ “establishes itself as a counter-discourse” (p. 55). One writer who employs this strategy is Derek Walcott, who defends the adoption of ‘English’ and its transformation into ‘english’ (p. 49), or Kamau Brathwaite's advocacy of a “nation language” (Walder 1998: 50). The Indian writer Raja Rao and the Guyanese poet Grace Nichols further exemplify how the colonizer's language is used in new forms (Walder 1998: 43). In the face of this, Memmi's (1990: 177) remark that “colonized literature in European languages appears condemned to die young” seems to be quite ironical in the contemporary case of postcolonial literary productions.

The means by which the ‘english’ language employed by postcolonial writers transforms the standard code of ‘English’ are various. Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (2002a: 51-71) have mentioned some interesting techniques: the use of untranslated words (which restore the presence of the native culture); the deliberate contrast between ‘english’ and another language still associated with the imperial centre; the translation in parenthesis of individual words (glossing); the combination of the linguistic structures of two languages; the fusion of the syntax of the native language and the lexical forms of English; and the interchange between two or more codes.

This attempt to transform the English language has been characteristic in Ireland. From a clear Deleuzian perspective, Lloyd (1993: 16-17) explains how one of the strategies of the Irish colonized has been to carry out a “reterritorialization” of language, which involves using the colonizer’s language in a revitalizing way, in order to recover the relationship between land and culture and reassure the identity of the colonized. The poet Thomas MacDonagh believed that literature in English was a perfectly acceptable part of the Irish tradition (Smyth 1998: 82). In his collection *Studies Irish and Anglo-Irish* (1916), MacDonagh celebrated the transformative and liberating use of the English language:

We have now so well mastered this language of our adoption that we use it with a freshness and power that the English of these days rarely have [...]. The loss of (Gaelic) idiom and of literature is a disaster. But, on the other hand, the abandonment has broken a tradition of pedantry and barren conventions; and sincerity gains thereby [...], let's us postulate continuity, but continuity in the true way. (Quoted in Smyth 1998: 82)

Similarly, Oscar Wilde is recorded to have said: “The Saxon took our lands from us and made them destitute [...], but we took their language and added beauties to it” (quoted in Kiberd 1996: 35). Joyce is generally regarded as mastering “the displaced language of the colonized” (Lloyd 1993: 121), and Yeats’ employment of Hiberno-English is praised by some critics (Kiberd 1996: 163). On the other hand, Lloyd (1993: 20) contends that Heaney’s poetry relocates identity through a “reterritorialization of language and culture” (p. 20). In one of his place-name poems in *Wintering Out*, for instance, Heaney (1972) invokes the original native place of “Anahorish” (meaning ‘place of clear water’), in order to reassure the relationship between self and land, and overcome “his displaced former identity” (p. 24). The split between the Gaelic word and the English equivalent is thus healed by invoking a landscape which unites Anglo-Irish differences (p. 25).⁷

In this sense, this use of ‘english’ by contemporary Irish writers is generally acknowledged to be different from the English language. Those whom English once colonized are exploring new territories within the language for themselves. Furthermore, it is important to note how Irish writers have sometimes produced their work intermingling both languages. This is the case of Patrick Pearse, considered by some scholars as “Ireland’s first major bilingual author” (Sewell 2003: 158). His example was followed by other Irish bilingual poets such as Brendan Behan, Pearse Hutchinson, Michael Hartnett, and recently, Eithne Strong and Celia de Fréine (ibid).

⁷ When discussing Heaney, Fulford (2002b: 29) rebukes Lloyd by arguing that Heaney’s work, mostly after *Station Island* (1984) and in *Seeing Things* (1991), moves towards a certain “deterritorialization” rather than “reterritorialization”, because of the strong sense of dispossession and dislocation in his poems.

(10) Most postcolonial theorists and critics point out that one of the dominant motives of many postcolonial works is their forms of cross-cultural contact and interaction. As Bhabha (1995: 185) and Said (1994: 261) have argued, the postcolonial text is always a complex and hybridized formation. This writing records a clear intermingling of forms derived from pre-colonial and European literary traditions. It is never a reconstruction of pure (indigenous) traditional values. Postcolonial critics such as Young (1995: 24) and Boehmer (1995: 227) have also agreed on the fact that, in general, all postcolonial literatures and cultures are characterized by this form of syncretism. In one of his numerous essays on postcolonialism, Ashcroft (1994: 34) asserts that postcolonial literature, if anything, is characterized by three interrelated modes of "excess": "the excess of insistence, the excess of supplementarity, and the excess of hybridity", especially the latter: postcolonial texts are always located "on the verandah", a concept which already invokes the liminality of hybrid positions (p. 42). As we will see when discussing Boland's poetry (see section 7.4.4.2.), this notion of 'hybridity', mostly associated to Bhabha, Said, and Hall, is generally used in order to talk about the intermediate position the postcolonial subject can adopt between imperialism and nationalism. Postcolonial writers penetrate into the discourse of Europe and the West in order to revise it and incorporate marginalized or forgotten histories. They move beyond national and international boundaries, cultural spaces, ethnic groups, and racial identities. In this sense, resistance is not merely a reaction to imperialism but also to nationalist hegemonic ideologies. This hybrid aspect has been identified in Aimé Césaire (*Une Tempête*), Salman Rusdie (*The Satanic Verses*), and Derek Walcott (*Omeros* and "Sainte Lucie") (Bhabha 1995: 227; Said 1994: 261; Moore-Gilbert 2000: 180). The work of the Caribbean poet Edward Brathwaite also illustrates the hybrid nature of postcolonial literature. His theories of "creolization" and "the in-between" (1971: 296, 304-305), exemplify this poet's attempt to position himself between different cultures, a strategy similarly carried out by writers such as Jamaica Kincaid and Laretta Ngcobo (Walder 1998: 80).

This notion of hybridity as intrinsic to all postcolonial discourses seems to be further intensified in Ireland, where hybridity has been considered an inherent quality. Kearney (1985a: 8) has suggested that the Irish mind favours a dialectical logic of *both/and* as opposed to the orthodox dualistic logic of *either/or* encoded in Western philosophy. In contemporary Irish cultural criticism, the clearest example of critical hybridity is David Lloyd's analysis of Irish literature. This critic (1993: 123) develops the notion of "adulteration", similar to Bhabha's concept of hybridity. For Lloyd, "adulteration" is a strategy employed by those who have found themselves on the margins of power and which is resistant to colonialist discourse as well as dominant forms

of nationalism (pp. 110-111). This critic reads nineteenth-century Irish street ballads and folk-songs as “vital” manifestations of the hybridity which characterizes all colonial cultures (p. 5). These two cultural formations are either marginalized from, or “purified” by, the dominant narratives of nationalism (p. 81). Whereas nationalism yearns for “monologic” genres in order to record national unity, these street ballads and Gaelic peasant songs were seen as sites of cultural hybridization, and therefore, threatening for the dream of nationalist unity (pp. 89-93). Lloyd (1993: 94-97) explains that this cultural hybridization was reflected in the stylistic level of the street ballads: they were often “adaptations of traditional airs to English words” and they recorded different cultural registers at the same time. On the other hand, these cultural formations recorded the miscellaneous nature of Irish society, moving away from the nationalist desire to represent the Irish people as ‘One’ people. In Beckett, Lloyd (1993: 56) also finds another instance of this hybridity, in his attempt to move away from imperialism and nationalism. Beckett’s novella *First Love* is read by this critic as articulating a postcolonial subjectivity which dismantles identity by producing an “aesthetic of non-identity” (pp. 55-56). In fact, as Beckett (1984: 19) himself asserted “The danger is in the neatness of identifications”. Lloyd (1993: 20-37, 104-109) also views the work of Joyce and Heaney as further examples of hybrid postcolonial productions. His analysis has been continued by Irish critics such as Fulford (2002b: 102-197), Arrowsmith (2000: 61-64) and Smyth (2000: 51), who have discussed the imminent hybridity of writers such as Wilde, Shaw, Yeats, Muldoon, Paulin, Mebh McGuckian, and even Eavan Boland.

6.4. Women’s writing as minority and postcolonial

As we have seen, Bhabha (1995: 157) has identified ‘minority discourse’ in those literary productions written not only by the colonized community, but also by women. Similarly, feminist postcolonial critics such as Minh-na (1989: 28) locate minority discourses in the voices of women and the postcolonial subject:

the *minor*-ity’s voice is always personal; that of the *major*-ity, always impersonal. Logic dictates. Man *thinks*, woman *feels*. The white man knows through *reason* and logic – the intelligible. The black man understands through *intuition* and sympathy – the sensible.

In fact, women’s writing has often been labelled by feminist critics such as Simone de Beauvoir (1981a: 47) as ‘minor’ in relation to the literary mainstream. Given the widely accepted (and sometimes oppressive) images of literature and myths from which they derive, women, just like “the American Negroes” and the “ghetto Jew”, for instance, have been helpless in determining the course of public history (ibid). This tendency to equate women’s writing with other minority

discourses is clearly observed in feminist literary critics such as Renza (1984), who focuses on the minority position in American letters of the provincial writer Sarah Orne Jewett, in particular her short story "A White Heron". Adopting a Deleuzian critical perspective, this author qualifies Jewett's as a "minor writer", using "the major language of American patriarchal culture" (p. 35). Similarly, the contemporary Chicano novelist Sandra Cisneros (1994: 468) has also categorized her own work as "minority" discourse, defined in opposition to the (male) "mainstream" literature.

This trend to view women writers as a unified group which shares those qualities of 'minority' and 'postcolonial' communities has a clear exponent in Elaine Showalter's *A Literature of their Own*. Showalter (1999: 11-13) looks at English women novelists from a collective point of view, and establishes a parallelism between women's writing and "any literary subculture", such as "black, Jewish, Canadian, Anglo-Indian, or even American". By "literary subculture", Showalter (1999: 11-12) means three different things:

(1) A minority group which sets itself in relation to a dominant society. In this sense, Showalter aligns herself with JamMohammed and Lloyd's definition of "minority discourse" (1990a: ix), as that discourse that is always written by those who share the same experiences of domination, marginalization, and exclusion by the majority groups.

(2) Showalter contends that, as a "literary subculture", women's writing finds itself with no self tradition to look back on. Showalter (1999: 11-12) states that women artists have found themselves "without a history, forced to rediscover the past anew".

(3) Showalter (1999: 11) argues that any "literary subculture" involves a personal, political, and literary unity between its members. Her main argument is that, as women writers share a similar oppression by a patriarchal literary tradition, they are unified not only by common political interests and concerns but also by literary conventions and imagery. By mentioning its political and communal stance, Showalter's theories look similar to Deleuze and Guattari's (1986: 17) categorization of "minor literature", and some theorizations of postcolonial women's writing. Mohanty (1991a: 36) states that postcolonial women tend to rewrite and remember history, and in the process, they usually "forge collective selves". As Boehmer (1995: 227) explains, they concentrate on their own unique experiences, involving "a political commitment, a way of noting the validity of the buried, apparently humble lives of the women who have gone before them and who [...] helped make their own achievements possible".

Nevertheless, as has been already explained, women writers' emphasis on a common experience of oppression runs the risk of ignoring cultural differences and different female experiences of powerlessness. Therefore, it is not difficult to find that, in some postcolonial works

written by women, there is an attempt to overturn preconceptions of Third World women's experience as uniformly degraded, insisting on the diversity of female experiences (Mohanty 1991a: 36; Boehmer 1995: 227).

6.5. Boland's work as minority/postcolonial poetry

6.5.1. Introduction

Like the feminist literary critic Showalter (1999: 11), Eavan Boland has talked about her own work in terms of concepts such as 'minority' and 'subculture'. In an interview, this woman poet has compared her own writing with Black American writing and dissident writing in Europe, because they all share powerful images which become "visible" in terms of their "invisibility" (Wilson 1990b: 88). In this sense, Boland establishes an interesting parallelism between women's writing, in particular her own work, and that kind of writing which might be labelled (at least in the case of Black American literature) postcolonial. Furthermore, she has argued in *Object Lessons* that women writers "are a minority within the expressive poetic tradition" because "[m]uch of their actual experience lacks even the most rudimentary poetic precedent" (Boland 1996a: 242). Although Boland defines women's writing as 'minority' discourse, and compares her own writing with dissident (postcolonial) productions, her stance on this matter is everything but simple. Boland remains skeptical towards those literary critics who tend to discuss Irish women's poetry as a "subculture" apart from mainstream poetry (pp. 147-148). She attacks these critics who marginalize women, on the grounds that women's project, in moving from being the objects to being the subjects of Irish poems, "is neither marginal nor specialist. It is a project which concerns all of poetry, all that leads into it in the past and everywhere it is going in the future" (p. 235). In this sense, Boland makes a conscious distinction between women writers' 'minority' position and their 'subcultural' status, implying that occupying the very edges of the Irish literary tradition should not be a reason for 'marginalizing' women's writers under headings which might be dismissive.

In what follows I intend to trace the different ways in which we can consider Boland's work a 'minor/ity' and 'postcolonial' poetry. As most of the features I am about to comment here will be developed in more detail in subsequent chapters, I will only pay closer attention to some aspects.

6.5.2. Minority discourse on the margins of the Irish literary canon: collectivity, language, and politics

As we have seen, JamMohammed and Lloyd (1999a: ix) have identified 'minority discourse' as that kind of literature which is written by a group which, despite their heterogeneous nature, share the same experiences of domination, marginalization, and exclusion by the majority groups. From this perspective, Boland's work could certainly be categorized as 'minor'. Eavan Boland shares with most women writers in the female literary tradition an enclosure in an overwhelmingly male-dominated literary canon. As a woman writer in Ireland, she does experience her gender as a painful obstacle. Her marginalized position as a female artist, her feelings of alienation from male predecessors, and her consequent ambivalent attitude towards the patriarchal authority of art link her struggle for artistic self-definition with the female literary tradition most successfully perceived in the nineteenth century. Furthermore, she is attached to contemporary women poets in Ireland. As Wilson (199a: xii) explains, women in Ireland present a special "complexity" which is "twofold", for it "encompass[es] both their female and national identities". Within the specific context of Ireland, both colonialism and gender discrimination have subordinated women in two kinds of power relations: they have been colonized both by British imperialism and by the Irish patriarchal society. As Kearney (1985b: 77) says, women had become "the 'slaves of slaves'; they were, in sociological terms at least, obvious candidates for compensatory elevation in the realm of myth and mystery". Irish women's double colonization will create a bond between all women poets in Ireland who struggle within a potentially problematic culture in which literature, subjects, and symbols have already been predominantly defined by men. Boland herself is trying to subvert male aesthetic and poetic values, just like feminists and other contemporary women poets in Ireland (Eithne Strong, Eiléan Ni Chuilleanáin, Medbh McGuckian, and Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill) (Haberstroh 1996: 16-27).

In the common personal and literary concerns that unite Boland with other Irish women poets, her poetry can also be categorized as 'literary subculture' and 'minor literature'. As we have seen, Showalter (1999: 11) argues that the members of all literary subcultures are united in their political interests and literary imagery. Similarly, Deleuze and Guattari (1986: 17) have argued that minor literature is identified by its collective assemblage of enunciation. Precisely because of the difficulties Irish women have encountered in becoming poets, their work presents an incredible amalgam of common literary motives. A systematic approach to the most important differences between male's poetry and women's poetry in Ireland gives us an insight into Boland's link with her female colleagues. These differences stem not from the sex of the authors (and therefore from

biological features), but rather from the cultural circumstances that have affected both genders. In the context of (contemporary) Ireland, the woman poet must often make difficult choices in order to write. In an interview, Boland talks about her personal experience when conducting writing workshops, and notes the different sociological factors Irish male poets and women poets contemplate, when balancing their writing careers with other choices:

I took away from those workshops two formative impressions. The first was the way Irish women poets were emerging. They came forward in a completely different way from men. The male poet often began publishing quite young, at a time when he didn't have a family and – if he wasn't economically independent – at least he didn't have dependants. Therefore, although his struggles were real and could just be as eroding, he has advantages of mobility which could bring him from the margins to the centre, from the regions to the city. He could join a ruling poetic class, if you want to call it like that, with much more ease. A woman was often a new poet rather than a young poet. Through the workshops I could see that it was quite common for an Irish woman poet to emerge in her thirties or even her forties. She might be publishing for the very first time in these years. By which time she had a job or a family, was less mobile and often economically dependent. Because she emerged in that way she needed different funding, different support, a more sensitive perception of what she was doing. Until recently she didn't get it. The second impression was more elusive. I was aware of certain resistances which amounted to subtle permissions and their consequent withholding. [...] Male poets frequently spoke to me – half joking and whole in earnest – about the bad writing [by women] these workshops were encouraging. (Allen-Randolph 1993b: 126)

Understanding these gender-related difficulties is essential when approaching the main distinctions between Irish male and female poetry. I will rely on Haberstroh's (1996: 19-27) identification of the main characteristics observed in contemporary poetry by Irish women, for I think it sheds significant light on the contrast between both writings.

(1) Haberstroh (1996: 19) views the issue of identity as an important theme in women's poetry. Whereas male poets take "gender as a given in assuming a poetic identity" (Foster 1999: 2), women poets find more difficulty in drawing together their femininity with their creative potential. Thus, at the core of Boland's poetry is the quest for autonomous self-definition, an attempt to attain her unique female identity. She admits that poetic self-definition is at the core of women's poetry, because "for a woman to explore and write her own poems in Ireland, sooner or later she will have to dismantle some pre-existing definitions" (interview with Allen-Randolph 1999b: 303). Her poems are reflections of her experiences as a woman. When asked about what the lyric "I" of the poems stands for, Boland replies: "the voice is me. It isn't just the voice of an 'I'. It's me in the Yeatsian sense, in that it's the part of me that connects with something more durable and more permanent in my own experience. [...] I am a woman and write in terms of what defines me" (interview with Wilson 1990b: 80-81). This need to assert the speaking voice of the

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poem as female is a consequence of what Gilbert and Gubar (2000: 49) denominate “anxiety of authorship”. Female writers’ anxieties differ from those of male writers’. According to Harold Bloom (1973), the male artist experiences an “anxiety of influence”, that is, a fear that he is not the creator of his work of art, because he is excessively influenced by his literary predecessors (p. 46).⁸ In contrast, the female writer cannot undergo the “anxiety of influence”, as her predecessors are exclusively male (p. 48). Fogarty (1999: 259) restates this point to include the specific case of Irish women poets:

Unlike their male counterparts, it is not the anxiety of influence that serves as a goad for the individual creativity of the Irish woman writer but rather it is the entire absence of a female line of influence that acts both as a bogey and as a powerful impetus to question, refurbish, and invent poetic strategies of self-definition.

Rather than experiencing an “anxiety of influence”, a woman writer is prone to feeling a deeper kind of anxiety: a conflict with her own autonomy, subjectivity, and creativity, as traditional stereotypes have offered a distorted image of her own self. Thus, Gilbert and Gubar (2000: 48-49) assert:

“the anxiety of influence” that a male poet experiences is felt by a female poet as an even more primary “anxiety of authorship” – a radical fear that she cannot create, that because she can never become a “precursor” the art of writing will isolate or destroy her.

Boland will show this fear of “authorship” in her highly feminist volume *In Her Own Image* (1980).⁹ The creative potential of the strong woman in this volume will lead her to isolation and self-destruction. Writing will be equated with an act of insanity by a woman shamefully exposing her naked body in public (“Exhibitionist”), or to the self-destructing activity of a witch burning her own body (“Witching”). Therefore, in contrast to male writers, Boland will explore in her poetry all possible ways to come to terms with her own self, as a woman and a writer.

(2) Another characteristic which is generally identified as peculiar to Irish female poets is their interest in creating a new image of women in Irish literature. Celtic mythology and nationalist

⁸ Gilbert and Gubar (2000: 47) view Bloom’s study on literary history “intensively (even exclusively) male”, and “offensively sexist”, for his paradigm of the historical relationships between literary artists centres exclusively on the relationship father-son, as he only focuses on male poets.

⁹ On this point, Medbh McGuckian (1993: 33) disagrees, claiming that Boland has not suffered from such anxiety of authorship and that, quite the contrary, she has managed to become “her own precursor”. Although at first sight and by looking at the title of the volume, Boland seems to avoid this ‘anxiety of authorship’ (she establishes herself as a female counterpart of God in the act of creating herself “*in her own image*”), a closer look at the poems of *In Her Own Image* shows precisely the contrary.

iconography have been inhospitable terrains for a woman writer. Thus, women poets feel the need to reconstruct old misconceived images of the feminine. As Fogarty (1995: 5) explains:

The static and sublimated images of mothers and motherhood that strew the pages of Irish patriarchal tradition take a new meaning, for example, in the hands of the woman poet, because they are viewed as proximate and personal metaphors for female experience and relationships.

Ostriker (1986: 211) considers this redefinition of cultural images a "revisionist mythmaking" technique, which is an important strategy in women's poetry. In her reconstruction of the myths of the past, Boland's poetry records a process of exploration of Irish women, from the everyday details of the housewife, and the emigrant, to the sexually active whore.

Nevertheless, it is important to bear in mind that some contemporary male poets in Ireland also reject some female images of the dominant tradition.¹⁰ As O'Brien Johnson and Cairns (1991: 4) explain, Paul Mulddon's "Sky-Woman" and Michael O' Loughlin's "Medium" are energetically subversive. Armengol's (2001: 15) study on Heaney's "Act of Union" shows that this poet also moves away from some of the conventional poetic patterns of the *aisling* tradition, by introducing some ideological and poetical innovations. Similarly, Fogarty (1994: 95) identifies in Seamus Heaney a revisionist strategy of the *aisling* poetic tradition which might be read "as an effective and witty rebuttal of the sublimated idealism of this nationalist myth". Thus, in "Asling", Heaney (1975: 48) recasts an encounter with the spectral female figure of Ireland:

He courted her
With a decadent sweet art
Like the wind's vowel
Blowing through the hazels:

'Are you Diana...?'
And was he Actaeon.
His high lament
The stag's exhausted belling?

Nevertheless, in spite of his reconstruction of the poetic tradition, Heaney "does little to trouble the gender roles contained in this inherited fiction" (Fogarty 1994: 95). Only the male poet is allowed to speak, whereas the female figure remains silent, or rather, only speaks by the male reporting her words. As Fogarty (1994: 96) explains, Heaney only changes the nationalist myth by replacing one

¹⁰ Similarly, some male writers at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, such as George Moore, John Millington Synge, Sean O'Casey, and James Joyce, offer the first examples in Irish literature of feminine figures which do not correspond to the desired object of the male artist, but, quite the contrary: they are self-sufficient and strong women (Jaime de Pablos 1999: 144). For a more comprehensive discussion on Synge's subversion of conventional images of Irish women, see Hidalgo Tenorio (1999).

stereotype of women for another, the fierce and vengeful Diana, perpetuating the traditional female “icon of otherness”. In this sense, Heaney shares with his contemporary colleagues the employment of feminine images in order to express their masculinity in poetry. By subverting women stereotypes in this simplistic way, male poets find in these traditional feminine figures the sufficient strength to acquire “sovereignty in [their] craft” (Coughlan 1991: 94), as their women are usually silent and disempowered.

(3) Haberstroh (1996: 21) identifies as characteristic in Irish women's poetry the recurrence of internal spaces, usually domestic interiors. In contrast, this critic explains, some of the better known Irish male poets are concerned with the land rather than with the people of the land, and they lay less emphasis on the value of the self, which is a central question for women poets.¹¹ In order to illustrate this point, Haberstroh mentions Heaney's *Field Work*, and other works by John Montague, Thomas Kinsella, Paul Muldoon, and Richard Murphy. This “place” imagery is used to refer to Irish political history and the poetic self's relationship to his place in history. Meanwhile, women poets are less concerned with the “public world” of their male colleagues (ibid). In their poetry, they prefer kitchens, and nursery rooms, for instance. Accordingly, Eavan Boland, as a woman poet, describes herself as an “indoor poet” (interview with Allen-Randolph 1993b: 124). Her interest in Ireland, as we will see later in more detail, is an interest in kitchen utensils, washing machines, bicycles, the baby's bottle, and patchwork. As she says, “these were parts of my world. Not to write about them would have been artificial” (ibid). In a later prose work, she asserts:

My children were born. I entered a world of routine out of which, slowly and mysteriously, a world of vision manifested itself. For all that, it was a commonsense and familiar world, a stretch of road with whitebeam trees and driveways where cars – the same, for all I knew, which had just moved down the hillside – returned at dusk and left first thing in the morning. (Boland 1996a: 192)

Thus, Boland starts writing poems about the invisible world of the suburbs, altering the “view of the elegy, the pastoral, and the nature poem” (ibid), which did not account for this ordinary world. The legitimization as literary of what has been excluded from literature is a common characteristic of women writers in most cultures. Ostrilker (1986: 89) explains that “it is immediately apparent that women who seek themselves will include the material of their daily lives and feelings in their poems”. Thus, the roles of mothers, daughters and wives, and the routines of domesticity will be

¹¹ In contrast to Haberstroh, Kiberd (1996: 584) considers that since 1960 the “privatization of experience” is a common trend among contemporary writers, both male and female.

legitimized by Irish women poets in an attempt to express their own womanhood, in contrast to Irish male poets, more supposedly concerned with Ireland's political history.

(4) Irish women poets are engaged nowadays in offering a new view of female anatomy (Haberstroh 1996: 22). They mention their anatomy both more frequently and far more intimately than male poets. As we will see in more detail when discussing Boland's *In Her Own Image* (see section 7.2.), women poets seem to find in their body their own creative potential, the strength to assert themselves. Although they have been discouraged from writing about their flesh, they assume control over their sexual and reproductive lives (Ostriker 1986: 93). Thus, when they start writing to praise their bodies, they take some kind of "liberating jump" and their "muted parts begin to explain themselves" (p. 92). Haberstroh (1996: 22) identifies a wide movement in the 1980s among Irish women who began to "challenge sexual taboos [and to] express[...] a new view of female anatomy". Together with Eithne Strong's and Mary Dorcey's work, we come across *In Her Own Image*, wherein Eavan Boland (1980) examines the effects of traditional sexual images of women.¹²

(5) When women poets speak about their female experience, a recurrent subject matter appears in their work: the love between mother and child. Haberstroh (1996: 23) points out: "in the work of Eavan Boland, Medbh McGuckian, Nuala Dhomhnaill, and Eithne Strong, there are numerous poems about the value of motherhood, but the difficulties of mothering recur often in these poems". Whereas male poets are more concerned with father-son relationships (Gilbert & Gubar 2000: 46), the theme of the mother-child relationship has proven extraordinarily intense in contemporary women's poetry. I will explain, mainly in my analysis of *Night Feed* (see section 7.4.2.4.), that Boland is a poet of maternity. The close bond between mother and child will be glorified, and she will feel that her motherhood is a universal experience. Subsequently, her poems also reflect Boland's concern with the passing of time, with her child growing older and distancing from her.

(6) Contemporary Irish women poets also tend to express a strong disapproval of idealized representations of Irish battles, "even though women are rarely credited with making any kind of comment on Irish history and politics" (Haberstroh 1996: 24). As Boland (1996a: 183) asserts, "in [the] pages [of the *Nation*], the public poem and the political poem were confused". What she means is that in the cultural nationalist tradition, poems were only limited to the public events and the communal interpretations of them. Mangan's "Dark Rosaleen", Patrick Pearse's "Mother

¹² Nevertheless, as Praga (1996: 245-246) explains, their poetry, with the exception of Eithne Strong (I would also include Boland's *In Her Own Image*), is not as radical and uninhibited as the feminist poetry produced in Britain and America. They generally adopt a subversive stance, not a separatist one.

Ireland", and Francis Ledwidge's "The Blackbirds" (Kennelly 1970: 149, 295, 305), are examples of this kind of political poem Boland talks about in which the poet-patriot invokes the land to incite rebellion. In an interview with Allen-Randolph (1993b: 122), Boland explains that there are two kinds of political poems. The first one is the "private" political poem, operating between the private experience of the poet and the poet's relation both to his/her literary predecessors and to his/her own reality. The second type of political poem, "the one people generally have in mind when speaking about 'the political poet'", is less persuasive, and concerns the poet's feeling for the received tradition, for the social environment and for the "relation between the artist and society" (p. 122). In her mature poetry, Boland develops the first kind of political poem by relying on her private experience as mother and housewife. Her private world is used as a metaphor for public reality, for the national history of Ireland. She feels the need to subvert this conventional political Irish poem, to see "the powerful public history of [her] own country joined by the private lives and solitary perspectives [...] which the Irish poetic tradition had not yet admitted to authorship" (Boland 1996a: 187). In order to do so, she relies on Yeats's example, for he managed to destabilize the conventional poem through the intensity of his private world (p. 189).¹³ Therefore, some of Boland's poetry focuses on how important it is to rely on the bonds of love created in ordinary atmospheres, and laments the impact of war on home and family life.

All these six common motives Haberstroh (1996: 19-27) identifies in Irish women's poetry (its concern with poetic identity; its revision of conventional feminine images in literature; the predominance of internal spaces; its reliance on female bodily imagery and mother-child relationships; and its subversion of the traditional Irish political poem) are a sign of their collective value as a 'minor literature' or 'literary subculture'.

Furthermore, if we take into account other aspects of Deleuze and Guattari's (1986: 16-18) theories, Boland's work will be unquestionably considered another instance of 'minor' literature. Together with its collective value, these theorists argue that two salient features of minor literature are the connection of the individual to politics and the "deterritorialization" of language. As I have attempted to demonstrate, these features have also been identified in some way or another by postcolonial theory and by feminist literary criticism. First of all, and as Deleuze and Guattari's (1986: 17) would argue, Boland's can be considered a 'minor' literature in the sense that her poetry is deeply loaded with political content. Although, as we will see, Boland will define her own mature work as non-ideological, she has also acknowledged that just by "trying to record the

¹³ In particular, Boland mentions Yeats's "Meditations in Time of Civil War" (Yeats 1991: 135-142), where the poet, rather than focusing on the political violence going on outside Thoor Balley, focuses on the divided world of the subject, on his ambiguous feelings about the world of action (Boland 1996a: 187-189).

life I lived in the poem", she becomes a political poet, because the "material" she uses is already "politicized" material in the Irish national tradition (Boland 1996a: 183). Secondly, Boland also experiences the "deterritorialization" of language of other 'minor' and 'postcolonial' writers. Her poetry, mostly her mature production, constantly draws us into the linguistic displacement she has experienced as a woman and an Irish citizen. This woman poet finds herself limited by the fact that she has never learned Irish, and therefore, she is distanced from much of her native literary tradition. In this sense, Boland becomes, as Deleuze and Guattari (1986: 26) argue in relation to Kafka, "a stranger *within* [her] own language", and she is bound to write in the only language she knows by birth, the 'major' English language. Furthermore, as a woman, Boland notices that she has been forced to articulate her experiences in a nationalist (patriarchal) language that dictates how her feminine role is to be defined. In her semi-autobiographical book *Object Lessons*, Boland (1996a: 134-135) describes how the blurring of the feminine and the national in the Irish context has encouraged a distorted and simplified idea of womanhood:

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 a nation became a woman and the woman took on a national posture.

In this sense, as we will see, Boland's poetry records a constant process of searching for an appropriate language that articulates in a more truthful way her 'Irishness' and her 'womanhood'. Her desire to create a new idiom is also a common feature of all 'minor' writers. Renza (1984: 37) maintains that every 'minor' writer manifests a "major" ambition, in his/her interest in "the possibility of producing one's own language", a language that will be "unique" and truthful to his/her own reality.

On the other hand, as Deleuze and Guattari (1986: 28) have argued, minor literature "begins by expressing itself and it doesn't conceptualize until afterwards". In her initial poetry, as we will see, Boland will elevate style over subject matter, something Yeats had also done (Kiberd 1996: 126). In volumes such as *New Territory*, Boland (1967b) shows her belief that linguistic expression and the poet's ability to use language effectively are more important than anything. The "point of departure" in the journey of poets, Boland (2000b: xxix) argues, "remains clear. It is the form of the poem. That form which comes as a truth teller and intercessor from history itself, making structures of language, making music of feeling". In Boland's mature work, form will also acquire great importance; but in contrast to her initial poetry, this time she won't rely on

conventional techniques and styles, but rather on experimental devices and “technical innovation” (p. xxix). Like Kafka had done (Deleuze & Guattari 1986: 28), Boland will scrutinize, mostly in her mature work, the ability of language to convey meaning, by writing poems wherein ‘signification’ and ‘content’ seems to escape representation. For Boland, language will not be an exponent of power, but rather of powerlessness. By doing so, she will “reterritorialize” and subvert those authoritarian (imperialist and nationalist) languages that have attempted to define ‘Irishness’ and ‘womanhood’ in essentialist terms.

6.5.3. A literary subculture with no previous tradition

As it has been outlined, one of the reasons why Ireland's contemporary women poets greatly differ from male ones is mainly due to the trouble Irish women have had in asserting their own identity as poets, whereas male writers have found no difficulty in passionately committing themselves to their art. In their common experiences of isolation and oppression from the Irish national literary tradition, their poetry, and in particular Boland's work, can be categorized under headings such as ‘minor’ and ‘subculture’. Most contemporary Irish women poets, with the exception of Nuala Ní Dhomhnaíll,¹⁴ insist on the intangibility of female predecessors, who are, in Mary O'Malley's phrase, “safely dead and mostly unread” (1999: 253-254). As Peter (2000: 13) explains, Irish women writers find the strong necessity to find a literary history which will provide them with necessary literary models to follow. This lack of a viable female tradition has been more strongly bemoaned in Eavan Boland's prose accounts. In this sense, her work can, once again, be categorized as a “literary subculture” by its lack of (female) literary precedents (Showalter 1999: 11-12).

As Boland (1996a: 242) has argued in *Object Lessons*, women poets are a minority within the expressive poetic tradition: “Much of [women's] actual experience lacks even the most rudimentary poetic precedent. ‘No poet’, says Eliot, ‘no artist of any kind has his complete meaning alone’. The woman poet is more alone with her meaning than most”. When looking back into Irish poetry, Boland (1996a: xvi) only finds silences on the part of women: “I wanted a story. I wanted to read or hear the narrative of someone else – a woman and a poet [...], I remember thinking that it need not to be perfect or important. Just there; just available. And I have remembered that”. Boland observes how Irish poetry, with a few exceptions such as Emily Lawless, was largely male and bardic in formation (p. 134). In this sense, she regrets the lack of a

¹⁴ Nuala Ní Dhomhnaíll, a contemporary woman poet writing exclusively in Gaelic, certainly finds a very strong connection with ancient Irish women poets, such as Liadán, Cuirithir, Eibhlín Dubh Ní Chonaill, and Fedelm Banfhile (Praga 1996: 266).

female literary tradition in Ireland, the absence of “an expressed poetic life” of women (ibid). The influence that this lack of female literary tradition, what she calls “the influence of absences”, exerts on Boland should not be underestimated (ibid). Isolation has a powerful effect on the woman poet when she comes to write her own work:

It is difficult, if not impossible, to explain to men who are poets – writing as they are with centuries of expression behind them – how emblematic are the unexpressed lives of other women to the woman poet, how intimately they are her own. And how, in many ways, that silence is as much part of her tradition as the troubadours are of theirs. (Boland 1996a: 248)

Boland's impossibility to find female poetic precedents might result from her inability to read native poetry written in Gaelic; this has created what Sewell (2003: 161) has called a “deaf and blindspot” between herself writing in English and those writing in Irish, such as Mhac an tSaoi, in whom Boland would have certainly found an “encouraging example”. As Montague (1974: 21-22) has argued, one of the great tragedies for Irish poets who can only write in English is their realization that “the larger part of [the Irish literary] past lies in another language”. On the other hand, Boland's inability to find any precedent in previous Irish women poets is also due to the fact that access to the work of earlier Irish women writers was, and still is, barely adequate (Haberstroh 2001: 11). Nevertheless, one should bear in mind that women's literature in Ireland is starting to be known at present and that increasing research in the last decades of the twentieth century has tried to uncover this work. A close reading of Kelly's 1987 anthology of verse by Irish women shows that women's poetry has always existed since medieval times. In his study on women in Celtic society, Berresford (1995: 162, 187-189) even draws upon the existence of female poets in Ireland in the early medieval period, for example Liadin (the ‘Grey Lady’) in the seventh century, and Gormfalith and Uallach in the tenth century. It has also been acknowledged that some of the *Love Songs of Connaught* in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were written by women (Kelly 1997: 11). In spite of this, sometimes the reason why it is hard to have access to Irish women's poetry before the twentieth century is that women often wrote anonymously or under male pseudonyms, due to the contemporary social restrictions they experienced by their sex (ibid). In pre-Christian Celtic society, women had a coequal role in society, and as such, they could attend ‘higher education’, taking prominent roles in the school of bards (Berresford 1995: 233-234). Gradually, with the introduction of Christianity and the Norman and Anglo-Saxon conquests, the role of women began to be diminished. After the Battle of the Boyne in 1690, the Gaelic tradition finally went underground, the Brehon law system eventually disappeared, and women found more restrictions to becoming poets.

In spite of the difficulty of recovering female voices from ancient times to the present, Kelly's 1987 anthology has been able to offer contemporary women poets in Ireland a rich amalgam of very different women writers, whose work reflects in various ways Irish social and political history. Therefore, one might consider that Boland omits and ignores important and valorous voices who widely recorded the anxieties of their sex and who conducted a savage social criticism which was quite subversive at the time. This fact prompts Meaney's (1993a) critique of Boland. Meaney (1993a: 137, 144) argues that Boland does not take into account the diversity of Irish women's writing, and that the woman poet undervalues figures such as Emily Lawless, by considering her complex adoption of the voice of Mother Ireland as a "small" thing within the dominant tradition. Meaney (1993a: 144) also attacks Boland for ignoring those poetic foremothers that appear in Kelly's anthology, for instance, and argues that, by excluding her female predecessors, Boland "comes dangerously close to deference to the cult of the great man, the [male] poetic personality". This attack has perhaps been sharper by other Irish critics such as NiFhrighil (2003), who rebukes Boland for ignoring past and present Irish women poets writing in Irish, such as Eibhlín Ní Chonaill, Máire Bhuí Ní Laoghaire, or, indeed, Máire Mhac an tSaoi, who was an established poet when Boland was beginning to write.¹⁵ Both Meaney (1993a: 146) and NiFhrighil (2003) also accuse Boland of not using the other possibilities offered by the Gaelic tradition, which is not always idealizing in its representation of women (i.e. the conjunction of fertility and sexuality in the literary and oral Cailleach Bhéarra tradition, for instance). In particular, NiFhrighil (2003) argues that Boland oversimplifies the Irish literary tradition, by exclusively equating it with bardic poetry and eighteenth-century *aisling* poetry.

On the other hand, Ní Dhomhnaill (1992: 24) does not agree with those critics who support the existence of Irish foremothers, and claims that Irish women since antiquity have never been allowed into the canon of Irish poetry: "Nowhere in the Irish poetic tradition can I find anything but confirmation of Eavan Boland's claim that women have been nothing else but the 'fictive queen and national sibyls'". Ní Dhomhnaill also attacks Montague (1974: 22), who remarks that one of the unique aspects of early Irish poetry, in contrast to other literatures in Europe, is its unbroken line of women poets, indicating that "there was no discrimination against them". Ní Dhomhnaill (1992: 19) argues that Montague's "lavish overpraising of mythical women poets of some great prelapsarian past [is] an excuse for not taking proper cognisance of living women poets of our own day". This idealization of Ancient Irish women poets (fetishizing them as sexually free

¹⁵ NiFhrighil, Riona (2003). "The Poetry of Eavan Boland", paper delivered in IASIL (in Debrecen, Hungary, on Thursday 10 July 2003). I am deeply grateful to Dr. NiFhrighil for giving me a copy of her interesting paper before it has been published.

and exotic) that Montague carries out is, for Ní Dhomhnaill (1992: 31), an attitude akin to the Orientalizing tendencies of the West Edward Said (1995) describes.

In response to those critiques, Boland argues that there are a variety of good reasons for not finding in women poets, as those gathered in Kelly's anthology, the example and model she is looking for. As Boland (2001a: 98) asserts, while women poets "might [have] contribute[d] to the canon with individual poems, they were unlikely to shift or radicalize the course of Irish poetry itself". This woman poet finds out that, when she looks back to the work of Katherine Tynan, Rhoda Coghill, Susan Mitchell, and Sheila Wingfield, for instance, she misses the sense of experiment – what she calls the "sense of surprise" of a proper poetic model to follow (interview with Allen-Randolph 1999b: 303). It is in American poetry where she finds "that sense of not knowing where the next upsetting of the apple cart is coming from" (ibid). With the absence of women writers as appropriate models in Ireland, Boland finds other useful models in Europe and America, such as Sylvia Plath, Ann Akhmatova, and Adrienne Rich (Haberstroh 1996: 66). As we have seen, this is a feature shared by most postcolonial writers: their being influenced by models from abroad so that they can move beyond the restrictions of national literature.

Before criticizing Boland's omission of female predecessors as fairly justified or as wrongly dishonourable, it is essential to have a look at Irish women's poetry from remote times to the present. It is indeed true that we find a female literary tradition totally uncritical of the contemporary socio-political situations and the inherited literary conventions. Within courtly love poetry, and following the conventions of traditional love poetry, we find Eibhlín Dubh Ní Chonaill in the eighteenth century (Kelly 1997: 30). She composed a lament on the death of her husband, entitled *Caonieadh Airt Uí Laoghaire*. Other women poets such as Elinor Mary Sweetman and Winifred M. Letts in the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries also wrote love poetry, employing traditional poetic motives and styles (pp. 69, 97). Conventional themes such as peasant life-stories, and Gaelic myths and legends were also revived more or less in the same period by women writers such as Jane Barlow, Mary Anne Hutton, Ethna Carbery, and Alice Furlong. Furthermore, their internalization of mainstream literature is perceived by their recurrent adoption of the male masquerade in their work (pp. 59, 65, 73, 85). As artists who hid their femaleness, some of them, such as Emily Hickey in the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth centuries, assimilated conventional images of women, by perpetuating in poems such as "A Rose" the Christian myth that 'Eve' was the one who brought pain and despair for her race and for the world at large (pp. 52-54). Taking all this into account, it is not surprising to find that Boland cannot find any sense of experiment in her female literary predecessors: all these women have written about what has been traditionally sanctioned in Irish poetry, without

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attempting to denounce their marginalization and record their ordinary experiences as women. But perhaps, this submissive attitude Boland finds in Irish women's writing is best observed in those women who undertook active and important roles in the furthering of Irish nationalism. Kelly's 1987 anthology offers a long list of women writers in the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth who yielded to the nationalist cause, by constructing a poetry entirely dedicated to expressing Ireland's aspirations of liberty. In "Songs of Our Land", for instance, Frances Brown praises the bardic poetic tradition for maintaining the "spirit for freedom" of her nation (Kelly 1997: 41-42). Poems such as this one were published in *The Nation*, a newspaper marketed by the Young Irelanders to reinforce emotive ideas of the Irish past and Irish identity. It also included many female contributors who wrote ballads and patriotic verse anonymously or under pseudonyms such as 'Eva' (Mary Eva Kelly) and 'Finola' (Elizabeth W. Varian). Among them, we find Bridget's highly ironical "English Schools and Irish pupils", Mary Eva Kelly's "The Patriot Mother (A Ballad of '98)", and Ellen O'Leary's "The Dead of Ireland" and "A Legend of Tyrone" (pp. 42-50). Emily Lawless also employed highly nationalist imagery in poems such as "After Aughrim", where Mother Ireland addresses her sons, the warriors who died for Ireland (p. 56). Charlotte Grace O'Brien, Rose Kavanagh, and Dora Sigerson Shorter were also ardent patriots, as their respective poems "Wicklow", "Christmas Eve in the Suspect's Home", and "Ireland" exemplify (pp. 56, 60, 75). This list of nationalist women writers widens with other names such as Susan Langstaff Mitchell, and her "To the Daughters of Erin", or Eva Gore-Brooth, sister to Countess Constance Markievicz, to whom she dedicated "Comrades" (pp. 83-84).

These women poets Kelly includes in her anthology do not conform to Boland's view of how Irish poetry should be. Their persuasive nationalist songs attempted to be, as Boland (1996a: 129) has argued, "an archive of defeat and a diagram of victory". The problem with such notion of Irish poetry is that it turned the "losses into victories", and restated "the humiliations as triumphs" (ibid). This betrays Ireland's history, for, as we will see, Boland conceives the Irish past as a history of defeat and dispossession. On the other hand, these women poets, under the influence of the Irish Literary Revival, perpetuated the strong fusion of the feminine and the national, by adopting nationalist allegories such as Mother Ireland and Cathleen ni Houlihan. In the process, much of women's actual experiences were omitted.

Therefore, this long list of traditionalist and nationalist women writers seems at first to justify Boland's refusal to find female predecessors in Ireland. Nevertheless, it is important to bear in mind that there was also a more heterogeneous and less conformist writing, a form of literature that was not always concerned with politics and women's expected cultural roles. Boland omits

other women poets, such as Mary Barber, for instance, who stands out in the eighteenth century for her struggle for women's right to have access to knowledge and writing poetry. In poems such as "Conclusion of a Letter to the Rev. C-", she defended women's coequal role in society, claiming that a husband should not "treat her the worse, for her being [his] wife", and that he should "Choose books for her study, to fashion her mind,/ To emulate those who excell'd of her kind" (Kelly 1997: 28). A century later, Katharine Tynan was an advocator of women's rights, and she defended in poems such as "Any Woman" the social importance of women's role as mothers and caretakers (p. 63). Others such as Dora Sigerson Shorter, in "A Vagrant Heart", more explicitly denounced the conventional social laws on women and defended her right to enter "a world of passion [...] for all its dangers" (p. 73). This feeling was also shared by other women writers such as Mary Devenport O'Neill, who attempted to break the stereotype of 'sentimental poetry' (p. 94). On the other hand, Boland's emphasis on the need to recover ordinary women's experiences and make them suitable themes for poetry has also been advanced by women poets such as May Norton, who gave in "Spindle and Shuttle" an extraordinary picture of Belfast women weavers (p. 90). Social criticism was also an important motif for other nineteenth-century artists such as Anna Brownell Jameson, whose feminist writing, mostly in prose but also in some of her poems, described the social employment of women and the relative position of mothers and governesses (p. 37). Although not so explicitly feminist-oriented, writers such as Blanaid Salkeld also conducted social criticism of the miners' conditions in "On the Rand (*On Dit*)" (p. 96). All these women, in some way or another, have attempted to disrupt poetic and nationalist expectations. Their subversive stance on conventional women's roles, together with their defence of including new themes within Irish poetry is akin to Boland's project. In this sense, Boland's (1996a: 134) remark that contemporary Irish women's poetry lacks "an expressed poetic life" runs the risk of being simplistic and misrepresentative.

Boland's omission of Irish women poets such as Mary Barber, Sigerson Shorter, May Norton, and Brownell Jameson, has therefore been highly controversial. The woman poet does not only refuse to find suitable poetic models in these women from the past, but also in her contemporary Irish female colleagues, turning to other models from abroad. NiFhrighil (2003) has argued that Boland denies the existence of female predecessors in both languages as a mechanism to hail herself as a pioneer of Irish women's writing, "Sappho's daughter who will uncover the hidden truths of female experience, challenge the preconceptions of the literary tradition, and make it more inclusive as a result". It can certainly be argued that Boland attempts to herald herself as an initiator of Irish women's poetry, as a precursor that has been able to turn women from being the objects of Irish poems to being their authors. Nevertheless, it is essential to bear in mind some

contextual factors: first of all, the fact that Boland experiences an extra handicap, as a woman poet who does not master the Irish language and therefore cannot read much of the native literary tradition; and secondly, the fact that much past Irish women's work has only be recovered lately, after Boland started to write in the late 1960s. On the other hand, I would like to argue that Boland's emphasis on the loneliness and isolation she experiences as a woman poet is also a self-conscious strategy to 'marginalize' herself in order to act more subversively against the Irish Literary Revival tradition and its emphasis on creating a truly national culture. As has been theorized by Bhabha (1995: 157), occupying a 'minor' position allows the writer to elude totalizing formulations, such as those offered by binary canonical thinking. As I will show, being (or presenting herself) on the margins of historical and literary accounts allows Boland to stand at the very edges of authoritarian discourses such as imperialism and nationalism. Marginality enables this woman poet to occupy a resistant 'in-between' space that both dismantles dominant ideologies, and denounces Irish women's omission from historical and literary accounts. This act of self-marginalization is even more explicit as Boland's popularity increases. As we will see, by the time she publishes *The Lost Land* (1998) and *Against Love Poetry* (2001), her position within the Irish literary canon is well established. In this sense, her status as a "minor" writer changes by time. As Renza (1984: 15) argues by quoting T. S. Eliot (1963: 46), due to the instability of canon formation, what gets termed minor literature may vary, like "a stock market in constant fluctuation" from period to period. Nevertheless, in spite of Boland's prominent role within the Irish literary panorama, and the great influence that this position can afford to her, she still avoids writing herself as an authoritative poetic self. As we will see in her latest volumes of poetry, Boland continues describing herself as a woman who has been doubly colonized, both by imperialism and by nationalism. This (perhaps exaggerated) emphasis on the simplification and omission Irish women have experienced throughout history is a mechanism to contest nationalist discourses that lead to claims of cultural supremacy and historical priority. As I intend to demonstrate, oppression is conceived in Boland's poetry as a source of resistance.

6.5.4. Boland's "anti-anti essentialist" postcolonial poetry

If we embrace Boehmer's (1995: 3) and Kiberd's (1996: 6) definition of postcolonial literature, Boland's work can indisputably be categorized as such. Her poetry, mostly her mature production, constantly scrutinizes Irish women's subjugation in terms of imperialist and nationalist practices. In this sense, Boland creates a text committed to cultural resistance towards their double colonization as Irish citizens and as women.

In her essay "Daughters of Colony", Boland (1997e: 10) argues that it is very difficult to measure the colonial effects because they vary not only from one culture to another, but also among those people belonging to the same community:

the aftermath [of a colony is] profoundly different in different cultures, it also changes from life to life. Not only it is different in India, and different in Africa. It was also different from the friends I had when I was young, who lived only a few miles away from me in Dublin: who played cricket and ate afternoon tea.

What it is interesting to note is that, in spite of the obvious differences that seem to separate colonial experiences, Boland's poetry can be read in the light of those theoretical paradigms proposed by postcolonial critics such as Homi Bhabha, Edward Said, and Gayatri Spivak. In fact, her essay contains one of the few instances where this woman poet openly discusses the possibility of adopting a postcolonial approach to Irish literature. Here, Boland (1997e: 18-21) explicitly declares the need to study Irish women's writing from a perspective that not only attends to imperialist colonization, but also to women's colonization by the Irish literary canon (with their manifold simplifications) and by later postcolonial literary scholars (such as the Field Day's, with their 1991 anthology). In this sense, as I have already pointed out, she advocates a "gender-conscious postcolonial critique" (p. 19). Postcolonial theorists such as Bhabha (1995), Said (1994), and Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (2002a), for instance, offer the grounds from which to approach Boland from such a perspective. Many of the strategies of decolonization they find in postcolonial literary productions surface in her poetry: reclaiming a history previously unrecognized by imaginatively recreating it; the production of alternative poetic representations to those offered by authoritarian discourses; the subversive use of the imperialist language; the intermingling of Irish and European traditions; and the way that exile, migrancy, and hybridity are combined to resist the binary politics of imperialism and nationalism.

As we have seen, postcolonial literature can be classified, broadly speaking, into two types. First of all, we find those postmodernist writers who opt for an imminent anti-essentialism and anti-nationalism. They discard notions such as cultural identity, and therefore, they celebrate national and historical rootlessness. Secondly, we find those writers for whom the sense of cultural identity is still very important and, as a consequence, they try to construct, through their work, a viable national and historical continuity that might give them a sense of stability.

It is widely acknowledged how Eavan Boland's work revises concepts such as nationhood and 'Irishness' for a more inclusive category that can embrace her ordinary reality as an Irish woman. As we will see, she needs to establish a dialogue with the idea of the nation. Cultural identity is very important for this woman poet, and as she has admitted in an interview, she

6. Boland's poetry as minority and postcolonial

considers herself to be an "Irish poet" (Wilson 1990b: 84). In this sense, Boland looks for a different relation with the past and with Irish identity. Her work is moulded according to the imperative of recovering that (female) life that stands on the margins of official historical and literary accounts. This prompts her interest not only in revising Irish traditions and myths, but also in creating a collective self, an imagined community of Irish women in the past who suffered the wounds from patriarchy and colonialism. That is why she constantly focuses on women from the Irish past, and their involvement in painful Irish events such as emigration and the Great Famine. In the way Boland often attempts to speak on behalf of women's oppression, her writing is similar to the Third World women's writing Mohanty (1991a) discusses. As this critic has argued, some postcolonial women poets feel compelled to establish a collective link with other women from the past. A central concern of postcolonial literature, as Mahonty (1991a: 34) argues, is to rewrite history and recover lost stories from the past. This process is significant not only for bringing to the fore the misrepresentations of hegemonic (and patriarchal) historical narrations, but also "because the very practice of remembering and rewriting leads to the formation of politicized consciousness and self-identity" (ibid). In this perspective, Boland's work can certainly be categorized within the second type of postcolonial literature Mohanty identifies. Nevertheless, her stance is more complicated than it looks at first sight. Very few critics, with the exception of Mills Harper (1997: 192) and Fulford (2002a: 213), have noticed Boland's postmodernist techniques in her poetry. While her poems certainly attempt to construct a viable sense of cultural identity, they dwell more on rootlessness and non-identity than on the formation of a stable and grounded self. As I will show, whenever Boland wants to assert in her mature work her own 'Irishness' and 'womanhood', she can only do so by means of fluidity and dissolution. In this sense, an unstable sense of identity flourishes in almost all her poems. Furthermore, her ability to recreate a sense of cultural continuity with her own past will be constantly undermined. She will be unable to forge a collective (Irish and female) self and the past will always be presented as an inaccessible terrain that escapes artistic representation. In this sense, Boland's work can be located 'in-between' both forms of postcolonial literature mentioned above. While she constantly attempts to construct a suitable and stable sense of cultural identity, she does not escape the postmodernist splintering of the subject in the process.

Therefore, the stance that Boland adopts in her work can be categorized as "anti-anti-essentialism", a term coined by the Irish critic Arrowsmith (2000: 69). Arrowsmith (2000: 66) maintains that some contemporary Irish women writers are, nowadays, particularly interested in exploring the ways they can position themselves beyond the constraints of essentialism of a

dogmatic nationalism, and “the nihilism of anti-essentialism”. This critic gives the example of Anne Devlin’s play *After Easter* (p. 67). This is certainly Boland’s position. On the one hand, this woman tries to avoid the creation of an essentialist nationalist discourse, in which the poet claims to be speaking on behalf of an oppressed community, to act as an authoritarian and privileged spokesperson. On the other hand, Boland attempts to move away from the postmodern uncertainty (anti-essentialism and anti-nationalism) of writers such as Rushdie and Beckett, by asserting the importance of notions such as nationhood. As I will demonstrate, Boland’s search for cultural identity is, as Hall (1990: 230) would define it, rather than a search for an essence, a way of “*positioning*” herself within the discourses of history and culture. The construction of a new Irish woman in Eavan Boland’s poetry attends to her cultural national identity, while at the same time moving away from defending her Irish identity in essentialist and exclusive terms.

**7. EAVAN BOLAND'S WORK SEEN AGAINST SHOWALTER'S,
MEMMI'S, AND FANON'S CRITICAL MODELS**

7.1. Introduction

In Boland's evolution as a poet, we come across an Irish woman striving to overcome the internal trauma of her colonized nation, and a woman gradually searching for her own place as a female poet in a mainly andocentric literary tradition. That is why Boland gradually redefines two essential categories for her identity: 'womanhood' and 'Irishness'. In the process, her poetic career follows a certain evolution, from an initial imitation of the prevailing models of the literary tradition, to a gradual rejection and subversion of them. In order to analyze this development, I will apply the theoretical models proposed in Elaine Showalter's *A Literature of Their Own* (1977), Memmi's *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (1957), and Franz Fanon's *Black Skins, White Masks* (1952) and *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961). The resemblance between these feminist and postcolonial models indicates that there is a common pattern of evolution for both the gendered subject and the colonial subject.

In *A Literature of their Own*, Showalter (1999: 13) argues that, in relation to the literary mainstream, women's writing has moved through the phases of subordination, protest, and autonomy. Her main focus is the evolution of a female literary tradition in the English novel. In order to study this evolution, this critic looks at English women novelists collectively, establishing a parallelism between women's writing and what she has termed "literary subcultures" (pp. 11-13). Like all literary subcultures, Showalter (1999: 13) argues, women's writing goes through three major phases:

First, there is a prolonged phase of *imitation* of the prevailing modes of the dominant tradition, and *internalization* of its standards of art and its views on social roles. Second, there is a phase of *protest* against these standards and values, and *advocacy* of minority rights and values, including a demand for autonomy. Finally, there is a phase of *self-discovery*, a turning inward free from some of the dependency of opposition, a search of identity.

These stages are identified respectively as "Feminine", "Feminist", and "Female". Showalter proceeds to explain that these phases are "obviously not rigid categories", clearly "separable in time" (p. 13). Much to the contrary, the three stages may be present in the career of a single writer and they may overlap.

A clarification of concepts such as 'feminine', 'feminist', and 'female' might be useful here. Moi (1997: 104-116) offers a very illuminating distinction between these often confused concepts within feminist literary criticism. 'Femininity' is a social construct, and the 'feminine' stands for those "patterns of sexuality and behaviour imposed by cultural and social norms" (p. 108). According to this definition, Showalter's 'Feminine' phase would be understood as that

stage when women writers remain uncritical of these socio-cultural constructs. On the other hand, the words 'feminist' and 'feminism' are political categories: they involve a political commitment to the fight against all forms of patriarchy and sexism (pp. 104-106). This definition coincides with what Showalter defines as the 'Feminist' phase, a stage where the woman writer both protests and advocates minority rights. Finally, 'femaleness' is "a matter of biology": it relates to the biological aspects of sexual difference. By using terms such as 'femaleness' and 'masculinity' in her discussion of women's literature in their final stage of evolution, Showalter may run dangerously close to suggesting that there are 'natural' and 'innate' patterns in the way women write. Although I will denominate Boland's mature work 'Female', I do not intend to suggest that her poetry is biologically and sexually determined. Much to the contrary, I will show how in her final evolutionary stage Boland attempts to find artistic decolonization by moving beyond essentialist definitions of categories such as 'Irishness' and 'womanhood'. In fact, Showalter's categorization of women writers in their final evolutionary period moves towards a possibility of deconstructing stable identity-formations.

Showalter's tripartite structure of artistic development resembles Memmi's and Fanon's critical models of decolonization. Franz Fanon offers a very interesting analysis of the colonized writer, this time oppressed by race and not gender. In the *Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon (1990: 31-149) distinguishes between three different phases in the process of decolonization. Memmi's *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (1990) proposes a tripartite structure of decolonization very similar, if not identical, to Fanon's. Memmi's book was published in 1957, four years before *The Wretched of the Earth* came into print. This makes anyone think that it would probably be this anti-colonial intellectual, and not Fanon, who inaugurated this influential evolutionary model, something ignored by postcolonial theorists and critics such as Said (1994) and Amuta (2002). For the purposes of this study, I will summarize Memmi's and Fanon's pattern of evolution for the colonized both during and after the colonial era.

First, Memmi (1990: 168) argues that there is an initial phase of "assimilation" or "petrification", in which the colonized accepts colonization. Before passing on to the stage of revolt, any colonized subject attempts to be like the colonizer: he or she adopts the colonizer's language and ideology. According to Memmi (1990: 190), this attempt is proven unsuccessful, for the colonized can never entirely resemble the colonizer: "In order to be assimilated, it is not enough to leave one's group, but one must enter another; now he meets with the colonizer's rejection". This phase corresponds to Fanon's (1990: 31-32) initial stage of "oppression". As he explains in *The Wretched of the Earth*, it is not enough for the settler to circumscribe physically the place of the native with the help of the army and police force (pp. 31-32). The colonized is

7.1. Boland's work seen against Showalter's, Memmi's, and Fanon's critical models

being dehumanized, he or she becomes “a sort of quintessence of evil”, and all native traditions and myths become “the very sign of that poverty of spirit and of their constitutional depravity” (p. 32).

Both Memmi (1990: 195) and Fanon (1990: 74) agree on the fact that, in order to move away from the colonial situation, the colonized engages in a second (bloody) phase of protest. This violent phase is based on a vigorous attempt to recover and assert the self, the autonomous entity. Now the colonized entirely rejects the colonizer, and defends with passion his/her own distinctiveness. For Memmi (1990: 95), colonialism creates the patriotism of the oppressed, who attempt to affirm their exclusivity in national selfhood. In this phase, there is a reconstruction of old myths and neglected traditions, a return to religion and the native language, together with all those aspects which have been previously neglected by the colonizer (p. 199). Similarly, Fanon (1990: 74) states that this second phase in the evolutionary process starts in the “building-up of the nation”, at that very moment when the native realizes he or she is not “an animal”, and he or she “decides to come to terms with his own humanity” (p. 33). It is at this phase when decolonization begins, and the native population is mainly focused on the achievement of national liberation.

But this second phase, as Memmi (1990: 201-205) and Fanon (1990: 38-39) explain, does not mean ultimate liberation, for, even after the struggle for national freedom has succeeded, there are certain features of the former colonial power which are still maintained in the national governments. The reason for this, as Memmi (1990: 202) explains, is that the colonizer continues to define him/herself in the same terms imposed by the colonizer. On the other hand, nationalism can become as restrictive and exclusionist as imperialism (p. 201). Like Memmi, Fanon shows his reluctance to accept nationalism as a legitimate means of decolonization. His argument is that the national economy of this period of independence is not set “on a new footing”, and a split occurs between an incompetent native bourgeoisie in power and the peasants, who are mainly moved by the ideal of “bread and land” (Fanon 1990: 38-39). Their hostility towards the bourgeoisie becomes plainly visible: “the masses begin to sulk, they turn away from their nation in which they have being given no place, and they begin to lose interest in it” (p. 136). On the other hand, the leader of the country, refusing to break bonds with the national bourgeoisie, “asks the people to fall back into the past and to become drunk in the remembrance of the epoch which led up to independence” (pp. 135-136). Thus, Fanon implies that this period, governed by an ideal of nationalism which does not look into the present or the future, is incapable of bringing national unity and incapable of ‘decolonizing the mind’ of the native population.

Both Memmi (1990: 198) and Fanon (1990: 148) believe that the second phase in the decolonizing process is a prelude to a more “positive” and “liberating” movement. Memmi argues

that, in the previous phases, the colonized depended on the figure of the colonizer, as a model to follow or as an antithesis to reject. He believes that it is only in “the decomposition of this interdependence” between colonizer and colonized that any sort of viable decolonization is possible (p. 7). In this sense, Memmi agrees with Showalter (1999: 13), who argues that women in their final phase of decolonization are “free from the dependency of [establishing their] opposition” towards a patriarchal literary culture. As Memmi (1990: 216) puts it: “[f]or the colonized just as for the colonizer, there is no way out other than a complete end to colonization”. The colonized has to cease defining himself through the categories imposed by the colonizers, and this would certainly imply moving beyond boundaries such as East vs. West, colonized vs. colonizer. Memmi's (1990: 217) call for “revolution” and the creation of “a whole and free man” advances Fanon's (1990: 28) later advocacy of the “veritable creation of new men”. Fanon writes against fixed and stable forms of nationalist narratives. By speaking of a “zone of occult instability where the people dwell”, Fanon (1990: 182-183) advances later claims (mostly by Bhabha) that the heterogeneous reality of the people disturbs the fixed principles of the national culture that attempts to revive a ‘true’ national past. Although Fanon (1990: 198) defends the “expression of national consciousness” as a viable means of decolonization, this must not be confused with nationalism. Fanon's notion of liberation moves away from any form of exclusive patriotism. Fanon's “national consciousness” must be understood in an international dimension; he defends the establishment of connections between different people, different nations. In other words, his national consciousness is a force that unites the people within a single cause, a force that enables the discovery and encouragement of universalizing values. As he asserts, “[i]t is at the heart of national consciousness that international consciousness lives and grows. And this two-fold emerging is ultimately the source of all culture” (Fanon 1990: 199). Said (1994: 277) similarly understands Fanon's idea of a liberating “national consciousness” not as a narrow nationalism, but as “a more generous and pluralistic vision of the world”. Fanon, wishing to move away from nativist nationalism, argues for the transformation of a national consciousness into “a consciousness of social and political needs, in other words, into humanism” (Said 1994: 325). Both Memmi and Fanon seem to move towards a very similar humanism and universalism, that can be summarized by these words Sartre (1990a: 20) dedicates to Memmi's *The Colonizer and the Colonized*:

caught between the racist usurpation of the colonizers and the building of a future nation by the colonized, where the author suspects ‘he will have no place’, he attempts to live his particularity by transcending it in the direction of the universal.

7.1. Boland's work seen against Showalter's, Memmi's, and Fanon's critical models

Perhaps, the main difference between both intellectuals is that Fanon's final phase of liberation is explained in less abstract terms than Memmi's. Fanon (1990: 148-149) argues that in this last stage, the national bourgeoisie, realizing that in the previous period it copied its methods from those of Western political parties, finally "hears the needs" of the peasants. It is only when "the middle class's trading sector is nationalized", and "a programme of humanism" which aims at developing "the brains of its inhabitants" begins, that the country is governed by the mass of the people, and liberation is finally brought about (ibid).

There are some theoretical models which bear important similarities to Memmi's and Fanon's evolutionary process of decolonization. In "New Ethnicities", Stuart Hall (1996a) shows how Memmi's and Fanon's second and third stages can be applied to the current political context of England. Hall focuses on two different phases of England's black cultural politics. These phases, Hall (1996a: 441) asserts, are not clearly discernible movements, and they "constantly overlap and interweave".

The first phase that Hall describes is dominated by a form of cultural politics which became extremely important in the British anti-racist struggles of the 1970s. It was designed to challenge and resist the stereotypical image of blacks as "the invisible 'Other' of predominantly white [...] cultural discourses". In this phase,

the term 'black' was coined as a way of referencing the common experience of racism and marginalization in Britain and came to provide the organizing category of a new politics of resistance, among groups and communities with, in fact, very different histories, traditions, and ethnic identities. (Hall 1996a: 441)

Different communities suddenly became unified by a singular and unifying notion of "the black experience" as a counter-hegemonic form of resistance. In "Cultural Identity and Diaspora", Hall (1990: 223) defines this form of cultural politics "as a sort of collective 'one true self'". Later, Hall (1997: 52) calls this form of cultural politics "Identity Politics One". He highlights the usefulness of this counter-politics moment on the grounds that it is a necessary step that the people on the margins must take in order to begin to contest, speak, and come to representation.

This first moment in black cultural politics Hall describes bears significant similarities with Memmi and Fanon's nationalist phase. Both constitute a defensive collective identity, the construction of categories such as 'nation' and 'blackness', defended culturally and politically. Similarly, the moments these anti-colonial intellectuals and postcolonial critic speak about are captured by Showalter (1999: 13), when talking about a 'Feminist' phase in which the female artist relies on the construction of a category 'Woman' which would contest imposed and negative

images. As Hall (1997: 54) explains, the category "Black" was created as a consequence of the following ideological struggle:

You have spent five, six, seven hundred years elaborating the symbolism through which Black is a negative factor. Now I don't want another term. I want that term, that negative one, that's the one I want. I want a piece of that action. I want to take it out of the way in which it has been articulated in religious discourse, in ethnographic discourse, in literary discourse, in visual discourse. I want to pluck it out of its articulation and rearticulate it in a new way.

It is difficult not to apply this passionate discourse to those women writers appropriating the category "Woman" in order to give it a positive twist. Indeed, this is what Boland does in her 'Feminist' phase, taking the term 'woman' as "it has been articulated in religious discourse, in ethnographic discourse, in literary discourse, in visual discourse", and rearticulating it "in a new way".

Although Hall asserts that this notion of "the essential black subject" is necessary as a first instant of resistance, he implies that this form of cultural politics cannot take the black marginalized community very far (1996a: 442). Negritude is not the solution, for it embraces the binary nature of the Western philosophical tradition. In a later essay, Hall (1997: 56) openly states his opposition to this kind of essentialist politics, explicitly mentioning its pitfalls:

The truth is that in relation to certain things, the question of Black, in Britain, also has its silences. It had a certain way of silencing the very specific experiences of Asian people. Because though Asian people could identify, politically, in the struggle against racism, when they came to using their own culture as the resources of resistance [...], when they wanted to create, they naturally created within the histories of the languages, the cultural tradition, the positions of people who came from a variety of different historical backgrounds [...]. These are the costs, as well as the strengths, of trying to think of the notion of Black as essentialism.

Accordingly, this notion of black cultural politics was obliterating the reality of other marginalized communities, not only the Asian community, but also the poor white working class, or the Black women themselves, who were also denied a suitable position of resistance (Hall 1997: 56-57). Hall's critique is similar to that carried out by Fanon (1990: 131-134) concerning nationalism. As we have seen, Fanon criticizes nationalism for its obliteration of the realities of the masses. A nationalist government, Fanon states, duplicates the same errors of the colonial regime, and therefore, does not ultimately bring liberation for the people on the margins. As Hall (1997: 57) puts it, "[y]ou cannot, as it were, reverse the discourses of any identity simply by turning them upside down". As I will argue, this is Boland's main error in her 'Feminist phase'; in her desire to

overcome marginalization, she replicates the binary logic which has been so damaging for women. She ends up creating an essentialist discourse that homogenizes women's heterogeneous realities under a common biological female nature.

For Hall, there is a second form of cultural politics which is the appropriate one for the marginalized community. As he advanced in "Cultural Identity and Diaspora" (1990: 225-237), this is a politics which recognizes that all individuals are made of multiple identities, and therefore seeks to negotiate and not obliterate these differences. In this phase, Black cultural politics suddenly realizes "the extraordinary diversity of subject positions, social experiences, and cultural identities which compose the category 'black'", and recognize that race is "essentially a politically and culturally *constructed* category, which cannot be grounded in a set of fixed trans-cultural or transcendental racial categories" (1996a: 443). Its relation to the past cannot be a "simple 'return' or 'recovery' of the ancestral past which is not re-experienced through the categories of the present" (p. 448). A real cultural and revolutionary politics would involve a complex mediation and transformation of the past by "memory, fantasy, desire" (ibid). By adopting this sort of cultural politics, Hall envisages "the beginning of a positive conception of ethnicity of the margins, of the periphery" (1996a: 447). It is here where he locates a possible decolonization for the postcolonial individual located on the margins.

These stages of evolution applied to the political and social terrain can also be observed in (post)colonial literature. Interestingly enough, Fanon, unlike Memmi, applies this evolutionary schema to the realm of culture. This might be the reason why Fanon's evolutionary schema has been more influential among postcolonial theorists and critics anxious to analyze postcolonial literary productions. Fanon (1990: 166-199) dedicates one entire chapter in *The Wretched of the Earth* to explaining the effects of this process of decolonization on the cultured individual of the colonized race – what he calls "the native intellectual" (1990: 178). Fanon asserts that these levels are more clearly observed in the work of colonized poets (p. 177). He focuses on the literary evolution the colonial subject (at times symbolized by the figure of "The Negro of the Antilles")¹ experiences in order to achieve an ultimate decolonization, which includes the following: (1) a phase of "occupation" (in which the "Negro" wants to become white and in order to do so he or she assimilates the imperial culture); (2) a phase of a constraining "cultural nationalism" (in which this figure attempts to define him/herself by asserting his/her negritude through writing); (3) a final phase of "liberation" (in which negritude is not considered to be the final state of liberation, and

¹ In *The Wretched of the Earth* and mostly in *White Skin, Black Masks*, Fanon consistently employs the term "Negro of the Antilles" in order to refer mainly to the male colonized subject. That is why, as we have seen, he has been widely accused by critics such as Gopal (2002: 41) and Miller (1990: 122) of ignoring the reality of the gendered colonial subject.

the colonial subject attempts to assert him/herself within terms not imposed by the colonizer) (pp. 178-195). In *Culture and Imperialism*, Said (1994: 331) criticizes Fanon on the grounds that he does not specify how this idea of artistic decolonization is obtained, and that his idea of "liberation" is described more "as a process than as a goal". Indeed, Fanon's characterization of the writer's role in liberating the colonized community is loaded with abstract and ambiguous imagery, as when he states from a revolutionary stand-point:

We must join [the people] in that fluctuating moment which they are just giving shape to, and which, as soon as it has started, will be the signal for everything to be called into question [...]; it is to this zone of occult instability where the people dwell that we must come; and it is there that our souls are crystallized and that our perceptions and our lives are transformed with light. (Fanon 1990: 182-183)

The liberationist phase is described as "a fluctuating moment" in which people dwell in "occult instability". This ambiguity will prompt postcolonial reformulations of Fanon's idea of liberation by Said (1994) and Bhabha (1995) (see section 7.4.4.2.1).

Fanon's paradigm has become one of the most "enduring value[s]" in contemporary criticism (Amuta 2002: 158). Critics of various kinds, such as Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (2002a: 4-6) and Walder (1998: 77-78), have implicitly or explicitly applied Fanon's critical mode to discuss various literary productions. In *The Empire Writes Back*, Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (2002a: 4-6) observe that there are three main phases in the development of postcolonial literatures. These critics identify a first stage of writing produced in the colonies "by 'representatives' of the imperial power", such as Rudyard Kipling (p. 5). Writers like Kipling tend to privilege the 'metropolitan' centre over the 'provincial'. Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin go on to identify a second stage of post-colonial writing characterized by its potential for subversion. Third, there is a final stage which marks the development of independent literatures characterized by what these critics call the "abrogation" and "appropriation" of the colonial language "for new and distinctive features" (p. 6). Walder (1998: 77-78) more explicitly applies Fanon's model to writers in the newly decolonized nations of the Caribbean Islands and Africa. The first phase Fanon talks about is exemplified in the "assimilationist" poetry of Francophone Négritude writers such as Senghor. This critic observes Fanon's second stage of cultural decolonization in the early autobiographical writings of Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o or the Trinidadian Michael Anthony. On the other hand, Walder notes how the Jamaican poet Loise Bennet exemplifies in her production Fanon's triple paradigm.

Said (1994) and Kiberd (1996) have also used Fanon's tripartite structure to discuss Ireland's history and Irish writers. In *Culture and Imperialism*, for instance, Said (1994: 271)

relies on Fanon's theories in order to discuss the Irish people's process of decolonization. He explains that, within the Irish Nationalist Revival, there were two distinct political moments, moments which have a correspondence with Fanon's phases: an initial moment of an anti-imperialist resistance which produced nationalist independent movements; and a more openly liberationist moment which occurred during the Western imperial mission after WWII (ibid). It is during this last phase, Said states, when the conventional nationalism of Pearse was proven to be inadequate, and it "comes the idea of liberation, a strong new post-nationalist theme that had been implicit in the works of Connolly", for instance (ibid). Furthermore, Said (1994: 282) establishes a very interesting parallelism between Yeats's poetry, "written under the shadow of imperialist domination", and "the narrative of liberation depicted so memorably in Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*":

Fanon's is a discourse that anticipated triumph, liberation, that marks the second moment of decolonization. Yeats's early work, by contrast, sounds the nationalist note and stands at a threshold it cannot cross. [...] One might at least give him credit for adumbrating the liberationist and Utopian revolutionism in his poetry that was belied and even cancelled out by his later reactionary politics. (p. 283)

Thus, Said locates Yeats within those nativist movements which resulted from the colonial encounter.² His attack on Yeats is based on the poet's "outright fascism, his fantasies of old homes and families, his incoherently occult divagations" (p. 275). Yeats's nativist views prevented him from imagining a full political liberation (pp. 287-288), and therefore, he is not considered to be a 'liberationist' (p. 279).

Within the Irish academy, Fanon's model has also aroused great interest. Lloyd (1993: 7), for instance, recognizes his indebtedness to Fanon's "critique of the identity politics of the negritude movement" and his attack on the national state. Kiberd (1996: 184) is also a self-declared follower of Fanon's dialectic of decolonization (from occupation, through nationalism, to liberation) which he uses in order to refer to Ireland's history as a colonial and postcolonial country. He deploys Fanon's theory of the three stages of decolonization to explain, for instance, the Literary Revival's attempt to forge a national culture that would recover a lost history and celebrate liberation from domination. As this critic (1996: 551) asserts: "The history of independent Ireland bears a remarkable similarity [...] to the phases charted by Frantz Fanon in *the Wretched of the Earth*". At the cultural level, Kiberd finds in Fanon's theoretical model a useful point of reference for an understanding of the work of Synge, Yeats, and Joyce. The tripartite

² In this sense, Said (1994: 283) departs from those who argue that Yeats's poetry moved away from nationalist claims, as in his famous poem "The Second Coming": "Things fall apart, the centre cannot hold" (Yeats 1989: 184). He attacks these critics on the grounds that "their use of Yeats is minority".

structure of Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World* would correspond very systematically with Fanon's dialectic of decolonization (p. 184). In Act One, Christi encounters a false image of himself in the broken mirror of his father's merciless house, reflecting Irish self-disgust under colonial rule. In this sense, this would stand as an allegory of Fanon's "occupation phase". In Act Two, Christi then "discovers an over-flattering image of himself in the perfect mirror of Pegeen's shebeen". This would equate the Irish feeling of self-worth under the conditions of a self-glorifying revival, and consequently, Fanon's "nationalist phase". In Act Three, Christy, not concerned anymore with the good opinion of others, throws the mirror away and "constructs himself out of his own desire", instead of becoming the focus of the desire of others. Christy will form a conception of himself, rather than existing as a conception of others, and this would take him to Fanon's "liberationist phase". According to Kiberd (1996: 288), Synge's play, as it is structured, is indicative of the fact that the playwright clearly understood that the problem with cultural nationalism was its mimicry of the English stereotypes of the Irish. In Yeats's observations on national culture, Kiberd (1996: 325) finds another instance of Fanon's "liberationist phase", contradicting Said's assertions. According to Yeats, when the ego is released from the mirror phase of mimic nationalism, what the poet called "a nationalism of mourning", a deeper self is freed (p. 291). In order to achieve the third phase of liberation, Yeats recurred to style, described as "a form of self-conquest", evinced in *A Vision* (p. 325). Finally, Kiberd (1996: 334) reads Joyce as an exemplary writer of Fanon's liberationist phase. Joyce, foreseeing the failure of nationalism, attempted to represent the spiritual liberation of his country by unleashing a plurality of voices. *Ulysses* records these full range of voices "which would sound together the notes that moved beyond nationalism to liberation" (p. 338). By analyzing in such a way these three writers, Kiberd shows the Irish version of Fanon's "veritable creation of new men" (1990: 28).

Similarly, I believe that Fanon's evolutionary model is also highly significant for an understanding of Boland's poetry. Even so, what I am talking about here is not a notional easy fit between Fanon's model and Boland's poetry. Memmi and Fanon neglected important issues like feminism, and as the example of Eavan Boland's poetry immediately shows, their work needs to be viewed critically from a feminist standpoint.

Some critics have mentioned the difficulty of applying American, or indeed, European theories of feminist aesthetics to the Irish context (Fogarty 1994: 92). In this work, I will challenge these assumptions by demonstrating that in Boland's poetry we may observe the three phases advocated by the American feminist Elaine Showalter. As in the case of Showalter, applications of Fanon's theories to discussions on current literary productions have been looked at suspiciously.

7.1. Boland's work seen against Showalter's, Memmi's, and Fanon's critical models

Marcey (2000: 3), for instance, has attacked current applications of Fanon out of the historical circumstances in which he wrote his work. In particular, this critic rebukes Homi Bhabha's for locating Fanon's writings as "exist[ing] outside time and space and in a purely textual dimension" (ibid). Later in his work, Marcey (2000: 26) criticizes Edward Said for quoting Fanon and W.B. Yeats in a single paragraph, arguing that Fanon's theories cannot be understood as transhistorical 'facts'. Against this view, it is clear that Fanon's "insurgent and liberationist rhetoric", as Brennan (1994: 57) characterizes it, can be linked to the situation of the oppressed elsewhere. As Kwadwo (2002: 30-40) notes, Fanon often identifies his ideological project "in ways that went beyond the specific Algerian situation in which he was involved". As he himself argues at the end of *The Wretched of the Earth*, "the process for liberation of mankind" is independent of the particular situation in which a person finds himself or herself, and "concerns the whole of humanity" (Fanon 1990: 253). Thus, it is not surprising to find that his writings have been approached when attempting to consider other political and theoretical uses, such as the contemporary repression of the Third World (Bewes 2002: 9), or most relevantly for the purposes of this study, the oppression of the gendered subject. Dubey (1998: 2) argues that Fanon's work can provide useful information for the projects of postcolonial feminism. Similarly, Bell (2002: 17) defends reading Fanon within a feminist theory, on the grounds that the feminist struggle is linked with Fanon's theories in its interest in anti-colonial and anti-racist movements.

Taking into account the above mentioned, I consider Showalter, Memmi, and Fanon very helpful for understanding Boland's decolonizing process, both as a woman poet and as an Irish citizen.³ I will show that the resemblance between their theoretical models indicates that the gendered subject and the colonial subject share in many ways not only the phenomenon of oppression but also the methods employed in order to overcome their marginalized status. It is my intention to portray the evolution of this particular woman writer, and how she tries to overcome marginalization as a postcolonial gendered subject in the traditionally andocentric field of poetry.

³ Despite the fact that these three phases follow a coherent order in Boland's work, they are not rigid categories. Although her evolution as a poet underlies a process of initial imitation, intermediate protest and final artistic autonomy, the departure from the inherited poetic tradition is not an easy step to take, and Boland, in her process to attain self-assurance as a poet, shows backward and forward movements. Her second volume, *The War Horse* (1975), illustrates how Boland's (ideological) progression towards self-affirmation is at times delayed by the constraining tradition she has inherited. Furthermore, the three phases proposed by Showalter, Memmi, and Fanon overlap at times in Boland's career.

7. 2. “FEMININE/ASSIMILATIONIST” PHASE

7.2.1. Introduction

Showalter (1999: 13) argues that the first phase in the literary work of a woman artist is characterized by the imitation of the predominant modes of the hegemonic tradition and the internalization of its values. This stage of evolution, or ‘Feminine’ phase, bears great resemblance to the initial phase anti-colonial intellectuals such as Memmi (1990: 168) and Fanon (1990: 178) identify in the process of decolonization. Memmi (1990: 168) argues that there is first a phase of “assimilation” or “petrification”, according to which “[t]he first ambition of the colonized is to become equal to that splendid model and to resemble him to the point of disappearing in him” (ibid). In this phase, there is a systematic self-denial, because the colonized does not only try to resemble the “white” man but also he rejects “his true self” (p. 187). According to Memmi (1990: 190), this attempt is proven unsuccessful, for the colonized can never entirely resemble the colonizer. This phase corresponds to Fanon’s (1990: 31-32) initial stage of “oppression”. Unlike Memmi, Fanon applies more specifically this phase to the literary career of a colonized subject. He argues that, in this first phase, “the native intellectual gives proof that he has assimilated the culture of the occupying power” (Fanon 1990: 178). This is a period of unqualified assimilation, where the writer, in an attempt to overcome his/her marginalized status and become “whiter” or “blackless”, is more influenced by the culture of the colonizer than by his/her own distinctive culture. As Fanon (1990: 176) explains: “He will not be content to get to know Rabelais and Diderot, Shakespeare and Edgar Allan Poe; he will bind them to his intelligence as closely as possible”.

Boland’s initial work, in particular *Poetry by Boland* and *New Territory*, published in 1963 and 1967 at the age of nineteen and twenty-three, is an instance of Showalter’s ‘Feminine’ phase and Memmi and Fanon’s ‘Assimilationist’/ ‘Occupation’ phase. Critics tend to identify *New Territory* as Boland’s first volume of poetry, ignoring other previous smaller collections such as *Twenty Three Poems* (1962), *Autumn Essay* (1963a), and *Poetry by Boland/ Prose Joseph O’Malley* (1963b). These “chapbooks”, as Boland defines them, are out of print (interview with Villar Argáiz 2005a). A close look at *Poetry by Boland* and *New Territory* might give us an insight into Boland’s poetic aesthetics in her initial years as an Irish woman writer. Both volumes of poetry show Boland at her most uncritical stance, as she seems to internalize, both formally and ideologically, the poetic conventions of the (Irish) past. In her beginnings as a poet, she defines herself as “a sexless, Victorian” woman, as “a product of nineteenth-century ideas” (Boland 1996a: 218). Significantly enough, Showalter (1999: 13) identifies the ‘Feminine’ phase as the period from the emergence of the male pseudonym in the 1840s to G. Eliot’s death in 1880. In fact, Boland is, as we will see, concerned with nineteenth-century ideas, such as the poet’s role,

her relation to society, and Celtic myths and legends which constitute the Irish identity. On the other hand, and as Fanon (1990: 178) advanced, Boland reads and tries to imitate the accepted masters of the poetic tradition. Throughout *Object Lessons*, Boland (1996a: 24, 83, 124, 138, 141, 221) recalls how, as a younger self, she 'devoured' books by English authors such as Keats, Chatterton, Byron, Arnold, the Court poets of the Silver Age (i.e. Wyatt and Raleigh); and by Irish poets such as Yeats, Padraic Colum, and Francis Ledwidge. As she has argued elsewhere,

I read all kinds of poetry [...]. I also read about poets. I was eighteen. [...] I read about Eliot in Paris. And Yeats in Coole. I read Pound and Housman and Auden. It was the reading of my time and my place: Too many men. Not enough women. Too much acceptance. Too few questions. (Boland 1997b: 24)

All these poets, in some way or another, had simplified women's lives in their work, but they enabled Boland "to internalize a sense of power and control" (Boland 1996a: 191).

Some insight into the social and historical conditions under which Boland was writing is essential for the understanding of the social and cultural limitations this woman poet felt at the time, and which prompted her to adopt this uncritical (or submissive) attitude. Boland wrote most of the poems in *Poetry by Boland* and *New Territory* when she was attending Trinity College, Dublin, in the 1960s. At that time, women in Ireland were still relegated to the private domestic sphere, and their educational and employment opportunities were significantly limited. Another woman, Catherine Shannon, also in the early 1960s, recalls her days as a graduate student at University College, Dublin, and explains how she was startled by women's political, social, and economic powerlessness:

The impact of social conditioning was clearly apparent at University College, Dublin, where female undergraduates were only 28 percent of the student body. Most were from upper middle-class backgrounds [...], and spent more time worrying about getting a man than in using a very unique and privileged opportunity to obtain a university degree in preparation for a career. (Shannon 1997: 258)

Although Boland was studying at a different institution, she surely experienced this same atmosphere of powerlessness. In their particular social and cultural condition, women did little to challenge the authoritarian structures of this unequal society. Similarly, Boland seems to accept the inherited social and cultural values, as her first volumes illustrate. She prefers to make for herself a place among the well established (male) literary canon, by adopting conventional poetic features, rather than by defying them, and so asserting herself as a female poet.

7.2. "Feminine/Assimilationist" phase

As a young student in Dublin in the 1960s, Boland (1996a: 27) has explained how she could associate with male poets like Derek Mahon, Brendan Kennelly, and Seamus Heaney. She could even see Patrick Kavanagh in the pubs and coffee-shops. As this woman poet asserts, "everywhere, at least to my eyes, there were signs of the command and ascendancy of poetry" (ibid). Nevertheless, within this enriching literary atmosphere, Boland could also feel some sense of exclusion:

There were [...] deprivations to be a woman poet in that situation, and I don't want to minimize those [...], especially as the deprivations carried some actual dangers to identity. Although there were rich and interesting parts of [the Dublin Literary Life] climate, there was real narrowness. The oral history of poetry, which matters in every poetic community, did exist. But it didn't fit subject matter for it. The woman as poet was very alien to that way of thinking. [...] Male poets would say things like "the best thing about your work is that you would never know it was by a woman". (Interview with Allen-Randolph 1993b: 118)

Boland wants to be part of the poetic community surrounding her, but she knows that in order to do so, she has to conceal the woman in her in order to become "an honorary male poet" (ibid). There are several significant features in the poems of *Poetry by Boland* and *New Territory* which indicate that Boland is a woman writer in her 'Feminine'/ 'Assimilationist' phase:

(1) Showalter (1999: 19) points out that women, at the first stage in their literary career, do not see their writing as an expression of their female experience. The direct conflict between their vocation as writers and their status as women prompt them to hide their womanhood, sometimes by the use of a male pseudonym, or under the masquerade of a male persona (ibid). This is a feature of Boland's initial work. As Boland (1996a: 65) explains, she adopts in her initial poetry "the properties of the hero", the male voice recurrent in Western literary tradition. Gilbert and Gubar (2000: 15) have argued that the initial stages of a writing career for a woman start in her "searching glance into the mirror of the male-inscribed literary text". This is precisely what Boland does in *Poetry by Boland* and *New Territory*, creating a "male-inscribed literary text". She begins to use her writing as an artistic mirror of the poetic conventions she inherits, rather than as "a method of experience" (interview with Wilson 1990b: 82). With the exception of "Athene's Song" and "Malediction" (*New Territory*), Boland avoids the use of the feminine persona. Since there is no sense of self-awareness in her poems, she tries to conceal her womanhood under an apparently neutral "I" who is in the end male rather than female.

(2) Showalter (1999: 20) has demonstrated that in the 'Feminine' phase, women writers' main focus is to participate in the mainstream of culture, which involves having an uncritical attitude towards their own (oppressive) situation as women. In her initial work, Boland does not

only disregard her own female reality, but also perpetuates traditional depictions of Irish women. Her initial poems describe powerful dangerous female creatures (such as Aoife in "Malediction"), or passive female objects, ideal icons of eternity and beauty (such as Etain in "The Winning of Etain"). In her indulgent stance, she remains faithful to the literary aesthetic tradition, ignoring what she will later call "the real myths" of the Irish woman (Boland 1996a: 12).

(3) Boland also hides her own female identity with the employment of traditional epic topics and conventional poetic concerns. The woman poet (1996a: 104) describes her initial poetry as "a hybrid: half British movement and half Irish lyric"; in other words, she internalizes two different kinds of poems which were dominant when she began writing in the Dublin of the 1960s.¹ The first "half British movement" poem refers to the metropolitan poem which was influenced by the romantic movement in the nineteenth century (Boland 1996a: 92). This poem, which was "an outcome of British civilization", proposed a radical relation between an inner and an outer world, becoming "a commanding text of an interior life" (pp. 92-93). At this initial stage in her career, Boland internalizes the romantic concept of the poet as "a person set apart from ordinary life", who, as Allen-Randolph (1993a: 6) argues, is specially endowed with "powers of vision and articulation". As we will see in "Appraisal", "The Poets", "New Territory", "Mirages", and "Migrations", Boland represents poets as powerful "hero[es]", "lions", "birds", or "strenuous sailing men" who inhabit the realm of the stars and constellations.

The second kind of poem Boland (1996a: 104) refers to as "half Irish lyric" is "sharper and more bitter" (p. 92). This kind of poem is more concerned with the external meaning of the poet's life, which Boland (1996a: 92) describes as follows:

It was the history of the bard, the prince's friend, the honoured singer. Who made his way from village to village, shifting from praise to invective as the occasion demanded. [...] Who became, reluctantly, a witness to the totality of the British conquest and the loss of the vital language.

In *New Territory*, we also come across this second kind of poem, which is "deep in Irish life" (p. 93). Boland internalizes the conventional Irish literary strategy of sublimating and aestheticizing the national turmoil. We will see how in "After the Irish of Egan O'Rahilly", for instance, Boland develops the traditional Irish political poem. The communal voice is speaking on behalf of a dispossessed Irish people; it addresses the enemy, the Protestant English, who is

¹ In *Object Lessons*, Boland (1996a: 95) has argued that this mingling of metropolitan and nationalist tendencies in Irish literature is personified by the city of Dublin itself. The statues of Goldsmith and Burke at the main entrance of Trinity College remind her of this metropolitan poem. On the other hand, Grafton Street is linked in her imagination to a lost world of Irish poetry, "a place where the Irish bard Aodghan O'Rathaille has seen the Gaelic order collapse and his own patrons flee after the Treaty of Limerick failed at the end of the seventieth century".

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destined to be driven from Ireland. Boland recurs to important events in Irish history, such as the overthrow of the Gaelic order ("The Flight of the Earls"), the Easter Rising ("A Cynic at Kilmainham Gaol"), or the Irish Civil War ("Yeats in Civil War"). The "history of the bard, the prince's friend, the honoured singer" Boland (1996a: 92) refers to makes its appearance in the troubadour searching for his king in "The King and the Troubadour", as well as in those mythical Classical and Celtic figures (such as Oedipus, Isaiah, Paris, and Lir's son) in "The Pilgrim", "New Territory", "The Flight of the Earls", and "The Dream of Lir's Son". Boland's consistent choice of conventional themes and figures of the dominant aesthetic tradition reflect her desire to achieve, not only genuine excellence as a poet, but also the acceptance of Dublin's literary community.

(4) Showalter (1999: 27-28) argues that women writers at this stage develop "innovative and covert ways to dramatize the[ir] inner life", in order to give expression to their repressed feelings. In fact, Boland develops covert ways to dramatize (or give voice to) her inner anxiety. As a woman, she feels she is writing in a denied territory, and therefore, she experiences a fear of failing as a poet. Precisely because of this, the poetic figures in *New Territory* (e.g. "New Territory", "The Gryphons", and "The Flight of the Earls") usually encounter difficulties when expressing their own thoughts. Although they are successful in the end, their journey towards artistic expression is, as we will see, continually fraught with difficulty.

(5) Another important feature of *Poetry by Eavan Boland* and *New Territory* is the importance Boland attaches to her literary forefathers. Eight of the twenty-one poems in *New Territory* are dedicated to well-recognized poets at the time (Derek Mahon, Michael Longley, Eamon Grennan, Philip Edwards, and Brendan Kennelly). With the exception of "On Giving a Cyclamen 1961" and "Athene's Song", dedicated to her mother and father respectively, significantly all her poems are written with a particular male-poet addressee in mind. At the same time, some of these poems praise canonical literary writers, such as Yeats (in "Yeats in Civil War") and Shakespeare (in "Shakespeare" and "Comic Shakespeare"). These two aspects indicate Boland's anxiety to be included in Ireland's (andocentric) literary canon. As Derek Mahon (to whom "Belfast vs. Dublin" is dedicated to) argues, Boland's praise of male writers indicates her need "to assert herself in what she correctly perceived to be a male-dominated literary culture" (Mahon 1993: 24).

(6) Boland's conservative stance is also reflected in the structure and language of the poems. In her first years of poetic career, Boland's formalism was part of the strategy to show certain artistic 'masculinity'. Adrienne Rich (1979: 40), who will exert an enormous influence on Boland's next phase ('Feminist'/ 'Cultural Nationalist' phase), has also admitted using formalism in her initial years of her poetic career to conceal her womanhood. Boland attempts to master the

poetic language of canonical poetry, to achieve the “exhilaration of language” of male poets (Boland 1996a: 27). It seems, as Fanon (1991: 18) asserts, that dominating the oppressor's language affords remarkable power: “The Negro of the Antilles will be proportionately whiter – that is, he will come closer to being a real human being – in direct ratio to his mastery of the French language”. According to Fanon (1991: 38), the colonized subject attempts to gain a mastery of the imposed language in order to overcome his/her marginalized status. Similarly, it seems that Boland will be a greater poet by showing her command and assurance with the language of her male poetic ancestors. Writing within a constraining tradition means sticking to well defined poetic forms. Therefore, there is a recognizable regularity in *New Territory* of traditional metrics and rhyme schemes. These poems are usually rhymed, always stanzaic, and have identifiable moving parts: a beginning, middle, and ending. As Boland (1996a: 77) states, her initial work was concerned mostly with form, with the shaping of the stanza and the pure line, with the fitting of the rhyme and with finding “a real music for the cadence”:

It was a very intense book to write. I understand the impatience some people have expressed about it being formalist and so on. On the other hand, it's too much of a received truth of poetry critics to talk about formalism in a young poet as something negative, or as necessarily covering an evasion of feeling. I don't quite see it that way. There is a fear of feeling in almost every emerging poet. You're not sure what's the proper self and what's simply untransmuted egotism. Somehow the engagement with form helped me to know one from the other. (Interview with Allen-Randolph 1993b: 120)

In order to exemplify the features that characterize what I have called Boland's ‘Feminine’/ ‘Assimilationist’ phase, I have written the following sections which approach her work more deeply. But, before that, I think it is necessary to analyze the ways in which Irish poets, especially W.B. Yeats, influence the initial years of Boland's literary career.

Yeats, as Haberstroh (1996: 60) rightly asserts, has a remarkable influence on Boland's initial work in various aspects. Derek Mahon (1993: 25) explains that when he first met Boland in Dublin, she seemed to be “obsessed” with Yeats, “as if she had to come to grips with this man, in combat or in love”. The influences this poet exerts over Boland are numerous. First of all, Yeats attempted to create a national culture by relying on a disregarded past or a set of disinherited values: the legendary, the mythological past of Ireland (Webb 1991: xx). His fascination with Irish myths is represented in lyrics such as *Crossways* (1889), *The Rose* (1893), and *The Wind Among the Reeds* (1899) (volumes collected in Yeats 1889, 1991), in which Yeats shows his interest in

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Celtic folklore and the oral tradition of ballads.² One of Yeats’s objectives in his employment of myth was to give voice to Irishness, to a distinctive literary tradition. According to this poet, the Irish themselves scorned their own distinctive culture, because, in their coercive colonization, they had learned to look at it from an English perspective. As Yeats stated, “[f]orms of emotion and thought, which the future will recognize as peculiarly Irish, [...] are looked upon as un-Irish because of their novelty in a land that is so nearly conquered that it has all but nothing of its own” (cited by Webb 1991: xxxiv). Thus, he saw an imperative prerogative for the Irish writer to recover those myths and legends of an ancient Gaelic past in order to create an ‘authentic’ Irish poetry of its own. Boland resembles Yeats in her constant evocation of Celtic myths, topics, and characters. She retains the magnetic splendour of Celtic legends, such as the myth of the Children of Lir and the legend of Etain. At the same time, she also shows her interest in the Irish oral tradition, with ballads such as “Lullaby” and “The King and the Troubadour”. As Yeats had done, in her initial work she tries to restore the values of a lost civilization. Yeats’s attempt to capture Irishness was of essential importance for Boland. She spent most of her childhood living in London and New York because her father was an Irish diplomat. She did not return to Ireland until she was fourteen. In her essay “Imagining Ireland”, Boland (1997a: 17) recalls how she felt detached and estranged from her country and her subsequent need to feel Irish. In order to overcome this physical and emotional displacement, she had to reconstruct her childhood and this implied gaining some insight into what to be Irish meant: “The word *Ireland* should have become the name of my childhood. Instead it became the name of my hope, my invention, my longing” (ibid). Thus, Boland felt the need to go back to the literary tradition of Ireland, in order to find her own identity. Yeats, in his aim to portray Irishness, was a powerful model for Boland to follow.

Secondly, Boland inherits Yeats’s romantic idea of the poet: the poet is a bard, a special individual with visionary powers. Yeats was a self-declared romantic: his poetry focuses on the individual’s expression of emotion and imagination (Webb 1991: xxii). He viewed the poet “as [a] craftsman and as [a] hero” who has to confront reality by using the creative power of the mind. As Webb (1991: xxxvii) explains, Yeats’s posture is best described as bardic in “the grand declarative gestures of his rhetoric”. He believed in a sense of personal nobility, and built his art around it. In her aspiration to become a well recognized “honorable male poet” (interview with Allen-Randolph 1993b: 118), Boland finds in Yeats’s example an appropriate influence.

² See, for example, Yeats’s “The Madness of King Goll”, “Fergus and the Druid”, “Cuchulain’s Fight with the Sea”, and “The Song of Wandering Aengus” (Yeats 1989: 14, 27, 29, 55).

Besides the concept of the poet, Yeats's influence upon Boland is also observed in her dedication to poetic technique. In "A General Introduction for my Work", Yeats (1924) explained the importance of form and defended his use of traditional verse forms as follows:

If I wrote of personal love or sorrow in free verse, or in any rhythm that left it unchanged, amid all its incidence, I would be full of self-contempt because of my egotism and indiscretion, and foresee the boredom of my reader. I must choose a traditional stanza, even what I alter must seem traditional. [...] Ancient salt is best packing. (Quoted in Webb 1991: xxv)

In the same way, Boland develops the strictly regulated and received verse form. Her emphasis on artifice is a legacy of Yeats's formalism, a formalism he justified by saying: "Art is art because it is not nature" (cited by Webb 1991: xxi). The demanding requirements of technique exert a discipline in Boland which prevents her from expressing the emotional exaltation of the inspired artist. Thus, she inherits Yeats's emphasis on technique and on keeping the mind under control (Webb 1991: xxiii). This self-imposed discipline as regards poetic technique is recognized by Boland herself, when she explains her initial obsession with poetic form, with "the rhetoric of a callow apprenticeship", "the dissonance of the line and the necessity of the stanza", the fact "that the poem is pure process, that the technical encounter is the one which guarantees all others" (Boland 1996a: 132). In this sense, the poetic persona in *New Territory* is distanced by her adherence to conventional forms, by its formal and observant tone.

Apart from poetic technique, Boland inherits another feature of Yeats's poetry: his distance from the speakers of the poems, whether imagined, legendary, or historical. In *New Territory*, for instance, Boland employs several well-known classical and mythological characters (Oedipus, Lir's Son, Aoife, and Isaiah). By depicting characters of recognized superiority, Boland tries to acquire the poetic authority which she herself lacks as a woman writer at this first stage.

7.2.2. The poet as hero set apart from ordinary life

Boland's main concern in *Poetry by Boland* and *New Territory* is to explore the poet's role, and to highlight 'his' powers of vision and elocution. Her poetic figures are raised to metaphysical status by their ability to have access to a knowledge that is hidden to ordinary human beings. Boland (1996a: 191) has argued that in her initial years as a writer her reading of the "accepted masters of the tradition" prompted her internalization of "a sense of power and control". In fact, Boland inherits from Irish poetry its authoritative stance, the inflexible association between poetry and privilege; that is, what she calls "the shadow of bardic privilege", a belief which gave Irish poets "an authority long taken from and renounced by their British counterparts" (ibid). As we have

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seen, Yeats perpetuated this idea of the romantic poet, in order to portray him both as a visionary and a representative of an ancient, traditional, and mystical past, a more ‘authentic’ Irish past (Webb 1991: xxxix). Yeats’s notion of the Irish artist takes us back, in this sense, to the figure of the druid in Ancient Ireland, a prominent figure within Celtic society who enjoyed high status as a royal adviser and, in some instances, even as a ruler. As Green (1997: 7) explains, Irish druids “were involved in politics, sacrificial rituals, prophecy”, the practice of magic, and “the control of the supernatural world”. As faithful keepers of the oral tradition, they were considered to be the tribe’s history and its identity. In this sense, their role was often intermingled with that of the Bard and Filidh, lyric singers and seer-poets (p. 15). The influence Yeats’s romantic vision of this Irish bard/poet exerts over Boland in this period of her life is enormous. In the poems I am about to analyze, Boland takes us back to a time when bards enjoyed high prestige.³ Her intention is to portray the poet as a prominent figure of high status, with a great responsibility towards ‘his’ society.

In poems such as “Appraisal” (*Poetry by Boland*), Boland inherits this romantic figure of the male Irish bard, a special person whose poetic visions single him out as a privileged individual. As the very title indicates, Boland is going to carry out an official valuation of the role of the poet. Her main concern in poems such as this one is to describe the whole process of writing as difficult and painful, but successful and illuminating in the end:

The climb
To consciousness is slow, not to discuss
The pain. And you must have great patience now
With my evidence and hero. He is preoccupied
With waking up, escaping from the truss
Of sleep he has inherited: You must allow
Him youth, and freedoms hitherto denied.

As is typical of Yeats, Boland maintains a detached position from the poetic figure she represents. The narrative voice distances itself from the male poet: a figure described as a “hero” who wishes to escape from the constraints of humanity itself, “the truss/ of sleep” in which his community has fallen. As Green (1997: 50) explains, druidic poets were “genuine thinkers, who disdained the humdrum world of human concerns”. Boland’s poetic figure tries to get away from the boredom of ordinary life. The speaker is explicitly addressing the Irish national tradition, a tradition of exclusively Irish male writers where women have no place. By using the pronoun in the third person singular (‘he’), Boland is clearly adopting an uncritical attitude towards the omission of the female voice in this prominently andocentric tradition. On the other hand, the use of the modal

³ As Canny (1989: 95) explains, special provision was made by the priestly office for the maintenance of the families of bardic poets.

'must', implying obligation, indicates that the poetic voice is authoritarian. While it is tempting to read the last assertion of this stanza as a feminist denunciation of the omission of women as active voices within the Irish literary panorama, Boland's claim is not as subversive as it might sound. The voice demands the national tradition to be patient with this figure, for his access to poetic vision is slow and painful. Boland emphasizes that achieving artistic expression and perfection is difficult. That is why the act of writing poetry, like in other poems from this collection, is allegorized in terms of designing and constructing large buildings. Like in "Conversation" (*Poetry by Boland*), where the poet "has still responsibility to architect/ His own survival", in "Appraisal", he is represented as a young amateur "in this new and hard cathedral". In both cases, therefore, poets are represented as 'architects', professional figures who must mould their poems according to a pre-ordained design or pattern. Poetry is conceived as an art that must follow an orderly arrangement, a skill that is prescribed by its necessity to rely on aesthetic pattern and organization. In this sense, form acquires great importance for this figure:

He knows that rhymes
Must replace the rhythm, petty words the fair,
Free, elegant confusion, a dripping tap the maelstrom.

Now all his past observances recoil
Upon him. He must understand for
Every scribe and singer with his toil
Of destiny, that incoherence, though the core
Be purest vision, is as impermissible
As silence and less beautiful.

The preponderance of a modal indicating obligation, typical in Boland's initial work,⁴ indicates that the poet feels compelled to write according to well-defined aesthetic parameters. Form and "rhymes" give harmony, cohesion, and "beauty" to what is apparently confusing and incoherent. Boland conceives the poet as a powerful creature who is able to express a chaotic reality. This figure shows his mastery by expressing his thoughts in a clear and orderly manner. In fact, Irish bardic poets were regarded as skilled and persuasive rhetoricians (Green 1997: 44). For this poetic figure in "Appraisal", verbal skill is also very important. Rhetorical emphasis, the capacity to use language effectively and persuasively is an achievement. As Boland (1996a: 27) has argued, an "exhilaration of language" is inseparable from its power. For the poet in "Appraisal", "silence" is "impermissible", for it would be understood as a weakness. In her mature poetry, Boland will highlight more the poet's silences than her ability to achieve declamatory force in her verse. Her objective will be to express a powerless and non-authoritarian poetic voice,

⁴ See, for instance, the use of this modal verb in "The Pilgrim", "Lullaby", and "Requiem for a Personal Friend" (*New Territory*).

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whose vision can only be incomplete and partial. Nevertheless, in her initial phase, she feels compelled to rely on form, on what is rhetorically sanctioned. In "Shakespeare" (*New Territory*), Boland praises this major English writer on the grounds that he "made of every quill the fire which men/ Primitively lit against the beasts, whose flames/ Were agile sentries between them and chaos". In his plays and lyric poetry, Shakespeare showed his ability to give order to the "chaos" of an age devastated by hunger and the plague. His pen (the "quill") was like the fire ancient people used to defend themselves from external dangers; his writing achievements were of such magnitude that they acted as "agile entries" of a world which, without them, would be otherwise destructive and unbearable. In this sense, form gives shape to those realities and experiences that apparently escape the artist's control. On the other hand, by relying on formalism, the poet can dominate his unrestrained enthusiasm, or as Boland puts it in "Appraisal", "All the first exuberance of knowledge".

In his ability to use language effectively, the figure in "Appraisal" distances himself from common ordinary people. Poetry is viewed as an art entirely restricted to a professional and learned class. Green (1997: 31) notes how druidic poets were "trained specialists (taking as long as twenty years to learn their craft), set apart from the common people". This special 'knowledge' that characterizes Boland's poetic figures runs throughout all the poems in Boland's initial work. Poets are represented as druids endowed with a power of prophecy and bound to fulfil a divine duty. "For what his spirit saw", as Boland argues in "Appraisal", "no word was made". Highlighting the difficulties the poet encounters in his journey towards artistic mastery is a mechanism to extol his tremendous achievement.⁵ Boland employs the traditional metaphor of darkness in her depiction of a poet, who, enclosed in his room, strives ambitiously with the lines and stanzas of his poem:

When the room flicks to dark
And his wrist flicks away the first glass light,
He cannot see the room inside its run
Of walls, nor faraway the covers and the mark
He left upon a waiting page; he has no sight.

Only a minute goes before, impatient
And quick-fingered, he unseals the tomb-
The new bulb fitting tightly in its socket
The light flares round into the hidden room;
Then he takes up the book and reads the twice
Beloved lines, and feels the whetted appetite

⁵ In "Shakespeare" and "The Comic Shakespeare" (*New Territory*), Boland depicts the harsh conditions this poet and playwright had to undergo in the Elizabethan period. By so doing, she pays homage to someone who managed to produce noble masterpieces in a tough and toilsome age. As she implies in the last couplet of "The Comic Shakespeare", his achievement was a consequence of the hardship he had to go through: "Would each comedy,/ Each festival and whistle of your prime, / Today exist if you had wept in time?"

Inside him, gradually lose consciousness
Until he reads the memory of the lights
Away into a trivial past of things.
There is the lesson of that man, who placed his great
Experience into the pitiless contraction
Of a chosen word, and watched it wring
His vision out like drops from cloth: Late
Is the night, and late his pain before reaction

Comes to him.

The poet in this poem “cannot see the room”, “he has no sight” and therefore, he is presented as someone limited both physically and also apparently intellectually. As Boland (1997/1998: 156) has argued, “the blind poet is at the heart of the myth of the poet. As far back as Homer, the blind poet is an allegory, not only of outer limitation, but of inner vision”. This myth of the blind poet, as Boland explains, is not only a legacy of the Greek epic poet Homer, but it is well rooted in Irish culture. She mentions, for instance, Antoine Raftery, one of the most important poets of the oral tradition at the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth. According to Boland (1997/1998: 155), blindness was “at the heart of his identity”, and this explains “the fame which attended his recovery by the Irish Revival”. In “Appraisal”, Boland perpetuates this allegory of the blind poet, in order to highlight the strength rather than the weakness of poetic vision; in other words, with a view to stressing “the poet’s privilege, the poet’s power” (p. 157). The poetic figure in this poem seems to claim, by his blindness, what Boland will sharply criticize as a mature poet:

See me, the poet seems to say. See me, because I cannot see you. Yet even without this essential quality, I am powerful. Even without the human faculty of sight, I have the divine power of vision. There is a hubris concealed in the legend which has always made me uneasy. (Boland 1997/1998: 157)

It is this lack of sight ascribed by Boland to her poetic figures that makes them both authoritarian and mystical. Darkness is associated with the poet’s lack of external vision and also, paradoxically, with his strength of internal vision. In this sense, it is precisely this physical handicap that makes his later achievements more precious:

And then when all his hope
Is fleeced away, and he is bare-backed
As the first complaining ewes, who meet
The Spring with sacrifice, he sets his sacked
And plundered mind to read the words. Ah there
Is nothing to resemble what he knows
When lines he wrote in darkness start to flare
Around his bones, with all the genius of speed
That words have shouted down a hill in summer.

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The moment of sudden revelation is represented by an abrupt eruption of lightness. The lines the poet wrote in a dark room begin “to flare” and with them, his “genius” reaches its summit. In Boland’s initial work, lightness is in this sense associated with knowledge and discovery. Poems such as this one emphasize the poet’s movement from darkness towards lightness and poetic vision.⁶ As Boland (1996a: 101) states, at the beginning she holds the belief that poetry is “magic”, and that “to name the lighting is to own it”. Although the ultimate fate of the poet is to discover this ‘magical’ realm in isolation, he is linked in his creative discernment with a literary community that both supports and inspires him. The poet at the end of “Appraisal” reasserts his own value by restoring his sense of kinship and “affinity” with every artist:

He has been right he finds; he thinks of anglers
Catching princes of the loch with worms,
He feels affinity with every mummer,
And his lines, by rote, his paint, the wranglers
And the clowns, the wooden stage, where truth is reaffirmed.

As is usual in Boland’s initial work, “Appraisal” is a narrative poem clearly written with a beginning, middle, and end. The thought is compressed in the metrical framework; that is to say, each stanza contains one description or narrative event. “Appraisal” is written with nearly end-rhyme schemes and it follows the traditional lay-out. In contrast to what I will call Boland’s ‘Feminist’/ ‘Cultural Nationalist’ phase, where there is a clear lack of punctuation marks, punctuation is explicit and lines are syntactically complete. On the other hand, there are no enjambments between stanzas, in contrast to Boland’s mature work, where sentences will unfold down the page. The use of the present tense, usually simple present, is also a common feature of her initial work. Boland uses it not only to give vividness and dynamism to her account of the poet’s journey towards artistic vision, but also to state what she believes to be a universal ‘truth’. As Quereda Rodríguez-Navarro (1997: 111) explains, this basic verb form is sometimes employed when the speaker wants to emphasize that his/her statements are timeless: “[t]he facts stated are usually valid all the times”, and consequently they have “a universal validity”. Boland’s use of the simple present is deliberate. She is talking about the role of the poet, a role which is socially and culturally pre-established. In this sense, she is making a universal ‘appraisal’ which is “valid all the times” and which should be considered as axiomatic and absolute.

On the other hand, the poet’s self-conscious struggle with form parallels the diction of “Appraisal”. Boland wants to write poems of reflection and thought, and in order to do so, she

⁶ As we will see in Boland’s mature work, she will reverse this movement. Her poems tend to end by highlighting the speaker’s powerlessness and her immersion in darkness. Her later use of dark and diffuse lights, rather than simply a metaphor of poetic failure, will be the best context where the boundaries between past and present begin to blur, and where Boland finds the summit of her poetic inspiration.

employs a vocabulary containing words of Romance origin, such as “resignation”, “preoccupied”, and “impermissible”. As Reeves (1965: 158) explains, these words derived from Latin make the text more abstract and intellectual, because they convey the impression of pompous and self-conscious grandeur. Boland uses words such as these in order to give dignity and solemnity to her ‘heroic’ account of the poet. “Appraisal” draws us back to the epic tradition, to Homer and Virgil’s narrative poems concerned with the deeds of a national hero, and the memorable events of the past (Reeves 1969: 66-73). This kind of poem is suitable for Boland’s aim: to explore the magnificence of Irish poets with a language also intellectual.⁷ Rhetorical language is also observed in Boland’s use of hyperbatons (e.g. “late is the night”). It is significant how this poem is composed of long sentences with large chains of modifiers. This dense syntax makes Boland’s initial work at times difficult to read. As Hurlley et al. (1996: 17) explain, one of the reasons of bards’ prestige was the complexity and elaboration of the prosodic system. They needed a long process of learning and training in order to use this system with mastery and skill. In this sense, the poetry they produced was extremely difficult to understand and interpret. Boland attempts to create this high elaborated language. Since she believes that poets are distanced from ordinary human beings, her work similarly attempts to remove itself from a simpler, easier and vulgar use of language. It seems that only well educated readers can have access to the poetic realm. Boland’s attempt to demonstrate her artistic craftsmanship, her poetic elaboration of language, and her ability to employ conventional verse forms and poetic devices is further manifested in “The Poets”, the poem which opens *New Territory*.

As we have seen, the end of “Appraisal” depicts a poet who is firmly integrated within the literary establishment. This emphasis on a male literary community becomes the main topic of “The Poets”. The article ‘the’ in the title shows that Boland is talking about a specific, definite entity the speaker and hearer are familiar with, or have spoken about previously, in contrast to “Poets”, which would be generic. On the other hand, this article is used to indicate uniqueness, to emphasize a group of writers as the most outstanding and prominent.⁸ “The Poets” offers a view of the poets as powerful and privileged figures. Like in “Appraisal”, this poem follows an interesting movement. The speaker begins by depicting the limitations poets encounter when writing, if only to highlight at the end their strength and authority:

⁷ As we will see, Boland combines two poetic traditions. Whereas poems such as “Appraisal” clearly follow the epic tradition, others such as “The King and the Troubadour” follow the ballad convention.

⁸ The use of this exclusive and non-generic article is also employed in “The Gryphons” (*New Territory*). Boland wants to make clear that the group she is talking about is well-defined and enclosed.

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They, like all creatures, being made
For the shovel and worm,
Ransacked their perishable minds and found
Pattern and form
And with their own hands quarried from hard words
A figure in which secret things confide.

Poets are initially presented as normal human beings, “like all creatures”, bound to live and perish. Like in “Appraisal”, their artistic endeavor is everything but simple, because finding their exact words for their poems is a laborious task. Nevertheless, these poets are set apart from ordinary life by their virtue to find “pattern and form”, and by their power to see “secret things”. Their special status is reinforced by placing these poets in the realm of the constellations, rather than in an earthy and human landscape:

They are abroad: their spirits like a pride
Of lions circulate,
Are desperate, just as the jeweled beast,
That lions constellate,
Whose scenery is Betelgeuse and Mars,
Hunts without respite among fixed stars.

This second stanza equates poets to “lions” and “beast[s]”, traditional symbols of power and strength. Rather than isolated creatures, they are united cohesively in their project. Their strong sense of literary community is emphasized by the metaphor of the constellation: poets form a group or cluster of stars that are orderly arranged in a specific configuration. The use of the constellations in Boland’s initial work is not accidental. As Green (1997: 10) explains, druidic poets had much knowledge of “the stars and their motion, of the size of the world and of the earth, of natural philosophy”. This link between poets and astrology is made evident in “The Poets”. The process of writing is an act of deciphering, of knowing how to read the position of the stars. On the other hand, poetry is also equated to something violent. These figures are hunters in pursuit of a precious treasure, a ‘jewel’. They are working without interruption and “respite” in another sphere of existence unreachable to common human beings. “Fixed stars” implies the unchanging, definite, and everlasting supreme position of poets. Nevertheless, this image also suggests confinement. Poets can only write within a poetic tradition whose tenets are already fixed, established, and where no experimentation is allowed. Boland emphasizes how, by inhabiting such a closed system, their access to an ‘original’ vision is achieved with difficulty. Once again, the speaker implies that it is precisely because of their imprisonment of insight that their final achievement becomes more valuable and precious. In the last stanza, Boland identifies poets as suns, stars which will not only survive but will sustain life on earth, as everlasting sources of heat and light:

And they prevail: to his undoing every day
The essential sun
Proceeds, but only to accommodate
A tenant moon,
And he remains until the very break
Of morning, absentee landlord of the dark.

Like the sun which is at the centre of the planetary system, the poets' power, importance, and influence will not diminish with the passing of time, but quite the contrary. Their poetry will remain like an "absentee landlord of the dark", until the "break / Of morning", when another poet or reader revives their work. The overlexicalization of terms referring to land and its occupation in this poem are powerful metaphors which bear witness not only to the poet's role in society but also to Ireland's history. Boland establishes a comparison between farming and the very act of writing.⁹ In the first stanza, poets are presented as 'quarrying', digging, and excavating the land with their "shovel". As Herrmann (1981: 169) explains, "man's place is a space of domination, hierarchy and conquest, a sprawling, showy place, a *full* place". In contrast, this feminist critic believes, woman's place is not conceptualized in terms of supremacy over the 'Other'. The violent metaphorical images "The Poets" develops refer to this world of 'domination' and 'conquest' Herrmann mentions. These figures can explore and plunge into the land as they wish. By owning and dominating this external landscape, they exercise their literary power. That is why they become at the end of the poem powerful "landlord[s]" who "accommodate" a "tenant moon".

Furthermore, it is important to bear in mind that the issue of land and land ownership has been central to the colonial situation of Ireland. The plantations this country experienced in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were re-enacted at the end of the nineteenth century, when the British government carried out plenty of evictions in several counties such as Donegal and Mayo (Quinn 1997: 51). Irish tenants were obliged to abandon their lands and properties, which were occupied by British landlords.¹⁰ Eagleton (1995: 4) explains that, as a consequence of their distinctive historical circumstances, Britain and Ireland have a different way of perceiving land. Whereas in England land is treated as an aestheticized object, in Ireland land becomes rather a political and economic category, as well as a sexual subject (the torn victim of imperial penetration):

The word 'land' in England has Romantic connotations, as befits a largely urbanized society [...]. Ireland also witnesses a romanticizing of the countryside, in contrast to the morally corrupt, English-oriented metropolis;

⁹ For a similar comparison between poetry and agriculture see Seamus Heaney's poem "Digging" in his volume of poetry *Death of a Naturalist* (Heaney 1966: 13).

¹⁰ These evictions prompted the foundation in 1989 of the *United Irish League*, with the intention of creating a bourgeois peasantry (Quinn 1997: 52), and establishing local programs to allow the movement of people to a better land (Murphy 1997: 94).

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but this is more an ethical than an aesthetic matter. ‘Land’ in Ireland is a political rallying cry as well as a badge of cultural belonging, a question of rents as well as roots. (Eagleton 1995: 7)

Land in “The Poets” is also perceived as a politically and socially relevant category. Boland employs images of land labour and land occupation to explore issues of power and superiority, in short, to examine the sources of poetic authority. She describes poets as “absentee landlords”, surprisingly depicting them as British colonizers. The fact that she locates them in the imperialists’ side and not in the colonized’s, may be surprising at first, for Boland, as her later poetry will demonstrate, is deeply concerned with the sufferings of the Irish people during the colonial period. Yet, Boland may depict the figure of the poet as an “absentee landlord” for three different reasons, all of them interrelated. Firstly, she wants to show the powerful role of male poets. As we have seen, the Irish land was traditionally represented as feminine by the imperialists, wishing to show the disadvantage and inferior position of the colonized; and by Irish nationalists, who saw in Mother Ireland a sign of their distinctiveness. At the end of this representational spectrum, Britain was always allegorized in masculine terms, as the powerful colonizer in the superior position of male/ husband. By portraying poets as landlords, and ultimately British, Boland implicitly seeks to express their ‘masculine’ superiority, their power to dominate the ‘stars’ as well as the ‘tenant moon’. The second reason to designate poets as “absentee landlords” may be that Boland wants to grant them all the grandeur and nobility of traditional British landowners in Ireland. As Eagleton (1995: 53) explains, in contrast to Irish landlords, English landlords, “the oldest agrarian capitalist class in the world”, have been regarded as “a model of hegemonic rule, bound to their tenants by custom, affection, and paternal care”. As English landlords, poets are able to evoke in their ‘tenants’ (readers, other poets) a grateful loyalty. This loyalty is shared by Boland, as a faithful disciple to the inherited poetic tradition. In this sense, she becomes the “tenant moon” of the last stanza, occupying a terrain which is not hers, and showing affection and loyalty to her lords. Finally, at a more symbolical level, “absentee landlord” may also refer to all those Gaelic landlords who had to escape to Europe after the defeat in their battle of Kinsale in 1601. This event will be explained in detail in a later poem in *New Territory*, “The Flight of the Earls”, where Boland mourns the overthrow of the Gaelic order in Ireland. In this sense, Boland portrays Irish poets as survivors of this ancient and native race, as those bards and druids who enjoyed great status in the Gaelic society. The fact that poets are, in this sense, ‘absentee’ implies that they have not perished; they are just ‘abroad’. Thus, Boland portrays Irish poets as bards who have been able to survive and who can enjoy their original majesty. In spite of the different interpretations one might hold as regards this potent metaphor, one thing is clear: Boland conceives poetry as a highly hierarchical terrain, an art that is dominated by literary masters

(‘landlords’) to whom mere apprentices (‘tenants’) such as herself show her devotion. This is well observed in poems such as “Shakespeare” and “The King and the Troubadour”, as we will see, where poets are described as minstrels, “siblings/ Of the court” singing and praising their masters.¹¹

“The Poets” is exemplary of Boland’s initial reliance on traditional lyric forms. It follows the usual technique of measuring verse in English (the accentual-syllabic meter), in its pattern of regularity in the number of syllables and stresses. Close to the conventional blank verse, the poem is written in three sestet. Most of the lines are iambic, though they are intermittently combined with trochees (“Pattern and form”). This variety within regularity gives a musical effect by interposing rising and falling rhythms. We can also observe a progression of pentameters, trimeters, dimeters, and tetrameters. The speed slows down in the second and fourth lines of each stanza, as the number of syllables decrease with respect to other lines. This fact, together with the regular distribution of stressed and unstressed syllables, enables the musical continuity of the verse. The low pace is contrasted with the rhyming of plosives (‘break’ / ‘dark’) of the last couplet, at the end of the poem.

Together with these prosodic factors, which reflect that Boland is aware of the poetic (routine) licences of the aesthetic tradition, we might observe what Leech (1969: 15) would call, a “poetical” language; that is to say, an archaic and conventional use of language. The abundance of hyperbatons (e.g. “their spirits like a pride / Of lions circulate”; “to his undoing every day / The essential sun, / Proceeds”) reinforces Boland’s desire to imitate traditional lyric poetry. On the other hand, the first stanza, for instance, contains pleonasm, such as “perishable minds”, a phrase self-evidently true, and “Pattern and form”, where the meaning of both terms is somehow redundant. As regards schemes (foregrounded repetitions of expression), we come across phonological parallelisms, as in the second stanza: “Of lions circulate / That lion constellate” (pararhyme of initial consonant and last syllable). Although the overall effect of the poem is unrhythmical, there are some end-rhyme schemes such as ‘worm’/ ‘form’ and ‘Mars’/ Stars’; and a final repetition of plosives connoting hardness: ‘break’/ ‘dark’. The most significant syntactic regularity is the appearance of the third person pronoun ‘They’ referring to the poets at the beginning of each stanza, giving rhetorical emphasis to what the poem is communicating. The fact that Boland is referring to the poets without including herself (there is not a single first person pronoun) implies that she feels excluded from the Irish poetic community. Boland deliberately

¹¹ Precisely because of this, a medieval world of “kings”, “princes”, “troubadours”, “minstrels”, “sycophants”, “clowns”, “immoral courtiers”, “mummers”, and “wranglers”, is constantly evoked in almost all the poems of Boland’s initial work, especially in “Appraisal” (*Poetry by Boland*), “Mirages”, “Shakespeare”, “The Flight of the Earls”, “After the Irish of Egan O’Rahilly”, “The King and the Troubadour”, and “The Winning of Etain” (*New Territory*).

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detaches herself from these figures, showing her respect as a mere apprentice. As in “Appraisal”, she avoids any sort of emotional involvement and she is mainly concerned with specifying the poet’s role and his source of authority in an aloof and removed manner. The narrative voice gains her authority only by perpetuating the traditional position of the (male) poetic voice, a position Boland has described as “right in the middle of the poem – the voice directed in a triangle relation with the subject and object” (interview with Allen-Randolph 1999b: 299). “The Poets” exemplifies this distance between the poetic voice and the subject matter of the poem.

This notion of the artist as a person removed from ordinary life that Boland develops in “Appraisal” and “The Poets” is also made explicit in the title poem of *New Territory*. In this poem, the poet is allegorized as an ancient seafarer who must dangerously travel to his own destination, “land hove”. “New Territory” recovers the Irish genre of “Immram”, which flourished in Pagan Ireland, and consists of stories of journeys of discovery and exploration, generally fantastic navigations to the world beyond.¹² As is typical in Boland’s initial work, this poem is well structured thematically. In contrast to “Appraisal” and “The Poets”, the poetic voice does not maintain a detached position from her poetic characters. From the very first line, the speaker includes herself as one of the men on board:

Several things announced the fact to us:
The captain’s Spanish tears
Falling like doubloons in the headstrong light,
And then of course the fuss –
The crew jostling and interspersing cheers
With wagers. Overnight
As we went down to our cabins, nursing the last
Of the grog, talking as usual of conquest,
Land hove into sight.

The use of the first person plural pronoun is typical in Boland’s initial work, and it appears not only in “New Territory”, but also in poems such as “The Gryphons”, “A Cynic at Kilmainham Gaol”, “Yeats in Civil War”, and “The Flight of the Earls” (*New Territory*). In all these poems these pronouns refer to an explicitly male community, and therefore, they are indicative of Boland’s attempt to be included within the Irish national tradition. In “New Territory”, Boland introduces her own voice and identifies herself with a mariner within the crew. Therefore, she continues concealing her womanhood. As she has argued, the only way by which she could “feel the power of the nation” was to “take on the properties of the hero” (Boland 1996a: 65). Her desire to be recognized as a ‘national’ poet forces her to hide her gendered identity, and adopt the

¹² The Irish genre of “Immram” was also employed by Yeats in *The Shadowy Waters* (Butler 2001: 136), and by contemporary Irish poets such as Paul Muldoon in *Why Brownlee Left* (Praga 1996: 178) and Nuala ni Dhomhnaill in “The Voyage” (Keen 2000: 21).

masculinity of the traditional poet. Nothing in the first stanza (nor in the whole poem) tells us that this is a woman talking, quite the opposite: she jokes with her male comrades in the ship, and she gambles and shouts with them in unison. The fact that the captain of the ship is Spanish might be surprising at first, but a look at the history of Ireland shows that Ireland and Spain have tended to be closely associated. As a Catholic country, Spain was of great help to the Irish landlords when fighting English rulers, mostly in 1601, at the battle of Kinsale (Canny 1989: 113). On the other hand, it is important to note that native Irish myths have tended to trace the origins of the Celtic race in Spain. Rolleston (1998: 96) explains that some legends claim that Irish people originally came from the mysterious regions of the dead. Later Irish records written by monks endeavored to reconcile this mythical account with Christianity. They invented for the Celtic race a descent from Scriptural patriarchs, and an origin in earthly lands such as Spain. Spain, therefore, becomes in some Irish legends "a rationalistic rendering of the Celtic words designating the 'Land of the Dead'" (Rolleston 1998: 102).¹³ By identifying the captain as Spanish, Boland creates an effect of ancient times, of fearful pirates exploring the seas, of seafarers anxious to find land in sight and of Celtic races invading undiscovered territories. Like in "The Poets", these poets/ mariners are described as travelling through penetrating "constellations":

Frail compasses and trenchant constellations
Brought us as far as this,
And now air and water, fire and earth
Stand at their given stations
Out there, and ready to replace
This single desperate width
Of ocean. Why do we hesitate? Water and air
And fire and earth and therefore life are here,
And therefore death.

Like the "lions" of the previous poem circulating desperately "among fixed stars", these pirates have explored "the single desperate width / Of ocean". Sky and water are complementary images in the volume, suggesting the mysterious and undiscovered territory where poets navigate. Images of entrapment occur once again: in these "dark" landscapes poets feel imprisoned, desperate. They even hesitate when seeing land, when descending to earth and coming to terms with their own human (mortal) condition. As is typical in Boland's initial work, the Atlantic Ocean embodies a savage, wild, natural, and nomadic life, the strength of the poet in the beginning of a sea-journey towards vision, truth, and articulation. The poet becomes in this way, someone who is more suited than any other to understand the whole significance of life:

¹³ We should take into account, nonetheless, that the Celtic conception of the realm of death differed from that of the Greek and the Romans. The Other-World, as Rolleston (1998: 89) explains, "was not a place of gloom and suffering, but of light and liberation. The Sun was as much the god of that world as he was of this".

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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 the holy boy.

As a person who has come from the dark (from the Celtic Land of the Dead), the poet is endowed with a natural ability to perceive and understand reality. In his ambition to explore new ‘territories’, he is like a mariner. Boland, furthermore, views poets as prophets who, like “Isaiah of the sacred text”, are “eagle-eyed” to peer down “the unlit centuries”. Like in “Appraisal” and “The Poets”, lightness symbolizes special knowledge, and darkness the common state of human kind. Boland praises Isaiah as the model poet par excellence. Together with Job, Isaiah is considered to be one of the greatest poets in the Bible for his great compositional skills and power of evocation. He was also a soothsayer, able to predict the coming of “the holy boy”. The introduction of the figure of Isaiah is interesting. As in other poems, such as “Appraisal”, where Boland compares her poetic character with Judas and his “vision-selling”, in “New Territory” Boland inserts a biblical figure. This intrusion, nevertheless, reinforces, rather than diminishes, the mysterious and magical qualities attributed to the poets. Poets are gifted with divine inspiration; they are interpreters of the will of God.

“New Territory” is composed of three stanzas of nine lines each. Like in the other poems, Boland shows her skillfulness when combining trochees and iambs. There is a regular succession of pentameters (in the first, third, fifth, seventh, and eighth lines of each stanza) and trimeters (in the second, fourth, sixth, and ninth lines). This creates musical rhythm, “frail compasses”, for the longest lines are read faster than the short ones, whose pace slows down. There is some occasional end-rhyme, such as ‘us’/‘fuss’, ‘overnight’/‘sight’, and ‘dies’/ ‘eyes’. Interestingly enough, some of these rhymes parallel the content of the poem: ‘tears’ rhymes with ‘cheers’, denoting the mixed and complex feelings the mariners/ poets experience in their journeys. ‘Constellations’ rhymes with ‘stations’, reinforcing the fixed, organized, and closed system the poets inhabit. Finally, ‘joy’ rhymes with ‘boy’, expressing the poets’ happiness in their hope of the coming of the Messiah and their final poetic achievement. All these prosodic features are a sign that Boland is fully aware of poetic resources as regards rhythm, meter, and rhyme, and how she can use them in order to convey meaning.

The symbolic portrayal of poets as mariners is recurrent in Boland’s initial work. In “Mirages” (*New Territory*), Boland also equates poets with “strenuous sailing men” who are able

to see “creatures of myth / Scattering light at the furthest points of dawn”.¹⁴ Once again, lightness and astrology come to represent the poets' ability to use their knowledge, to see beyond the worldly surface, and to decipher the unknown. In their sea-journeying and consequent adventurous exploration, mariners and poets are more in touch with the divine, with the unseen. Green (1997: 32) explains that Irish bards were also Pagan priests and, therefore, they could act as mediators between the human world and a supernatural world of divine deities. “Mirages” makes explicit this role of the poet as priest. As the speaker says in this poem, they are entrusted to decipher correctly those “mirages” that “revisit generations”. Reeves (1965: 44-45) explains that poets, by their powerful capacity to articulate sensations and their ability to express much more than just physical awareness of their own environment, were often believed to be insane:

In former times poets were often regarded as mad. This was simply a way of expressing the feeling that only poets were aware of the forces of unreason and in contact with them through inspired speech. [...] It is because poets have something in common to lunatics that they were once regarded, and are perhaps still regarded, with suspicion.

Boland explores the traditional suspicion surrounding poets, who in “Mirages” have (in their irrationality) to confront a society based entirely on reason. As she says, theirs is not an easy task, for

Reasonable men, however, hold aloof,
Doubting the gesture, speech and anecdote
Of those who touch the Grail and bring no proof –

In this poem, like in some others such as “Conversation” (*Poetry by Boland*), Boland asserts the viability of the existence of mirages and therefore, poets' reliance on magic. Poets should be credited, for they just decipher what, though unseen to most people, is highly relevant to our daily experience. She views the poet as bard, as a person who knows how to ‘read’ and predict miracles. This is a figure which believes in magic and has touched the Grail, but who is unable to offer actual evidence to confirm this mirage.

In this way, Boland explicitly equates poetry with magic. As she has argued in her essay “Virtual Syntax, Actual Dreams”, “[t]he first poets were certainly magicians. Keepers of secrets. Makers of encantations. Coaxers of rain and harvest. Holders of spells. But the dream did not die with the keepers of it” (Boland 2003a: 26). Certainly, in poems such as “Appraisal”, “The Poets”,

¹⁴ In this poem, the scope of the comparison widens. Poets are also compared to “kings riding to battle”, royal rulers who are in touch with the irrational and are able to see “crosses burn / In the skylight of the winter solstice”.

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“New Territory”, and “Mirages”, Boland keeps this dream of the Irish native poet alive. The poet’s access to magic results from his ability to use language efficiently. As Boland (2003a: 26) puts it:

The idea of the poet, under an arc of stars, at the edge of a harvested field, at the centre of society has a true charm. But the idea of the poet in possession of a particular language to control all these has more than that. Furthermore, the idea that the poet will find the right name for these constellations, will keep the rain away from the harvest or guarantee a firstborn son is compelling. Not because these things give the poet access to magic. But because they give access to power.

In this quotation, Boland is explicitly portraying the poet as a powerful druid who is able to have nature at his mercy by his ability to master language. In her initial work, the woman poet appears as a faithful inheritor of Romanticism, not only in her view of the role of the poet in society but also by following a conventional poetic language and style.

7.2.3. The poet as pilgrim

As the poems above exemplify, Boland presents poets as heroic figures, as lions and mariners who are bound to travel mysteriously through “trenchant constellations” and dangerous oceans. In this sense, she also portrays the artist as an incessant pilgrim, internalizing an important tenet of the Irish literary tradition. As Kiberd (1996: 580) has explained, the Irish Renaissance fostered a notion of the artist as a person “at war with social consensus”, “a crusader for some ideal which existed more often in the past or in the future, but rarely in the present”. In Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot*, for instance, the poet figures as a tramp (Kiberd 1996: 537). Synge signed his letters to a friend as “your old tramp” and in plays like *In the Shadow of the Glen* and *The Tinker’s Wedding* he also portrayed his characters as uprooted ‘pilgrims’ (ibid). In Yeats’s poetry, the speaker usually personifies a rootless Anglo-Irish, “caught wandering across no-man’s-land between two cultures” (ibid). The central character in Boland’s initial work is a version of this wanderer, this pilgrim, who frequently appears in Western epic literature, and particularly in Yeats’s poetry. As Haberstroh (1996: 60) explains, Boland’s figure bears great resemblance with “the Yeats-inspired voyager” or “the traditional religious pilgrim seeking a way to deal with death”. In “Appraisal”, for instance, Boland perpetuates the myth of the Irish poet as romantic pilgrim, a “tripper”,

Who has stopped at small, unthought of towns
Upon his journey. Now he sets his sights again
Thinking he must watch among the browns
And grays and scenes of winter pain,
Until he too is fitted in the scheme – told
In a secret mystery what is his part
In this. [...]

He travels in the hills, and there the trees
And birds, the frozen animals the grass
Sway with a dancer's rhythm and the ease
Of centuries. His eyes dim with the pass
Of cavalcades of harmony, until
No single thing distinguishes itself
From any other, not from him: The still
Hollow, ecstatic time is come – the pelf
Of genius.

As a free spirit, Boland's poetic character can harmonize more easily with the forces of nature than with any member of the settled community. The speaker portrays a landscape which is highly romanticized, an ideal Edenic place where the poet can find "the pealf/ Of Genius". As we will see in poems such as "Lullaby", Boland portrays an ideal land, a profoundly loved and cherished territory where the poet finds 'his' self-fulfilment. Nevertheless, in most poems, land is also depicted as a place where the poet cannot live. He feels compelled to emigrate, to go into exile to another landscape where he is to keep his integrity, where his artistic creativity can flourish. In this sense, Boland's poems recall the voluntary exile of those Irish writers and intellectuals throughout the twentieth century who felt the need to leave a country strongly conservative both culturally and religiously, in order to be creative and defend their ideals. This is the case of James Joyce and Samuel Beckett, who emigrated to Switzerland and France respectively, among many other Irish writers such as Oscar Wilde, Sean O'Casey, Brian Moore, George Moore, Louis MacNeice, and John Hewitt, for instance (Hurtley et al. 1996: 100).

Emigration becomes the main topic of "The Pilgrim" (*New Territory*). This poem is dedicated to one of the fellow poets Boland met during her university years: Eamon Grennan. Grennan was born in 1941. Although he was educated at University College, Dublin (Welch 2000: 138), and Boland in Trinity College, they had the chance to meet each other and discuss their work, for poetic gatherings were held in Dublin's pubs and coffee-shops in the evening. As it has been hinted earlier, the fact that Boland dedicates several poems of *New Territory* to her male colleagues is a sign that she is trying to create a place for herself within the poetic community of Dublin and that she undoubtedly respects the members of this masculine tradition. "The Pilgrim" revives the conventional idealist figure of the poet in the Irish Renaissance period. In this poem, the artist must travel alone, sharing the fate of all those birds which are bound to emigrate yearly:

When the nest falls in winter, birds have flown
To distant lights and hospitality.
The pilgrim, with his childhood home a ruin,
Shares their fate and, like them, suddenly
Becomes a tenant of the wintry day.
Looking back, out of the nest of stone
As it tumbles, he can see his childhood

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Flying away like an evicted bird.

Boland’s initial work, as we have seen in “The Poets”, is loaded with land imagery, and concepts involving land ownership, property, and spiritual and physical exile. In this poem, the pilgrim is portrayed as “a tenant” in “eviction” who has to abandon his country. Like the birds, he must travel alone, “to distant lights and hospitality”. Boland’s portrayal immediately reminds one of the landlords and earls who were banished from Ireland from the seventeenth century onwards, an image which will be made more explicit in poems such as “The Flight of the Earls”. In his fortitude, the pilgrim is compared to the conventional male hero Oedipus, a classical figure commemorated also in Yeats’s poetry.¹⁵ Greek mythological figures are common in Boland’s initial work. “The Gryphons” focuses on these creatures (usually represented as having the head and wings of an eagle and the body of a lion) who kept the treasure of Apollo, and who also did service to Dionysus (Falcon Martínez et al. 1980: 276). From the very beginning of her poetic career, Boland shows her admiration for myth, for the strange wisdom and magical power of legends such as this one, although she does not subvert mythological accounts until her more mature work. In this sense, she resembles Yeats, whose poetry was more concerned with “Pagan rather than Christian beliefs”, and who was himself obsessed with the invisible world, rather than the mortal world, with Celtic folk tales and Classic legends (Boland & Mac Liammóir 1971: 23). Boland uses mythological figures such as the Gryphons and Oedipus in order to raise the poet to a magical and mystical status. Oedipus was a son to Laius and Jocasta and he was abandoned at birth (Falcon Martínez et al. 1980: 463). He stands as a tragic figure because he unwittingly killed his father and then married his mother. In “The Pilgrim”, the poet becomes a figure who, like Oedipus, is tragically doomed to wander restlessly in search for atonement:

Underground although the ground is bare,
Summer is turning on her lights. Spruce
And large and massive chestnut will appear
Above his head in leaf. Oedipus
Himself, cold and sightless, was aware
Of no more strife or drama at Colonus:
He became, when he could go no further,
Just an old man hoping for warm weather.

At journey’s end in the waters of a shrine,
No greater thing will meet him than the shock
Of his own human face, beheaded in
The holy pool. Steadily he must look
At this unshriven thing among the bells
And offerings, and for his penance mark

¹⁵ See, for instance, Yeats’s poem “Owen Aherne and his Dancers” (Yeats 1989: 233), where one section is entitled “From ‘Oedipus at Colonus’”. In this poem, Yeats honours the memory of Oedipus: “Endure what life God gives and as no longer span;/ Cease to remember the delights of youth, travel-wearied aged/ mad”.

How his aspiring days like fallen angels
Follow one another into the dark.

The sinister picture of “an old man” striving to survive in harsh conditions contrasts the romantic and peaceful view of nature, of life flourishing and resurrecting in summer. As the pilgrim reaches the end of his journey and he faces death, he is forced to look at his own reflection, and deal with those “unshriven” deeds of his life. Boland gives the impression that the pilgrim, as most humans in ancient primitive societies, is not totally dependent upon his own actions, but he is at the mercy of some powerful external forces; call it gods, elemental powers, or magical beings. In fact, this last stanza sees a proliferation of words which bear religious connotations. As in other poems from Boland's initial work, such as “Conversation” (*Poetry by Boland*) and “The Gryphons” (*New Territory*), there is an explicit reference to magical rites of Pagan religions. The pilgrim seems to find no “penance”, and therefore, he can foresee his own death, his beheading, in the reflections of the water of “The holy pool”. These words loaded with religious implications seek to elevate the pilgrim to the status of the mystical and martyred figure trying to come to terms with his own death, and suffering great grievances while making the journey of life. Thus, the atmosphere created in “The Pilgrim” is very similar to that observed in previous poems. Boland is constantly exploring the visionary powers of poets and bards, the fortitude of pilgrims in their journey to life, the mystery of male heroes and other mythical figures who are in contact with the gods. In short, by means of conventional themes she explores all those sinister forces male figures, mostly poets, must face when dealing with a chaotic world of ‘constellations’ (which must be deciphered) and of ‘penance’ marks and punishments (which must be suffered). The use of the simple present tense, a recurrent tense in Boland's initial work, reinforces the feeling the pilgrim is stalking restlessly through the centuries in search of expiation. Time is suspended; the traveller seems to be frozen in an eternal present. As we will see in “The Flight of the Earls”, Boland is giving voice to the typical view of Irish history, in which, according to Eagleton (1995: 190), past is continuously re-enacted in the present. As this critic explains, “a wrong, once perpetuated, can never be undone by chronological succession but is doomed ceaselessly to re-enact itself”. In this sense, the pilgrim, like Oedipus, acquires vividness in his doomed search for the expiation of sins and wrongdoings which will never be undone.

Like in the other poems, the metrical structure of the poem is regular, denoting Boland's concern with form. It is written in three stanzas of octaves and it follows an unrhymed scheme. In this poem, Boland plays with trochees in trimeters, tetrameters, and pentameters. Though trochees are combined with iambs, the former abound. As Boland asserts in an interview, in the initial years of her poetic career, she is fascinated with trochees (Allen-Randolph 1993b: 120). The use of

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trochees in “The Pilgrim” helps to enhance the mood of melancholy, creating a falling rhythm and slowing the pace of every line. On the other hand, the lines in this poem are longer, and so are the syllables in which stress falls (“bare”, “aware”). This contributes to slowing the movement, and reinforcing the elegiac tone of the poem. The diction of the poem highlights this mood of solitude and woefulness. Most of the words have pessimistic connotations: “ruin”, “fate”, “wintry day”, “evicted bird”, “cold and sightless”, “dark”. Once again, Boland uses some words derived from the Latin with the aim of taking us back to ancient times, to a primitive society which believes in fate and magical rites: “distant”, “massive”, “drama”, “Colonus”.

The image of poet as pilgrim reappears in “Migration”, also from *New Territory*. Once again, Boland dedicates this poem to one of the fellow poets she met during her university years, Michael Longley, who studied classics in Dublin. In “Migration”, Boland develops the notion of poets as a community of birds which are moved by the necessity to embark “on every wind”. The bird has been a traditional icon used for patriotic motives. Francis Ledwidge was one Revival poet, together with Patrick Pearse and Joseph Plunkett, who strongly engaged in national issues (Welch 2000: 193). In “The Blackbirds”, Ledwidge recurs to the well-known allegory of the Poor Old Woman in order to incite patriotic feelings. In this poem, a helpless woman summons the blackbirds to fight for her:

I heard the Poor Old Woman say:
'At break of day the fowler came,
And took my blackbirds from their songs
Who loved me well thro' shame and blame.

No more from lovely distances
Their songs shall bless me mile by mile,
Nor to white Ashbourne call me down
To wear my crown another while.

With bended flowers the angels mark
For the skylark the place they lie,
From there its little family
Shall dip their wings first in the sky.

And when the first surprise of light
Sweet songs excite, from the far dawn
Shall there come blackbirds loud with love,
Sweet echoes of the singers gone.

But in the lonely hush of eve
Weeping I grieve the silent bills.'
I heard the Poor Old Woman say
In Derry of the little hills. (Quoted in Kennelly 1970: 305)

“The Blackbirds” illustrates the easy blend of the feminine and the national in the Irish Literary Revival. Whereas the blackbirds are humanized as the Irish rebels and patriots who will

save the country from the colonizers, the Poor Old Woman is merely a mouthpiece, an emblem of Ireland. In "Migration", Boland retains the allegorical image of birds to signify the Irish community of poets. Although she slightly changes the notion of Irish rebellious patriots as it appears in "The Blackbirds", the poets/birds of "Migration" are in some sense patriotic figures as well, "literary patriots" as Boyce (1991: 233) would call them. As Boland has explained, the poet has been traditionally conceived as a public artist, a "communal" voice, writing for the benefit of 'his' society (interview with Allen-Randolph 1999b: 297). This conventional notion of the Irish poet is made explicit in "Migration", where poets are depicted as figures which must support and defend the culture of their community. This poem begins by depicting the migration of birds at the end of the summer:

From August they embark in every wind,
Managing with grace
This new necessity, widely determined
On a landing place.
Daredevil swallows, coloured swifts go forth
Like some great festival removing south.

The sailing men of "New Territory" and "Mirages" are recalled by the main verb "embark" and the bird's necessity of "landing" in a new "place". Birds and seafarers resemble poets in their setting out on dangerous adventures. These are represented as migrant birds, inner émigrés escaping "towards the sea at night", travellers whose uprooted intellectuality causes them to feel uneasiness in the place where they live. Everything in the poem suggests movement: most of the verbs are lexical verbs of action: "embark", "go forth", "return", "lift up". This dynamism enhances the birds/ poets' determination to emigrate, to journey to new (unexplored) lands. This flight of birds forms a highly organized community: they march in an orderly whole, "in complete agreement", and they show a "bright geometry":

Cuckoo and operatic nightingale
Meeting like trains of thought
Concluding summer, in complete agreement, file
Towards the sea at night,
And find at last their bright geometry
(Triumphant overland) is not seaworthy.

In spite of their heterogeneity and difference, "daredevil swallows", "coloured swifts", "cukoo[s]", and "operatic nightingale[s]" are able to form a cohesive group. Boland's emphasis on a singular and homogeneous community of Irish poets is linked to that cultural nationalist attempt to 'invent' a national literature which integrates differences and unites the Irish people in a social bond. As Lloyd (1993: 43) has explained, according to cultural nationalists such as Daniel

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Corkery, the writer must be "the people's representative", in other words, he must represent the common identity of the Irish people. He envisages a literary culture which is "the prime agent and ground of unification" (p. 16). The terms of mid-nineteenth-century nationalist discussions are reproduced half a century later in the Irish Literary Revival. Yeats devoted three decades of his life to cultural nationalism (Lloyd 1993: 60). His earlier writings exemplify an attempt to found and forge a nation.¹⁶ Nationalist allegories such as Cathleen ni Houlihan, which Yeats for instance used in his famous 1902 play, are employed in order to convey what Lloyd names "political coherence", a common identity which overrides class and ethnic differences and unites people in a unique goal: achieving an independent nation (p. 17). We have seen how Boland captures this notion of collective unity and kinship in a good variety of poems such as "Appraisal", "The Poets", and "New Territory". Likewise, in "Migration", this community of birds form a single totality. They record a national unity, what Bhabha (1995: 141-147) would call a "pedagogical" formation of identity that seeks to turn "People into One". These birds, constantly emigrating in an organized community, resemble poets, who also meet "like trains of thought". Like in "The Poets" and "New Territory", birds/poets also find obstacles in their difficult voyage towards artistic mastery:

Sandpiper, finch and wren and goldencrest,
Whose baffled
Movements start or finish summer, now at last
Return, single and ruffled,
And lift up their voices in a world of light,
And choose their loves as though determined to forget.

Once again, images of entrapment and desolation appear in order to symbolize that poets, as birds, may feel "single and ruffled" in their exploration. "Their bright geometry", though it compensates at times ("Triumphant overland"), does not always bring happiness and it may not be "seaworthy". Like in "New Territory", the sea implies the dark side of human life. The ocean is the origin but also the end of life. As mortal human beings, poets also suffer the weakness of the human condition. Though endowed with the power of insight, they find difficulty when crossing the sea. They try to find relief in their poetry, as birds do when lifting "up their voices in a world of light". The contrast of light-dark recurs once again. Music and lightness imply the poets' ability to reveal a hidden truth, a knowledge inaccessible to common human minds. The importance of the poet's role in society results from their ability to provide lightness to "the sea at night".

¹⁶ Lloyd's contention is that the poem "Easter Rising 1916" (Yeats 1991: 119-122) marks "a certain rupture in Yeats' poetics" (1993: 70). With the nation that was founded after 1916, Yeats loses any sense of connection with nationalism, and he feels marginalized as a poet.

Though some managed to sing their songs loudly, many of them “Tumbled together without name or burial”:

As though upon their travels, as each bird
Fell down to die, the sea
Had opened, showing those above a graveyard
Without sanctity –
Birds and their masters, many beautiful,
Tumbled together without name or burial.

Those poets who manage to traverse the sea achieve “sanctity”, that is, a prominent role within the literary tradition. Yet, the sea becomes for many unknown and unsuccessful poets (as for many birds which fell down before reaching land) a symbolic unholy graveyard. Boland pays tribute to those “without name or burial” by remembering them and recalling that they belonged to a “bright geometry”, a community composed of “birds” and “masters”.¹⁷ Like in “The Poets”, poetry is viewed as a highly hierarchical artistic terrain. Boland gives voice to what commonly concerns male authors: the presence of literary predecessors, of a long tradition of ‘forefathers’, from which the conventions of genre, style, and topics are inherited. This is what Harold Bloom (1973) calls the “anxiety of influence”, the frightening prospect the male artist experiences that the writings of his literary forefathers take priority over his own work (Gilbert & Gubar 2000: 46). In “Migration”, this poetic anxiety is also experienced. Boland stands as a faithful inheritor of the work of her predecessors, a whole patriarchal literary tradition. On the other hand, she expresses her concern for all those unrecognized poets who have died “without name or burial”. We may find in this assertion Boland's radical fear to be excluded from the (male) literary canon. She feels like a ‘fledging’ among powerful ‘sandpipers’, ‘nightingales’ and ‘goldencrests’. Her gender and inexperience in a terrain which she has just occupied causes her anxiety to ‘tumble’ as those birds/writers who have died anonymously.

In this sense, the theme of emigration in Boland's poem can suggest various things. First of all, it recalls the journey towards death and disappearance all poets as human beings are bound to experience. Some of them are able to “survive” as “absentee landlord[s]” (“The Poets”), whereas others are destined to perish without “name or burial”. It is significant how Boland, at the age of 22, is obsessed with the theme of death.¹⁸ Her compulsive preoccupation with death reflects her inner anxiety to fail as an Irish artist, to lose the acceptance of Dublin's literary community. Secondly, the theme of exile recalls the large-scale number of emigrants bound to abandon Ireland

¹⁷ Curiously, this second-to-last line of the poem, “Birds and their Masters”, becomes the title of an essay by Medbh McGuckian (1993), in which she describes her indebtedness to Boland, who has been a role model for her.

¹⁸ Note the preponderance of words such as ‘death’, ‘mortal’, and ‘human’ in poems such as “Conversation” (*Poetry by Boland*), “The Gryphons”, and “The Winning of Etain” (*New Territory*).

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in the nineteenth century, due to the devastating years of the Great Famine (Eagleton 1995: 13), and in the twentieth century, as a consequence of the poverty and bad economic conditions of the country (Murphy 1997: 92). Thus, Boland feels bound to remember the lives of those who had to abandon their country, in a poem of nationalistic and elegiac tone. Thirdly, and most importantly, "Migration" perpetuates the Irish Renaissance myth of the poet as an uprooted intellectual who feels the need to 'emigrate' in order to be creative and defend his integrity as an artist.

As Boland attempts to imitate the (patriarchal) literary tradition not only thematically, but also formally, she writes "Migration" following the conventional 'accentual meter'. This poem is composed of four sestets and it follows regular stresses (ranging from three stresses in trimeters, to four and five stresses in tetrameters and pentameters). Most of the verse lines are rhymed, or near-rhymed, following the verse pattern *ababcc*. Interestingly enough, Boland plays with stress, combining trochees and iambs (an iambic line is usually followed by a trochaic one). This pattern of regularity is disrupted in the last stanza, where iambic lines follow one another. This succession of rising rhythmic lines anticipates the climax of the poem. The very absence of trochees, together with the repetition of items such as 'And', 'as' and 'as though' in the poem creates expectation and suspense. The point of greatest intensity is achieved in the last two lines of the poem, with two trochaic lines.

Emigration, exile, the tendency of the Irish spirit to abandon home are observed in the adventurous nature of almost all poetic figures in Boland's initial work: in Yeats's escape "aboard a spirit-ship" ("Yeats in Civil War", *New Territory*), in the Gaelic landlords' flight to Europe in 1607 ("The Flight of the Earls", *New Territory*), or in Derek Mahon's portrayal as a homeless pilgrim with "a rag tied to a stick" ("Belfast vs. Dublin", *New Territory*). The Romantic movement represents a departure from the attitudes and forms of classicism, and a rebellion against social rules and conventions. These poems develop precisely this image of poets as romantic dissidents, "immoral / Courtiers in unholy waste" ("Belfast vs. Dublin"), whose ethics are contrary to society's established principles, and who therefore feel uneasy in their own country.

"The King and the Troubadour" (*New Territory*) summarizes this view of the Irish artist. In this narrative poem, Boland shows, once again, that she is an excellent pupil of the dominant aesthetic tradition. This poem shares most of the defining characteristics of ballads. Reeves (1969: 50-56) explains that ballads in oral tradition were usually concerned with magical themes and recorded the emotions of the ancestors (memories of battles, revenge, and supernatural elements, for instance). As they were intended to be sung and remembered easily by itinerant singers, their rhyme was usually complete; their language was vigorous and direct. "The King and the Troubadour" is consequently written in rhyming quatrains. Its language is conventional and

familiar to all readers. As a ballad, it is loaded with vivid images and verbal parallelisms, compressed into short lines. On the other hand, it is magical in theme: it deals with a troubadour, who, like those pilgrim figures in the previous poems, feels bound to engage in a desperate search for his king, who has been imprisoned by “bitter spells” in a tower.¹⁹ By exploring themes of sentimental nature, Boland is faithful to the Irish literary tradition. Welch (2000: 18) explains that the ballad was one of the most popular poems written in Ireland after the seventeenth century. In the nineteenth century, in the hands of Irish nationalists such as Thomas David and Charles Gavan Duffy, it became a means of raising political awareness (ibid). As a political poem, it usually contained a mournful lament for the lost kingdoms of Gaelic Ireland, and “a more practical aspiration towards modern nationhood” (ibid). Writers of the Literary Revival, such as Padraic Colum in “She Moved Through the Fair”, made extensive use of the form (ibid). By employing this poetic form, Boland shows her internalization of the dominant aesthetics of the Irish literary movement of the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth. The troubadour in this poem is more than a poet and singer loyal to his king; he reminds one of the primitive Celtic bard endowed with an instinctive understanding and knowledge.

The first stanzas offer an image of a poet who, like the male characters in “The Pilgrim” and “Migration” wanders, restlessly under harsh conditions, and who gradually loses his young vigour:

A troubadour once lost his king
Who took a carven lute
And crossed the world and tuned its heart
To hear it sing.

Starved, wasted, worn, lost,
His lute his one courage,
He sang his youth to fumbling age,
Fresh years to frost.

The image of the “carven lute”, essential for the troubadour, becomes a living entity. There is something magical about music, as though supernatural powers spoke through it. Rolleston (1998: 155) has explained that poets' skill in music is constantly referred to in Irish legends. The enchanting and bewitching effect of music highlights the metaphysical portrait of the Irish poet, a druid, who, as this critic explains, was not only a master of verse, but also of other artistic skills

¹⁹ Other poems from *New Territory*, such as “The Gryphons”, also combine some of the elements of the traditional ballads and folk songs of the Ancient Celtic tradition. It touches the border of the fantastic, as in its narration of a Greek man “who begged [the gods] for deathless life”.

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such as music and science (p. 137).²⁰ In the third stanza, Boland introduces the figure of the king, who is confined within his palace and cannot hear his troubadour singing:

In bitter spells his king lay bound,
In bitter magic walled;
Within a cruel shape swelled love no sound,

Like in other poems from *New Territory* (“The Dream of Lir’s Son” and “Malediction”), Boland immerses us in a world of myth where human beings are subject to “bitter spells” and “bitter magic”. The king is under a powerful spell from which he cannot be saved: “No sight, no troubadour searching / Could set [him] free”. The doomed state that he suffers reminds one of some tragic narratives in Celtic myths and legends. Rolleston (1998:165) explains that every Irish chieftain or personage of importance had “a bond, a spell, a prohibition, a taboo, a magical injunction” which he was not supposed to transgress. This was known as the *geis*. If ever this *geis* was violated, it led to “misfortune and death” (ibid). In this narrative poem, both the troubadour and the king defy the *geis*. The minstrel, in his loyal attitude to the king, transgresses this magical spell, by finding his master and addressing him. This becomes the turning point in the tragic narrative. As “fiercely”

Came he singing finally
“My king, my king.”

To the window the king’s head
Came. The troubadour
Dashed his lute on leaf and flower
And tumbled dead,

And the king at one glance
Seeing ransom ruined,
Majesty perplexed, pined
In magic silence.

There are hardly any hyperbatons in the poem, contributing to the highly quick narration. Whenever there is a disruption in the word order, as in the line that opens the stanza above, it contributes to heightening the poetic style of the poem. Boland introduces the troubadour’s dialogue, creating vivacity in the narration. As his minstrel, the king similarly violates the “bitter spells” and goes to the window of the castle to hear his troubadour singing. Consequently, tragedy occurs, and the exhausted troubadour perishes. Therefore, the king cannot be rescued, and he is

²⁰ In “Requiem for a Personal Friend” (*New Territory*), Boland makes even more explicit how skill in music is the prerogative of the druidic poet. In poems such as this, Boland keeps the flavour of the oral tradition of Bardic poetry by equating the act of writing with the act of singing.

drawn back to his former doomed state. Nevertheless, this dramatic story is resolved positively at the end:

The rain of God gathering
Surrounded the smashed lute,
Solving its fragmented heart
Into Spring.

The king who in a cruel husk
Of charms became as tragic
Through monotonies of magic
As the dusk,

Each minstrel spring was called and sent
No horrid head, but came
Above the ground, a grassy atom
Hearty as a giant.

With the aid of the “rain of God”, the troubadour’s shattered lute recovers its initial shape. Once again, the lute is depicted in animistic terms: its “heart” has not died, but it is transformed into an enormous tree. This divine intervention could be attributed to the Christian God or to the Greek God Zeus. The introduction of the figure of the Christian God in Boland’s ballad would not be surprising. Rolleston (1998: 138-139) explains that, when Ireland was converted to Catholicism, the monks rewrote the Celtic legends, loaded with Pagan beliefs and divinities, by introducing Christian motifs. On the other hand, this God can be interpreted as Zeus. Zeus, as the father of all Gods and Goddesses, reigns over the universe, the skies and the weather phenomena (such as the rain) (Falcon Martínez et al. 1980: 630). His power over the weather is associated with fertility. Thus, when Zeus exerts “rain”, the magic lute is ‘resurrected’. Although the tragic king is still doomed and he cannot listen to the sound of the lute, for he still remains confined in the tower under the “cruel husk of charms”, the troubadour survives with the aid of God, whether Christian or mythological.

The figure of the troubadour is suggestive. He does not ultimately die at the end of the poem, because his soul, or rather his lute, is able to outlive as “a grassy atom”. As that male figure in “Appraisal”, the troubadour becomes one with nature, mingled with the flowers and the leaves of spring. In this sense, this minstrel inevitably reminds one of the poet Amergin, the founder of poetry in Ancient Ireland (Rolleston 1998: 150). When Amergin arrived for the first time in Ireland, he is said to have chanted “a strange and mystical lay”:

I am the Wind that blows over the sea,
I am the Wave of the Ocean;
I am the Murmur of the billows;
I am the Ox of the Seven Combats;

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I am the Vulture upon the rock;
I am the Ray of the Sun;
I am the fairest of the Plants;
I am a Wild Boar in valour;
I am a Salmon in the Water;
I am a Lake in the plain;
I am the Craft of the artificer;
I am a Word of Science;
I am the Spear-point that gives battle;
I am the god that creates in the head of man the fire of thought.
Who is it that enlightens the assembly upon the mountain, if not I?
Who telleth the ages of the moon, if not I?
Who showeth the place where the sun goes to rest, if not I? (Rolleston 1998: 134)

In Amergin’s composition, the poet is the “Word of Science”, the god who gives man “the fire of thought”. As science is not distinguishable from its object, as God and Nature are but one, the poet is fused with the winds and the waves, with the warrior’s arms and the wild animals. In the same way, the central figure of the troubadour in Boland’s poem seems to be mingled with nature. Although he is not able to overturn the *geis* imposed on his king, he survives at the end “hearty as a giant”. There is something magic in his “carved lute”, something supernatural in the songs he sings. Boland’s portrayal of the troubadour follows traditional depictions of the Irish poet: he is portrayed as a pilgrim constantly travelling, and also as a bard imbued with an intuitive wisdom.

7.2.4. The poet’s affinity with nature

Apart from developing the image of the poet as an uprooted traveller, in her initial work Boland also idealizes the natural landscape. In the two poems I am going to comment on, “The Dream of Lir’s Son” and “Lullaby” (*New Territory*), the poetic speakers, clearly male, establish a very close and emotional relationship with nature. In both cases, the natural surroundings are not only personified, but they are also viewed as something which exerts a powerful influence on human beings. In this sense, Boland’s initial work perpetuates the idealization of nature in early Irish poetry and more recently in the Irish Renaissance literature.

Early Irish literature offers a large amount of “nature poems”, which, as Heaney (1984b: 181) explains, exalt the untouched and unpolluted beauty of Irish landscapes.²¹ These poems exemplify the profound love and admiration early Irish poets felt for nature, and which might have its origin in the sacramental value the Celts attributed to landscape (Green 1997: 24).

²¹ Another important genre within Gaelic poetry which is related to nature poetry is the *dinnsheanchas* (meaning “knowledge of the lore of places”). As Welch (2000: 90-91) explains, early Irish literature preserves a toponymic lore, according to which “placenames are explained by reference to legends which are linked to them by means of pseudo-etymological techniques”. A large corpus of this literary tradition was gathered in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, and medieval Irish poets were expected to learn it by heart.

Although bardic poetry declined under the Elizabethan and Tudor reconquests of Ireland, their tradition did not completely die. There were still Gaelic poets in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries who gathered in rural communities in the so-called "courts of poetry", where they recited poetry and interchanged material (Praga 1996: 217-218). In the late nineteenth century, this native tradition was brought back by writers of the Irish Renaissance. Yeats, Synge, and Lady Gregory initiated a movement to revive native tradition and folklore (Kiberd 1996: 107). They devoted their writings not only to recovering the heroic legends of Cuchulain and ancient heroes, but also to creating "a vision of the western peasant as a secular saint and Gaelic mystic" (p. 171). The emphasis the Revival movement laid on locality aimed at restoring the confidence and pride in the Irish landscape. Revivalists such as Yeats, Synge, and Lady Gregory were moved by the belief that to know who you are you have to have a place to come from. Yeats's ritual invocation of places is well known. He found his poetic inspiration in what Heaney (1984a: 136) denominates "the local spirit of place", the potentiality of a rural and natural world: "Yeats's sense of the otherness of his Sligo places led him to seek for a language and an imagery other than the ones which were available to him in the aesthetic modes of literary London" (p. 135). In "The Lake Isle of Innisfree", Yeats expresses his longing for a peaceful life close to nature:

I will arise and go now, and go to Innisfree,
And a small cabin build there, of clay and wattles made:
Nine bean-rows will I have there, a hive for the honey-bee.
And live alone in the bee-loud glade.

[...]

I will arise and go now, for always night and day
I hear lake water lapping with low sounds by the shore;
While I stand on the roadway, or on the pavements grey,
I hear it in the deep heart's core. (Yeats 1989: 35)

This ritual invocation of Innisfree exemplifies the Renaissance trend to romanticize the Irish landscape, especially the western regions of the country, and the rural landscape, the world of peasants, farms, and cattle. The pastoral was an urban creation, not only by artists like Yeats, but also by politicians such as Éamon de Valera and Michael Collins. De Valera's nationalist politics sanctified rural life with a view to locating Ireland's national identity in the agricultural community (Butler 2001: 198). He fostered an ideal of Ireland as a pastoral community, Gaelic speaking, and Catholic. This utopia became essential for subsequent Irish politics: "rural Ireland was real Ireland, the farmer [was] the moral and economic backbone of the country" (Kiberd 1996: 492). That is why the Irish national movement for political and cultural liberation has been generally characterized "as more a rural than an urban phenomenon" (p. 481). The revival of the

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pastoral genre of the bardic tradition and its subsequent idealization of nature responded to several cultural and political reasons.²² As Kiberd (1996: 482) explains, the myth of a rural nation intended to undermine the differences in rural communities (mostly between labourers, the gentry, and the new land owners), intensified after the Land Acts of the 1880s. By 1916, a new group was added to the list of victims: the urban poor community negatively affected by “the rising food prices and contracting job opportunities” (p. 491). Later, the object of this rural, Gaelic myth was to forget the atrocities committed in the Civil War “by touching base with an identity perceived, however mistakenly, as native and authentic” (Butler 2001: 215).²³

Boland’s initial work follows the Irish cultural nationalist tendency to romanticize and idealize the natural and rural landscape. In contrast to her mature poems, where Boland will focus more on urban and particularly suburban landscapes, at this stage in her literary career, she is exclusively concerned with a pure and Edenic landscape, which is almost untouched by civilization. The only poems in which Boland explicitly focuses on urban landscapes are “On Giving a Cyclamen 1961”, “February 1961” (*Poetry by Boland*), and “Belfast vs. Dublin” (*New Territory*). Yet, in these poems, towns and cities such as Kiltiernan and Dublin are highly idealized as places full of “magic” and “reverence”, filled with “coloured streets”, a “gentle crowd” and “chatter of romance”. On the contrary, rural and natural landscapes predominate in her initial work. With the exception of “Yeats in Civil War” and “A Cynic and Kilmainham Gaol” (*New Territory*), where the speaker refers to a “wasted place” and “the broken/ Countryside” respectively, Boland offers a very ideal image of Ireland, as a place of unpolluted farmlands and wild woods.

The pastoralism of Boland is observed in “The Dream of Lir’s Son” (*New Territory*). This poem is one of the best examples of Boland’s initial adherence to Irish traditional poetry, not only as regards style, but also as regards content. Following the line of the poets of the Revival, Boland relies on Irish myths, in order to establish continuity with a presumably authentic Irish Celtic past. “The Dream of Lir’s Son” is based on the mythic legend of “the Fate of the Children of Lir”.²⁴ As

²² The pastoralism of Collins, De Valera, and Yeats was also partly inspired by the Romantic English movement led by Wordsworth and the Lake Poets (Kiberd 1996: 486). Irish revivalists relied on the poetics of Wordsworth, Coleridge and, most of all, Matthew Arnold, in their idealization of peasantry and the rural world, in contrast to a degenerated urban setting. Butler (2001: 199) extends the origins of the pastoral genre farther back in history, explaining that it was initially created by urban Latin poets, like Virgil and Theocritus, “as an imaginary break from the pressures of life at imperial court”.

²³ With all these idealizations of rural Ireland carried out by political thinkers and writers, it seems inevitable to find an immediate counter-movement, an anti-pastoral version of the Irish landscape. In *The Great Hunger*, Patrick Kavanagh proposes an alternative for the Yeatsian myth of romantic Ireland (Praga 1996: 63). The anti-pastoral was also put to practice by Brian O’Nolan in *An Béal Bocht* and by James Joyce in *Stephen Hero* (Kiberd 1996: 503).

²⁴ The mythological tale of the Children of Lir has always fascinated Boland, and consequently, it appears not only in her initial work (with poems such as “The Dream of Lir’s Son” and “Malediction”, *New Territory*), but also in her later work, such as in “Elegy for a Youth Changed to a Swan” (*The War Horse*) and “Escape” (*The Lost Land*).

Rolleston (1998: 114) explains, this myth, together with “The Fate of the Sons of Usna” and “The Quest of the Sons of Turenn”, forms a triad of mythical tales which are regarded as “the flower of Irish romance”. This critic even asserts that “[i]n all Celtic legend, there is no more tender and beautiful tale than this of the Children of Lir” (p. 142). Lir was a Danaan deity, and he usually appears in two distinct forms: as a vast impersonal presence as big and powerful as the sea (like the Greek Oceanus), or as a separate person dwelling invisibly in the fairy world (p. 139). According to the legend, Lir married in succession two sisters. His second wife was named Aoife. Although she was childless, Lir's former wife had given him four children (ibid). The ardent love Lir felt for the children made the stepmother jealous and she ultimately decided to transform them by spells of sorcery into four white swans. According to the doom cast by Aoife, they had to spend nine hundred years travelling incessantly from one place to another (pp. 139-142). The eldest of the four children is the girl Fionuala. Interestingly enough, she is the one to take “the lead in all their doings”, nurturing the younger children in the most tender way, and “wrapping her plumage around them on nights of frost” (p. 141). Fionuala is also the one taking the most important decisions. When their doom is finished and they turn back to their human shape, they are about to die, due to their vast old age. Fionuala is the one speaking for the four of them, and explaining how she wants to be buried: “Lay us in one grave, and place Conn at my right hand and Fiachra at my left, and Hugh before my face, for they were wont to be when I sheltered them many a winter night upon the seas of Moyle” (p. 142). Murphy (1997: 99) explains in more detail the significance of the literary image of Fionuala:

Fionuala has the power of speech, and it is she who confronts her stepmother and negotiates the terms of the children's enchantment. She explains the predicament to their father, and it is her voice that articulates the desolation of their exile and that counsels her brothers to draw on faith to endure their suffering.

In “The Dream of Lir's Son”, Boland adopts two poetic voices. On the one hand, she takes on the role of one of Lir's sons whose name is not specified (it should be either Conn or Hugh). She seems to reject at first the assertive and self-confident voice of Fionuala. Boland is like the children of Lir, hidden as a poet under someone else's appearance. On the other hand, she adopts the voice of the boy's “old sweet nurse” (a figure which also appears in “Lullaby”, *New Territory*), establishing an interesting dialogue between the two of them. Firstly, it is Lir's son who speaks in the poem. He narrates a dream he has had of a bird singing. As he himself will be transformed into a swan by the spell of his step-mother, he unconsciously predicts his coming future.²⁵ Past,

²⁵ This announced transformation into a swan is carried out in another poem from *New Territory*, “Malediction”.

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present, and future are thus intermingled in the poem. The dream begins in summer. Everything is highlighted by its very abundance:

I saw a country tree as green as grass
Clasp the simple daylight in its boughs
Like love; at last it swelled with fruit
And to its fertile house a bird brought
Its house, and sang aloud in leafy splendour
Until my ears were dazed at its air,
My human eyes dazzled at its lodging.

The speaker is praising the natural surrounding: an ideal place where nature flourishes incessantly, and where birds can constantly be heard to the delight of all hearers. Boland is being loyal to those early Irish “nature poems”, poems that praise, as Heaney (1984b: 181) explains, a “pristine world full of woods and water and birdsong”. This wealthy nature appeals to the senses in such a way that emotions are highly stirred: the speaker’s ears are “dazed” and his eyes “dazzled”. This is an untouched and unpolluted setting, unaffected by social change and civilization. Boland uses animistic and humanizing metaphors and similes to reinforce the speaker’s exaltation of nature. The tree is able to “clasp” lightness “in its boughs” just as the bird brings “its house” to the tree. Rolleston (1998: 120-121) asserts that these sorts of metaphors are very common in Celtic myths: “the tendency to attribute life to inanimate things is apparent in the Homeric literature, but exercises a very great influence in the mythology of this country”.

There is considerable musical artistry in sound patterns such as alliteration (“I saw a country *tree* as green as *grass*”). By rhythmic effects such as this one, the poet intends to make language memorable. This is also observed in other intensifying mechanisms, such as syntactic parallelisms (“my ears were dazed at its air / My human eyes dazzled at its lodging”), lexical repetitions (“And to its fertile *house* a bird brought / Its *house*”), and place (“only spared the bird to *sing*/ Who *sang* in the clipped boughs”). The speaker is in a state of extreme emotional excitation by the “leafy splendour” of the tree and the singing of the bird. All the devices commented indicate the intensity of his emotion. As Leech (1969: 84) explains, “[m]an needs to express himself superabundantly in matters which affect him deeply”.

Suddenly, the setting changes abruptly. Lir’s son narrates how, in his dream, night replaces day, and summer gives way to autumn. The tree has no more leaves and fruit, and the only thing left is the “spared” bird singing “in the clipped boughs”. This dream predicts the future of Lir’s son: he will be transformed from a happy child into a doomed swan, suffering loneliness and much hardship. After narrating his dream, his “old sweet nurse” takes the floor and attempts to cool down the speaker by telling him

"I tell, you, you were better",
His nurse answered him, "to hold this matter
Close and keep it light, for there are times
Indeed when in secret forms, dreams
Mime and play the future's mystery
Before the present; but in the main, merely
They are jackanapes of yesterday, full
Of nothing, just as after nursery school
When you were young and naughty, your good pocket
Would be filled with snails and twine, picked
As treasure by your childish brain and worthless,
And the weary mind makes no wiser choice
Asleep."

Although the 'nurse' tells him not to worry, she announces that the menace Lir's son felt in his dream will actually occur. Life, the nurse seems to announce, is a cyclical repetition: human beings are like "jackanapes of yesterday", mischievous children whose attitudes predict their future. In their "naughty" manner of filling their pockets "with snails and twine", they anticipate what is going to be their adulthood. Lir's son, who after nursery school also picked these "treasures", will be bound as a swan to fill his mouth with "snails and twine" in order to survive. The nurse wisely concludes: "the weary mind makes no wiser choice/ Asleep". Dreams, she seems to proclaim, anticipate and 'mime' the future, in the same way as childhood is another manifestation of adulthood.

As Boland is writing poems such as this one from a traditional perspective, one presupposes that the nurse (a traditional feminine role) is clearly a woman. Lir's son may be addressing Fionuala, a nurturing mother/sister who takes care of her siblings. In this case, Boland may implicitly be giving authority to a female speaker. It is her voice that gives significance to her brother's dream, predicting his future by her ability to see beyond. The fact that Lir's son addresses her as 'nurse' implies that she is the one that may counsel him in his suffering, realizing her capacity to protect him under 'her wings'. On the other hand, if we understand 'nurse' as an influential person, we may also view this figure as the poet. This last interpretation will parallel the image of those figures which have already appeared in poems such as "New Territory", for instance, empowered visionaries endowed by their capacity to decipher dreams. Thus, Lir's son relies on the power of the druidic poet, who, as an intermediary of god and man, has a knowledge superior to that of the common people. Thus, 'nurse' may be interpreted as Fionuala or as the poet figure. In the first case, Boland would be employing the myth of the Children of Lir as a way of exploring the possibility of placing a woman speaking at the centre of the poem. Nevertheless, she does this implicitly, because she avoids making any reference to the gender of the 'nurse'. It is the reader who has to read between the lines. Only a good acquaintance of the mythical legend will

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enable the addressee to arrive at this first reading. Boland’s reluctance to give explicit information about the nurse’s gender may arise from her fear to be excluded from the (male) literary canon. As we have explained, women poets were expected to keep their womanhood hidden: any explicit empowerment of the female voice will discard the work as dealing excessively with woman’s issues and hence worthless (interview with Allen-Randolph 1993b: 118). The second possible interpretation of ‘nurse’ would be that of the poet. Accordingly, Boland would employ the myth to show the poet’s capacity of vision, his powers of articulation and prediction. ‘Nurse’ in this sense would enhance Boland’s initial interest in exploring the role of the poet in society, how he signifies a special person by his extraordinary competence in discernment and perception.

The employment of this myth is quite canonical. Boland is writing about conventional topics, as she has made explicit in a passage in *Object Lessons*, where she recounts the exact moment when she wrote poems like this one:

It is late at night. The room is airless and warm. The overhead light is on, and the coffee jug is empty. I am just a few days short of my twentieth birthday. When I sit down to write, I have an uncanny sense of spoiled identity and uncertain origin. I start to write about a swan. It is a legendary image at first, cloaked in the resonance of a myth. I try the stanzas, the structures. I write down nouns and adjectives. [...] Finally, only when most of what I write has been scrapped, I see the image for what it is. I see a swan that has never been imagined, only received. (Boland 1996a: 105)

The style is equally traditional. The poet chooses her usual combination of trochees and iambs. The first speech of Lir’s son is constructed by a regular succession of iambic and trochaic pentameters. The nurse’s speech, on the other hand, is constructed entirely on iambic lines, with the exception of one trochaic pentameter (“Mime and play the future’s mystery”). The absence of variation in the rhythmic pattern indicates that the nurse is addressing Lir’s son in a much more calmed speech. He or she is under control and all the verse lines, consequently, follow the same rising rhythm. Throughout the poem, the poetic language of both speakers is highly rhetorical. Boland uses what Mahon (1993: 25) denominates “quaint language”, that is, an attractively old-fashioned style. The linguistic archaism “jackanapes”, and the irregular order of syntactic elements in “it stripped bare the tree” reflects a resurrection of bygone ages.

In another poem from *New Territory*, “Lullaby”, Boland develops even further the speaker’s closeness with nature. As a conventional schoolgirl versifier, Boland follows the pattern of traditional nursery rhymes. “Lullaby” is built upon a nearly regular rhyme scheme (*aabbccdeffgghijj*), similar to that used in the heroic couplet. Thus, once again, we perceive Boland’s awareness of the aesthetic dominant tradition. In this poem, Boland enacts the role of a

“young and naughty” boy who is in a process of discovering the suggestive power and strength of nature:

O nurse, when I was a rascal boy, bold
February winds were snaffling gold
Out of the crocuses; there in grief
For the pretty, gaudy things I'd cry: “Stop thief”
And you would grumble: “Child, let be, let be.”
Or we would come across a sapling tree
To discover frost sipping its new blood:
I'd join my arms around its perished wood
And weep, and you would say: “Now child, its place
Is in a merry hearth, not your embrace.”
And one April morning that was filled
With mating tunes, a nest of finches spilled
Which slipped its flowering anchor in a gale.
I cupped one in my fingers, dead and small.
But late that night you stole to me on tiptoe
And whispered: “Child, child, the winds must blow.”

We hear a child addressing once again his nurse, with the initial vocative “O nurse”. This vocative is greatly significant, for it reminds one of those traditional evocations to the poetic muse, or to the beloved maiden of the male artist: Shakespeare's “Oh mistress mine!”, William Blake's “O Rose, thou art sick”, John Keats's “O Goddess! Hear these tuneless numbers”, Lord Tennyson's “O love, they die in yon rich sky”, Edward Lear's “O lovely Pussy! O Pussy, my love” are just a few of a long list of examples.²⁶ In this sense, Boland is imitating the conventional poetic way of evoking someone on whom the speaker is emotionally dependent. Like in this previous poem, animistic metaphors abound. The boy discovers that February winds are dangerous, because they are stealing “gold out of the crocuses”; he finds frost “sipping” the “new blood” of a sapling tree and believes gales to be intentionally destroying “a nest of finches”. Like in “The Dream of Lir's Son”, there is great lyric artistry in these lines. This is an Edenic paradise, filled with “flowering anchor[s]” and “mating tunes”, but also a cruel and merciless nature which enacts its rage against the weakest. The child's anguish and initiative to defy nature is soothed by his nurse. He or she continuously calms the boy by telling him that he must keep aside, for “the winds must blow”. Like in “The Dream of Lir's Son”, the nurse embodies the extraordinary competence of discernment and perception. He or she is the child's caretaker, holding back the boy's imagination, and keeping under control his unbridled necessity to save helpless creatures such as flowers and finches from perishing. The nurse's authority is enhanced by the modal ‘must’ in the last line of the poem, which indicates the existence of established rules the boy should not trespass. Because

²⁶ Lines taken from Shakespeare's “Oh Mistress Mine” (Abrams et al. 1993a: 806), Blake's “The Sick Rose” (Abrams et al. 1993b: 36), Keats's “Ode to Psyche” (Abrams et al. 1993b: 788), Tennyson's “The Splendor Falls” (Hollander 1996: 68), and Lear's “The Owl and the Pussy-cat” (Hollander 1996: 133).

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of the boy's behavior, the nurse complains in a discontented manner: grumbling impatiently and coercively rebuking him (note the repetition of "Child, child" in the last line, which implies that the nurse is losing his/her patience).

Boland's enactment of a male character, the boy, is highly significant. The childlike stance is a noteworthy feature of nineteenth-century poetry by women. Gilbert and Gubar (2000: 591) explain that some women poets such as Emily Dickinson adopt striking distorted images in their poems, as child figures, because of their confusion about their own sense of identity as women writers. Enacting the part of a child, these critics suggest, enables Dickinson to forget her female adulthood and to escape from the responsibilities of women at home behind the mask of a playful and high spirited child (pp. 591-593).²⁷ In the case of Eavan Boland, it is her sense of female powerlessness, her impossibility to define herself as a woman, even less as a woman writer, which may provoke her childish enactment. In this poem, the child is described as having a tremendous imagination which is constantly thwarted by his nurse. His ingenuity and creativity might be read as an allegory of the author's womanhood: the child's desire to carry out his own intentions may unconsciously hide Boland's own wish to give voice to her own experiences as a woman. The child's ambition is restrained by the nurse, in the same way as Boland's aspirations are silenced by a constraining literary tradition. As the very same title, "Lullaby", indicates, this poem aims to lull the child to sleep. Similarly, Boland's self, her own female identity, is slumbered by this soothing song. This is a poet who is writing within very well defined parameters. Writing as a woman writer would signify a dangerous subversion of the inherited tradition and, hence, her banishment from the community of Ireland's poets. Thus, Boland feels constrained to express her own womanhood, needless to say, to identify herself as a feminine persona.

On the other hand, we should also bear in mind that by enacting the role of a child, Boland shows, once again, the great influence Yeats exerts on her initial work. Yeats equated childhood with an ideal of peasantry: both of them were recommended as "zone[s] in which the older forms of culture now jeopardized by modernity are preserved in oral tradition" (Kiberd 1996: 104). Thus, it is not surprising to find that one of this poet's favourite rhymes is "wild" and "child" (p. 102). Boland also establishes a parallelism between childhood and everything which is pure. The child teaches us that the natural thing is to feel affinity and closeness with nature. The boy's world in the poem is the adult poet's heart desire: she would like to live on "one April morning [...] filled/ With mating tunes" with the same childlike intensity.

²⁷ See, for instance, the childlike stance adopted by Dickinson in "A Narrow Fellow in the Grass" (Hollander 1996: 159-160).

Similarly, in “the Winning of Etain”, the long final poem in *New Territory*, Boland keeps with the mood of idealizing the countryside, as when dramatizing the love encounter between the Irish mythological figures of Etain and Aengus: “All about them acorns and dried leaves/ Lay close as gold and silver at a feast,/ Friendly trees shaded them like slaves/ And the sun rising was their priest”. Boland envisages an idealized couple living in a timeless and purified landscape, a perfect and sacred Eden unaffected by social change. In this sense, land is perceived in Boland's work as a place impossible to inhabit, a place the speaker has to leave, to emigrate from. Poets are like Lir's sons, doomed to wander the seas with much suffering and distress. This view of the Irish landscape is counteracted by its romantic depiction as a utopian paradise, a delightful place where the poet can find innocence, bliss and, ultimate happiness.

7.2.5. Two kinds of Irish political poems

As we have seen, one of the main preoccupations in Boland's initial work is the role of the (male) poet and ‘his’ sources of poetic authority. In the literary climate of Dublin, as she explains in an interview, Boland absorbs “a very powerful model of being an Irish poet”:

Poets [...] were definitely communal figures. People were measured and steered by them in a way that's hard to get back to now. I'd seen this tempting, charming, hidden city, with all its self-confidence and talk – and the poet right at the centre of it. I found that difficult to resist. (Allen-Randolph 1999b: 297)

Boland internalizes this role of the poet as a spokesperson for the Irish community who must give voice to ‘his’ people's dispossession. In the literary tradition mostly of the Revival period, the political poem was almost limited to the public event and its communal interpretation. James Clarence Mangan's “Dark Rosaleen” and “The Woman of Three Cows”, Patrick Pearse's “I am Ireland” and “The Rebel”, and Francis Ledwidge's “The Blackbirds” (Kennelly 1971: 149, 154, 295, 298, 305) are some examples of this. These writers were only concerned with public and external issues as subject matters for their poems and their work aimed at inciting patriotic feelings in their readers. Boland develops the traditional ‘political’ poem of the Irish Revival, a poem that is exclusively concerned with national affairs, such as the fight for cultural and political independence:

When I began writing, an Irish poem was a very definite, tangible thing. It was as if there was a fixed space where the poet was expected to stand and speak. Right in the middle of the poem – the voice directed in a triangle relation with the subject and object. [...] It was a very potent mix of obligation and oratory. (Interview with Allen-Randolph 1999b: 299)

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As a mature poet, Boland views Irish poetry as dangerously conscripted. The national issue, she claims, laid a whole new set of claims for the Irish poet, who had become a communal figure and an eloquent patriot at the service of Irish society (ibid). As an apprentice poet, Boland takes this pre-established role for granted. This is well observed in a poem such as “After the Irish of Egan O’Rahilly” (*New Territory*), in which a male voice is speaking on behalf of a dispossessed Irish people. It addresses the enemy, the Protestant English, who is destined to be driven from Ireland.

In this poem, Boland particularly adopts the voice of the seventeenth-century poet O’Rahilly (1670-1726), one of the last Gaelic poets who were trained at a latter-day bardic school (Welch 2000: 296). This poetic school was one among many others which proliferated in Ireland and Gaelic Scotland down to the middle of the seventeenth century (p. 20). The training poets received there had its roots in the druidic learning associated with the religion of Celtic Ireland. According to Welch (2000: 20), poets, also referred to as ‘fili’, were at that time bardic figures who had “a special responsibility towards traditional knowledge, laws, [and] language”. From the twelfth to the seventeenth century, the bardic caste had a prominent influence on a society which was profoundly conservative and based on privilege. O’Rahilly, whose original Gaelic name is Aodhagán Ó Rathaille, was one of these well-recognized bards at that time.

Taking into account the above-mentioned, it is not surprising that Boland incorporates this figure in her initial work. As we have seen at this stage in her literary career, Boland holds the view that the poet is a special person, endowed with specific powers unknown to other human beings. In “After the Irish of Egan O’Rahilly”, Boland creates her own version of O’Rahilly’s poem “Is fada liom oíche”, a heavy-hearted lament of the Irish defeat at the battle of the Boyne on July 1st 1690 (Welch 2000: 296).²⁸ This battle was fought between the supporters of James II, England’s last Catholic monarch, and William III, the Protestant English king (p. 38). James II and his Irish Catholic supporters (known as the Jacobites) were defeated, and the Protestant ascendancy was confirmed in Ireland. O’Rahilly was one poet among many others in the seventeenth century to mourn the defeat of Catholicism in the battle of the Boyne. Welch (2000: 309) explains that, mostly after the battle of Kinsale of 1603, Catholicism was central to the cultural identity of Ireland. A sort of political poetry emerged in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In this kind of literature, a communal voice speaks in the first person on behalf of the Irish oppressed people. He carries out a premonition according to which the enemy (both Protestant and English speaking) will be defeated. One of its most common literary genres was the *aisling*, poems in which the female persona of Ireland (usually represented as a fairy maiden of remarkable beauty) encounters the poet, engages in a dialogue with him, and declaims a prophecy

²⁸ Boland is one exponent of a long list of Irish poets, such as James Stephens, James Clarence Mangan, Séan Ó Tuama, and Thomas Kinsella, who have either translated or written versions of O’Rahilly’s work (Welch 2000: 296).

of the return of Catholicism to Ireland. The link between poetry and prophecy is not only exclusive to this new kind of political poetry, but it dates back to Ancient Ireland. Rolleston (1998: 82-83) explains that no political decision was taken by the Celtic kings without asking the advice of the druids/poets. Similarly, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, prophecy was essential in political matters (Welch 2000: 309). Poets, in their prophetic vision, were treated as indispensable figures for the future of independent Ireland. They saw in James II, the Catholic king defeated in the battle of the Boyne and exiled to France, the idealized Irish king "destined to return and save his people" (Welch 2000: 309). His son and grandson also acquired this idealized role and, throughout the eighteenth century, "the main focus of Irish political poetry was the house of Stuart and the Jacobite cause" (pp. 309-310).

O'Rahilly develops this kind of political poetry. Most of his work laments the physical and psychological damage inflicted upon Ireland. "Créachta Crích Fódla" and "Is fada liom oíche" were written after the battle of the Boyne (Welch 2000: 296). "Tionól na bhFear Muimhneach" is an *aisling* describing the Jacobites military preparations in Munster for an imminent invasion. Similarly, in "Mac an Cheannaí" and "Gile na Gile", O'Rahilly depicts Ireland as a beautiful young woman who is mourning the loss of Catholic heroes (ibid).

In "After the Irish of Egan O'Rahilly", Boland reincorporates this theme. The choice of the male persona in the voice of the seventeenth-century poet indicates Boland's willingness to perpetuate the bardic tradition. Boland maintains the heartbroken lament of O'Rahilly's poem. In her own version of the poem, the poetic voice adopts the communal stance she will sharply criticize in her mature poetry. The narrator is speaking in the first person, on behalf of his dispossessed community. The poem is a set of carefully patterned six-line stanzas. In the original version, O'Rahilly employs the *amhrán* meter, a type of accentual verse (characterized by having a regular number of stressed feet and an irregular number of syllables in the lines) which has "a richly assonated stanzaic form" (Welch 2000: 236). Boland recomposes the original poem. She maintains its accentual feature (all verse lines have two or four stresses), but avoids the assonance of O'Rahilly's poem. In the seventeenth century, this poet emphasized his angry lament by means of harsh and discordant consonants. In order to maintain this effect, Boland substitutes assonance by enumeration and repetitive and redundant structures which aim to intensify the speaker's desolation:

Without flocks or cattle or the curved horns
Of cattle, in a drenching night without sleep,
My five wits on the famous uproar
Of the wave toss like ships,
And I cry for boyhood long before
Winkle and dogfish had defiled my lips.

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This is a lonely and devastated voice speaking in “a drenching night without sleep”. As a bardic poet, he has a special responsibility towards his own society, and he cannot remain indifferent towards the dispossession of his people. His “five wits” are agonizing, they “toss” like the waves. “The famous uproar” of the waves recalls the battle of the Boyne, the agitation and disturbance between Catholic Jacobites and Protestant Williamites in 1690. As their defeat meant the defilement of Catholicism, the poet’s lips are polluted with “Winkle and dogfish” and he longs for purity. Thus, O’Rahilly cries for “boyhood”, for rejuvenation. As the minstrel in “The King and the Troubadour”, the speaker realizes that he has lost his young vigour, his earlier mental and physical strength. There is a constant preoccupation in Boland’s initial work with the passing of time, and in particular, with the consequent degeneration of the poet’s visionary powers. In this poem, the death, loneliness, and spiritual decay that threatens O’Rahilly acts also as a bemoaning for the end of a past age, the ancient Gaelic order.²⁹ The speaker yearns to restore the original condition and privilege of his community, which long before had been usurped by the English intruders. This lamenting speech continues in the second stanza, where O’Rahilly mourns the death of the prince who had protected him:

O if he lived, the prince who sheltered me,
And his company who gave me entry
On the river of the Laune,
Whose royalty stood sentry
Over intricate harbours, I and my own
Would not be desolate in Dermot’s country.

Like in “Lullaby”, the speaker employs the traditional poetic vocative, in order to refer to James II, the defeated Catholic king at the battle of the Boyne. The “river of the Laune” and the “intricate harbours” refer to this battle. As his king is dead, O’Rahilly is like that lost minstrel in “The King and The Troubadour”, constantly strolling in search of his patron. The significance of the reference to Dermot should not be underestimated. As Rolleston (1998: 47) explains, Dermot Mackervall was a king ruling in Ireland in the sixth century, a hundred years after the introduction of Christianity by St. Patrick. Dermot established for the first time an effective central authority, an authority represented by the High King. This figure symbolized “the impulse which was about to move Irish people towards true national unity” (p. 47). By referring to this well-known legendary king of Ireland, O’Rahilly makes explicit not only his desire for an idealized king who will save his people, but also the possibility of an independent Ireland free from its oppressors. His

²⁹ In poems such as “Shakespeare” and “Comic Shakespeare” (*New Territory*), Boland imagines how the Elizabethan writer finds his artistic skills threatened as he grows old and faces death. In other poems such as “The Gryphons” and “The Poets” (*New Territory*), death and loss are also recurrent motives.

advocacy of Dermot's return is followed by a profusion of references to other Irish heroes and brave rulers who had been defeated in the past:

Fierce McCarthy Mor whose friends were welcome.
McCarthy of the Lee, a slave of late,
McCarthy of Kanturk whose blood
Has dried underfoot:
Of all my princes not a single word –
Irrevocable silence ails my heart,

My heart shrinks in me, my heart ails
That every hawk and royal hawk is lost;
From Cashel to the far sea
Their birthright is dispersed
Far and near, night and day, by robbery
And ransack, every town oppressed.

The different Irish heroes the speaker refers to belong to the ancient clan of the McCarthy, an Irish family ruling over the Gaelic kingdom of Desmond (south Munster). Of the three names mentioned, McCarthy Mor (the head of the royal dynasty in Desmond during the twelfth century) is the best known. This branch of the family was extinct with the death of the last of that line in 1773.³⁰ In this sense, O'Rahilly mourns the disappearance of his 'authentic' roots, the death of Irish legendary heroes who made their resistance to imperial rulers systematic. They are allegorized as 'hawks', aggressive and combative warriors, whose special status have been silenced by the Protestant English. In this sense, O'Rahilly recounts a frustrated quest for national independence. Boland elaborates once again a formalized literary language. The verbal parallelism of the third and fourth stanza, the use of tautology such as "every hawk and royal hawk" and pleonasm in "robbery/ and ransack" enhance the declamatory force of O'Rahilly's speech, as well as his inner restlessness. As Leech (1969: 137) explains, these semantically redundant expressions are used in order to heighten the poetic language and express the speaker's great intensity of emotion. Nevertheless, as a communal figure, O'Rahilly's must not only express the sorrow of his people, but he must also predict the coming of the new 'Messiah', that "holy boy" who appeared in "New Territory" and will restore Ireland to the Irish. In this sense, his mournful speech gives way at the end of the poem to a more combative discourse, which defies the enemy more openly:

Take warning wave, take warning crown of the sea,
I, O'Rahilly – witless from your discords –
Were Spanish sails again afloat
And rescue on your tides,
Would force this outcry down your wild throat,
Would make you swallow these Atlantic words.

³⁰ From <http://www.iol.ie/~edmo/mccarthy.html> and <http://mccarthy.montana.com/MacCarthyMor.html>. Read on January 24th, 2005.

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Though O’Rahilly admits that his intellect is in decay, that he is “witless from your discords”, he achieves in the end the rejuvenation that he aspired to in the first stanza. The use of imperatives enhances O’Rahilly’s authoritarian status. His bitter “outcry” has all the power of the ocean waves and courageously confronts the enemy, proclaiming Ireland’s liberation. Furthermore, in this poem, as well as in “Appraisal” (*Poetry by Boland*), the poet is portrayed as a superior person, endowed by his powers of predictions. In the latter poem, for instance, the role of the poet is envisaged as a person who has to keep alive the dream of the Jacobite armies coming to liberate his community:

O he knows
That days of such destruction should be passed
In one another’s arms, kissing with bold
And lovely confidence, planting the rows on rows
Of promises, until the winter die is cast.

In “Appraisal”, the poet is socially and morally determined to remember those moments when the Gaelic world was at its full splendour: “he is born to” keep alive “a calm faced memory”, a memory that will feed their anti-colonialist hearts. Like this figure in “Appraisal”, O’Rahilly, in his prophetic overthrow of the English government, envisages the coming of “Spanish sails”. As has been explained, Spain, as a Catholic country, was of great help to the Irish landlords when fighting English rulers. King Philip III of Spain, who was at war with Britain, sent an army of 4,000 men to help the Irish (Canny 1989: 113). Though they were defeated in the Battle of Kinsale in 1601, Spain, since then, was an allied country for the Gaelic Irish. Thus, O’Rahilly, empowered by the help of the Spanish boats, foresees a free Ireland, an independent Catholic nation.

In short, “After the Irish of Egan O’Rahilly” exemplifies Boland’s attempt to connect herself with her native tradition. She writes the traditional Irish political poem, which travels back “into the rough angers, the street ballads, into the music of anxiety of a nationalist song [...], into the folk memory of bardic purpose and invective” (Boland 1996a: 104). In this sense, Boland internalizes the conventional Irish literary strategy of sublimating and aestheticizing the national turmoil. She adopts the male angry lament of O’Rahilly, a communal voice right at the centre of the poem speaking on behalf of the oppressed Irish. Consequently, she avoids, once again, the use of the female voice.

Whereas in this poem Boland perpetuates the communal stance of a male poet highly engaged in national issues, her stance in this initial work is much more complicated than what it looks at first sight. In other poems from *New Territory*, such as “Yeats in Civil War”, Boland questions the validity of the political poem itself. Yeats advocated a new kind of Irish poetry, one which aims to be ‘national’, which gives voice to Irish national identity, rather than ‘nationalist’,

that sort of political poem which aimed at inciting rebellion (Webb 1991: xxxii). According to Boland (1996a: 187), Yeats was able to create a “genuinely radical poem”, because he proposed a “private world” in a political poem. As we have seen, it was by relying on Celtic myths and legends that Yeats wished to locate Ireland's cultural unity. This new political poem was not so openly public and it established an interesting relationship between the inner and outer world of the artist.

Fed by the romantic ideas about Irish poetry, and under a clear Yeatsian influence, in her initial work Boland is concerned with how she can join the private and the public world.³¹ As Haberstroh (1996: 61) notes, “Yeats in Civil War” honours Yeats as “the poet-explorer of the imagination”. The poem is a Shakespearean sonnet. It is composed of three quatrains and a final couplet, following the rhyme scheme *ababcdcdefefgg*.³² Boland admires Yeats's ability to escape from the horrors of war by his inhabiting a world of fantasy and imagination. In particular, she refers to the period when Yeats was living in Thoor Ballylee at the time of the Civil War in the 1920s. Yeats had bought a Norman tower, with two adjacent cottages, in the village of Ballylee, Galway (Boland & Mac Liammóir 1971: 92). Mostly in his older years, Yeats was open to the receipt of public affairs and he was even elected as a Senator (p. 97). Nevertheless, in his poetry, he distances himself from the external political conflict, adopting a non-committed perspective. Boland's admiration of Yeats is prompted by his ability to destabilize public reality through the intensity of his private world, his internal emotions. In his collection of poetry *The Tower* (published in 1928), Yeats makes explicit his attitude towards public events. In the long lyrical poem that gives the title to this volume, he rejects any involvement in public affairs:

It is time that I wrote my will;
I choose upstanding men
That climb the streams until
The fountain leap, and at dawn
Drop their cast at the side
Of dripping stone; I declare
They shall inherit my pride,
The pride of people that were
Bound neither to Cause nor to State. (Yeats 1991: 133)

By shutting himself away in his tower, Yeats makes explicit his contempt towards the conflictive reality. He describes the Civil War as an incongruous event, characteristic of an age in which moral values are impaired and worn-out:

³¹ This interest will not fade in her mature work, quite the contrary. As we will see, Boland will continue with this attempt to destabilize the traditional Irish political voice. Her private world as a woman will seek to break the public order, i.e. break the belief that the Irish poet should be a communal voice.

³² Other poems which also imitate the conventional Shakespearean sonnet include “The Comic Shakespeare”, from *New Territory* (no other verse form could pay better homage to Shakespeare).

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What shall I do with this absurdity –
O heart, O troubled heart – this caricature,
Decrepit age that has been tied to me
As a dog’s tail? (Yeats 1991: 129)

In this sense, poems such as “The Tower” explicitly announce Yeats’s deliberate distance from political issues, from a world in which people are only “rage-driven, rage-tormented, and rage-hungry” (p. 141). Adopting this ‘apolitical’ positioning allows him to see with more clarity and arrive at the conclusion that the fighting patriot struggles for an unrealistic ideal, “plunges towards nothing, arms and fingers / spreading wide / For the embrace of nothing” (ibid). The only way to escape from this unbearable and “senseless tumult” surrounding him is to cultivate his wits, to keep his soul alive (ibid). In section five of “The Tower”, “The Road at my Door”, Yeats narrates his encounter with two men involved in the Civil War, and makes explicit his ability to detach himself from the conflict, which has even extended to the rural setting:

An affable Irregular,
A heavily-built Falstaffian man,
Comes cracking jokes of civil war
As though to die by gunshot were
The finest play under the sun.

A brown Lieutenant and his men,
Half-dressed in national uniform,
Stand at my door, and I complain
Of the foul weather, hail and rain,
A pear-tree broken by the storm

I count those feathered balls of soot
The moor-hen guides upon the stream,
To silence the envy in my thought;
And turn towards my chamber, caught
In the cold snows of a dream. (Yeats 1991: 139)

Here, Yeats meets the irregular at his front door and hears him talking facetiously about violence and death. Then, he meets his opposite number, a lieutenant in the newly constituted national army, with whom he engages in a trivial conversation about the natural violence of the weather. At the end of the poem, Yeats counts the moorhen’s ducklings to suppress his own ambiguous feelings about the world of action, to silence “the envy in my thought”. Eventually, he turns towards his chamber, caught in “a dream”. Thus, after describing himself as a coward envious of the heroes’ courage, Yeats denounces the horrors of an age full of “rage” and violence, and hides himself out in a private world of dreams.

Boland’s “Yeats in Civil War” begins with an epigraph quoting some lines from Yeats’s volume of poetry *The Tower*:

Presently a strange thing happened:
I began to smell honey in places
Where honey could not be.

These lines portray the poet in one of his moments of maximum comfort. He has managed to become a recluse in an imaginary world, set apart from the barbarity of war. In this withdrawal, the "smell of honey" symbolizes all the sweetness, the happiness, and relief Yeats finds. In fact, bees are a recurrent image in Yeats's poetry, and he constantly evokes them in "The Tower":

We had fed the heart on fantasies,
The heart's grown brutal from the fare;
More substance in our enmities
Than in our love; O honey-bees,
Come build in the empty house of the stare. (Yeats 1991: 139-140)

The "honey bees" help Yeats to inhabit, as a dreamer and an escapist, a world of fantasy and imagination. Boland finds in Yeats an attractive example to follow. By writing this poem following the verse form of the Shakespearean sonnet, Boland pays homage to Yeats, who was an occasional sonneteer (Strand & Boland 2000: 58). The first quatrain portrays him as adopting a deliberated spiritual and physical reclusion in Thoor Ballylee:

In middle age you exchanged the sandals
Of a pilgrim for a Norman keep
In Galway. Civil war started, vandals
Sacked your country, made off with your sleep.

The speaker praises Yeats for disengaging from the quest for the sacred ideal of the State, an aspiration that moved those rebels of the Easter Rising and their subsequent followers in the Civil War. The tower, in this sense, comes to represent Yeats's soul. In order to avoid the violence outside his tower, Yeats is portrayed as escaping by means of his imagination:

Somehow you arranged your escape
Aboard a spirit-ship which every day
Hoisted sail out of fire and rape,
And on that ship your mind was stowaway.

The sun mounted on a wasted place,
But the wind at every door and turn
Blew the smell of honey in your face
Where there was none. Whatever we may learn

You are its sum, struggling to survive –
A fantasy of honey your reprieve.

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Yeats's "spirit-ship" allows him to sail to a 'foreign' country, to another realm of existence. He is elevated, "hoisted", as those lions in "The Poets" which were lifted to "Betelguese and Mars". This metaphor reminds one of Yeats's "Sailing to Byzantium", in which the poet imaginatively sails the seas and goes "To the holy city of Byzantium", to a lost civilization of "Monuments of unageing intellect" and "Grecian goldsmiths" (Yeats 1991: 128-129). While the sun ascends over a devastated and destroyed land, the poet finds comfort in "the smell of honey" "at every door and turn". By portraying Yeats's powerful imagination, his ability to find reprieve from a world of violence, Boland makes explicit, once again, her concept of the Irish poet. As we have seen in "New Territory" and "The Poets", Boland views the poet as a Romantic figure, a bard removed from the commonplace. Yeats exemplifies Boland's ideal poetic figures. He is raised to the highest status ever possible: Yeats is "the sum" of what Boland and her colleagues might ever learn. The final couplet is the most powerful part of the sonnet. In contrast to what is usual in her initial work, the poet introduces an enjambment between the final two stanzas, which increases the speed of the poem and highlights the speaker's emotional exaltation of Yeats. The poem is constructed almost entirely in iambic lines. When trochees occur, as in "You are its sum, struggling to survive", their aim is to create a disruption of the expected pattern of initial unstressed syllables. This disruption is intended to mark this line as the greatest point of intensity and force. "You are its sum" is a powerful and important declaration, and, as such, it must be highlighted by placing the stress in the word 'You'. The dissonance of this line requires resolution. Hence, the final line of the poem returns to the expected pattern of iambs: "A fantasy of honey your reprieve".

In this sense, Boland's attitude towards the role of the national poet is contradictory. As we have seen, she adopts O'Rahilly's eloquent patriotism in her poetry. On the other hand, she shows her indebtedness to Yeats, defending his immersion within a private world of emotions and his reaction to writing the traditional political poem. The contradictory pulls experienced by Boland can be summarized as follows: whether to follow the kind of art advocated by "literary nationalists" such as Thomas Davis, a poetry whose main aim is to foster political awareness; or whether to imitate "literary patriots" such as Yeats, whose work mainly intended to create a worthy national literature that could compete on equal terms with European culture (Boyce 1991: 321). The fact that in "After the Irish of Egan O'Rahilly" she employs the traditional political poem she rejects in other poems in the volume suggests that Boland is confused about the kind of poem she should write. In her initial years as a writer, Boland imitates the prevailing modes of the dominant poetic tradition, but she encounters difficulties, as whether to follow O'Rahilly (in his strict nationalist political poems) or Yeats (in his rather privatized and personal speech).

Nevertheless, in spite of this confusion, what is clear is that Boland maintains an uncritical attitude towards notions such as 'Irishness' and 'national belonging'. In contrast to her more mature production (see section 7.4.3), the woman poet takes for granted the concept of the nation. That is why, like most of her Irish (male) predecessors, her work attempts to honour the memory of those heroes who, throughout history, have taken an active role in the formation of the Irish nation. I will analyze this aspect in the following section.

7.2.6. A commemoration of lost heroes

As was hinted at in "After the Irish of Egan O'Rahilly", a very important constitutive aspect of Boland's initial work is the remembrance of lost heroes and defeated Irish warriors. This is more explicitly manifested in "The Flight of the Earls" and "A Cynic at Kilmainham Gaol" (*New Territory*), where Boland views poetry as a nostalgic recollection of the past history of Ireland. In both poems, the poet is conceived of as a worshipper, a voice that must honour and pay tribute to those who have fought for Ireland's independence.

"The Flight of the Earls" is dedicated to Brendan Kennelly, a poet, dramatist, and novelist born in 1936 who met Boland during her university years in Dublin (Welch 2000: 181). Once again, Boland specifically states her need of comradeship, and her desire to be considered one poet among the male poets. In this poem, she mentions one of the events which drastically changed Irish society: the expropriation of land property to all Gaelic Catholic landlords by the British government in 1603 and their subsequent flight to Europe in 1607. In order to understand this event and its significance, it is necessary to go back some centuries earlier. Although it was in the twelfth century when Britain carried out the military conquest of Ireland, Canny (1989: 88) explains that their settlement was only partial. Until the late fifteenth century, Ireland was under the control of Gaelic or Gaelicized lords (p. 96). This was due to the fact that the government in London was more interested in continental policy than in Irish affairs (p. 97). Ireland in the middle ages was fragmented into a series of political lordships, each ruled by a particular lord (p. 90). Some of these lords were descendants of the Anglo-Norman settlers who had occupied Ireland during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries (the 'Old English'). Nevertheless, the majority were of Gaelic origin, descendants of Irish natives before colonization. These Irish landlords continued to be the predominant political influence in Ireland. Their increased monopolization of power meant a reduction in the authority of the Crown government (p. 91). Nevertheless, their situation drastically began to change in the mid-1590s. Tension resulted from two conflicting reform strategies, "each calling upon different allegiances" (p. 102). The first reform was sponsored by the British government which, conscious of the weakness of central institutions in Ireland, saw the

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need to emphasize the obligation of landlords to prove their fidelity to the Crown (ibid). King Henry VIII, who denied the authority of the Pope in spiritual terms, established himself as the supreme head of the Church and the representative of the Crown. The second reform was led by the Counter-Reformers, who emerged as opponents of the Crown government, and demanded the Irish people to remain loyal to the Catholic religion. Catholic counter-reformers, initially the Gaelic landlords, were quite successful in the sixteenth century and even succeeded in making an alliance with the Old English landlords against the Crown supremacy (Canny 1989: 98-99). Motivated by the growing Catholic menace, King Henry’s government decided to introduce a systematic English settlement. This resulted in an enormous transfer of property from Irish to English landlords in the region of Munster by the mid-1590s (p. 111). Their main goal was the dispossession of the native Catholic landowners. Numerous rebellions by local landlords consequently occurred. The Old English Hugh O’Neill, the owner of the earldom of Tyrone, was one of these landlords to rebel against the Crown government (p. 112). He requested the aid of all dissatisfied lords in Ireland (both Gaelic and Old English), and advanced himself as a leader of the Counter-Reformation (p. 113). He further received the help of King Philip III of Spain, who was at war with England at the time. Queen Elizabeth, now governing England, had come to recognize this as the greatest challenge to the Crown, and sent an army of 20,000 men to deal with the 4,000 men sent by Philip III. The Hiberno-Spanish and the English met in Kinsale, Munster, and after a short battle, England won (p. 113). With the final defeat of Kinsale in 1601, the property of all Catholic landowners in Ireland was expropriated (p. 114). James I, successor of Queen Elizabeth, only allowed the maintenance of property to those landowners who had been continuously loyal to the Crown and who had accepted Protestantism. The most comprehensible settlement proceeded in Ireland. English adventurers began to colonize the entire province of Ulster, Connacht, the Leinster midlands, and the unplanted lands of Munster (p. 114). This meant the definite defeat of the Gaelic order in Ireland. On 14 September 1607, Hugh O’Neill, Earl of Tyrone, Rory O’Donnell, Earl of Tyrconnell, and Cúchonnacht Maguire of Fermanagh set sail for Europe from Co. Donegal (Welch 2000: 120). Although both O’Neill and O’Donnell were assigned the titles of Earls at their surrender in 1603, they suffered persistent harassment from the English authorities and their Irish rivals. These native landlords, most of them Old English, had to flee the country and find refuge in the continent, particularly in France (Louvain), and later in Rome (Canny 1989: 113). Their defeat was more than the confiscation of their lands; it meant the overthrow of the Gaelic order exerted by landlords. Their exile, known as ‘The Flight of the Earls’, was going to provoke major changes in Irish society.

In this poem, Boland recalls the event of the flight of the Earls. As is typical in her initial work, it is written following a regular stanzaic pattern. Musical effect is achieved by end-rhyme and some occasional internal near-alliteration. Its very title reminds us of Yeats's imaginary flight "aboard a spirit-ship" but, in contrast to this poet's liberating escape, the flight of the earls suggests everything but a journey in search for freedom. "The Flight of the Earls" records in an ironic way the speaker's nostalgia over the failed and lost leaders. Boland begins by establishing a sarcastic comparison between these Gaelic landlords and classical figures such as Paris:

Princes it seems are seldom wise:
Most of them fall for a woman's tears
Or else her laughter, such as Paris
Whose decision stretched to ten alarming years –
Nothing would suit
Until he'd brought
The kingdom down around his ears.

The ironic tone is set in the very first line, which contains a rhetorical understatement or litote. This particular non-committal statement is remarkable for what it omits rather than for what it mentions. The poetic voice fails to say enough about the subject, and by using the adverb 'seldom', the reader assumes the covert presupposition that princes are never wise. Boland draws an interesting comparison between the exiled Earls and the classical hero of *The Iliad*. Paris was the King of Troy. In one of the weddings celebrated at the Court, all the Gods and Goddesses were invited, with the exception of Eride, the Goddess of Discord (Falcon Martínez et al. 1980: 492). In revenge, Eride placed on the banquet table a golden apple in which it was written "For the most beautiful" (p. 493). Immediately, Hera, Athene, and Aphrodite started to struggle for the apple. Zeus decided that Paris, who was at that time a prince, should be the judge of this dispute. The three Goddesses tried to bribe him in different ways. Hera offered him the dominion of the universe, Athene promised him all the knowledge and victory, and finally, Aphrodite offered him the most beautiful woman in the world. Paris decided to accept Aphrodite's offer, granting the golden apple to her. The most beautiful woman in the world was Helen from Esparta, and winning her love meant to snatch her away from her husband, Menelao, who was allied with the kings of Greece (ibid). Boland uses Paris's example to illustrate the imprudence and foolishness of most princes. As Paris had done, they reject the possibility to dominate the universe, and have everlasting wisdom, in order to possess a woman. Thus, the prince of Troy fell "for a woman's tears / Or else her laughter". Due to Paris's obsession with Helen, there was a long war between Troy and the Greeks which stretched to "ten alarming years". Eventually, Paris was defeated by the Greek warrior Heracles (Falcon Martínez et al. 1980: 495) and the kingdom of Troy was left

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under the supervision of the Earls. Boland links here the mythological legend of Paris with the event of the flight of the Earls. The speaker seems to suggest that Paris’s imprudence and foolishness is also shared by other princes in the middle ages:

Now in the middle ages see
The legendary boy of king and queen:
A peacock of all chivalry,
He dies at twenty on some battle-green
And ever since
The good Black Prince
Rides to the land of might-have-been.

Boland focuses now on the “legendary boy of king and queen”, a figure that has already appeared in other poems from *New Territory*, such as “Mirages”, where the poet focuses on a “fledging” prince murdering “empty air”. Using what Mahon (1993: 25) has called “quaint language”, Boland depicts the prince as a braggart concerned with exhibiting himself. Throughout the poem, she employs words both of Germanic origin (“kingdom”, “theft”) and Romance origin (“chivalry”, “flounces”), in order to take us back to a medieval system of principles and customs of knighthood, bravery, courtesy, and honour, in contrast to her mature work, where she avoids using such vocabulary. Like Paris, this prince seems to be foolish and irresponsible. He lacks good sense and judgment, and his showing-off is vain, for he is defeated and “dies at twenty on some battle-green”. Like the prince of Troy, the medieval “legendary boy” enters myth, “the land of might-have-been”, where he rides for ever as a “good Black Prince”, or as a spectral ghost. Boland is interested in applying myth and legend to historical events such as the flight of the Earls. This is common in her initial work. As we will see in “A Cynic at Kilmainham Gaol”, Boland portrays the place where the rebels of the Easter Rising were imprisoned as “excellent abroad for ghosts”. The effect of establishing such an ironic contrast is made explicit in the last stanza of this poem, where the tone becomes, for the first time, clearly elegiac:

Whether our own were foolish or wise
Hardly concerns us; death ran away with our chances
Of a meeting, yet we strain our eyes
Hoping perhaps just one with his golden flounces
Has outwitted theft.
So we are left
Writing to headstones and forgotten princes.

Like in “Yeats in Civil War”, Boland uses the plural form of the first person pronoun, in order to place herself within the Irish literary tradition and with a view to conveying a sense of poetic comradeship. But in this poem, this pronoun also indicates Boland’s wish to include herself within Ireland’s history, and her desire to express a common national identity. Boland mourns the

“forgotten princes”, the Old English and Gaelic Earls, and asserts that she, as her colleagues, cannot judge if they were foolish or wise in their fight, whether they can be compared to Paris or the medieval prince in their irresponsible acts. Although she is distanced from her own past, from her own ancestors, the poetic voice nonetheless, makes clear her wish to commemorate them through poetry. The act of remembering is also a wishful attempt to bring them back. But, as the title underlines, all the Earls have flown and their realm of existence is outside our own. The speaker cannot grasp, see, or touch them, and the only way to come to terms with these heroes of Irish history is by mythologizing them, by turning them into legendary creatures and immortalizing them in “headstones”. As she has argued in “The Gryphons”, “perennial stones” can survive “the prospect of a living feast”. Her poem, in this sense, becomes a “headstone”, a national monument that outlives and commemorates her ancestors. In this final couplet, the most significant part of the poem, Boland makes explicit her wish to mourn their death and exile. As explained, the typical view of Irish history is one according to which a misdeed can never be forgotten by the passing of time “but is doomed ceaselessly to re-enact itself” (Eagleton 1995: 190). Like in “The Pilgrim”, in which the traveller restlessly stalks through the centuries in search of expiation, the speaker in this poem feels bound to constantly remember the Irish earls as failed and lost leaders. Eagleton (1995: 190) points out that a road sign in Donegal today reads ‘To the Flight of the Earls’, as though this event of 1607 is incessantly happening in the present. Britain, by contrast, lacks any road signs which read ‘To the Execution of Charles I’, ‘To The Industrial Revolution’, and so on (ibid). Boland seems to be consciously perpetuating this Irish concept of suspended time, in which past history and present reality are intermingled. By doing so, she keeps her national past alive, by vividly bringing to the fore of her poems certain issues which are at the heart of the national identity.

This act of worship and elegy is continued in “A Cynic at Kilmainham Gaol”. In this poem, Boland shares the fate of those imprisoned by their involvement in the Easter Rising. Kilmainham Gaol is a jail located in the surroundings of Dublin where some of the rebels who survived to the insurrection were sent. The jail is an emblematic place of the Republican movement, because relevant political figures who fought for the nationalist cause (members of the United Irishmen, Young Ireland, and the Fenians) were not only imprisoned but also sentenced there (Hurtley et al. 1996: 174). Among those leaders of the Easter Rising who were fusilladed in Kilmainham gaol, we find prominent figures such as James Connolly and Patrick Pearse. The surroundings contain, on the other hand, one of the few Irish monasteries which survived the Viking wars of the 830s. Knowing this fact reinforces the sense of Christian martyrdom and the sentimental cult of veneration inspired by those Irish rebels. Like in “Yeats in Civil War”, Boland seems at first to

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agree with Yeats on viewing the shedding of blood as a useless and futile struggle. Her apparent skepticism is indicated by the fact that she identifies herself in the title as a “cynic”. Nevertheless, this poem shows an ironic contrast. Like in “The Flight of the Earls”, her attempt is not to judge the futility or appropriateness of their actions, but to remember and thereby commemorate these defeated leaders. In this sense, the poem is written in a highly pessimistic and melancholic tone. Boland attempts to understand the ideal which moved the rebels, to decipher their feelings and aspirations:

There is nowhere that the gimlet twilight has not
Entered, not a thing indeed to see,
But it is excellent abroad for ghosts:
A gaslamp in the dark seems to make sea
Water in the rising fog – maybe
For those imprisoned here this was a small
Consoling inland symbol – how could their way be
Otherwise discovered back to the western sea-board?
How could they otherwise be free in prison
Who for more than forty years have been shot through
To their Atlantic hearts?

The profusion of negatives in the first two lines of the poem and the gloomed connotations of “twilight” reinforce the elegiac tone. This foggy place is inhabited by the “ghosts” of the past, of all those imprisoned there. This imagery, furthermore, reinforces the sense of indefiniteness and mystery which surround the event of the insurrection in 1916. The light is diffused, just as the cult of the martyrs is characterized by mysticism and vagueness. The profusion of questions, the adverb “maybe” and the verb “seems” indicates uncertainty, as the speaker can only bring in these lost leaders by imagining them. Everything in the jail reminds Boland of those prisoners from the Rising: the “gaslamp in the dark” was, she imagines, “a consoling inland symbol” for the rebels, who saw in this light imagery a sign of comfort, a slight hope that their insurrection was not futile. Boland seems to imply that these rebels were, in their nationalist ideal, a race of resurrected Gaelic heroes from “the western sea-board”, the regions in Ireland where people, even at present, keep with more perseverance their Irish traditions and language. Like that figure in “After the Irish of Egan O’Rahilly” who described his words as “Atlantic”, these rebels are equated with “Atlantic hearts”. In both poems, the ocean evokes the invincible nature of Irish heroes, their strength and courage in their fight for national independence. Boland’s employment of rhetorical questions to convey all these meanings is significant. Dramatic effect arises from the fact that no answer is provided for such questions. Nevertheless, as Lloyd (1993: 65) asserts when analyzing a poem by Yeats, “[t]he triumph of rhetoric is for a rhetorical question to become an unquestioned fiat”. Although Boland identifies herself as a “cynic” in the title, these lines offer support and

encouragement for their engagement in the national cause. The speaker's memory is also an act of veneration, as she makes explicit in the second stanza:

But in this wizened
Autumn dark, no worship, mine or yours
Can resurrect the sixteen minds. O those,
Perhaps (Godspeed them) saw the guns with dual
Sight – seeing from one eye with the tears they chose
Themselves the magic, tragic town, the broken
Countryside, the huge ungenerous tribe
Of cowards – and the one laughing eye saw
(God help them) growing from their own graves to jibe
At death, a better future, neither tear nor flaw.

The disruption in the lay-out may signal the poetic voice's need for a pause, after the intensity of emotion felt. Like in "The Flight of the Earls", the speaker feels limited by the fact that her "worship" cannot ultimately bring these leaders back. Nevertheless, this worship that Boland claims to be worthless is practiced in the following lines. Once again, Boland engages in a process of remembrance, trying to decipher the motives which encouraged the prisoners to undertake rebellion. On the one hand, these prisoners fought for a "broken countryside", for the misadventure of a country which longed to be independent. They felt that their town, Dublin, was both "magic" and "tragic": magic in the enchanted and attractive themes of the nationalist rhetoric, tragic in the brutality and unrelenting military response by the British. The poetic speaker accentuates their martyrdom by mentioning how they were left alone in their action. Fitzpatrick (1989: 196) explains that only a minority of activists within Sinn Féin, the Gaelic League, the Irish Republican Brotherhood, and the Irish Volunteers contributed to the army of 1916. The "ungenerous tribe of cowards" referred to in the poem alludes to the Irish majority who did not get involved in the insurrection out of fear and skepticism. The second ideal that moved these rebels to fight, Boland imagines, was the vision of "a better future", where there would be "neither tear nor flaw". They believed that the shedding of blood, in Pearse's words, was "a cleansing and a sanctifying thing" (Fitzpatrick 1989: 198) that would lead to the eventual attainment of the Irish Free State. Encouraged by this visionary future, they do not fear death. In this sense, and under an urgent need to keep their memory alive, Boland feels bound to imagine the complementary ideals which moved the rebels to use the guns. In "Myth and Motheland", Kearney (1985b: 65) has explained the importance that Christian martyrdom had in fuelling the Irish nationalist struggle. Boland's sentimental veneration for the martyrs in the Easter Rising keeps this patriotic sentiment alive. Her attitude towards their quest for national liberation is ultimately uncritical. As Boland (1996a: 63) has later admitted:

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[...] the nation, at least for a time, was a definite and sharp reality. [...] I looked at the shamrocks, the wolfhounds, even the crude likeness of the 1916 patriots with uncritical eyes. I listened to and used the dialect of patriotism. *Martyr. Sacrifice. Our own.* And if there was a hidden drama, to some extent it was concealed by the sheer eloquence of the cause and my own need for that eloquence.

It is this “dialect of patriotism” that Boland maintains not only in “After the Irish of Egan O’Rahilly” but also in “A Cynic at Kilmainham Gaol”.

7.2.7. Uncritical attitudes towards cultural representations of women

While few poems in Boland’s initial work focus on women, Haberstroh (1996: 61) notes that in those that do so “Boland [has] adopted the poetic stereotype of women, which she would later argue, reduced and simplified them”. In fact, Boland retains traditional depictions of Irish women in myth: passive objects, ideal symbols of eternity and beauty, or powerful and dangerous creatures. As Gilbert and Gubar (2000: 20-30) explain, two opposed female images have prevailed in male texts. The most recurrent figure is the ideal woman, the eternal icon of female purity, an “angel in the house”, who has no story to tell, and whose virtues are contemplation, selflessness, and delicate beauty (pp. 20-26). At the other extreme, we may encounter the supernatural monstrous woman, who threatens “to replace her angelic sister”, and who is empowered with a bewitched and mysterious nature (pp. 27-30).

Boland maintains this first literary convention of the woman as a beautiful angelic Madonna, wholly passive, contemplative, submissive, graceful, and selfless. This is observed in the long final poem of *New Territory*, “The Winning of Etain”. Boland focuses on the beautiful Celtic figure of Etain, who, in contrast to Aoife, as we will see, is passive and speechless. Written in octaves, the poem narrates the fairy battle of two men, Fergus and Aengus, to win Etain’s love, ending with Aengus’s victory as he and Etain escape.

On the other hand, Boland perpetuates the malevolent and monstrous female figure of the literary tradition in “Malediction”. This poem is based on the mythical legend of Lir’s son. In contrast to “The Dream of Lir’s Son”, the poetic voice is explicitly female. We hear Aoife’s addressing one of Lir’s sons, in the process of casting on her step-child a spell which gives him the shape of a white swan. Her speech is highly authoritarian and emotional; she is obviously moved by anger and hatred, jealousy and cruelty. Boland’s interest in Aoife may be surprising at first, but the reason is simpler than what it might first seem. Boland feels an alluring attraction to Aoife due to her power, her bewitched and mysterious nature. Her strength almost seems ‘masculine’, if we compare her to the usually passive and silent female figures of traditional Western literature. A study of Irish mythology gives literary evidence that, in contrast to the literature of the Romantics

and the Revivalists in Ireland, female deities are represented as enjoying a powerful role and higher status than other Western representations. Berresford (1995: 15, 43, 48) lists the gallery of vigorous, independent, fiery-hearted women who figure in Celtic myths: Maeve, Grania, Findabair, Deirdre, and the historic Boadicea, for instance. Aoife is another example of these strong and powerful figures. Boland feels attracted to Aoife's superiority over Lir, to her ability to defy her husband's power. Aoife embodies some attractive attributes: jealousy, passion, cruelty. She also embodies compassion, for the legend says that when she was about to slay the children, "her womanhood overcame her", and instead of killing the children she transformed them by spells of sorcery into four white swans (Rolleston 1998: 140).

By employing passive and beautiful as well as strong and fierce female figures of Celtic myths in her poems, Boland shows her need to explore traditional female stereotypes. Before subverting the inherited myths, she needs to discover and dig into the damage which this tradition has exerted upon women. As she explains in her semi-autobiographical prose work:

Then why did I not walk away? Simply because I was not free to. For all my quarrels [...], I needed to find and repossess that idea [the conservative stereotypes of women] at some level of repose. Like the swimmer in Adrienne Rich's poem "Diving into the Wreck", I needed to find out "the damage that was done and the treasures that prevail". (Boland 1996a: 146)

In order to observe how Boland, in contrast to her mature work, maintains a highly uncritical attitude towards male representations of women in any form of artistic representation, I have chosen to analyze "From the Painting 'Back From Market' by Chardin" (*New Territory*). As Boland has admitted, her mother has exerted a great influence in her poetry (interview with Allen-Randolph 1993b: 117). She was a painter, and this originated Boland's later enthusiasm with great artists such as Chardin, Renoir, Van Eyck, and Degas, whose paintings will be consistently mentioned in her poems. "From the Painting 'Back From Market' by Chardin" constitutes one of the few lyrics in Boland's initial work, together with "The Winning of Etain", "Malediction", and "Athene's Song", to have a woman at its central subject matter. Nevertheless, this woman is described from a male perspective, an "I" who gazes at the painting as Chardin had gazed at the woman (see illustration 1). The persona does not identify with this female figure, but rather stays at a great distance. In contrast to a later poem which focuses on another painting by Chardin, "Self-Portrait on a Summer Evening" (*The Journey*), Boland includes the artist's name in the title, revealing his importance and authority (McGuckian 1993: 31). In this poem, Boland, as is typical in her initial work, describes her from a detached position:

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Dressed in the colours of a country day –
Grey-blue, blue-grey, the white of seagull’ bodies –
Chardin’s peasant woman
Is to be found at all times in her short delay
Of dreams, her eyes mixed
Between love and market, empty flagons of wine
At her feet, bread under her arm. He has fixed
Her limbs in colour, and her heart in line.

The woman, depicted as wearing a dress in “the colours of the country day”, seems to be trapped in the phrase “Grey-blue, blue-grey”, where the adjectives are interwoven. This antistrophe emphasizes the persona’s consignment. Furthermore, the woman is not portrayed as an independent person, as a subject carrying out actions, but as an object. This justifies the use of the genitive in the third line: “Chardin’s peasant woman”. The genitive is significant, for it implies possession: the woman is Chardin’s object of art. In the following line, the passive construction “is to be found” reinforces the woman’s submissive stance, her deprived condition to be the subject of the poem, and her status as a mere decorative object. The “I”, the gazer of the painting, is the one that ‘finds’ this woman. On the other hand, Chardin, in contrast to the female figure, appears as an active agent, fixing “her limbs in colour, and her heart in line”. The heart is the vital centre and source of one’s being, emotions, and sensibilities. By fixing it in line, the woman is denied all chance to give voice to her emotions, to her “dreams”. Mahon (1993: 25) asserts that “her heart in line” is “a good if unintentional pun: this faithful wife, domestic, whatever she is, is not about to step *out* of line”. Not only are the woman’s feelings and intelligence insignificant to the artist’s eyes; her “limbs”, that is to say, her body, is reduced to “colour”. The woman’s physicality is only to be seen by the gaze. Just as limbs (“hindlegs”) are sold in the market, women’s hearts become a sort of buying and selling property. Thus, Chardin fixes the woman in his work of art both physically and spiritually.

Boland’s use of passives and genitives to portray female figures as aesthetic objects of male possession is recurrent in her initial work. In “The Winning of Etain”, interestingly enough, agentive subjects are always portrayed as male (either Aengus or the Druid), whereas Etain is portrayed as a mere object, something to be won. Some examples of this are “Etain, twice a woman twice a queen/ Possessed of two lives and one love”; “the winning of Etain a second time by Aengus”; “Her cheeks, blanched with light, were charmed away/ Her long embracing arms convulsed, her face/ Shriveled”, etc. One notes that, in the only moment when Etain is portrayed as speaking, the agentive subject is deliberately omitted from the utterance: “Bitter words were woven into the stuff/ Of disappointment”. Boland maintains an uncritical attitude towards

women's subordination in literary and cultural representations by perpetuating this oppression in her poetry.³³

In the second stanza of "From the Painting 'Back From Market' by Chardin", we observe for the first time female action:

In her right hand, the hindlegs of a hare
Peep from a cloth sack; through the door
Another woman moves
In painted daylight; nothing in this bare
Closet has been lost
Or charged: I think of what great art removes:
Hazard and death, the future and the past,
This woman's secret history and her loves –

Although this other woman is presented in motion as an agentive subject, her action only occurs in "painted daylight", and therefore her movement is determined by the painter's gaze and the degree of lightness he decides to give to his painting. Furthermore, this woman can only move in a "bare / Closet", that is, she is exposed to view in the enclosed cabinet of the drawing. Since both women have been simplified in Chardin's painting, Boland introduces her voice for the first time, mediating on the imprisoning functions of art and myth. The "woman's secret history and desires" are not portrayed in the painting, and Boland realizes the necessity to incorporate the silent and untold lives of women. Her concern for what the poem cannot grasp, what lies outside artistic representation, will be one of Boland's most important guiding motives in her mature work. In this poem, there is an implicit desire to revise the portrayal of women in the painting, to include woman's current experiences in Chardin's canvas. Nevertheless, Boland eventually remains uncritical towards this painter's "great" representation. As McGuckian (1993: 31) believes, Boland simply offers her "opinion rather than a personal distortion or revision". She maintains in the poem the authoritative stance of the male gaze, 'fixing' the women as mere objects of art to be looked at. On the other hand, in contrast to her mature work, here Boland is not compelled to reveal this "woman's secret history and her loves". We will have to wait for her future collections of poetry to see the work of art from the subversive perspective of a woman, and not from a masculine 'I' describing Chardin's painting. Until then, Boland does nothing to change the immortalized portrayal of these women as andocentric objects of art. By describing in detail the canvas for more than half the poem, she seems to accept the painter's knowledge over his objects of art. In the last stanza, Boland extends the cause of the woman's simplification: it is not only in Chardin's

³³ It is worth noting how in "The Winning of Etain", Etain is perceived only fragmentally, in bodily parts, by Aengus's male gaze, as when he utters: "How can I kiss these red forgetful lips,/ This unfamiliar hand, or take this body". One also notes the preponderance of verbs such as 'watch', 'see', and 'look' in this poem. The agent of such an action is always, unsurprisingly, the male character.

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painting where her inner life is omitted, but also in the market. This suggestion is implied by the conjunction 'and' followed by the adverb 'even', which links the last stanza with the previous one:

And even the dawn market, from whose bargaining
She has just come back, when men and women
Congregate and go
Among the produce, learning to live from morning
To next day, linked
By a common impulse to survive, although
In surging light they are single and distinct,
Like birds in the accumulating snow.

The speaker implies that it is also in real life where this woman cannot see her desires fulfilled, where her heart is fixed "in line" and dreaming is the only possible escape. Boland incorporates men in the picture and, advancing her mature work, she asserts that it is their very ordinariness, their human "impulse to survive", which makes them "single and distinct". In any case, her description is everything but ordinary. Keeping with the mood of her initial work, the poet offers a very romantic image of these poetic figures. Men and women are living in a capitalist society moved by cruel competitive laws and concerned with the public buying and selling of "the produce". In this setting, they are compared to birds imprisoned in an asphyxiating snow. As McGuckian (1993: 31) notes, this final image coalesces with the animal imagery observed throughout the poem. In the same way as the "seagulls" seem to be unable to move in the canvas and the "hindlegs of a hare", which enable the animal to run fast, are enclosed in a cloth sack, the birds are confined in "the accumulating snow". This imagery of entrapment suggests the imprisoning function of art, both for men, and especially for women. Boland does nothing to subvert this imprisonment, or include these women's daily life and experiences in her poem. Therefore, her stance towards Chardin's canvas is an indulgent one, in contrast to the subversive attitude she will take in her later poems, such as in "Self-Portrait in a Summer Evening" (*The Journey*), where she will criticize the painter's portrayals of falsifying women.

In "From the Painting 'Back From Market' by Chardin", Boland demonstrates, once again, her expert knowledge of the poetic craft. In this poem, there is not a single feature of versification, stress or syntactic structure which is insignificant. Boland has carefully chosen the exact words, their exact order, and the correct stress to convey meaning. It is written in three stanzas of octaves. In its complex formal qualities, the poem complements Chardin's art. Although there is some occasional end rhyme, this time Boland exploits internal rhyme and alliterative chiming ("colours of a countryday", "Grey-blue, blue-grey", "delay / of Dreams", "hindlegs of a hare"). Most lines are iambic, and when this regular pattern is broken, the reader's attention intensifies. Boland uses trochaic lines, stressing the initial syllable of the line, in order to draw importance to words such as

“Peep”, “Closet”, “Hazard”, and “Congregate”. These words are highlighted precisely because they refer to the main important aspects of the content: a ‘peek’ into the picture is enough to understand that the objects (persons) within are imprisoned like in a ‘closet’. This, Boland implies, is dangerous for women’s current reality is lost, their uniqueness and distinctiveness is ignored, and all women become merely objects of representation, indistinctive like a ‘congregation’, a mob of similar items.

In short, this poem is a good illustration of Boland’s imitation and internalization of the prevailing modes of the dominant tradition. While her later work will revise the traditional exploitation and appropriation of the female subject by the male artist, in this poem she perceives this woman within Chardin’s perspective. She seems to employ the basic assumption underlying all male-dominated Western philosophical discourse that a postulating subject is capable of using the gaze in order to show his mastery (Moi 1991: 180). In this sense, Boland favours the authoritative point of view, by describing the painting with great fidelity from a detached position.

7.2.8. A dispossessed and submissive female voice

As we have seen at this stage in her literary career, Boland is mostly concerned with the role of the poet and her mastery over poetic language and aesthetic tenets. Nevertheless, and as the poet admits in *Object Lessons*, in spite of “the acute sense of liberation which a command of language and technique brought to me, [this] was offset by a growing sense of oppression” (Boland 1996a: 25). In poems such as “February 1963” (*Poetry by Boland*) and “Athene’s Song” (*New Territory*), we can observe this sense of oppression. Interestingly enough, the poetic voice in these poems is explicitly female, and we can even identify it with Boland herself. In contrast to the authority and power of those male poetic voices in “New Territory” and “After the Irish of Egan O’Rahilly”, for instance, here, the speaker is clearly dispossessed and/or eventually submissive.

This sense of oppression is observed in “February 1963” (*Poetry by Boland*). In this poem, the poetic voice seems to be that of a young girl, Boland herself at the age of eighteen. Although no explicit references are given to the sex of the speaker, some contextual knowledge helps us reach this conclusion. Boland returned to Ireland at the age of fourteen, after a long childhood exile in London and New York. Her first poetry, as she has put it, is an attempt to “say all the ambiguities, awkward regrets, and distances of [her] childhood. It wants to say a country” (Boland 1996a: 93). Boland’s obsession with belonging to her own country, with being recognized as authentically Irish, needless to say, being accepted as an Irish woman poet, is all observed in this poem. “February 1963” is unique in Boland’s initial work, because, in contrast to the previous poems mentioned above, it explicitly expresses her uncertainty and dispossession as a young girl

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back in her native land. The speaker is described as standing alone in St. Stephen’s Green, at the very heart of Dublin. In this context, she narrates an encounter with a mysterious man who asks her to come back to him:

For twenty days the wind blew from
The East without a taste
Of summer, let alone of spring. At last
Though, April came and, unashamed for past
Caprice, the sunlight faced
On Stephen’s Green, and it was warm.
My lost love came across the grass,
His head as bright as day,
He came to me and said: ‘Will you not come
To me again, and spin a bridge from
Frost to April, so we’ll betray
The sour tradition, that a great thing must but pass’.

Like in “Lullaby” and “The Dream of Lir’s Son” (*New Territory*), the speaker establishes a very close relationship with nature. Her emotions are described in terms of natural phenomena such as the passing of seasons. Winter symbolizes her current desolation and loneliness, whereas the coming of summer and spring brings a promise of happiness and hopefulness. The warmth of sunlight therefore parallels the miraculous arrival of the speaker’s “lost love”, a man who seems to possess all the power and self-confidence she lacks. By describing “[h]is head as bright as day”, Boland immediately links this figure with those poets in “The Poets” and “New Territory” who were equated to the “essential sun” and who were able to “peer down the unlit centuries”. Similarly, in this poem lightness indicates the strength and power of the (male) literary tradition. As Boland (1997a: 16-17) has argued in her essay “Imagining Ireland”, because of her childhood exile, she returned to Ireland without a clear sense of where she belonged. Her yearn to identify herself as Irish is fuelled by reading the accepted masters of the Irish national tradition. Her “lost love” is therefore Ireland, that country she has ‘lost’ by going into exile and which she finds the need to recover, at least by reading and memorizing poems by romantic nationalists such as Yeats. As Boland (1996a: 77) has admitted, she finds “a peculiar indignity [...] in the silence of my childhood [...]. Lacking an idiom, I had lacked a place, [...] I had been silent”. When she discovers Yeats, she began to imagine what it ‘truly’ means to be Irish, to read poems that, for the first time, fitted into place. The man she encounters in the park, an allegory of Irish poets such as Yeats, seems to offer this young girl the sense of stability she aspires to. He urges her to keep the dream of “the great thing” alive, to defy the traditional assumption that her (Gaelic) roots are irremediably destroyed by the imperial intervention. Yeats’s poetry, as we have seen, attempts to

capture a native 'authenticity', a pure and uncontaminated 'Irishness'. By turning to this man, therefore, Boland might heal her injured identity:

And I am in the park, looking for in this
Man, (as though his eyes
Will issue it, his hand quite suddenly uncover
It), my eighteenth winter, so that I can discover
Who in me once prized
His love and every passionate, possessive kiss.
But neither he, nor I, have found me here.
And I must still be found:
I am not in his memory, nor I am on
The grass behind me nor on that I'll stand upon.
Only on this green ground
Alone, my head upon the breast of eighteen years.

The appearance of the conjunction 'and' twice in this second stanza in order to introduce verse lines is, as we will see, a very characteristic feature of Boland's mature poetry. In this poem, it emphasizes the speaker's anxiety to find in this man her own sense of identity, her "eighteenth winter". Boland yearns to recognize herself in those books that she 'devoured' as a young girl, those poems by English authors such as Keats, Chatterton, Byron, and Arnold, and by Irish poets such as Yeats, Padraic Colum, and Francis Ledwidge. This andocentric literary tradition is expected to compensate her sense of dispossession. As Boland (1996a: 102) has explained, she was drawn to their ability to master poetic language, in the belief that "the idea of place [is] something language could claim even if ownership had been denied". Nevertheless, these poets had, in some way or another, simplified women in their work, either by treating them as poetic ornaments, whose 'love' must be won (remember "The Winning of Etain"), or as national emblems, mere mouthpieces and ornaments. It is, therefore, unsurprising that Boland cannot identify herself with these female images. Neither the male artist nor the woman speaker "have found me", and therefore Boland's self, what her 'I' represents, "must still be found". The appearance of this passive is significant, for it indicates that the speaker is clearly deprived of agency. Boland maintains a helpless attitude, declaring that she is not able to discover her own self, and that it is for someone else to give her both a location and an identity. The only thing the poetic voice manages to make clear is that her sense of belonging is not found in England or New York, that "grass" she has left behind, but on "this green ground", Ireland, her native country. Boland is certain that it is here where she must attempt to find her own roots. But this assertion is counteracted at the end of the poem. "February 1963" finishes by emphasizing the speaker's sense of solitude and alienation, what Boland (1996a: 105) has later defined as "an uncanny sense of spoiled identity and uncertain origin". Knowing where to "stand" is not sufficient, for she hasn't found the clues to construct her present self through poetry.

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Like in “February 1963”, the female voice in “Athene’s Song” similarly describes herself as strongly alienated and submissive. This poem refutes Haberstroh’s (1996: 60) contention that “[w]e hear no identifiable woman’s voice” in *New Territory*. The ‘I’ of the poem corresponds to Athene, the goddess of war, and also of art and craftsmanship (Falcon Martínez et al. 1980: 99). Boland’s choice of this mythological figure is quite telling. For the first time, she is going to try to revenge herself against a constraining patriarchal tradition, as she is starting to feel confident about her artistic skills and her poetic craft. We should also take into account that Athene is one of the few mythological goddesses to remain indifferent to passion, proudly maintaining her virginity (Falcon Martínez et al. 1980: 100). As a woman poet who is starting to be conscious of her exclusion from a predominantly male tradition, Boland implicitly avoids, by speaking through Athene’s voice, any ‘sexual’ intercourse which may ultimately destroy her own female identity. This advances the highly feminist and separatist stance Boland will adopt in *In Her Own Image*. As “Athene’s Song” is the only poem within Boland’s initial work which is written from an obviously subversive female perspective, Boland’s claim that this is the only poem in *New Territory* that still appeals to her is unsurprising (interview with Villar Argáiz 2005a).

“Athene’s Song” is written in four sestets, following a rhyme scheme. It is dedicated to her father, who encouraged Boland’s interest in music.³⁴ He stands in this poem as a representative of Boland’s literary forefathers. Adrienne Rich (1979: 38-39), who will exert a great influence during Boland’s next phase, has asserted that, “for about twenty years I wrote for a particular man [her father], who criticized and praised me and made me feel I was indeed “special”. The observe side of this, of course, was that I tried for a long time to please him, or rather, not to displease him”. Similarly, in her initial work, Boland tries to please the patriarchal literary tradition by writing within the main aesthetic tenets in order to be accepted as an Irish poet. Nevertheless, in “Athene’s Song”, she adopts a subversive attitude, revenging herself against her forefathers and creating what she believes to be her own poetry. As Haberstroh (1006: 62) notes, this poem describes Athene’s transformation from goddess of war to goddess of love. The first stanza describes how this goddess springs from her father’s head:

From my father’s head I sprung
Goddess of the war, created
Partisan and soldier’s physic –
My symbols boast and brazen gong –
Until I made in Athens wood
Upon my knees a new music.

³⁴ As poems such as “Fond Memory” (*The Journey*) will show, as a child Boland used to listen to her father playing piano; arguably, this is the reason why music is recurrent in her poetry.

Athene is born, not from her mother's womb, but from the head of Zeus, something, as González Arias (2000b: 265) explains, Boland leaves unquestioned. Her body is linked to the masculine one in an uncritical stance, just as in the Genesis story, where Eve springs from Adam's rib. Thus, she rises as a creature which depends on the other sex. From her very introduction to the world, she is predetermined to please others, to devote herself to the "partisan and soldiers". As in "The King and the Troubadour", Boland equates music and poetry. Her music must be a "physic", a cathartic drug which must encourage men to go to war. It must follow the demands of the Irish nationalist literary tradition, and therefore its main objective is to incite rebellion by glorifying a dispossessed nation and fuelling the pride of the fighters. In this sense, Athene becomes an allegorical version of Mother Ireland, an emblem of nationhood and a woman reduced to "symbols". Her loud and sonorous "brazen gong" is intended to give confidence to the warriors, but not to herself. For the first time in her initial work, Boland attempts to challenge this submissive stance. We have seen how in "The King and The Troubadour" Zeus is essential for the survival of the troubadour: with the aid of the rain of God, his music survives every "minstrel spring". In "Athene's Song", the goddess is going to defy Zeus. Suddenly, Athene gets tired of war, and decides to subvert her status as a goddess. This transformation parallels her creation of a new music:

When I played my pipe of bone,
Robbed and whittled from a stag,
Every bird became a lover
Every lover to its tone
Found the truth of song and brag;
Fish sprung in the full river.

The fact that her musical instrument has been "robbed and whittled from a stag" denotes that she is taking a subversive and dangerous attitude, contrary to orthodox conventions: now, it is not the male Christian god who takes the rib out of Adam's body in order to create the woman. Athene is the one who creates herself by usurping a bone from the stag. Therefore, the creation of the "pipe of bone" symbolizes the advent of her creative mind, her potential to create her own music, her own distinctive poetry. With her music, nature seems to be rewarded: "fish sprung in the river" and "every bird became a lover". In contrast to the fake self-assurance her earlier music created, now "the truth of song and brag" is found. As a goddess of love, Athene finds her own self, her personal identity and happiness. Nevertheless, her personal fulfillment, her inner peace and calm slumber, are threatened as soon as war breaks out:

Peace became the toy of power
When other noises broke my sleep:
Like dreams I saw the hot ranks

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And heroes in another flower
Than any there; I dropped my pipe
Remembering their shouts, their thanks.

The “hot ranks / And heroes” summon Athene to create her warlike music. In her sense of obligation towards the national cause, she remembers nostalgically the glamour of “their shouts, their thanks”. The differences between her father’s heritage and her distinct song are irreconcilable. The contrast between male and female symbols in this poem indicates this: whereas “boast and brazen gong”, “hot ranks”, and “shouts” denote violence, restriction, and repression, Athene’s female symbols imply peacefulness and personal fulfillment. Her “pipe of bone” aspires to “every lover” and becomes the “truth of song and brag”. The dramatic tension of the poem is therefore achieved by means of Athene’s opposing desires: on the one hand, she feels compelled to be loyal to her literary tradition; on the other hand, she feels the need to escape from it by establishing her ‘new music’. As Allen-Randolph (1993a: 6) asserts, “the engaging drama of the poem springs from the clash between ‘the new music’ of Athene’s nascent feminist consciousness and her paternal inheritance of boast and gong”. Athene’s conscious beliefs and unconscious intentions are certainly at odds. Taking into account Boland’s conformist stance in her initial work, the conflict is resolved in an expected way. Athene eventually denies her own sexuality by dropping her pipe:

Beside the water, lost and mute,
Lies my pipe and like my mind
Remains unknown, remains unknown
And in some hollow taking part
With my heart against my hand
Holds its peace and holds its own.

At the end, Athene renounces her own creativity, her music of love, and returns to her earlier self. Her “pipe of bone” lies forgotten “in some hollow taking part”. Now, her creative mind, “remains unknown”, and her aspirations and dreams lie “lost and mute”. Boland is patriarchally constrained from being disloyal. Therefore, her relationship to the tradition from which she sprung is clearly uncritical. Athene’s music is silenced, as the final lines of the poem express.

The importance of this poem in Boland’s initial production is that, for the first time, the woman poet acknowledges the existence of an inner creative self, her femaleness, which is at odds with the literary tradition she has inherited. As Boland (1996a: 58) asserts, when “I began to write those first poems, even through the borrowed images and false gestures, I saw the existence and demand of a preliminary self”. “Athene’s Song” witnesses Boland’s “preliminary self”. This poem

anticipates what will be her main preoccupation in her future poetry (what I will call the 'Female'/'Liberationist' phase): giving voice to her own experience as a woman, who, like Athene's mind, "remains unknown" in the dominant aesthetics of the literary tradition. Athene's silent pipe is only a pretence of abandonment, for it "holds" its peace waiting to be sung again. This song of love will be heard again as Boland repudiates her initial male-orientated poetry.

7.2.9. Conclusion

As I have attempted to demonstrate, Boland's initial work can be categorized in broad terms as belonging to Showalter's 'Feminine' phase and to Memmi and Fanon's 'Assimilationist' phase, for a number of different reasons:

(1) With the exception of "Athene's Song" and "Malediction", Boland avoids the use of the feminine persona. Of these two poems, only the former is feminist oriented. Boland does not use her poetry as an aspect of her female experience, or an expression of it. There is no sense of self-awareness in her poems, and she tries to conceal her womanhood under the masquerade of an apparently neutral "I" who is, in the end, male rather than female. Consequently, Boland retains traditional depictions of (Irish) women: as powerful, dangerous creatures (such as Aoife in "Malediction"), or as passive and beautiful icons (such as Etain in "The Winning of Etain", or Chardin's woman in "From the Painting 'Back From Market' by Chardin").

(2) Boland deals with conventional themes and figures of the dominant aesthetic tradition, such as the romantic view of the poet and the idealization of Irish natural landscapes. Poets are portrayed as heroes, ambitious mariners conquering new territories and constantly exploring a world of violence, mortality, and death. In all cases, they are powerful figures, and the limitations they usually encounter in their journey through life only increase the value and achievement of their literary work. As romantic figures, they are "at war with social consensus" (Kiberd 1996: 537). They are dissidents, rebelling against established social rules and conventions. In this sense, the poet is portrayed as a person who maintains a position of non-commitment in a time of war (i.e. "Yeats in Civil War"), or who challenges the existing order ("After the Irish of Egan O'Rahilly"). As a result of this, they are described as lonely and isolated creatures, pilgrims in constant emigration, but also, paradoxically, as figures who are 'rooted' in a highly cohesive literary community, a place where they find a sense of belonging and their identity as poets. This sense of kinship between male poets is captured in a variety of poems, such as "The Poets", "New Territory", and "Migration". Maintaining the legacy of her forefathers also entails writing in remembrance of lost heroes and famous events that have shaped history. The Battle of the Boyne, the Flight of the Earls, the Easter Rising, and the Irish Civil War become the main poetic themes

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around which poems such as “After the Irish of Egan O’Rahilly”, “The Flight of the Earls”, “A Cynic at Kilmainham Gaol”, and “Yeats in Civil War” revolve. The tone of her poems is usually elegiac, melancholic, and sentimental, for they try to restore the values of a lost civilization of druids and bardic poets. The praising of some noble literary writers, such as Yeats (“Yeats in Civil War”) and Shakespeare (“Shakespeare”, “Comic Shakespeare”), as well as her dedication of some poems in the volume to well recognized poets of her time (Derek Mahon, Michael Longley, Eamon Grennan) enhance her anxiety to be included in the literary canon of Ireland (an arena which in the 1970s was exclusively dominated by male writers).

(3) This choice of subject matter is reflected in the structure and language of the poems. Boland shows her concern with models, with literary conventions, with the literary tradition as the very vehicle for artistic expression. Following traditional lyric poetry, she adheres to regularly-rhymed stanzas, and if there are no end-rhyme lines, Boland recurs to internal rhymes. The stanzas are usually isometric. She plays with dissonant lines by combining trochees (which suggest unrelieved tension) with iambs (which give a resolution). The language is exact, deliberate, and measured. On the other hand, Boland seems to rely on the traditional shaping forms of epic narratives (“Appraisal”), elegies (“A Cynic at Kilmainhan Jail”), and ballads (“The King and the Troubadour”). In tone, it is very rhetorical and pompous. She keeps control of her emotions throughout the whole volume. Wherever the intensity of her feeling is too high, it is the voice of a male, not a female, persona who is speaking (“After The Irish of Egan O’Rahilly”). In short, she shows herself to be a conventional schoolgirl poet, following the example of Irish poets such as Yeats.

Therefore, in her initial work, Boland conceals her womanhood by imitating and internalizing the prevailing modes of the dominant poetic tradition, as regards not only subject matter but also style. The title of the volume, *New Territory*, reveals a lot about the poet’s situation at the time. Boland tried to form part of the (male) literary canon of Dublin; she wanted to fully engage in the circle of poets, and become one of them. For her, as a young poet, this is a ‘new territory’ to explore. Nevertheless, *New Territory* is nothing but a well-known ‘Old Territory’ for women in the Western/Irish literary tradition. As Roche (1993: 1) explains, “the title of *New Territory* announced an aspiration rather than an achievement”. Boland does not sense then that she is truthful to her own reality as an Irish woman poet. The “uncanny sense of spoiled identity” that Boland (1996a: 105) felt in her initial attempts at writing poetry will prompt this woman poet to embark on a drastic and radical change in her poetry. It will not be until her following volumes of poetry that Boland will be conscious of the gap between the experiences she wants to record as

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a woman and the poetic conventions available for articulating them. By bridging this gap, she will be able to create a new ground, a more authentic “new territory” for Irish women in literature.

7.3. “FEMINIST/CULTURAL NATIONALIST” PHASE

7.3.1. Introduction

Showalter (1999:13) proposes a second phase in women’s writing which she denominates ‘Feminist’ phase, and whose significance lies in “the protest against [...] the standards and values [of the dominant tradition], and advocacy of minority rights and values, including a demand for authority”. This phase is mainly characterized by a radical confrontation with patriarchal society, and “a cultist celebration of womanhood” (p. 181). In this phase, Showalter (1999: 4) states, American and British women writers advocated sexual separatism, recurring at times to the theme of an “Amazon utopia”. In their rejection of “male society and masculine culture”, feminist writing stands as “a declaration of independence”, a separatist writing (p. 31). In other words, this is a writing mainly defined in opposition to the male tradition.

This ‘Feminist’ phase resembles the second phase in the process of decolonization that Memmi (1990: 195) and Fanon (1990: 179) identify in *The Colonizer and the Colonized* and *The Wretched of the Earth* respectively. Both Memmi and Fanon agree on the fact that, in order to move away from the colonial situation, the colonized engages in a vicious and bloody phase of protest. This second violent phase in the process of decolonization is based on a vigorous attempt to recover and assert the self, an autonomous entity. Now the colonized entirely rejects the colonizer, and defends with passion his/her own distinctiveness. This second phase is a “cultural nationalist” stage which aims at constructing a self-defensive culture in opposition to the imperialist culture, and which starts at that very moment when the native comes to terms with his/her own humanity. As Memmi (1990: 95) argues, colonialism creates the patriotism of the oppressed, who attempt to affirm their exclusivity in national selfhood: “For a number of historical, sociological, and psychological reasons, the struggle for liberation by colonized peoples has taken on a marked national and nationalist look”. In this phase, therefore, nationalism and native identity are the writer’s main concerns.

The main feature shared by the second stage of Showalter, Memmi, and Fanon, is the radical assertion of identity. Thus, whereas the feminist writer celebrates womanhood in essentialist terms, Memmi and Fanon’s colonized writer strongly defends all the distinctive characteristics of his/her native tradition. In *White Skin, Black Masks*, Fanon (1991: 16-140) dedicates one chapter, “The Fact of Blackness”, to a discussion of the desperate struggle of a colonized black subject who wants to discover those aspects that constitute negritude, previously undervalued and neglected by the colonizer. Fanon explains that this kind of ‘Negro’ is absolutely different from the ‘Negro’ that wants to become white (a figure resembling Boland in her initial phase, when she is willing to become a male writer), since the Negro “now wants to belong to his own people” (p. 16). This attitude resembles Showalter’s feminist writer. Whereas Fanon’s voice

reclaims his negritude, the woman writer at this stage wants to reclaim her womanhood, and both 'colonial' subjects (affected by the social and cultural constructs of race and gender) engage in similar 'separatist' writings.

Boland's third volume of poetry, *In Her Own Image* (1980), may be included in what Showalter calls the 'Feminist' phase, or what Memmi and Fanon identify as the 'Cultural Nationalist' phase. Nevertheless, this work does not immediately follow *New Territory*, as *The War Horse* is written before, in 1975. This latter volume would be described as a transitional book to Boland's third phase, in which she repositions herself as a poet and redirects her sense of poetry (its content and linguistic features better fit Boland's mature poetry). Thus, I will deal with *The War Horse* in the following section, which I will label as Boland's 'Female'/ 'Liberationist' phase, following Showalter, Memmi, and Fanon's nomenclature. On the other hand, it is important to bear in mind that *In Her Own Image* was written at about the same time as *Night Feed* (1984). Whereas the first one grew out of Boland's experimentation with the "anti-lyric",¹ as she explains in an interview, *Night Feed* responds to Boland's treatment of "lyricism".² These two intermediate volumes of poetry, *The War Horse* and *Night Feed*, imply, as Showalter (1999: 13) explains, that the three phases in women's writing are not fixed categories, and as such they may overlap. Although Boland's evolution as a poet underlies a process of increasing poetic maturity (a process of initial imitation, intermediate protest, and final artistic autonomy), the departure from the inherited poetic tradition is not an easy step to take, and Boland, on her journey towards attaining artistic decolonization, shows backward and forward movements.

As Haberstroh (1995: 21) has noted, Boland's poetry after *New Territory* attempts to place itself "outside the two types of poems she started with: the English 'movement' poem and the Irish bardic poem". In *In Her Own Image*, Boland records her own womanhood as against the set texts of canon and nation. In the process, she yields to the prescriptions of feminism. Her radicalism and separatist stance is a direct consequence of what Fanon denominates an *inborn complex*. As Fanon's "Negro", who feels the need to destroy the false statements that "Negroes are savages, brutes, illiterates" (Fanon 1991: 117), Boland also finds that there are conventional images of women that must be destroyed at all costs. In order to challenge the restrictions imposed on women's self expression, Boland embraces feminism at the aesthetic level, angrily attacking those

¹ As Allen-Randolph (1993a: 10) notes, "[t]he precedents for these poems were Plath's late anti-lyrics in *Ariel*". Like Plath, Boland attempts to move away from the restrictions she felt that traditional lyric poetry had posed to her as a woman writer.

² In the interview with Allen-Randolph (1993b: 122), Boland explains:

In Her Own Image was a liberating book to write. Some of the poems in it were drafted or revised at the same time – even sometimes, my notebooks show, in the same week – as poems in *Night Feed*. [...] *In Her Own Image* allowed me to experiment with the anti-lyric which I saw as providing or guaranteeing the lyricism of *Night Feed*.

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aspects of patriarchal society she views as damaging for her own reality as a woman. Moreover, Boland finds the poetic tradition oppressive and alienating, and consequently adopts what she would later refuse as a “separatist” stance (Boland 1996a: 234). At a certain point in *Object Lessons*, Boland (1996a: 145) narrates how she has felt, as a woman poet, the suggestive call of feminist ideology:

‘Start again’ has been the cry of some of the best feminist poets. ‘Wipe clean the slate, start afresh’. It is a cry with force and justice behind it. And it is a potent idea: to begin in a new world, clearing the desert as it were, making it blossom, even making the rain.³

These “separatist” appeals demand that Boland should be loyal to the women’s movement, that she should leave aside former literary traditions, and construct her own writing criteria (p. 243). Probably because of this, and in contrast to *New Territory*, Boland discards requiems and dedications. Now, she does not write for “a notional *male* readership”, as Mahon (1993: 24) puts it, and she engages herself in the exploration of the rawness of female experience, in shorter lines and freer rhythms.

As I intend to demonstrate, *In Her Own Image* is a feminist volume of poetry that means a breakthrough in Boland’s poetic career.⁴ I think it is convenient to highlight the words ‘protest’, ‘advocacy’ and ‘reclaim’ from Showalter’s (1999: 13), Memmi’s (1990: 195), and Fanon’s (1990: 179) assertions, because these are present unequivocally in *In Her Own Image*:

(1) In contrast to the uncritical stance adopted in *New Territory*, Boland *protests* against patriarchal literary standards, in an outspoken and subversive manner. She angrily departs from conventional depictions of women. The beloved lyric muse of male artists is attacked in “Tirade for the Mimic Muse” with assertions as follows: “I know you for the ruthless bitch you are:/ Our criminal, our tricoteuse, our Muse-/ Our Muse of Mimic Art”. Similarly, the patriarchal dichotomy evil witch/ submissive wife is strongly criticized in poems such as “Witching” and “In His Own Image”. This act of exposing the damaging consequences of negative stereotypes on the

³ Maguire (1999: 62) explains that the feminism Boland refers to is that early feminism of “Stalinist impulses” reflected in Ireland in the mid 1970s. According to this critic, it was the feminist theory developed within the Irish Women’s Movement and the emerging Women’s Studies departments.

⁴ By asserting that *In Her Own Image* is a feminist volume, I disagree with O’Donnell (1993: 41) when she argues the following:

The ten poems in *In Her Own Image* were relentlessly described as ‘feminist’ poems. As women writers have been discovered in the intervening years, almost anything to do with women’s lives is liable to be termed ‘feminist’, a convenient mechanism perhaps, by which the actual poetry may be critically diminished.

According to O’Donnell, the adjective ‘feminist’ has been too easily linked with critical denigration. It is my contention that, precisely because of its feminist stance and not in spite of it, *In Her Own Image* is a unique volume of unquestionable value in Boland’s career. The themes that Boland puts forwards are an enormous and significant achievement for a woman poet who is trying to make herself heard in a country with a strong andocentric poetic tradition.

(gendered) colonial subject has also been identified by Fanon (1991: 113) as central to this second phase of decolonization.

(2) Boland *advocates* her right to be the author of a creative work, to be in control of her subjects in the poem. The title of the volume, *In Her Own Image*, is itself clearly subversive of the dominating male poetic discourse. As González Arias (2000a: 37) notes, Boland overturns the Biblical passage that explains how God created humankind *in his own image*. Boland is suggesting a goddess who is able to create humanity, and by extension womanhood, in her own image. At the same time, she implies that women poets are able to write poetry in their own image, (with their own experiences), without having to imitate a previous tradition which simply ignored them.

(3) Boland *reclaims* her right to describe taboo areas of female experience, such as anorexia, menstruation, mastectomy, or masturbation. The fact that *In Her Own Image* was published by Arlen House, “the pioneering Irish feminist press of the early mid-eighties” (Roche 1993: 1), is no surprise, given the radical tone of the book.⁵ Boland demands the authority to create a new literary tradition and defends her creative potential by approaching subjects that were new in Ireland. Haberstroh (1996: 22-23) points to the emergence in the 1980s of a whole body of poetry by Irish women defying sexual taboos and offering alternative images to female autonomy:

Female sexuality [...] became a focus of self-identity. In 1980, Eithne Strong published *FLESH... The Greatest Sin*, which might be read as a female version of Patrick Kavanagh's *The Great Hunger*; in the same year Eavan Boland's *In Her Own Image* explored the effects of conventional sexual images of women; and in 1982, Mary Dorsey's *Kindling* ignored the homosexuality taboo to depict lesbian experience.⁶

Boland is one voice among many others who, in the 1980s, rely on body imagery.⁷ As I will argue, the woman poet produces an avant-garde work of art rooted in the female body, very similar to the one that French feminism has advocated.

French feminists like Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray have encouraged women to rely on their own potential and personal experiences. Hélène Cixous' name is most often associated with that of “écriture féminine” or “feminine writing”. For Cixous, the best means to transform the

⁵ Arlen House also published disregarded masterworks like Kate O'Brien's *The Ante-Room* (dealing with issues like lesbianism) back into print (Roche 1993: 1).

⁶ González Arias (2000a: 37) points out that while American women poets had started to employ body imagery as a subversive technique in the early 1970s, in Ireland, it was after a decade that women poets began to express their sexuality.

⁷ Some literary critics, such as O'Donnell (1993: 41), assert that *In Her Own Image* was essential for all the other women writers who, like her, started to publish in the early 1980s:

It is not so much that her subjects were so new – because [...] Eithne Strong had been exploring some of the terrain Boland ventures into here. [...] But unlike Strong, Boland brought with her a critical agenda which she seemed consciously to employ to carry her through the inevitable misunderstandings, hostilities, silly tussles, and half-baked – notions about women's writing.

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prevailing socio-symbolic system is by means of inscribing women’s sexuality in a particular form of writing called “écriture féminine”.⁸ Like Cixous, Irigaray defines woman’s language in its relation to their sexuality. Irigaray envisages the possibility of a different, non-masculine discourse, a revolutionary and iconoclastic woman’s language, what she calls “a feminine syntax” (1991: 136) or “a speaking (as) woman” (1991: 137).⁹

This French attempt at a feminist writing has its equivalent in Adrienne Rich’s American advocacy of the expression of women’s lived experiences. Several critics have singled Rich out as a significant influence on Boland’s feminist volume.¹⁰ Albert Gelpi (1999: 210) explains that Boland read Rich’s *Diving into the Wreck* (1973) and *The Dream of a Common Language* (1978) in the final 1970s, before she began writing *In Her Own Image*. Nevertheless, it was Rich’s essay “When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision” what exerted the greatest influence on Boland’s departure from her earlier ‘Feminine’/ ‘Assimilationist’ phase. As Boland explains in an interview, “it was an enormous rush of oxygen to read Adrienne Rich’s “When We Dead Awaken”” (Allen-Randolph 1999b: 300). In a previous prose work, Boland asserts: “Adrienne Rich is a wonderful poet and her essay “When We Dead Awaken” [...] is a central statement in contemporary poetry. It should be read by every poet” (Boland 1996a: 244).¹¹

After having read “When We Dead Awaken”, it is easy to understand why Boland was so fascinated with this essay. Adrienne Rich’s own life (as described in her essay) coincides in more than one way with Boland’s life at that time. Rich (1979: 38) explains how she was encouraged by her father to read and write. In her early years, she began writing to please him, “the literary master”, in a kind of respectful conservatism which demanded her to be “maidenly, elegant, intellectual, [and] discreet” (p. 39). Her life radically changed as she married in her early twenties and had three children before her thirties (p. 42). Since then, she had to share her time between fulfilling her domestic duties and writing poems. She found out that she felt dissatisfied with the poems she had written, for they seemed “mere exercises for poems I hadn’t written” (p. 42). Rich gradually realized that “to be maternally with small children all day in the old way, to be with a man in the old way of marriage” required her to put aside some of her desires to write her own

⁸ Cixous suggests that both sexes are potentially capable of producing a “feminine writing”. As Andermatt (1984: 11) explains, she believes that there are “women who write on the masculine side and men who do not repress their femininity”. Nevertheless, Cixous believes that women are currently more capable of producing this kind of writing. By giving voice to their experiences, they have more potential to subvert the prevailing order. In her essay “Extreme Fidelity”, Cixous (1994: 136) describes the work of Clarice Lispector as the best example of feminine writing.

⁹ Irigaray develops this theme particularly in her essays “This Sex Which Is Not One” (1985: 23-33), “The ‘Mechanics’ of Fluids” (1985: 106-118), and “When Our Lips Speak Together” (1985: 205-218).

¹⁰ See Allen-Randolph (1995), Luftig (1993), and Gelpi (1999).

¹¹ Nonetheless, somewhat later, as a more mature poet, Boland (1996a: 244) criticizes Rich for being “separatist” and “antitraditional”, something that Maguire (1999: 61) disagrees about, by arguing that Rich is not so radical, for she consistently highlights the influence that canonical male poets exerted on her, mostly in terms of technique.

sense of herself, her female experience (p. 43). Surely, Boland identified herself with Rich when she claims: "I am aware of the women who are not with us because they are washing dishes and looking after the children" (p. 38).

Like Rich, Boland began as a conservative young formalist, but, at the time of reading Rich's essay, she had a similar change of life that will radically reform her as a poet. At the end of the 1970s, she moved from the University culture in Dublin, where she had become "a sort of honorable *male* poet" (my emphasis), out to the suburbs. She married and had two children (interview with Allen-Randolph 1993b: 118). Gradually, she began to feel that the traditional Irish canonical poem could not account for the 'ordinary' life she had started to live. They were poems where "you could have a political murder but not a baby. Or the Dublin hills and not the suburbs under them" (Boland 1996a: 119). As her life as a woman in a Dublin suburb with small children was not part of Irish poetry, Boland felt the need to subvert the poetic tradition she had inherited. As Adrienne Rich, Boland felt that "to be a female human being trying to fulfill traditional female functions in a traditional way is in direct conflict with the subversive function of the imagination" (Rich 1979: 43).

Boland's change of lifestyle meant for her the sort of "awakening [of] consciousness" Rich (1979: 35) talks about in her essay. According to Rich, women have to 'wake up' to the fact that they have been culturally oppressed in a male-dominated society. The challenge for women writers, she goes on, would be to rebel against this repressive reality, to search for their own identity, to explore "a whole new psychic geography", a geography which could bear witness to women's reality (ibid).

In order to approach Boland's *In Her Own Image* as an intermediate volume in Boland's evolution, I intend to apply not only Showalter, Memmi, and Fanon's theories as regards the 'colonized' subject (affected by gender and race respectively), but also other feminist and/or postcolonial critics. As I intend to demonstrate, Rich, Cixous, and Irigaray's feminist tenets are carried out faithfully by Boland in *In Her Own Image*. On the other hand, Spivak (1993: 3-17), among other feminist postcolonial theorists, will be helpful for an understanding of this volume's essentialist and separatist stance.

With a view to discussing the main features that clearly distinguish *In Her Own Image* as a volume of oppositional poetry, I will rely on its internal evolution. As Allen-Randolph (1991: 49-53) has also noted, the first half of the volume offers a negative analysis of society: child abuse ("Tirade for the Mimic Muse"), wife abuse ("In His Own Image"), and anorexia ("Anorexic"). The second half of the volume moves from a negative analysis to an exploration of a form of writing rooted in female sexuality. In this sense, the poems move from women's oppression to a

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celebration of womanhood in essentialist terms. It is in poems such as “Menses”, “Solitary”, “Exhibitionist” and “Making up” where Boland recognizes the link between sexuality and textuality as theorized by Cixous and Irigaray.¹² The following sections are aimed at demonstrating that Boland is, in 1980, at her second phase in her search for artistic autonomy.

7.3.2. Anger and revenge: a ‘tirade’ against patriarchal representations of women

A clear indication that *In Her Own Image* has not yet reached the ultimate artistic autonomy stage characteristic of Showalter, Memmi, and Fanon’s final phases is that its women are moved by anger and revenge.¹³ Fanon (1990: 27) argues that a subjugated writer necessarily has to go through a period of distress, difficulty, and unrepressed anger in order to achieve artistic liberation. He shows that the destruction of the colonial world is only possible by the fierce abolition or substitution of the colonizer for the colonized:

National liberation, national renaissance, the restoration of nationhood ... whatever may be the headings used or the new formulas introduced, decolonization is always a violent phenomenon, [...] a whole social structure [is] changed from the bottom up. (Fanon 1990: 27)

The very first process of colonization, Fanon goes on, was brought about by the violent exploitation of the native by the settler, when the figure of the colonized consequently becomes the invader’s own creation: “it is the settler who has brought the native into existence and who perpetuates his existence” (ibid). Therefore, decolonization is not only a total and absolute substitution of power, but also the colonized’s search for their own distinctiveness, what Fanon suggestively recalls as the “veritable creation of new men”, who re-introduce their own language, their own traditions, and who become “human in the very process by which they liberate themselves” (p. 28). In the process, the very violence of the colonial regime is adopted by the native (p. 31). As Sartre (1990b: 18) explains in the preface to *The Wretched of the Earth*, “[w]hen [the native’s rage] boils over, he rediscovers his lost innocence and he comes to know himself in that he creates himself”. According to Fanon’s theories, anger and self-creation go necessarily together, something that Rich (1979: 48) has also identified in women’s writing:

¹² It is important to note, however, that, while her writing practice in *In Her Own Image* shows a clear affiliation with the French feminist movement, Boland was not familiar with this critical school until several years after publishing this volume of poetry (Allen-Randolph 1991: 48).

¹³ Boland shares the greedy, open, and angry stance characteristic of nineteenth-century women writers such as Laura Riding, Anne Finch, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Anne Sexton, Emily Dickinson, and Cristina Rosseti, who tried to assert themselves at a certain point (Gilbert & Gubar 2000: 35, 44, 143, 191, 549).

The awakening of consciousness is not like the crossing of a frontier – one step and then you are in another country. Much of woman's poetry has been of the nature of the blues song: a cry of pain, of victimization, or a lyric of seduction. And today, much poetry by women [...] is charged with anger. I think we need to go through that anger [...] if not we will betray our reality.

By reading Fanon and Rich, one understands how Boland's rage in *In Her Own Image* is a necessary step in her radical defence of those womanly aspects that have been denigrated by Irish historical and literary accounts. In the opening poem of *In Her Own Image*, "Tirade for the Mimic Muse", Boland rebels with anger against her cultural oppression and uses violent metaphors to address the traditional feminine muse beloved by male poets:

I've caught you. You slut. You fat trout.
So here you are fumed in candle-stink.
Its yellow balm exhumes you for the glass.
How you arch and put in it!
How you poach your face in it!
Anyone would think you are a whore-
An ageing-out-of-work kind-hearted tart.
I know you for the ruthless bitch you are:
Our criminal, our tricoteuse, our Muse-
Our Muse of Mimic Art.

This poem shows Boland at her most aggressive and direct stance. The poetic voice addresses the Mimic Muse by means of colloquial language, traditionally regarded as "unpoetical" (Leech 1969: 23): "I've caught you out", "Your luck ran out", etc.¹⁴ This, together with insults such as "slut", "fat trout", "whore", "tart", and "ruthless bitch" amaze any reader who has in mind Boland's rather conservative stance in *New Territory*. As Hagen and Zelman (1991: 448) explain, the speaker begins by holding up a mirror to compel this old epic muse to confront herself. Her intention is, above all, to uncover her superficial image:

Eye-shadow, swivel brushes, blushers,
Hot pinks, rouge pots, sticks,
Ice for the pores, a mud mask-
All the latest tricks.
Not one of them disguise
That there's a dead millennium in your eyes.
You try to lamp the sockets of your loss:
The lives that famished for your look of love.
Your time is up. There's not a stroke, a flick
Can make your crime cosmetic.

¹⁴ Leech (1969: 23) regards colloquialism in poetry as an attempt to escape from banality, from the traditional poetic fashion. Boland also uses other linguistic devices to get free from the literary conventions of the past. By using words of her own creation, she gives oddity to the concept it represents: "An ageing-out-of-work kind-hearted tart".

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The image of making up is quite recurrent in *In Her Own Image*. As González Arias (2000a: 38) points out, this imagery reinforces, on the one hand, the fictitious and artificial nature of female stereotypes and, on the other hand, women’s tendency to ‘kill’ themselves artistically in order to appeal to men. But makeup can also mean “self-made”. The poet-speaker of “Tirade for the Mimic Muse” strips the male-fashioned Muse with the promise that her “words” will “make your face naked”, nakedness here, as in a later poem of this volume, “Exhibitionist”, referring to an image of her own creation. In this way, the passive and conformist stance of a woman wearing all sorts of (lifeless) masks is confronted by a fierce woman who seeks to destroy all patriarchal structures. As a woman extremely conscious of her creative potential, the woman in the poem resembles all those mad and monstrous creatures of nineteenth century literature who mean a threat to the well structured (male) society.¹⁵ Boland literally becomes that figure of the madwoman in the attic that Gilbert and Gubar (2002: 85) mention. As these critics explain, this character is the author’s double, because it is

through the violence of the double that the female author enacts her own raging desire to escape male houses and male texts, which at the same time it is through the double’s violence that this anxious author articulates for herself the costly destructiveness of anger repressed until it can no longer be contained (ibid).

But the woman speaker also reminds one of Celtic goddesses such as Mór, Mórríghna, or Badb, who characterized themselves by their violence and aggressiveness (González Arias 2000b: 176). In a direct confrontation against the Irish nationalist tradition, the narrator is able to debunk the muse’s “drums and dances”, her “rituals and flatteries of war”, and her “chants and pipes and witless empty rites”, clear references to the national muse of “war-like men” and the traditional Irish songs which appeared in “Athene’s Song” (*New Territory*). The image of Mother Ireland, a “looking-glass” for male poets, is blamed for escaping from the real (at times harsh) conditions of life:

The kitchen screw and the rack of labour,
The wash thumbed and the dish cracked,
The scream of beaten women,
The crime of babies battered,
The hubbub and the shriek of daily grief
That seeks asylum behind suburb walls-
A world you could have sheltered in your skirts-

¹⁵ See Gilbert and Gubar’s second chapter in *The Madwoman in the Attic*, “Infection in the Sentence: the Woman Writer and the Anxiety of Authorship”, for rebellious female characters in women’s fiction (2000: 45-92).

Although this muse “could have sheltered” this world in her “skirts”, she prefers to “protect” herself “from horrors”, and use “all the latest tricks” (such as makeup) to disguise “that there’s a dead millennium in [her] eyes”. The woman’s rage is reinforced by the recognition that she “had [once] waited on [her] trashy whim”. But as the speaker mazes “her way to womanhood”, she realizes that thanks to the details of her ordinary life (“in a nappy stink, by a soaking wash / Among stacked dishes”), the muse’s “glass cracked”. The image of the mirror is crucial to the understanding of the poem. As Virginia Woolf (1974: 53) points out, “[w]omen have served all these centuries as looking-glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size”. It is Boland’s intention to unmask the mimic muse and show her “true reflections”, so that her Muse, more inclusive now, can bear witness to the reality of women’s lives:

Make your face naked,
Strip your mind naked,
Drench your skin in a woman’s tears.
I will wake you from your sluttish sleep.
I will show you true reflections, terrors.
You are the Muse of all mirrors.
Look in them and weep.

What the speaker suggests is that, although this woman has been a prisoner of the mirror/text’s images, she has the ability to break her former mirror and look at last at her “true reflections”, her own womanhood and her own autonomy. Gilbert and Gubar (2000: 17) explain that “before the woman writer can journey through the looking glass towards literary autonomy, she must come to terms with the images on the surface of the glass”. In other words, this woman must contemplate herself in the mirror of the male-inscribed literary tradition, in order to kill the aesthetic ideal through which she has been ‘killed’ into art. In this sense, Boland’s poem shares this powerful metaphor of the mirror-looking woman with Mary Elizabeth Coleridge’s “The Other Side of the Mirror”, where the poet encourages the woman to break the glass and be free of it:

Shade of a shadow in the glass,
O set the crystal surface free!
Pass – as the fairer visions pass –
Nor ever more return, to be
The ghost of a distracted hour,
That heard me whisper, ‘I am she!’ (Quoted in Gilbert & Gubar 2000: 15-6)

As in Coleridge’s poem, in “Tirade for the Mimic Muse”, Boland seems to have opened her eyes to female realities within and around her. Before asserting herself in essentialist terms, as she will do in the second half of this volume, she must come to terms with those male constructs

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which are reflected in the mirror. As Gilbert and Gubar (2000: 17) assert, “self-definition necessarily precedes self-assertion: the creative “I AM” cannot be uttered if the “I” knows not what it is”.

Boland’s new aesthetics is perceived formally in the poem. She changes the conventional verse technique of her first poems by writing ten-line stanzas with no regular meter and rhyme. Her aggressive and assertive stance is reflected in the use of vocatives, “You slut. You fat trout”; and imperatives: “Make your face naked./ Strip your mind naked”. Both devices denote the authority of the poetic voice. Her empowerment is reinforced by the modal volitional ‘will’, which expresses her intention to carry out actions: “I will wake you from your sluttish sleep./ I will show you true reflections, terrors”. It is this use of the volitional modal, as we will see, which clearly distinguishes *In Her Own Image* from other volumes of poetry. The conflict between this “Muse of Mimic Art”, the woman’s former self, and this new conscious woman is reflected in the tense atmosphere created. The high emotional tone of the poem is achieved by exclamatory sentences: “How you arch and pout in it!/ How you poach your face in it!”, “To think I waited on your trashy whim!”; and by emphatic auxiliaries: “You *did* protect yourself from horrors” (my emphasis). Boland shows in this poem a frightening self-hatred, and this is accompanied by an incoherent use of personal pronouns. There is a blurring of the “I” and the “You”, so that the poetic voice seems to be addressing her former self: “And I who mazed *my* way to womanhood/ Through all *your* halls of mirrors”, “Among stacked dishes/ *Your* glass cracked” (my emphasis). Lack of coherent form is also observed in the deviated syntax of the poem. There are midline caesuras created by commas: “Through all your halls of mirrors, making faces”; fragmentary lines: “The kitchen screw and the rack of labour,/ The wash thumbed and the dish cracked,/ The scream of beaten women,/ The crime of babies battered...”; and incomplete sentences: “Eye-shadow, swivel brushes, blushers,/ Hot pinks, rouge pots, sticks,/ Ice for the pores, a mud mask-/ All the latest tricks.” Deviation at the level of graphology is also significant. Orthography becomes an expressive device in this poem. Note the lack of punctuation at the end of the second and third lines:

Hoping your lamp and flash,
Your glass, might show
This world I needed nothing else to know [...]

All these linguistic deviations commented above may indicate that Boland is giving verbal expression to the revolution of discourse advocated by French feminism, most notably by Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray, which I will develop later on. French feminism defends a form of language that manages to surpass “the coded, clichéd, ordinary language”, as Andermatt (1984: 5) explains. Although Kristeva’s theories will be most appropriately addressed in Boland’s mature

work, some of her assertions come close to Cixous's and Irigaray's. In "Oscillation du 'pouvoir' au 'refus'", Kristeva (1981: 165-166) argues that women's writing has to be the work of the avant-garde which produces linguistic innovations:

in a culture where the speaking subjects are conceived of as masters of their speech, they have what is called a "phallic" position. The fragmentation of language in a text calls into question the very posture of this mastery. [...] If women have a role to play in this on-going process, it is only in assuming a *negative* function: reject everything finite, definite, structured, loaded with meaning, in the existing state of society.

According to these feminists, language is masculine, in a system entirely based upon one fundamental signifier: the phallus. When women begin to speak confidently of themselves, they manage to find what they think of as their true voice, a "feminine syntax". Boland's language certainly disorients the reader for its incoherent form and fragmented language, for its angry stance and chaotic emotional state.

As we will see in the following section, Boland's 'feminist' women, in their demolishing discourses, reflect more dispossession, self-hatred, and anger than relaxed authority and artistic freedom. As Virginia Woolf identified, there are risks in reacting with anger and bitterness toward one's reality. When talking about Charlotte Brontë, Woolf (1974: 104) argued that it was her indignation that distanced her from the freedom to think by herself:

one sees that she will never get her genius expressed whole and entire. Her books will be deformed and twisted. She will write in a rage where she should write calmly. She will write foolishly where she should write wisely. She will write of herself where she should write of her characters. She is at war with her lot.

It won't be until Boland leaves aside her anger that she will come to terms with her own poetic voice and she will write her finest poems. As she will later assert, "I do not believe we will reach the future without living through the womanly angers which shadow this present" (Boland 1996a: 254).

7.3.3. Ambivalent impulses: a fractured and confused self

7.3.3.1. A split poetic voice in "Anorexic"

As Fanon (1991: 110) and Showalter (1999: 191) have explained, the rage that invades the gendered and colonial subject in the second phase of artistic decolonization is linked to increasing ambivalent impulses and antagonistic feelings about the self. Fanon (1991: 110) describes how the

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colonized black figure is constantly assailed by profound contradictions concerning his/her own identity:

An unfamiliar weight burdened me. The real world challenged my claims. In the white world the man of colour encounters difficulties in the developing of this bodily schema. Consciousness of the body is solely a negating activity. It is a third-person consciousness. The body is surrounded by an atmosphere of certain uncertainty.

Fanon’s character suddenly feels insecure about his own body, confused by the acknowledgment that, for the white man, “[t]he Negro is an animal, the Negro is bad, the Negro is mean, the Negro is ugly” (Fanon 1991: 113). Instead of ignoring this aspect of his (culturally constructed) identity, the colonized subject demands that “notice” be taken of this current image (ibid).

In *In Her Own Image*, under the threatening male gaze, Boland experiences this sort of uncertainty and “corporeal malediction” that Fanon (1991: 111) identifies. Although Boland, as a feminist writer, openly talks about her sexual attitudes, in the process, she reflects profound conflicts and contradictions. This is observed in the clear splitting of identity that the poetic voices in some of the poems experience. In most of them, we come across double selves in constant struggle (“In Her Own Image”, “Anorexic”, “Menses”) or distorted minds which turn this self-hatred into self-destruction (“Witching”). These women achieve a distinct identity by means of self-destruction. This self-annihilation observed in *In Her Own Image* resembles Boland’s mature dissolution of her poetic images. Nevertheless, the cause and effect is different. In her mature poetry, the woman poet will represent the self in terms of dissolution, the aim being to show the fallacy involved in defending essentialist definitions of identity. In this volume, Boland ironically destroys herself with a view to reflecting the myth that the cost of female wisdom is self-extermination, or, at best, insanity.¹⁶ On the other hand, the movement towards self-annihilation that these poems exemplify might be caused by Boland’s “anxiety of authorship”. As we have seen, this term, coined by Gilbert and Gubar (2000: 49), signifies a woman artist’s fear that she cannot be an artistic creator and that, if she ever writes, she will be destroyed, or, at best, she will be forced to live in isolation.

A significant case of this is found in “Anorexic”, where, as Kelly (1993: 49) notes, Boland portrays a woman acting in self-destruction, by her internalization of the polar opposites of purity

¹⁶ Gilbert and Gubar’s comment as regards Charlotte Brontë’s *Villette* is significant here:

Power itself does seem to be dangerous, if not fatal for women: unsupplied with any sociable acceptable channel, the independent and creative woman is dubbed crafty, a witch. If she becomes an artist, she faces the possibility of self-destruction; if she does not, she destroys others. (Gilbert & Gubar 2000: 433)

and sexuality, as represented by Mary (an ideal of intellectual virtuousness) and Eve (an allegory of sinful sexuality):

Flesh is heretic.
My body is a witch.
I am burning it.

In this poem, Boland portrays what Gilbert and Gubar (2000: 53) consider as one of the most common 'female diseases' portrayed in women's writing: anorexia. Boland associates anorexia with traditional conceptualizations of female sexuality, as recorded in historical, literary, and religious texts. In this poem, a male wish is fulfilled by a woman who seems to have accepted her role fully. Taught by patriarchal conventions to be a beautiful and virginal object, this woman feels anxious about her own flesh. The feeling underlying this poem is one of masochistic violence. The woman in "Anorexic" draws attention to her deformed figure, and despising herself, proceeds to act in self-destruction:

Yes I am torching
her curves and paps and wiles.
They scorch in my self-denials.

How she meshed my head
in the half-truths
of her fevers

till I renounced
milk and honey
and the taste of lunch.

I vomited her hungers.
Now the bitch is burning.

The confusion of personal pronouns here is symptomatic of how, within Western phallogocentric thought, women can only experience themselves "fragmentarily" (Irigaray 1985: 30). As Irigaray (1985: 30) explains, the traditional binary logic has divided women into two, "one outside, the other inside": one superficial woman, the one who is there for male contemplation, and the 'real' one, the one who carries out autoeroticism and is therefore not sanctioned by patriarchy. These double-selves are constructed by a male logic which wishes to place women into "their compartments, their schemas, their distinctions and oppositions: virginal/deflowered, pure/impure, innocent/experienced" (p. 212). The anorexic woman's contempt for her own body results from internalizing the male binary logic. In a reversal of the myth of origins in which Eve is condemned for having eaten the apple, the poetic persona, "thin as a rib", deliberately punishes herself with starvation. González Arias (2000a: 40) explains this analogy between the woman in

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the poem and Eve. In attempting to mould her identity in man’s idealized image, the anorexic woman internalizes what Hélène Cixous (1994: 37) denominates the “dual, hierachized oppositions” of the male discourse:

Where is she?

Activity/ passivity

Sun/ Moon

Culture/ Nature

Day/ Night

Father/ Mother

Head/ Heart

Inteligible/ Palpable

Logos/ Pathos

Form, convex, sep, advance, semen, progress.

Matter, concave, ground –where steps are taken, holding – and dumping – ground

Man

Woman

The “couple” man/ woman is inserted within this opposition as irreconcilable opposites. In this hierarchical distribution, male is privileged and the feminine is subordinated to the masculine order. The other/woman only appears in the negative side, only as the construct of man. The result is that “she” has become non-existent, “unthinkable” (Cixous 1994: 39). Furthermore, Cixous argues that this oppositional practice has become endemic to the extent that it appears “eternal-natural” (ibid). In this poem, Boland adopts the anorexic’s point of view in order to denounce how easy the labels and categories of (masculine) thought can be understood as ‘natural’. To the opposing dualities Cixous mentions, we may add one that directly affects the speaker: flesh vs. soul. Only by rejecting her female flesh, can she attain the male soul or the desired purity associated with the Virgin. Internalizing the patriarchal discourse, Boland’s Eve, viewing her identity split into two opposite binaries, perceives masculinity as the ideal state. That is why the poetic persona seeks to be sinless and return to Adam’s body where she can grow “angular and holy”. She desires it so intensely that spatial imagery becomes obsessively depicted:

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My dreams probe	past pain, keeping his heart such company
a claustrophobia a sensuous enclosure. How warm it was and wide	as will make me forget in a small place the fall
once by a warm drum, once by the song of his breath and in his sleeping side.	into forked dark, into python needs heaving to hips and breasts and lips and heat and sweat and fat and greed.
Only a little more, only a few more days sinless, foodless,	
I will slip back into him again as if I had never been away.	
Caged so I will grow angular and holy	

As Allen-Randolph (1991: 52) rightly notes, here, verse imitates content. As the penultimate stanza “falls” into the final one, the speaker tries to reverse the “fall” from the grace of the male body into a female body of “python needs”, “hips”, “breasts”, “lips”, and “sweat and fat and greed”. It is significant how the woman avoids employing possessive constructions in the first person when referring to her body, preferring to use no possessives at all, or the third person possessive (as in “her curves and paps and wiles”). Parallelism in the text is also significant. The equation of “sinless” and “foodless”, and “angular” and “holy” carry strong implications of the anorexic’s distorted world-view. By placing these nouns and adjectives in succession, the reader assumes they take on semantic relationships: starving is holy while eating is sinful. According to Fowler (1986: 42), these linguistic techniques of placing together apparently non-related (and even opposing) terms, promote *defamiliarization*, forcing the reader “to look, to be critical”. Thus, here the reader, startled by the similarity drawn by “sinless” and “foodless”, for instance, is inclined to examine carefully the anorexic’s point of view.

With linguistic techniques such as this, Boland explicitly denounces the corruption exerted by male-centered myths. In an interview with Wilson (1990b: 82), Boland explains her interest in adopting the speaking voice of one of the patriarchal victims, the anorexic:

I have to say that I think *In Her Own Image* is a misunderstood book [...]. I wrote it with a puritan perspective, but it was taken to be a confession of a number of diseases which I had and neuroses which I was clearly giving evidence of! There are certain areas that are degraded because they were silent. They need to be re-experienced and re-examined. Their darker energies need to be looked at. That is exactly what *In Her Own Image* is about, seeing the image by looking at it.

7.3. “Feminist/Cultural Nationalist” phase

Boland looks at the trauma of anorexia from a feminist critical stance. Fogarty (1994: 97-98) draws a very interesting comparison between Paul Muldoon’s ‘Aisling’ and Boland’s ‘Anorexic’. Her analysis of two poems dealing with anorexia provides a useful insight into the different uses of feminine images by contemporary Irish male and female writers. She concludes that, whereas in Muldoon’s poem anorexia acts as “an allegory of the futility of the actions of Irish republican prisoners on hunger strikes”, in Boland’s poem, anorexia is not used to talk about apparently public and political issues (p. 98). Boland’s lyric ‘I’ is no longer a “transcendent and universalizing” male voice, but rather a voice that treats a concrete experience with “ironic closeness and familiarity” (ibid). Thus, Boland places the anorexic at the centre of a private experience. As González Arias (2000a: 38) explains, “The Beauty Myth” is the only way contemporary society has to imprison women, as former myths about chastity, maternity, and passivity have lost most of their effectiveness. Boland questions the portrayal of anorexia from the inside of its victim’s mind, showing how the acceptance of the male ideal of women as beautiful objects only leads to self-inflicted torture.

Other poems in this volume continue exploring the tragic consequences when women accept imposed patriarchal systems of representation, by reflecting a fractured and split identity which results from woman’s internalization of the conventional roles of mother and wife. The following section analyzes this aspect.

7.3.3.2. Ambivalent attitude towards motherhood

As has been hinted, Showalter (1999: 191) also identifies the ambivalent impulses and contradictory feelings that Fanon (1991: 110) diagnosed in the second phase of artistic decolonization. This American feminist critic explains how the celebration of motherhood and maternal love can at times be combined with an extreme aversion to the actual process of sexual intercourse and childbirth. In the title poem “In Her Own Image”, Boland puts the reader inside a woman’s mind that ends up killing her own child. The narrator’s rejection of motherhood results from her uneasiness with the social conventions regarding women as mothers. In a country where a nationalist tradition has often recurred to symbolic identification between Ireland and the Mother, and where the precepts of the 1937 Constitution have relegated women to the exclusive roles of mothers and housewives, feminist counter-statements such as this are quite revolutionary. As González Arias (2000b: 150) explains, the act of rejecting motherhood does not necessarily imply a rejection of female procreativity, but an escape from the traditional role of mothering that women have been subjected to. In “In Her Own Image”, the mother kills her own daughter in order to avoid her experiencing the same victimization that she has suffered from. By destroying her

offspring, the woman speaker avoids the perpetuation of male stereotypes. From the very beginning, we come across the internal confusion of a woman who has just strangled her own child:

It is her eyes:
the irises are gold
and round they go
like the ring on my wedding finger,
round and round

The initial lines of the poem show how the woman speaker is alienated by the roles of mother and wife. She compares the gold irises of the dead child's eyes with her wedding ring. Both are metaphors of the timelessness that have entrapped the speaker in an image which portrays her as eternally beautiful and immortal. Motherhood and marriage have been institutions that have secluded women for centuries. Adopting these traditional and conventional feminine roles implies living a lifeless life, a sort of living burial of repression, annihilation, and dependence upon men. That is why there is a connection in this poem between death and femininity: "[t]he ring on my wedding finger" becomes a sort of living "burial", that distances the speaker from the 'real' experiences of womanhood, from women's "histories or tears".¹⁷

The schizophrenic personality of the anorexic acquires here the shape of a married woman who revolves around double selves. As Rich (1979: 34) has noted, woman's "awakening of consciousness" can be "confusing, disorienting, and painful", for realizing the oppression you have been exposed to is not pleasant at all. The woman in "In Her Own Image" similarly feels confused and disconcerted at her awakening to the oppression she has been suffering. Her inability to define herself leads her to an act of self-negation:

She is not myself
anymore, she is not
even in my sky
anymore and I
am not myself.

These lines show a fragmented self, which, as Allen Randolph (1991: 51) explains, only knows how to define herself in negative terms, by "what-she-is-not" (quoted in González Arias 2000b: 216). She cannot perceive herself as a stable and fixed subject. Unable to disentangle her sense of herself from her sense of her daughter, she ends up confusing her own body with that of

¹⁷ Emily Dickinson has also described marriage as a repressive institution, as in her famous passage: "Born-Bridalled – Shrouded/ In a day [...] / Is this- the way?" (Dickinson 2001: 372). For women, especially for women writers, marriage has meant the death of their souls, the annihilation of their creative potential. As Dickinson, Boland finds difficulty in identifying with the "pretty face" of the married woman.

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her child. As in “Anorexic”, the narrator tries to kill that part of herself she feels is oppressing her. But, instead of proceeding to act in self-destruction, she ends up killing her own daughter:

I will not disfigure
her pretty face.
Let her wear amethyst thumbprints,
a family heirloom,
a sort of burial necklace

and I know just the place:
Where the wall glooms,
where the lettuce seeds,
where the jasmine springs
no surprises

I will bed her.
She will bloom there,
second nature to me,
the one perfection
among compromises.

The end of the poem portrays a dead daughter who wears a “family heirloom” of “amethyst thumbprints”. Family is understood as a socially and culturally sanctioned structure in which violent parameters towards women are perpetuated. Unable to escape from this destructive heritage, killing her own child and liberating herself from a possible offspring are the only means the speaker can have access to her own identity. The poem ends with the persona burying her “second nature”, and adopting a “compromise” to “bloom” *in her own image*. This promise of a future, compromised identity, a healed fragmented self, will be fulfilled in poems such as “Solitary” and “Making Up”, where the body will be an essential element for the woman’s united and unbreakable identity.¹⁸

Boland’s rejection of motherhood as a social institution is continued in poems such as “Witching”. The image of the witch in this poem is significant. As Fanon’s ‘Negro’ (1991: 130), who finally decides to embrace a mystical past, a valid historical place where accounts of “learned blacks” might restore “the dignity of his race”, Boland similarly embraces in “Witching” a mystical past inhabited by those elderly sisters who had a magical power fearful to men. The witch becomes a liberating symbol of an oppressive masculine culture. For feminists as well as contemporary women writers, witches stand for female creativity with their highest potential. As French feminist Gauthier (1981b: 199-201) asserts:

¹⁸ The endangered selfhood presented by the speaker in “Anorexic” and “In Her Own Image” is also manifested in “Mastectomy”, where the identity of the narrator is destroyed by the male surgeon’s removal of her breast. Because of the poem’s connection between woman’s identity and her body, I will analyze this poem in the following section, by applying some principles of French Feminism.

Why witches? *Because witches sing* [...]. In reality, they croon lullabies, they howl, they gasp, they babble, they shout, they sigh. [...]

Why witches? *Because witches are alive*. Because they are in direct contact with the life of their own bodies and bodies of others, with the life force itself. [...]

Why witches? *Because witches are rapturous* [...]. Their pleasure is so violent, so transgressive, so open, so fatal, that men have not yet recovered.

This reliance on witches in the second stage of decolonization has also been identified by Showalter (1999: 193). This feminist critic has noted that, in their allusions to physical victimization and sexual exploitation, feminist writers usually identify with fearful figures, such as the witch or the prostitute, who albeit despised by patriarchal society are very helpful for the purposes of subversion.¹⁹ In this poem, Boland recurs precisely to this figure in order to subvert what has traditionally been a sacred role for women. Rather than something desired, motherhood is connected here with those women who repeat male standards, and also with the damaging allegorical image of Mother Ireland. Directing her speech towards those “nursery lights”, the witch describes them in rather negative terms:

these my enemies [...]

who breed
and breed,
who talk and talk –

birth
and bleeding,
the bacteria of feeds.

By connecting childbirth and bleeding, the speaker links motherhood with that nationalist speech that advocates blood sacrifice in the fight for the mother country. The “nursery lights” signify, as Kelly (1993: 53) puts it, those “national-muses [who provide] nurturing milk for the male oral tradition”. These apparently harmless lights are constraining images of womanhood that “shine”, “multiply”, and “douse” the witch’s own light. Only by burning her own body, can she create her own light, a light which is not the reflection of any looking-glass, any “nursery light”:

But I
know
what to do:

I will
reverse

¹⁹ In a similar way, Memmi (1990: 199) has also noted this need to reconstruct old myths, according to which the colonized was undervalued by the colonizer.

7.3. “Feminist/Cultural Nationalist” phase

their arson,

make
a pyre
of my haunch

and so
the last thing
they know
will be
the stench
of my crotch.

In this sense, the woman in the poem becomes a figure of her own creation: she turns out to be a self-burnt witch, rather than a witch burnt at the stake by others. As in “In Her Own Image”, childbearing is understood as an impediment to achieving one’s identity. The witch-figure denies the possibility of bearing a child, reacting to an inherited tradition in which women were most valued for their sole role in motherhood. By burning her ‘haunch’ (a metonymy of motherhood), the witch destroys not only her potential to be pregnant, but also those traditionally Irish icons of female domesticity. Addressing the “nursery lights”, or the Irish nationalist literary tradition, she concludes: “smell/ how well/ a woman’s/ flesh/ can burn”. Destruction and creation are intrinsically linked. By destroying the mythical mother of the Irish tradition, the woman in the poem creates her own distinct identity. Now she “own[s] the earth”, or in other words, she is not owned by anyone.

By rejecting to write about motherly experiences, Boland seems at first to distance herself from that French feminist advocacy of a woman’s language grounded in the primitive union between mother and child. Both Cixous (1994: 47-55) and Irigaray (1991: 16) defend a form of language that inscribes the rhythms and articulations of the mother’s body, and re-establishes the pre-symbolic union between self and m/other. It won’t be until Boland’s volume *Night Feed* that this aspect of Cixous’s and Irigaray’s theories will be manifested (see section 7.4.2.4.). Nevertheless, the artistic expression of the motherly “rhythms” that these feminists advocate might be observed in “Menses”. This poem contains the only passage in the volume where motherhood forms an indispensable part of the woman’s identity. Although “Menses” belongs to the second half of the internal evolution I earlier identified in *In Her Own Image*, I think it appropriate to include it here. This poem will provide useful introduction for the following section, for it contains one of the most positive affirmations of Boland’s womanhood in this volume.

In “Menses”, Boland exposes to public view something which has not only been ignored, but also hidden as shameful in society: menstruation. As González Arias (2000b: 129-130) explains, menstruation is understood, both in the Bible and in early Irish texts as a divine

punishment for women. By focusing on this womanly experience, Boland overturns this belief, transforming what has traditionally been considered a penance into a liberating source of woman's creativity. "Menses" starts by describing a woman who initially feels angry and disgusted at the experience of menstruation, especially because she is under the control of the moon. In the traditional association of women with the earth, the moon has been an emblematic figure which controls the woman and the earth's fluids (Cixous 1994: 39). In this poem, the moon symbolizes all the powerful forces at work both within and outside the speaker. Rather than standing as a symbol of female power, the moon both paralyzes the woman, in an endless cycle of biological menstruation, and condemns her as a sinful Eve, "a fallen self", who is punished with menstruation:

I am sick of it,
filled with it,
dulled by it,
thick with it.

To be the mere pollution of her wake!
a water cauled by her light,
a slick haul,
a fallen self,
a violence,
a daughter,

I am the moon's looking glass.

The verbal parallelism of these lines, combined with the passive structures, reinforces the trapped mental state of the speaker, who uselessly tries to free herself from "the mere pollution of [the moon's] wake". As in "Tirade for the Mimic Muse", the image of the looking-glass emerges again. The woman fears being a mere reflection of someone else's making. In contrast to "The Poets" (*New Territory*), where the moon was a mere "tenant" dependent on the sun ("the landlord"), here the moon is represented as an entity with its own force, controlling the woman at her whim. Nevertheless, a further reading indicates that this powerful entity needs the woman speaker, for it is the female fluids that satiate her own thirst:

My days are moon-dials.
She will never be done with me.
She needs me.
She is dry.

I leash to her,
a sea,
a washy heave,
a tide.

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The narrator, associating fertility with the rhythms of the sea and the moon, describes herself with water imagery. The startling verbal parallelism in these lines reinforces the cyclical biological process of menstruation. The repetition of structures imitates the constant coming and going of the woman’s fluids, compared to the “sea”, the “washy heave”, the “tide” (metaphors of blood flow).²⁰ Significantly enough, both Cixous (1994: 44) and Irigaray (1985: 214-215) have described women as “diffusion”, “liquefaction”, “aerial swimming before the symbolic”. As we will see when I apply these theories to Boland’s mature poetry, by envisaging womanhood as fluid, both French feminists attempt to describe it as a category that surpasses the opposition self/other. The metaphor of the woman as fluid water is constantly present in their theories, as in this passage by Cixous (1981: 260):

“Ah, there’s her sea”, he will say as he holds out to me a basin full of water from the little phallic mother from whom he’s inseparable. But look, our seas are what we make of them, full of fish or not, opaque or transparent, red or black, high or smooth, narrow or bankless; and we are ourselves sea, sand, coral, seaweed, beaches, tides, swimmers, children, waves... More or less wavily sea, earth, sky – what matter would rebuff us? We know how to speak them all.

In another essay, Cixous (1994: 44) argues that precisely because of this liquid nature, a woman can never be enclosed “within frontiers”, as “[h]er libido is cosmic” and “her unconsciousness is worldwide”. In contrast to this feminist belief, the fluidity that invades the woman in this poem is asphyxiating rather than liberating.²¹ The narrator here is doomed and dominated by the coming and going of fluids inside her body. Rather than escaping the binary logic intrinsic in Western patriarchal thought, the woman internalizes the patriarchal duality flesh vs. soul that appeared in “Anorexic”. In an act of negating the ‘tides’ of her body as a source of creative potential, the speaker argues that “[o]nly her mind is free” to analyze “the ruffian growths,/ the bindweed/ and the meadowsweet,/ the riff-raff” of her garden. These plants are allegories of her own female potential. They symbolize, as Kelly (1993: 52) would put it, “the woman’s own artistic drives”, to leave aside her own bodily discomfort and engage in a liberating creative activity. As we will see in “Solitary”, the narrator here adopts a separatist stance, by envying the plants which are not bound to sexual intercourse in order to experience childbirth:

How I envy them:
each filament,

²⁰ For traditional associations of women with water (rivers, sea, wells) in contemporary poetry by Irish male writers, in particular John Montague and Seamus Heaney, see Coughlan (1991).

²¹ It won’t be until Boland’s mature poetry that the dissolution and fluidity of the poetic speaker will lead to artistic autonomy.

each anther bred
from its own style,
its stamen,
is to itself a christening,
is to itself a marriage bed.

They fall to earth,
so ignorant
so innocent
of the sweated waters
and the watered salts,
of ecstasy,
of birth.

They are street-walkers,
lesbians,
nuns.
I am not one of them

In this sense, the speaker quarrels with the negative influence that the moon exerts over her own body, and therefore, over her own artistic potential. She reflects the ambivalent impulses of those voices in “In Her Own Image” and “Anorexic”. On the one hand, the speaker represents herself as “barren with [the moon’s] blood”, a metaphor similar to that appearing in “Witching”, and signifying the idealistic blood-sacrifice that has been so significant in nationalist discourse. On the other hand, the final part of the poem offers a more positive image of the lunar influence, as enabling the woman’s biological pull of her maternal body. By reorienting the woman’s stance towards the moon-mother at the end of the poem, Boland reconstructs menstruation as a source of her creative potential. It is in her own inner self, her potential for motherhood, and sexual desire, where she must find her own ‘true’ creative self:

Another hour
and she will addle me

till I begin
to think like her.
As when I’ve grown
round and obscene with child,
or when I moan
for him between the sheets,
then I begin to know
that I am bright and original
and that my light’s my own.

As the previous witch figure, the speaker here can create her own light, a light which is not necessarily a reflection of those “nursery lights” of the nationalist tradition. Motherhood is not, as in “In Her Own Image”, perceived as a confinement for women’s creativity. On the contrary, it is in the positive reconstruction of an identity grounded in motherhood where the woman speaker finds her artistic inspiration. By her ability to be a mother, the speaker becomes a god-like

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creature with significance of her own. Nevertheless, Boland runs the risk of defining womanhood in terms of biological features, by praising menstruation as a typical womanly experience that allows the speaker to have access to a distinct identity. González Arias (2000b: 192), identifying possible criticisms such as this, argues that Boland avoids biological determinism by revealing the woman’s physical discomfort at menstruation. Nevertheless, it is my contention that Boland will not avoid this essentialism. Her poems are grounded in the female body, as when she creates speaking subjects such as the menstruating woman. This will be further explored in the following section.

7.3.4. Reaffirming sexual difference: foregrounding the woman’s body

In contrast to previous poems like “Anorexic” and “In Her Own Image”, where identity was perceived as something unstable, in the second half of this volume, the poems move towards an assertion of the self in essentialist terms. We have seen something of this in “Menses”, where the woman found her distinctive identity in her biological pull towards motherhood. The negative analysis of culture and victimization which underlies the first poems²² gives way to a praising description of womanhood in terms of the female body.

Before explaining how Boland states her identity from the perspective of the female body and sexual pleasure, it is essential to explain the main reasons that drive her to emphasize women’s ‘Otherness’ through writing. In order to do so, I will rely on Cixous’s and Irigaray’s advocacy of a woman’s liberation based on what they call “sexual difference”.

Cixous (1994: 38) and Irigaray (1991: 24) argue that women must have access to a full identity of their own, distinct from men. One of the main differences between feminists such as Simone de Beauvoir, on the one hand, and Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray, on the other, is that whereas de Beauvoir fights for women’s equal rights, Cixous and Irigaray opt for difference, specifically sexual difference. As I am addressing Cixous’s theories in subsequent sections, and due to the similarity of their approaches, I will focus particularly on Irigaray’s theories. In an essay called “Equal or Different?”, Irigaray (1991: 23-29) develops this point. For this feminist critic, de Beauvoir’s defence of equality is erroneous, as “equal” tends to mean “equal to men”. It is her view that women need an identity as women, and that there should be “*womankind* as well as *mankind*” (p. 24). Whereas de Beauvoir emphasizes access to the world of men (and thus *equality*), Irigaray is suggesting instead the creation of a world of women. In Irigarayan terms, woman has always been defined as man’s other, what she terms the “other of the same”, the

²² As in “Tirade for the Mimic Muse”, “In Her Own Image”, and “Anorexic”, Boland attacks social standards in “In Her Own Image”. In this poem, Boland ironically portrays the internal confusion of a woman who is being battered by her husband.

necessary negation of the male subject. In order to cease being the "other of the same", this 'Other' must stress her otherness and difference, what is unique in herself. Only by doing so, a self-defined woman with 'real' social and symbolic representation can emerge (p. 32). In this sense, woman would become "woman-for-herself" rather than the "other of the same" (p. 159). As Irigaray (1991: 151) has put it: "For women, it is [...] a matter of learning to discover and inhabit a different magnetism and the morphology of a sexuate body, especially in its singularities and mucous qualities". Sexual difference is envisaged as both liberating for the two sexes and preserving what is unique and distinctive in each sex. Irigaray envisages a possible female imaginary in which the language of the female body is inscribed. Her advocacy of sexual difference would imply "an autonomous and positive representation of [women's] sexuality in culture" (p. 42).

This notion of sexual difference defended by French feminism is very similar to Gayatri Spivak's advocacy of "strategic essentialism". As Spivak (1993: 17) has admitted on several occasions, adopting "a strategic use" of essentialism has enabled her project as a feminist. In other words, essentials must be employed in certain situations, as she asserts in a conversation with Elizabeth Grosz (1990: 11):

I think we have to choose again strategically, not universal but essentialist. I think that since as a deconstructivist [...] I cannot in fact clean my hands and say, "I'm specific". In fact I must say I am an essentialist person from time to time. There is for example, the strategic choice of a genitalist essentialism in anti-sexist work today.

In her essay "Feminism and Critical Theory", for instance, Spivak (1988a: 77) asserts that the word "woman" must be defined in terms of the word "man":

[...] defining the word "woman" as resting on the word "man" is a reactionary position. Should I not carve an independent definition for myself as a woman? Here I must repeat some deconstructive lessons learned over the past decade that I often repeat. One, no rigorous definition of anything is ultimately possible, so if one wants to, one could go on deconstructing the opposition between man and woman, and finally show that it is a binary opposition that displaces itself. Therefore, "as a deconstructivist", I cannot recommend that kind of dichotomy at all, yet, I feel that definitions are necessary in order to keep us going, to allow us to take a stand. The only way that I can see myself making definitions is in a provisional and polemical one: I construct my definition as a woman not in terms of a woman's putative essence but in terms of words currently in use. "Man" is such a word in common usage.

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Although this feminist postcolonial critic asserts that essentialism is not the right stance, she defends it as a necessary step and strategy: “women today may *have* to take ‘the risk of essence’ in order to think differently” (Spivak 1993: 3). In this sense, Spivak reminds one of Irigaray, who warns, as Whitford (1991: 13) explains, against deconstructing (or replacing) the male/female opposition before women have access to “identity and subjectivity”.

Cixous’s and Irigaray’s defence of sexual difference and Spivak’s occasional return to essentialism is observed in Boland’s *In Her Own Image*. Boland becomes an essentialist in the strategic sense Spivak talks about, as a necessary way of fighting back at a certain point. It is in this phase where Boland discovers the possibility of a feminist discourse, and in this first flush of feminist thought she becomes the most energetic essentialist, as I show below.

In all the poems of *In Her Own Image*, there is a strong connection between body imagery and personal identity. That is why Boland might be located within that phase of feminism which endorses sexism, and “women write as a biologically oppressed group” (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin 2002a: 174). This reliance on the body is identified by Fanon as a distinctive and necessary feature in the process of decolonization. Fanon’s colonized subject states at a certain point: “I was responsible at the same time for my body, for my race, for my ancestors. I subjected myself to an objective examination, I discovered my blackness, my ethnic characteristics. [...] I made myself an object” (Fanon 1991: 112). In a similar way to Fanon’s colonized subject, Boland proceeds to analyze her body, making herself an object of analysis. *In Her Own Image* shows, above all, Boland’s quest for autonomous self-definition based on the potential of her female body. Ostriker (1986: 92), noting that contemporary women poets employ anatomical imagery far more frequently than male poets, asserts:

One of the ways we recognize a poetess - which is to say a woman poet locked into sentimentality by her inhibitions - is that she steers clear of anatomical references. [...] One of the ways we recognize that a woman poet has taken some kind of liberating jump is that her muted parts begin to explain themselves.

The poems in the second half of *In Her Own Image* might be read as a sign of liberation for the female writer, in Ostriker’s own words (1986: 91), a “release of anatomy”. Patrick Kavanagh (1967: 27) asserts in *Collected Prose* that “the body with its feelings, its instincts, provides women with a source of wisdom, but they lack the analytic detachment to exploit it in literature”. In contrast to this view, Boland’s poetry shows a woman who is able to perceive through her body. It is in the body where the poetic voices in this volume find their name and identity.

That is why Cixous’s and Irigaray’s theories are appropriate for approaching *In Her Own Image*. In their advocacy of sexual difference, these French feminists connect writing with

women's bodies in a direct and intrinsic way. In "The Laugh of the Medusa", Cixous (1981: 245-246) stresses the importance of writing about the female body, insisting that women's creativity is and should be intrinsically sexual and carnal:

Woman must write her self: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have driven away as violently as from their bodies. [...] And why don't you write? Write! Writing is for you; you are for you; your body is yours, take it.

Irigaray shares Cixous's dependence on the female body.²³ The language that she envisages in "When Our Lips Speak Together" directly connects female sexuality and writing:

if we don't invent a language, if we don't find our body's language [...] [w]e shall [...] leave our desires unexpressed, unrealized. Asleep again, unsatisfied, we shall fall back upon the words of men – who for their part, have "known" for a long time. But *not our body*. (Irigaray 1985: 214)

The invention of language parallels the rediscovery of the body which has its own language, a feminine language that must be heard. For Irigaray, "the feminine syntax" is best deciphered in what she describes as "the gestural code of women's bodies" (1991: 136). It is necessary to elaborate "an art of the sexual", a place where women can explore their autoeroticism (p. 200).²⁴

This writing deriving from the body emerges for the first time in *In Her Own Image*. Boland writes herself, her bodily feelings or the imaginary carnal experiences of other women. In the process, she destroys traditional poetic standards, for it is women's real lives which defy the laws of patriarchal texts. In contrast to the women in Irish legends, who have been denied their right to act as agentive subjects (Haberstroh 1996: 192), *In Her Own Image* is revolutionary, because it introduces women who speak through their own body, in their own voice, disrupting the imposed silence. By analyzing their body as if it were the first time they examine them and by fulfilling their sexual desires, these women try to attain their own identity. In this sense, Boland carries out a celebration of womanhood, which is mainly defined by sexuality, by those biological

²³ Whitford (1991: 2) thinks that it is inaccurate to view Irigaray as an "essentialist" who defends a transparent relation between women's bodies and women's true identity. According to this critic, readings such as this tend to ignore the complexity of Irigaray's work. Although it is true that Irigaray's work should be viewed in its totality, what is unquestionable is that bodily references are constantly present in her essays, and that, in her notion of woman's language, biology determines speech.

²⁴ Other feminist critics like Chantal Chawaf (1981: 177-178) argue for a similar woman's language grounded in the female body:

The word must comfort the body. [...] In order to reconnect the book with the body and with pleasure, we must disintellectualize writing. [...] If a music of femininity is arising out of its own oppression, it materializes through the rediscovered body.

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features that distinguish women from men. This stance has been described as “biologism”, the belief that there is a given ‘female’ nature, “an essence which is biologically given” (Moi 1997: 108-109).

In order to introduce this aspect of Boland’s work, I will briefly analyze “Mastectomy”, a poem included in the first half of *In Her Own Image* for its emphasis on the tragic consequences cultural impositions have on women’s bodies. As in the poems considered later on, this poem reflects a strong connection between the body and the personal identity. The violence and aggressiveness that invaded the woman in “Tirade for the Mimic Muse” is observed in this poem, where the poetic speaker angrily attacks the male surgeon who has usurped her breast, a symbol of her identity as a woman. This poem advances the separatist stance that we observe in poems such as “Solitary”, “Exhibitionist”, and “Making Up”, by setting a sharp contrast between the woman speaker and a male ‘Other’. In contrast to “Tirade for the Mimic Muse”, “Anorexic”, and “In Her Own Image”, where the ‘Other’ was perceived as the woman’s double self, “Mastectomy” places this division in terms of sexual difference. The “other of the same”, as Irigaray (1991: 159) would put it, is connected with a masculinity, described in negative and accusing terms, since the “he” is a violent subject who satisfies himself by engaging in war and usurpation. Boland establishes a symbolic connection between the male victimizer and the patriarchal discourse, which claims authority over the woman’s body.²⁵ The woman’s body becomes the site where all sorts of male atrocities are committed:

I could see
through them
to the years

opening
their arteries,
fields gulching

into trenches,
cuirasses stanching,
a mulch of heads

and towns

This male ‘Other’ acquires the shape of a surgeon, who extracts the woman’s breast, and therefore endangers her deepest sense of herself:

²⁵ This also happens in “In His Own Image”, where the male domestic attacker has the right to remake the woman *in his own image*.

How well
I recognized

the specialist
freshing death
across his desk,

the surgeon
blade-handed,
standing there

urging patience.
How well
they have succeeded!

I have stopped bleeding.
I look down.
It has gone.

So they have taken off
what slaked them first,
what they have hated since:

blue-veined
white-domed
home

of wonder
and the wetness
of their dreams.

The poetic voice is deprived of women's main bodily symbol. For Boland, the breast is a symbol, not only of procreation, metonymic for her function as mother (as the bosom nurtures her child), but also of female potential and sexual pleasure for both. Boland turns upside down the Freudian thesis of the penis-envy, according to which the woman desires what she can never have, as González Arias (2000a: 41) has noted. Here, it is the man who lusts after the woman's breast. Boland's critique resembles Irigaray's attack on psychoanalytic theories. In her second book *Speculum* (originally published in 1974) and in essays like "The poverty of psychoanalysis" (1991: 79-104) and "The Power of Discourse and the Subordination of the Feminine" (1991: 118-132), Irigaray stands as an outspoken feminist and critic of psychoanalysis, both of Freud and Lacan.²⁶ According to the psychoanalytic theories of Freud and Lacan, female sexuality is conceptualized according to masculine parameters. The constitution of women's sex means "deficiency", "lack", "atrophy" of the male sex, and even "penis-envy" (Irigaray 1991: 119). In this sense, women are left within the symbolic in a perpetual "exile", "like ghosts" in the masculine phallic imaginary (p. 91). Boland is able to reverse this belief. It is now the male sex that is described as 'lack', as an 'Other' which cannot have the female breast. In their envy, the surgeon and specialist deprive the woman of what "slaked them first", "the wetness of their dreams". On the other hand, Boland criticizes the Freudian concept of the breast as an erotic object for the male sexual fantasies. Instead, the breast, after it has been extracted, is everything but erotic. Although it continues

²⁶ According to Irigaray, psychoanalysis is patriarchal and takes its phallogocentric bias for universal truth. In her essay "The poverty of psychoanalysis" (1991: 79-104), we can observe well how Irigaray criticizes psychoanalysis as dominated by this sort of "phallo-narcissism" (p. 79). Lacan, for instance, gives primacy to the phallus and conceptualizes the imaginary body of the mirror stage as a male body. This critique is continued in "The Power of Discourse and the Subordination of the Feminine" (pp. 118-132). Freud is accused of taking the development of the little boy as norm, and assuming that a similar model of development applies to the little girl (p. 119). In this sense, Freud's weakness is that he "is enmeshed in a power structure and an ideology of the patriarchal type" (p. 120).

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arousing awe and admiration (“wonder”), it is described in more realist terms, as “blue-veined” and “white-domed”.

Because of the male destructive power directed towards the woman’s sexuality, the speaker’s identity is, in this way, damaged:

I flatten
to their looting,
to the sleight

of their plunder.
I am a brute site.
Theirs is the true booty.

As she implies in the last line of the poem, the body is the *truth* of the woman’s self. In this volume, womanhood is best defined by bodily imagery, in contrast to those traditional allegorical notions (such as Mother Ireland) where carnal references are usually occluded.

This reliance on the female body continues in “Solitary”, where Boland, by writing about the experience of masturbation, connects female pleasure with artistic expression and female speech, something that Gilbert and Gubar (2000: 568) have identified as common in women’s writing. The very title of the poem indicates that the woman is alone in giving speech to her female experience. In reacting against all traditional misrepresentations of femaleness, Boland has to face the absence of sisterly ancestors, she has no mother tradition to follow.

In worshipping, as we will see, her own power to touch herself, Boland links her own writing with that woman’s language advocated by Irigaray (1991: 126) which privileges touch rather than sight. Subverting the dominance of the ‘male gaze’ in patriarchal Western constructions, this feminist critic conceptualizes female relationships in more physical terms:

[What women] have to do is touch one another, listen to one another, smell one another, see one another – without necessarily privileging the gaze, without a beautiful mask, without submitting to a libidinal economy which means that the body has to be covered with a veil if it is to be desirable! (Irigaray 1991: 101)

The female eroticism that “Solitary” advocates disrupts those Western constructions in which women have been consigned to passivity and become beautiful objects of contemplation. Paying homage to her own sexuality, the speaker starts by describing her experience as sacramental:

Night:
An oratory of dark,
a chapel of unreason.

Here in the shrubbery
the shrine.
I am its votary,
its season.

Flames
Single
to my fingers

expert
to pick out
their heart,

none may violate.

The opening word of the poem is telling. As Cixous (1994: 37) shows, night has traditionally been a female term in the binary logic. In "Solitary", it becomes clear that the speaker is working in the realm of the unknown, under the shadows, in the domain of the mysterious power of the moon and the spell of witches. In this way, "Night" immerses us in a female universe which stands in direct opposition to the male world. The speaker establishes this contrast by defying the male gods who have the privilege of giving her sexual pleasure. Taught that "You could die for this / The gods could make you blind", the speaker, nonetheless, lets herself be carried by "these incendiary / and frenzied ways". Female sexuality is depicted as a sensual and erotic experience which, briefly after reaching its summit, rapidly descends. Light and fire imagery is used in order to imply the brevity of orgasm. By showing she is not sexually inert (as traditionally acknowledged), she defies the orthodox gods. While the poet in "O Fons Bandusiae" (*The War Horse*) intended to praise something external, the masturbating speaker in "Solitary" is a "votary", "worshipping" in the "shrine" of her female genitalia. It is her body, and not any external fountain, the source of "sacred heat". In this sense, masturbation becomes an act of worship of the self, a celebration of female sexuality very much in the mood of French feminism. As Luce Irigaray (1985: 24) explains, whereas the man

needs an instrument in order to touch himself: his hand, woman's genitals, language [...], a woman touches herself by and within herself directly, without meditation, without anyone being able to forbid her to do so, for her sex is composed of two lips which embrace continually.

By masturbating herself "without anyone being able to forbid her", the woman is self-sufficient and powerful. Nevertheless, although French feminism has advocated a form of women's writing that is rooted in the female body, both Irigaray (1991: 171-174) and Cixous (1994: 119-128) have identified the danger involved in claiming the superiority of one's sex. They

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argue that in order to achieve a complete renewal after a destructive patriarchal culture, sexual difference must be combined with what they call an “amorous exchange” between a man and a woman. This “amorous exchange” is that in which one sex will not seek superiority over the other, and their relationship will be one of equality and harmony between opposites. The “amorous exchange” that Irigaray and Cixous so strongly advocate is not manifested by the woman in “Solitary”, but rather in other poems which better suit Boland’s ‘female’ aesthetic.²⁷ In this poem, the poetic voice refuses to engage in sexual intercourse with men, and claims her superiority by making clear that she herself, and “only” she, has access to “the true sensual rhythms of her own body” (Kelly 1993: 51):

I defy them.
I know,
only I know

these incendiary
and frenzied ways:
I am alone

no one’s here,
no one sees
my hands

fan and cup,
my thumbs tinder.

In this sense, Boland maintains the opposites of sexual difference (male sexuality vs. female sexuality), and establishes their relationship on a basis of superiority and not equality as advocated by Cixous and Irigaray. This egocentrism and self-admiration is a necessary step in the process of turning upside down other masculine constructs. By praising her autoeroticism, the woman calls into question the puritan dual view of body and mind. Whereas the woman in “Anorexic” adopted the traditional opposing duality flesh vs. soul common in male discourse, the persona in this poem integrates body and mind by means of verbal parallelism:

How my flesh summers,
how my mind shadows
meshed in this brightness²⁸

Whereas the woman in “Anorexic” avoided using possessive constructions to refer to the parts of her body, the speaker in “Solitary” openly makes her dominion over her own body

²⁷ I will explain in more detail Irigaray’s and Cixous’s theories of the “amorous exchange” in those poems where Boland draws closer to these theories, in particular “Botanic Gardens” (*The War Horse*) and some poems included in *Against Love Poetry* (see section 7.4.2.2.).

²⁸ The lyrical beauty of these lines anticipates the lyricism of the following collection, *Night Feed* (1982).

explicit: "my fingers", "my hands", "my thumbs", "my flesh", etc. This is a woman who asserts herself, and does not despise her body, in contrast to her sister in "Anorexic". Her body is her identity, so fulfilling her desire is coming to terms with her own true self.

Unsurprisingly, this poem is full of imagery concerning the earth. As Fanon (1991: 126-128) has explained, one way for the oppressed subject to assert his/her identity is to defend an authentic relation with everything that is pure and absolute, something which the (white and/or male) colonizer cannot have access to. As we have seen, Boland defends an essentialist union between woman and nature in poems such as "Menses", where she draws upon women's unique relationship with the moon. In a similar way to Fanon's 'Negro', Boland defends in "Solitary" a union with the natural and spiritual world inaccessible to the (white) man.²⁹ Like the woman in "Menses", the speaker here is intrinsically connected with the rhythms of the earth, and the cyclical variation of the seasons: her flesh "summers", her mind "shadows", and after "flush[ing]" and "dark[ing]" in her orgasm, she "winter[s]/ into sleep".

In this sense, Boland's main objective becomes to write a poetry that can record the fluid rhythms of her own body. The act of masturbation becomes a definite form of "écriture féminine". Irigaray's sexual lips are the woman's lips opening to utter her 'true' speech, a language that celebrates female sexuality and drives us closer to female's subjectivity:

how my cry
blasphemes
light and dark,
screams
land from sea,
makes word flesh
that now makes me

animal,
inanimate,
satiated

In a reversal of the Christian myth of creation, the speaker "makes word flesh". She becomes a goddess, producing a new artistic representation *in her own image*. Boland explicitly connects creativity and biology, text (the word) and body (the flesh). On the other hand, references to "my cry" and to her act of "scream[ing]" directly link this woman's agency with her ability to perceive herself through her own body. This appreciation of the female body as a place of

²⁹ Fanon (1991: 126-128) explains the colonized's union between self and nature as follows:

Black Magic, primitive mentality, animism, animal eroticism, it all floods over me. All of it is typical of peoples that have not kept pace with the evolution of the human race. [...] Yes, we are – we Negroes – backward, simple, free in our behaviour. That is because for us the body is not something opposed to what you call the mind. We are in the world. And long live the couple, Man and Earth! [...] Between the world and me a relation of coexistence was established. I had discovered the primeval One.

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resistance reaches a point where Boland adopts the most extreme biological and deterministic stance. At the end of the poem, the speaker is reduced to biological matter: she becomes “animal / inanimate”.

The danger of falling into this sort of biological determinism the end of “Solitary” exemplifies has been identified by de Beauvoir (1981b: 153), who views the female body as a menace for the liberation of the female potential:

it's a good thing that a woman is no longer ashamed of her body, of her pregnancy, of her menstruation. I think it is excellent that she should get to know her body. But it would be an error to make of it a value and to think that the feminine body gives you a new dimension of the world. It would be ridiculous and absurd, it would be like constructing a counter-penis. The women who share this belief fall again into the irrational, into mysticism, into a sense of the cosmic.

This is what happens in “Solitary”: by revalorizing the body in such a way, the speaker eventually falls into “the irrational” and “mysticism”. The woman is immersed in an intense private experience of madness and delirium. She describes herself to be in “a chapel of *unreason*” and argues that she, and only she, has access to “these incendiary/ and *frenzied* ways” (my emphasis). The irrational discourse that the woman conducts in “Solitary” was also observed in “Witching”, where Boland identified with an apparently mad figure (the witch). The “craft” and “bookish” gifts of the witch paralleled her evil and psychotic enterprise: to “abort the birth/ of calves/ and warps”. Boland’s connection of poetry with madness is symptomatic of a whole patriarchal belief that places womanhood more in touch with the irrational than with the rational. This traditional equation is also maintained in French Feminism. Both Cixous and Irigaray have envisaged a woman’s language that draws on the resources of the unconscious and has the capacity to go beyond reason. In *La*, Cixous (1994: 59) describes feminine writing as against “reason”, labelled an “enemy”: “Her scene of wild writings forever escapes vigilance armed reason, force, jealousy, death, wish, [...], the traps and bites of life’s enemies” (1994: 59). Similarly, Irigaray (1985: 28-29) argues that due to the fact that women find sexual pleasure almost everywhere, their discourse touches irrationality itself.³⁰

³⁰Just by looking at one passage in “When Our Lips Speak Together”, one might get this idea of how Irigaray’s discourse itself touches irrationality:

Open your lips: don’t open them simply. I don’t open them simply. We-you/I- are neither open nor closed. We never separate simply: a single word cannot be pronounced, produced, uttered by our mouths. (Irigaray 1985: 209)

For other examples in which Irigaray puts this form of irrational language into practice, see her essay “He Risks who risks life itself” (1991: 213-218).

This is doubtless why she is said to be whimsical, incomprehensible, agitated, capricious ... not to mention her language, in which "she" sets off in all directions leaving "him" unable to discern the coherence of any meaning. Hers are contradictory words, somewhat mad from the standpoint of reason, inaudible for whoever listens to them with ready-made grids, with a fully elaborated code in hand [...]. For if "she" says something, it is not, it is already no longer, identical with what she means.

By defining women's language as irrational and non-reasonable, both Cixous and Irigaray try to show the impossibility of trapping women in an exact definition, for they try to express a "*silent, multiple, diffuse touch*" that is utterly inaccessible and therefore incomprehensible to men (Irigaray 1985: 29). Nevertheless, in the process, what they do is replicate the male binary logic Logos/ Pathos by which women have been undervalued as irrational and hysterical to the standards of (masculine rational) logic. This is precisely what occurs in "Solitary" and "Witching": in their irrational and mad discourses, these women refuse to escape binary male constructs.³¹

A linguistic analysis of "Solitary" significantly supports this interpretation from a French feminist perspective. The loosening of stanzaic form and the absence of a regular rhythmic pattern corresponds with the speech of a woman who strives to give voice to her own sexuality, discarding inhibitions, and moving away from the main stream of discourse. Accordingly, we see a broken and fragmented language: short lines and incomplete sentences ("Night:/ An oratory of dark,/ a chapel of unreason."; "Flames/ single/ to my fingers"; "expert/ to pick out/ their heart"). The lack of punctuation ("makes word flesh/ that now makes me"), and the lack of almost any cohesive conjunctions in the poem ("I am alone/ no one's here/ no one sees/ my hands/ fan and cup,/ my thumbs tinder.") further indicate that this speaker is interested in breaking textual conventions, dislocating normal cohesive devices. Therefore, "Solitary" is written in a form of woman's language according to which, as Irigaray (1985: 300) puts it, "'she' goes off in all directions and in which 'he' is unable to discern the coherence of any meaning". As Boland goes against the logic of male reason, in her statements we come across "some chatter, and exclamation, a half-secret, a sentence left in suspense" (ibid).

As in most of the poems in this volume, "Solitary" tries to define womanhood in a proper way, by delineating the precise qualities that constitute this category. This is linguistically observed in the obsessive repetition of first person pronouns, in contrast to *New Territory*, wherein first person pronouns hardly appear. Likewise, assertive statements using the first person singular present indicative of 'be' abound. This has been well observed in "Menses", where the woman, acknowledging her distinct subjectivity, constantly analyzes herself in an attempt to come to terms

³¹ In arguing this, I disagree with González Arias (2000b: 187), who argues, when commenting on "Exhibitionist", that Boland manages to dismantle the binary Logos/ Pathos.

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with her own sexuality: “*I am* sick of it”, “*I am* not one of them”, “*I am* barren with her bloods”, “*I am* bright and original”, etc. Similarly, “Solitary” presents copulative structures in which the subject ‘I’ is followed by a present tense verb phrase, implying security and self-assurance: “*I am* its votary”; “*I am* alone”.

The emphasis on ‘writing the body’ that “Solitary” reflects is perhaps more clearly put into practice in “Exhibitionist”, the longest poem of the whole volume. In this poem, the woman decides not to hide the clearest sign of her identity, her body, anymore. By exposing the naked body of a woman, Boland transcends the traditional distinctions between the public and the private.³² Furthermore, Boland equates writing with an act of exhibitionism. Both “the text” and the poem’s “aesthetic” are intrinsically connected with “this trash/ and gimmickry/ of sex”, the female body:

I wake to dark, a window slime of dew. Time to start	my aesthetic: a hip first, a breast,
working from the text, making	a slow shadow strip out of clothes
from this trash and gimmickry of sex	that bushelled me asleep. What an artist am I!

As in “Witching” and “Solitary”, Boland situates this moment in a dark setting. As in most of the poems of this volume, imagery of lightness and darkness are brought together in order to enhance this feeling of female enlightenment (interestingly referred to as ‘dark’) vs. the male tradition (allegorized as ‘light’). When she carries out a strip show the poet is allowed to express her own art freely and unrestrainedly. Gaining autonomy over her own body, she has the power to expose “a hip first”, and then “a breast”. These images powerfully suggest Eve’s mythical rib-shaped curve. This new Eve, rather than hiding her shameful flesh (as she has been taught to), decides to get rid of all those clothes which “bushelled” her “asleep”, finally waking from a liberating self-unconsciousness.

Like in “Solitary”, the speaker seems to be reduced to a mere biological entity. Through the conversion of nouns into verbs, the poet emphasizes the link between the female body and the woman’s identity:

³² González Arias (2000b: 188-189) relates this woman’s nakedness and exhibitionism with the Sheela-na-gigs. For an illustrative explanation of these medieval representations see González Arias (2000b: 63-70).

I subvert

sculpture
the old mode:
I skin

I dimple clay
I flesh,
I rump stone.

By means of this conversion, the narrator implies that “I am skin”, “I am flesh” and “I am rump”. Nevertheless, by turning these nouns into verbs of action, she also describes herself as an agent who creates her own body, rather than a mere inanimate object of male production. In this sense, agency and subversion are carried out by the speaker's intimate experience of her own body. Subverting the clay model by which the wife of Adam was created out of his rib, this new Eve becomes a figure of her own creation.

As in “Mastectomy” and “Solitary”, where the ‘Other’ took the form of “bladed men” and male “gods”, “Exhibitionist” similarly emphasizes this woman's agency as opposed to the masculine world. In this poem, the narrator aims at re-educating the ‘Other’, which, this time, acquires the form of lustful businessmen:

Cast down
Lucifers,
spruce

businessmen,
their eyes
cast down.

I have them now.
I'll teach them now.
I'll show them how

in offices,
their minds
blind on files

the view
blues through
my curves and arcs.

They are
a part
of my dark plan [...]

The speaker deliberately enters those “files” where men have registered their representations of women. The reiterated presence of the volitional ‘will’, a characteristic feature of this volume, shows the narrator's determinacy and intention to carry out her revenge against patriarchal values. Drawing their attention towards her own nakedness, the woman subverts the power of the male gaze to exert violence over the female body. As in “Witching”, it is now she herself who burns her own flesh. By doing so, she defeats the male gaze and those stereotypical images of women as symbols of male fantasies: “Into the gutter/ of their lusts/ I burn/ the shine/ of my flesh”. By her self-destruction, Boland ‘burns off’ mythical visions of women, as fallen Eves, and produces her own self, described as “the light that is/ unyielding/ frigid/ constellate”. As Alen-Randolph (1991: 56) explains, ‘frigid’ in this context means “unresponsive” to the male sexual

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organ and to male lust. In this way, the end of “Exhibitionist” connects true self, woman’s identity, with a clear aversion to sexual intercourse. This separatist stance, according to which the male ‘Other’ is described as an unsuited sexual partner, was also observed in “Menses”, where the speaker envied her garden weeds for their ability to reproduce independently, and in “Solitary”, where the speaker defiantly masturbated herself.

This equation of female identity with body imagery is continued in the final poem of *In Her Own Image*, “Making Up”. Here, the poet gains the freedom of expressing her own womanhood through a complex succession of metaphors that have appeared throughout the whole collection: makeup, waking up, mirrors, witchcraft, lightness and darkness, and water. The rich amalgam of literary motifs Boland recurs to is symptomatic of a second phase in the process of artistic decolonization whose style is, as described by Fanon (1990: 177),

[a] harsh style, full of images, for the image is the drawbridge which allows unconscious energies to be scattered on the surrounding meadows. It is a vigorous style, alive with rhythms, struck through and through with bursting life; it is full of colour, too, bronzed, sun-baked and violent... [It] expresses above all, hand to hand struggle and it reveals the need that man has to liberate himself from a part of his being which already contained the seeds of decay.

This quotation is very helpful for understanding this volume’s recurring motifs. By using the images mentioned above, Boland tries to unmask her women, and liberate them from the imprisonment male texts have confined them to.

In this poem, makeup operates simultaneously as a metaphor of self-creation and a reference to women’s victimization by conventional “made up” images of femininity (Allen-Randolph 1991: 58). As the woman wakes up, she realizes how her “naked face” is “dulsed and shrouded”, suggesting the artificiality of the images of women reproduced in culture and literature. This shroud, a veil covering the face, is an image of confinement which has fascinated women and male writers ever since the nineteenth century (Gilbert & Gubar 2000: 469). This veil implies the presence of power, of an inner life behind its surface. Romantics such as Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Emerson, and Shelley have perpetuated a tradition which embraces the veil as a necessary concealment of guilt and sin (ibid). Thus, in male minds, the veil has been an emblem of the “obscure potential” associated to the female, “a mysterious [and inaccessible] otherness” (p. 471). As a woman, Boland in “Making Up” experiences herself behind a veil, a “shrouded” face; she feels under “a cloud” in “a dull pre-dawn”. Suddenly, she decides to lift this veil and disclose the obscure potential behind it. She does so by creating her own make up:

But I'll soon
see to that.
I push the blusher up,

I rattle
and I prink,
pinking bone
till my eyes

are
a rouge-washed
flush on water.

Demystifying Romantic myths, she lifts the patriarchal veil, cleanses the male makeup, for more "rouge-washed" colours. This is a woman creating her own painted face, with a desire to celebrate her own creativity. Her new assertive stance is observed in the choice of syntactic constructions, in which an agentive subject is followed by verbs of action, something typical in this volume of poetry: "I push the blusher up", "I rattle", "I grease and full/ my mouth", etc. Her empowering act reforms the pale makeup of her constrained sisters, in the same way as the exhibitionist "black[ed] the light" of tradition:

Now the base
pales and wastes.
Light thins
from ear to chin,
whitening in the ocean shine
mirror set
of my eyes [...]

The woman in the poem, "fledg[ing]/ in old darks", departs from light, from the conventional poetic canon, to a place where her mouth "won't stay shut". Her light is not tradition's 'light', but a light stemming from "old darks", from behind the veil. Now that her "face is made", and the woman reclaims her status and control of her image, she warns:

Take nothing, nothing
at its face value:
Legendary seas,
nakedness,

that up and stuck
lassitude
of thigh and buttock
that they prayed to -

it's a trick.
Myths
are made by men.

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By admitting that all identities are necessarily fictional constructions, the narrator argues that both her new makeup and the nakedness that identified her former sister in “Exhibitionist” are merely repetitions of male persuasive myths. In this sense, she would be moving away from that essentialist stance that pervaded previous poems. Nevertheless, in the following lines, the speaker contradicts this assertion. Once again, she adopts a biological stance by defending, through her own body, ‘the real’:

The truth of this
wave-raiding
sea-heaving
made-up
tale

of a face
from the source
of the morning
is my own:

Mine are the rouge pots,
the hot pinks,
the fledged
and edgy mix
of light and water
out of which
I dawn.

The triumphal awakening of this new self at the end of the poem, a self that proclaims her superiority by *making up* her own image and successfully “dawn[ing]”, refutes the previous deconstruction of identity-claims. At the end of the poem, the speaker reclaims the truth, the tale, and the rouge pots as her own. This belief that the ‘true’ essence of herself is found in her body (in this case, her painted face) is observed in the numerous times in which ‘truth’ is repeated in this volume, mainly in those cases where the poetic voice is referring to the body. As we saw in “Mastectomy”, the speaker accused the male surgeon of stripping her breast, described as “the *true* booty”. Woman’s genuine essence that men appropriated in this poem becomes the source of resistance in “Tirade for the Mimic Muse”. The statement of intent in this opening poem, “I will show you *true* reflections” reflects the aesthetics of a woman poet who advocates her perception of ‘real life’ as experienced by the female body. This belief in the ‘real’ and in its advocacy by the woman writer pervades Cixous’s writings too. As we saw in “The Laugh of the Medusa”, this feminist writer advocated that women must break out of their silence and write their bodies (Cixous 1981: 245-246). Only by doing so, they come onto the stage of the “real”, as Andermatt (1984: 56) explains. Similarly, Boland defends that a writing that gives voice to the woman’s body stands in a direct relation to life and to reality. This conviction stands in contrast to Boland’s later

poetic production, where notions such as 'truth' and 'the real' will be constantly put into question, in the most poststructuralist fashion. As we will see, her mature work will identify 'the real' as a social construction. By showing the impossibility of solidifying her artistic images within the poem, Boland will show the fallacy of essentialist attempts (such as those by feminist, nationalist, and imperialist ideologies) to define a 'real' and 'true' identity.

But, at this early stage in her career, Boland cannot help adopting an emancipating project that defines womanhood in essentialist terms. In this way, Boland experiences the same dilemma as Cixous and Irigaray. As Whitford (1991: 12) argues, these French feminists are confronted by the modernist/postmodernist debate: on the one hand, their emancipatory force is grounded precisely in the very "modernist category 'woman' with essentialist implications"; on the other hand, they try to avoid the perpetuation of oppressive structures by envisaging new forms of resistance that overcome the Western patriarchal binary thought.

Cixous's and Irigaray's conception of sexual difference, for instance, exemplifies this feminist dilemma. On the one hand, they advocate defining women as sexually different from men, and the existence of boundaries that preserve what is unique and distinctive in each sex. As Irigaray (1991: 115) puts it, the difference between the sexes "contrives a space or site of liberty between two bodies, two flesh, which protects the partners by giving them boundaries". Cixous's and Irigaray's need for a separate woman's identity requires the existence of boundaries that prevent the fusion between the male and the female, or the incorporation of one category into the other. On the other hand, Cixous and Irigaray argue that women are merely characterized by fluidity, and that it is this fluid nature which allows them to escape all binary oppositions. Here, one might ask, how can the female, if it is merely defined by fluidity, be held behind some boundaries? Wouldn't women's fluid nature overcome these boundaries that separate the sexes? In short, the belief that there is a woman's essence clearly distinguishable from man's, a "womanness" as Rooney (1993: 2) would put it, contradicts the French feminist belief in a woman's language that "can only go on and on, without ever inscribing or distinguishing contours" (Cixous 1994: 44), a writing mainly defined by fluidity and infiniteness.

Boland exposes a similar contradiction. On the one hand, she defends sexual difference in poems such as "Mastectomy", "Solitary", and "Exhibitionist", in which a distinguishable woman's body and sexuality stands in contrast to a male 'Other'. In "Making Up", this new woman will create her aesthetic *in opposition* to those "myths made by men", myths in which women have been "stuck" in a "lassitude", in which their "thigh[s]" and "buttock[s]" only serve to fulfil male's desires. On the other hand, Boland re-situates this new woman as a fluid entity that is able to overcome categorizations. The fluid definition of the woman in "Making Up" is attained by means

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of water imagery. Her eyes are described as “a rouge-washed/ flush on water”, a “mirror set” of “ocean shine”, and her face projects visions of “wave-riding” and “sea-heaving”. In contrast to the “Legendary seas” of patriarchal tradition (in which women have been edible seaweeds, “dulsed”), the woman’s sea is a sort of liberating ocean, a rising, insurrectionary combination of bright colours and liquids that manages to escape male simplistic representations. The “edgy mix/ of light and water” that makes up her own face is unstable; it escapes masculine ‘contours’. The image of the woman is as variable as the makeup that covers her, makeup that is liable to change, depending on the light or the sea tides during the day. The new muse’s identification with water links her with the idea of perpetually renewed fertility, with a constant ability to make herself up differently ‘in her own image’. In this sense, Boland combines sexual difference while attempting to offer an image of womanhood that refuses simplification by male standards. It won’t be until her mature work that Boland will more successfully represent her women as escaping artistic solidification, as she will leave aside this emphasis on sexual difference and will be able to achieve the desired effect, by bringing her own women to dissolution.

7.3.5. An experimental language

In order to re/claim her womanhood, Boland departs from the prevailing modes of the literary tradition and attempts to experiment with what she calls the “anti-lyric” (interview with Allen Randolph 1993b: 122). There is a shift of poetic language as regards her earlier phase, the ‘Feminine’ and ‘Assimilationist’ phase (*New Territory*). *In Her Own Image* exposes a more fluid poetry, not so constrained as the first.

Although Allen-Randolph (1991: 53) recognizes the volume’s link between the female body and textuality, he argues that Boland’s project distances itself from French feminism by operating not at the level of style, but at the level of content: “While Cixous envisions a new language based upon the rhythms of the body, Boland envisions a new aesthetic which reconceptualizes the body as a subject for poetry and as a mode of knowing”.³³ I disagree with this critic, for I think that Boland manages to give voice to “the rhythms of the body” by means of linguistic techniques. As we saw in “Menses”, parallelism and lexical repetition helped emphasize the cyclical nature of menstruation. In a similar way, Boland’s writing techniques manage to subvert the “coded, clichéd, ordinary language”, an endeavour, as Andermatt (1984: 5) explains, at the centre of Cixous’s and Irigaray’s theorization of “écriture féminine”. It is my contention that Boland writes a highly experimental poetry.

³³ Similarly, Fogarty (1994: 94) asserts that Boland’s work “cannot readily be aligned with any preconceived belief in a hidden, radical dynamic in women’s language”. Nevertheless, I presume she is referring to Boland’s later volumes of poetry, where language is everything but radical.

First of all, Boland deliberately breaks with the male-orientated linguistic style. Accordingly, she leaves behind the logical patterns of meter and rhyme. *New Territory* showed how poets were merely concerned with “pattern and form” and how they hunted “among fixed stars” (“The Poets”), that is, among a well-established poetic canon. Now, Boland abandons the need to organize sound in beautiful and logical patterns, creating a disruption in the patriarchal order. There is no regular rhythmical pattern whatsoever, and if there is some occasional rhyme and musicality, it is created by lexical repetition. Haberstroh (1996: 66) argues that “this loosening of form represents a departure for Boland from those conventional models which had dominated her earlier volumes”. In *In Her Own Image*, everything is loose: we find a lack of coherent form and no conventional verse techniques. With the exception of “Tirade for the Mimic Muse”, all the poems break even orthographical conventions, by beginning in lower case. In some interesting cases, as in “In His Own Image”, there is an interchange of lower case and upper case, in order to break conventional poetic patterns. In contrast to her earlier production, Boland gives preference to tercets, as in poems such as “Mastectomy”, “Exhibitionist” and “Witching”. With poems such as “In His Own Image” and “Menses”, Boland starts to experiment with the loosening of stanzaic form, something unobserved in her earlier poetic production.

Secondly, deviated syntax abounds in this volume: the blurring of personal pronouns (as in “In Her Own Image”) and the presence of midline caesuras (as in “Tirade for the Mimic Muse”) are quite common. Fragmentary lines (as in “Exhibitionist”) and incomplete sentences, sometimes with no predicates (as in “Solitary” and “Tirade for the Mimic Muse”) are also recurrent. We also come across clipped stanzas, some of them created by only one word and others by complete sentences. The length of the verse lines as well as the length of the sentences greatly vary in poems such as “Exhibitionist” and “Making Up”. With the exception of “Tirade for the Mimic Muse”, it is quite typical to find very short sentences, mainly when the ‘I’ is the focus of attention. This, together with the fact that there are no strong hyperbatons (in contrast to Boland's initial production where rhetorical emphasis was favoured), supports the view that Boland wants to make her message clear.

Thirdly, Boland's experimentation with language is also observed in the lack of punctuation, which clearly distinguishes *In Her Own Image* from earlier and later volumes (note in particular “Solitary”, “Witching”, and “Making Up”). This lack of punctuation is reinforced by the fact that there is, in some poems, a total absence of cohesive devices. In other poems, by contrast, we come across a proliferation of additive conjunctions (‘and’) following one another in the same sentence (usually enumerations). In poems such as “Anorexia” this technique suggests that this woman is emotionally carried by her own thoughts, and it further emphasizes her anxiety over her

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own flesh. Although the presence of the additive conjunction is typical in Boland’s mature style, it usually appears after long sentences, sometimes after a dot, and not indiscriminately after one another in the very same sentence as in this volume.

Fourthly, excessive repetitions of the first person pronoun indicate that the woman in *In Her Own Image* is constantly trying to analyze and define herself, to let her voice be heard and not reported. Furthermore, there are constant references to the female body, most of them, interestingly enough, preceded by ‘my’, indicating self-possession.³⁴ These references vary, from the most common ones (skin, flesh, body, face, eyes, cheek, hips, thigh) to more subversive ones (nipples, curves, paps, wiles, breasts, haunch, and crotch).

Fifth, the women in these poems are restlessly struggling to assert themselves, as exclamatory sentences and emphatic auxiliaries indicate. The presence of these constructions in almost all the poems also indicates that the woman in this volume wants to be carried away by her own thoughts, her own emotions. In this sense, Boland deliberately perpetuates the binary logic by which women correspond to pathos and men to logos, as we analyze below. On the other hand, there are plenty of free intermittent lexical repetitions (‘ploces’) that indicate that these women want to emphasize what they are actually saying.

Finally, the highly rhetorical language so significant in Boland’s initial poems is now substituted by colloquial language. There are plenty of common insults (which will not appear in Boland’s later production), some significant neologisms (as in “Tirade for the Mimic Muse”), and conversions of nouns into verbs that emphasize the link between the female body and the speaker’s identity and agency (as we have seen in “Exhibitionist”).³⁵

7.3.6. Conclusion

Boland’s emphasis on the union between sexuality and textual creativity is an essential step she takes in the process of dismantling the dominant male discourse. As I have tried to show, this stance might be interpreted through Cixous’s and Irigaray’s advocacy of a “sexual difference” that encourages women to have access to a full identity of their own, distinct from men. Precisely because of this, Boland’s revolutionary project evinces a biological essentialism according to which the poet reveals, by writing the body, what is ‘real’ and ‘true’. As Irigaray (1991: 44) argues, women must discover their sexual identity, “the *singularity* of *our* desires, of *our* auto-eroticism, of *our* narcissism” (my emphasis). A discourse such as this which emphasizes a

³⁴ As we have seen, the only case where this does not happen is in poems such as “Anorexic”, where the speaker prefers to use the third person in singular ‘her’ or no possessive constructions at all in order to refer to her own body.

³⁵ This conversion is also observed in those poems from *Night Feed* that still show a trace of Boland’s feminist aesthetic, as in “The Woman Turns Herself into a Fish”, where the speaker utters “I flab upwards”.

distinctive woman's identity by means of nouns such as 'singularity' and the first personal possessive 'our' could hardly be more essentialist. Although Spivak (1993: 17) defends an occasional "strategic" use of essentialism, she asserts that this is not the ultimate solution. She warns against defining women in terms of "woman's putative essence", and asserts that the concept must never be mistaken for "universal truth" (ibid). Boland's unquestionable defence of the sexual individuality and pleasure of her poetic voices prompts the reader to identify these women with universal prototypes that incarnate the ultimate definition of womanhood. In *In Her Own Image*, the body seems to embody the essence of woman literally. In returning to the body, what Boland actually does is assert her own identity as different from the male 'Other', and voluntarily replicating, therefore, the patriarchal mode of thinking (according to which the male subject predicates his control and domination upon those designated as different) in order to subvert women's position within this logic. As Rooney (1993: 2) explains in a conversation with Spivak:

The body is of course essentialism's great text: to read in its form the essence of Woman is certainly one of phallocentrism's strategies [...], feminism's return to the body is only in part a rejoinder to the resilience of anti-feminism's essentialism.

Other postcolonial feminist critics like Christian (1990: 45), Minh-ha (1989: 38), and Donaldson (1992: 11) have similarly identified the danger of forging feminism from such "univocal" terms such as sexual difference and 'sisterhood'. Laying claim to the specificity of women's sexuality is both limiting and deceiving, because it reduces "the Other to the same – an impulse at the heart of the colonialist project" (Donaldson 1992: 11).

Boland in *In Her Own Image* does not manage to decentralize binary positions. The radicalism of this second stage is an impediment to ultimately achieving artistic autonomy. Feminist militance can be as constrained and restrictive for women's writing as nationalism for the postcolonial population. It has been well documented how nationalism and feminism can act as coercively as imperialism, because they perpetuate the hierarchical notion of power, and, in their homogenizing tendencies, they can omit the realities, experiences, and needs of the most oppressed subjects.³⁶ Showalter's 'Feminist' phase is similar to Fanon's "Cultural Nationalist" period in the sense that both attempt to seek the inversion of the structures of domination: one power is substituted by another. In *In Her Own Image*, there is a very clear intention to replace a male-dominated canon with a female tradition, or traditions. These poems seem to be addressed

³⁶ On this point, see Spivak's interesting critique of feminism and nationalism in an interview with Threadgold and Bartkowski (1990: 18).

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entirely to women, something clearly observed in those poems where the male other is referred to in the third person (as in "Mastectomy", "Solitary", "Exhibitionist", and "Making Up").

The women in *In Her Own Image* are radical feminists: they are moved by anger and revenge, and they reject any sexual intercourse with their male counterparts, defending their independence and their capacity to give themselves sexual pleasure and be creative forces. The couple man/woman that Cixous identifies as irreconcilable opposites in Western thought is reiterated in this volume, in which Boland usually places her women in opposition to the male 'Other'. Central to Boland's work in this phase is the principle of duality. In *In Her Own Image*, there is always a split, a clear boundary between the 'self' and the 'Other'. It is worthwhile noticing the repetition of 'self', 'myself', and 'yourself', noun and pronouns that emphasize those essential qualities distinguishing one individual from another. Boland's emphasis on individuality inevitably leads to a clear and binary demarcation between the 'self' and the "other than the self", to use Irigaray's term (1991: 159). This 'Other', described as opposite to the 'self', acquires different forms in *In Her Own Image*: although it is usually the male other, it can also be the mimic muse, the moon, the nursery lights, or the sinful Eve. This compartmentalization of distinguished identities will disappear in Boland's mature work. In *Night Feed*, we will observe how Boland yearns for a union with her child, for a pre-Oedipal realm in which there is no separation between the 'self' and the 'm/other'. Similarly, later volumes of poetry will show how Boland will constantly fuse the 'I' of the poem (the poetic self) with those images she represents (usually a 'she').

On the other hand, Boland views female elements (such as the body and passion) as more valuable and powerful than male ones. By doing so, she perpetuates traditional gender (binary) oppositions that introduce hierarchical relations between men and women in the first place. The danger of adopting feminism at the aesthetic level has been noted by Kristeva (1986c: 195, 202), who has argued that, in its search for "an irreducible identity which has no equal in the opposite sex", feminism runs the risk of becoming "an inverted form of sexism".

The main problem with the egalitarian and non-oppositional notion of sexual difference that Irigaray (1991: 171-174) and Cixous (1994: 119-128) envisage is that it is very difficult to assert sexual difference without invoking one of the parts of this difference as superior. It is not only that both Irigaray and Cixous conceive of woman's language in terms of biological determinism, but that they also seem to be privileging women's sexuality over men's. As we have seen, Irigaray (1985: 24) overvalues woman's ability, in contrast to men, to touch herself without any recourse to instruments: her sex "touches itself all the time". Furthermore, Irigaray has stated that "[n]othing is more spiritual than female sexuality" (1991: 190). Statements such as this endow

women with a higher value than men, contradicting the belief in an "amorous exchange" that avoids theorizing the superiority of one sex over the other.³⁷ Irigaray does not avoid the reversal of hierarchical values of one sex over another that she tries passionately to dismantle. This is the modernist/ postmodernist debate that feminists have to confront, something that Whitford (1991: 12) has already taken into consideration: the difficulty of envisaging sexual emancipation without claiming women's superiority, or without advocating their uniqueness.

This is one of the dilemmas that Boland encounters in *In Her Own Image*. By constantly praising her poetic voices for their superiority to talk (or write) about their sexual life, about their bodies and womanly experiences, Boland replicates the pattern of authority present in the male discourse. In the dualistic opposition that Cixous most drastically attacks, the strong, high, and active place is occupied by men, and the other by women. Boland does not escape this opposition, and attempts through the act of writing to acquire a strong and powerful position similar to the masculine one.

The presence of an authoritarian and rhetorically powerful self is observed in the predicates that Boland employs in these poems. First of all, the use of imperative is recurrent, always addressed to the 'Other': the mimic and national muse of male poets (as in "Tirade for the Mimic Muse" and "Witching"), or the male 'Other' (as in "Exhibitionist"). Secondly, the presence of the volitional 'will' is distinctive and unique in this volume. At times this use of the modal is combined with the modal 'will' of certainty (as in "Witching"). Nevertheless, whereas Boland will continue to employ modals indicating certainty, the use of the volitional 'will' be significantly rare in later productions. In poems such as "Tirade for the Mimic Muse", "In Her Own Image", "Anorexic", "Witching", "Exhibitionist", and "Making Up", this use of the modal 'will' indicates that the speaker is involved in the act or instance of making a conscious choice or decision. The fact that three of these poems ("Tirade for the Mimic Muse", "Witching", and "Exhibitionist") end with these uses of the modal shows that Boland favours the movement from oppression towards a liberationist project in which the woman exerts her own agency.

Thirdly, the poetic speaker, eager to make clear that she is in command of the experience she is talking about, reassures her right to act as a spokesperson for women's experiences by the, sometimes overused and repetitive, presence of the verb 'to know'. This verb, exclusively attached to the first person pronoun 'I', indicates that the poetic speaker can perceive directly, can grasp 'reality' with clarity and certainty. Some examples of this are found in "Tirade for the Mimic Muse" ("I know you for the ruthless bitch you are", "[A world] well I know and how I see it

³⁷ Furthermore, Irigaray (1991: 196) argues that in the world of technology women are perhaps even better than men, because "they are more patient, more obedient, and because they have a talent for more delicate, more precise gestures".

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know”); “In Her Own image” (“And I know just the place”); “Solitary” (“I know,/ only I know/ these frenzied and incendiary ways”); “Menses” (“then I begin to know/ that I am bright and original/ and that my light’s my own”); and “Witching” (“But I/ know/ what to do:/ I will reverse their arson”).

Fourthly, the significant presence of lexical verbs of action indicates that this is a woman adopting a subject rather than object position.³⁸ This, combined with the preponderance of verbs reflecting subversion, indicate that the woman intends to overthrow male authority. Some significant examples appear in “Solitary” (“I *defy* them”; my cry/ *blasphemes*/ light and dark/ screams land from sea,/ makes word flesh), “Witching” (“I will *reverse* their arson”), and “Exhibitionist” (“I *subvert* sculpture/ the old mode”; “*Cast down*/ Lucifers,/ spruce/ businessmen,/ their eyes/ cast down.”; “the light that is *unyielding*.”). As we have seen when analyzing the poems, the presence of an assertive speaker is also emphasized by the use of the verb ‘to be’ followed by the subject ‘I’ in the present form. Furthermore, the use of the adverb ‘yes’ three times in this volume is used to affirm what the narrator is actually saying, as in “Anorexic” (“Yes I am torching/ her curves and paps and wiles.”), “Menses” (“Yes it is me/ she poaches her old face in”), and “Witching” (“Yes it’s my turn/ to stack/ the twigs/ and twig the fire”). It is as if the poetic voices in this volume are answering with assurance and confidence all those who question what she is actually doing.

Finally, whereas in Boland’s mature work the focus of attention will be more on what cannot be said and grasped within the poem, in other words, on the limits that the poet finds in describing ‘the real’, this volume of poetry focuses more on what the speaker can actually say and describe. There is nothing that she cannot address: both the source of her oppression and the creation of a new self are given voice.³⁹ In this sense, the woman is always portrayed in the act of speaking. In “Making Up”, the narrator argues that “[my mouth] won’t stay shut” and that “My face is made,/ It says”. In “Solitary”, the speaker describes how “my cry [...] makes words flesh”. In this sense, there are constant references to the woman speaker’s “mouth”, “lips”, and also to her “hand” and “fingers”. These parts of the body are essential, for they enable the woman to exert agency by talking and writing.

By depicting her poetic voices in *In Her Own Image* as strongly authoritative and powerful, Boland deliberately maintains a hierarchical structure. As Irigaray says at the end of “This Sex Which is Not One” (1985: 33), if women’s “aim were simply to reverse the order of things, even

³⁸ The only moments in which we can’t find modal volitional ‘will’, verbs of action, and of certainty are those poems where Boland deliberately adopts an oppressed role, as in “In His Own Image”. In “Mastectomy”, for instance, there are no verbs of action whatsoever, and the only action is carried out by the male ‘Other’.

³⁹ In contrast to Boland’s later emphasis on ‘silences’ and ‘whispers’, the only poem where silence appears in this volume is in “Exhibitionist”, where the woman describes her own act of stripping down: “hush/ of hip”.

supposing this to be possible, history would repeat itself in the long run, would revert to sameness: to phallograticism".⁴⁰ As Irigaray envisages, a reversal in the hierarchies of power wherein the formerly 'inferior' term occupies the position of the 'superior' term, will not alter the nature of their relationships. It won't be until her more mature production that Boland will more successfully subvert this dichotomy, by stressing the powerlessness of her poetic voices rather than their power.

In this sense, and however defensive her assertive stance might be, Boland ends up reinstating patriarchal values and writing within those terms which have oppressed women in the first place. This is another feature that clearly distinguishes *In Her Own Image* as what Showalter would call a 'Feminist', and Memmi and Fanon a 'Cultural Nationalist' volume. Feminist critics like Moi (1997: 108) have argued that, by attempting to define 'feminine' features, feminism perpetuates traditional binary oppositions. This sort of feminism falls back into another patriarchal trap:

we still need to emphasize that difference between male and female experience of the world. But that difference is shaped by the patriarchal structures feminists are opposing; and to remain faithful to it is to play the patriarchal game. (Moi 1997: 113)

Like radical feminism, nationalism runs the risk of 'playing the colonizer's game' by its necessity to construct a counter-ideology which at the end is constructed upon the categories of the colonizing culture itself. Both Memmi (1990: 201-205) and Fanon (1990: 38-39) show a reluctance towards nationalism as a viable means of decolonization. Even after the struggle for national freedom has succeeded, there are certain features of the former colonial power which are still maintained in the national governments. The reason for this, as Memmi (1990: 201: 197) explains, is that the colonized continues to define himself in the terms imposed by the colonizer. In relation to this, Fanon (1990: 38-39) explains that the techniques the writer employs in this phase, and which are based on an exclusive defence of his/her own identity, are not really creative, for they are merely inverted copies of the previous colonial regime. As Fanon (1990: 192) states, it was the colonizer who, in the need to reassure his power, encouraged a defensive and violent writing: "Stinging denunciations, the exposing of distressing conditions and passions which find their outlet in expression are in fact assimilated by the occupying power in a catharsis process". Thus, the native culture maintains its values within the framework of colonial domination.

⁴⁰ As Jacques Derrida (1981: 41) argues in another context: "To deconstruct the opposition [...] is to overturn the hierarchy at a given moment. To overlook this phase is to forget the conflictual and subordinating structure of opposition" (quoted by Renza 1984: 39).

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Like nationalist writing, Boland’s revolutionary volume of poetry does not challenge the very foundations of patriarchy. Although Boland’s intention is to re-evaluate the ‘feminine’ categories of male discourse, in the process, she reiterates the traditional gender binary divisions Cixous (1994: 37) identifies. For Boland, it is very important to situate her women in a night atmosphere, in contrast to that lightness that surrounded the poet in *New Territory*. Whereas in Boland’s later productions the women inhabit ‘in-between’ landscapes (located either at diffuse moments such as dawn or dusk), the women here are located in clearly determined and well-established ones: they inhabit the night, as the first sentence of poems such as “Solitary”, “Menses”, “Witching”, and “Exhibitionist” make clear: “Night/ and oratory of dark”; “It is dark again”; “My gifts/ are nightly”; “I wake to dark”. In this sense, her women are dominated by the moon and their realm is the night, just as in the binary logic. Although Boland’s characters deconstruct some of the patriarchal binary oppositions (her women are strongly active), they keep exalting the typical feminine pathos over the conventional male logos, as we have seen in “Solitary” and “Witching”. The women in the volume constantly ‘talk’ in a high emotional tone. They are moved more by emotion (revenge, hatred, and bitterness) than by reason.

Furthermore, Boland’s poetic voices create themselves by means of the same devices that patriarchal society provides them with. Subversion is carried out by relying on traditional images such as cosmetics and mirrors. The woman poet feels the need to move within traditional (male) parameters, in order to define herself. Although the poetic voice in “Menses” asserts at one point that she is “bright” and “original”, it will not be until later when Boland will produce more original imagery to bear witness to her female subjectivity. As a result, Fanon (1990: 192) says, this phase is characterized by a sort of “paralyzed and non-creative culture”. There is no over-production of literature and the writer continues writing images that are not his/her own. Like Fanon, Showalter (1999: 215) observes how the feminist phase, in its prescriptive demands, was unproductive in the terrain of literature (note that she only dedicates one brief chapter in her long study to a discussion of feminist writing): “In retrospect, it looks as if all the feminists had but one story to tell, and exhausted themselves in its narration”. Following these remarks, it may not be coincidental that Boland’s “Feminist phase” only includes one volume of poetry.

Another reason justifies the fact that Boland has not yet moved into a liberating artistic autonomy. Although in *In Her Own Image* Boland implies that sexuality is a very important aspect in woman’s lives, she does not give voice to other ‘feminine’ qualities which she will find highly gratifying and fulfilling in her next phase: her role as a mother/caretaker of her children, her love for her husband, or her need to establish a comradeship with the women of the past. Boland’s artistic autonomy will not be attained until she gives voice to her own experiences as an Irish

woman writer, although this will not involve achieving an 'authentic' identity, but deconstructing it (she will avoid the essentialist stance of this second phase, by calling into question categories such as 'femaleness' and 'Irishness'). Her women, although representative of a variety of female experiences, do not bear witness to Boland's personal reality: she has neither suffered anorexia, nor been battered by her husband, as she explains in an interview with Wilson (1990b: 82). Thus, this volume represents a woman trying to define herself by means of other women. Until Boland does not disentangle what her 'I' is (a mother concerned with her daughters growing up, a woman worried about getting older), she will not achieve artistic decolonization. The identity crises suffered by the angry voices in this volume are a direct consequence of Boland's pressure on breaking away from the influence of the patriarchal tradition. In a later poem, "A False Spring", Boland will realize the need to calm down the angry woman in *In Her Own Image*: "I want to tell her she can rest,/ she is embodied now" (*Outside History* 1990: 29). This embodiment will represent for Boland her desire for a poetry that contains the whole of her experience, an experience which will be fully expressed in her next phase. It will not be until then that the woman in the poem and the woman writing the poem will become the same person.

7. 4. “FEMALE/LIBERATIONIST” PHASE

7.4.1. Introduction

Showalter (1999: 13) identifies a third stage in women's writing which she denominates the 'Female' phase, and defines as "a turning inward freed from some of the dependency of opposition, a search for identity". Showalter views "female literature" as that written by women which intentionally concerns itself with the enunciation of these women's own experiences and which reflects an "autonomous self-expression", self-discovery, and self-scrutiny (p. 4). This critic argues that, at this stage, women writers stick to their own feelings, values, and dissatisfactions (p. 241). If we highlight Showalter's emphasis that the third phase involves, above all, a freedom of expression in relation to the literary mainstream, Boland's mature work can be indisputably located within Showalter's 'Female' phase. Before going any further, I would like to make it clear that when applying the concept 'Female' to Boland's poetry, I refer to Showalter's main definition of the term: artistic freedom or autonomous self-expression. I do not intend to imply that there is a 'female essence' in Boland's poetry, because, as we will see, Boland calls into question the very category of 'womanhood'. In her volumes of poetry following *In Her Own Image*, we can see an increasing process of self-sufficient expression, by constantly giving voice to her own experiences as a woman, an Irish citizen, and a poet. Nevertheless, finding artistic autonomy for Boland does not involve a construction of a poetic identity in essentialist terms, but rather a deconstruction of it. At first sight, this would seem to distance Boland's mature work from what Showalter identifies as 'female writing', and its interrelated emphasis on 'female' identity and women's experiences. Nevertheless, a closer look at Showalter's analysis shows that Boland's poetry is but one instance of the 'Female' phase this feminist critic talks about.

Critics such as Moi (1991: 7) have criticized Showalter for studying women's writing from the assumption that there is a female writing vs. a masculine writing. Moi argues that feminist literary analysis must turn to the poststructuralist theory of French feminism in general, and Julia Kristeva in particular, because it rejects biologism and essentialism, and deconstructs "the opposition between masculinity and femininity" (Moi 1991: 12).¹ In fact, Showalter uncritically uses terms such as "female" and "masculine" (as in p. 33) implying that there are certain features specifically found in men and women's writing distinctively. This would justify Moi's critique that Showalter perpetuates the binary logic of Western thought (i.e. masculinity vs. femininity). Nevertheless, attacks such as Moi's seem to ignore that Showalter's intention is not to look at a woman's essence, at an "an innate sexual attitude", in the female literary tradition, but at the ways

¹ In her introduction to the 1999 edition of *A Literature of Their Own*, Showalter (1999: xix) defends herself from attacks such as this by arguing that when she finished this book in 1974, she had not even heard of Cixous, Irigaray, and Kristeva, as their work was not introduced to American scholars until 1980, in a translation by Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron.

in which women writers gradually achieve independent self-expression. As Showalter (1999: 12) asserts at the beginning of her study:

I am [...] uncomfortable with the notion of a "female imagination". The theory of a female sensibility revealing itself in an imagery and form specific to women always runs dangerously close to reiterating the familiar stereotypes.

In this sense, Showalter acknowledges the danger of conferring specific features to women's writers, because they might be understood as natural and exclusive to them. This belief of hers moves her close to the deconstructive moves that feminism has taken, mostly after Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray, and Julia Kristeva, and which have emphasized the artificiality of gender differences. Furthermore, Showalter (1999: 34) even asserts that although "female writing" at this stage involves a search for identity, this does not necessarily require, contradicting other assertions she makes in her study (as in p. 4), an articulation of women's experiences: "Paradoxically, the more female this literature became in the formal and theoretical sense, the further it moved from exploring the physical experience of women [...]; female aestheticism is [...] oddly sexless in its content". In this sense, when analyzing Virginia Woolf's fiction, a clear exponent of what Showalter calls a "deliberate female aesthetic", this critic highlights this writer's dream of androgyny (p. 264). Showalter understands androgyny as a "full balance and command of an emotional range that includes male and female elements" (p. 263). Although Showalter admits to being suspicious about concepts such as this, which, "like all utopian ideals [...] lacks zest and energy" (ibid), I would argue that androgyny might be understood in itself as a way of deconstructing maleness and femaleness, the binary (sexual) division identified as intrinsic to Western thought. As Moi (1991: 9) argues, Woolf practices "a deconstructive form of writing, one that engages and thereby exposes the duplicitous nature of discourse". In this sense, Woolf's sexual identity unites two polarized concepts which are identified as opposites. As this woman writer (1974: 139) argues in *A Room of One's Own*, the "ideal and free state of mind" of a good artist like Shakespeare should be androgynous. Woolf (1974: 147) defends that women must stop regarding men as "the opposing faction" in order to find harmony between both sexes and gain what she calls the "unity of mind". More than a deconstruction of identity as such, Woolf's notion of androgyny is an ideal of identity, the utopian dream of encompassing within the same personality two distinct principles, maleness and femaleness. In this sense, this ideal notion of identity deconstructs at least one aspect of it: the sexual aspect of identity. Showalter's emphasis on this "sexless" dream of women writers at their final stage, reminds one of that deconstructive movement within French feminist theory which aims to disentangle polarized concepts in the

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prevailing language, such as the terms ‘man’ and ‘woman’. On the other hand, by identifying in the third phase of women’s writing “a turning inward freed from some of the dependency of opposition”, Showalter (1999: 13) seems to argue that, unlike the radical feminism of the second stage, women writers do not seek an inversion of the structures of domination. In this sense, ‘female’ identity would not operate within the discursive limits set by patriarchal discourse, and it would move away from binary oppositions such as ‘man’ vs. ‘woman’.

Feminism in this deconstructionist phase would be part, as Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (2002a: 174) explain, of the political project “to raise and transform consciousness”, a project similar to the one advocated by anti-colonial intellectuals such as Albert Memmi (1990: 198) and Franz Fanon (1990: 148). Both Memmi and Fanon believe that the second phase in the decolonizing process is a prelude to a more “positive” and “liberating” movement. Memmi argues that, in the previous two phases, the colonized subject depended on the figure of the colonizer, both as a model to follow, or as an antithesis to reject. He believes that it is only in “the decomposition of this [inter]dependence” established between colonizer and colonized that any sort of viable decolonization is possible (Memmi 1990: 7).² Like Showalter, therefore, Memmi’s writings advocate liberation from the dependency of opposition. The colonized has to cease defining himself/herself through the categories imposed by the colonizers, and this would certainly imply moving beyond boundaries such as East vs. West, colonized vs. colonizer. Memmi’s (1990: 217) call for “revolution” and the creation of “a whole and free man” advances Fanon’s (1990: 28) later advocacy for the “veritable creation of new men”.³ Fanon argues that, in the final phase of liberation, the colonial subject does not rely on an antagonistic resistance (p. 182). In contrast to the second phase of the process of decolonization, the writer in this period does not seek to replace the canon, but intends to reconstruct it by rereading previous oppressive assumptions and creating his/her own writing criteria. Now, according to Fanon, colonialism and the colonized subject must vanish. The radical division into paired oppositions such as good vs. evil, true vs. false, white vs. black underlying colonial relationships, which Fanon (1991: 11) characterizes as the product of a “manichaeism delirium”, hinders the process of ultimate liberation. In this sense, Fanon explains that assertion of negritude is not sufficient in itself, for race is a cultural construct. By moving beyond racial boundaries, the individual achieves the ultimate freedom and liberation. As Fanon (1991: 231) explains, “the black soul is a white man’s artifact”, “[t]he Negro is not. Anymore than the white man. [...] Why not the quite simple attempt to touch the other, to feel the other, to

² As Memmi (1990: 216) puts it, “[f]or the colonized just as for the colonizer, there is no way out other than a complete end to colonization”.

³ The main difference between Albert Memmi and Franz Fanon is that the latter explicitly applies his theories of decolonization to the realm of culture. That is why I will quote him in this chapter more often.

explain the other to myself?"⁴ In this sense, as Young (1992: 119) has acknowledged, Fanon was one of the pioneering writers to deconstruct Western thought and its binary system.

In Boland's final phase, there is also an urgent need to break national and gender boundaries. Boland's assertion of womanhood in *In Her Own Image* is one means of achieving artistic freedom, but not the ultimate end. Her poetry, as we will see, moves away from essentialist identity-claims such as Irishness, and also from those feminist attempts to construct the category 'woman' in opposition to the category 'man'. Boland explicitly moves away from feminism, because, in her own words, it only encourages the woman poet "to feminize her perceptions rather than humanize her femininity" (Boland 1996a: 245). As Boland (1996b: 142) has asserted elsewhere, women's importance in Irish poetry is not because of issues of gender or politics, but because their poetry "contains elements of human justice". According to Boland (1996a: 235), women's project is "neither marginal nor specialist. It is a project which concerns all of poetry, all that leads into it in the past and everywhere it is going in the future". The extent to which Boland's discourse resembles Fanon's "humanist" and "liberationist discourse" is significant, as made explicit throughout *White Skin, Black Masks* and *The Wretched of the Earth* with assertions such as "I believe that the individual should tend to take on the universality inherent in the human condition" (Fanon 1991: 12), or his belief that the writer must "use the past with the intention of opening the future, as an invitation to action, a basis for hope" (p. 187). Boland's project is not merely concerned with issues like gender; it is concerned with the transformation of poetry itself, the restructuring of the foundations on which canonical poetry has been based (such as the traditional association of 'man' as writer/poet and 'woman' as decorative object or sexual image in the poem).

Taking the aforementioned into account, I think it appropriate to apply Showalter's 'Female' phase, and Memmi and Fanon's 'Liberationist' phase to Boland's work produced between 1982 and 2001: *Night Feed* (1982), *The Journey and other poems* (1986), *Outside History* (1990), *In a Time of Violence* (1994), *The Lost Land* (1998), and *Against Love Poetry* (2001).⁵ As Fanon (1990: 192) explains, the final period in the decolonizing process, in contrast to the earlier inoperative and non-creative phases, witnesses a relative over-production of literature. Boland's numerous volumes of poetry record a process of 'female' consciousness expanding and maturing.

⁴ Note the similitude between Fanon's project and Kristeva's feminist advocacy for an "analysis of the potentialities of *victim/executor* which characterizes each identity, each subject, each sex" (Kristeva 1986c: 210). Both Fanon and Kristeva defend moving beyond the dichotomy 'One' vs. the 'Other' which is intrinsic to the process of identity-making, by identifying 'the Other' in oneself.

⁵ In my discussion of Boland's latest volume of poetry, my source is the American edition, *Against Love Poetry*, not the Irish edition entitled *Code*. The only difference between both volumes of poetry, apart from the title (see interview with Villar Argáiz (2005a) for Boland's explanation of why the Irish and the American edition have different titles), lies at the level of graphology.

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She is going to express her dissatisfaction with her earlier feminine work (mostly *New Territory*), where she wrote the kind of poetry which was expected from her sex, and also with her feminist volume of poetry (*In Her Own Image*), where she defensively celebrated womanhood and adopted a separatist stance in her attempt to establish her own poetic aesthetics.

In what follows I will demonstrate how Boland’s mature poetry is going to be dominated by some specific features which construct what Showalter (1999: 33) denominates a “deliberate female aesthetic”, or Memmi (1990: 148) and Fanon (1990: 182) a “liberating” writing. Instead of a volume-by-volume consideration of her works, I have chosen a thematic framework to explore Boland’s mature work. While it is tempting to trace in this phase a linear course of development from volume to volume, her production from *Night Feed* to *Against Love Poetry* does not follow that straight line.

The first section focuses on Boland’s main source of poetic creativity: her life as a suburban married mother. Firstly, I will show, principally by drawing on some poems from *The War Horse* (1975) and *Against Love Poetry* (2001), how Boland avoids adopting an oppositional stance by advocating what French feminism calls “an amorous exchange” that is based on an equal partnership between antagonistic opposites. Although *The War Horse* was written before *In Her Own Image* (1980), I will treat it as a prelude to Boland’s third phase, for the poetic aesthetics that Boland develops in this work better fits her mature production. In these poems, Boland particularly draws on her marriage to envisage an ideal form of life that can maintain ‘female difference’ while not imposing this difference as superior. Secondly, I will deal with those poems, mostly from *Night Feed* (1982), where Boland focuses on domestic interiors and mother-child relationships. As I will demonstrate, her reliance on her ordinary experiences as a woman is a subversive mechanism to criticize a national tradition whose literature has for long obliterated this issue by considering it ‘unpoetic’, and to dismantle traditional idealizations of women in nationalist writings.

The second section will discuss how Boland carries out a reconstruction of women’s images in art and literature, in particular the nationalist emblem of Mother Ireland. Feminist and postcolonial critics such as Cixous, Irigaray, Spivak, and Bhabha have advocated a revision and not rejection of Western cultural institutions, texts, and theoretical practices. Boland follows this tendency, negotiating with colonizing (patriarchal) discursive practices in order to show their simplification and misrepresentation of women. I will demonstrate how Boland advocates a more inclusive and fluid national identity that encapsulates different heterogeneous experiences.

The third section is dedicated to Boland’s deconstruction of poetic identity, mostly in her volumes *The Journey and Other Poems* (1986) and *In a Time of Violence* (1994), and also in some

individual poems from *Outside History* (1990) and *The Lost Land* (1998). It will be here where Showalter's, Memmi's, and Fanon's deconstructive theories will be better observed. Postcolonial theory (with its advocacy of hybridity and ambivalence) and French feminist theory (with its emphasis on woman's fluidity) will give us an insight into how Boland carries out this process.

The fourth section focuses on one of the most important aspects of Eavan Boland's poetry: her attempt to give voice to those lived experiences, mostly female, that lie unrecorded and undervalued by nationalist historical accounts. As I will show in this section, Boland avoids acting as a spokesperson, for such an act would perpetuate the nationalist relation between poet and community, and would also inevitably simplify under a homogenous voice a reality which is heterogeneous and fragmentary. The past is always for Boland an ungraspable terrain. Nevertheless, by recording her powerlessness and limitations as a poet, Boland's discourse will be non-authoritarian and therefore highly subversive. In order to analyze this interesting aspect of her work, I will rely on Spivak's postcolonial premises in "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1994) and Kristeva's feminist postulates in "Revolution in Poetic Language" (1986a).

The fifth section focuses on *The Lost Land* (1998) and how this volume of poetry is shaped by Boland's mature exile in the US. As I will demonstrate, Boland's poetic concerns experience a change in 1998 mostly by the demands of the American marketplace. The strong colonial and postcolonial issues that dominate this volume of poetry fulfil the desires of an audience which is drawn to 'Orientalist' issues. I will analyze the extent to which Boland might be accused of 'selling' Ireland's oppressed colonial experience abroad.

Finally, the last section is concerned with Boland's latest volume of poetry, *Against Love Poetry* (2001). In this collection, this woman writer deliberately distances from her previous focus on colonial issues with a desire to test the American feedback of less 'Orientalist' topics. As I will demonstrate, Boland stands as a more secure and confident writer, whose assured place within the Irish and American literary panoramas has allowed her to overcome her oppression as a woman writer and an Irish citizen. In spite of this, I will show how in some poems Boland still portrays herself as a powerless and non-authoritarian poetic voice, a subversive mechanism to move away from dominant discourses such as the colonialist, nationalist, and patriarchal.

7.4.2. Boland's female experience

7.4.2.1. Introduction

As Showalter (1999: 35) states, the woman writer at her 'Female' phase "tries to unify her fragments of female experience through artistic vision". By 'female experience', this feminist literary critic means women's personal stories, their involvement in society as caretakers, wives, mothers, and housewives. This is precisely what Boland does in her mature work; she tries to defend her female reality from the perspective of a woman poet. Like Showalter, Boland (1996a: 130) has expressed her belief that women's writing is specially marked by their (female) personal experience, for they have no literary tradition to look back to: "Yet in poetry and women's writing in particular, the private witness is often all there is to go on". Her volumes of poetry after *In Her Own Image* exemplify Boland's remark. She makes her own personal experience as a woman and a poet part of her source material. For the first time, Boland holds to her own private experience, knowledge, and dissatisfaction as a woman, putting into practice Adrienne Rich's realization that "instead of poems about experience, I am getting poems that are experiences" (Boland 1996a: 131). In this stage of her evolution, the 'I' of her poems can be identified with Boland herself. As she admits in an interview, "the voice is me. It isn't just the voice of an 'I'" (Wilson 1990b: 81). Thus, one of Boland's great achievements in this phase is her ability to become the speaking subject of her own poems. She adopts the perspective of, and speaks as, a wife, a mother, a housewife.

Boland's emphasis on women's experiences indicates that her poems are grounded in an oppositional politics, even though she tries to subvert them. By focusing on a woman's world of domestic interiors and night feedings, she inevitably describes it as presumably different from a male world. As Keen (2000: 28) has argued, gendered postcolonial identities are constructed upon a series of

alienating contradictions that have to be embraced before they can be ended, worked through rather than merely transcended, but always with the hope of re-emerging in a less polarized context which makes an appreciation of the heterogeneity of lived experience possible.

Nevertheless, although in her poetry Boland praises her lived experience as an Irish woman, she will not fall prey to the biological essentialism of *In Her Own Image*. On the one hand, Boland avoids adopting the separatist stance of this volume, by recognizing the positive influence of the male 'Other'. As a married woman, Boland begins to dedicate some of her pieces of work to her husband. This is the case of "The Other Woman" and "The Botanic Gardens" (*The*

War Horse), poems in which she specifically focuses on the new concerns of marriage life and domesticity. On the other hand, as we will see in the following section (7.4.2.2.), she will emphasize the need to resituate sexual difference on an equalitarian relationship, not based on oppositions as in the second phase. In order to explain this feature of Boland's work, I will rely, again, on French feminism. As we have seen, both Irigaray (1991: 174) and Cixous (1994: 40) advocate women's liberation based on egalitarian sexual difference (the relevance of their theories lies in their ability, as we will see, to combine sexual difference with equality).

7.4.2.2. Boland's marriage: an amorous exchange in *The War Horse* and *Against Love Poetry*

Although *The War Horse* (originally published in 1975) was written after *New Territory*, her most conventional volume as regards subject matter and poetic form, and before *In Her Own Image*, a volume with a clear feminist bias, we start to perceive in some poems of this collection an emerging female awareness characteristic of her mature style. In this sense, this volume stands as a work of transition in Boland's poetic career, something that Allen-Randolph (1993a: 8) and Brown (1993: 37) have already considered. The interesting thing about this volume is that it combines feminine submission and female awareness.¹ These contradictory pulls reflect Boland's difficulty in leaving literary conventions aside. As she has admitted in an interview with Allen-Randolph (1993b: 120-121):

I moved from the University culture out to the suburbs. I left an apparently sustaining literary culture – although one, as I've said, that I'd already begun to question. I was really trying to find a voice within my own poems and having some puzzling experiences while doing so. [...] The learning experience of those years was essentially in unlearning received aesthetics, and in beginning to trust my instincts.

Because of these "puzzling experiences", Boland revolves around feelings of unconditional love and loathing for the legacy of the forefathers. On the one hand, she continues to connect her literary production to the patriarchal canon, by employing Irish myths and relying on traditional forms. She still writes under the masquerade of a 'male' poet in poems still constructed upon highly regular stanzas and well-recognized literary techniques. On the other hand, there are some significant poems in this volume where Boland explicitly becomes the speaking subject. In poems

¹ "From the Irish of Pangur Ban", "Elegy for a Youth Changed to a Sawn", "O Fons Bandusiae", "Conversations With an Inspector of Taxes", and "The Atlantic Ocean" are, broadly speaking, still firmly in the formal conservatism of Boland's first phase. It is interesting to note how in the 1980 Arlen Edition, Boland arranges these poems so that they appear in the middle of the volume. The fact that they are surrounded by more innovative poems, both in their theme and their poetic language ("The Other Woman", "The Famine Road", "The Greek Experience", "Suburban Woman", and "Ode to Suburbia", for instance) indicates that Boland deliberately wishes to set a contrast, a tension between literary convention and subversion. This contrast parallels Boland's confusion in those years: whether to stick to formal parameters, or to open new avenues of experimentation.

7.4.2. Boland's female experience

such as “The Other Woman”, “The Botanic Gardens”, “Prisoners”, and “Suburban Woman” the poetic voice is Boland herself, a suburban married woman and a housewife who bases herself in her house in Dumdrum.²

Another key factor that distinguishes *The War Horse* as a work of transition is Boland's paradoxical attitude towards Ireland's fight for national independence. She claims opposite postulates: a call for war and an advocacy of peace. As in her initial phase, poems such as “Conversations with an Inspector of Taxes” and “The Atlantic Ocean” offer an image of the poet as a male communal figure, supporting revolution and encouraging his community to fight against the oppressor. Writing is portrayed as a politically committed activity, and the poet stands as a spokesperson, as someone who must give voice to the needs of his people. The poetic voice in “After the Irish of Egan O'Rahilly” (*New Territory*) is very similar to that which appears in “Conversations with an inspector of Taxes”. Following the style of the Soviet poet Mayakovski, Boland writes a forceful and declamatory poem praising the Communist revolution. The poet supports rebellion: he is a warrior who, loyal to his “debts of honour”, must follow “the Red Army, boiling across frontiers/ In a wash of Cossack stallions”. This support and encouragement of rebellion also appears in “The Atlantic Ocean”, where the poet's angry and emotional speech reminds one also of Egan O'Rahilly's discourse. Poems such as these attempt to follow a poetic legacy, such as that created by the Celtic Revival, which at times involved supporting violence and feeding a national feeling of revenge and freedom.

The call for war and support of rebellion that these poems exemplify contradicts the accusation of war and advocacy of peace in most of the poems in *The War Horse*. This shift as regards poetic sensibility is due, not only to Boland's personal change of lifestyle, but also to Ireland's political agitation at the moment. Brown (1993: 34) explains that, in the mid-seventies, the Northern Irish crisis reached its climax with “the Worker's Strike, the fall of the power-sharing executive, and the bombing of Dublin”. In the face of such manifestations of violence and disagreement, Boland rejects Yeats's vision of an Irish cultural and national unity.³ In June 1974, at the time of writing the poems in *The War Horse*, Boland published an essay in the *Irish Times* entitled “The Weasel's Tooth”. This essay expresses her belief in the damage done by the Yeatsian dream of cultural unity, because, as she explains,

² Because of this lack of consistency in her subversion of the Irish poetic tradition, *The War Horse* has received some negative reviews. See in particular Dodsworth (1986: 96).

³ As has been observed in *New Territory*, Boland was profoundly indebted to Yeats in her employment of Celtic myths, her defence of the value of the imagination to escape from the horrors of war (“Yeats in Civil War”) and, most importantly, in her philosophy of Romanticism.

there is, and at last I recognize it, no unity whatsoever in this culture of ours. And even more important, I recognize that there is no need whatsoever for such a unity. If we search for it we will, at a crucial moment, be mutilating with fantasy once again the very force we should be liberating with reality. (Boland 1974: 56)

In *The War Horse*, Boland challenges national definitions of unity suggesting that the image of Ireland as a cultural whole has caused violence and death. In contrast to other poems in the collection, Boland does not aestheticize violence and war, but places it under close scrutiny. The poet shows the destructive side of war, and focuses on the wounds and deaths caused by national struggles. In poems such as "Suburban Woman", the poet presents war as a "rape on either side", showing that in any form of contemporary struggle, all parts (whether Loyalist or Nationalist) find themselves damaged. Other poems such as "The War Horse" and "Child of our Time" reveal another perspective to war, not a communal one this time, but a private and personally experienced one. "Child of our Time", for instance, evokes a photograph of the body of a young child being lifted from the debris of a bomb-blast in Dublin on 17 May 1974 (Brown 1993: 34). As Haberstroh (1996: 62) notices, in this volume, the Irish troubles "parallel private family battles" within Boland's own domestic world.⁴ Boland's intention is to show how the Northern Irish conflict is, in the end, a conflict between members belonging to the same community. In "Belfast vs. Dublin" (*New Territory*), Boland presented the point of view between Northerners and Southerners as irreconcilable. This poem was dedicated and addressed to Derek Mahon, a poet born in Belfast in 1941. After realizing that she, as a Dublin poet, is inevitably distanced from Mahon by "the brilliant quarrel/ Of our towns", and that they will never agree on "the living out/ Of life", Boland concludes:

Let us then cavalierly fork
Our ways, since we, and all unknown,
Have called into question one another's own.

The woman poet here prefers to evade any possible communication between both parties. The points of view of Northerners and Southerners are not only extremely different, but also impossible to reconcile. It is not until *The War Horse*, where Boland relies on love and communication as possible solutions to all quarrels. In this sense, some of the poems in this volume put into practice Cixous's and Irigaray's advocacy of reconciling opposites in a 'love' that surpasses boundaries. Although these French feminists refer to male and female sexual opposites,

⁴ In "The Hanging Judge", war is presented as a battle between fathers and sons. The poetic speaker becomes at the end the son who is been hanged, killed by his own father. In "The Family Tree", Boland also represents her cousins as "wag[ing] their sterile fight, their arid battle/ Pleasuring to poison enemy cattle,/ Innocent children now". These poems, together with "Sisters", where two sisters are presented as in enmity for a long time, help to show war as something closer to the domestic environment, as a battle that takes place between members of the same family.

their theories can be applied to Boland's advocacy of a uniting love that reconciles English and Irish warring factions.

Cixous and Irigaray envisage an alternative subject position where both the 'self' and the 'Other', although maintaining their sexual difference, can coexist in a relationship of enabling and egalitarian love. For both feminists, the orientation of Western (patriarchal) thought has been to divide, separate, and distinguish between polar opposites such as spirit and nature, mind and matter, male and female. In this dualistic stance, masculine and feminine are placed in opposition in a relation of power and domination. Their theories attempt to dismantle in this sense such rigid and hierarchical oppositions. In *The Book of Promethea*, Cixous (1994: 119-128) advocates a "love exchange" in which the self will not dominate the other. This new relationship between the self and the other is established between what Cixous terms "bisexuality" (1994: 40) or feminine "economy". In her essay "Sorties", Cixous (1994: 35-46) distinguishes between what she terms a masculine and a feminine "economy". The masculine is concerned with property, and with those "gift functions" that reinforce his position: "virility, authority, power, money, [...] pleasure, [and] phallogocentric narcissism at the same time" (p. 44). The "feminine gift", by contrast, is given "without calculation" and for the other's pleasure. Being aware that this stance might be easily used to charge her with being biologically essentialist, Cixous (1994: 129-137) asserts in her essay "Extreme Fidelity" that the terms masculine and feminine "economy" are not dependent on anatomical sex, but on different modes of behaviour.⁵ Similarly, Irigaray (1991: 115) advocates a sexual difference that is combined with what she calls the "amorous exchange" between a man and a woman. In this encounter between the sexes, women become desiring subjects, partners of love, instead of objects of "sexual exchange" (p. 130). The sexual relationship is understood by Irigaray as one in which one's own sex is fulfilled equally, and the different sexes can co-habit in harmony and peace, without seeking any superiority over the other. In this sense, the "sexual encounter" or what she calls "the genesis of love" would be established in a sort of horizontal relationship, and not as a "disguised or polemic form of the master-slave relationship" (p. 174).⁶

Like Cixous and Irigaray, Fanon (1991: 231) has also identified the need to overcome oppositions by establishing a differential relationship with the 'Other'. Criticizing the colonial dichotomy colonizer and colonized that is intrinsic to Western (and imperialistic) thought, this

⁵ Cixous (1994: 135) argues that it is only because of women's assigned position within the socio-symbolic system that they are potentially closer to a "feminine economy". Although Cixous tries to avoid adopting an essentialist stance, her theories will, as we will see in the following section, fall prey to biological determinism, by arguing that women, in their ability to be mothers, have more access to this "feminine" economy.

⁶ One of the reasons why sexual difference and therefore "amorous exchanges" have not flourished in Western culture, according to Irigaray (1991: 172-173), is because the binary thought, or split dichotomies, have not allowed the alliance between the sexes. Dichotomies such as "body and soul, sexuality and spirituality, [...] inside and outside", have been hierarchically distributed among the two sexes, to the extent that everything has been "constructed in such a way as to keep these realities apart, if not opposed to one another" (ibid).

postcolonial theorist argues that liberation for the individual lies in the “quite simple attempt to touch the other, to feel the other, to explain the other to myself” (ibid).

The advocacy of love and amorous exchange that feminist and postcolonial criticism argues in favour of is put into practice in *The War Horse*. Boland's main objective is, as she says in “The Laws of Love”, to

Plead

Another world for whose horizons,
For whose anguish no reprieve
Exists unless new citizens.

Boland envisages a world whose “new citizens” are regulated by the “laws of love”. This is a world in which warring opposites no longer exist and where one must be able to “judge which is the other's source” today, to understand what drives the other party to violence. This urgent call for peace and love is best observed in those poems where Boland explicitly adopts the voice of Mother Ireland. The main concern in poems such as “A Soldier's Son” and “Ready to Flight” is not so much to turn Mother Ireland into a humanized figure or an ordinary woman (the concern of later poems such as “Mise Eire”, *The Journey*; and “Mother Ireland, *The Lost Land*, as we will see), but to change Mother Ireland's discourse from encouraging war and violence to proclaiming peace and love. The Goddess Athene (who first appeared in *New Territory*) starts to acquire a voice of her own, creating a “new music” with which to combat the heroic music of “song and gong”. This new Athene is no longer a Goddess of War but a Goddess of Peace.

This Goddess of Peace appears for the first time in “A Soldier's Son”. Whereas in her initial poetry, Boland remains uncritical of a national tradition that advocates violence, here the nation (and all that originates from it, such as the literary tradition) is referred to in the third person of the plural, indicating that the speaker maintains a detached distance from it:

A young man's war it is, a young man's war
Or so they say and so they go to wage
This struggle [...]

In this poem, Mother Ireland reveals what most people obliterate in their bloody engagement with violence: that war is, in the end, a battle that confronts fathers and sons: “knowing as I do// That in the cross-hairs of his gun he found/ You his only son”. She shows the fallacy of the binary logic of ‘self’ vs. ‘Other’ that underlies Loyalist or Nationalist discourses by presenting the different opponents as sharing the same roots and belonging to the same family. By killing his enemy, the warrior in this poem really kills a part of himself. The problem that this new

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Mother Ireland identifies is that the confronters stick to a very narrow definition of Irishness. Reversing the nationalist call for self-sacrifice, Mother Ireland advises her sons to move beyond war lines in order to start perceiving the enemy as a part of their identity as well, their "heritage":

Son of a soldier who saw war on the ground,
Now cross the peace lines I have made for you
To find on this side if not peace then honour,
Your heritage.

When crossing the "peace lines" that Mother Ireland has created, one can observe that the 'Other' that lies on the other side of the border is but an instant of the 'self', for it shares the same legacy, tradition, and ancestors.

Mother Ireland's advocacy of crossing well established boundary-lines (Loyalist vs. Nationalist, North vs. South) is also observed in "Ready to Flight". This poem shows that Boland is still greatly concerned with traditional poetic forms, because it is written in the form of a sonnet with high regular stanzas and rhythmic patterns. Nevertheless, in spite of its reliance on conventional literary techniques, "Ready to Flight" exemplifies a great shift in Boland's poetic sensibility. Mother Ireland stands as a different saviour than the one supported by the nationalist discourse. Instead of calling 'her sons' to fight for her, she promises to bring "to wasted areas the sight/ Of butterfly and swan and turtle dove/ Their wings ruffled like sails ready for flight". These birds are symbols of peace, of the harmonious coming together of different warring factions. The image of the birds promising liberation inevitably reminds one of Ledwidge's "The Blackbirds", where the Poor Old Woman summons her birds to rescue her (Kennelly 1970: 305). In the poem of this well-known patriotic Revivalist, writing in the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, the Poor Old Woman is speaking in constant grief. She is portrayed as a victimized figure who is unable to act on her own, and thus summons the 'blackbirds' to save her from her dissatisfaction. The poem is intended to incite patriotic feelings, in order to encourage rebellion on the Irish people's part. Whereas in "Migration" (*New Territory*), Boland retained the allegorical image of the birds, to signify the Irish community of poets, and their important national task, here Boland subverts their significance. "Ready to Flight" does not intend to provoke struggle, but quite the contrary: it offers peace and relief in the face of conflict and war. She is no more the grieving Poor Old Woman, but a sheltering woman who lodges under her arms all opposing factions. On the other hand, in contrast to the angry poetic voices in *In Her Own Image*, this new Mother Ireland confesses to exerting her agency at "a more temperate place". Anger and revenge are alien to her project of proclaiming an alternative to war: the union of "love with love". This is the only way by which, as she says in the final couplet, "you and I would live in peace".

The woman poet is here addressing everyone, Northerners and Southerners, Loyalists and Nationalists. Nationalism is in this sense viewed as a persistent “renegotiation” to incorporate new and varied voices of individual experience (Gray 2000: 287). As Gray (2000: 287) points out:

Boland's concept of nation [...] reflects contemporary concern with the complexity of subject positions – that is, the recognition that all single points of view are actually complex and fluid intersections of pressures, a recognition that consequently denies that any single point of view can claim extended hegemony over others.

In her attempt to envisage a better world, a world of peace, warring oppositions such as ‘self’ (the ‘I’) and ‘the other’ (the ‘you’ of the poem) must be overcome by an “amorous exchange” that unites “love with love”. In this sense, the poems of *The War Horse* move towards a possibility of healing the scars created by the war. Even though, Boland suggests, her contemporary reality, as that reality of Irishmen and women, is wounded by the present state of affairs, there is, in some poems of this collection, a visionary hope for a better future. This stands in contrast to the pessimism that abounds in Boland's mature poetry. As we will see in the following sections, volumes such as *The Journey*, *Outside History*, *In a Time of Violence*, and *The Lost Land* place greater emphasis on the oppression and dispossession that has surrounded, and as a legacy, still surrounds the Irish woman poet.

Cixous's and Irigaray's advocacy of a sexual difference based on a relationship of equality is best observed in “The Botanic Gardens”.⁷ Compared to “A Soldier's Son” and “Ready to Flight”, this poem proposes an alternative to the external conflict now more specifically rooted in the lived experience of the speaker: her marriage. In this poem dedicated to her husband, two lovers, ignoring for an instance the violence observed in newspapers and television screens, walk among the plants of a botanic garden:

Guided by love, leaving aside dispute –
Guns on the pages of newspapers, the sound
Urgent of peace – we drive in real pursuit
Of another season, Spring, where each has found
Something before, new, and then sense
In the Botanic Gardens, terms of reference.

The presence here of the first person pronoun in the plural form is significant. Whereas in Boland's ‘Feminist’ phase, the use of the first person pronoun in plural was used exclusively to refer to a woman's community (as in “Tirade for the Mimic Muse”), here, as in other poems in *The*

⁷ As in the case of “Ready to Flight”, this poem is composed of five sestets which follow a pattern of half-rhyme. This is Boland's transition from a purely formalized poetic style, to a poetry in which syntax is more flexible. As we will see, open forms will dominate her mature poetry.

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War Horse, it includes herself and her husband. The male 'Other' is no longer her adversary (as in *In Her Own Image*), but quite the contrary: the male 'Other' is her lovely husband, her companion and complement, an important part of her female identity. In this poem, both, man and woman are "[g]uided by love", and not by a desire to dominate the other. Boland's marriage is presented as an ideal relationship, an "amorous exchange" that is based on an equal relationship. It offers a "new" alternative to war, another "season", spring, where peace and love bloom. In their walk through the gardens, she recalls the time when she got married and her discovery of new sensations at that time:

You take my hand. Three years ago, your bride.
I felt your heart in darkness, a full moon
Hauling mine to it like a tide.⁸

Love is envisaged as something which can unite two different persons in harmony, in a mysterious relationship of mutual positive influence. The image of the "full moon" encompasses mysterious forces, incomprehensible to reason, which draw her to the side of a man.⁹ Equality does not entail that one person cannot learn from another, but much the contrary, it even leads to personal enrichment. Whereas the constellations largely stood in the first phase for the mysterious realm where the poets navigated (e.g. "The Poets", *New Territory*), in this volume, the constellations stand for the mysterious love and admiration that unites two people together in such a special relationship. Like the birds in "Ready to Flight", the blooming flowers in the "Botanic Gardens" are metaphors for peace. The speaker's marriage symbolizes the harmonious union of two people, who "twine like these trees in peace and stress/ Before the peril of unconsciousness". In the third stanza, Boland explicitly connects her marriage with those plants in the garden: both nature and her relationship are able to maintain peace at a time of national struggle. In this sense, the botanic gardens stand as a metonymy of Ireland, and its plants acquire political connotations:

⁸ In this sort of stream of consciousness, one is inevitably reminded of Virginia Woolf's short story "Kew Gardens" (1919), where the woman-speaker, while wandering through a botanic garden, gives free rein to her thoughts, finding mixed sensations in the colours and shapes of the plants and flowers, and in the noises of the garden. In fact, Boland makes explicit her own admiration for Virginia Woolf in her prose work *Object Lessons* (1996a: 132-133), where she quotes some passages from *A Room of One's Own*.

⁹ The metaphor of the moon and constellations to express positive influence between people has been common in Boland's poetry. As early as *Poetry by Boland*, poems such as "On Giving a Cyclamen" employ the metaphor of the moon to express the positive influence that her mother exerts on her: "you sped my way with more than moonlight/ You have circled all my heritage/ With brightness". In another poem in *The War Horse*, "Sisters", this metaphor is used to indicate a relationship of equality, in which one sister learns from the other: "since you hauled my one eye blind,/ Round like the morning globe to meet/ Light". In Boland's more mature work, constellations will acquire a different significance, as we will see.

Corsican pine, guerrilla poison plants –
The first gardener here by foreign carriage
And careful seeding in this circumference
Imitated the hours of our marriage:
The flowers of forced proximity, swollen, fed,
Flourishing here, usually sheltered,

Exposed this once.

As Haberstroh (1996: 64) rightly notes, the foreign gardener recalls the different invasions that Ireland has experienced and its subsequent plantations in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Seeding and planting are not, as in “The Poets”, a metaphor of domination (poets dominating chaos by inflicting order and form), but a reference to love. The flowers and spring stand as a symbol of peace and reconciliation between not only different communities co-habiting together (whether Irish, Anglo-Irish, Protestant, or Catholic), but also between the two different sexes. In a direct association between imperialism (by which one ‘race’ dominates the other one) and patriarchy (according to which men have dominated women in the conventional ‘contract’ of marriage), Boland envisages a way in which colonizers and colonized can co-exist peacefully, a model of peace which has its basis in mutual acceptance and understanding. The diverse plants, by “forced proximity”, were compelled to survive together in a small place, in the insular territory of Ireland: “this circumference”. But, as in her marriage, these plants were able to flourish in a harmonious unity. In order to achieve equality, Boland implies, the ‘self’ must not obliterate dissimilarity, but accept the ‘Other’ as different. This is what the following lines of the poem exemplify. The speaker’s husband is suddenly portrayed as beyond her reach: he moves away from the speaker in his search “for something”, without noticing her “absence in the conservatory”. Boland temporarily feels distanced from her husband, who is absorbed observing the grotesque figure of the cacti, sweating “in sandy heat”, without realizing she is at his side. Even though he is “beyond her reach”, Boland does not try to impose a definition on the ‘Other’, but loves him for what she cannot grasp:

Each pumpkin history
Turns coach at a touch of your hand.
I watch and love you in your mystery.

It is the mystery of this figure, the fact that “Each pumpkin history/ Turns coach at the touch of [his] hand”, which makes Boland love his husband. The emphasis of “The Botanic Gardens” is on the fact that the poetic speaker is able to love her husband, not in spite of, but precisely because of his ‘Otherness’. Irigaray (1991: 171) has argued that in this “amorous exchange”, the self must feel “admiration” and “wonder” for the “unknowable other”, “that which

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differs sexually from me". The gap between man and woman becomes enabling as long as "[w]onder might allow them to retain an autonomy based on their difference, and give them a space of freedom or attraction, a possibility of separation or alliance" (p. 172). This feeling of admiration, of seeing the other as though for the first time, as unknowable, but equally irreplaceable, is observed in this poem. Like Cixous and Irigaray, Boland is able to combine sexual difference and equality. Her poem focuses on the marriage experience of the speaker, but it also emphasizes a way of life according to which one loves the 'Other' as different, without converting this 'Other' to one's own view of the world. In this sense, Boland's true and liberating marriage stands as a reconciliatory attitude between opposites, in which 'sexual difference' is maintained, but not used for dominating purposes. As in other poems from *The War Horse*, such as "The Other Woman", Boland comes to the realization that what really matters is the closeness, the mysterious emotional bond which links both people together in marriage.

Whereas Boland's married life becomes one of the most important topics in *The War Horse*, it is significant how it remains occluded throughout her subsequent volumes of poetry, collections, as we will see, mainly concerned with other aspects such as her ordinary domestic life as a mother and housewife, and Ireland's oppressed and unrecorded past. It is not until her latest volume of poetry, *Against Love Poetry*, where marriage becomes once again the most important motif. As in *The War Horse*, in this volume there is a preponderance of first person pronouns and possessive forms in the plural (i.e. 'we' and 'our'), in order to include within the same term of reference the speaker and her husband. The main difference between the two collections of poetry is that whereas in the first one Boland's uses her own marriage in order to counteract the violence of the Troubles, in the latter one, she employs it with a view to debunk conventional love poetry. This is made explicit in Boland's prosaic poem "Against Love Poetry". By recurring to a paragraph, she expresses her wish to move away from the conventional love sonnet:

We were married in summer, thirty years ago. I have loved you deeply from that moment to this. I have loved other things as well. Among them the idea of women's freedom. Why do I put these words side by side? Because I am a woman. Because marriage is not freedom. Therefore, every word here is written against love poetry. Love poetry can do no justice to this. [...] It is to mark the contradictions of a daily love that I have written this. *Against love poetry.* (*Against Love Poetry* 2001a: 5)

As Murphy (2003: 347) asserts, for Boland, it is not so much that "love itself is contradictory; rather it is the institution of marriage itself", conventionally established as a "social contract that defines a power relationship". On the other hand, she does not intend to write against love as such, but against the way in which love has been idealized and conventionalized in lyric poetry.

Henderson (1997: 39) explains how conventional love poetry has been based on the trope of the male gazing upon his beloved. By doing so, male poets have displayed a “domineering attitude towards their [female] object of desire” (p. 56). Both in her prose account and in her poetry, Boland dismantles this convention. In *Object Lessons*, she criticizes the fusion of the sexual and the erotic in poetry, because it has been responsible for the everlasting beauty, silence, and agelessness of the female object (Boland 1996a: 210). Various poets, throughout time, have perpetuated this damaging fusion, such as Spenser, Robert Herrick, and Keats (p. 215, 218, 225). In order to overcome this pitfall, Boland becomes the speaking subject of the poem, rather than a passive and erotic object. On the other hand, she destabilizes conventional love poetry by presenting the figures of a husband and wife no longer as eternal, perfect, and romanticized, but as people who experience the passing of time and the loss of beauty.¹⁰

The poem that opens *Against Love Poetry* introduces the concern which is at the heart of the volume: the intersections of art and marriage. In “In Which Hester Bateman, 18th Century English Silversmith, Takes an Irish commission”, Boland draws on a popular eighteenth-century woman artist in order to show how art has traditionally violated and simplified the union between husband and wife:

Hester Bateman made a marriage spoon
And then subjected it to violence.
Chased, beat it. Scarred it and marked it.
All in the spirit of our darkest century.

[...]

Here in miniature a man and a woman
Emerge beside each other from the earth,
From the deep mine, from the seams of rock
Which made inevitable her craft of hurt.

In Boland's poem, the man and the woman, in contrast to traditional poetry, are not associated with eternal love and beauty, but with “hurt”. This couple, in this sense, represents Boland's own poetics: “a craft of hurt”, an art that does not immortalize the images as ideal emblems, but a sort of anti-aesthetic art that brings to the fore of the poem all the chasing, beating, and scarring that artistic representation entails. For Boland, any sort of artistic representation relies on violence to create order and beauty. As soon as Bateman attempts to inscribe their profiles in silver, she inevitably simplifies and misrepresents their reality. This misrepresentation becomes the starting point from which Boland reflects on how marriage has been a conventional institution

¹⁰ Boland's contrast between her ordinary relationship with her husband and that marriage portrayed in myth and conventional love poetry is explicitly addressed in “Thanked be Fortune” and “Once” (*Against Love Poetry*).

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that establishes power relationships. The marriage that Bateman portrays in her silver spoon is further compared to the unequal relationship between England and Ireland. Her artistic representation, as Hagen and Zelman (2004: 89) explain, "emulates the colonial process" by which England has brutally attempted to remould Ireland to an English plan. As this woman "lets cool the sweet colonial metal", both figures "inch[...] towards the light", to a place where

Past and future and the space between
The semblance of empire, the promise of nation,
Are vanishing in this mediation
Between oppression and love's remembrance

Until resistance is their only element. It is
What they embody, bound now and always.
History frowns on them: yet in its gaze
They join their injured hands and make their vows.

Although Ireland and England seem to be bound forever in a relationship that, as conventional marriage, unites two factions in a hierarchical way, the final lines of the poem offers an earnest promise of co-habitation on equal terms, a form of "amorous exchange" according to which two countries can live in peace and harmony (Irigaray 1991: 115). As we will see, the change from past to present tense that the poem records is a typical feature of Boland's mature work. Boland constantly brings a past and remote situation to her present context, extracting all its relevance and significance. After remembering the violations of conventional love poetry and the unequal 'marriage' between England and Ireland, Boland creates a promising space in her poem where real change can be brought about. On the other hand, the short sentences, some of them incomplete, that opened the poem are substituted now by longer sentences which unfold down the page by means of enjambments. Whereas the first linguistic technique is used in order to show the violence and simplification of a 'real' marriage in art, the more fluid language at the end of the poem enhances the feeling that this violence and oppression can be got rid of. Boland envisages liberation, a possibility that the English and the Irish can co-habit on equal terms and that art and marriage can make a more accurate match. Both "empire" and "nation" start to vanish as colonizer and colonized "join their injured hands and make their vows". Although violence cannot be forgotten and wounds are still inscribed in their bodies,¹¹ Boland is able to visualize a new relationship. The "remembrance" of "oppression" is therefore counteracted by "love", by a new marriage that is based on affection, mutual understanding, and forgiveness of past atrocities. The movement from dark to light that the poem exemplifies parallels this release. "[T]he spirit of our

¹¹ As we will see, scars and wounds are a common metaphor in Boland's poetry to talk about how colonial and postcolonial effects are still perceived by the speaker and/or the other subjects in the poem.

darkest century" in the first stanza suddenly "[i]nches towards the light", towards a place where Boland envisages "an amorous exchange" that maintains difference and equality simultaneously.

In other poems from *Against Love Poetry*, Boland more explicitly focuses on her married life in order to draw us into a liberating form of relationship between apparently contrary factions. The woman speaker in "A Marriage for the Millennium" asks her husband:

Do you believe
that Progress is a woman?
A spirit seeking for its opposite?
For a true marriage to ease her quick heartbeat?

Although this question is left unanswered in this particular poem, Boland's contention in this volume is that it is indeed in "a true marriage" that unites "opposite[s]" where "Progress" is found. In contrast to *In Her Own Image*, change is not brought about by isolation, but by uniting one's efforts with the 'Other'. This becomes the main topic of "A Pinhole Camera", a poem where Boland recalls a solar eclipse in August 1999 and her husband making a device in order to track the obscuring of the sun by the moon. In this natural phenomenon the speaker finds an appropriate metaphor to record her thirty-year-marriage life:

[...] this is real –
how your page records
the alignment of planets:
their governance.
In other words,
the not-to-be-seen again
mystery of
a mutual influence

As we will see, the disruption of the lay-out is a common feature in Boland's mature work in order to represent the flowing of human lives. Boland does not wish to describe herself and her husband as eternal figures, unaffected by the passing of time, but as ordinary and ageing human beings which are bound to perish. Her husband's page, in contrast to conventional love poetry, stands out as a more accurate representation of her marriage. Rather than fixing images both in time and space, his pinhole camera is able to record the movement of celestial bodies. The speaker establishes a parallelism between "the alignment between planets", the "mystery of [their] mutual influence", and her own relationship with her husband. The co-habitation of constellations suggests the miraculous ability of being united to a separate and apparently opposite person. As in "Botanic Gardens", the "mystery" of such a union is that, in spite of their differences, they are able

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to love each other. This miracle becomes explicitly manifested in another poem from *Against Love Poetry*, "First Year", where Boland records the initial years of her marriage:

My talkative, unsure
unsettled self
was everywhere;
but you
were the clear spirit of somewhere.

Once again, her husband is portrayed as "beyond" the speaker's "reach" ("Botanic Gardens"), as someone who is unknowable and therefore unreachable. But it is precisely this preservation of difference between opposites that makes marriage such a liberating relationship. Like Cixous and Irigaray, the feminist postcolonial theorist Spivak (1988a: 253-254) has argued that warring factions can only be more truthfully united when one acknowledges that he or she is separated from the 'Other' by an "irreducible difference".¹² Any attempt to grasp this "difference" runs the risk of perpetuating hierarchical relationships that are based on dominance and superiority. The speaker in "First Year" and "The Pinhole Camera" avoids understanding the 'Other' fully in her own terms. It is this "mystery", as she implies, that allows "mutual influence"; in other words, it permits opposite factions to learn from each other in positive and enriching ways. That is why marriage is envisaged in "First Year" as a transcendental, mystical, and superior form of relationship. Although, as we have seen, husband and wife are humanized figures whose destiny is death, Boland argues when addressing to her husband that their love will be able to outlive:

You know
the reason for the red berries
darkening, and the road outside
darkening, but did you know
that the wedding
of light and gravity
is forever?

Constellations serve as metaphors for her marriage's endurance and survival.¹³ Whereas the suburban and ordinary landscape finds itself affected by the changes of daylight, their love will never perish and "darken". "[T]he wedding of light and gravity" that the solar eclipse shows "is forever", just as the miracle of their everlasting union.

¹² Note the similarity of approach that Kristeva (2004) adopts. In the recent study that she has published on the work of three twentieth-century women (Arendt, Klein, and Collete), Kristeva (2004: 12) argues that she can only approach them by admitting that they expose in their writings an "irreducible subjectivity". My reading of Kristeva's paper delivered in May 2004 at the Royal Irish Academy, Dublin, is indebted to Dr. Riona NiFhrihil, who attended her presentation and very generously provided me with a copy of it.

¹³ This sacramental view of marriage that Boland presents in *Against Love Poetry* by recurring to the eternity of constellations is also manifested in "Lines for a Thirteenth Anniversary": "All those years, all those years together –/ the stars in a frozen arc overhead".

As we have seen in this section, Boland's project resembles French feminists' attempt to challenge Western (patriarchal) thought and its dualist stance according to which the masculine and the feminine can only be related in hierarchical ways. The woman poet offers a new vision of marriage based on balance, partnership, collaboration, mutual respect, equality, and symmetry. She demonstrates that the two modes of operation, masculine and feminine, are not necessarily hierarchical and oppositional, but complementary. Both are equally important because they are essential to bringing about the wholeness of the self.

That is why Boland draws on her ordinary life as a married woman in order to reflect on the pressure of contemporary events (the Troubles), and also in order to establish an argument with traditional and conventional love poetry. In both cases, her marriage stands out as an ideal and true relationship that is both enriching and liberating for the speaker. In this sense, for Boland, poetry and daily ordinary life appear as intrinsically related, as two distinct but mutually inspirational experiences. This fact would subsequently be shown in the poems that constitute mostly *Night Feed*, where Boland praises her domestic landscape and her role as a mother. The following two sections will address this issue.

7.4.2.3. Boland's domestic interiors

Several critics have drawn attention to Boland's use of internal places, especially the kitchen, as, metaphorically, the place of the "process and plenty" of her artistic creation (Allen-Randolph 1993a: 13; Smith 1993: 93; Haberstroh 1996: 21-22). In fact, Boland's mature poetry shows that she finds at home a domestic interior which allows her to attain growth, change, and creativity. In these surroundings, the woman poet finds her most private emotional world, and more relevantly, one important aspect of her identity as a woman poet. Haberstroh (1996: 21) explains that, while this focus on domestic interiors is a common feature among contemporary women poets in Ireland, Irish male poetry is more concerned with an external and "public" landscape, such as the Irish land. She notes that

[m]uch of this "place" imagery involves the male poet's response to Irish political history and the individual's relationship to his place in a divided land: his poetic "self" is often integrally tied to that history. While especially evident in the Northern poets, images of farms, towns, counties, cities, streets, and museums figure prominently in the work of poets from both Northern Ireland and the Republic, illustrating the more "public" life that men in Ireland have known. (Ibid)

Allen-Randolph (1999a: 207) also believes that this tendency among male poets to focus on "public" landscapes may be due to the inherited relationship of poet to history. Comparing

American and Irish poets, this critic notes that Irish poets (consistently male poets) have been more obliged "to the history of their own country", and to a specifically national tradition which has often put public concerns before individual matters (ibid).

On the other hand, Irish women poets tend to identify themselves with a different type of place. They frequently circumscribe a domestic world, "the world many women in Ireland inhabit" (Haberstroh 1996: 21). As Haberstroh (1996: 21) asserts, "the predominance of internal spaces, in rooms and houses clearly links them to one another". Their handling of the domestic may be understood as a way of subverting a tradition which exclusively revolved around the traditional subject matter of the heroic, dismissing the ordinary world as a trivial issue (Allen-Randolph 1999a: 207). Irish women poets' reliance on these interior places is also shared by women writers in other cultures. Ostriker (1986: 89) explains how such imagery expresses a quest for self-identity: "it is immediately apparent that women who seek themselves will include the material of their daily lives and feelings in their poems". Gilbert and Gubar (2000: 500) offer some examples of women writers in the nineteenth century who have deliberately drawn on domestic interiors in order to be subversive. They explain, for example, how George Eliot, in *Middlemarch*, had emphasized ordinary domestic details, as a way of potentially criticizing the patriarchal culture.¹⁴ As Simone de Beauvoir stated in an interview, "women are more strongly rooted in everyday life" (1981b: 153). Therefore, if they want to preserve their own identity, they must write about their real experiences very often rooted in their ordinary existence, challenging thereby patriarchal literary values. On this point, Showalter (1999: 9) admits that, if "we want to define the ways in which 'female self-awareness' has expressed itself, we need to see [women writers] against the backdrop of the circumstances affecting them at the time". Virginia Woolf (1974: 142) has also recognized this need:

The extraordinary woman depends on the ordinary woman. It is only when we know what were the conditions of the average woman's life – the number of her children, whether she had money of her own, if she had a room of herself, whether she helped in bringing up her family, if she had servants, whether part of her housework was her task – it is only when we can measure the way of life and the experience of life made possible to the ordinary woman that we can account for the success or failure of the extraordinary woman as writer.

¹⁴ Nevertheless, some other examples cited by Gilbert and Gubar are intended to demonstrate that the ordinary interior has become for nineteenth-century women writers a spatial imagery of enclosure and imprisonment. They illustrate this point by mentioning Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, where Jane is portrayed as been enclosed in a red room, figuratively representing the society in which she is entrapped (Gilbert & Gubar 2000: 340). However, one should bear in mind that the social conditions of Irish women in the nineteenth century are not the same as those in the twentieth century. In the case of Irish women poets, in particular Eavan Boland, the domestic interior is not always a place of figurative or literal confinement, but the best place where her female power and creativity can flourish. For some critics who disagree about viewing Boland's attitude towards the domestic as a place where she finds her poetic creativity, see Logan (1991).

Thus, we must measure the lifestyle of contemporary women poets in Ireland in order to fully understand the ordinary interiors which abound in their writings. Boland's evolution as a poet is determined by her personal circumstances. She experiences a drastic change of lifestyle as she moves from the literary atmosphere of Dublin city, to Dumdrum, a small suburb in the environs. She marries and gradually finds herself with two children and leading a life completely different from the previous one. She is no longer the "honorary male poet" she talked about in an interview (Allen-Randolph 1993b: 118), but an ordinary housewife and a mother. Her greatest concern from now on is to be faithful to her own experience, giving voice to the apparently 'trivial' details of her daily life. According to Haberstroh (1996: 87), this becomes both an "aesthetic and ethical issue for Boland".

But, in her reliance on the domestic world, Boland is not going to forget her personal history and Ireland's past. In her familial spaces she will constantly attempt to comprehend public history. We have seen how Boland treats the external world from her private space and/or perspective in "The Botanic Gardens" (*The War Horse*). As Thurston (1999: 230) explains, Boland's more mature work will continue to situate the domestic spaces, objects, tasks, and relationships "in a network of other concerns, especially art and the land". This is an effort to give a more public and historical dimension to her domestic interiors, or, as Praga (1996: 251) asserts, to reconcile "Hearth and History". As will be seen in the examination of some of her most significant poems about internal spaces, Boland will finally produce a rich and complex understanding of history at home. Ordinary objects and incidents will be the starting point from which to retrieve moments of personal and public history. By doing so, she will turn what is trivial and private into what is universal and public; in Allen-Randolph's (1999a: 207) words, she will make "the domestic historical". In this sense, Boland's perspective is very similar to that adopted by postcolonial theorists such as Homi Bhabha (1995: 11) who has redrawn the domestic space as a space

of the normalizing, pastoralizing, and individuating techniques of modern power and police: the personal-*is*-the political, the world-*in*-the-home. This is a way to criticize the ambivalent structure of the Civic State with its boundary between the private and the public spheres.

For Boland, just as for Bhabha, the 'political' does not necessarily reside in the public sphere.

The poems which are going to be analyzed in this section belong to the volume *Night Feed*, originally published in 1982. As has already been explained, it was written at the same time as *In Her Own Image*. By including this volume in Boland's 'Female'/'Liberationist' phase, and not in the 'Feminist'/'Cultural Nationalist' one (as *In Her Own Image*), I intend to show that

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Showalter's, Fanon's, and Memmi's three phases do not follow a well-defined chronological evolution. As Showalter (1999: 13) explained, "these are obviously not rigid categories", and as such, they may overlap. Boland is writing both *Night Feed* and *In Her Own Image* during turbulent years of self-definition. The arrangement of the poems in two separate books marks the different phases Boland is going through, in her creation of a new and creative identity. Allen-Randolph (1993a: 13) argues that it was in *Night Feed* where Boland

harnessed a poetic self to a powerful private vision. By moving the lyrical persona closer to the material, she achieved the radiantly unified sensibility that would carry her forward into the impressive technical advances of *The Journey* (1986) and *Outside History* (1990).

This critic is indeed right when arguing that it is in *Night Feed* where Boland finally opts for her ordinary life experience as the primary subject matter of her production. As Boland admits in an interview, "it was a time when my life had a detail and richness and immediacy which gave me a sense of myself I hadn't had before" (Allen-Randolph 1999b: 299). Nevertheless, I disagree with Allen-Randolph's assertion that it is because of Boland's "radiantly unified sensibility" that she accomplishes her achievements in terms of poetic technique. As we will see in sections 7.4.4.2. and 7.4.4.3., Boland's poems will instead be characterized by the speaker's contradictions, ambiguities, and powerlessness. Hers will be a split and unstable identity rather than a "unified" and integrated one. As I will demonstrate, it is precisely this feature of her work that will lead to those "impressive technical advances" that Allen-Randolph identifies in *The Journey* and *Outside History*. In this sense, I agree with Clutterbuck's (1999: 279) remark that Boland develops in her poetry not a unified, but a "*disunified* sensibility".

In order to illustrate how Boland's domestic interiors are a valuable source for the woman poet's artistic creativity, I will analyze in detail two poems from *Night Feed*, "Monotony" and "Domestic Interior". Boland's later volumes of poetry continue with this emphasis on the ordinariness of women's private worlds. In poems such as "Nocturne" (*The Journey*), for instance, Boland expresses her sense of comfort at home: "After a friend has gone I like the feel of it:/ The house at night. Everyone asleep". Nevertheless, it is in *Night Feed* where the woman poet writes more emphatically about her private emotional world as a housewife. It is, therefore, unsurprising that in this volume of poetry the word 'home', and its (psychological and emotional) implications of a space that offers happiness and security, is more recurrent than 'house', in contrast to later collections.

The setting of "Monotony" is the familial and domestic landscape inhabited by a contemporary wife and mother. In this poem a woman is descending the staircase of her house in

her way to the laundry room. As a characteristic feature of most poems in Boland's mature work, the tone is introspective. This is a woman giving voice to her own thoughts and feelings. The domestic interior in which she lives becomes the turning point at which the woman poet questions her own self as regards history, her role in society, and her own creative potential:

The stilled hub
and polar drab
of the suburb
closes in.

In the round
of the staircase
my arms sheafing nappies,
I grow in and down

to an old spiral,
a well of questions,
an oracle

The lines in the poem are short and most of the words are mono- or bi-syllabic. One should bear in mind that this poem and some others in *In Her Own Image* were being written simultaneously. In the latter volume, as we have seen, the lines were also short, and the language was loose. In this sense, "Monotony" shares some stylistic devices employed in Boland's 'Feminist'/ 'Cultural Nationalist' phase. Nevertheless, at the level of content, this poem is indisputably included in Boland's mature phase. The woman poet now directly draws on her ordinary landscape as a suitable source of creative potential. The suburb is at the centre of the speaker's world. There is nothing disturbing her existence, the axis of her inner life. Significantly enough, the suburb is also described as "polar drab", a place at the edge of the world and therefore remote and out of reach. This woman suddenly feels outside history, as her ordinary life and the suburb in which she inhabits are outside geography, unrecorded by a national tradition which concerned itself with beautiful and Edenic rural landscapes where Gaelic traditions were truthfully reflected. Because of this exclusion, the speaker feels entrapped by the suburb closing in, as if it was about to swallow her own self. As she descends the staircase of her house, she gives free rein to her thoughts. But her intellectual activity seems to be also enclosed, moving in a circle of thoughts, "an old spiral", "a well of questions". Both 'spiral' and 'well' suggest confinement, but also emptiness and illimitable space, no answer for the questions which obsess the woman. Feeling herself to be in an "oracle", a sort of shrine where she waits to be answered by a prophetic deity, she asks herself:

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am I
at these altars,
warm shrines,
washing machines, dryers –

with their incense
of men and infants,
priestess
or sacrifice?

As Kupillas (1999: 16) explains, the woman's central question is what her role is: a vital and glorified one (a "priestess" who helps to keep "the world in order"), or just a victim, a "sacrifice", wasting her creative potential for the sake of everlasting routine labours. Hence, in her domestic interiors, Boland gives voice to her most transcendental feelings, debating whether domestic life is the right choice for her or not. By employing religious motifs, the poet expresses her need to surpass the boundaries of gender imposed on her. Although apparently she despises the interior space in which she lives, what she is truly reacting against is not the domestic sphere as such, but the possible loss of her creative potential by her social confinement. Here, we can observe what is going to be one of the most troubling paradoxes that Boland finds, as we will see in section 7.4.4.3.2.: the contrary pulls of womanhood and poetry. Apart from religious imagery, Boland also recurs to images evoking celestial bodies. Feeling that as an ordinary woman, her life has been unrecorded within cultural representations, she finds in the outside world of "winter constellations" a more appropriate place where her life has been represented. It is here where Boland might find the answer she is looking for:

will I find
my answer where

Virago reaps?
Her arms sheafing
the hemisphere,
hour after frigid hour,

her virgin stars,
her maidenhead
married to force,
harry us

to wed our gleams
to brute routines
solstices,
small families.

The image of 'Virago' is a poetic minefield. First of all, it suggests a woman of great power, even masculine in her strength. Secondly, at a more figurative level, Virago is a constellation in the region of the celestial equator, and also a mythological goddess, usually

identified as the Goddess of Justice (Falcon Martínez et al. 1980: 622). Thus, the woman in the poem hopes to find in the courageous potential and moral rightness of Virago a possible answer to all her questions. As has been explained at the beginning of this section, the domestic interior is not only the place where the woman questions her own poetic creativity, but also where she attempts to comprehend her historical past. At the turn of the century, both Sinn Féin and the Gaelic League encouraged women to lead their lives exclusively in their domestic sphere. The 1937 Constitution further imposed an ideal behaviour of women, as its articles 41 and 45 illustrate. Hywel (1991: 24) explains that the place for women

was not with the men in the public arena. "Shrieking viragoes" and "aggressive amazons" were specifically discouraged, and it was emphasized that Irish women were not "required to plunge into the vortex of public life". Instead, the woman was to exchange any claim to autonomy outside the home for a kind of divine rule within.

In this context of suppression, strong and courageous women, "shrieking viragoes" were unacceptable. The image of the constellation of Virago in "Monotony" is not accidental. Boland is implicitly confronting the national figure of the ideal woman by identifying herself with this strong and courageous independent female figure. Furthermore, the overabundance in the poem of allusions to religion and sacramental rites is intrinsically connected to the national idealization of the woman at home. The static figure of the housewife confined in her domestic sphere was symbolized by the Irish national tradition into "a secular Madonna" (Hywel 1991: 25). Her world revolved around the two poles of "altar and hearth", and in her selflessness, she was idealized as the mother of Jesus (ibid). Boland connects her spirituality with this emblematic figure of the Irish Madonna. That is why, although apparently bold-spirited and domineering, Virago is portrayed here as a virginal and selfless woman, "hour after frigid hour". She is like the speaker in the poem, another housewife "sheafing", not the nappies, but "the hemisphere". Both subjects feel that they are living the kind of life expected from them, a life of selflessness, devoted to others, in their domestic tasks. In this context, they are "wedding [their] gleams", their talents, and their creative potential. What ultimately worries the housewife is the diminishing of her creative powers. Boland fears that she may become like Virago, an ideal woman devoted to others, and without noticing, she may lose her artistic creativity. The reference to the "solstices" enhances the feeling that this woman is living "in the figurative end of the world" (Kupillas 1999: 15). On the other hand, the continuous references to the cold weather indicate that this is a winter solstice, the shortest period of lightness in the year. Thus, the loss of sight the woman experiences parallels the threatening prospect of losing her creative potential.

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In short, "Monotony" illustrates one important aspect of Boland's mature work. Although she seems to fear her loss of poetic creativity in the domestic interiors she inhabits, this landscape is in fact a good place for her poetry to flourish. It is in the interior of her house where Boland's poetic self attains a powerful private vision, a vision of constellations, of altars and shrines. In other words, the internal space is exploited to gain a better understanding of the self, by redefining her situation in terms of Irish history and culture. She establishes a dialogue with her past by interrogating the very assumptions underlying the Irish traditional culture. "Am I [...] priestess/ or sacrifice?" is more than a question about her own validity as a housewife: it confronts the foundations upon which the Irish nation has been built.

This new understanding of women's ordinary landscape is further put to manifest in "Domestic Interior". In this poem, Boland shows her indebtedness both to her mother (who influenced her interest in painting) and to her husband (who, as a novelist, has encouraged Boland's dedication to writing poetry). In an interview, the woman poet asserts: "My mother and my husband, Kevin, have been the two great influences on my new way of looking at things. They both have – in two different ways – a sense of the geography of the imagination" (Allen-Randolph 1993b: 117). We have seen as early as "From the Painting 'Back from Market' by Chardin" (*New Territory*) how Boland was concerned with the misrepresentation and distortion that art can exert on real human lives: "I think of what great art removes:/ hazard and death". But, as was explained, her attitude there was uncritical, and she did nothing to offer a more authentic female image. In her mature work, Boland is going to maintain a more subversive attitude. "Domestic Interior" describes Van Eyck's painting, *The Arnolfini Wedding* (see illustrations 2 and 3), from a "female conception of art, attendant on life's process" (Gelpi 1999: 218).¹⁵ In any case, the woman poet avoids adopting a separatist stance that would substitute the male canon by a female canon. Rather, she engages in a revision and reconstruction of male constructs in cultural representations. Boland identifies herself with the female subject of Van Eyck's painting, subverting the tradition of male-artist as the author in control of his female representations. By highlighting the differences between art and life, she is going to express her belief that poetry, as such, must be grounded in the ordinary experiences of human beings, and not in aesthetic ideals only.

The poem is dedicated to her husband, the novelist Kevin O'Casey. Boland moves back in time, establishing a comparison between her own marriage and the relationship of the couple in Van Eyck's painting. The discrepancies begin by the fact that Signora Arnolfini, caught by the painter's gaze, is silent and powerless:

¹⁵ Boland's revision of paintings by male artists such as Van Eyck, Degas, Ingres, Chardin are constantly present in her mature work, as observed in "Pose", "Degas's Laundresses" (*Night Feed*), "Self-portrait on a Summer's Evening" and "Growing Up" (*The Journey*).

New Territory for the Irish Woman in Eavan Boland's Poetry

The woman is as round
as the new ring
ambering her finger.
The mirror weds her.
She has long been bedded.

There is
about it all
a quite search for attention,
like the unexpected shine
of a despised utensil.

The oils,
the varnishes,
the cracked light,
the worm of permanence –
all of them supplied by Van Eyck –

by whose edict she will stay
burnished, fertile,
on her wedding day,
interred in her joy.

Arnolfini's bride symbolizes pregnancy. Her 'ring' suggests containment, everlasting entrapment, and also commitment and possession. The woman's life is delimited and captured in the painting at a particular moment in her life, her state of pregnancy. On the other hand, 'ring' suggests, in its round shape, the cycle of life, of life-giving and life-ending. This woman is just a tool to perpetuate the continuity of life. Furthermore, and as Kupillas (1999: 28) rightly asserts, the word "amber" also means "a substance in which specimens of once-living things are trapped and preserved for future study". In this sense, the woman is shrouded alive, suspended in time like the woman in "Monotony". The figure of the painter appears on the other side of the "mirror": he is the witness of the woman's actual event, but he is also the woman's husband, entrapping and wedding her. The fact that Signora Arnolfini "has long been bedded" suggests, not only that she is obviously pregnant, but that she has been firmly placed and fixed in the painting a long time ago. In contrast to "From the Painting 'Back from Market' by Chardin", Boland reinterprets Van Eyck's painting. Firstly, she views that the woman's state of pregnancy is of great importance to her. Secondly, Boland considers that Van Eyck is only capturing a particular moment in her life, and that the portrait does not bear witness to the future of this woman's life. Now, she is perceptible and outstanding, presumably also beautiful, but in the future, she will grow old and useful, like a worn-out and "despised utensil". Thirdly, the speaker implicitly criticizes that her husband is only interested in his "worm of permanence", in his wife giving him a child for him to reassure his family dynasty. Once the woman has delivered her child and lost her youth, she will become unappealing to her husband's eyes. In this sense, Boland predicts the future and finds in the painting "a quite search for attention/ like the unexpected shine/ of a despised utensil". As

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Kupillas (1999: 27) notes, to identify this woman as a “despised utensil” is a strong assertion. Boland will not remain uncritical to the damage cultural manifestations have done to women. Signora Arnolfini has been objectified by Van Eyck's “edict”, by his proclamation of authority over her. In the painting, she is merely a passive subject “burnished, fertile”, and buried (“interred”) on her wedding day. Inserting her voice within this external description of the painting, Boland suddenly declares:

Love, turn.

The convex of your eye
that is so loving, bright
and constant yet shows
only this woman in her varnishes,
who won't improve in the light.

The speaker's imperative may be interpreted in two different ways. First of all, the woman poet may be addressing Van Eyck, an artist who deeply loves his art. Boland is trying to make him know that, although he is extremely talented, “bright/ and constant”, his vision only focuses “convex[ly]”, that is to say, only superficially on the external aspects of their wedding ceremony. The female subject he portrays, though young and beautiful, is in “her varnishes”, and her attractive appearance is deceptive. She will not become any better as time passes by; quite the contrary, she will be instead a diminished “despised utensil”. Thus, the poet warns Van Eyck by asserting that she “won't improve in the light”. Although Boland, as we have seen in “The Pinhole Camera”, views marriage as an everlasting and sacramental bond, she cannot accept its representation frozen in time. In this sense, Boland's poem suggests that although the painting represents a wedding, it cannot portray a true marriage, because it omits the daily routines that bind the husband and the wife together.

Secondly, “Love, turn” may refer to Boland's husband, to whom the poem is addressed. As the husband turns towards Boland, she sees herself reflected in “the convex” of his eye. But, in contrast to Van Eyck, she realizes that the mirror of her husband's eye reflects a marriage very different to the one portrayed in the painting, a marriage “that is [...] loving, bright/ and constant”. Boland is concerned with her future loss of beauty. Now, she is young and beautiful, made up in “varnishes”, but she “won't improve in the light”, because her beauty and youth are in decline. Nevertheless, there is a sense of relief in this poem, as Boland realizes her anxieties are irrational. The nature of her husband's love and his sense of her worth will not change, even if she loses all physical attraction. This feeling of self-worth increases as the poem proceeds and the woman declares that she needs no artist to represent her marriage, for

there's a way of life
that is its own witness:
Put the kettle on, shut the blind.
Home is a sleeping child,
an open mind

and our effects,
shrugged and settled
in the sort of light
jugs and kettles
grow important by.

Marriage gains importance through the rituals of daily life, rather than through a voyeuristic male gaze which yearns to fix it in its representation. The poet finds in her husband an “open mind”, unrestrained by patriarchal beliefs that dictate women's traditional roles in society. But “open mind” also refers to Boland's state of mind. At home, she finds the zenith of her creative potential. In contrast to “Monotony”, where the poetic stance towards the domestic interior was not explicitly positive, there is a quite tender evocation of home life in this poem. Boland's domestic interior is a place where she feels at ease to write her own poems, to expand her female consciousness. “Sleeping child” suggests peacefulness, an atmosphere of serenity and comfort. It also implies potentiality and energy. As we will see in the following section, Boland exploits the image of the child as a significant source of energy. At home, both husband and wife can achieve self-fulfilment. Confidentiality between the couple is suggested by the imperatives “Put the kettle on, shut the blind”. Like in those poems from *The War Horse* and *Against Love Poetry*, Boland focuses on the idea that marriage is highly gratifying for her. Against the idealization and perfection of Van Eyck's portrayal of marriage, Boland depicts a husband and wife who are linked in their ordinary and routine world, and whose love will not wane with the passing of time and the loss of beauty. Boland offers a new perspective to art: whereas Van Eyck's light was intended to fix the woman in “oils” and “varnishes”, her poem proposes “a sort of light/ jugs and kettles/ grow important by”. The kitchen utensils in “Domestic Interior” are indisputably valued as emblems of Boland's marriage. The jugs are containers which preserve and store family values. Besides, kettles are sources of energy, because they enable the metamorphosis of water into tea or coffee. As Thurston (1999: 235) explains, “the result of Boland's self-witnessing way of life is a sense of home enriched by the situation of the domestic interior”. Home is for the speaker, once again, a place where her creative self expands and asserts itself.

7.4.2.4. Boland's experiences as a mother

Boland's mature work (mostly *Night Feed*) introduces us to a maternal world which recognizes the substantial worth of women as bearers of children. Boland's emphasis on motherhood links this poet with other Irish women poets like Medbh McGuckian, Nuala Ní Dhomnaill, and Eithne Strong, who have written extensively about mother and child relationships (Haberstroh 1996: 23).¹⁶ Coulter (1997: 277) explains that Ireland remains, in contrast to Britain and the United States, "a more humane and less fragmented society". The main reason for this is that family and maternity have been of paramount importance for a very conservative society that, until very recently, has found problems accepting divorce and contraception. Because of this, family bonds are closer, and marriage, child bearing, and the family as such are still of tremendous importance for Irishmen, and especially for women (p. 291). On the other hand, one should bear in mind that motherhood has become in Ireland a metaphor tied up with national identity. The images of Mother Ireland and The Old Woman of Beare, among others, have been repeatedly employed by nationalists in order to incite patriotic feelings.

Motherhood has been a feminist concern since the end of the 1970s, particularly since the publication of Adrienne Rich's *Of Woman Born* (1977) and Nancy Chodorow's *The Reproduction of Mothering* (1978). In her essay "Stabat Mater", Julia Kristeva (1986b: 184) points to the need of using strategically the mother's body, transcending its biological essentialism and discovering its potential for female self-fulfilment. Kristeva's call for a satisfactory discourse on motherhood links her with other French feminists such as Luce Irigaray and Hélène Cixous, who have advocated the necessity of writing about motherly experiences. In her essay "The bodily encounter with the mother", Irigaray (1991: 34-46) argues that the major cultural taboo in Western culture is the subject's relationship with the mother. Using psychoanalytic terminology, this feminist critic argues that the traditional stress on the Oedipus complex, on castration, is one way of perpetuating the authoritarian discourse of "the fathers", because it serves to conceal the cutting of the umbilical cord to the mother (p. 39). Sarup (1993: 22) has explained the different Lacanian stages of the entrance of human beings into the social sphere. The first stage is "pre-Oedipal territorialization", a phase in which the child does not distinguish between itself and the mother. This original androgynous whole is destroyed in the second phase, "the mirror stage", where the first articulation of the 'I' occurs. At this stage, the 'self' suddenly discovers itself as the 'Other', an entity separated from the Oedipal mother. After the eventual separation from the mother, the child gradually identifies with the father. This final phase is called "symbolic castration", because in this

¹⁶ This issue has also been shared by other women poets around the world. Ostriker (1986: 180) explains that, because the mother as an independent and agentive figure has been excluded from literature, motherhood acquires an extraordinary significance in women's poems.

period the father 'castrates' the child by separating it from its mother. Irigaray (1991: 39) has argued that patriarchal thought merely lays stress on this final stage of human development. As this critic believes, the exclusively masculine world avoids the representation of "the relationship with the placenta", of that "first bodily encounter with the mother" (pp. 39-40). That is why Irigaray (1991: 160) advocates a woman's language that gives voice to the relationship with the primitive mother. According to this feminist, if women are to create a new identity for themselves, they should find ways to talk about this union:

We must give her new life, new life to that mother, to our mother within us and between us. We must refuse to let her desire be annihilated by the law of the father. We must give her the right to pleasure, to jouissance, to passion, restore her right to speech, and sometimes to cries and anger. (Irigaray 1991: 43)

In *This Sex Which is not One*, Irigaray (1985: 27) identifies the employment of maternal images in women's writing as a medium to supplant the deficiencies of a restrained female sexuality. With the child, the woman can fulfil "her appetite for touch, for contact", compensating the dissatisfactions that she usually experiences "in sexual relations per se". In this sense, "maternity fills the gaps in a repressed female sexuality" (ibid).¹⁷

Cixous has also envisaged a form of woman's writing that gives voice to the rhythms and articulations of the mother's body, in order to re-establish the pre-symbolic union between 'self' and 'm/other' (Sellers 1994: xxix). In "Breaths", Cixous (1994: 47-55) presents a feminine voice that talks about this pre-Oedipal relationship prior to the Law's intervention: "Her body makes me speak: there is a link between my breath and her brilliance" (1994: 50). Cixous praises this form of 'écriture féminine' because it goes beyond the borders of the self and brings "the togetherness of one-another" (p. 42). This new language allows the woman to write her self and the other within herself. In this sense, Cixous' vision of feminine writing is based on non-exclusivity, precisely because of its capacity to "marry[...] oppositions" (1994: 60). As we have seen, Cixous (1994: 129-137) has argued in her essay "Extreme Fidelity" that this liberating language is not dependent on anatomical sex, but on different modes of behaviour. Although this critic argues here that this form of writing is opened to both sexes, she clearly contradicts herself in her assertions. In other essays such as "Sorties", Cixous (1994: 35-46) argues that women's real or imagined experiences as mothers enable them to be closer to feminine "economy", and therefore to "bisexuality". The experience of pregnancy and childbirth allow women to establish a radically different relation to the 'Other'. As a consequence, they have a closer relationship with the body and with "love".

¹⁷ "The Limits of transference" also reflects Irigaray's (1991: 105-117) preoccupation with mother-daughter relations, and the consequent problems of separation and merging.

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Because women are accustomed not to “annihilate differences” in themselves, they are “bisexual” in their very nature (p. 41). Femininity and bisexuality go together in a combination, whereas “[i]t is much harder for man to let the other come through him” (p. 42).¹⁸ In this sense, Cixous is inevitably trapped in the very biological essentialism she wishes to discard. The main problem in her theories is that she eventually connects “feminine” economy with womanhood.

Boland's focus on mother-child relationships in *Night Feed* can be analyzed from this French feminist perspective. As we will see, the speaker's identity in some poems is merged with that of her child, to the extent that as Cixous advocates, the boundaries between ‘self’ and ‘Other’ are not clear. In contrast to *In Her Own Image*, where there was always a split, a clear boundary between the ‘self’ and the ‘Other’, these distinctions are not so well demarcated in Boland's maternal poems. As Ostriker (1986: 70) has noted, women find in their relationship with the daughter a deeper understanding of themselves:

According to the influential speculations of Nancy Chodorow in *The Reproduction of Mothering*, mothers treat sons as differentiated beings but daughters as extensions of themselves; daughters persist in their preodipal attachment to their mothers. One consequence is that females tend to experience themselves not as autonomous selves but as enmeshed in, and defined by their relationships with others.

Following Ostriker's argument (1986: 70), motherhood can be so important for Boland because she may tend to experience in her daughter a larger version of her own female self. By exploring the relationship between herself and her daughter, the woman poet engages in a valorous self-exploration. This would explain why in *Night Feed* Boland describes her role of mother as a sacred one, because by doing so, she asserts her own value and worth in society. Showalter (1999: 33) has explained that women's writing in their ‘Female’ phase is characterized by the fact that “female sensibility takes on a sacred quality”. In fact, Boland describes in a highly transcendental way the union between mother and child. As we will see in poems such as “Night Feed”, “Hymn”, and also in “Partings” and “Energies”, mother and child relationships are constantly blessed and sanctified.

This sacramental quality that Boland ascribes to the mother-child relation can be problematic. In *Object Lessons*, Boland has argued that one of the most limiting aspects of the Irish national culture has been the simplification of women and the silencing of their voices. Describing the temptations that she has experienced at the very moment of writing, Boland

¹⁸ Like Cixous, Rabuzzi (1988: 43-59) has argued that once a woman becomes a mother, she no longer experiences selfhood as a single and separate unit. Much the contrary, the mother's concept of selfhood becomes interwoven with the self of the child. This new concept of selfhood is termed by Rabuzzi as “binary-unit”, to indicate the bringing together as “one” of the two separate selves of mother and child (p. 50).

(1996a: 240) notes: "Powerful, persuasive voices are in her ear as she writes. Distorting and simplifying ideas of womanhood and poetry fall as shadows between her and the courage of her own experience". The idea of poetry that the national canon promulgates is what she calls the "Romantic Heresy", the belief that there are some areas of signification which are "poetic" and others which are non-poetic and ordinary, unacceptable for poetry (pp. 240-242). In order to make one motif poetic, according to this "Heresy", the poet must romanticize it: "The temptations are considerable, therefore, for a woman poet to romanticize [her] routines and [her] feelings so as to align them with what is considered poetic" (p. 242).¹⁹ By romanticizing her own experience as a mother, Boland seems to yield to these temptations that Irish poetry has traditionally encouraged. On the other hand, the sacramental quality that the mother-child relation gains in *Night Feed* may be seen as a direct influence of Roman Catholicism and the conservatism of Ireland after the 1921 Treaty. Remember how women were supposed to be like virgins, exerting a kind of divine rule within the home. In all those poems where Boland describes motherhood with a sacramental value, she aligns herself with the Virgin Mary, with the idealized role of the mother encouraged by the Church and the State in Ireland at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth.

Nevertheless, to read Boland's maternal poems only from this perspective would be incomplete. Her representations of mother and daughter relationships are complexly woven according to different imperatives. First of all, Boland's reliance on her personal experiences of motherhood allows her to blur the conventional boundaries of the public (political) and private (domestic) spheres. As we will see, her depictions of the personal relationships between mothers and children offer an extended view of the world in general. National and international affairs become in this sense larger versions of the personal. When Irigaray (1991: 43) talks about the maternal dimension of women, she does not only mean bearing children, but also bringing into the world new creative energies, disrupting fixed categories such as the social, the political, and the religious. As Ostriker (1986: 185-186) explains, "[s]ocially and politically, the mother-child attachment converges with the eroticizing of public life to become a maternal politics: an argument against hunger, poverty, violence, oppression, and war".²⁰ As we have seen in those poems from

¹⁹ On this point, Maguire (1999: 62) agrees with the assertion that women's experiences were largely considered 'unpoetic', but she disagrees on the reasons, since Boland thinks that the source of the problem lies in the influence of Romanticism. For this critic, this problem originates in women's social discrimination, in particular, their lack of influential jobs within the publishing industry.

²⁰ Gilbert and Gubar (2000: 482, 499) offer various examples among women writers in the nineteenth century who relied upon their maternal experiences to bring relief to "a world otherwise damned by masculine aggression". In *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, the union between mother and child becomes for Harriet Beecher Stowe an ideal relationship that counteracts social institutions such as slavery, and that teaches human beings how to establish non-hierarchical relations. In *Scenes of Clerical Life*, George Eliot criticized patriarchal values by implying that all meaningful relationships are based on the nurturing love between the mother and child. Boland follows this tendency. In *The War*

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The War Horse and *Against Love Poetry*, Boland envisages her marriage as a suitable and ideal form of uniting sexual and warring opposites. The interaction between mother and child, and the resulting binding love, is also for Boland the most instructive and surprising human relationship. As Haberstroh (1996: 72) notes, the poet “shows how the intensity of a woman’s experience as mother can suggest much about the universal meaning of love, life, and death”. On the other hand, Boland emphasizes how the nurturing affection between mother and child is a possible refuge from a world of violence and destruction. Her poems in *Night Feed*, as those in *The War Horse*, focus on how important it is to rely on family bonds. As we will see in “Hymn”, Boland deliberately establishes a contrast between a peaceful domestic environment and a public landscape of violence and war. This apparent indifference to the political problems in Ireland is commonly suffered by Irish women in what Hidalgo Tenorio (2000: 389) calls their “ideological exile”. When using the example of the mother in O’Casey’s *The Star Turns Red*, this researcher asserts that this playwright portrays a woman who wants to be unresponsive and insensitive to nationalism (p. 391). The main reason for her indifference is that, with the prospect of finding no possible reconciliation between warring factions, she opts instead to nurture personal relationships which might be more gratifying for her. Eavan Boland suffers from a similar “ideological exile”. As she feels she never “owned Irish history”, and “never felt entitled to the Irish experience” (Boland 1996a: 190), she refuses to adopt the ideological stance of nationalist writers who invoked the land to incite rebellion. Boland’s ideology stems rather from her private sphere, from the love experienced at home. Only this can wane the hatred that fuels war.

Secondly, Boland finds in motherhood a temporal female resolution to the feminine conflict between biological and artistic creativity.²¹ Pregnancy is, for the woman poet, a way of knowing, of giving voice to her creative potential. She draws an analogy between the production of verse and the female labour of giving birth.²²

Last but not least, mother imagery is employed in Boland’s poetry in order to portray the complexity of a woman’s life and experiences. The mother finds relief in bearing her child, but she also feels a strong sense of loss, in the prediction of this child growing old. Childbirth is not a victory; quite the contrary, it is an acceptance of the compensations of giving in and giving up. In

Horse she has employed child imagery to portray a world of violence whose victims are the most vulnerable creatures (“Child of Our Time”, “Naoise at Four”, etc.). In her following volumes of poetry, Boland will perpetuate this imagery, but this time, from a more personal perspective.

²¹ I say that this resolution is only temporal because Boland’s poems, mostly after *Night Feed*, focus more on mother-child separations than on their union, and the subsequent identity-break that the speaker experiences. Consequently, as we will see in section 7.4.4.3.2, Boland will continue to experience a tension between the categories ‘womanhood’ and ‘poetry’.

²² Significantly enough, some critics note that childbirth as a metaphor for creativity has not been exclusively used by women writers. Butler (1991: 47-48) explains that Yeats employed this metaphor, not as “a male appropriation of the procreative labour to which women have been confined”, but as a “gesture of solidarity” towards females, and also as a way to deconstruct gender stereotypes.

most of the poems where Boland focuses on motherhood, there is also a sense of defeat. She fears that the close bond linking mother and child will disappear as the child grows old. On the other hand, the woman in her maternal poems fears for what her daughters will have to face in the world ahead of them. Thus, motherhood is charged with a sacramental value, but most of the time, it causes pain and despair in the mother. By focusing on the ordinary but significant details of maternal love and fear, Boland expresses the often confusing and conflicting emotions a mother generally experiences. Some of the poems I am going to analyze explore the possibility of the communion between mother and child, but in the end, they record the woman's frustration as she fails to communicate with her daughter. By portraying the mother's multiple fears and her sense of loss, Boland expresses the multidimensional nature of the female and the complexity of human experience. In this sense, she disrupts the traditional idealizations of motherhood encouraged by Irish national tradition. Her mothers are going to be highly humanized figures that experience jealousy and are affected by the passing of time and the loss of beauty.

In order to demonstrate the above mentioned, I am going to analyze some poems from the collection of poetry *Night Feed* (1982), the first volume where Boland shows she is a poet of maternity par excellence. I will also focus on later poems from *In a Time of Violence* (1994) and *The Lost Land* (1998), with a view to demonstrating that motherhood continues to be an important concern in Boland's subsequent collections of poetry.

One of the poems in which Boland clearly aligns herself with that "Romantic Heresy" that she so sharply criticizes in *Object Lessons* (1996a: 240) is "Hymn". In this poem, Boland might be accused of adopting the traditional idealizations of motherhood that Irish Catholic and nationalist discourses have encouraged, and of romanticizing her experiences as a mother in order to make them 'poetic'. Nevertheless, a closer look at this poem shows that Boland uses these conventional techniques in order to adopt a voluntary "ideological exile" from authoritarian ideologies (Hidalgo Tenorio 2000: 389). "Hymn" portrays the connection between the speaker and her child as sacred and sanctified. Her lullaby turns out to be a "Hymn", a song of praise or thanksgiving to God (Haberstroh 1996: 71). In fact, the poem is loaded with religious imagery, in order to depict the moments when the child and mother come together alone as highly sacramental moments. On the other hand, the mother deliberately aligns herself with the Virgin Mary, the role that Roman Catholicism has always imposed on women. "Hymn" begins by describing a suburban landscape deep into a December night, as freezing as the one in "Monotony":

Four a.m.
December.
A lamb
would perish out there.

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The short and fragmented language parallels the cold landscape perceived outside. The image of the lamb is suggestive. On the one hand, it suggests the innocent and vulnerable child sleeping in "Night Feed". On the other hand, it connects us to the birth of Jesus Christ in December (Kupillas 1999: 18). This newborn lamb is predestined to perish. According to the Christian religion, through the ritual slaughter of the Lamb of God (Christ's death in the cross), mankind was redeemed. Boland's religious metaphors widen to incorporate the mercilessness of her contemporary world, where the most inoffensive and vulnerable perish (remember the death of the innocent child by a Dublin bomb blast, the main subject of "Child of Our Time", *The War Horse*). In the face of the violent political climate of Ireland, Boland turns the Christian myth upside down. As Kupillas (1999: 18) explains, the death of the innocent amid violent and warring factions does not bring redemption, but only destruction and death. In this sense, the harsh and cold weather perceived in the landscape is an extension of the cruelty of the contemporary world. Establishing a contrast between an undisturbed and peaceful domestic interior and a violent public landscape, Boland makes explicit her own ideological position:

The cutlery glitter
of that sky
has nothing in it
I want to follow.

Here is the star
of my nativity:
a nursery lamp
in a suburb window

behind which
is boiled glass, a bottle
and a baby all
hisses like a kettle.

According to the Bible, when Jesus Christ was born, three wise men set out on a journey following a nativity star that would eventually lead them to the crib where the Lamb of God was born. Boland, in the contemporary context of Ireland, has a different nativity star to follow: the nursery lamp in her suburb window.²³ The sparkling light in the sky is only superficially attractive: its "glitter" is not real, but man-made, "cutlery". On the other hand, its brightness is a reflection of the metallic weapons and bladed swords used in combat. Kupillas (1999: 20) observes that, for Boland, "human problems are not going to be solved by some miraculous intervention of deity. Instead, the changes in human relationships will be the result of humans intervening in and influencing the lives of others". I agree with Kupillas, for in this poem Boland implies that the

²³ In "Lights", another poem from *Night Feed*, Boland also explicitly announces her desire to follow "a nursery light".

solution to contemporary problems is not found in the distant stars (by invoking unreal or illusionary emblems), but in this suburban setting, in the speaker's everyday world. It is here where a promising and happier future lies. The mother's unconditional love towards her child teaches us how this change can be brought about. By invoking the Nativity, the birth of Jesus Christ, Boland elevates and sanctifies her immediate domestic situation. The nursery lamp becomes the guiding star for the mother, who wakes up at night in order to feed the baby. The room, in the face of the newborn, brims with energy and vitality. The baby is portrayed as a contained source of energy: within the child lies the future, what the world will be. The sibilant sounds made by the child are accompanied by the hissing of the domestic utensils (boiled glass and the bottle), which become animated in the face of the newborn's energy. As we have seen in "Domestic Interior", kettles are potential objects which allow the transformation of ingredients into food. These kitchen objects provide food, both for the child, and for the mother-poet, who finds in them valuable images for her poems. As the night setting is gradually transformed into a morning scene, the light of the nursery lamp "goes out" and "the blackbird takes his part" by singing some morning notes. As Kupillas (1999: 20) notes, along with the idea that a better future lies in this ordinary setting is the idea that it is the suburban world that is sacred, rather than the "cutlery glitter/ of that sky":

These candles
and the altar
and psaltery of dawn.

Again, ordinary objects are sanctified and motherhood is seen as sacramental. The nursery lamp is allegorized as "candles" on the "altar", and the blackbird's morning notes are described as a "psaltery of dawn", a hymn of praise to life. This theme is reinforced in the final lines of "Hymn", which as Gelpi (1999: 218) explains, reinterpret the opening lines of John's Gospel ("The Word made flesh") in order to signify the first appearance of daylight in the morning:

And in the dark
as we slept
the world
was made flesh.

Boland transforms John's lines by substituting "Word" by "world". In her revision of the Gospel, the speaker enhances the already commented idea that holiness resides in the everyday world and more specifically in a nursery, and not only in the orthodox 'Word'. Human salvation is here, in the room where a baby is being fed. Family values are highly praised, and therefore, the mother

and child relationship gains a sacramental and significant value. A better future can be achieved, the poet implies, by the mother's nurturing of the child, in other words, by the child's proper education. In this sense, Boland turns the 'personal' into the 'political', disturbing the symmetry of what is traditionally considered public and private.

This theme is continued in other poems such as "Night Feed", where Boland describes in complex terms the bond between mother and child. This poem takes place at dawn, a moment when mother and child are alone. The title "Night Feed" gives us an indication of what is going to be the double concern of the poem. First, it predicts a night feeding, by which the mother supplies nourishment to her child by giving her a bottle of milk. Secondly, it anticipates that this mother not only gives the newborn food, but is also "provided with [this] sustenance" (Kupillas 1999: 14). In other words, the woman's sense of worth and value is enhanced by her nurturing of the child. Self-assertion is, hence, fuelled by this night feeding. Like "Hymn", this poem is written in what Allen-Randolph (1993a: 14) considers "short, clean-edged, and uncluttered" lines of normal speech rhythms. As it has been said, one should bear in mind that the poems in *Night Feed* and *In Her Own Image* were simultaneously written. In the latter volume, there was a clear disruption of versification and poetic techniques. In *Night Feed*, Boland, instead, experiments with a higher lyricism, but the lines are still as short and jagged as those in *In Her Own Image*. Her more mature poetry, *The Journey* and *Outside History*, for instance, will be constructed upon longer verse lines, which will unfold down the page to slow down the pace of the verse. "Night Feed" begins by setting the temporal context in which the mother speaker experiences a close bond with her daughter:

This is dawn.
Believe me
This is your season, little daughter.
The moment daisies open,
The hour mercurial rainwater
Makes a mirror for sparrows.
It's time we draw our sorrows.

The sentence which opens the poem, as Thurston (1999: 231) explains, introduces us to a moment of change, "a time of transition, wakening and newness". On the other hand, the deictic pronoun 'this', common in *Night Feed*,²⁴ also suggests proximity and immediateness between the mother and child. The tone is in fact meditative and introspective: the woman will reflect upon an ordinary incident (feeding her baby at night), extracting all its significance. The first stanza offers images of birth: the daisies open, the rainwater gathers, and the little daughter wakes up. Boland

²⁴ See for instance the preponderance of 'this'/'these' in "Hymn", "Energies", "Fruit on the Straight-Sided Tray", and "In the Garden".

associates dawn and daughter, daylight and nourishment, sunrise and the speaker's sense of renewal. On the other hand, her child is allegorized as a daisy opening, as in other poems from *Night Feed* where children are consistently equated to flowers, animals, seeds, earth, birds, fruit, trees, and branches. As is characteristic in this volume of poetry (i.e. "Partings", "Before Spring", "Energies", and "In the Garden" for instance), there are plenty of personifications of nature that help to add a sacramental value to this moment between child and mother. On the other hand, Boland's romantic view of nature is employed to show the closeness between mother and child, which is as intrinsic and rudimental as the link between her daughter and the earth. At dawn, there is rebirth. Both, mother and child are like sparrows, which can see their reflection in the mirror made by the "mercurial rainwater". There, both can drown their "sorrows", in the presence of a nurturing love which can annihilate the violence and injustice of the external world. Nevertheless, in the "mercurial rainwater", there is an implicit menace to this joyful state, a brief suggestion that both subjects will experience a change in their relationship. The adjective "mercurial" means quick and changeable in temperament, something volatile. The mother recognizes in the "mercurial rainwater" of this dawn meeting a premonition of a later loss, an anticipation that her initial close relationship will dissolve as time passes by.

In the second stanza, the arrival of dawn parallels the speaker's sudden activity:

I tiptoe in.
I lift you up
Wriggling
In your rosy, zipped sleeper.
Yes, this is the hour
For the early bird and me
When finder is keeper.

The shortness and simplicity of the sentences enhance the close link between mother and child. Nothing seems to interrupt the moment when both meet, there is nothing intercepting their encounter, not even language. The baby is portrayed as a womb, "wriggling/ In your rosy, zipped sleeper". This image enhances the already noted association between the child and the earth, as well as the implication that there is a strong source of energy in the newborn. The deictic structure "This is" in the first stanza is now repeated, including now the speaker herself. There is self-assertion in the reply 'Yes', as if the woman, while dialoguing with her own self, confidently restores her position. This is a period of communion, a state of grace, where, in her nexus with her child, the mother asserts the importance of her role as "keeper". Boland's discovery of her daughter (she is a "finder") is, hence, a rediscovery of herself, of her role as mother ("keeper") and value as a woman. This feeling of self-worth is continued as the poem proceeds. The mother

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crooks the bottle to feed her baby, and she marvels at the strength of her baby, who suddenly wakes up to eat:

I crook the bottle.
How you suckle!
This is the best I can be,
Housewife
To this nursery
Where you hold on,
Dear life.

It is significant how, in contrast to *In Her Own Image*, the poetic voice does not expose to public view her breast while giving birth to her child. On the contrary, she only focuses on her child. As a mother, guardian, and keeper, she feels at the zenith of her self-fulfillment. Once again, Boland perpetuates Irish traditional idealizations of motherhood. The speaker finds her role of “Housewife/ To this nursery” essential for her female identity. The preponderance of the deictic expressions, a typical feature of *Night Feed*, create a sense of motionlessness which contrast with the flurry of the speaker's activity in the second and third stanzas (“This is your season, little daughter”; “this is the hour/ For the little bird and me”; “This is the best I can be” and “this nursery”). Thurston (1999: 231) notes that amidst the woman's movement, there is also a resistance to it, a desire for stasis and motionlessness, reflected in the poem's very syntax. That is why the present tense (usually simple present) is common in most of Boland's maternal poems in this collection, not only in “Hymn” and “Night Feed”, but also in “Partings”, “Energies”, “In the Garden”, and “Endings” for instance. It is as if the mother fears change and growth in the future and she wants to fossilize this moment of intense happiness. As Haberstroh (1993: 70) explains, “[t]he inevitability of future partings makes these moments precious – suspends time”. Hence, the mother-poet deliberately paralyzes the cyclical nature of the world outside, and she seems to be at a standstill within the nursery. As Irigaray (1991: 43) advocates:

We must also find, find anew, invent the words, the sentences that speak the most archaic and most contemporary relationship with the body of the mother, with our bodies, the sentences that translate the bond between her body, ours, and that of our daughters.

Boland's desire to give voice to this “bond between her body [...] and that of [her] daughter” is reflected in the linguistic techniques above mentioned. Nevertheless, as the mutual feed between mother and child ends, the speaker's identity will suddenly find herself threatened:

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.

The child is suddenly upset by the exhausting of milk, and she opens her eyes. As O'Brien Johnson (1991: 69) explains, the Lacanian theory of the construction of the subject and entry into the symbolic order is based on the power of the gaze. This scholar quotes Nelly Furman (1985: 70) in "The Politics of Language", in order to explain this issue in more detail:

The primitive union with the mother is ruptured at the mirror-stage, which is the moment when the child recognizes its reflected image, identifies with it, and becomes aware of being a separate entity from the mother. The moment at which the infant perceives itself as an image, as "other", is also the moment when the "I" which does the perceiving is split off from the "I" which is perceived. (Quoted in O'Brien Johnson 1991: 69-70)

In this perspective, the literal opening of the child's eyes and the sudden eruption of desire for more milk figuratively imply that the newborn is coming to the realization that the mother is another separate self. The primitive union between mother and child in the womb is, hence, broken. The woman in the poem recognizes this act as a prediction of a future loss, the moment when the "finder" will be a "weeper", and not a "keeper", as Kuppilas (1999: 14) explains. The mother's fears seem to wane as the "Earth wakes" and the child goes "back to sleep". As the child closes her eyes, once again, the newborn returns to the primitive union with the mother. However, the woman's fears return in the last stanza:

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.

Despite the former period of communion, the child now "turn[s]", anticipating the future, when she has grown old and will become independent from her. As in "Monotony", celestial bodies make their appearance. Like the moon in "Menses" (*In Her Own Image*), which depended on the woman speaker to satiate her 'hunger', here the mother is a subject who relies on the newborn in order to acquire self-significance. Nevertheless, just as the dawning of the new day eclipses the

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moon, the mother realizes that she will be “losing [her] face”, in other words, that her importance will diminish as the child grows up. Outside, the poplars seem to be equipped with “stilt[s] for dawn”, hinting at the future growth of the child and her walking away from the mother. In this sense, the poem ends by emphasizing the inevitable disunion between mother and daughter. The mother explicitly announces her fear that her prominent influence will fade with the passage of time, as the child enters into adulthood. By tucking up her infant at the end, the woman-speaker implies that she will maintain, despite the inevitable growth of her child, her attitude of protection and nurture. Furthermore, the mother-poet implies that she will always remember this initial bond, to ‘nurture’ and reassure her sense of self-worth, even when the “worm [has] turn[ed]”, and the child has grown away.

Recently, Kristeva (2004: 21) has argued that one feature of what she calls “feminine psycho-sexuality” is its emphasis on the temporality of birth and rebirth. It is important to bear in mind, as Moi (1997: 112) and Sarup (1993: 123) have explained, that Kristeva defines the ‘feminine’ in terms of “positionality” (occupying a position of marginality) rather than in terms of “essences”. According to Kristeva, those writers, whether male or female, that expose this feminine quality, are able to approach temporality in new liberating ways. Their new conception of time is based on new beginnings and renewal. It is here where freedom is found, in “the very possibility of starting anew”, in the rebirth of the subject (ibid). This ability to reconstruct oneself, to be born again, is found, according to Kristeva, in the woman novelist Collete:

The blooming of a cactus rose, the budding of plants and the birth of children: this woman, who was herself far from being a model mother, found in writing also, this rhythm of the infinite, [...] of new beginnings.
(Kristeva 2004: 23)

We could analyze Boland's maternity poems from this perspective. Poems such as “Night Feed” focus on the birth and energy of the newborn, and on the mother's inability to freeze the moment when both herself and her child are united. In this sense, one could indeed argue that the experience of maternity enables Boland to consider her own death or perishing in the light of birth and the beginning of life. This is made explicit in a poem such as “Endings”, where the speaker utters:

A child
shifts in the cot.
No matter what happens now
I'll never fill one again.

The speaker here is not only realizing that her child-bearing years are now over, but also the fact that the older she grows, the more distant her child will be from her:

If I lean
I can see
what it is the branches end in:
The leaf.
The reach.
The blossom.
The abandon.

Boland's images of branches and flowers coming to fruition are suggestive of her child's innocence and also of the inevitable process of life unfolding and perishing. Boland's attempt to "reach" her child is counteracted by the noun "abandon". Motherhood is in this sense characterized by moments of closeness and also by defeat. According to Kristeva (2004: 21), this ability to reconsider birth and death within the same passage allows the writer constantly to reconstruct herself, to "start[...] anew". In fact, one gets the impression that Boland's representation of herself in terms of death in the light of the newborn allows her persistently to remould her image. She constantly 'dies' in her poems if only to revive and "blossom" later. That is why the title of poems such as "Endings" and "Partings" are in the plural. Boland experiences constant "endings" in her life, and also paradoxically, multiple rebirths.

Up to now, poems such as "Hymn" and "Night Feed" have shown how the speaker sanctifies her role as a mother by remembering and recording the intensity of those moments she shared with her daughter. Although Boland perpetuates traditional depictions of women as holy mothers and caregivers, she does so in order to adopt an "ideological exile" from which to counteract an Irish patriotic call for violence and nationalist liberation. On the other hand, Boland depicts motherhood as a complicated experience for women. The initial closeness experienced between mother and child in the womb is threatened as the woman realizes how quickly the child will grow and move away from her. In this sense, there is always in Boland's maternal poems "a melancholy/ in the undersong" ("Before Spring", *Night Feed*). Before daylight breaks in, the speaker's union with her child is left unquestioned. In "Partings" (another poem from *Night Feed*), the mother describes how at night her identity is merged with that of her child:

The world lives down
the dark union
of its wonders.

The blurring of outlines in a dark and twilight setting allows mother and child to become what Rabuzzi (1988: 50) would call a "binary-unit", that is, the bringing together as "one" of the

separate selves of mother and child. Nevertheless, the coming of the new day, as in "Night Feed", means the restoration of those boundaries between the 'self' and the 'Other': "dawn sunders/to define". Lightness can only define, fix, and harden their outlines, and therefore, their separation. As this division is inevitable, Boland at least, imagines a form of artistic representation where this union is possible. In "Fruit on the Straight-Sided Tray", also from *Night Feed*, Boland uses the metaphor of a still life, to establish a parallelism between the painter's arrangement in a tray of different pieces of fruits (melons, grapes, and lemons) with her union with her child. Their close bond is, as the speaker argues, "an assembly of possibilities;/ a deliberate collection of cross-purposes". This is what the speaker calls "the science of relationships", the potential of family bonds such as mother and child. Nevertheless, the mother-poet realizes that individuality can only be achieved when there is a distance between herself and her daughter: "the true subject is the space between them". If her child is to gain a self-identity, it must be separated from her mother. Realizing this, the speaker nostalgically recalls at the end of this poem: "you are my child and between us are//// spaces. Distances. Growing to infinites".

Even though Irigaray advocates women writers giving voice to motherly experiences, it is important to note that this feminist critic, in contrast to Cixous, stresses more separate identity between mothers and daughters rather than fusion. According to Whitford (1991: 3), it is inaccurate to read Irigaray as constantly exalting a pre-Oedipal fusion between mother and child, "attempting the impossible return to a pre-patriarchal space before language". In fact, Irigaray (1991: 74) warns women writers to maintain the boundaries between themselves and their daughters. Although these boundaries might be crossed, they are necessary, because they provide an identity to which each woman can always go back. Confusion of identity between women will prevent them from establishing any fruitful relationship, and it will make "maternal genealogy" impossible (pp. 160-161). The announced separation between mother and child in *Night Feed* becomes completed in Boland's subsequent volumes of poetry, as observed in "Daughter" (*The Lost Land*) and "The Pomegranate" (*In a Time of Violence*).

It is interesting to note how Boland, like Irigaray, goes to Greek mythology to find cultural representations of the mother-daughter relationship (Sarup 1993: 119). In particular, the woman poet exploits the Ceres and Persephone myth.²⁵ According to Agha-Jaffar (2002: 10), the reason why this myth has become so significant for women writers is because it is the only one in Greek mythology that is not preoccupied with the conventional subject matter of the heroic and situates

²⁵ Gilbert and Gubar (2000: 504) note that the myth of Persephone has been employed by women writers in order to describe "female sexual initiation". They offer some examples to illustrate this point: Mary Shelley's *Proserpine and Midas*, Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*, Sylvia Plath's "Two Sisters of Persephone", Muriel Rukeyser's "In the Underworld", and Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*. Nevertheless, Boland employs this myth here with another aim: to address the mother's grief over her daughter's enthrallment to the King of the Underworld.

the female character at the centre and not on the margins of the story. Nevertheless, Boland is not drawn to this myth only because of this, but also because it provides her with ways of perceiving and understanding her own reality as a mother. Ceres was the Roman goddess for the Greek goddess Demeter, the goddess of agriculture and vegetation, in short, the goddess of the Earth (Falcon Martínez et al. 1980: 170). The legend Boland is going to exploit in the following poems concerns Persephone, the daughter of Ceres and Zeus, who as a girl is kidnapped by Hades, the king of the Underworld, to be his wife. Her agonizing mother, looking for her everywhere, refused to allow the Earth to flourish; crops could not grow and no animals reproduced (p. 172). As Ceres denied Earth its fertility, the whole human race was threatened to be destroyed. Eventually, Zeus submitted to Ceres' demand and sent Hermes to bargain with Hades for the return of Persephone. Hades unwillingly accepted to do so, but tricked the girl into eating some pomegranate seeds (p. 173). Since Persephone had eaten the food of the Underworld, she was forced to return to the world of the dead for half a year. On Earth, this is the season of winter, when no crops would grow. Spring announces the return of Persephone to her mother. This myth teaches Boland just how much of motherhood is necessarily characterized by loss.

In "Daughter", Boland transfers Ceres' suffering over the loss of her daughter to a Dublin mother, the poet herself, who experiences such a loss. Thus, the speaker identifies her own feelings with those of the mythic goddess. This poem belongs to the volume of poetry *The Lost Land* (1998). "Daughter" is just one of the numerous examples where Boland shows her concern to redefine myths. As Haberstroh (1996: 79) explains, in Boland's poetry "history, story, myth, and daily life are closely woven together by image and idea".

This poem is divided into three sections: "The Season", "The Loss", and "The Bargain". The three of them refer to the different episodes of the legend of Persephone and Ceres. The first section alludes to spring, when Ceres, the mother-poet, seems to find the girl she was seeking. The second section, "The Loss", refers to the inability of Ceres as mother to bring Persephone back. Finally, the third section refers to the bargain done between Hermes and Hades, the god of the Underworld, for the return of Persephone to the Earth. In the first section, the speaker describes herself at a point of transition, at "The edge of spring":

The edge of spring.
The dark is wet. Already
stars are tugging at
their fibrous roots:

In February
they will fall and shine
from the roadsides
in their yellow hundreds.

7.4.2. Boland's female experience

My first child
was conceived in this season.
If I wanted a child now
I could not have one.

This poem shows Boland's characteristic style in *The Lost Land*. It is written with short, strongly end-stopped lines, and midline caesuras created by periods or dashes. With the coming of spring, Persephone is expected to resurrect, along with the blossoming of all the flowers and plants. According to the legend, Ceres is dressed in black, mourning for the loss of her daughter (Falcon Martínez et al. 1980: 172). The reference to the night and the wet weather seems to refer to the goddess Ceres, weeping and dressed with a mourning garment. As in most of the poems which have been analyzed until now ("Night Feed", "Hymn", "Monotony"), the stars make their appearance again. These remote celestial bodies are suggestive of the separation of present and past, of the mother's inability to change what has already happened thousands of years before. In the past, Ceres was like one of those stars, "tugging at/ their fibrous roots", in her effort to drag her daughter out of the Underworld. The mother-speaker feels identified with the mythological goddess, in her earnest attempt to retain her daughter by her side. Predicting the coming of spring in February, the speaker feels a temporal relief by knowing that it will be the period when her child comes from the Underworld. The meteor shower, the sudden rain of the "fibrous roots" of the stars that the poem records, symbolizes the mythological union between mother and daughter. The "fall" of the stars from the sky is in fact Persephone's ascent from the Underworld. Their power to "shine [...] in their yellow hundreds" is, on the other hand, her ability to blossom in the spring season. Nevertheless, the speaker's contemporary world is at a great distance from the stars in the sky. By redefining the myth of Ceres and Persephone, the mother nostalgically expresses that spring will not bring her child back. On the other hand, unlike the goddess Ceres, who, as a mythological creature, is always young and fertile, the actual mother feels defeated by time. She was Ceres once, when she conceived her first daughter in spring, but now, she cannot enter the mythological tale, for "If I wanted a child now/ I could not have one". Thus, the only way to become Ceres is by recalling her initial closeness with her child, or by entering the mythological tale:

Except through memory.
Which is the ghost of the body.
Or myth.
Which is the ghost of meaning.

We have seen how in "Night Feed" the woman promised to retain the memory of the initial close bond between her and her infant, to sustain and inspire her when her child has grown old. Now, this girl has entered the adult world and the mother is no longer the centre of her world. "Memory" and "myth" are employed to ease the mother's anguish, in the face of the imminent loss of her daughter. Daniels (1999: 400) has argued that in *The Lost Land* Boland brings together two narrative strands,

inserting women into the predominantly male cast of recorded history and myth, and removing herself from the autobiographical script of her life as a mother. This is the lost land of the title, what Boland calls a ghostly territory where human experience – lived, but lost, but unrecorded – comes to be stored. Thus, the book is a kind of celebratory dirge about both loss and gain, exile and residence.

"Daughters", the poem under discussion, records the contradictory "loss and gain" Daniels talks about: the "loss" of motherhood through the daughter's journey to womanhood, and the "gain" of the speaker's identity as a mother by means of this mythological tale. As motherhood is so important for Boland's sense of identity, her separation from her daughter inevitably produces an unstable self, who is no longer sure of what she is. In this sense, by identifying with Ceres, Boland restores, although fictionally, her identity as a mother. Nevertheless, she implicitly criticizes myth by its failure to represent completely her current life as a woman. As "the ghost of meaning", myth can be dangerous if it is not set in its specific historical context. Thus, the mythological image of Ceres must be established in a continuous dialogue with the historical image of the Dublin woman, in order to bear witness to the bodily and real identity of the current Irish mother. This revision of the mythological images of women is one of the most important features of Boland's mature work, as we will see from now on.

The second section, "The Loss", continues with this identification with Ceres. Like this goddess after finding the girl she was seeking in the Underworld, the woman speaker cannot ultimately bring her back:

All morning
the sound of chain-saws.
My poplar tree has been cut down.

In dark spring dawns
when I could hardly raise
my head from the pillow

its sap rose
thirty feet into the air.
Into daylight. Into the last of starlight.

7.4.2. Boland's female experience

I go out to the garden
To touch the hurt wood spirits.
The injured summers.

Out of one of them a child runs.
Her skin printed with leaf-shadow.

And will not look at me.

The pruning season, when the branches of the trees are cut in summer to improve their growth, figuratively becomes the ultimate loss of the daughter. The demonstrative 'my' indicates that the pruning of the poplar tree has a personal significance for the mother. The woman-speaker senses the "sap" of her daughter rising "thirty feet into the air", and reaching her, as she lies on bed, with her head on the pillow. In contrast to those poems in *Night Feed*, Boland represents the coming of a new day in terms of darkness rather than lightness ("dark spring dawns"; "the last of the starlight"), in order to emphasize loss and separation rather than union between mother and child. In her attempt to recover her daughter, the speaker goes "out to the garden", where the pruning is being carried out. As the Earth goddess Ceres, her desolation has an effect on nature: trees are "hurt" and the summers "injured". One of the cut branches becomes Persephone, the speaker's daughter, who suddenly runs away from her. The mother, as in "Night Feed", merely becomes a satellite of the girl's existence, her earlier influence on her has diminished, and she is just a "leaf-shadow", a slight remembrance for the girl as she moves away from the mother. Persephone's return to the Underworld means the daughter's natural journey toward adulthood. Now, her autonomy is completed and, as the mother admits, she "will not look at me". The presence of the conjunction 'And' in the beginning of this last sentence is, in fact, one habit in Boland's mature poetry, as I will further explain, that usually re-defines or complements what has been previously mentioned in the poem. We have already seen one example in "Hymn", where the woman-speaker ends by claiming: "And in the dark/ as we slept/ the world/ was made flesh". The "And" recurrence is without doubt purposeful. The poet's static lines, long silences, midline caesuras, and short end-stopped lines work in the service of a larger theme: the point where past and present, myth and history meet, where legendary images and actual lives confront each other. This interweaving of daily life and legendary life causes a tension which is perceived in the very syntax of the poem.

The last section of "Daughters" refers to the bargain between Hermes and Hades for the return of Persephone. Their negotiation is made explicit by natural manifestations:

The garden creaks with rain.
The gutters run with noise water.
The earth shows its age and makes a promise

only myth can keep. *Summer. Daughter.*

Nature is represented in its cycle of birth, growth, and death. Nevertheless, the mother does not encounter in her own life nature's periodically repeated sequence of events. Only in myth do Hermes and Hades reach at an agreement as regards Persephone's return to the world. There is no possible negotiation for the return of the current mother's daughter. She senses that she has lost her infant forever, and nostalgically finds refuge in myth, in order to ease her spiritual desolation. The last words of the poem ("*Summer. Daughter*") indicate that the mother prefers to enter the mythological account, where she will have the possibility, as Ceres has, of retrieving the lost daughter. Nevertheless, this fractioned language, typical of Boland's mature work, indicates that the speaker's identity finds itself irremediably damaged, fragmented, and destroyed by the shattering of the very foundations on which it has been grounded: motherhood and her union with her child.

Another poem in which Boland employs this Greek myth in order to talk about her experiences as a mother is "The Pomegranate". This poem belongs to the volume of poetry *In a Time of Violence*, published in 1994, four years before *The Lost Land*. I have deliberately chosen to comment "The Pomegranate" after "Daughters", which belongs to a later volume of poetry, merely for reasons of content. The speaker in "The Pomegranate" treats myth from a broader perspective than in "Daughters". In the poem under discussion, the woman identifies both with Ceres and Persephone, whereas in "Daughters" the speaker only acted out the part of the Earth goddess. As in the previous poem, "The Pomegranate" centres on the myth of Ceres and Persephone in order to explore the preordained outcome of the tale. From the very beginning, the poet herself states frankly:

The only legend I have ever loved is
the story of a daughter lost in hell.
And found and rescued there.
Love and blackmail are the gist of it.
Ceres and Persephone the names.

Significantly enough, Boland recalls as one of the most remarkable aspects of the tale the mother's ability to recover her child, and not their eventual separation. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy how Boland refers in the above stanza to Ceres' daughter as Persephone rather than Kore. As Agha-Jaffar (2002: 36) explains, the name Kore refers to her maiden and virginal status. On the contrary, Persephone is the name the child is given in the Homeric *Hymn to Demeter* after she has been raped, and once she becomes the wife of Hades and queen of the Underworld. By preferring to use the name Persephone rather than Kore, Boland deliberately stresses her daughter's separation from

7.4.2. Boland's female experience

her rather than their primitive union. As we will see further in the poem, it is precisely Persephone's new status as the queen of the Underworld, and her independence from her mother that is emphasized. The reason why Boland is drawn to such a mythological story, as she makes explicit, is because both female figures, Ceres and Persephone, allow her to explore the intensity and complexity of the emotions she has felt in her life:

And the best thing about the legend is
I can enter it anywhere. And have.
As a child in exile in
a city of fogs and strange consonants,
I read it first and at first I was
an exiled child in the crackling dusk of
the underworld, the stars blighted.

First of all, Boland identifies with Persephone, as a child exiled in a strange country, identified here as the Underworld. At the age of seven, Boland moved with her family to London. Her father, the diplomat Frederick H. Boland, had to serve as Irish Ambassador to the Court of St. James (Donoghue 1994: 26). Boland, as she will make explicit in several of her poems, usually refers to her six years living in London as an unhappy time.²⁶ As a child in exile "in/ a city of fogs and strange consonants", Boland identifies with Persephone, living "in the crackling dusk of/ the underworld, the stars blighted". The snapping and distasteful noises and the air pollution of London parallel the adverse environment condition of the Underworld. Nevertheless, as Agha-Jaffar (2002: 116) explains, Persephone's Underworld is not merely a negative space but also a positive one. More than simply a geographical location, the Underworld is "a psychic space that contains within it the potential for health and healing". It is in the Underworld where Persephone is transformed from an innocent and virginal child into an autonomous and compelling figure with a new power and status. Agha-Jaffar's (2002: 48) contention is that Persephone knew exactly what she was doing when she ate the pomegranate seed. Hades informs Persephone that if she stays in this place, she will acquire a high status, autonomy, and respect among the gods as queen of the Underworld. Persephone's decision to eat the food from the land of the dead is, in this sense, deliberate. She knows that eating the pomegranate would guarantee her return to the Underworld for a certain period every year. If she doesn't eat it, Persephone realizes that she will go back to her former status as a child relegated to her mother's side, in a relationship of psychological dependency. By viewing her childhood exile as a journey into the Underworld, Boland believes that this painful experience in her life has provided her with the potential for growth, insight, and transformation. The Underworld becomes for Boland, just as for Persephone, a dark but fertile

²⁶ I will treat Boland's childhood exile in more detail in section 7.4.4., "A deconstruction of the poetic self".

space in her life. It is a psychological space where one can experience death, the potential for transformation, and rebirth. In London, Boland experienced isolation, estrangement, and displacement. But, as a realm of death, the Underworld is paradoxically the realm of rebirth. Without death, there can be no life and growth. In other words, an old self has to die before a new self can be born. Boland's descent into the Underworld at such an early stage of her life allows her to experience the 'death' of her naïve self, the 'death' of a child who took for granted notions such as nationalism and Irishness without realizing that these very categories have excluded her as a woman. This metaphorical death allows her to enter another phase of critical attitude. Her loss of innocence (a symbolic death) is an opportunity for growth and development. As we will see in the following section, the woman poet will attempt to create a more inclusive national identity that bears witness to women's ordinary experiences. In this sense, Boland emerges from the darkness with new perspective about what Ireland is, and what it is to be Irish. Agha-Jaffar's (2002: 122-123) words dedicated to Persephone can be usefully applied to Boland in this context: "Persephone conveys the message that if we are abducted to the inner depths of the underworld, we are able not only to survive the experience, but we can also transform the ordeal into something life-enriching". Furthermore, by experiencing the Underworld, Boland not only undergoes a process of transformation and metamorphosis. Persephone's myth must mean something else. By staying in the Underworld for four months every year and then returning to the Earth, Persephone maintains a balance between the two worlds and what they represent, alternating between one and the other. As Agha-Jaffar (2002: 51) argues, Persephone "has created a third world for herself" by occupying a position that avoids the control of either Demeter or Hades. She no longer belongs to the Underworld and the over-world exclusively, and therefore she is not subject to the authority of either her mother or her spouse. As we will see in section 7.4.4.2, when living in London Boland will not consider herself either an English child nor an 'authentic' Irish girl. In many ways, her early exile allows her to occupy a sort of liminal space 'in-between' Englishness and Irishness. It will be my contention that Boland's painful diaspora will enable her to transcend the limitations of imperialist and nationalist discourses alike.

In this sense, Boland establishes a parallelism between her painful experiences of exile and Persephone's descent into the Underworld in order to suggest both displacement and liberation. On the other hand, and more noticeably, Boland identifies with the goddess Ceres, the mother figure in the legend:

I walked out in a summer twilight
searching for my daughter at bed-time.
When she came running I was ready
To make any bargain to keep her.

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The mother realizes that her daughter, by growing up, will be separated from her, and hence, she is getting prepared to negotiate the stay of the child in the world. In the poem, the mother finds her child and carries her back home passing "whitebeams/ and wasps and honey-scented buddleias". The flourishing natural world is not only suggestive of the power of the Mother Earth, but it also refers to the flowers which Hades offered Persephone to persuade her to follow him to the Underworld. Thus, the mother realizes, as Collins (2000: 38) puts it, that she "must bear the children carefully through a world of temptation". She acknowledges the menacing presence of Hades, allegorized as the winter season, when Persephone is expected to move away from the mother:

[...] I was Ceres then and I knew
 winter was in store for every leaf
 on every tree on that road.
 Was inescapable for each one we passed.
 And for me.
 It is winter
 and the stars are hidden.

Boland uses the word 'inescapable' deliberately. She suggests that the tragic rapture of Persephone by Hades does not occur only in the mythic tale, but also in reality. Boland implies that, as a mother, she cannot 'escape' this loss because the child's natural entry into adulthood necessarily involves gaining autonomy and independence. The disruption in the lay-out between the first stanza and the second indicates the actual moment when Persephone is abducted by Hades and the moment when the poet realizes this. The season is consequently winter, the time when Persephone is trapped in the Underworld. At first, the mother's child seems to have escaped Hades' temptation, for the woman-speaker can see her "child asleep beside her teen magazines,/ her can of Coke, her plate of uncut fruit". The finely observed realism of the scene suggests at first that both, mother and child, would not suffer the tragic ending of the myth. But, we soon realize that the child cannot be safe from the tale's conclusion.

The pomegranate! How did I forget it?
 She could have come home and been safe
 and ended the story and all
 our heart-broken searching but she reached
 out a hand and plucked a pomegranate.
 She put out her hand and pulled down
 the French sound for apple and
 the noise of stone and the proof
 that even in the place of death,
 at the heart of the legend, in the midst
 of rocks full of unshed tears
 ready to be diamonds by the time
 the story was told, a child can be

hungry.

As in the myth, Boland's daughter has fallen into the temptation of some pomegranate seeds. Boland moves here between the imaginative mythological world and the realistic setting of her house. The "French sound for apple, and the noise of stone" allude to her contemporary world, a world where the five senses are felt. The imaginary world of myths and legends is suggested by a place where no emotions are felt, and where even "unshed tears" are fossilized into "diamonds". Nevertheless, there is an intermediate point where myth and reality meet for, in both stories, the legendary and the real one, "a child can be/ hungry". The mother temporarily mediates on saving her daughter: "I could warn her./ There is still a chance". Nevertheless, she soon realizes that her child needs to experience, as she did once, this tale in its totality:

[...] But what else
can a mother give her daughter but such
beautiful rifts in time?
If I defer the grief I will diminish the gift.
The legend will be hers as well as mine.
She will enter it. As I have.
She will wake up. She will hold
the papery flushed skin in her hand.
And to her lips. I will say nothing.

Myth is viewed here from a clearly positive perspective. Although the poet claimed in "Daughters" that "myth [...] is the ghost of meaning", for the speaker here, this legend expresses some truth of the inevitable fate of human beings, some of the "meaning" of life. The myth of Ceres and Persephone reflects not only "the inevitability of the split between mother and daughter, but the universal need for the female to live her story completely" (Collins 2000: 38). The fusion of real and imaginative worlds suggests that myth and ordinariness are not so distant from each other: the real, practical experience of a daughter growing up affects both Ceres, the mythological goddess, and also Boland, the mother-poet. The loss of a child becomes, according to the woman poet, one of the true human legends. Thus, she decides at the end not to warn her daughter against the myth, but to "say nothing", as the child wakes up and holds the pomegranate skin in her hand. By choosing not to scold her daughter for eating this food, Boland is, as Demeter in the myth, reinforcing her daughter's right to make her own choices. She realizes that her daughter's separation will allow her to venture on her own, to make her own mistakes and triumphs, and to find her own path in life. As Agha-Jaffar (2002: 46) explains, the process by which a person moves towards developing an independent identity is predicated upon psychological separation from the mother: "unless we do separate from mother, unless we cut that umbilical cord and fly free, we will never have the opportunity to actualize our potential and to discover who we are and

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what we are capable of doing". The failure of communication between mother and child (who remain silent to one another at the end of the poem), and their growing separation are, as in the myth, unavoidable and natural. Thus, the myth is not explained and transmitted verbally to the child by the mother, as the latter understands that her daughter will, as a female, inescapably act out the role of Persephone and Ceres. According to Collins (2000: 39), one of the poem's weaknesses is

its failure to acknowledge that the rift between mother and daughter may not be entirely natural and accepted [...] Were she to represent the sundering of bonds between mother and daughter in all their painful complexity, she would raise crucial questions about the collective nature of female experience and about women's attitude towards the passing on of tradition.

I disagree with Collins' assertion that Boland fails to explore the complex mother-child relationship. She examines minutely the intensity of the mother's emotions, her fears of loss, and her need to protect her child. The split between mother and child may not be entirely natural, but what is real is the mother's anxiety about a possible separation. The myth of Persephone is a tale of innocence and betrayal, desire and abduction, loyalty and temptation, grief and recompense. By properly understanding the dissonance of these emotions, one comes to the realization that Boland employs this myth in order to give voice to the complex female relationship between mother and daughter, or, in other words, to the complex feelings and thoughts which obsess the mother. The legendary story is, therefore, suitable for exploring heterogeneous human experiences.

The complex relationship between mother and daughter, and the consequent fears experienced by the woman poet, are a constant preoccupation in Boland's mature work. Most of her maternal poems employ the myth of Ceres and Persephone to portray the mother's terrible sense of loss. "Ceres Looks at the Morning" (*The Journey*) and "The Making of an Irish Goddess" (*Outside History*) are some illustrative examples of this idea. These poems show how closely Boland connects history, myth, and her own ordinary life in her poetry.

7.4.2.5. Conclusion

As we have seen in this section, Boland's female experience as a wife, a housewife, and a mother constitute very important aspects of her identity as a woman poet, and in fact, they are going to be mentioned throughout her production. By praising and making sacramental her roles in the domestic sphere, Boland might suggest that her own private and personal experience is universal. Her emphasis on the importance of marriage and motherhood as sources of identity for the female subject would be criticized by scholars such as Spivak (interview with Threadgold & Bartkowski

1990: 118), Davis (2003: 353), Rajan (1993: 1-2), and Mohanty (1991a: 11), who believe that homogenizing generalizations such as these might obliterate more heterogeneous women's experiences. As we have seen, all these feminist postcolonial critics have argued that any campaign which attempts to speak on behalf of all women runs the risk of eliding specific cultural, historical, and economic contexts. When wondering if women who do not bear children deal with the meaning of reproduction in the same way as women who do, Donaldson (1992: 138) argues:

One could only answer 'yes', [...] by regarding reproduction as purely biological, that is, naturalized, function that is separable from any human consciousness of reproduction. Yet this appeal to an unmediated materialism is precisely how many feminists define women's 'experience'. [...] While women do share the same involuntary biology of reproduction in menstruation and ovulation, they do not share consciousness of that biology.

From this perspective, Boland might be accused of an "unmediated materialism" which ignores the different experiences of all those women who do not find in motherhood their source of identity. Nevertheless, one should bear in mind that her poems, mostly in *Night Feed*, distinctively pay homage to women's roles as mothers and housewives, in order to reassess an experience which has been for long neglected (not in order to praise it above all other human experiences). On the other hand, it is also important to consider that, as Boland's work progresses, womanhood is, interestingly enough, gradually defined more in terms of fluidity and silences. As we have seen in "Daughters" and "The Pomegranate", there is something which threatens the speaker's stability as a mother, her self-significance, and that is the imminent separation between herself and her child. It is here where Boland begins to question the foundations upon which her identity as a woman is based. As a consequence, the poet will only be able to conceive of her own self in terms of fluidity and erasure. Poems such as "Anna Liffey" (*In a Time of Violence*) and "The Lost Land" (*The Lost Land*) will take this deconstruction of identity to the limit. As I will demonstrate, when notions such as motherhood find themselves threatened, the very bases on which Boland's female self-identity is founded begin to shatter.

7.4.3. Reconstruction of images of women in literature: a revisionary stance on Mother Ireland

7.4.3.1. Introduction

Apart from speaking from the perspective of wife, mother, and housewife, Boland also adopts a multiplicity of other roles. She also identifies in her poetry with Mother Ireland and with all sorts of mythological figures: Daphne and Psiquis, for instance. In contrast to *New Territory*, Boland does not remain uncritical to the traditional perspective of the male author who has conventionally objectified his female characters. Continuing with the project initiated in *In Her Own Image*, Boland challenges traditional gender stereotypes embodied in myth, literature, and other forms of cultural manifestations. Now, Boland drastically defends that women must move “from being the objects of Irish poems to being the authors of them” (Boland 1996a: 126). By so doing, she claims, Irish poetry, in which women had always stood as emblematic objects, would inevitably change and evolve (p. 126). In what follows, I intend to explain how Boland approaches traditional images of women in literature, in particular the national icon of Mother Ireland, in order to offer a more realistic portrayal which comprises the complex reality of womanhood.

7.4.3.2. Boland's revisionary stance

According to Fanon (1990: 187), the appearance of nationalist themes is an important feature of the native writer at his/her final stage of liberation. At this level of literary creation, Fanon (1990: 179) explains how the writer adopts a critical attitude towards the narrow view of nationalism of his/her nation, “not with the intention of paralyzing revolution”, but with a view to liberating him/herself and others. Realizing that, in the former period, the subject of his/her work of art has been greatly “estranged” from the people of his/her nation, the native writer looks for a truly “national literature” which “expresses the heart of the people” and highlights their dispossession (ibid). As Fanon (1990: 181) states, “[t]he native intellectual who wishes to create an authentic work of art must realize that the truths of a nation are in the first place its realities”. As Fanon's colonized writer, in her mature poetry Boland fights a narrow nationalism that has distorted and simplified womanhood. She constantly scrutinizes the connection between gender and nation in much Irish literature, in order to bring to the fore her own reality as a woman.

As Edna O'Brien (1976: 11) suggests in her book *Mother Ireland*, Ireland has often been allegorized as a woman in song and literature: “Countries are either mothers or fathers, and engender the emotional bristle secretly reserved for either sire. Ireland has always been a woman, a womb, a cave, a cow, a Rosaleen, a sow, a bride, a harlot, and of course, the gaunt Hag of Beare”. By recasting a defeated and dispossessed nation into a triumphant woman, many nineteenth and

early twentieth-century poets and rebels have depended on women as motifs in their poetry and their oratory. James Clarence Mangan's "Dark Rosaleen" is depicted as his virgin "flower of flowers", Patrick Pearse's "Old Woman of Beare" is "the beauty of beauty", and Francis Ledwidge's "Poor Old Woman" summons her sons, the "blackbirds" to maintain her wars (Kennelly 1970: 149, 295, 305). The implications underlying this rhetoric of nationalism at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth are quite clear: "there is an essential Ireland to be served, a definite all-Ireland mind to be described" (Kiberd 1996: 298). Nationalists, in their fixed and definite idea of Ireland, "asked writers to hold a mirror to Cathleen ní Houlihan's face" (ibid). In her essay "From Cathleen to Anorexia: the Breakdown of Irelands", Longley (1994: 174) defines nationalism as "a separatist movement" which has had great "ideological package", and which has made "absolute claims". This North-based critic establishes an interesting comparison between nationalism and unionism, in order to claim that nationalism, in contrast to the other movement, has developed into "a comprehensible symbolic system" (i.e. image of nation as woman), whose ideals have been widely accepted as norms.¹ In this sense, as Longley (1994: 175) explains, there has been a deep confusion between cultural and political Irishness. This range of cultural practices and traditions has been, according to Longley, misidentified with a political and constitutional nationalism that narrowly defines 'Irishness', "the ideology of identity ('Irish to the core')" (p. 176).

Most Irish critics agree on identifying among contemporary writers in Ireland a subversive stance on nationalist ideals. Graham (1994a: 35) has argued that "[r]e-thinking, re-positioning, and revising nationalism have become the central preoccupations of intellectual movements in Irish culture". In *Inventing Ireland*, Kiberd (1996: 4) asserts that there is a current movement in Irish literature towards reconstructing the idea of the nation. He further asserts that the last century was "dominated by the debate with which it began: how to distinguish what is good in nationalism from what is bad" (p. 7). Likewise, Longley (1994: 174) focuses on the "ideological breakdown" of this movement, asserting that nationalism is a dying ideology.² Longley (1994: 174) argues that there are three main recognizable reactions to nationalism in literature, for there must always be some kind of reaction to it: some "Southern writers strangely complain that 'Ireland does not exist'"; others adopt a cynical attitude; and, finally, there are those who engage in a sort of revisionism of the very foundations upon which nationalism was built. This last reaction is observed among most contemporary women writers in Ireland: they are going to adopt a

¹ Longley (1994: 187) asserts that, in contrast to nationalism, unionism, though traditionally patriarchal, does not appropriate the image of woman.

² As regards this, Longley (1994: 173) asserts "the 'Republic' as once conceived has invisibly broken down". Brown (1985: 13) agrees with Longley when explaining that the revolutionary ideals of an independent Ireland as theorized by Pearse and other nationalist rebels "were scarcely realized" in the following decades after the Treaty of 1921.

revisionary stance on some stereotypical nationalist images (i.e. the passive and vulnerable virgin and the mourning mother).

Eavan Boland is one such voice, among many others in Ireland, who finds difficulty in accepting those decorative images raised to emblematic status by nationalism, and who engages in this revisionary stance Longley refers to. In the process, Boland does not ultimately reject nationalism, but establishes a dialogue with the idea of the nation, revising the image of Mother Ireland and creating what González Arias (2000b: 22) calls a different "M/Other Ireland".³ Her dismantling of received nationalist conventions parallels the advocacy of French feminist writers such as Luce Irigaray and Hélène Cixous to enter the male text in order to deconstruct and reconstruct it. In "The Laugh of the Medusa", Cixous (1981: 258) encourages the appropriation of male's discourse, their concepts and myths, knowing "how it works" in order "to make it work". The point she makes is that the woman writer must take possession of these suffocating conventions for the sake of producing new insights, in her own words, "to dash through and fly" (ibid). Similarly, Irigaray (1991: 118-132) proposes in "The power of discourse and the subordination of the feminine" the strategy of a self-conscious mimicry that brings to light the mechanisms which exploit women within discourse. Mimesis would involve adopting the feminine role intentionally, in order to "convey a form of subordination into an affirmation" (p. 124). As Irigaray explains,

To play with mimesis is thus, for a woman, to try to recover the place of her exploitation by discourse, without allowing herself to be simply reduced to it. It means to resubmit herself [...] to 'ideas', in particular to ideas about herself, that are elaborated in/by a masculine logic, but so as to make 'visible', by an effect of playful repetition, what was supposed to remain invisible: the cover-up of a possible operation of the feminine in language. (ibid)

This mimicry is, thus, a way to challenge and disrupt masculine discourse from within. It is a process of "interpretive rereading", of destroying the discursive mechanism, or what she has called elsewhere the "sexuation of discourse" (p. 123).⁴

This feminist movement parallels postcolonial theory's call to engage with the colonizer's discursive practices. Spivak (1988a: 211) has encouraged the postcolonial academic critic to "negotiate", and not reject, Western cultural institutions, texts and theoretical practices. Similarly, Bhabha has claimed in an interview that "[s]ubversion is negotiation; transgression is negotiation"

³ See Villar Argáiz (2003a) for an insight into how Boland looks for a more inclusive national identity.

⁴ This process of dismantling inherited conventions is labelled by Ostriker (1986: 216) as "revisionist mythmaking technique", and by Adrienne Rich (1979: 35), "re-vision", or "the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction". Both critics assert that this technique is a common trend among contemporary women writers.

(Rutherford 1990: 216). According to these postcolonial theorists, this technique manages to unsettle the dominant from within, demonstrating what Young (1992: 173) explains as, “the possibility of providing a critique [...] towards an inversion of the dominant structures of knowledge and power without simply reproducing them”. By “negotiating”, the (postcolonial) writer manages to subvert the systems of binaries on which dominant discourses (colonialist, nationalist, patriarchal, etc.) characteristically rely to legitimize their power.

Eavan Boland has adopted these feminist and postcolonial strategies of “mimicry” and “negotiation”. Her poetry works within the tone, imagery, and language of the patriarchal tradition, revising conventional images of womanhood and opening new perspectives for the Irish poem. Haberstroh (1996: 19) argues that this task is difficult because in Boland's poetry “the voice we identify as female depends on a definition which grows from a social construct, and is therefore not natural or essential to females at all”. In any case, as this critic later mentions, Eavan Boland seems to solve this problem by accepting the fact “that women are constructed by the construct, and therefore live and write within its parameters” (ibid). As she has recently admitted, “[w]e are constructed by the construct. We can't deny all those compromises and revisions which colony [and nationalism] entail[...].” (interview with Villar Argáiz 2005a). That is why Boland retains in her poetry the conventional image of Mother Ireland, as well as other mythological figures, challenging and rewriting them. As she has argued, artistic decolonization is brought up when “previously mute images within [the poetic tradition] come to awkward and vivid life, when the icons return to haunt the icon makers” (Boland 1996a: 196-197).⁵

7.4.3.3. A ‘post-nationalist’ or a ‘post-colonial’ writer?

Boland's prose account *Object Lessons* contains extensive reflections on the harmful effects of nationalism and its cultural images for Irish women. She recognizes that in Ireland the idea of the nation was necessary in order to “resolv[e] and heal[...]” the “wounds” of a dispossessed community (1996a: 128). In the passage that follows, she seems to be accusing imperialism, more than nationalism, for the constraining nature of the Irish nation:

⁵ Boland's subversion of cultural nationalist ideals is influenced, funnily enough, by two male Irish writers. As she has argued in *Object Lessons*, James Joyce's ironic description of the daily milkwoman in the opening lines of *Ulysses* (1922) exerts a remarkable influence on her (Boland 1996a: 144). Boland praises him for “breaking the traditional association of Ireland with ideas of womanhood and tragic motherhood” (ibid). On the other hand, Patrick Kavanagh has exerted a tremendous influence on her work. Being a peasant, Kavanagh “represented a class which was falsely depicted and inaccurately politicized both in Yeats's poetry and in the Literary Revival period” (p. 197). The merit that Boland grants to Kavanagh is that he rejected the glamorization and simplification of the rural experience, as in his antipastoral *The Great Hunger* (1942).

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When a people have been so dispossessed by events as the Irish in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, an extra burden falls on the very idea of a nation. What should be a political aspiration becomes a collective fantasy. The dream itself becomes freighted with invention. The Irish nation, materializing in the songs and ballads of these centuries, is a sequence of improvised images. These songs, these images [...] propose for a nation an impossible task: to be at once an archive of defeat and a diagram of victory (p. 129).

Furthermore, she seems to suggest that the reason why Irish literature has simplified women by equating womanhood and nationhood is a direct consequence of imperialism. Images such as Mother Ireland and Cathleen ni Houlihan “have their root in a suffered truth”, and their raising as ornaments did “good service” to the raising of Ireland’s cultural confidence (p. 135). In this sense, Boland’s accusation of British imperialism and her apologetic stance on Irish cultural nationalism would align her with what Butler (2001: 257) has called “critical nationalism”, a new trend that describes

a politics that, while it acknowledges the absence of Ireland’s Others [gays, abused children, the working class, and of course, women] from the national narrative, see this gap as a function of imperial intervention rather than of limitations inherent in the nationalist position itself, and continues to draw on nationalist images and political energies as a source of strength for the future.

According to this critic, “critical nationalism” is employed by a whole generation of contemporary Irish artists, such as the Northern poet Seamus Heaney, the popular singer Sinéad O’Connor, the novelist and director of *Michael Collins* Neil Jordan, or the feminist film-maker Margo Harkin. These Irish artists keep a strong connection to a nationalist tradition (as when they make extensive use of Catholic imagery) that, “for better or for worse, has helped to define the Irish experience” and to defend a country from an imperial oppressor (ibid).

Nevertheless, a closer look at Boland’s prose accounts shows that the woman poet does not ultimately lay all the responsibility on English imperialist policies. Before gaining an insight into Boland’s critical attitude towards nationalism, it is important to note that this ideology has not been a flat homogeneous whole in Ireland. As we have seen, Boyce (1991: 228-258) has written on the three most important varieties of cultural nationalism in modern Ireland: “literary patriots”, “literary nationalists”, and the “Irish Ireland” movement. The first form of cultural nationalism was led by Samuel Ferguson and later by the Literary Revival, of which Yeats is an important exponent. They aimed to preserve and foster Ireland’s cultural heritage so that it could have its own place in European culture. They did not have a nationalist project behind, and they encouraged literature for art’s sake. The leader of the second form of cultural nationalism was Thomas Davis. “Literary nationalists” sought to make Irish literature subordinate to Irish

nationalism, and they only justified art as long as it fostered national consciousness. The newspaper *The Nation*, founded by Thomas Davis, John Blake Dillon, and Charles Gavan Duffy, became the principle medium for publishing political verse. The final form of cultural nationalism emerged around the group of the Gaelic Union. A key manifesto of this form of nationalism was Douglas Hyde's "The Necessity of De-Anglicizing Ireland", delivered in 1892 to the Irish National Literary Society. Hyde's nationalism, which was based on ethnicity and racial origin, became narrower than the other two manifestations. The national narrative that this movement promoted was based on the rural and Catholic nature of Irish society. It is the first and second form of cultural nationalism that Boyce distinguishes, "literary patriotism" and "literary nationalism", which Boland criticizes more sharply in her poetry.

Boland's attack on cultural images such as Mother Ireland is explicitly addressed to the Young Ireland movement and the Irish Literary Revival. This is made explicit in her essay "Writing the Political Poem in Ireland" (Boland 1995: 489-491).⁶ Here, Boland explains the difference between nationalist movements like O'Connell's at the beginning of the nineteenth century and the Young Ireland's movement at the end of the nineteenth century. O'Connell's populist speeches and Tom Moore's songs drew their nationalist images extensively from "British drawing-rooms", creating a sort of "souvenir shop" with their reliance on "[w]olfhounds, harps, and shamrocks" (p. 489). On the other hand, the Young Ireland movement advocated a new style of Irish cultural nationalism. This movement, as has already explained, was inspired by the founders of the newspaper *The Nation* (ibid). This tabloid that appeared periodically "turned its back on British drawing-rooms" and advocated the spiritual uniqueness of the Irish nation through its articles and poems (p. 490). The national and the feminine were frequently fused in their nationalist rhetoric (as in those poems by James Clarence Mangan) (ibid). It is this nationalist movement that Boland more openly criticizes in her poetry, because it "operated as a powerful colonizer", "mark[ing] out value systems, [...] politiciz[ing] certain realities, and deval[uing]" and simplifying women's realities (p. 491). In its desire to move away from imperialism, national literature repeated many of the ideological values of the colonizer. In other words, this literature was intended to exemplify the oppressions of Irish history by oppressing other realities. The Irish Literary Revival continued with this form of literary tradition, with figures such as W.B. Yeats, Padraic Colum, and Lady Gregory (ibid). Boland accuses these Irish writers even more strongly, because "[l]ong after it was necessary [after achieving the political independence], Irish poetry continued to trade in the exhaustive fictions of the nation" (1996a: 137).

⁶ This essay is clearly addressed to the American audience by its explanatory remarks on Irish history and culture.

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Because of Boland's critique of nationalism as a powerful colonizer for women, she moves away from that "post-nationalist" stance that Graham (1994a: 35) identifies in current Irish cultural manifestations. This Irish critic establishes a distinction between a "post-nationalism" and a "post-colonial criticism" (ibid). Within the first branch he locates critics such as Richard Kearney and his *Across the Frontiers: Ireland in the 1990s* (1988a, 1988b). Although Kearney advocates a pluralized European identity and a redefinition of cultural identity,⁷ Graham (1994a: 36) argues that he leaves nationalism behind "with a reluctance and a nostalgia" (p. 36). Post-nationalism, according to Graham, does not reject the nation, but evolves from it. Furthermore, it is unable to understand the ideological constructions and limitations of the nation, and "hopes instead to be able to preserve and move beyond it simultaneously" (p. 37). On the other hand, "post-colonialism" is, for Graham, more revolutionary, because it is able to adopt a more suspicious attitude towards the nature of nationalism and the ideological restrictions it implies. He names Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (1990) and the *Subaltern Studies Group* in India as appropriate models to follow (pp. 36-37). Their theories, according to Graham, have succeeded in building a critique of this ideology. They have understood more than Irish critics such as Kearney, that "the post-colonial nation becomes the 'ideological product' of the colonial regime" (p. 37).

Boland's stance on Irish nationalism certainly coincides with what Graham defines as "post-colonialism". Nevertheless, her position is more complex than what it first seems. First of all, she views nationalism as both a direct outcome of imperialism, and as a powerful restrictive ideology. Eavan Boland finds it difficult to accept the decorative images of Dark Rosaleen, Cathleen ni Houlihan, and the Poor Old Woman. She views the fusion of the feminine and the national, a monopoly in Irish poetry, as unacceptable, for the reality of womanhood is inevitably simplified. As she asserts in an interview with Rebecca Wilson (1990b: 87):

Irish poets of the nineteenth century, and indeed their heirs in this century, coped with their sense of historical injury by writing of Ireland as an abandoned queen or an old mother. My objections to this are ethical. If you consistently simplify women by making them national icons in poetry or drama you silence a great deal of the actual women in the past, whose sufferings and complexities are part of that past, who intimately depend on us, as writers, not to simplify them in this present. I am conscious of bringing my own perspective into the debate.

In the national tradition, the heroine Hiberna was utterly passive, and her role was almost always as a mother or a virgin. Boland cannot approve of these passive and simplified images of

⁷ See Kearney's (1988a: 17) call for a "post-nationalist network of communities, where national identities may live on where they belong – in languages, sports, arts, customs, memories, and myths – while simultaneously fostering the expression of minority and regional cultures within each nation".

women: she sees them as a "corruption" of Irish women's reality in the past (1996a: 135). Nevertheless, the worst of nationalist poetry, Boland seems to imply, is not only that it has misrepresented women, but that, in doing so, it has structured the position of the poet in such masculine terms that it has prevented women from constructing themselves as speaking subjects. Because of this, Boland (1996a: 66) realizes that she has been granted no power of expression as a female artist: "I was feeling the sexual opposites within the narrative. The intense passivity of the female; the fact that to the male principle was reserved the right not only of action but of expression as well". This dichotomy established between (male) subject/ (female) object has encouraged the fusion of the political poem and the private poem in Ireland, making the subject always "representative" and the feminine object always "ornamental" (p. 178). In short, for Boland cultural nationalist ideals are exclusive and narrow because, firstly, they conceive of poetry as an exclusively male vocation; and, secondly, because they rely on the conventionally fixed dichotomy between the male bard and the female muse/ emblematic object of the poem.⁸

In this sense, Boland's sharp critique of cultural nationalist images and her understanding of the dynamics that underlie such conventions makes her approach "post-colonial", as Graham (1994a: 37) would argue. Nevertheless, Boland resembles Kearney in that her cultural identity is still very important for her. When asked by Wilson (1990b: 84) if she considers herself as an "Irish poet", she assuredly answers that she wishes to be categorized as such, and that a "nation" is a "potent, important image" for her. As she has later admitted, "I knew that as a poet I could not easily do without the idea of the nation", because her reality is inevitably "rooted in one country and one poetic inheritance" (1996a: 128). In fact, nationhood, together with womanhood, is one of the two constituent aspects of Boland's realized identity. In her reliance and dependence on nationhood as a still viable narrative, Boland also shares that "post-nationalism" that Graham (1994a: 36) identifies in Kearney. Boland's rejection of the exclusive tendencies of cultural nationalism does not involve a rejection of nationhood as such. As Said (1994: 277) has explained, "moving beyond nativism does not mean abandoning nationalism; but it does mean thinking of local identity as not exhaustive, and therefore not being anxious to confine oneself to one's own sphere". It is precisely this position that Boland adopts in her poetry. Boland reinvents the notion of Ireland as a more 'inclusive' country, and she attempts to bear witness to the defeats of Irish

⁸ Critics such as Meaney (1993: 138) have blamed Boland for dealing with the images of the nation rather than the legislation of the nation-state. This scholar argues that in Boland's poetry the "poets who silence and reduce Irish women to 'static, passive, ornamental figures' are not accused of reproducing or reinforcing the ideology of the state". In contrast to Meaney's assertion, we should remember that, for Boland, the source of women's simplification in Irish literature does not lie so much in politics and gender but mostly in the morality of the poetic art. As Boland argues elsewhere, when poetic emblems become decorative clichés, the "necessary ethical relation" that exists "between imagination and image" is violated (1996a: 152).

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history and the sufferings of Irish women. In an interview, Boland makes explicit her approach to Irish national identity:

I am not a nationalist. It isn't always in linear time that nations flow along and define themselves. They crystallize in different individuals, at different times, in different voices and images. A "nation" is a potent, important image. It is a concept that a woman writer must discourse with. [...] And I know that as a woman, I couldn't accept the idea of nationhood as it was formulated for me in Irish literature. [...] I would always choose a past that was real and actual and was composed of private, enduring human dignities. [...] That is what a nation means to me. (Wilson 1990b: 84)

Thus, Boland rejects the traditional exclusive and narrow nationalist conception for a new national identity which includes, in her own words "private, enduring human dignities", that is, different voices of individual experiences. Just by being a woman, Boland destabilizes narrow poetic identities, becoming the female author of the poem. On the other hand, by moving her female characters from being the objects to the speaking subjects of the poems and by giving voice to women's experiences, Boland widens the previous exclusive national identity. As Gray (2000: 288) points out, "Boland's idea of nation accommodates difference and in so doing at once deconstructs, and some would say, feminizes, previously held hegemonic and exclusionary ideas of nation". But not all critics agree about praising Boland's treatment of the idea of the nation. Longley (1994: 188), for instance, objects to the woman poet's use of the concept of nationalism, especially to her use of the image of the Achill woman (which Boland employs in both her poetry and prose work),⁹ asserting that

her alternative Muse turns out to be the twin sister of Dark Rosaleen [...]. Boland's new Muse, supposedly based on the varied historical experience of Irish women, looks remarkably like the Sean Bhean Bhocht. By not questioning the nation, Boland recycles the literary cliché from which she desires to escape.

What Longley is really reacting against is Boland's reliance on certain traditional concepts as malleable. The woman poet works from within the literary tradition, challenging and revising conventional images. Whereas she wants to articulate a workable nationalism for women (as a poet she needs a sense of connection and belonging to a nation), Longley wants to replace nationalism "with issues of culture and politics" (Gray 2000: 288).¹⁰ This critic suggests that the debate of

⁹ See Boland's poem "The Achill Woman" in section 7.4.5.3.2., pp. 506-513.

¹⁰ Accusations such as this have been sharply turned upside down by Ní Dhomhnaill (1992: 27-28), who, raising her voice in Boland's defence, argues that this woman poet "is dead right to engage polemically" with the image of Mother Ireland.

what constitutes Irishness must be dropped from Ireland's cultural and political discourse: "I think that 'Irishness', with its totalitarian tinge, ought to be abandoned rather than made more inclusive" (Longley 1994: 179). Nevertheless, as critical as Longley is of Boland's stance on nationalism, she seems to coincide with Boland when defending an open, fluid sense of Irish cultural identity, one that avoids binarism and exclusion. As we have seen, Boland (1974: 56) expressed at the time of writing *The War Horse* that cultural unity is not possible in an Irish culture characterized by fragmentation and disunity. Concluding her essay "From Cathleen to Anorexia: the Breakdown of Irelands", Longley (1994: 195) makes the following call:

It would be preferable to downgrade nationalism to the ignoble status traditionally enjoyed by Unionism [...]. The image of the web is female, feminist, connective – as constructed with male polarization. So is the ability to inhabit a range of relations rather than a single allegiance [...]. [Yet] to admit more varied, mixed, fluid, and relational kinds of identity would advance nobody's territorial claim. It would undermine cultural defences. It would subvert the male pride that keeps up the double frontier-siege. All this would be on the side of life.

Boland's mature poetry reflects Longley's sense of cultural identity. As we will see, the woman poet rejects traditional exclusivism, for "more varied, mixed, fluid, and relational kinds of identity". Thus, both women treat the idea of Irish culture as pluralistic. The difference lies in their approach to nationalism: whereas Longley sees nationalism as harmful, Boland wants to formulate a new understanding of it. As an Irish poet, she needs a sense of connection with her past, and this involves establishing a dialogue with the idea of the nation. In this sense, Boland's stance is in-between that "post-nationalism" and "post-colonialism" that Graham (1994a) identifies. Her position is, as this Irish critic has explained in a later essay, one that still places "ultimate importance on the nation as the cultural dynamic of colonialism/post-colonialism; but it stops celebrating the nation and seeks to demystify the 'pathos of authenticity' which the nation demands" (Graham 1995/6: 35).¹¹

In order to gain some insight into the ways in which Boland examines nationalist ideals, and imaginatively reconstructs notions of Ireland and Irish identity, the following two sections focus on two significant poems of Boland's poetic career: "Mise Eire" (*The Journey*) and "Mother Ireland" (*The Lost Land*). In these poems we will see how Boland seeks to construct a complex Irish identity, one which encompasses the different experiences of women's lives.

¹¹ Boland's critique of that "pathos of authenticity" that nationalism defends will be further explained in section 7.4.4., "Towards a deconstruction of the poetic self".

7.4.3.4. Away from Pearse's "I am Ireland"

In one of her most popular poems, "Mise Eire", Boland reclaims the feminine persona often given to Ireland. As Irigaray (1991: 169) argues, "Woman ought to rediscover herself, among other things, through the images of herself already deposited in history". The image that Boland recovers from 'history' is in particular the Old Woman of Beare. The title of the poem echoes Patrick Pearse's poem "I am Ireland", a prototype of the passive, patient, and sorrowful Mother Ireland. Patrick Henry Pearse (1879-1916) was a commander of the Republican forces in the Easter Rising, 1916. When the uprising failed, Pearse was sentenced to death by a British court, and executed in Kilmainham Jail on May 3, 1916 (Welch 2000: 305). After his death, he was raised as a martyr for the Irish cause. His poems are prototypical examples of the "literary nationalism" that Boyce (1991: 155) has identified, a cultural nationalist movement that conceived of literature as a means of teaching nationalism and national self-awareness. Pearse's poem "I am Ireland" was originally written in Gaelic in 1912:

I am Ireland:
I am older than the Old Woman of
Beare.

Great my glory
I that bore Cuchulainn the valiant.

Great my shame:
my own children that sold their
mother.

I am Ireland:
I am lonelier than the Old Woman of
Beare. (Quoted in Kennelly 1970: 295)

Pearse's form of cultural nationalism attempted to create an image of an Ireland which was pastoral, mythic, and unmodernized, a new country that defined itself as 'not-English', and therefore, uncontaminated by foreign influence. That is why it drew its sources from Celtic mythology, in particular from figures such as The Old Woman of Beare, Shan Bhean Bhocht, Cathleen ni Houlihan, and Dark Rosaleen. Cuchulainn became the dominant fictional figure for "literary nationalists" such as Pearse, and also for the Literary Revival.¹² Nevertheless, and unlike Yeats, for instance, Pearse more openly linked these pre-colonial myths with Christian allegories, in particular the Virgin Mary. For Pearse, the Catholic religion and its view of womanhood, especially motherhood, were metaphors intrinsically connected with national identity.

¹² This Gaelic figure became the subject of numerous writings, such as Standish James O'Grady's *History of Ireland: Cuchulainn and his Contemporaries* (1880) and *The Coming of Cuchulainn* (1894), and Yeats and Lady Gregory's *Cuchulainn of Muirthemme* (1902), for instance (Welch 2000: 198)

Furthermore, he identified Christian martyrdom with the nationalist struggle. In his poem "I am Ireland", the female speaker appears as a dispossessed and sorrowful mother, who has been betrayed and abandoned by her sons, and who yearns for the appearance of another Cuchulain who will restore her happiness. In this sense, she lacks agency and depends on a male hero to 'save' her from the British oppression.

In her version of Pearse's poem, Boland rewrites "I am Ireland" as "I am a woman", an assertion reiterated twice in the poem, as we will see. This new woman is 'Mise Eire', the Goddess Éiru, one of the Celtic triple Goddesses of ancient Celtic mythology, together with Banba and Fotla, who wielded authority equal to, or greater than, that of their male counterparts (Condren 1989: 26). In this sense, and like Pearse, Boland deliberately goes back to a pre-colonized Gaelic society. The main difference is that Boland changes Pearse's 'Ireland' into a stronger and more humanized figure, who preserves its original high status and independence. Pagan mythology is thence used to counteract Catholic nationalist imagery. Boland implicitly criticizes Pearse's adaptation of the powerful archetypal female deity into a sorrowful mother and dependent heroine. From the very the very first line, Boland subverts the conventional evocation of Mother Ireland:

I won't go back to it –
my nation displaced
into old dactyls
oaths made
by the animal tallows
of the candle –

land of the Gulf Stream,
the small farm,
the scalded memory,
the songs
that bandage up the history,
the words
that make a rhythm of the crime

where time is time past.

The employment of the first person pronoun and the volitional 'will' indicate that Mother Ireland gains authority as a speaking voice. We do hear a woman talking, not simply being talked about. As Boland (2001a: 100) has argued, re-perceiving the old object and subject relation allows her to show "the flaws of the relation between Irish poetry and the national ethos". In contrast to the helpless figure of Pearse's poem, this new female figure is empowered to make decisions. She is determined to discard the romantic nationalism in which "old dactyls", that is to say, traditional evocations in poetry, were put before the interests of the nation. In this sense, her nation was "displaced", degraded, and misrepresented. By using the possessive in "my nation", Boland

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maintains the image of Ireland as a woman and mother, who is in charge of 'her sons', and who feels bound to teach them a new form of writing poetry. As explained, Longley (1994: 173) criticizes Boland for recycling the literary cliché of Mother Ireland, since, according to this critic, it prevents the woman poet from destabilizing the idea of the nation. Nevertheless, in contrast to Longley's assertion, Boland *does* destabilize the idea of the nation, for she rejects in "Mise Eire" the traditional abstract portrait of Mother Ireland. This new female voice discards former poetry, the "old dactyls", for its aim to incite rebellion and especially violence, and she views as useless the "oaths" the rebels made to save a nation which was allegorized as an unreal emblematic female figure. In their ideal, Boland implies, these patriots performed sorts of ritual and artificial acts, "by the animal tallows/ of the candle", which were shaped in the form of ballads. This tradition of Irish nationalist songs aimed to put a "bandage", a protective gauze, on the nation in order to maintain its own distinct cultural identity. Nevertheless, "bandage" also implies immobilization, incapability of renewal. Nationalist "songs", Boland implies, have covered up ('bandaged') the singularity of individual experiences. On the other hand, if there is a bandage, there is also a wound. The female voice implies that her nation is injured and "scalded" by the terrible and painful historical experiences. The muse Mother is here mourning for the injury done to her country, and complaining about the damage done to her, by immortalizing her as a passive and unrealistic emblem. In contrast to Pearse's poem, where Cathleen foresees the coming of "Cuchulainn the valiant", who will save her from her dispossessed state, in "Mise Eire", the sense of defeat by Mother Ireland is not transmuted into victory by the presence of the male hero. As Hagen and Zelman (1991: 447) explain, "the image of Cathleen protected by Cuchulain does nothing to soothe [her] anger and suffering". Mother Ireland's suffering stems from her coming to the realization that the traditional ballads of her past made "a rhythm of the crime"; in other words, she understands that the political poetry of the 'literary nationalists' was not only inappropriate because it did not bear witness to the reality of Irish men and women, but also because it incited rebellion, "crime", and death, and not communication and understanding between the different warring factions. "Mise Eire" senses that she was, in the past, helpless, paralyzed in "a palsy of regrets". But, now, her earlier enfeebled condition seems to be undermined by the strength of her new self, rising up and speaking with an autonomous voice. When remembering her past, 'Mise Eire' reiterates her desire to discard her earlier state:

No. I won't go back to it
My roots are brutal

There is self-determination in these lines; her resoluteness is indicated by the shortness of lines, and the well constructed syntactic arrangements. In *John Bull's Other Island*, Bernard Shaw explicitly criticizes the fact that Irish patriotism is moved by unreal dreams such as the abstract portrayal of a poor woman/ Ireland begging for the courageous protection of Irish men. Through the speaking voice of Larry Doyle (an Irish emigrant living in England), Shaw (1991: 137) complains: "I wish I could find a country where the facts were not so brutal and the dreams not unreal". Boland agrees with Shaw on criticizing this nationalist ideal exaltation of a heroic Gaelic past. On the other hand, she shows her determination to write about these "brutal" facts that Shaw mentions in his play. Mother Ireland suddenly realizes that her "roots are brutal", that her past is not as glamorous as nationalist discourses have reflected. Gaining authority, the woman suddenly advocates her right to emerge in less idealized roles. She offers a new view of herself which is clearly opposed to the virginal, bodiless, and mythical portrayal of national writings: the garrison slut and the Irish emigrant holding "her half-dead baby":

I am the woman-
a sloven's mix
of silk at the wrists,
a sort of dove-strut
in the precincts of the garrison-

who practices
the quick frictions,
the rictus of delight
and gets cambric for it,
rice-coloured silks.

I am the woman
in the gansy-coat
on board the "Mary Belle"
in the huddling cold,

holding her half-dead baby to her
as the wind shifts East
and North over the dirty
water of the wharf [...]

Boland widens the abstract personification of Ireland-as-woman to include different kinds of women. First of all, this new woman becomes a whore, who trades sex and practices "the rictus of delight", a radical rewriting of the nationalist icon of virginal Ireland being raped by corrupted England. Rather than beautiful, this prostitute is described as "sloven", careless in her personal appearance. She is portrayed as walking with pompous bearing in the environs of the garrison, in order to impress the soldiers at the military post. In contrast to the former representation of Mother Ireland, she does not incite rebellion. Her strut is "dove", indicating that she advocates peace, conciliation, and negotiation, instead of confrontation or armed conflict. On the other hand, her

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earlier bodiless figure is replaced by a new woman who wears “silk at the wrists”, “cambric”, and “silks”. Secondly, “Mother Ireland” has the potential to become an émigré, forced to escape from her country. The fact that the woman who is leaving the homeland is on board a ship called “Mary Belle” is not accidental. The name of the boat embodies the two main virtues imposed on women by patriarchal tradition: they must be like “Mary” (virginal, pure, and devoted to others), and they must also be “Belle” (attractive and beautiful). Boland invokes the patriarchal Madonna/whore dichotomy in order to create a new figure of Mother Ireland which encompasses both images: she is both the prostitute and the scarifying mother; in other words, she is a more real entity. The lexical repetition of “I am the woman” indicates Mother Ireland’s ability to be different kinds of women at the same time. The woman poet evokes those female lives which were erased from history and literature, precisely by being opposed to the pure and virginal woman encouraged by patriarchal tradition. Fogarty (1999: 270) explains that Boland “depicts female counter-selves that refuse to function as comforting and affirmative mirror images”. In fact, Boland is here rewriting the conventional image of Mother Ireland in order to suggest a more unpleasant reality: how Irish women have had to survive, either by selling their bodies as prostitutes, or by emigrating to a new country where they could start a new life.

In this sense, nationhood is not something to be praised by nationalist ballads and songs, but a cruel reality of dispossession and oppression. This poem moves away from the traditional political idea that a defeated nation must be reborn as a triumphant woman. As Kearney (1985b: 76) argues, “the more dispossessed the Irish people became in reality, the more they sought to repossess a sense of identity in the realm of ideality”. In other words, the more colonially oppressed the Irish people became, the more unreal and spiritualized the mythical dream of a victorious nation became. In the poem under discussion, Boland does not intend to follow the Celtic Revival idealization of triumphant nationhood. She shows instead a nation which has been defeated by a history of colonization and by an oppressive nationalism. The “half-dead baby” of “Mise Eire” is an emblem for a nation half-destroyed by violence and crimes.¹³ But, this baby is only half-dead, implying that there is a slight possibility for renewal, for rejuvenation. Despite the “scalded memory” of the woman in “Mise Eire”, there is a hope for the creation of “a new language”, a new poetry which will replace the “old dactyls” and “songs”. In this sense, Boland establishes a tension between her aim at recovery and the female voice of the emigrant woman, which is

¹³ This image takes us back to all those depictions of children made by Boland mostly in *The War Horse*. In poems such as “Child of Our Time” and “Naoise at Four”, the poet focused on the vulnerable and innocent image of a child in order to counteract the violence and cruelty of the adult world.

mingling the immigrant
guttural with the vowels
of homesickness who neither
knows nor cares that

a new language
is a kind of scar
and heals after a while
into a passable imitation
of what went before.

The Irish emigrant woman, in her specific context of suffering and hardship, does not even care about the damage done by the national tradition, but is only concerned with survival. In contrast, the female speaker is able to acknowledge the harm done by her past. She is able to see the kind of “psychological scar” (Gray 2000: 283) left on the emigrant woman by her absence in historical accounts, as well as by the loss of her original language. As in other poems, Boland elaborates images of scarring to expose the rawness of the wound in the Irish mind and memory.¹⁴ First of all, the scar suggests the damage done to women by the archetypical feminine image of nationalist (patriarchal) texts. As Fogarty (1994: 99) puts it, “the final stanza of Boland’s poem shows that the new language [...] is scored by the wounds of patriarchy”. Secondly, the scar is a motive for the loss of the Mother tongue, the Irish language. In a lecture at a conference in Oxford, Steiner (1995: 10) made an interesting remark as regards the loss of a language:

The extinction of a language, however remote, however immune to historical-material success or diffusion, is the death of a unique world view, of a sense of remembrance, of present being and futurity. A truly dead language is irreplaceable. It closes that which Kierkegaard bade us keep open if our humanity was to evolve: ‘the wounds of possibility’.

Boland’s new language is described as showing this scar, “the wounds of possibility” Steiner talks about. As she has argued in *Object Lessons*, “[a] small island, next to a larger one, loses both territory and language. And, after centuries of oppression, recovers part of one and less of the other” (1996a: 63). This story of “humiliation” (ibid), as Boland calls it, is recorded in “Mise Eire”, where the speaker shows her concern for the death of the Irish language, and for the wounds it leaves on the people.¹⁵ Nevertheless, in spite of this painful loss, the speaker finds the prospect

¹⁴ The image of the wound has already appeared in “The Greek Experience” and “Suburban Woman” (*The War Horse*), and it will be a motif in subsequent poems, such as “The Making of an Irish Goddess” (*Outside History*) and “Mother Ireland” (*The Lost Land*), which will be analyzed later on.

¹⁵ The remnants and the loss of a mother tongue are also mourned over, as Haberstroh (1996: 216-217) explains, by some other contemporary poets in Ireland. Moya Cannon, for instance, praises in “Prodigal” and “Yaom”, the value of the Irish language, for the older Gaelic language is “a source of nourishment” which counteracts the modern values. Paul Muldoon’s “Clonfeacle” also attempts to preserve and raise the status of the decaying language Cannon describes.

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of a “new language”, an idiom that represents a process of scarring and healing of the damage caused by a patriarchal nationalist tradition. In “Child of Our Time” (*The War Horse*), the speaker promised to “rebuild” the “broken images” and create “a new language”. In this poem, Boland is carrying out this compromise. Her new language addresses the lived experience traditionally omitted by historical and literary accounts. Now, Mother Ireland is no longer an unreal and abstract female figure, but real Irish women, such as prostitutes and emigrants. As Gray (2000: 284) explains, clichéd images of women in traditional Irish literature, which function as the imposed ‘old’ language, obscure the pain and labour which define Irish women’s contribution to the history of the nation. Boland’s “new language”, in contrast to the old language, attempts to bear witness to actual flesh-and-blood Irish women, so that they are not absent anymore from cultural documents. In this sense, “Mise Eire” is a new and more accurate national female icon.

One of the sharpest criticisms that this poem has received has been Meaney’s (1993a: 149). This critic contends that in a poem like “Mise Eire”, Boland’s version of Mother Ireland perpetuates feminine stereotypes. Her reconstruction “leaves maternity and sexuality separated”, as those traditional female roles that Irish nationalism has maintained. In this sense, Meaney accuses Boland of being “content with Pearse’s version” and of not using “the other possibilities offered by the [Gaelic] tradition”, which is not always idealizing in its representation of women (i.e. the conjunction of fertility and sexuality that the literary and oral Cailleach Bhéarra tradition offers) (ibid). Boland indeed subverts one specific Irish variant (the nationalist trope) by the more general Western myth: the Madonna/ whore dichotomy, as we have seen. Nevertheless, Meaney omits Boland’s general tendency in her mature work to avoid masculine constructs of women by her fluid representations of her female characters. As we will see in section 7.4.4.3., Boland depicts her women as subjects who are constantly moving in diffused lights, and therefore, impossible to grasp by any sort of artistic representation. On the other hand, and most importantly for the purposes of Boland’s reconstruction of Mother Ireland in this poem, this critic ignores the speaker’s contention at the end of the poem that her reconstruction of nationalist images is only partial and incomplete. Boland’s new language is only a “passable”, but not outstanding, “imitation” of how women in the past were. Boland avoids writing her subversive speech as another hegemonic and dominant (nationalist) discourse. As we will see in section 7.4.5., it is quite typical of Boland to undermine her poetic authority as her poems come to a close. In this poem, the speaker recognizes at the end that her language is imperfect, scarred, and that her reconstruction of Mother Ireland can only be malleable and workable as a copy of previous constructs. In this sense, whereas she subverts this nationalist and patriarchal icon, she still

acknowledges that her reconstruction is incomplete, and shaped by the “constructs” upon which women have been defined (interview with Villar Argáiz 2005a).

7.4.3.5. Towards a fluid national identity in “Mother Ireland”

In “Mother Ireland” (*The Lost Land*), Boland makes explicit, once again, her new stance on the age-old equation of woman and nation. The poem witnesses the transformation of the visionary, transcendent and defenceless entity of Irish nationalism into a powerful and self-sufficient woman. As in “Mise Eire”, this new female icon may correspond, in its very independence of action and decision, to those depictions of the powerful, active, and sexual goddesses of pre-colonial Irish mythology. Significantly enough, Boland deliberately produces deviations in the layout and graphology in order to reinforce her subversion of traditional national allegories and the traditional poem layout. There are also other significant stylistic devices employed by Boland which parallel the emancipation of her new muse. The poem is written from the personal perspective of Mother Ireland, who is able to recognize that she has been an object and now is also a subject. Thus, the first person pronoun in singular recurs in almost every single line. She is both the speaker and the object of discussion, the creative self and the topic of the poem. By including both, poetic image and poetic speaker in the same framed picture, Boland expands the boundaries of what seems at first a fixed national icon. The poem starts by introducing us to Mother Ireland's acknowledgement of her earlier image:

At first
 I was land
 I lay on my back to be fields
and when I turned
 on my side
 I was hill
under freezing stars.

These lines serve to illustrate what can certainly be viewed as the traditional feminization of the Irish land. The woman in the poem asserts that she was “land”, “fields”, and “a hill”. As explained, Armengol (2001: 9) points out that several ideological and political explanations have been put forward in order to account for the traditional relationship between gender and land. First, by turning Ireland into a passive, pure, and weak woman, Irish men exerted their authority over many flesh-and-blood Irish women, “so many Irish women were transformed into mythical, bodiless, idealized, and motherly figures” (ibid). On the other hand, the transformation of the Irish land into a myth of femininity allowed Irish men to keep an illusory dream of a common and invincible national identity, which was being snatched from them by the English colonizers (ibid). In this

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sense, the Irish land was portrayed as a defenceless and weak woman who needed to be rescued. The first lines of "Mother Ireland" portray a female entity which is incapable of carrying out any action. A linguistic analysis of the verbs indicate that this woman is static ("I *was*", "I *lay* on my back"). Even when she *turns* on her side (movement indicated by the disruption in the layout), she does not apparently achieve any significant transformation, but is a "hill/ under the freezing stars". Nevertheless, the transformation that Mother Ireland experiences in her earthly figure is noteworthy. Whereas 'lands' and 'fields' are territories which can be controlled by human beings (in the sense of being exploited in agricultural terms), a 'hill' stands out as a more uncontrollable place, difficult to plough and therefore to conquer. This change in appearance precludes Mother Ireland's imminent transformation. Boland's use of constellations (common in her mature work) is also significant. They indicate that the woman speaker and/or her female characters inhabit the figurative end of the world, the place most distant and humanly inaccessible. In "Mother Ireland", the image of the "freezing stars" suggests coldness, the solidification of life. Mother Ireland's existence, as the stars in the sky, is always present, but largely unnoticed. Furthermore, she is a mythical and idealized figure, and not a real flesh-and-blood woman:

I did not see.
 I was seen,
Night and day
 words fell on me.
 Seeds. Raindrops.
Chips of frost.

Notice the passive subject in "I was seen" and the affected object in "words fell on me". The passive voice indicates that Mother Ireland is the object of someone else's perception, which means that she is not allowed to interpret, but others can interpret her indeed. She can't initiate any action and she adopts a submissive and compliant role. Until now, Boland has deliberately omitted commas and written short verse lines. Suddenly, a succession of short noun phrases followed by a period, appear: "Seeds. Raindrops./ Chips of frost.". The woman poet is here intentionally slowing down the pace, anticipating the climatic moment when Mother Ireland rises up. The "Raindrops" and "Chips of frost" enhance the sense of coldness and time freezing. On the other hand, the image of the "seeds" reinforces the association of the fertility concept with both women and land. As Almengol (2001: 9) rightly points out, the gendering of the land as feminine is a universal trend that derives from the apparent association of the fertility concept with women and the earth: "both women and the land share a capacity to give forth life, and therefore, bring about physical changeability". This associative pattern of fertility between land and women is also going to be

mentioned by Boland in "Mother Ireland". The mythological woman is going to resurge with the aid of a seed:

From one of them
I learned my name.
I rose up. I remembered it.
Now I could tell my story.
It was different
from the story told about me.

These seeds falling upon Mother Ireland enable her to achieve transformation. They represent the source of the beginning of life, the germ of a new female identity. Learning her own name implies gaining insight into what constitutes her own female identity. Remembering her name, on the other hand, involves re-asserting her own female self. Thus, we are witnessing the female process which all literary women artists, according to Gilbert and Gubar (2000: 17), follow: self-definition is achieved when Mother Ireland learns her name, what the "I" means; self-assertion is attained when she remembers her identity, and positively declares her creative "I AM". The act of rising up signifies a reaction against her earlier imposed self, her static and inert status. In her elevation, she awakens and comes to the recognition of her female reality, and more importantly, her female potential. Now, she is the agent of her own actions, and not the passive and affected object: "Now I could tell my story". This new agency is further manifested as the poem progresses and active constructions become more predominant:

And now also
it was spring.
I could see the wound I had left
in the land by leaving it.
I travelled west.
Once there
I looked with so much love
at every field
as it unfolded
its rusted wheel and its pram chassis
and at the gorse-
bright distances
I had been
that they misunderstood me.
Come back to us
they said.
Trust me I whispered.

As the poem records the significance of the change experienced by Mother Ireland, lines become deliberately longer. Before, there was no distinct female identity, and thus, lines were short and clipped. Now, in contrast, the woman speaker knows precisely what she is. Boland employs, as in most of her maternal poems, the myth of Persephone. Persephone, the daughter of the Earth

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goddess Ceres, resurrects in spring. The seed which fell upon Mother Ireland enables her to come back to life, as Persephone does in spring. The legend enables the woman poet to explore the raising of a mythological female figure, the coming back to life of a woman, who, after a long period of darkness, wakes up and asserts her own female identity. As Persephone had done in the myth, Mother Ireland rises up in this poem. The woman's emancipation leaves "a wound [...] in the land by leaving it". This wound, as in "Mise Eire", suggests the injury done by the clichéd images of women in traditional Irish literature. But most importantly, it also suggests the scar and damage that Mother Ireland creates on the surface of national history by her emancipation and exile. Boland is conscious that by voluntarily abandoning her native country, she causes a cultural change, an alteration of canonical poetic images. Mother Ireland's potential for change and confidence in her speech parallels her emigration from Ireland. By removing her position and travelling to other places, Boland implies that cultural identity must not be exclusive (of a particular single place), but plural. As we will see, postcolonial theorists such as Bhabha (1995: 209), Said (1994: 284), and Hall (1990: 447) believe that postcolonial agency is achieved by emigration. This stance is well summarized by Boyce Davies in her 1994 study on the construction of the female subject through black women's literary and cultural texts. This critic argues that emigration is fundamental for the acquisition of a female identity freed from colonial and nationalist ideologies (Boyce 1994: 37). As she puts it, black female subjectivity "asserts agency as it crosses the borders, journeys, migrates, and so re-claims as it re-asserts" (ibid). In "Mother Ireland", the speaker only "re-claims" and "re-asserts" herself, as she argues, by "leaving" Ireland and "travell[ing] west". She breaks the traditionally strictly-defined borders imposed by nationalism, in favour of a more open and fluid sense of Irish culture.¹⁶ Emigration involves accepting different settings, different speakers, which are equally suitable for defining (Irish) nationalism. Boland's new concept of nation recognizes the need to move away from exclusive single points of view. On the other hand, the fact that Mother Ireland travels west is significant. First of all, the "west" can be understood as that land free of colonial influence, the western regions of the country where the Irish language and the Gaelic traditions are best preserved. Nevertheless, the "west" can mean something else, something more interesting and relevant for the purposes of Boland's subversion. This new geographical location that the speaker refers to stands for the United States. In fact, Boland's mature work is loaded with references to Irish emigration to North America, as we will see. Mother Ireland falls in love with this new landscape, its fields, vegetation, and ordinary objects. It is in this alien setting where she achieves a sense of

¹⁶ This fact will be further manifested in the following sections, where we will observe how Boland's speakers constantly cross geographical and national boundaries.

belonging. Boland implies that grounding oneself in a new place is both possible and positive, for it allows the subject to adopt a more critical attitude towards hegemonic ideals. By retaining this national icon, the woman poet does not ultimately reject nationalism (as we saw Longley did), but establishes a dialogue with it. On the other hand, by recurring to exile, the woman poet enhances her intention to formulate a workable idea of nationalism, as a more inclusive and fluid ideology. Boland lays claim to a new understanding of what it means to be Irish. Irishness is for Boland a category that is beyond national boundaries.

In this new American landscape, Boland finds the highest point of her creative potential. The "bright distances" suggest the reflection of Mother Ireland/ Boland's creative powers, and their potential to envisage new liberating territories across the sea. Now, Mother Ireland has the ability to see, in contrast to her earlier impaired situation. As her sight is now restored, Mother Ireland is able to comprehend that the national literary tradition "misunderstood" her. In the last lines of the poem, the patriarchal tradition summons her to come back to her native land, so that she could encourage the male patriots to the national cause. Whereas in "Athene's Song" (*New Territory*), the woman eventually denies her own femaleness in the face of the persistent call of the patriarchal tradition, Mother Ireland, in this poem, rejects coming back to her earlier self. The woman-speaker is confident enough of her own inner female self, and consequently replies "Trust me". As a self-assured woman, she calms down the crowd by telling them to rely on her. The comparison between "Mother Ireland" (*The Lost Land*) and "Athene's Song" (*New Territory*) offers significant insight into Boland's evolution from being constrained by the patriarchal tradition to being liberated from it. The woman poet is now confident of her artistic skills. Her acknowledgement of the potential of her own creative self leads her to subvert the dominant aesthetics of the inherited tradition. In "Athene's Song", the War goddess ultimately leaves her pipe in the grass, sacrificing her desire to play her 'music of love', in other words, to express her womanhood. In her 'Female'/ 'Liberationist' phase, Boland gets Athene's abandoned pipe back, and establishes a new music which gives voice to her own experience as a woman. "Mother Ireland" is Athene coming back to life as a new female and strong creature.

In spite of the general female authority that this poem reflects, it is important to note that Mother Ireland can only "whisper" in contrast to more potent nationalist discourses that are able to "say", that is, to speak loudly. As in "Mise Eire", Boland, through the speaking voice of this new national icon, does not attempt to create a dominant and authoritarian discourse. As the following two sections will demonstrate, Boland's mature work is loaded with 'whispers' and 'silences', soft voices that stand in contrast to other hegemonic and potent discourses, such as imperialism,

nationalism, and Catholicism. As we will see, in her poetry Boland avoids exerting poetic authority, and she stands out as a rather powerless and vulnerable poetic speaker.

7.4.3.6. Conclusion

When the image Women-Ireland-Muse meets Eavan Boland, the “breakdown of Nationalist ideology” Longley (1994: 186) talks about becomes particularly clear. As Longley (1994: 186-187) explains, nationalism still has a strong effect on Irish women: “[e]ven on her death-bed Cathleen-Anorexia exerts a residual power over the image and self-images of *all* Irish women. Both at home and abroad, she still confers status on selected kinds of Irish femaleness”. Boland is one of those women on whom nationalism has had a great effect. In the preface to his play *John Bull's Other Island*, Shaw argued that a secure national identity is invisible: “a healthy nation is as unconscious of its nationality as a healthy man of his bones” (cited by Frazier 1997: 10). Thus, if for Boland national identity becomes a painful obsession, as we have seen in her poetry, this is because she is not totally sure about her own place and role in nationalism. Establishing the relationship between women and nation is therefore at the core of Boland's mature poetry. As we have observed in “Mise Eire” and “Mother Ireland”, the traditional national icon breaks free of the conventional text and becomes the author of her own statements. By telling the story of her nation mainly by means of her sexuality, Boland contends that Irish women poets are really empowered to write a new poetry which transforms the received national culture, and hence, their concept of national identity.

7.4.4. A deconstruction of the poetic self

7.4.4.1. Introduction

As Boland (1996a: 132) has admitted, she attempts to bring to the surface of her poems the two categories ‘Irishness’ and ‘womanhood’. In the process, the very construction of identity itself (identity as an Irish citizen, and identity as a woman) is called into question. For Boland, ideas such as Irishness and womanhood, although necessary for the individual, are mere human ‘constructions’. As she has recently argued, “I think all human identity is fictional in a way”, and later she says that “[w]e are constructed by the construct” (interview with Villar Argáiz 2005a). Following Showalter’s (1999: 13), Memmi’s (1990: 7), and Fanon’s (1990: 231) findings, decolonization for the colonized subject must not be based on a politics of opposition (woman vs. man; black vs. white), and this is the main starting point from which to discuss Eavan Boland’s deconstruction of identity. Of course, one might be bewildered at this assertion, for, how to construct the category ‘Irishness’ if not by recurring to some specific features, some essences, which distinguish the ‘Irish’ subject from the (English) one, such as Irish nationalism and Celtic revivalism have done? Or, how to construct the category womanhood if not in opposition to the category man, such as radical feminism does? In what follows, I will show how Boland attempts to deconstruct both categories by occupying an ‘in-between’ space from which to counteract essentialist notions of identity.

The marginality that Boland has experienced both as an Irish person and as a woman writer has allowed her to have, as she believes, “clear eyes and a quick critical sense” (1996a: 147). The dislocation that she has felt as an Irish girl living in London is a disguised blessing for Boland, for, as she explains, “[i]t warned me away from facile definitions” of ‘Irishness’ (1996a: 179). On the other hand, Boland (1996a: 147) also understands her invisibility as a woman writer within the Irish poetic tradition as a “disguised grace”, because it has allowed her to see more clearly the simplifications and “distortions” of ‘womanhood’ deep in the very structure of Irish poetry. Boland has recently expressed the benefits from experiencing an “intimidatory disrespect” as a woman writer immersed in the restrictive circle of Dublin literary life: “For me, that was a subtle and painful exclusion. But it was also a motive to think more carefully about what I was doing – more carefully than I might have done if conditions hadn’t been so inhospitable” (interview with Villar Argáiz 2005a). Boland’s double marginalization, as an Irish citizen in London and as a woman writer in Ireland, have given her “an unique vantage point” from which “to make a critique of the tradition and its resistances that helped me, and I hope might help other writers” (ibid). In this sense, her discourse is located on the margins of nationalist and feminist representations alike.

Positioning herself in this border location allows Boland to act subversively, to move away from authoritarian constructions of identity.

An indication that Boland desires to move away from essentialist notions of 'nationhood' and 'womanhood' is her fierce critique of nationalism and feminism, as well as her own way of defining her poetry. Boland (1996a: 234) has extensively narrated how the contrary pulls of nationalism and feminism have threatened her project as a poet. Neither ideology helps the Irish woman poet to achieve artistic decolonization, for they both lay powerful prescriptions "on how men and women should and should not write" (ibid). Although she admits that she doesn't find nationalism "as enabling an orthodoxy as feminism" and that "[f]eminism is a powerful, ethical ideology", she further argues that "the most enabling ethical ideologies are anti-imaginative, painful as it may be to admit it" (interview with Villar Argáiz 2005a). In this sense, Boland (1996a: 254) has asserted that she is "neither a separatist nor a postfeminist", and that, although she considers herself to be an Irish poet, she is not a nationalist writer (interview with Wilson 1990b: 84). In this sense, her project is to move her poetry away from the restrictions imposed by nationalism and radical feminism (with their authoritative views on identity).

Boland's definition of her own poetry also shows how she tries to locate her work outside the realm of definite doctrines and ideologies: "My poetry begins for me where certainty ends. I think the imagination is an ambiguous and untidy place, and its frontiers are not accessible to the logic of feminism for that reason" (Boland 1996a: 254). This definition of poetry as encompassing ambiguity responds to Boland's desire to create her work outside essentialist feminism, which (as nationalism) constructs identity on differences and opposition. Boland resists defining her work in opposition, for such action would be polarizing. In this sense, when writing poetry, Boland finds that all sorts of "beliefs, convictions, certainties get left on that threshold" (interview with Allen-Randolph 1993b: 125). In this sense, poetry for Boland becomes not a place of "convictions" but a place of ambiguity.

By viewing her poetry as an uncertain terrain, Boland attempts to move away from counter-hegemonic discourses and to elude the politics of polarity. This brings her close to recent postmodernist, feminist, and postcolonial attempts to envisage alternative ways for both a politics of blame and even a more destructive politics of confrontation. Postmodernist theorists such as Jean-François Lyotard and Jean Baudrillard have rejected anything that might be linked to the "metanarrative of emancipation", and advocate adopting the position of "the anti-political individual" (Sarup 1993: 155, 105). Similarly, feminists like Kristeva (1986d) have expressed reluctance to collective political action and have defended a politics of marginality. This feminist critic asserts that political active intellectuals are hopelessly caught in the very logic of power he

or she wishes to destroy. Like these postmodernist and feminist moves, postcolonial theorists like Said (1995: 73), Bhabha (1995: 9), Spivak (interview with Bhatnagar et al. 1990: 71), and Hall (1990: 230) do not view political activism as the most effective resistant attitude to adopt, because it runs the risk of perpetuating the dominant symbolic systems it seeks to undermine. As Moore-Gilbert (2000: 139) argues when talking about Bhabha, “[for him] those who oppose the dominant power on its own terms or in its own language are necessarily caught up in its logic and thus perpetuate it”. In *Orientalism*, Said (1995: 73) warns of the dangers of inhaling the discourse of power employed by the West in order to manipulate and dominate the native population: “My hope is to illustrate the formidable structure of cultural domination and, specifically for formerly colonized peoples, the dangers and temptations of employing this structure upon themselves and upon others”. For the four postcolonial theorists mentioned above, the only way to elude the discourse of power intrinsic in the ‘identity politics’ of imperialism and nationalism, is by adopting a politics of the differential, “a politics of positioning” in Hall’s words (1990: 230), or “a politics of displacement” as Smyth (1998: 205) calls it. This form of politics emphasizes the necessity to adopt a cultural and political pluralism that has the virtue of blurring polarization and allows communication between the ‘self’ and the ‘Other’. In this sense, decolonization would be achieved by what O’Dowd (1990: 54) defines as “the attempt to escape from the colonialist relationship”, from the antagonism “colonizer and colonized”.¹

Boland’s explicit embracing of ambiguity as the place where her ‘apolitical’ poetry can be located tells us a lot about how she is going to construct her identity as an Irish woman poet. Boland consciously embraces ambivalence as the terrain in which to construct her identity. As she has asserted, “turmoil is easily negotiated into ambivalence” (Boland 1996a: 9). This ambivalence, results from the fact that her identity has always revolved around opposing and contradictory poles. Postcolonial theorists and critics as varied as Bhabha (1995: 278), Hall (1990: 230), and Boyce (1994: 36) believe that the subject, in particular the postcolonial one, is complexly constructed through different categories, of different antagonisms.² In her attempt to define her ‘Irishness’ and ‘womanhood’, two categories associated with realized identity, Boland (1996a: 252) explains how she is constantly “assailed by contradictions”. As a young child living in England, Boland feels confused: neither feeling entirely English nor Irish, her identity is fractured. Similarly, as a grown-up woman, Boland has to face a further ambivalence, which results from

¹ This refusal to adopt an explicit political attitude has been the source of much controversy. Sarup (1993: 186) has criticized postmodernist theories such as Lyotard’s theories as leading to “moral and political nihilism”. As we have seen in section 2.4., critics such as Ahmad (1992: 69) and Parry (1987: 29) have also accused postcolonial theorists of ignoring the political struggle of the Third World.

² Whereas Hall focuses on the Caribbean community, Boyce draws her theoretical premises from her study of black women’s literary texts. What is interesting to note is that the three theorists mentioned coincide in asserting that the colonized subject is constituted by multiple identities that do not always make for harmony.

those contradictions found in the very deep structure of the Irish poem: the culturally and socially accepted separation between being a woman and being a writer/poet. In this sense, Boland's identity is based on what Hall (1990: 225) describes as "ruptures and discontinuities". Her work attempts to highlight, rather than heal, the conflict between these antagonistic aspects of her identity. As she has argued, her poetry intends to record the "vivid and divided world of the subject, [...] a world so volatile" that collapses and refreshes "all the other apparently stable meanings in the poem" (Boland 1996a: 189). Boland defends the notion of a "decentred subject", a project at the core, as Sarup (1993: 96) argues, of poststructuralist theory. The contradictions that she has felt as an Irish citizen and as a woman poet are productive rather than delimitating. That is why Boland (1996a: 96) has talked about "the wealth of ambiguity" around her. These contradictions allow her to embrace hybridity and ambivalence as the best strategy to construct her poetic self. As Papastergiadis (1997: 259) has argued, "[t]he positive feature of hybridity is that it invariably acknowledges that identity is constructed through a negotiation of difference, and that the presence of fissures, gaps, and contradictions is not necessarily a sign of failure". The presence of contradictions and ambiguity in Boland's poetry is not "a sign of failure", but a strategy of subversion. In this sense, Boland's work is aligned with that branch of postcolonial and feminist theory that defends hybridity, boundary crossing and fluidity as the best option.³

Bakhtin's (1981) theory of linguistic hybridity, a turning point in current postcolonial debates,⁴ is essential to fully understand this concept. According to Bakhtin (1981: 358), hybridity is the way in which language, even within a single sentence, can be double-voiced:

What is a hybridization? It is a mixture of two social languages within the limits of a single utterance, an encounter, within the arena of an utterance, between two different linguistic consciousnesses, separated from one another by an epoch, by social differentiation or by some other factors.

Bakhtin distinguishes between two types of hybridity, an "organic" hybridity which leads to fusion, and an "intentional" hybridity, which creates separation. The unconscious "organic" hybridity is described as follows:

Unintentional, unconscious hybridization is one of the most important modes in the historical life and evolution of all languages. We may even say that language and languages change historically primarily by hybridization, by means of mixing various 'languages'. (Bakhtin 1981: 358-359)

³ See Green et al. (1996: xvi) who focuses on Francophone postcolonial women writers. Other postcolonial feminist critics, such as Rajan (1993) and Smith and Watson (1992), have similarly embraced hybridity in their discussion of postcolonial literature written by Third World women.

⁴ Bakhtin's double notion of hybridity is later applied by postcolonial critics such as Young (1995: 21-25) and Werbner (1997: 4-5).

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From this perspective, hybridity is the fusion of two languages, an encounter between two different linguistic codes. This hybridization is highly productive historically, for it enables “new world views, [...] new ‘internal forms’ for perceiving the world in words” (p. 360). In this sense, hybridity would mean “creolization”, a term coined by the Caribbean poet Edward Brathwaite (1971: 296) to suggest how, by means of borrowings and mimetic appropriation, two or more cultures or languages merge into a new one.

The second type of hybridity that Bakhtin mentions is the conscious, “intentional” hybridity. In this type of hybridity, Bakhtin explains, “[t]wo points of view are not mixed, but set against each other dialogically” (p. 360). The collision between two different points of view creates a politicized and challenging hybridity which leads to division and separation. The second form of hybridity that Bakhtin distinguishes is viewed by postcolonial critics as the one which undoes authoritative discourse, and undermines the single-voiced authority. As Young (1995: 22) highlights, “within a single discourse, one voice is able to unmask the other”.

Boland’s poetry can be analyzed from the perspective of Bakhtin’s doubled hybridity.⁵ *In Her Own Image* is an instance of Bakhtin’s “organic” hybridity. In this volume, Boland seeks to construct a counter-hegemony that contests dominant representations of women in male cultural and aesthetic practices. In order to do so, she homogenizes women’s experience under the single category ‘Woman’. In this sense, hybridization involves the fusion and assimilation of women’s experiences in the belief that there exists, what French feminism has called, a distinctive ‘sexual difference’.

By contrast, Boland’s mature poetry is characterized by Bakhtin’s (1981: 360) “intentional” hybridity. The poetic voice in Boland seems to be constituted by multiple identities that do not always make for harmony: her identity as Irish, as woman, and as poet. For Boland, the formation of identity is not the accumulation of one essence with another. It rather leads to a place where tensions are constantly recorded. By means of these tensions, Boland will open a space of hybridity and fluidity where opposites are dissolved.

The following two sections analyze Boland’s deconstruction of identity-claims in her mature work from a postcolonial and feminist perspective. I will focus first on those poems where Boland reflects on her young exile from Ireland. I will demonstrate how these diasporic poems record the confusions and contradictions of a girl who does not know where she belongs. Neither feeling entirely English nor ‘authentically’ Irish, Boland will advocate an exiled place, ‘in-between’ identity-claims. In order to study this aspect of Boland’s poetry, I will rely on different

⁵ Young (1995: 24-25) also applies Bakhtin’s doubled notion of hybridity when focusing on Hall’s discussion of black cultural politics in “New Ethnicities” (1996a).

postcolonial theorists who defend hybridity as a subversive strategy for the migrant postcolonial subject. Secondly, I deal with those poems where Boland talks about her present situation as a woman poet back in her home country. I will show how Boland will deliberately occupy a similar productive diasporic place, this time an 'internal' exile, from which to revise misconceived ideas of Irish poetry and womanhood. These poems will be discussed not only from the perspective of postcolonialism, but also bearing in mind French Feminism. These two sections will demonstrate how Boland's mature work provides the prospect of a fluid identity, putting into practice the theoretical postcolonial perspective that "one is always on the move" (Spivak 1990b: 38).

7.4.4.2. To a 'third space': Boland's imposed exile as a young child

Boland's imposed exile as a young child is going to mark her whole production of poetry. As she has argued, her initial poetry is an attempt to write and construct a nation, to overcome her earlier lack of ownership (1996a: 93). In her mature poetry, Boland's early sense of detachment and loneliness as an exiled child has helped her to adopt a more critical stance on notions such as Irishness and nationalism. This section will explore how Boland's return in some of her mature poems to her memories of detachment and loneliness is a resistance mechanism to construct a fluid poetic self that is able to escape imposed restrictive ideologies.

Leaving the country, both voluntarily or involuntarily, for political, economical or intellectual reasons, has traditionally been the topic of discussion of numerous writers. Harte and Pettitt (2000: 70) explain as follows the importance of emigration and exile for the Irish mind:

not only has emigration been a fundamental social fact for many generations, but also the Irish imagination is partly defined by its propensity to engage creatively with displacements, migrations, and peregrinations, from the ancient voyage tales to contemporary narratives of exile and global nomadism.

Various Irish writers have exemplified the exile and "nomadism" that Harte and Pettitt refer to. Note, for instance, the voluntary exile of Irish intellectuals and writers throughout the twentieth century: James Joyce, Bernard Shaw, Samuel Beckett, Brian Moore, W.B. Yeats, Sean O'Casey, Loius MacNeice, Derek Mahon, and Brian Friel among others (Hurtley et al. 1996: 100). Boland's work is not only an exponent of the importance of exile in Irish literature, but is also exemplary of a wider migrant postcolonial discourse which is taking place internationally. The politics of location, or rather dislocation, are as central to Boland's diasporic poems as to that "immigrant genre" that Marangoly (1996: 171) identifies in most postcolonial literary works. Just by looking at the writings of Salman Rushdie, Derek Walcott, V.S. Naipaul, and Bhatari Mukherjee, one

might observe the importance of the phenomena of migration and diaspora for postcolonial writers.⁶

Although the very word ‘exile’ has connotations of dispossession and displacement, it has generally been acknowledged how beneficial it has been for the postcolonial writer. For post-independent Irish writers such as James Joyce, Bernard Shaw, and Samuel Beckett, leaving their country of origin comes to be seen less in terms of enforced banishment than as an escape from a repressive and conservative state (Campbell 2003: 5).⁷ On the other hand, migration allows the postcolonial writer to easily unbalance the already unstable binary structure of self/other, colonizer/colonized, civilian/barbarian. This has been extensively theorized by postcolonial figures such as Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Spivak, Edward Said, and Stuart Hall. Migrant postcolonial writers become, *par excellence*, subversive ‘hybrid’ subjects who are able to disrupt and transform imposed boundaries and create new ‘identities’. The following section intends to explore the wide debate that is taking place, not only internationally, but also within the Irish academic context, around the figure of the exiled writer. As I will show, although the complex term ‘hybridity’ is often used ambivalently, most critics tend to recognize the privileged role of the emigrant subject to use it subversively.

7.4.4.2.1. Hybridity as a decolonizing strategy for the emigrant postcolonial subject

One of the favourite terms of most postcolonial writers and theorists is hybridity. The current fascination with the concept hybridity in contemporary theory is reflected in Said’s concept “contrapuntal”, Bhabha’s “Third Space”, Spivak’s advocacy for the deconstruction of identity, and Hall’s belief in the potential subversion of diasporic communities.

The concept of hybridity was inscribed in the nineteenth-century discourses of scientific racism and British colonialism. Young (1995: 4-17) and Papastergiadis (1997: 257-258) explain how hybridity was first coined as a metaphor for the negative concepts of racial encounters. This notion has survived in contemporary theory, although its meaning has changed. As Werbner (1997: 21) explains, “hybridity as a loaded discourse of dangerous racial contaminations has been transformed into one of cultural creativity: ‘insults’ have been turned into ‘strengths’”. With the achievements of poststructuralist theory in liberating the subject from “notions of fixity and purity of origin”, hybridity is seen as positively creative in a contemporary world mostly characterized by cross-cultural contact and interaction (Papastergiadis 1997: 257). In a society characterized by

⁶ For an extensive account of how these phenomena are reflected in postcolonial writing, see Bohemer (1995) (especially pages 232-243).

⁷ All these Irish writers reflect on the disillusionment of post-independent nations, that are, in Bohemer’s words (1995: 237), increasingly “plagued by neo-colonial ills” such as the maintenance of power hierarchies.

heterogeneity, cultural interchange, and diversity, notions of 'belonging' and 'nationhood' are increasingly looked at reluctantly. In this sense, there is a paradox, as Werbner (1997: 1) highlights, in the current interest in cultural hybridity. On the one hand, it is praised as "powerfully interruptive", that is, with a high level of "transgressive power"; and, on the other hand, it is "theorized as commonplace and pervasive", that is, it has become habitual and normal in the contemporary context of globalization (ibid).⁸

Stuart Hall, Homi Bhabha, and Gayatri Spivak will be the most important figures within postcolonial theory to offer interesting analyses of cultural hybridity. Papastergiadis (1997: 273) defines them as "authorizing hybrid identities within postcolonial theory", and Werbner (1997: 13) assertively claims that Hall and Bhabha are "great contemporary prophets of hybridity".⁹ Said is not usually included within this group, because he is usually referred to as the author of *Orientalism* (1995), and his subversive theories in *Culture and Orientalism* (1994) seem to be ignored. Although Said's defence of hybridity is advanced by Bhabha, I nonetheless consider it important to bear in mind his insights on this subject.

The term 'hybridity' has been mostly associated with the work of Homi Bhabha, whose analysis of the colonizer/colonized relations stresses the interdependence and the mutual construction of their subjectivities. As we have seen, Bhabha applies the concept of hybridity to the dialogical situation of colonialism. He explains how ambivalence, mimicry, and sly civility, for instance, subvert the authority of colonial discourses because "[o]ther 'denied' knowledges enter upon the dominant discourse and estrange the basis of its authority" (Bhabha 1995: 156). Therefore, the colonial discourse becomes hybridized. As Papastergiadis (1997: 279) asserts, "Bhabha gives a new twist to the meaning of hybridity" as articulated by Bakhtin, by extending the term to signify "the process by which the discourse of colonial authority attempts to translate the identity of the Other within a singular category, but then fails and produces something else". Thus, Bhabha transforms Bakhtin's intentional hybrid into "an active moment" which contests hegemonic cultural discourses (Young 1995: 23).

In what Moore-Gilbert (2000: 114) describes as his second phase, Bhabha is more interested in postcolonial relations. Whereas in the first phase of his work, Bhabha focuses on what Moore-Gilbert (2000: 131) terms "resistance from within" the colonial discourse, his second phase describes more conscious subaltern resistant strategies which take place in the postcolonial context. Now, Bhabha's notion of hybridity is articulated in the space of marginality. This

⁸ Hybridity is seen by postcolonial critics such as Young (1995: 4) and Fulford (2002b: 209) as "the self-conscious identity of modern society", because contemporary lives are mostly shaped by the postmodern conditions of spatial displacement, the advantages of speed communication, and "the permeability of borders".

⁹ This critic also includes Gilroy as a great "prophet of hybridity". In particular, see Gilroy (1993).

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postcolonial theorist focuses on the subversive figure of the diasporic migrant and the individual belonging to minority communities. Both figures are situated in the margins of society, and, as such, they are able to be subversive. They move across certain positions and established borders, such as the formal structures that confer identity in fixed terms like nation, class, gender, and race (Bhabha 1995: 140).

Bhabha defends the transformative potential that hybrid discourses present. Here, like in the case of Said, as we will see, Fanon is as an important point of reference for the articulation of liberation from restrictive ideologies. Bhabha (1995: 63) praises Fanon's analysis in *Black Skin, White Masks*, in the grounds that Fanon,

in seeing the phobic image of the Negro, the native, the colonized, deeply woven in the psychic pattern of the West, [...] offers the master and slave a deeper reflection of their interpositions, as well as the hope of a difficult, even dangerous, freedom.

The psychic choice of the colonized is not, as Fanon (1991: 82) puts it, “turn white or disappear”, or as Memmi (1990: 214) has argued, “extermination [...] or assimilation”; but, for Bhabha, there is a more ambivalent third choice: camouflage, mimicry, hybridity, and all those concepts involving a restructuring of the world. As this postcolonial critic argues,

[f]or Fanon, the liberatory ‘people’ who initiate the productive instability of revolutionary cultural change are themselves the bearers of a hybrid identity. They are caught in the discontinuous time of translation and negotiation. [...] In the moment of liberatory struggle, the Algerian people destroy the continuities and constancies of the ‘nationalist’ tradition which provided a safeguard against colonial cultural imposition. (Bhabha 1995: 38)

As we can see, Bhabha specifies in more detail Fanon's ‘liberationist’ phase, a characteristic of many postcolonial critics, who, like Said (1994: 284), accuse Fanon of not specifying well enough how actual decolonization is achieved in cultural terrains. Attacking notions of purity, Bhabha reformulates Fanon's idea of liberation into a sort of “hybrid displacing place”, or “Third Space”, a crucial concept in his theory. For Fanon, “the real leap consists in introducing invention into existence” (Bhabha 1995: 8). Bhabha asserts that Fanon's “creation of new souls” lies in the “Third Space” that allows the formation of “new signs of identity” (p. 2). The time of liberation is, as Fanon powerfully evokes, a time of cultural uncertainty, and most crucially, of indecision about personal and communal identity: “it is to this zone of occult instability where people dwell that we must come; and it is there that our souls are crystallized and that our perceptions and our lives are transformed with light” (Fanon 1990: 183). Bhabha takes

Fanon's idea that liberation implies an "occult instability" in order to explain the powerful cultural changes that adopting a "Third Space" would imply. This "Third Space" that the migrant occupies is described as "neither the One [...] nor the Other, [...] but something else besides which contests the terms and territories of both" (Bhabha 1995: 25). In this sense, the hybrid (migrant and marginalized) figure, by constantly crossing boundaries and occupying a liminal position, is able to elude the politics of polarity and break down all imposed dualities (colonizer/colonized; self/other; West/East; even masculine/feminine). The subject inhabits "the rim of an 'in-between' reality", a liminal space, where an ideal relationship between cultures lies, and where individual freedom is ultimately found (p. 13). As Moore-Gilbert (2000: 143) explains:

For Bhabha, culture is located between levels. He suggests that only when this postcolonial perspective, revealed by the light of cultural hybridity, diaspora, and *differance*, is acknowledged, will liminality replace the unities of nationalism and the binaries of colonial discourse.

As Bhabha implies, hybridity enables active forms of resistance, by opening a space which enables other positions to emerge. That is why Bhabha defends in an interview hybridity as politically effective: it is this form of "Third Space" that brings political change, because "new sites are always being opened" (Rutherford 1990: 216).

It is in the hands of the previously marginalized and excluded voices to bring about this "political negotiation". The hybridity present in the languages of minority discourses is able to disarticulate authority, by challenging the boundaries of "what is seen as a Eurocentric project" (Papastergiadis 1997: 273).

Like Bhabha, Said (1994) expands Fanon's theories of decolonization in *Culture and Imperialism*. Said (1994: 320) observes that nationalism is only one step in the evolutionary process of decolonization, for there is a final stage, a stage of liberation, that will lead "to true national self-liberation and to universalism" (ibid).

This postcolonial theorist 'reinterprets' Fanon's idea of liberation, which, as he complains, is left unspecified (p. 284). According to Said (1994: 277), the liberation and social consciousness that Fanon advocated is "not constructed upon warring essences". In *Culture and Imperialism*, Said develops a model to allow dialogue between East and West, in an attempt to overcome his former dismissive attitude towards the subaltern counter-discourse. We should remember that critics such as Young (2001: 391) and Walder (1998: 71) have criticized Said's analysis of colonial discourse in *Orientalism* on the grounds that it left no room for the constructive interaction between non-Western subaltern peoples and Western centres of political power. Two

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and a half decades later, Said (1994: xxviii) advocates negotiation and expresses his disagreement with binary divisions such as East and West, North and South, and white and coloured:

Gone are the binary oppositions dear to the nationalist and imperialist enterprise. Instead we begin to sense that old authority cannot simply be replaced by new authority, but that new alignments made across borders, types, nations, and essences are rapidly coming into view; and it is those new alignments that now provoke and challenge the fundamentally static notion of *identity* that has been the core of cultural thought during the era of imperialism.

By adopting the privileged ‘liminal’ and ‘median’ role of the artist or critic in exile, Said states, decolonization is possible. This subversive figure, whose “philological home is the world” (p. 385), is neither inside nor outside. He or she benefits from a “double vision”, from what he calls a “contrapuntal” mediation, that would enable a genuine dialogue between East and West (p. 78). Thus, like Bhabha, Said views hybridity as crucial in enabling a powerful and transnational perspective, escaping from the narrow and limited vision of both orientalism and nationalism. Bhabha’s “Third Space” becomes in Said’s theories the intellectual’s “double vision”. Both notions of hybridity may be understood as reformulations of Fanon’s idea of liberation, as indispensable conditions for decolonization.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak is also concerned with how the postcolonial subject can develop strategies of resistance against homogeneous ideologies such as imperialism and nationalism. In her reliance on deconstruction and on the subversive role of the postcolonial (emigrant) critic, we may also find a reformulation of Fanon’s ‘liberationist’ phase. Like Bhabha and Said, Spivak implies that figuring identities and relations differently is indispensable for any movement towards decolonization. Spivak’s difficult project consists in carrying out a deconstruction of identity. As she asserts (1988a: 201), “the greatest gift of deconstruction [is] to question the authority of the investigating subject without paralyzing him, persistently transforming conditions of impossibility into possibility”. Fanon’s ‘liberationist’ phase becomes for Spivak a “deconstruction phase”. The way to achieve Fanon’s “creation of new souls”, Spivak implies, is by adopting the broad project of deconstructing identity, not refusing identity, but moving beyond fixed and stable notions such as ‘nationhood’, ‘belonging’, and ‘origins’ (Spivak 1993: 5). Nevertheless, as Papastergiadis (1997: 274) notes, Spivak’s theories seem to be exclusively addressed to the diasporic individual living in the West. In fact, as I will analyze in section 7.4.5.3.1., Spivak finds problems when articulating agency for the subaltern community in the Third World. Nevertheless, her emphasis on the potential possibilities emigration entails links her theories to Bhabha’s and Said’s.

Stuart Hall also proposes his own model of decolonization for the postcolonial subject. This postcolonial theorist attacks those notions of cultural identity which are fixed and stable, and defends instead, by using the Caribbean experience as an example, a complex notion of identity which is always hybrid (1990: 227). Hall (1990: 222) starts with the premise that identity “as a production [...] is never complete [but] always in process”. He defends his own way of thinking about cultural identity, which is not based on some essentialist past, but on “ruptures and discontinuities” (p. 225). In this sense, identity undergoes constant transformation, and it is a matter “of ‘becoming’ as well as ‘being’” (ibid). Hall (1990: 226) defines this notion of cultural identity as follows:

Cultural identities are the points of identification, the unstable points of identification or suture, which are made, within the discourses of history and culture. Not an essence but a *positioning*. Hence, there is always a politics of identity, a politics of position, which has no absolute guarantee in an unproblematic, transcendental ‘law of origin’.

Hall's argument is that, since we all write and speak from a specific place and time, from a particular history and culture, “[w]hat we say is always ‘in context’, *positioned*” (p. 222). The different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, are what give shape to our identities (p. 225). But this notion of identity is not fixed and stable, for it is ‘framed’ around two vectors, simultaneously active: “the vector of similarity and continuity, and the vector of difference and rupture” (p. 226). In order to illustrate his ambivalent notion of identity, Hall recurs to the Caribbean example:

Caribbean identities always have to be thought of in terms of the dialogic relationship between these two axes. The one gives us some grounding in, some continuity with, the past. The second reminds us that what we share is precisely the experience of a profound discontinuity. (Hall 1990: 226-227)

For Hall, real decolonization does not lie in holding a politics of identity, but rather adopting what he calls a “strategic politics of positioning” (p. 230). Caribbean cultural identities, as he explains, are subversive because they are strategically ‘positioned’ in relation to at least three ‘presences’: “*Présence Africaine*”, “*Présence Européenne*” and “*Présence Américain*” (p. 230). Because one presence is not substituted by the other, cultural identity is the result of a complex juxtaposition of different realities. The black diasporic living in England, for instance, know that they are black, that they come from the Caribbean, and that they are British. Thus, in their search for identity, they speak from these three positions; taking into account their African origins, their

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relation with Europe, and finally the “New World” presence, what he calls *Présence Americain*. Hall (1990: 234) explains this last concept as follows:

None of the people who now occupy the [Caribbean] islands – black, brown, white, African, European, American, Spanish, French, East Indian, Chinese, Portugese, Jew, Dutch – originally ‘belonged’ there. It is the space where the creolizations and assimilations and syncretisms were negotiated.

The “New World” presence that Hall describes records the diversity and difference which characterizes Afro-American people, already a people coming from a diaspora. Hall’s notion of the “New World” is very similar to Bhabha’s “Third Space”. For Bhabha, hybridity is personified in the figure of the diasporic migrant, and so it is for Hall (1990: 235), who states:

The diaspora experience as I intend it here is defined, not by essence or purity, but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of ‘identity’ which lives with and through, not despite, difference: by *hybridity*. Diaspora identities are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference.

From this quotation, we can easily perceive how Hall recognizes the highly transformative potential of hybrid identities. Like Bhabha, Hall implies that hybridity leads to transformation in a ‘generative way’: ideas, world-views, and material forces interact with each other, they are reformulated until the old ones are replaced. Hybridity, rather than negative, involves a positive reconstruction of the world. Like Fanon, who viewed in the revolutionary people the potential for “the creation of new men”, Hall asserts that the diasporic “constantly produc[e] and reproduc[e] themselves anew”. Fanon’s ‘liberationist phase’ is found in Hall’s “politics of positioning” and his notion of the “New World”, a place from where “to constitute us as new kinds of subjects, and thereby enable us to discover places from which to speak” (p. 237). Therefore, for Hall, decolonization comes from this new recognition of identity, identity through difference.

As we have seen, there seems to be a consensus over the utility of hybridity as an antidote to essentialist subjectivity. Bhabha, Said, Spivak, and Hall, among others, have highlighted the migrant’s empowering potential to transform existing social structures. Within the postcolonial debate in Ireland, there are many critics who equally perceive hybridity as a helpful and subversive strategy. Most critics in the Irish academy seem to agree on the fact that when a writer challenges the boundaries imposed by concepts such as ‘Irishness’ and ‘Englishness’, finally a decolonization is achieved.

Within contemporary academic debate in Ireland, hybridity as a resistant concept has been embraced by many scholars. Fulford (2002b), Gibbons (1996), Kearney (1985a, 1988a, 1997), Kiberd (1996), Lloyd (1993), O'Dowd (1990: 52), and Smyth (1998, 2000), are some representative names in Irish studies.¹⁰ Not all these critics, some of them self-declared postcolonial, formulate hybridity in the same way.

Richard Kearney (1985a: 9) has suggested that the Irish mind is inclined toward a different logic than the orthodox dualistic logic of *either/or* intrinsic to Western philosophy. According to Kearney, the Irish mind favours a logic organized around the principle of *both/and*, holding the conventional oppositions of classical modes of thought together in creative combination. In this sense, the "Irish mind" would be permanently hybridized. Kearney traces this "Irish mind" throughout the history of Irish writing in English: figures like Swift, Berkeley, Wilde, Shaw, Beckett, O'Brien, and Joyce expose the hybrid nature of the Irish (p. 10-14). In later works, Kearney (1988b, 1997) seems to move away from a notion of hybridity as intrinsic to the 'Irish mind' towards a notion of hybridity that results from the "migrant minds" of Irish artists. For Kearney (1988b: 202), the political agenda of post-nationalism, in contrast to nationalist narratives, offers another way of "thinking otherwise", and this is mainly characterized by 'migrancy'. This critic (1997: 141) recognizes in the work of Medbh McGuckian and Paul Muldoon this subversive stance on nationalism, calling it a "desacramentalizing of fatherland and motherland". Nevertheless, as we will see, it will be Kearney's (1985a: 296) first characterization of hybridity, hybridity as intrinsic to the 'Irish mind', that will exert a tremendous debate within Irish criticism.

Lloyd (1993) is another critic who celebrates hybridity. In contrast to Kearney, his notion of hybridity is not a natural feature of the "Irish mind", but a consequence of a whole history of colonialism and repression. Under Bhabha's influence, Lloyd (1993: 123) states that hybridized discourses functioned as modes of resistance to imperial domination. This Irish critic coins the term "Adulteration", compared to Bhabha's version of 'hybridity', in order to refer to those resistant strategies employed by Irish subjects, who have, throughout history, found themselves on the margins of power (ibid). "Adulteration" helps not only to reveal nationalism's "mimicry of imperial forms" but it also acts as a mode of resistance to the politics of both imperialism and nationalism (ibid). When analyzing hybrid cultural manifestations, like the nineteenth-century Irish street ballads and folk-songs, Lloyd (1993: 99) contends that they are highly subversive, for they permit the colonized society to explore those elements which look strange and foreign to the colonizer, and therefore are indecipherable: "[the street ballads and Gaelic songs are] a means of at

¹⁰ All these Irish critics are but examples of a wider trend within Irish criticism to attack conceptions of colonial and national identity. See, for instance, other critics such as Graham (1994b: 31-33), who advocates exploiting the liminal spaces or passages between identity.

once disguising and communicating subversion, [a] message to the colonized and [...] uncertainty to the colonizer”.

Luke Gibbons’ notion of “allegory” functions in a similar way to Lloyd’s concept of “adulteration” (1996: 32). Like Lloyd, Gibbons uses this concept to describe the rituals of agrarian secret societies and those popular ballads which clash with the interests of anti-colonial nationalism (p. 207). Recalling Bhabha’s “Third Space”, “allegory” articulates an “identity without a centre” (p. 134). The allegorical tradition of popular ballads provided the modernist strategies from which future Irish writers such as Beckett and Joyce learned (p. 6). Although this critic does not imply that allegory is restricted only to subaltern discourse, Gibbons highlights its strategic employment as a form of representation by those on the margins of power (Smyth 1998: 33).

Declan Kiberd (1996: 636) turns to the metaphor of “patchwork quilt” to suggest that the formation of identity is dialogic, in perpetual dialogue. He draws on the Myth of Babel, in order to suggest that God punishes those “Semite imperialists” who “seek to impose an official language of enlightenment” by erecting their own tower “as high as heaven” (ibid). In Kiberd’s “patchwork quilt”, “[n]o one element should subordinate or assimilate the others: Irish or English, rural or urban, Gaelic or Anglo, each has its part in the pattern” (p. 563). Although Kiberd does not explicitly mention the hybrid nature of many Irish postcolonial cultural productions, from his analysis of Irish literature in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries we can observe how he embraces hybridity as an ultimate mode of “decolonization of the mind” (p. 6). Like the former critics, Kiberd (1996: 48-49) realizes that the problem for both colonialists and nationalists is that they forge and predicate identity “on difference”. In this sense, ultimate decolonization would involve a different conception of identity-formations. Hybridity would be found not in nationalist writers who defend a “single Ireland”, a “unitary Irish mind”, but in these artists, who, in their constant “negotiations”, dismantle received categories (p. 298). Kiberd (1996: 35-36, 55, 299) praises Oscar Wilde, Bernard Shaw, John Millington Synge, and Samuel Beckett for trying to find, in their rejection of the antithesis between Englishness and Irishness, a middle and reconciliatory identity. In particular, this critic views Samuel Beckett as “the first truly Irish playwright [...] free of factitious elements of Irishness” (p. 531). In what he calls the “second renaissance” in Irish literature (the rising generations of writers at the end of the twentieth century), Kiberd (1996: 612) finds a continuation of the writers already mentioned. Seamus Heaney, Derek Walcott, Nuala ní Dhomhnaill, and Eavan Boland, among others, are praised for their constant “negotiations” with all aspects of national tradition (pp. 580-613). Kiberd’s argument would be, then, that when the native culture of a people is destroyed, what follows is a very enriching “cultural confusion”,

which produces “a great experimental literature”, an art of “immense versatility, sophistication, and multiplicity of viewpoint”, where all elements, Irish or English, rural or urban, Gaelic or Anglo, have a part (p. 652). All of them illustrate Fanon's “liberationist phase” (in fact, Fanon is constantly evoked in Kiberd's *Inventing Ireland*). The above-mentioned writers are viewed as moving beyond a restrictive nationalism to an ultimate liberation (pp. 345-346). This is Kiberd's celebration of hybridity as observed in Irish literature.

For Smyth (1998: 28), hybridity is similarly useful as a strategy for decolonization. He asserts that in the Irish context, “the categories of colonial subjectivity, Englishness and Irishness, cannot be replaced, because they represent the only terms in which a decolonizing discourse can be articulated”. Therefore, hybridity as a decolonizing practice must employ these categories, but in order to deconstruct, destabilize, and displace them. Smyth (1998: 29) places Kearney's (1985a) analysis of the ‘Irish mind’ under close scrutiny, arguing that hybridity, as formulated by this philosopher, runs the risk of consolidating as the very ‘sign’ of difference, “the *sign* of Irish otherness”. The Irish mind, represented as permanently hybridized, runs the risk of incorporating the oppositional, “identitarian politics” of traditional colonialist discourse, and thus it would maintain the colonizer's stereotypical assumptions of the Irish people (ibid). To avoid the risk of being absorbed into disabling neo-colonialist narratives, Smyth (2000: 52) argues that “Bhabha's ‘Third Space’ has to remain a *potential* rather than a *programme*”. This *potential* notion of hybridity is acknowledged in the writings of Oscar Wilde, Bernard Shaw, and James Joyce. These Irish writers are viewed by Smyth (1998: 79) as offering a profound challenge to the dominant critical discourses of colonialism and anti-colonialism (nationalism). Similarly, Seán O'Faoláin in his book *The Irish* managed to challenge the boundaries of Irishness and offer an alternative national identity to the one promulgated in the post-revolutionary period (Smyth 1998: 198). In their “constant willingness to travel between [received] categories and essences, experiences and identities”, these writers offer alternatives to the standard (radical and liberal) decolonizing practices refusing narrow nationalisms (p. 205). By crossing boundaries, they signal “the onset of a genuine politics of displacement” (ibid).

Recently, Fulford (2002b) has expanded the above-mentioned arguments. This critic defends the political and ethical potential of a decentred model of identity for postcolonial subjectivities. Fulford (2002b: 25) views postcolonial identity formation in Ireland in terms of “deterritorialization”. The strength for the postcolonial subject comes from being uprooted, rather than being rooted. Fulford draws on Deleuze and Guattari's (1983: 10) concept of the “rhizome” as a metaphor for the postcolonial identity which is constantly transgressing boundaries. Attacking

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the binaries and dualisms intrinsic to Western thought, Deleuze and Guattari promote, by the image of the “rhizome”, an identity formation which is not based on root foundations:

As an underground stem a rhizome is absolutely distinct from roots and radicles. Bulbs and tubers are rhizomes. Plants with a root or radicles can be rhizomorphic in all other respects (the question is whether botany, in its specificity, is not completely rhizomorphic). Even some animals are rhizomorphic, when they live in packs like rats. Burrows are rhizomorphic in all their functions: as habitat, means of provision, movement, evasion, rupture (Deleuze & Guattari 1983: 10, cited by Fulford 2002b: 26-27)

The key words “movement”, “evasion”, “rupture” express a view of identity as constantly on the move, nomadic, refusing binary structures and static or monolithic notions. According to this critic, this “rhizomorphic” nature is what provides the postcolonial subject with an ultimate cultural decolonization (p. 27).

The Irish sociologist and critic O’Dowd (1990: 52) has similarly, although in a very indirect way, embraced hybridity as a form of resistance. This critic uses Memmi’s analysis of the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized in order to discuss the Northern Irish conflict. He argues that one way to escape the damaging antagonism “settler/native” that continues to surface in the Troubles is by embracing emigration. As O’Dowd (1990: 50) states,

Memmi has argued that there are two modes of escape from the colonial relationship for the colonized: assimilation or revolt. In Ireland there is a third option, that is [physical or spiritual] emigration for both the colonizer or the colonized alike.

This form of emigration that O’Dowd describes resembles all these attempts to find a politics of resistance that move beyond categories such as ‘Irishness’ and ‘Englishness’.

In short, all the Irish critics mentioned above attempt to discover a new mode of decolonization which might evade the pitfalls of radical nationalism or liberal and Marxist modes of resistance by exploring the possibilities afforded by concepts such as “the Irish mind”, “adulteration”, “allegory”, “patchwork quilt”, “negotiation”, “politics of displacement”, “deterritorialization”, “the rhizome”, and “emigration”. In other words, all these Irish critics try to articulate postcolonial “hybridity” as a new and useful mode of decolonization in the Irish context.

7.4.4.2.2. An inauthentic Irish girl in London: in-between Englishness and Irishness

Boland’s earlier diaspora and the resulting dislocation that it entails will allow her to occupy a hybrid space from which to counteract essentialist and restrictive ideologies. Boland’s mature poems open a hybrid space in which tensions are not resolved, but rather brought to the surface.

Only by means of this can new 'decolonized' identities emerge. As has been theorized by Salman Rushdie (1992: 19):

To migrate is certainly to lose language and home, to be defined by others, to become invisible or, even worse, a target; it is to experience deep changes and wrenches in the soul. But the migrant is not only transformed by this act; he also transforms his new world. Migrants may well become mutants, but it is out of such hybridization that newness can emerge.

In order to observe how this is achieved, Boland's personal experience of exile and dislocation will be described.

Boland (1996a: 35-37) has narrated in her prose account how, at the age of five, in 1950, she had to leave Ireland for England. Her father, the diplomat Frederik H. Boland, was commissioned to London, to work as the Irish Ambassador to the Court of St. James. Both in her prose work and in her poetry, Boland has focused on the six years she lived in London, and she describes this time as an unhappy and discontented one. Later, she spent a few years in New York, where her father served as President of the UN General Assembly.¹¹ Boland has admitted that the details of her young exile were quite atypical: while she considers her childhood "fictional and desolated in an odd way", she acknowledges having experienced a "privileged childhood" living in the Irish Embassy (interview with Allen-Randolph 1993b: 117).¹² In fact, in some of her diasporic poems, Boland implicitly records her own childhood in London as advantaged. "The Briar Rose" (*The Journey*) and "The Game" (*Outside History*), for instance, describe Boland's London house as richly decorated with "oyster crepe-de-Chine" and "inlaid card table[s]". These pieces of furniture can only possibly belong to an upper-middle class setting. In this sense, from such an earlier age, Boland has occupied an 'in-between' space between being marginalized and being privileged. Her knowledge of both conditions (oppressed and oppressor) will shape much of her mature poetry, and will allow her to have a more critical attitude towards identity-claims.

In order to demonstrate this point, I will analyze the most representative poems of Boland's diasporic texts: "An Irish Childhood in England: 1951" and "Fond Memory" (*The Journey*, 1987).¹³ These two poems are constructed in similar ways. Firstly, Boland focuses on her earlier

¹¹ In contrast to London, Boland grows to love New York "with its finned cars and theatrical weather" (Boland 1996a: 53). In poems such as "Carousel in the Park" (*Outside History*), Boland recalls her pleasant memories as an exiled child in New York.

¹² Probably because of this, Boland, as we will see, has been accused of perpetuating a specific "class-myopia", which results from her writing from the limited perspective of an upper-middle class Catholic family (O'Donnell 1995: 2). In poems such as "The Briar Rose" (*The Journey*), for instance, she describes herself as a grown up woman surrounded by "matronly damasks", identifying herself as a married woman of established social position.

¹³ Other mature poems which deal with this same issue are "After a Childhood Away from Ireland" (*Night Feed*), "The Game" (*Outside History*), "In Which the Ancient History is not my own", and "The Source" (*In a Time of*

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feelings of dislocation as an exiled girl living in London. Secondly, she expresses her longing for assimilation into the Irish national culture. Last, Boland shows the fallacy involved in her earlier attempts to define Ireland, and advocates adopting a middle position with which to counteract essentialist notions such as ‘Irishness’ and ‘Englishness’. In her attempt to move away from nationalism and imperialism, I will show how Boland articulates a postcolonial subjectivity which dismantles identity-claims by producing what Lloyd (1993: 55) calls an “aesthetic of non-identity”.

“An Irish Childhood in England: 1951” focuses on Boland’s displacement and unpleasant experiences when living in London. The indefinite article which introduces the title (“An Irish Childhood”) indicates how Boland generalizes her experience by rendering it nonspecific. Here, the poet is deliberately acting as a spokesperson, using her own childhood as a reference for all those exiled Irish individuals. This explicit communal stance that Boland adopts is also observed in other poems from this volume, most notably “The Journey” and “Envoi”. Although there is a clear danger in adopting this position, Boland will generally avoid acting as a spokesperson, by highlighting her own limitations and powerlessness as a poet, something I will explore in section 7.4.5. The first stanza of this poem introduces us to Boland’s sense of displacement and discomfort in London, describing this city as a noisy and unpleasant place:

The bickering of vowels on the buses,
the clicking thumbs and the big hips of
the navy-skirted ticket collectors with
their crooked seams brought it home to me:
Exile. Ration-book pudding.
Bowls of dripping and the fixed smile
of the school pianist playing “Iolanthe”,
“Land of Hope and Glory” and “John Peel”.

As a young girl, Boland feels frightened by the “bickering” sound of people talking. It is significant how the English are described as a mob, a mass of people with no individuality and who seem to be in constant quarrel and squabble. The sounds of the “clicking thumbs and the big hips” of the ticket collector parallel the sharp, plosive consonants in the words ‘bickering’, ‘clicking’, ‘skirted’, and ‘ticket’. The navy-blue of the collector’s skirt suggests, on the other hand, that England has an entire military organization displayed: Ireland and England are, if not in war, prepared for it; both nations’ warships are in alert for a possible outbreak of violence. In this sense, the first stanza introduces us into a world of warring factions, in which the confusing child is immersed, caught in a sort of cross-fire. This London scene described in the poem “brought it

Violence). The only poems in which Boland focuses on her childhood years in New York are “Carousel in the Park” (*Outside History*) and “Watching Old Movies when They were New” (*The Lost Land*).

home to me:/ Exile". Home is clearly equated here with exile. In this case, the unfamiliar place is "home". Boland cannot connect her idea of home neither with England nor with Ireland, a place about which she has no memories. Rather than connoting happiness and security, "home" suggests for the speaker dispossession and displacement. It is significant how in her earlier volume of poetry, *Night Feed*, there were more references to this term. In this collection, Boland found her sense of 'home' in her role as a mother and in her location within the domestic interiors. On the contrary, *The Journey* employs more the term 'house', rather than 'home', which indicates that Boland wishes to enhance her displacement from Ireland. Feeling neither English nor Irish, this child lacks a natural environment, a 'sense of place'. In order to overcome this detachment, she feels the need to imagine her own nation by reading children's books about Ireland, about what it meant to be Irish. In a passage from *Object Lessons*, Boland (1996a: 47-48) illustrates this point:

I found a book. It was thick and well bound. The illustrations were drawings of landscapes and figures, with stories as well as legends [...]. I turned the page again [...] there was a woman sitting on a throne, holding a harp. "Hibernia," it said under the picture. And the line "O harp of my country".

In the poem, "Exile" is immediately followed by "Ration-book pudding". The books which Boland read as a child are this "Ration-book pudding" which she had as a sweet 'dessert' in order to 'sate' her hunger for being Irish. They were only a fixed portion, a "ration" of the numerous books which dealt with the issue of Irishness in the mid-fifties. Nevertheless, the midline caesura that separates the two noun phrases "Exile" and "Ration-book pudding" indicates Boland's fractured and confused self. The Irish stories she reads are immediately juxtaposed by the English national songs that she was bound to hear in the convent school she attended in North London. Feeling both uneasy with English patriotic songs and detached from the Irish stories she reads, the child "didn't know what to hold, to keep". In contrast to *In Her Own Image*, where the woman speaker always emphasized her ability to 'know', the speaker here highlights more dispossession rather than liberating agency. This emphasis on the speaker's lack of certainty both as a young self but also as a mature self by means of phrases such as "I didn't know", "I'd never known", "I hardly know", "I am not certain" is characteristic of Boland's mature work.¹⁴ "Filled with some malaise/ of love for what I'd never known I had", the child in the poem falls sleep and "let[s] the moment pass", introducing us to the present context of the narrator, now a grown-up mother:¹⁵

¹⁴ See, for instance, her poems "The Bottle Garden", "Suburban Woman: a Detail", and "The Briar Rose" (*The Journey*).

¹⁵ In contrast to those poems in *In Her Own Image*, and to most of the poems in *Night Feed*, constructed mainly in the present tense exclusively, we start to perceive in poems from *The Journey* such as this one, a more extensive interchange of tenses, indicating Boland's movement from past to present, and from one landscape to another one. In

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The passing moment has become a night
of clipped shadows, freshly painted houses,
the garden eddying in dark and heat,
my children half-awake, half-asleep.

Airless, humid dark. Leaf-noise.
The stirrings of a garden before rain.
A hint of storm behind the risen moon.

As we will see, shadows are a recurrent metaphor in Boland's poetry, and they stand for those realities that remain unrecorded within historical and literary accounts. The "clipped shadows" in this poem are metonymic of those exiled from Ireland who, like her, stand outside well-defined boundaries such as Irishness. As shadows, they are an imperfect limitation of light, in the same way that, as migrants, they do not conform to 'authentic' Irishmen and women. As I will explain in more detail when commenting on Boland's fluid identity, *The Journey* is what I consider to be the great volume of the in-between. The woman is always located in this sort of diffuse light that the poem depicts. She is no longer in the dark setting in which the feminist voices in *In Her Own Image* exerted their agency, nor in a dawn context that those motherly figures in *Night Feed* usually inhabited. By contrast, this woman speaker is described in a landscape of rapid change, in a "garden eddying in dark and heat" with "stirrings [...] before rain". On the other hand, the menacing storm and the "[a]irless, humid dark. Leaf-noise." advances a change of weather. The lack of tensed verb phrases and the shortness of the lines here give a sense of that heart-stopping moment when a person knows that something is about to happen. Boland inhabits a world so volatile that it cannot be properly solidified in artistic representation. This is reinforced by the partial and incomplete state ("half-awake, half-asleep") the speaker ascribes to her children. The use of the adverb 'half' modifying adjectives, nouns, and verbs is common in this volume. In "Mise Eire", the emigrant woman holds "a half-dead baby"; in "Self-Portrait on a Summer Evening", Boland hears "half-tones"; in "Fever", the speaker has "a half-sense of half-lives"; and in "The Oral Tradition" and "The Bottle Garden", the speaker describes herself as "only half-wondering", "only half-listening", and "only half-aware". The states of mind and situations that Boland describes are always located between two extremes: the child that the Mother Ireland holds is neither dead nor wholly alive, just as her children in this poem are neither awake nor entirely asleep. In this sense, "An Irish Childhood in England: 1951" describes two different situations that

this poem, the change from past tense to present tense and again to past tense at the end of the poem indicates that the dispossession of her former situation still surrounds the speaker, or that she is still moved by this experience. This is a technique that Boland returns to in her poems about her exiled nature. "After a Childhood Away from Ireland" (in *Night Feed*) begins with past tense and ends with present tense, indicating not only that the speaker is reflecting on a past incident in her present situation, but also that she is still marked by those early feelings of exile. For similar interchanges between former self and mature self, or vice versa, see her poems "The Briar Rose" and "The Bottle Garden" (*The Journey*), and "Watching Old Movies when They were New" (*The Lost Land*).

equally stand in the 'in-between': a child who is neither English nor entirely Irish, and a mother who inhabits a landscape with no solid frontiers. Both are, what Marangoly (1996: 8) would call "less-than-whole" subjects, subjects that are marked by loss and distressful homelessness. The fact that Boland both as a young child and as a mature woman inhabits similar confusing and non-definite settings indicates that she is still marked by her earlier sense of estrangement, as she makes explicit in the following lines:

We are what we have chosen. Did I choose to?-
in a strange city, in another country,
on nights in a North-facing bedroom,
waiting for the sleep that never did
restore me as I'd hoped to what I'd lost –

In contrast to *In Her Own image*, where interrogations were avoided and exclamations were favoured, Boland's mature poems are loaded with rhetorical questions indicating, most of the time, dispossession, as in this poem. Although the narrator has now found a place in her domestic environment with her children, she feels the need to emphasize her earlier sense of displacement rather than her current sense of comfort by being 'at home'. Ireland is still described as foreign, distant, and unknown, as "what I'd lost". What she lost is the 'sense of place', the feeling of possession. There is a significant repetition of different variants of the verb 'to lose' in those poems that deal with Boland's young exile. In "After a Childhood Away from Ireland" (*Night Feed*), Boland records:

What I had lost
was not land
but the habit of land

Her lack of physical connection with Ireland, of identification with the place and with what it means to be Irish is persistently recalled in Boland's diasporic poems. But this experience of dislocation, a central narrative in her poetry,¹⁶ becomes Boland's main source of resistance. The non-definite and blurred landscape that Boland depicted in the earlier stanza gains further significance as the poem goes on. In the following stanza, Boland claims her earlier feelings of displacement and exile as enabling experiences that have helped her to overcome neat and simplistic definitions:

¹⁶ This sense of dislocation is not only characteristic of those poems that deal with Boland's early exile, but will also persist in other poems where she wishes to give voice to her own reality as a woman. In "The New Pastoral" (*Night Feed*), she describes herself as "a lost, last inhabitant", and in "Anna Liffey" (*In A Time of Violence*), she desires to become "a lost soul again".

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let the world I knew become the space
between the words that I had by heart
and all the other speech that always was
becoming the language of the country that
I came to in nineteen-fifty-one

The imperative here ('Let') is commonly used in Boland's mature poetry to express desire, request or proposal. Boland advocates the creation of a poetic space that can bear witness to her experiences of dispossession and dislocation. But she is also doing something else. She locates her painful exile ("the world I knew") within those words she knew "by heart", words such as "Ireland, Irish, Ours" (Boland 1997a: 15), and England, "the country that/ [she] came to in 1951". Her hybrid experience becomes an enabling in-between space with which to counteract those exclusivist identity claims advocated by nationalism and imperialism. In other words, her painful childhood becomes a bridging experience that is able to unite those numerous tensions between England and Ireland recorded in the first stanza of the poem. In this sense, Boland benefits from what Said (1994: 78) calls a "double vision", a "contrapuntal" mediation that enables a genuine dialogue between colonizer and colonized.

As we have seen, Bhabha is, together with Said, one of the best known postcolonial theorists who analyzes contemporary postcolonial works which locate themselves in a liminal position between nationalism and imperialism. In his theorization of "hybridization", Bhabha (1995: 185) has praised the work of Salman Rushdie and Derek Walcott, on the grounds that they succeed in creating "subversive strategies of subaltern agency". In these narratives, "difference is neither One nor the Other but *something else besides, in-between*" (p. 219). Like these two postcolonial writers, Boland manages to occupy Bhabha's (1995: 25) "Third Space", or Hall's (1990: 234) "New World". This liminal space is where individual freedom ultimately lies. Boland transforms her earlier exile into an enabling experience 'in-between' Irishness and Englishness. It is in her very displacement as a hybrid subject where her power and strength lies.¹⁷

The way "An Irish Childhood in England: 1951" ends also seems to favour this movement towards the 'in-between'. The poem begins with stanzas of eight lines with no enjambments, and the lines are well constructed, carefully separated by punctuation. This cohesion gradually changes as the poem develops, to the extent that, at the end, very long sentences are linked by strong enjambments between stanzas, enhancing, in their unfolding movement, Boland's wish to evade

¹⁷ Similarly, Lloyd (1993: 68) has argued, when analyzing Yeats, that it was "his radical dislocation" as an Irish poet that enabled him to find "the sources of his power".

definite landscapes, her desire to evade simplistic identity-claims.¹⁸ The last two stanzas of the poem indicate this:

let the world I knew become the space
between the words that I had by heart
and all the other speech that always was
becoming the language of the country that
I came to in nineteen-fifty-one:
barely-gelled, a freckled six-year-old,
overdressed and sick on the plane
when all of England to an Irish child

was nothing more than what you'd lost and how:
was the teacher in the London convent who
when I produced "I amn't" in the classroom
turned and said – "you're not in Ireland now".

The final lines of the fourth stanza refer to the actual moment when the girl left Ireland in 1951. As Kupillas (1999: 24) notes, "her detached, reserved reactions contrast with what was the response typical of many Irish emigrants", a response which Boland makes explicit in "After a Childhood Away from Ireland" (*Night Feed*): "the ground the emigrants/ resistless, weeping/ laid their cheeks to,/ put their lips to kiss". In this poem, the speaker recalls having felt a sense of unease and discomfort, but in contrast to those emigrants of traditional ballads, it was because she was sick on the plane, and not because she was leaving her native land. The poem ends with an experience which Boland mentions almost in every prose account about her childhood exile: the moment the English teacher scolds her for speaking with an Irish accent.¹⁹ Boland links both situations (her actual moment of leaving Ireland and her later experience at the London convent school) with the conjunction 'and' and the adverb 'how', a recurrent technique in Boland's poetry to strengthen the unfolding of lines at the end of the poem, and to emphasize how the narrator's thoughts gradually become more intense and introspective.

In these lines, Boland recalls how, in an unconscious way, her tongue, the sounds it made in her mouth, 'betrayed' her, by using the Irish form of negative construction ("I amn't") and not the standard form in English. As we have seen, it is this distinctive use of the colonial language that Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (2002a: 8) identify as a one of the common features to all postcolonial literatures written in English. These authors distinguish between "English", the 'standard' imperial language; and "english", the language used by the postcolonial individual, a linguistic code (generally articulated in the peripheries) which subverts the standard code (ibid).

¹⁸ As regards verse, this poem is representative of all those poems included in *The Journey*, such as "Bottle Garden", "Nocturne", "The Glass King", "Canaletto in the National Gallery of Ireland", and "Lace", among others. All these poems begin with very short cohesive stanzas that gradually become looser at the end.

¹⁹ See, for instance, Boland's account of this experience in *Object Lessons* (1996a: 45-46) and in "Imagining Ireland" (1997a: 14-15).

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By fusing the linguistic structures of two languages, Boland unconsciously transforms the imperial language. Her use of 'english' establishes itself as a counter-discourse that destabilizes standard English, prompting the English teacher's anger. As Boland (1996a: 46) has argued: "Without knowing, I had used that thing for which the English reserve a visceral dislike: their language, loaded and aimed by the old enemy".

In this sense, Boland unconsciously becomes what Bhabha (1995: 87) would call a "mimic" girl. Bhabha argues that 'mimicry' creates ambivalence in the colonial relationship. He explains how the production of mimic (Indian) Englishmen and women ("Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect") becomes disturbing. The mimic subject emerges as "an inappropriate colonial subject", because he or she fails to be "authentic" (p. 88). As he explains, "to be Anglicized is *emphatically* not to be English" (p. 87). In this sense, mimicry is at once resemblance and menace: "almost the same, *but not quite*" (p. 86). Boland's partial and incomplete use of the colonizer's language ("almost the same, *but not quite*") disrupts the authority of colonial discourse. As Young (1992: 147) has argued, "imitation subverts the identity of that which is being represented". Because of her distinctive use of English, Boland offers a distorting mirror that fractures the colonizer's language, and consequently becomes a threat to colonial authority and power. Arrowsmith (2000: 62) has argued that the immigrants' transgression of the borderlines of self/other incites the reinforcement of colonial discourses of "othering" and "such pressurized disassociation often takes a racialized form". It is this sort of racial discrimination that Boland suffers in London.

Because of this, the child experiences for the first time the power of language, as well as the pain of estrangement. When Boland speaks with an Irish accent, she unconsciously conveys the general idea of the interdependence of language and identity: you are the way you speak. The articulation of two quite opposed possibilities of speaking English highlights the cultural gap between Ireland and England. The irony of this situation lies in the fact that she has identified herself as Irish, without exactly knowing what that means; in other words, without a clear idea of which nation she had left behind. In this sense, the final lines of the poem enhance the speaker's deprivation and displacement. In contrast to Boland's second phase, where the poems moved from woman's oppression to liberation, the endings of Boland's mature poems generally enhance the speaker's contradictions and her sense of estrangement.

The adversity that Boland experiences as an Irish child in England produces in her the cultivation of an idea of Ireland.²⁰ Boland's difficulties in London, in combination with the

²⁰ In *Object Lessons*, Boland narrates other instances when, as a child living in London, she suffered the consequences of racial stereotypes. See, for instance, those passages where she recalls how she realizes that the Irish were

ruptures of emigration, prompts her construction of an 'imaginary homeland', an anchor moulded on the symbols and narratives contained in the discourses of Irish nationalism. This early attempt to define Ireland is observed in another poem included in *The Journey*, "Fond Memory".

As in "An Irish Childhood in England: 1951", the first verse lines are dedicated to describing London, in particular her primary-school, as an uncomfortable setting:

It was a school where all the children wore darned worsted;
where they cried – or almost all – when the Reverend Mother
announced at lunch-time that the King had died

peacefully in his sleep. I dressed in wool as well,
ate rationed food, played English games and learned
how wise the Magna Carta was, how hard the Hanoverians

had tried, the measure and complexity of verse,
the hum and score of the whole orchestra.

In this passage we can observe how Boland, as a child, becomes, as she says in "In Which the Ancient History I Learn is Not My Own" (*In a Time of Violence*), "nearly an English child". Boland has recognized in an interview how she almost became "a little Victorian English child" (Sammells 1993: 13). Her childhood in London provided her "with a great love of certain English things that I will never lose" (ibid). In "Fond Memory", we can observe precisely how Boland starts to feel 'English' in some interesting ways. Whereas she hardly knows her country, the history and traditions of Ireland, she is learning English culture and history in detail. She can list the English kings, name the famous battles, she knows about the Royal family of Hanover, and about the Magna Carta.²¹ The rapid succession of verbs in the simple past tense enhance the fact that this child was simply doing in an automatic way what she was ordered to do: she "dressed", "ate", and "learned" as all the other English children did. Like in the previous poem, in which the teacher's smile was "fixed", there is an implication here that the children's lives were inflexibly programmed and scheduled. The "darned worsted" the children, including Boland, wore, imply that they were immobilized, fixed in the firm-textured and compact woolen of the 'worsted'. Nevertheless, she is not entirely English; she cannot identify the English king as her king, and therefore, she cannot share the children's sorrow. Boland does not cry when the children cried: she uses the exclusive third person pronoun in plural ('they'), and, furthermore, she claims that not all the children cried: "they cried – *or almost all*". Thus, she avoids using the first person pronoun

unwelcome in London, and also where she mentions how she was called "Ginger and Carrot-Top" at the English school (1996a: 37, 45).

²¹ Boland deliberately remembers this lesson out of many others, for the significance of learning it. She wants to express the ironic contrast of studying an English document or piece of legislation that serves as a guarantee of basic rights, when her native land, Ireland, was still trying to come to terms with a history of oppression and dispossession.

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when expressing the emotions and feelings of the children, but includes it when talking about their activities. The only thing she shares with the English children is that she wears their same clothes, eats the same food, and plays the same games. In this way, Boland stands as a “mimic” subject, an “inappropriate colonial subject” who, as Bhabha (1995: 88) has argued, fails to be “authentic”.

The following lines of the poem introduce us to an interesting contrast: after school the girl goes to her house, an apparently Irish homely setting, where she might find a yearned ‘authenticity’:

At three-o-clock I caught two buses home

where sometimes in the late afternoon
at a piano pushed into a corner of the playroom
my father would sit down and play the slow

lilts of Tom Moore while I stood there trying
not to weep at the cigarette smoke stinging up
from between his fingers²²

After catching two buses home, the child encounters her father playing the piano. In contrast to Boland’s mother, the figure of her father appears in very few of her poems. Apart from “Fond Memory”, the only poem in which Boland’s father becomes a leading figure is “City of Shadows” (*The Lost Land*). The particular remembrance that Boland recalls in this poem is the “Fond Memory” of the title. Both her affection towards her father and her sense of relief as she came back from school (where she felt isolated and different from the other children) make the woman speaker remember this instant as a tender and “fond” moment. Nevertheless, one should bear in mind that ‘fond’ can mean something else. According to *The American Heritage Dictionary*, ‘fond’ does not only mean “having a strong liking, inclination, or affection”. One archaic meaning of this word is “naively credulous or foolish”, what gives us an insight on the young girl’s innocent stance.²³ The literal journey by bus describes how the speaker travels from two different and antagonistic worlds: the English world (symbolized here by the convent school) and the Irish world (her house in London). Significantly enough, *The Journey* is loaded with references to means of transport. As we saw in “An Irish Childhood in England: 1951”, the speaker recalled her bus journeys within London, and how she took the plane to England. Other poems in this volume (“The Oral Tradition” and “The Unlived Life”) also record journeys, this time by train. All these accounts of literal journeys enhance the imaginary journeys that Boland carries out in this volume, from one landscape to another imaginative one, from her present situation as a grown-up woman to a past situation (either her own past as a child, or a more remote Irish past).

²² For a prose account of this moment, see Boland (1996a: 49).

²³ *The American Heritage Dictionary*, Third Edition Version 3.6a. SoftKey International Inc. 1994.

After the child's arrival at her house in London, the poetic voice introduces us to a new setting in "the late afternoon", a diffused moment when lightness begins to disappear and shadows are present. Boland, once again, describes this moment in a blurred light, enhancing not only her dim recollection of her exiled experience, but also her confused state of mind at the time. The girl is as emotionally detached as when she heard that the Kind had died: she does not approach her father, but rather stays at a distance. On the other hand, the young child is trying not to cry when hearing Moore's lilt, but funnily enough not because any sense of loss of, or nostalgia for, Ireland (which the song actually evokes), but because of the cigarette her father is smoking. Thomas Moore (1779-1852) was a poet born in Dublin, the son of a Catholic merchant (Welch 2000: 244). His works commemorate the heroic deeds of past leaders, such as those of the 1798 Rebellion. In his poems there is both a sorrowful and melancholic tone and a "veiled hint of sedition and a warning that violence would break out again in Ireland if justice were not done to the Irish Catholics" (p. 244-245). Moore's songs and poems, therefore, aimed at encouraging all those exiled from Ireland, as well as those patriots to continue with their fight for independence. Whereas the Irish emigrants would feel a highly emotional nostalgia (a fervent affection and 'fondness' towards their land of birth) when hearing Moore's lilt, the girl simply feels immune to the song. There is a sense that what it means to be Irish, what it means to be at "home", is unclear for the child. She will have "to grow back into the habits of land", as Kupillas (1999: 25) puts it, if she wants to identify with her nation. But, up to now, she can only feel a "rare and virulent homesickness" (Boland 1996a: 39).

In this sense, as the previous poem, "Fond Memory" highlights Boland's dispossession as a child who feels neither entirely English nor Irish. She is "neither the One [...] nor the Other, [...] but something else", "in-between" as Bhabha (1995: 25) would say. Lloyd (1993: 111) has argued that, as cultural hybridization resists being identified with any narrative of representation, it "issues in *inauthenticity* rather than authentic identity". Boland strategically focuses on her childhood's "inauthenticity" in order to undermine the stable formation of legitimate and authentic identities. After emigrating at such an early stage in her life, Boland is very distant from the 'authentic' Irishwoman. On the other hand, she is unable to identify with the other English girls at the school. By focusing on her 'inauthenticity' as both Irish and English, Boland is able to destabilize the dream of a national unity that is at the basis of imperialist and nationalist ideologies.

As we have seen in "An Irish Childhood in England: 1951", Boland felt, as an exiled child living in London, a powerful need to belong to somewhere: the books of the Irish poetic tradition (the "Ration-book pudding"), in many ways, created Ireland for her. In "Fond Memory", the

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woman poet recalls again her need for reconstructing her sense of ‘place’ and ‘home’. Out of her desire to belong, she feels a sense of identification with Moore’s songs:

– as much as I could think –

I thought this is my country, was, will be again,
this upward-straining song made to be
our safe inventory of pain. And I was wrong.

The modal ‘could’ here indicates limited ability. As hinted earlier on, Boland’s mature work is more interested in highlighting both the poetic speaker’s earlier and mature limitations and not the unquestioned authority characteristic of *In Her Own Image*. Boland as a mature poet emphasizes her earlier lack of knowledge and experience. As a child, she senses that Moore’s song, highly emotional and sorrowful (“upward-straining”), gives voice to the sufferings of the Irish people. The child identifies her painful experiences, as an exiled and unhappy girl living in London, with the emigrant Irish the song evokes. She thinks that it is “our safe inventory of pain”; in other words, she thinks that the song contains the repository, an “inventory” of the pain of the dispossessed Irish people, including herself. The presence of the inclusive possessive “our” to refer to the Irish community is recurrent in Boland’s mature work, as is observed in the “Emigrant Irish”, another poem included in *The Journey*. Whereas in the first stanza the English are referred to in the third person, the child here yearns to be included in the Irish community. She does not wish to search for a dialogue with the idea of the nation, but she is looking, instead, “to disappear into powerful images” and to learn by heart that dialect of patriotism containing such eloquent words as “*Martyr. Sacrifice. Our own*” (Boland 1996a: 57, 63). As Said (1994: 407) has argued, to be in exile “is predicated on the existence of, love for, and a real bond with one’s native place; the universal truth of exile is not that one has lost that love or home, but that inherent in each is an unexpected, unwelcome loss”. It is this “unwelcome loss” that Boland felt as a fourteen-year-old child returning to Ireland. Her earlier attempt to follow the eloquence of a patriotic dialect which fuses the national and the feminine will exclude women’s real lives and experiences, and therefore, her own reality as a woman.

That is why the mature poet, realizing this, debunks her earlier sense of identification with the Ireland of songs and poems in the last sentence of “Fond Memory”: “And I was wrong”. The existence of final short sentences or clauses, sometimes beginning in motion with the conjunction ‘And’, is a very characteristic feature of Boland’s mature style.²⁴ Foster (1999: 10) calls them “tag-

²⁴ See, for instance, the endings of “The Shadow Doll”, “We are Always too Late”, “Outside History” and “An Old Steel Engraving” (*Outside History*), and “Beautiful Speech” and “The Huguenot Graveyard at the Heart of the City” (*In a Time of Violence*).

line[s]”, and argues that Boland uses them in order to insert an afterthought, which reinterprets or turns over the meaning of the preceding passage. Whereas the whole poem is constructed upon very strong enjambments and long unfolding sentences that create a melancholic tone and quicken the speed as we approach the last line, this short line brings the poem to a sudden stop and creates an anticlimax. Now Boland expresses her adult sense of detachment, as a mature poet, from that construction. First of all, nationalist songs such as Moore's mainly focus on action and resistance, and as such, they are based on a damaging politics of opposition in which the 'English' are viewed as the enemy (Boland 1996a: 130). Secondly, Boland decries “the safe inventory of pain”, the multiple falsifications and simplifications of traditional Irish poetry. Moore's songs, in contrast to her earlier perception as a young child, do not bear witness to the sufferings and painful experiences of the Irish people.²⁵ On the contrary, they were mere “fictions” which aestheticized violence, and turned defeat into glorious victory (Boland 1996a: 50).²⁶ In the process, the crudeness and dispossession that characterized Irish experience was left unrecorded. Boland's main objective is now to record this history of ordeal and painful memories. The fact that her father's cigarette smoke is “stinging up” and that the song he is playing is described as “straining” (words that in their different ways connote injuries and wounds) suggests that what really identifies Irish history is pain and dispossession. From *The Journey* onwards, Boland increases her references to scars and wounds, in order to suggest the damage that colonialist discourses as well as dominant forms of nationalist appeals have exerted on the Irish people. In this sense, she does not wish to heal the wound created by history, but rather the contrary: to expose these wounds and scars in all their rawness.

In short, “Fond Memory” shows a confusing child who learns “the [English] hum and score of the whole orchestra” and yearns to assimilate “the slow/ lilts of Tom Moore”. By showing at the end of the poem that none of them are appropriate models to follow, Boland advocates exile and the ‘in-between’ as the best stance to adopt.

In subsequent diasporic poems, Boland continues to scrutinize her earlier sense of isolation and dislocation from Ireland, her need to find a sense of belonging and the fallacy of such a dream. In “The Game” (*Outside History*), Boland advocates ‘spiritual exile’ as the best option for a child caught between the non-satisfying identities of Englishness and Irishness. Throughout this poem, the child is portrayed as enclosed within a violent world of well-demarcated boundaries, in “a

²⁵ Although Boland criticizes Moore's songs in “Fond Memory”, she acknowledges in *Object Lessons* Moore's endeavor to reclaim Irishness: “Tom Moore was a survivor. In a time of transition and danger, he had understood that safety is not a place but a language. In his search for a nation, he had discovered that after all” (Boland 1996a: 50-51).

²⁶ In other poems included in *The Journey*, such as “Listen. This is the Noise of Myth” and “The Glass King”, Boland accuses Irish poets of putting “old poultices on the old sores”, of becoming “soothsayers of the ailment/ and disease of our times”.

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room with sharp corners and surfaces”. She is like “the archangels trapped in their granite hosannahs”. In order to escape from this enclosure, she imagines that she becomes a bird that can fly away. While “an English spring was/ summoning home its birds” (reminiscent of all those English who, after the end of imperialism, came back to their own country), the child also finds the need to become a bird, but not to go back to Ireland, but to find a safe place where concepts such as ‘home’ and ‘territory’ are not sources of oppression for the speaker. In her discussion of Northern and Southern Irish poetry, Fulford (2002b: 29-246) explains how poets as disparate as Seamus Heaney, Tom Paulin, Paul Muldoon, Medbh McGuckian, Sarah Berkeley, and Eavan Boland draw on nomadic metaphors, imagery of flight and loss at sea in order to defend a more fluid and hybrid sense of identity. This imagery appears precisely in “The Game”. The only way the young girl can escape is by imaginatively flying away, “following the thaw northward” into a place where there is no land, and therefore, no source of any dispute:

below me

was only water and the shadow of flight in it
and the shape of wings under it, and in the hours
before the morning I would be drawn down and down and drawn
down and there would be no ground under me

By flying away, this child manages to get to a place with no demarcated territories. Boland refuses to accept the given limits and boundaries, and questions the adequacy of identity politics both in England and Ireland. Although the poem emphasizes the child’s vertigo in her flight, Boland also manages to record how this simple childish game is the viable alternative for escaping asphyxiating identity demarcations. This advocacy for an ‘spiritual exile’ will also be observed, as we will see, in those poems where Boland records her life as a suburban woman now back in her home country.

7.4.4.2.3. A fragmented Irishwoman: away from the ‘pedagogical’ into the ‘performative’

The previous section has shown how Boland, as a young child in London, felt confused as a hybrid subject neither feeling entirely English nor Irish. When Boland could finally return in her mid-teens to Dublin, this feeling of inhabiting what Bhabha (1995: 13) would call “the rim of an ‘in-between’ reality” is further emphasized. In *Object Lessons*, Boland (1996a: 55-56) explains her sense of estrangement when she could finally go back to her native land:

Language. At first this was what I lacked. Not just the historic speech of the country. I lacked that too, but so did others. This was a deeper loss; I returned to find that my vocabulary of belonging was missing. The street

names, the meeting names – it was not just that I did not know them. It was something more. I had never known them. I had lost not only a place but the past that goes with it, the clues from which to construct a present self.

As we observe in this quotation, Boland describes herself as a young child profoundly marked by a sense of what is called “linguistic displacement” or “deterritorialization”, concepts that, as Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (2002a: 10) and Lloyd (1993: 16) explain, involve the postcolonial writer's disjunction between place and language. Nevertheless, it is not only language, Boland's “vocabulary of belonging”, which is damaged by geographical dislocation. Boland's “clues to construct a present self” also find themselves damaged. Her ordinary displacement from Ireland creates what she calls “an extraordinary distance between the world *place* and the world *mine*” (Boland 1996a: 36). For Boland, place is an important aspect of her own identity. As we have seen when discussing Boland's reconstruction of allegorical images such as Mother Ireland, the idea of the nation, of Ireland with its geographical boundaries, is essential for the poet. The strong connection between place and self is explained by Boland (1996a: 155) as follows: “that what we call place is really only that detail of it which we understand to be ourselves”.

In fact, the “sense of place” has been a constant in the shaping of Irish culture. Since remote times, Ireland has been characterized by all sorts of religious, social, cultural, and political factions which were accentuated by the Anglo-Irish Treaty in 1921 in which Ireland was divided into two irreconcilable poles, North and South. In a context of perpetual division and fracture, the Irish have at times felt the need to find an element of stability, of resistance to combat the constant change, deterioration, and displacement they have been subject to. As Praga (1996: 33) explains, land becomes for Irish people this element of endurance and resistance. Its great importance emanates from the fact that territorial possessions in Ireland have always been threatened in some way or another. Note that the oldest historical book of Ireland is entitled *Book of Invasions (Lebor Gabála)*.²⁷ The history of Ireland is a history of repossessions and violence. In this sense, it is not surprising to find that land (the need of belonging somewhere) is a constant in Ireland's collective memory.

This importance of feeling and knowing how to perceive landscape, of establishing a relationship between the self and land, overwhelms Boland even as a girl who is finally back in the home country.²⁸ An important concern for the woman poet is to recognize a place as her own, to find in this a spiritual refuge in which to feel herself as owner, as possessor. In fact, this is one of

²⁷ *Book of Invasions* is a medieval account explaining the historical origins of Ireland, and it emphasizes the five invasions which took place before the arrival of the Celts (Welch 2000: 192).

²⁸ For some studies on how Boland reflects her ‘sense of place’ in her poetry see García García (2002) and Villar Argáiz (2003b).

the most significant features of most literary writers in Ireland: the intense sense of place that all of them display in their work and which they develop in different ways (Praga 1996: 34). Due to the fact she spent her childhood away, Boland experiences a painful sense of dislocation as a child longing to find her own place in Ireland. Seamus Heaney (1984a: 131), in his essay “The Sense of Place”, argues that there are two ways of recognizing landscape, two complementary ways in which place is known and cherished: “One is lived, illiterate, and unconscious, the other learned, literate, and conscious”. The problem for Boland is that, because of her imposed exile, she even lacks this “illiterate and unconscious” knowledge.

The disruption between self and place that Boland experiences at such an earlier stage can be explained by Said’s theories in *The World, the Text and the Critic*. This postcolonial theorist draws a distinction between two kinds of affinity that an individual can hold (1984: 8). First of all, Said mentions “filiation”, which involves those ties that an individual has with places and people of his/her native culture; that is, ties of biology and geography. This form of affinity is natural and usual, as for instance, the personal and private ‘natural bond’ that one feels with the concept of home. Secondly, “affiliations” are those links that are established with institutions, associations, communities, and other social creations. This form of affiliation is not natural, because it has to be learned and taught. The movement is, as Said puts it, always from filiations to affiliations; it constitutes “a passage from nature to culture” (ibid). For postcolonial peoples, whose lives have been shaped by exile, emigration, and dislocations, these affiliations are complex and complicated, for they do not experience a ‘natural’ bond with their place of origin. As Marangoly (1996: 17) explains, “[t]he discourses that construct ‘home’ in the contexts of colonialism and postcolonialism suggest that ultimately both affiliations and filiations are learned, created, recalled, and/or forgotten in everyday history”.

For Boland, the supposedly ‘natural’ tie to one’s homeland becomes something that she has to learn. In this sense, as Boland (1996a: 50-51) has argued at a certain point, “the exile is in search of a self”. Belonging to a country, knowing her exact self in terms of place, becomes an obsession for Boland as a young girl. As she could not remember her country, Boland (1997a: 16-17) records in her essay “Imagining Ireland” her anxiety as a young girl to imagine what her childhood might have been in Ireland:

It became a powerful impulse. This slow and intense reconstruction of a childhood which had never happened [...]. The word *Ireland* should have been the name of my childhood. Instead it became the name of my hope, my invention, my longing.

If she cannot remember a country, she could at least invent a nation – what she calls “Ireland, Irish, Ours” (Boland 1997a: 15). As Salman Rushdie (1992: 10) has argued, migrants “create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands”. Exile becomes for this child a nursery of nationalism. As a migrant postcolonial girl, Boland searches for a homeland in literature that parallels those romantic nationalists such as Yeats who sought to construct a national culture through poetry. As the speaker argues in “Beautiful Speech” (*In a Time of Violence*): “I had yet to find/ the country already lost to me/ in song and figure”. Therefore, nationhood becomes for Boland, an imaginary construct. In *John Bull's Other Island*, Shaw (1991: 139) claims, through the speaking voice of Larry Doyle, that an “Irishman's heart is nothing but his imagination”. Later in the play, Doyle defines the Irish person as follows:

He can't be intelligently political; he dreams of what the Shan Van Vocht said in ninetyeight. If you want to interest him in Ireland you've got to call the unfortunate island Katleen ni Hoolihan and pretend she's a little old woman. It saves thinking. It saves working. It saves everything but imagination, imagination, imagination; and imagination's such a torture that you can't bear it without whisky. (Shaw 1991: 131)

As Shaw has argued, cultural nationalism is moved by an ‘unreal’ dream of a heroic Gaelic past, by the abstract portrayals of a mother country that begs for the courageous protection of Irish men. This Irish male writer showed, as early as 1904, how notions such as ‘Irishness’ and ‘nationhood’ are fabricated and fictional. For Boland, her mother country also becomes something that starts to take shape only in her imagination. In order to show the fallacy in this, I will briefly discuss some interesting criticism on this matter.

Benedic Anderson (1983) is probably one of the first to articulate the nation's ambivalent emergence. His analysis in *Imagined Communities* has exerted a tremendous influence on those postcolonial critics who wish to dismantle the foundations upon which the idea of nationalism is based. Anderson (1983: 15-16) proposes some general characteristics that define the conditions of modern nationhood: first, nations are limited, because they are defined by fixed boundaries beyond which other nations lie; secondly, nations are imagined, “because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion”; and finally, nations present themselves as communities, as deep, horizontal comradeships.

The essays in *The Invention of Tradition* (edited by Hobsbawn & Ranger in 1983) expand Anderson's definition of nationhood. Like Anderson (1983: 41), who insists that all the texts that are produced within a society are united by their imagining of that community, these authors stress the creative side of nation-forming, suggesting that nationalism in a way invents the idea of the

nation: “it is [...] clear that entirely new symbols and devices [come] into existence[...], such as the national anthem, [...] the national flag, [...] or the personification of ‘the nation’ in symbol or image” (Hobsbawm 1983: 7). Brennan (1994: 49) also highlights the fact that nations are imaginary constructs, and that their existence depends on “cultural fictions” that defend and legitimize them. As Parker et al. (1992: 11-12) assert, “[t]o say, however, that a nation is ‘imaginary’ is not to consign it to the category of (mere) fiction; it is a ‘dream’ possessing all the institutional force and affect of the real”. On this point, Anderson (1983: 15) writes that “[c]ommunities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined”.²⁹

In “What is a Nation”, Renan (1994: 8) argues that the creation of the “nation” is recent in history. He demonstrates that antiquity was unfamiliar with it: there were “republics, kingdoms, confederations of local republics and empires” but not nations (p. 9). In this sense, this critic dismantles some “myths” of the origin of the nation. Firstly, the nation has not, as some political theorists have defended, a “dynastic basis” (p. 12). Secondly, he denies the fact that nations are founded on an ethnographic basis: there is no pure race in the formation of the nation, for race is “something which is made and unmade” (p. 15). Thirdly, language and religion do not constitute nationality either (pp. 16-17). Therefore, this critic argues that the “natural frontiers” which nationalism tends to defend are fictional and fabricated constructs.

This imaginary aspect of nation-forming has also been identified by Hall (1990). The imaginary construct of nationhood acts as a source of resistance to the contemporary experiences of emigration and diaspora which mark the present world’s reality. He defines cultural nationalist identity “as a sort of collective ‘one true self’”, according to which different people are united as “one people” by common historical experiences and shared cultural codes (Hall 1990: 223). Writing from the perspective of a Caribbean diasporic, he asserts that this “oneness”, this identity, rather than an essential truth, is grounded in “an imaginative coherence” with which to confront the fragmented and dispersing experience of different individuals (p. 224). Thus, all enforced diasporas, Hall asserts, recur to this notion of some fixed origin, cultural identity as ‘oneness’, as “resources of resistance and identity” (p. 225).

Imagining the nation becomes for Boland, as this postcolonial theorist suggests, precisely a resource of resistance and identity, as we saw in her earlier attempt to identify with Moore’s lilt.

²⁹ Notice for instance, how Salman Rushdie describes the moment of India’s “birth” in his novel *Midnight’s Children*. This passage recalls graphically what it means to *imagine* a nation:

A nation which had never previously existed was about to win its freedom, catapulting us into a world which, although it had five thousand years of history, although it had invented the game of chess and traded with Middle Kingdom Egypt, was nevertheless quite imaginary; into a mythical land, a country which would never exist except by the efforts of a phenomenal collective will – except in a dream we all agreed to dream. (Rushdie 1980: 129-130)

Nevertheless, in the process, she will record the tension between this pure notion of Irishness that she aspires to, and her own fragmented and distorted experience of Irishness. As she has argued, there are two possible views of Irishness that can be embraced:

In the first, you could follow writers like Daniel Corkery – he makes a powerful case in his book *The Hidden Ireland* – which argues that below the surface of colony, below all the humiliations, there is a pure, untouched and somehow golden land of saints and scholars. A pure Ireland. It's a surprisingly dangerous notion. Or you can believe, as I came to, that the island and all the people on it are deeply marked by the humiliation and pain of what happened. That we ourselves are the text of it. That we are, in other words, constructed by the construct of colony itself: we are the sum total of the fragmentations, compromises, sufferings that occurred. And the more real, the more substantial for being so. If you don't have that sense, you may fall into the nostalgia for an Ireland which never really existed, and reject the present for an unreachable past. (Interview with Villar Argáiz 2005a)

Showing the fallacy and dangers of following that dream of national unity that nationalists such as Daniel Corkery advocated, Boland advocates an 'Irishness' that is 'fragmented' and surpasses national boundaries. Like Hall (1997: 44), Boland's poems exert a fierce critique of essentialist notions of cultural identity, and show that collective identities such as race and nation can no longer be thought of as "homogenous, unified collective identities", but as mere 'imagined' constructions. Her own diasporic experience unsettles the nationalist ideal of a united Ireland, and demonstrates how 'uprootedness' and liminality can be productively employed in order to create a more inclusive vision of nationalism.³⁰ In order to exemplify the above mentioned, I will focus on three particular poems included in *The Lost Land*: "Heroic", "Unheroic", and "Whose?".

In "Heroic", Boland juxtaposes her own disenfranchised experience of Irishness and that 'essence' conveyed in national heroic stories. Now the child, back in Ireland, walks through Dublin in the rain. Walking along O'Connell Street, Boland (1997b: 23) has argued in "Letter to a Young Woman", is like walking "straight into Irish history", for one is constantly assailed by eloquent statues of male heroes:

There was the Post Office. Inside it was the bronze statue of Cuchulain with a raven on his shoulder. Here was the stone building and the remembered action. And all up the street, placed only fifty yards or so apart was statue after statue of Irish patriots and orators. Burke. Grattan. O'Connell. Parnell. Made of stone and bronze and marble and granite. With plagues and wreaths and speeches at their feet.

³⁰ Probably because Boland turns displacement into a subversive and transformative experience, she is drawn to "the sheer placelessness" of German-speaking women poets like Elizabeth Langgässer, Else Lasker-Schüler, Rose Ausländer, all affected by the devastating Second World War (interview with Villar Argáiz 2005a). See, in particular, Boland's introduction to their selected work (Boland 2004).

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In her search for her Irish homeland, Boland finds that the heroic statues in the streets of Dublin convey a more 'authentic' Irishness:

The patriot was made of drenched stone.
His lips were still speaking. The gun
he held has just killed someone.

I looked up. And looked at him again.
He stared past me without recognition.

I moved my lips and wondered how the rain
would taste if my tongue were made of stone.
And wished it was. And whispered so that no one
could hear it but him: *make me a heroine.*

Note that the figure of the patriot is made of stone in a landscape that is described as rainy. The solidity of this image counteracts the fluidity of Boland's world. Whereas statues symbolize the possibility of naming, of granting identity and significance to objects; the rainy landscape, on the contrary, is able to dissolve and erode all solid beliefs. But, in contrast to other poems such as "Anna Liffey" (*In a Time of Violence*), which I will comment in due course, rain here does not guarantee the dissolution of such a solidified and established image. It is a firm and compact figure that stands in contrast to a rather vulnerable child who finds the need to "shelter[...] from the rain". The dichotomy that Boland establishes between solid statues and living entities is recurrent in her work. In "Canaletto in the National Gallery of Ireland" (*The Journey*) and "City of Shadows" (*The Lost Land*), the speaker emphasizes her own distance from those "pin-pointed citizens,/ their solid ease" and from "the bronze arms and attitudes of orators". But it is in this "lost land of orators and pedestals" ("City of Shadows"), a land of powerful nationalist images, where Boland wishes to find her own place as an Irish citizen. The additive constructions separated by dots in the final lines of "Heroic" are very typical linguistic features of *The Lost Land*. As the poem comes to a close, the speed quickens, and so does Boland's anxiety to be included within this national narrative. "Feeling drawn", as Boland argues in an interview, "to the enterprise of trying to be a nation or a people" (Allen Randolph 1999b: 302), she pleads the statue to "make [her] a heroine".³¹ Nevertheless, the (male) statue does not recognize Boland when she looks at him. The shortness of the sentences, in contrast to the more unfolding language that the poet favours in volumes such as *The Journey*, indicates that the girl's self is fractioned, not only

³¹ Boland's mature work avoids, in contrast to the second phase, any reference to bodily parts. The only cases in Boland's mature work where the speaker mentions her own body are in order to talk about the wounds inflicted by national representations, and also to emphasize the act of writing or speaking. Here, "my lips" and "my tongue" are the only sources of resistance for the speaker. Boland's mature work gives preference to the act of speaking and writing, and not to parts of the body, as we will see.

because of her experience of migrancy, but also because of her distance from nationalist images.³² She is displaced from the rhetoric of the nation, a rhetoric in which heroes take an active part, and heroines are perceived as utterly passive:

The heroine [...] was Ireland or Hibernia. She was stamped, as a rubbed-away mark, on silver or gold; a compromised regal figure on a throne. Or she was a nineteenth-century image of girlhood, on a frontispiece or in a book of engravings. She was invoked, addressed, remembered, loved, regretted. And most important, died for. She was a mother or a virgin. [...] Her flesh was wood or ink or marble. And she had no speaking part. (Boland 1996a: 66)

As a more mature poet, Boland cannot identify either with the hero of the tale or with these female figures. Acknowledging the strong link between Irish national identity and sexual identity, the speaker draws a very significant verbal parallelism: "Sex and history. And skin and bone". As Hagen and Zelman (2004: 18) argue, Boland is, as a female subject, "destined to remain skin and bone, not stone". Establishing the new relationship between women and nation is therefore, as we have seen, at the core of Eavan Boland's poetry. But Boland's criticism of nationalism also refers to male figures. She realizes that all nationalist identities (whether male or female) are mere fictionalized images. The hero tale, just as Mother Ireland, is eventually perceived in this poem as just another national myth.

As I intend to demonstrate, one of Boland's main interests is to show how nationalism, in its exclusive tendencies, has excluded those 'unheroic' stories of more ordinary Irishmen and women. Because of her critical attitude towards concepts such as nationhood, her poetry is distanced from that sort of anti-colonial writing which presents the native land as negatively affected exclusively by imperialism. Although Boland's poetry consistently draws upon a colonized country which has lost its native language and which has experienced terrible events such as the Great Famine and mass emigration, in *The Lost Land*, Boland presents a more complex idea of 'colony'. "The Harbour", for instance, focuses on the distance between an 'idealized' Irish nation which flourishes after the demise of the imperial epoch and a rather fragmented and wounded Irish community: "Lord be with use say the makers of a nation./ Lord looks down say the builders of a harbour". Whereas Dun Laoghaire (the Dublin harbour) was designed by those in the seat of power, it was, on the contrary, constructed by "the wretched of the earth", as Fanon (1990) would put it. By focusing on those citizens who do not conform to what is perceived as 'authentically' Irish, Boland stresses that ambivalence that Homi Bhabha (1995: 147) and Gayatri Spivak (1990c: 120) identify in the formation of all nations.

³² A similar technique occurs in "Watching Old Movies when They were New" (*The Lost Land*).

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Bhabha offers one of the sharpest critiques of nationalism, as his essays in *Nation and Narration* (originally published in 1990, and later published in *The Location of Culture*, 1995) exemplify. Reformulating Anderson's argument that nations are born of peoples sharing an imagined community, Bhabha (1995: 145) explains that those who occupy the margins of the nation disturb the idea of the imagined community as a given essentialist identity. Like Bhabha, Spivak, in "Woman in Difference" (1990c: 120), argues that the modern nation is being rewritten by those on the margins. The intention of these two authors mentioned above is to contest the traditional authority of concepts such as 'Tradition', 'Nation' and 'High Culture', authorities which rely on holistic and constructed concepts. For Bhabha (1995: 140), culture itself is not homogenous and the 'nation' as a narrative strategy is ambiguous. Nationalism tries to homogenize cultural differences (as those created by sexuality and class) by "turning the People into One" (p. 149). But this "imagined community" of the nation is altered by mass migration, colonial, postcolonial, and minority communities who, in their writing disperse the homogeneous "horizontal" view of society (p. 141). Therefore, in reading those texts which "narrate the nation", Bhabha comes across an inevitable ambivalence, a tension originating between two simultaneously narrative moments (p. 145). The first represents people as "objects" of a nationalist past. This sort of "imagined community" is based on the assumption that there is a "pre-given or constituted historical origin" that guarantees the existence of essentialist identities. The representation of "People as One" finds a counter-narrative in the different representation of the people: people as contemporary "subjects" that erase, with its heterogeneous histories, any "originary presence of the nation-people". The ambivalence between the two narrations is defined by Bhabha (1995: 147) as a tension between "the pedagogical" and "the performative". Here, Bhabha draws on "Women's Time", by Kristeva (1986c: 189), for whom the borders of the nation are constantly faced with a double temporality: "that of their *identity* constituted by historical sedimentation [what Bhabha calls "the pedagogical"], and that of their *loss of identity* in the signifying process of cultural identification" (what Bhabha calls "the performative").

This ambivalence between those representative "objects" of a nationalist past and a more heterogeneous contemporary reality of "subjects" is perceived in "Unheroic". In this poem, Boland describes her summer job at the age of seventeen in a Dublin hotel. As in the previous poem, Boland narrates how in her walk towards the hotel she was amazed at those statues of gesturing heroes: "iron orators and granite patriots./ Arms wide. Lips apart. Last words".³³ Once again, Boland describes a rainy landscape of "wet umbrellas", advancing the child's discovery of a new

³³ The short incomplete sentences of these verse lines may be a signal of the fractures that national images create. For a similar linguistic technique see "Imago" and "The Colonists" (*The Lost Land*).

world that is able to dissolve the significance of these national sculptures. The speaker recalls the memory of a manager who lived in the hotel:

He was a manager. I rarely saw him.
There was a rumour that he had a wound
from war or illness – no one seemed sure –
which would not heal. And when he finished
his day of ledgers and telephones he went
up the back stairs to his room
to dress it. I never found out
where it was. Someone said in his thigh.
Someone else said deep in his side.

Boland identifies a dissonance between the Irish nation memorialized in those statues and another nation composed of ordinary people who, like this man, are fragile and wounded. In this sense, the poet avoids adopting an exclusive feminist perspective, by focusing on how the nation as a 'master' narrative has also excluded contemporary Irishmen.³⁴ Boland's mature work turns away from the philosophy of poetry that she put to practice into *New Territory*, specifically from the romantic view,

which sees the poet as a person apart, an exceptional individual voice. For of course the concept of the exceptional individual is a contradiction in terms. The individual and the poet who writes out of his own individuality honestly, is simply the voice of unheroic, dull and tedious humanity whose dullness and tedious requires to be structured in the tedious craft of words to fight back against that deepest fear of individuals, their fear of anonymity, of the annihilation of self. (Boland 1974: 56)

The romantic and bardic figure of the poet in Boland's initial work gives way to a more realistic and 'unheroic' figure. The tension between the 'pedagogical' and the 'performative' in this poem is created by the distance between a frozen (nationalist) object and a 'living' fragile subject. In contrast to the "bronze and unbroken skin" of the orators, the manager has a wound that would not heal, and he is bound to dress it constantly. The recurrence of wounds and scars, as we have seen, is probably one of Boland's unchanged features throughout her mature collections of poetry. It is used both to denounce the damage that colonialism and nationalism have caused in Ireland, and also to indicate the difficulty, as Kiberd (1996: 6) has argued, "to decolonize the mind", to leave the past behind and move beyond those imperialist and nationalist impositions. The speaker, like the manager, bears the burden of a colonial past on her shoulders. The disparity between the

³⁴ This tendency runs consistently in Boland's mature work. Although she more explicitly focuses on Irish female experiences, poems such as "Witness" (*The Lost Land*), focus on how both sexes have been displaced by nationalist narratives: those "men and women/ they dispossessed".

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statues and the hotel receptionist also affects the narrator. As is typical in her mature work, she inserts her present reality by the sudden use of the present tense:

[...] the wet bronze and unbroken skin
of those who learned their time and knew their country.

How do I know my country? Let me tell you
it has been hard to do. And when I do
go back to difficult knowledge, it is not
to that street or those men raised
high above the certainties they stood on –
Ireland hero history – but how

I went behind the linen room and up
the stone stairs and climbed to the top.
And stood for a moment there, concealed
by shadows. In a hiding place.
Waiting to see.
Wanting to look again.
Into the patient face of the unhealed.

The verbal parallelism that connects the two initial stanzas mentioned above stresses Boland's difficulty of "knowing a country", and locates her experience as a disruptive one.³⁵ What has traditionally united "Ireland" and "History" is the "heroic". In this sense, both the ordinary female speaker and the hotel receptionist are consequently excluded from it. Although most of the time the child "went home" after work,³⁶ the end of "Unheroic" records the exact moment when she deliberately stayed "in a hiding place" out of curiosity to see the wound. The short incomplete sentences and verbal parallelism of the end of the poem indicate that Boland goes back to the past gradually, reconstructing by degrees the scene, in "fraction[s] and refraction[s]", as she says in "At the Glass Factory of Cavan Town" (*In a Time of Violence*).³⁷ Furthermore, her concealed location in the shadows shows, as Boland argues in "Beautiful Speech" (*In a Time of Violence*), that both she and the manager are "citizens of its [nationalist rhetoric's] hiding place". Nationalism's "atavistic [...] past" and "its language of archaic belonging" (Bhabha 1995: 167) have displaced and excluded both figures, who stand on the margins of official narratives. Moving away from that dream of national unity, Boland chooses the manager as an emblem of her own experience of

³⁵ For similar verbal parallelisms between stanzas see, for instance, "Moths", "In Which the Ancient History is not my Own", and "The Source" (*In a Time of Violence*). In these cases, Boland uses this technique in order to establish a contrast between her own fragmented experience and those mythical, imperialist, or nationalist stories.

³⁶ As we have seen in those poems from *The Journey*, Boland was more interested in using terms such as 'house' rather than 'home', in order to emphasize her dispossession and "detritorialization", as Lloyd (1993: 16) would put it. In *The Lost Land*, there are, interestingly enough, more references to 'home'. Nevertheless, a closer look at those contexts where Boland uses this term indicates that 'home' is usually perceived as a destination, more than as an actual place where the poetic speaker is located. As in "Unheroic", poems such as "City of Shadows", "The Colonists", "Happiness", and "Escape" use 'home' as the place to which the speaker or other people are going to. I will analyze this aspect more deeply in section 7.4.6.

³⁷ Similar techniques occur in "City of Shadows" and "Escape" (*The Lost Land*).

“nationhood”. This ordinary man, who has a wound in his leg that has not yet healed, dismantles the belief in “*Ireland hero history*”. The italics that Boland employs here is quite significant. By using this type of writing, the poet seems to be questioning their essence, the ‘certainty’ of these notions. This is a common technique in her poetry, as observed in “Beautiful Speech” (*In a Time of Violence*), where the speaker disperses “the dear vowels/ *Irish Ireland ours*” in “the Autumn air”.³⁸ In the presence of this unheroic character, Irish heroism becomes a collective fantasy, an unreal dream and delusion. In this sense, Boland's project is akin to the postmodernist aim of focusing on everything that has been neglected from ‘totalizing’ narratives: the local and fragmentary experience of those on the margins. Sarup (1993: 100) explains that the objective for postmodernists such as Jean-François Lyotard is to celebrate those contemporary life experiences that are characterized by their “anonymity”, “fragmentation”, heterogeneity, and diversity. All these experiences, as this critic argues, distance themselves from the nationalist dream of a pre-colonial Utopia, from “a nostalgia for an alienated community which might have existed in the past”.

The contrast that “Heroic” and “Unheroic” have established between the ‘pedagogical’ formation of the Irish nation and the ‘performative’ experience of common people is observed in “Whose?”, the poem which closes *The Lost Land*. This poem posits an interesting discrepancy between a nationalist countryside of male heroes, and the woman speaker's ordinary suburban landscape:

Beautiful land the patriot said
And rinsed it with his blood. And the sun rose
And the river burned. The earth leaned
Towards him: Shadows grew long. Ran red.

Beautiful land I whispered. But the roads
Stayed put. Stars froze over the suburb.
Shadows iced up. Nothing moved.
Except my hand across the page. And these words.

In contrast to those writers of the Irish Literary Revival, and in particular ‘literary nationalists’ such as Thomas Davis, who took private emblems for patriotic purposes, Boland's poetry is not moved by some ideal of the past, but by her ordinary and fragmented experience as an Irish woman. The poet openly shows the futility of the lost lives of patriots who, moved by a non-realistic ideal, gave up their own lives and ended up staining “the beautiful land” with “burned”

³⁸ In *The Lost Land*, Boland does not only use italics in order to call into question notions such as Ireland, but also to question her sense of rootedness as a mother. See for instance “The Lost Land”, “Home”, and “Daughter”. In this sense, Boland's poetry scrutinizes all sorts of foundations upon which identity-claims might rest. I will deal with this issue more extensively in the following section, 7.4.4.3.

rivers and “red” shadows. Whereas patriots invoked the land to incite rebellion, Boland’s invocation does not carry with it any violent reaction. Accordingly, “the roads stayed put” and “nothing moved”. In this sense, Boland opposes an Irish history of courageous Irish patriots to her own, apparently futile, story as a suburban woman. As in “Heroic”, where the patriot’s lips “were still speaking” and the girl only “whispered”, in “Whose?” the eloquence of the patriot that “says” is contrasted by the grown-up woman who can only “whisper”.³⁹ Her soft and quiet voice contrasts with the determined and loud speech of the nationalist tradition. As Boland (1996a: 185) has argued in *Object Lessons*, she attempts to disestablish the link between the political poem and the public poem in Ireland, because it was this strong nationalist association that silenced ordinary lives and experiences under emblems such as Mother Ireland. Boland, therefore, tries to write a new political poem from a subversive private experience. This distance between the speaker’s private discourse and a more openly public nationalist rhetoric does not involve, in this sense, lack of agency, but much the contrary. In contrast to what Boland has accustomed her readers to expect, this poem does not present a landscape of rapid change. She deliberately paralyzes the background scene, and the only thing that is left in movement at the end is her hand and “these words”, with the effect of increasing the transformative potential of her own poems. By using this deictic pronoun of proximity in a poem entirely constructed in the past tense, Boland indicates that poetry can still have some effect. As we will see in “Anna Liffey” (*In a Time of Violence*), Boland believes that words can transform, that the female “voice”, in recording the contradictions between the ‘pedagogical’ and the ‘performative’, can change existing national parameters. In contrast to *In Her Own Image*, the poet does not intend to exert agency by claiming the superiority of the woman’s world, but in recording precisely this tension between an ideal version of ‘Irishness’ and her own fragmented experience of it. The italics that open both stanzas, as in “Unheroic”, indicate that the speaker questions not only the patriot’s “beautiful land”, but also her own sense of “beautiful land”. As the very title “Whose?” indicates, Boland challenges the validity of both versions: neither the heroes nor herself can ultimately offer an ‘authentic’ and accurate narrative of ‘Irishness’. In this sense, the poet shows the instability of claiming a land as one’s own, and therefore questions the whole idea of ownership itself. This advances what is going to be the following section, where Boland even scrutinizes, in poems such as “Anna Liffey” (*In a Time of Violence*), her own identity as a suburban mother. For Boland, as well as for postcolonial theorists such as Bhabha and Hall, identity is not conferred in fixed notions such as nation and gender, but is itself composed of contradictory pulls and “fragmentations”, as she has recently argued (interview with Villar Argáiz 2005a).

³⁹ This contrast has also been observed in “Mother Ireland” (*The Lost Land*). Remember how the patriots were recorded to “say” “[c]ome back to us” and Mother Ireland only “whispered” “[t]rust me”.

7.4.4.3. A fluid conception of the self: an Irish suburban woman

Until now we have observed how Boland's poetry records the contradictory pulls between her earlier dream of Ireland as a cultural unity and her own experience of Irishness as fragmentation. The tension that Boland experienced as a young child is highly productive for it has enabled her to open a 'Third Space' in which nationalist identity-claims such as a 'pure' and 'authentic' Irishness are dismantled. In what follows, I will show how Boland's mature work records other sorts of tensions: the contradictions between the stillness of art and the versatility of her life experience, the opposite poles of womanhood and poetry; and the distance that Boland finds between mythical and historical versions of Ireland.

Out of these tensions, Boland will occupy a subversive hybrid space, in which her own identity will always be represented in terms of fluidity, dissolution, death, and erasure.⁴⁰ Nothing is stable in her mature poetry, everything is changeable, even her sense of identity. Showalter (1999: 259) asserts that one way of identifying women's 'Female' art is by their ability to "create [their own distinctive] atmospheres". Boland's mature work creates this distinctive atmosphere Showalter talks about. In most of the poems from *The Journey* onwards, Boland's time of day is usually dusk, a time of transition when nothing is definite and everything blurs. In this context, the poet-speaker is able to shift from one sphere to another, from a real and concrete world to a supernatural or bygone world. Boland's poetic voices inhabit non-defined spaces, liminal and in-between spaces. Hers is always a landscape of rapid change: a mother walking in a suburban dusk or a woman writing at a table by an open window in a twilight setting of diffused lights. Locating herself in this transitional position allows Boland to evade facile definitions and artistic misrepresentations. In this context, self-definition engages in a gradual process of dissolution and fluidity.

Mills Harper (1997) and Fulford (2002a) are two of the few critics who have detected the fluid sense of identity in Boland's poetry. Mills Harper (1997: 192) has noted that Boland "occupies a region beyond subject-object definition". Fulford (2002a: 213), in the belief that identity cannot be founded on an idea of authenticity, praises Boland's dissolution of categories such as 'Irishness' and 'womanhood', because, only by so doing, she forces readers to understand the misrepresentation involved in all representations. Thanks to the versatility of her identity, this critic goes on, Boland manages to abandon "the pathos of authenticity that has informed first-generation nationalist and feminist projects alike" (ibid). In fact, I intend to show that, by writing

⁴⁰ This fluid sense of identity is also observed in other Irish women writers, such as Medbh MacGuckian, whose poetry records "the tension between the evolving selves and identities of a [...] woman in a troubled land" (Haberstroh 2001: 9).

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from a place of liminality, Boland resists essentialisms, defies definitions of women (as those offered by nationalist and feminist ideologies), and opens a space of future potential.

7.4.4.3.1. Against the solidification of images in art

7.4.4.3.1.1. The limits of artistic representations

Boland faces a troubling dichotomy as an Irish woman poet: her desire to describe the fluidity of a life experience, and the stillness and solidification that any sort of artistic representation involves. In the following quotation, Boland (1996a: 33-34) questions her ability to record a life in a poem without simplifying or keeping it fixed. Here, her grandmother's life is symbolized by the image of the "lava cameo":

To inscribe a profile in the cold rock. To cut a human face into what had once flowed, fiery and devouring, past farms and villages and livestock. To make a statement of something which was already a statement of random and unsparing destruction. [...] If I remembered her life, if I were to set her down – half-turned-away face in its context of ill luck and erased circumstance – would I be guilty of sarcastic craftsmanship? Would I too be making a statement of irony and corruption?

As we can see in this passage, the woman poet feels that her recovery of women's past is inadequate because she feels limited by the fact that she cannot make a statement of something which has been destroyed. But she is also doing something else: Boland is questioning her very ability to record the changes that affect women, their lived experience, without freezing the moment. As Fulford (2002a: 206) explains,

[a]s Boland tries to work against monumental or immortal versions of identity and time, she becomes 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.

In this sense, Boland is faced with the task of giving voice to women's realities within a poem, without running the risk of immortalizing and objectifying them any further. In order to overcome the "irony and corruption" that threatens every artist, and therefore every poet, Boland always describes her women as fluid and dissolved, and therefore, as impossible to grasp.

The danger of simplification and misrepresentation that artistic representation involves is constantly recorded in her poetry, as in poems such as "Bright-Cut Irish Silver", "An Old Steel Engraving", and "The Photograph on my Father's desk" (*Outside History*).

The first poem explicitly criticizes the (Irish) poetic tradition, allegorized as silver-crafting. The speaker in this poem, attracted by the sensuality of the silver object, is induced to “take it down/from time to time” in order:

to feel
the smooth path of silver meet the cicatrice of skill.

These scars, I tell myself, are learned.

This gift for wounding an artery of rock
was passed on from father to son, to the father
of the next son;

is an aptitude
for injuring earth while inferring it in curves and surfaces;

is this cold potency which has come,
by time and chance,

into my hands.

Note the clear equation of art and wounding that these lines exemplify. First of all, she attacks the fact that literature has been based on a patrilineal inheritance, from which women have been excluded. Boland is here emphasizing that poetry is nothing but a male terrain, to which poets have access by “right” and “inheritance”. Secondly, she denounces the conventional relationship between artistic mastery and coercion. ‘Injuring’ and turning women into solidified emblems is for male poets an “aptitude”, a “skill”. By inscribing “curves and surfaces”, the artist “inscribe[s] a profile in the hard rock” (Boland 1996a: 33), transforming the hardened material in order to define and mould it.⁴¹ Boland implies that the artist creates ‘wounds’, by neglecting the dynamics of women’s lived experiences. The deictic demonstrative pronouns in this poem enhance the speaker’s approximation to the scars, as if they were inscribed in her very same body. The relationship of power as established in Irish poetry between male subject and female object has also affected the woman speaker. The final single-line stanza, characteristic of Boland’s mature style, focuses on the speaker’s hands, as if, like silver, they share the same cicatrices.

Nevertheless, this poem is not only criticizing the Irish poetic tradition. The end of the poem is quite ambiguous, because Boland presents herself both as a victim and an accomplice of the same artistic ‘conspiracy’. The distance of the subject from the predicate gives the impression that this is a rhetorical question. Boland wonders if she is excluded from this art, or if she has rather inherited its same violence. By holding in her hands “this cold potency”, Boland yields to the temptation of exerting the same power and violence over her poetic images. Although she has

⁴¹ In *Outside History* there abound references to materials such as iron, steel, silver, granite, and how they are transformed, injured by art.

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received this gift, not by heritage, but by “time and chance”, with her hands, she can equally, in her search for order and beauty, carry out a similar misrepresentation. In this sense, and as Hagen and Zelman (2004: 88) have also noticed, Boland points to the, perhaps inevitable, diminishing and deformation that the artist, in his/her pursuit of formal and aesthetic beauty, exerts on the objects. In poems such as “The Art of Grief” (*In a Time of Violence*), the speaker implicitly questions her own ability to reconstruct poetic images:

An object of the images we make is
what we are and how we lean out and/
over the perfect surface where
our features in water greet us and save us.
No weeping there, only the element
claiming its emblem.

The first person pronoun of this passage indicates that the speaker admits to being an accomplice of an art where no “weeping” and living experiences are recorded. As “The Art of Grief” and “Bright-Cut Irish Silver” show, Boland believes that we are inevitably trapped by our own representations. In order to reverse the process, as we will see, Boland attempts to do the contrary, creating images which cannot be defined “in curves and surfaces”, but that, in their very indefinite shapes, can escape both the poet and the reader’s grasp.

In “The Photograph on my Father’s Desk”, Boland also reflects on the stillness and solidification that, in this case, a photograph inflicts on a man and a woman. As in other poems from this volume, such as “Mountain time”, “We Were Neutral in the War”, and “An Old Steel Engraving”, this poem is written as a third person narration. Interestingly enough, all these poems focus on ‘official’ and ‘sanctioned’ cultural and historical accounts (a mythical story, a particular historical event, or conventional artistic representations). It is as if Boland adopts the stance of an omnipresent narrator and a distant observer both to handle with more assurance her subversive movement, and also to perceive more clearly the pitfalls of traditional forms. The poem opens by describing an apparently active natural setting:

It could be
any summer afternoon.

The sun is warm on
the fruitwood garden seat.
Fuchsia droops.
Thrushes move to get
windfalls underneath the crab apple tree.

Although we discover a seemingly dynamic setting, the indefinite determiner ‘any’ indicates that the reference to the summer afternoon of the photograph is generic, and that the

scene is not located within a particular time or place. The use of the present simple in these lines is significant, too. We should remember that the present simple can be used with a timeless reference, according to which the speaker states his/her facts as “usually valid all the time” (see Quereda Rodríguez-Navarro 1997: 111). Since they have such “a universal validity”, “they are always presented as a whole” (ibid). Similarly, in this context, Boland uses the simple present in order to show how past, present, and future are irrelevant in the photograph. Without any specific temporal reference, Boland locates this scene as timeless, at no concrete point in time. The image of the thrush also appears in “Object Lessons” (*Outside History*), a poem that similarly reflects on the stillness and solidification of artistic images, in this particular case, within the pictorial scene of a simple black mug. In this poem, the bird is portrayed as “ready to sing”, but its song will be a “never/to-be-finished aria”. Whereas the bird in “Object Lessons” is constantly singing, the birds in this poem will be perpetually in movement. Nonetheless, although they are in motion, in reality their movement is static. Similarly, the sun will always be warming the garden chair, and the flower will always be drooping. This scene, frozen both in time and place, widens in the following lines, in order to include a man and a woman:

The woman
holds her throat like a wound.

She wears
mutton-coloured gaberdine with
a scum of lace
just above her boot

which is pointed at
this man coming down the path with
his arms wide open. Laughing.

The woman's pose contrasts with the man's. While she is still, he comes with “his arms wide open” and his laughing face. The lexical verbs of action are only assigned to the male character. It is the man who has the action and is presented as moving, as the present participles indicate. The woman does not share the male's action-in-progress and her solidification is stronger in the photograph. Whereas the man is “[l]aughing”, the woman in the picture is silenced and oppressed, holding her throat “like a wound”. Using Boland's words in “The Art of Grief” (*In a Time of Violence*), it is the woman's very “indivisible act of definition which ha[s] silenced her”. As we have seen in “Bright-Cut Irish Silver”, Boland recurs in her poetry to metaphors of wounds and scars to suggest the violence that Irish poetry, in its desire to portray passive and beautiful female emblems, has exerted on real-and-blood women. As Foster (1999: 7) has noted, the poem is constructed upon the traditional formula of “male pursuer” and “female [...] victim” which is at

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the heart of canonical poems such as Keats's "Ode to the Grecian Urn". Wearing a gaberdine described as "mutton-coloured", the woman seems to be an oppressed lamb, a sacrificed scapegoat. The silence that characterizes this image is further intensified by the end of the poem:

The garden fills up
with a burned silence.

The talk has stopped.
The spoon which just now
jingled at the rim of the lemonade jug
is still.

And the shrubbed lavender
will find
neither fragrance nor muslin.

The photographer has not only silenced the woman, but in solidifying this moment, has also "removed [all] life from it" (Foster 1999: 7). The previous tinkling metallic sound of the spoon has been silenced, and the lavender has even lost its fragrance. In this sense, visual representation gets rid of other senses. The faculties of hearing, smell, not to say, touch or taste, find themselves damaged, and with them, the richness of perceiving an image in all its totality. The poem ends with the modal 'will' indicating a high degree of certainty, something common in Boland's mature work in order to express the poet's conviction of how oppressive artistic representation can be.

Nevertheless, Boland manages to carry out a certain amount of subversion, by giving preference to the female character's world. Interestingly enough, the picture is described from a woman's point of view. Boland describes the woman's clothes, the lace that decorates them, the lemonade that she has supposedly prepared, and the lavender that she might keep in wardrobes or hang in the kitchen, as other women in her poems do (i.e. "What We Lost", *Outside History*). On the contrary, the man, of whom we know almost nothing, doesn't have such a prominent role. Furthermore, the way the poem is constructed indicates that Boland, although very implicitly, refuses to leave the scene as a mere picture of contemplation. Whereas it is constructed upon short sentences, the only moment when a long sentence and an enjambment appear is, significantly enough, when Boland describes the two figures in the picture. By this linguistic technique, the woman poet attempts to liberate them from their enclosure and solidification. The final sentence of the poem begins with the conjunction 'and', a characteristic feature of Boland's mature work. It is as if the poet attempts to open, at least through language, a place where these images can move.

This attempt to liberate artistic images from their stillness is carried out more explicitly in "An Old Steel Engraving". As in "Bright-Cut Irish Silver", Boland uses the engraving in this poem

as a metaphor of the Irish literary tradition and also as a starting point to reflect on the dangers of “inscribing a profile” into a hard surface (Boland 1996a: 33). In the initial stanza, Boland adopts, as in “The Photograph on my Father’s Desk”, the position of an observer who, as an omnipresent narrator, has the authority to draw, by means of imperatives, the reader’s attention to what she is interested in.⁴²

Look.
The figure in the foreground breaks his fall with
one hand. He cannot die.
The river cannot wander
into the shadows to be dragged by willows.
The passer-by is scared witless. He cannot escape.
He cannot stop staring at
this hand which can barely raise
the patriot
above the ground which is
the origin and reason for it all.

This poem captures a moment similar to “The Photograph on my Father’s Desk”. The traditional formula of male pursuer and fleeing maiden is transformed here into a hero wounded by a bayonet thrust, and a terrified eyewitness. The preponderance of the use of the modal ‘can’ in the negative form indicates both characters’ impossibility of movement, and it enhances their stillness and petrification in the engraving. This impossibility or ‘limited’ possibility is also enhanced by the adverb “barely”, and by later lexical repetitions of “nothing can move [...] nothing can stir”. While the victim hangs suspended just above the ground, the passer-by “cannot stop staring” at him. As in “The Photograph of my Father’s Desk”, Boland uses the simple present in order to express timeless reference. On the other hand, the use of short sentences enhances the stillness and imprisonment of these figures in art, something common in Boland’s mature work, as observed in “Object Lessons” (*Outside History*) and “A Woman Painted in Leaf” (*In a Time of Violence*). At the end of this first stanza, these short sentences give way to longer ones, as with an attempt to push language to the limit, in order to overcome stillness and open a place of movement.

As this poem exemplifies, Boland’s mature work, in contrast to *In Her Own Image*, addresses how Irish art/ poetry had negatively misrepresented not only women, but also men. As Kupillas (1999: 19) argues, “Boland’s program for change is addressed to all”. In poems such as “The Glass King” (*The Journey*), for instance, Boland has reflected on the destructive power that the Irish poetic tradition has also had on male figures. This poem explores the anguish of King Charles VI in his belief that he is made of glass. In this sense, the poet moves away from that

⁴² Boland’s use of imperatives is common in those poems where she addresses the solidification of mythical and cultural constructs, as in “Listen. This is the Noise of Myth” (*The Journey*).

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narrow feminist focus that characterized her second phase, where she exclusively addressed women's oppression from the starting point of male destructive myths. As the woman in "The Photograph", these two male figures are silenced by the engraver, they cannot talk, and they are imprisoned in "an unfinished action". Boland directly associates the engraving with those "mute images" of Irish poetry (1996a: 196), by calling the speaker's attention to "the spaces on the page":

More closely now:
at the stillness of unfinished action in
afternoon heat, at the spaces on the page. They widen
to include us:
we have found

the country of our malediction where
nothing can move until we find the word,
nothing can stir until we say this is

what happened and is happening and history
is one of us who turns away
while the other is turning the page.

In order to break this silence, the speaker calls us to "find the word", to raise our voices to talk about "what happened and is happening". Refusing to leave the scene intact, Boland implicates herself, as well as the readers, within the aesthetic experience. Rather than exerting a passive and contemplative appreciation of the engraving, the woman poet advocates the readers engaging actively with her in "finding the word" that can 'unfreeze' the scene, that can restore these characters as living entities. But this restoration of time is not a pleasant one, for it involves the death of the wounded hero and the recognition that having a nation is not a blessing, but a "malediction". Boland suggests that national stories are not composed by these frozen patriots in steel. For Boland, the nation is not something to be glorified by singing the glories of battles and the heroism of warriors, but it is about death and painful experiences, in other words, an "ordeal" (a common word in her poetry to refer to Irish history).⁴³ "[T]he spaces on the page" of history must be widened, in order to include the ordinary and unexceptionable lives of common Irish people. Only by "turning away" from romanticized images of battle-cries and monumental deeds, Boland seems to suggest, can liberation from artistic representation and restrictive historical accounts be achieved. In the last lines of the poem, Boland carries out her intention to restore these engraving figures as moving and living entities:

⁴³ See, for instance, "What Love Intended", "Outside History (*Outside History*), "That the Science of Cartography is Limited", and "The Art of Grief" (*In a Time of Violence*).

Is this river which
moments ago must have flashed the morse
of a bayonet thrust. And is moving on.

The predicate that opens the final stanza is at a considerable distance from its elliptical subject. This difficult syntactical structure allows the reader to engage in Boland's creative process of reconstructing the scene in the engraving. The woman poet wants us to participate in her process of invention: what is the subject of the final stanza, is it "the country of our malediction" or is it "history"? As we lack actual facts, our reconstruction of the engraved scene is a matter of deduction, and so it is for the poet, who infers that the "morse/ of a bayonet thrust" flashed just before the scene was captured by the engraver. In this sense, Boland has to decipher what might have happened in an action described as solidified. The speaker succeeds in reversing the stillness of the engraving, by letting the scene move at the end. The simple progressive at the end counters the initial use of simple present verbs. As we will see, Boland uses the fluidity of water (in this case the river) to suggest another form of life that cannot be solidified into any sort of artistic representation. Boland always prefers to describe her poetic images as watery rather than inflexible. In this poem, whereas ground is portrayed in rather negative terms (as "the origin and reason" for war and violence), water, by contrast, is a positive 'terrain' that allows representation but not simplification. Like the river moving on, Boland's words at the end are left in motion, opening a place of mobility where the patriot can eventually die and the passer-by can finally escape. The verse of this last stanza, although constructed with short sentences, enhances this loose movement. The omission of the subject in ("Is this river") indicates that this sentence is but a continuation of the previous one. On the other hand, and as in "The Photograph on my Father's Desk", the last sentence begins with the conjunction "And". The syntactic complexity of the stanzas and the acceleration of the lines at the end of the poem are two frequent features of Boland's mature style. Both linguistic techniques create a profound sense of instability as the poem closes, and they parallel its movement from solidification to liberation from the restriction of artistic representation.

As we have seen in *Outside History*, Boland focuses on photographs and engravings as a starting point from which to reflect on how art exerts violence by simplifying 'real' images. This interest is continued in volumes such as *In a Time of Violence*, where maps, paintings, sculptures, figures of glass, and dolls are portrayed critically for their inability to record life in all its complexity. In "Which the Ancient History I Learned is not my own", Boland criticizes the map hung on the wall of her school in London for not displaying her own native land. But even supposedly accurate Irish maps are attacked as well. In "That the Science of Cartography is Limited", Boland recalls the moment when her husband took her to a place at the very "borders of

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Connacth”, in “its northern edge”, and pointed out a “famine road”. As we will see, Boland constantly focuses on interstitial locations, such as edges and borders in order to suggest that there is a reality that stands on the margins of representation, outside any science of cartography. This is Boland’s main criticism in this poem. What remains unrecorded on the Irish map is the past itself, the marks and wounds left on the land by those “starving Irish” making famine roads. It is this very exclusion that makes Boland call cartography into question:

when I take down
the map of this island, it is never so
I can say here is
the masterful, the apt rendering of

the spherical as flat, nor
an ingenuous design which persuades a curve
into a place,
but to tell myself again that

the line which says woodland and cries hunger
and gives out among sweet pine and cypress,
and finds no horizon

will not be there.

Even in spite of the map’s rendering of three dimensions on the flat page, a map conveys still a flawed and simplified representation that does not include Ireland’s past. At the end of the poem, Boland also extends the limits of the art of cartography to her own poetic endeavour. As Thurston (1999: 245) has also noticed, the “line” not only refers to remnants of the famine road but also to Boland’s own poem, which is made up of ‘lines’ unfolding down the page. Boland’s words cannot offer an “apt rendering” of those famine roads, they simply “will not be there”. Her attempt to focus on what lies outside maps is difficult, perhaps impossible, both because there is no actual evidence of their existence, and also because poetry is in some ways for Boland a limiting form of expression. Furthermore, the woman poet has argued that “the act of map-making is an act of power”, and as such, it includes some geographical places at the expense of excluding others (Boland 2000a: 25). Boland tries to avoid creating a new (authoritarian) representation; in fact, she wants to create a new form of cartography that contests all acts of power. In this sense, the poem ends by emphasizing the poet’s own limitations to include those details of the past.

This also happens in “Lava Cameo” (*In a Time of Violence*), a poem about Boland’s grandmother. Boland attempts to capture this figure’s life, not “as sculpture but syntax”. Whereas the sculpture solidifies images, fixing the flow of life, Boland wants to “[i]nscribe catastrophe”, to “arrest a profile in the flux of hell”. This is a very difficult project, as it involves simultaneously a process of capturing and a recognition of something that cannot be held still. In this sense, Boland

realizes that art is a double-edged sword, as it can only apparently describe living images in solid grounds. As she has argued:

It's an odd paradox of art that it can only work by fixing the moment – whether it's painting or poetry or fiction – and yet once the moment gets fixed, everything in expression restricts it and limits it. It's one of the most interesting aspects of writing a poem. (Interview with Villar Argáiz 2005a)

According to Thurston (1999: 246), this is precisely Boland's own strength, the fact that “she insistently leaves questions unanswered and problems unresolved”. In fact, Boland recognizes that “the limitations of the poem [...] are the strength. I've always found freedom in those limits” (interview with Villar Argáiz 2005a). Boland's work consistently points out that her own poems, just as those artistic representations like photographs and engravings, are always incomplete. This is where her power as a poet lies: by suggesting that all representations are necessarily partial, she manages to undermine those authoritarian ideologies (whether imperialist, nationalist, or feminist) that rely on truthful and complete images.

Nevertheless, even though Boland admits her poems are fallible representations, she believes that poetry “offers opportunities to change and dissolve time and space” (interview with Villar Argáiz 2005a). Fluidity and dissolution are subversive techniques to overturn those images sanctioned in cultural (nationalist and feminist) representations. The fluid ending that we observed in “An Old Steel Engraving” is characteristic of Boland's mature work. In “We Were Neutral in the War” (*Outside History*), Boland presents a married woman who, ignorant of all the talk of war in the 1940s, is mainly concerned with sewing and making preserves from her garden fruits. At the end of the poem, Boland offers an image of this woman dancing “the fox-trot, the two-step,/ the quick-step [...] in waltz time”. The constant movement with which the woman is depicted at the end is Boland's attempt to counteract her earlier artistic representation of her, a representation that might run the risk of defining and therefore solidifying her. This also occurs in “The Carousel in the Park”, a poem that similarly ends with an image of Boland as a young child playing on a carousel at Central Park. This young girl is presented as moving in intervals, “[u]p and down”, “going high and descending”, as riding a horse at a “canter”. The end of these two poems, like in “An Old-Steel Engraving”, offer fluid images which, in their constant movement, are impossible to grasp both by Boland and by the reader. The endings of Boland's poems create a space free from the limitations, boundaries, and restrictions imposed by artistic representations. By focusing on moving images, Boland allows her figures to acquire a limitless number of different shapes. The following section will address this aspect of her work more thoroughly.

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7.4.4.3.1.2. A woman who escapes artistic representation

As the previous poems have shown, Boland believes that any form of representation, whether in maps, sculptures, photographs, or poems, runs the risk of misrepresenting real images, because of its desire to capture and define them as solid and fixed entities. With a view to moving away from any sort of restrictive representation, Boland attempts to bring her poetic images to dissolution and fluidity.

In order to study this aspect of Boland's work, I will draw on those French feminists' theories that conceptualize women as fluid entities in order to escape and undermine the binary masculine thought. Although, as we have seen, Cixous and Irigaray advocate sexual difference, they also urge women to gesture towards a fluid identity, one that cannot be defined and enclosed within masculine representations.

Due to her marginalized background, Cixous has maintained a very critical attitude towards all forms of oppression.⁴⁴ As an Algerian Jewish woman, Cixous has clearly understood the dangers involved in adopting any sort of ideology, which, in the long run, can be restrictive and inflexible. This is why she has attempted, through her work, to move beyond a narrowly defined feminism which relies on essentialist categories such as 'man' and 'woman'. Although in *Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing* she admits that both categories are necessarily used to defend women in a patriarchal society, Cixous (1994: 200) also expresses her view that they are deeply artificial, socially and culturally charged. The opposition man/ woman is, as established, dictated by society, and therefore, it should be considered as idiosyncratic and not essential. Therefore, her writings attempt to displace this conceptual opposition:

Let's imagine we love a woman who is a man inside. This means we love not a man exactly, but a woman who is a man, which is not quite the same thing: it's a woman who is also a man, another species. These complexities are not yet audible. (Cixous 1994: 199)

In this sense, Cixous embraces the Derridean deconstruction of identity.⁴⁵ In an attempt to overcome social constructions such as 'man' and 'woman', she envisages the category of 'woman' as fluid, constantly surpassing binaries:

⁴⁴ Cixous was born in Oran, Algeria, in 1937, of a Spanish/French/Jewish father and a German/Jewish mother (Sellers 1994: xxvi). As she explains: "I was born at/from the intersection of migrations and memories from the Occident and Orient, from the North and South. I was born a foreigner in "France" in a said-to-be "French" Algeria. I was born in not-France calling itself France" (Cixous 1994: xv).

⁴⁵ As this feminist critic has argued:

A subject is at least a thousand people. This is why I never ask myself "who am I?" (*qui suis-je?*). I ask myself "who are I?" (*qui sont-je?*) – an untranslatable phrase. Who can say who I are, how many I are, which I is the most I of my I's? Of course we each have a solid social identity, all the more solid and stable as all our other phases of identity are unstable, surprising. [...]. We: are (untranslatable). (Cixous 1994: xvii)

Let masculine sexuality gravitate around the penis, engendering this centralized body [...] under the party dictatorship. Woman does not perform on herself this regionalization that profits the couple head-sex that only inscribes itself within frontiers. Her libido is cosmic, just as her unconsciousness is worldwide: her writing also can only go on and on, without ever inscribing or distinguishing contours, [...] she goes on and on infinitely. (Cixous 1994: 44)

As we observe here, Cixous draws a parallel between female libido and an 'in-between' writing that goes on infinitely, without inscribing outlines. As Calle-Gruber (1994: 213) argues, "Hélène Cixous' books give precisely the feminine [...] other entries to meaning; the between at work which escapes classification; a between-two, which makes three a more; a between-time which exceeds time". Cixous describes womanhood as a category that surpasses the opposition self/other. In their ability to be more bisexual than men, women move beyond binary oppositions. In this sense, Cixous returns to a very similar metaphor that Irigaray uses to describe women: as diffusion, liquefaction, aerial swimming before the Symbolic.

According to Luce Irigaray (1985: 26), symbolic language has granted priority to what is organized around the phallus, the only identifiable form: "[t]he *one* of form, [...] the (male) sexual organ". This feminist critic believes that woman cannot be defined by male parameters, and consequently she is described as the negative side of man: "her sexual organ, which is not one organ, is counted as *none*. The negative, the underside, the reverse of the only visible and morphologically designatable organ [...]: the penis" (p. 26). Women present an "excess of form", or an apparent lack of (male) sexual organs. Therefore, their reality is impossible to grasp or describe by male standards (p. 11). Men fear the 'open container', that which flows and is mobile, because it is not a solid ground/earth or mirror for the subject to identify with (p. 64). In this sense, they need to represent her as a closed volume, a set container, in their desire to possess, immobilize and keep her under their control.

Irigaray (1991: 56) offers a counter image to the male representations of woman: what she calls an "other woman" or "(The/A) woman". This woman "does not yet exist", but her arrival will destroy, according to Irigaray, the very "foundations of patriarchy" (p. 29). This new woman cannot be defined, represented and fixed into male representations, for she is constantly in a state of movement and flux:

You are moving. You never stay still. You never stay. You never "are". How can I say "you", when you are always other? How can I speak to you? You remain in flux, never congealing or solidifying. (Irigaray 1985: 214-215)

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As opposed to ‘One/oneness’ (*le un*), which signifies those unitary representations of identity within the masculine (and universal) system, Irigaray (1985: 218) prefers to define the female subject as ‘all’ (*toute[s]*), a subject simultaneously singular and plural. In a culture that claims to count everything, “to number everything by units”, this “other woman” resists all adequate definitions, she is “[n]either one nor two”, and “always one and the other, at the same time” (p. 207). Irigaray’s definition of the woman in “When Our Lips Speak Together” directly reminds one of Bhabha’s definition of the postcolonial migrant subject, a subject described as “neither the One [...] nor the Other [...] but something else besides which contests the terms and territories of both” (Bhabha 1995: 25). Significantly enough, Irigaray (1991: 91) also envisages this new woman as a nomad who is constantly moving and dancing, taking her own ‘house’ with her. Perhaps the main feature that distinguishes postcolonial theorists such as Bhabha from feminists such as Irigaray and Cixous is that, whereas Bhabha locates hybridity in the postcolonial subject’s ability constantly to surpass imperialist, national, and ethnic boundaries, these French feminists more specifically locate women’s fluid nature in the plurality and richness of the female sex. Irigaray (1985: 111) argues that woman’s sexual organs are not countable in the male logic and, therefore, they overcome polarization. The woman’s lips, for instance, touch themselves without distinction of “one and two” (ibid). In this sense, the woman’s body transgresses and confuses those boundaries of the male discourse:

[The female sex] is a threshold unto *mucosity*. Beyond the classic opposites of love and hate, liquid and ice, lies this perpetually *half-open* threshold, consisting of *lips* that are strangers to dichotomy, pressed against one another, but without any possibility of suture, at least of a real kind, they do not absorb the world either into themselves or through themselves. (Irigaray 1985: 175)

In this sense, the female sex is located within no fixed boundaries. Irigaray argues that women are able to escape masculine definitions due to the various kinds of ‘jouissances’ or pleasures they get from their sexuality. Whereas men have only one sex organ, and therefore, they can only have one kind of orgasm, women have many more sex organs, and therefore they can enjoy more plural and varied orgasms: “Fondling the breasts, touching the vulva, spreading the lips, stroking the posterior wall of the vagina, brushing against the mouth of the uterus, and so on. To evoke only a few of the most specifically female pleasures” (Irigaray 1985: 28).

In line with Cixous’s and Irigaray’s theories, Boland’s mature work questions the view of the female subject as unified and stable. The woman in her poems is depicted as a subject “without

common measure", a "volume without contours",⁴⁶ who cannot be reduced to the quantifying measurements by which she is defined and captured by male standards (Irigaray 1985: 163). From this perspective, it would be tempting to read Boland's fluid self as another feminist attempt to conceptualize the richness and plurality of the female sex. In any case, Boland avoids falling prey to this biological and deterministic notion of woman's fluidity. She conceptualizes women in terms of hybridity, instability, and blurring, not because of the existence of a distinctive sexual difference, but because she suggests it is impossible to describe any living subject (whether male or female) within any sort of artistic representation. In contrast to *In Her Own Image*, her mature work offers almost no bodily references, and she does not write with a radical feminist project in mind. Although sometimes she focuses on a damaged and scarred female body, this is done in order to counteract idealistic and mythical images of women as everlasting beautiful and young. Boland's women suffer the consequences of the passing of time and the loss of beauty: they are living and bloody entities, unlike those allegorical images such as Mother Ireland.

Nevertheless, there are certain features that Boland shares with Cixous and Irigaray. Her women are presented as fluid, constantly moving. For Boland, mobility is linked with flesh-and-blood women, whereas immobility is linked with death and with those monumental and mythical images of women imprisoned in poetry. On the other hand, Boland's poetry moves to the "in-between-space" that Cixous and Irigaray talk about, when arguing that the 'in-between' is the space of women's writing, something that Meaney (1993a: 141) has also identified.

This fluid notion of identity runs throughout Boland's volumes of poetry after *The Journey and Other Poems*. As I hinted earlier, *The Journey* is, what I would like to call, Boland's "volume of the 'in-between'" par excellence. In this volume, the woman poet is concerned with presenting her women in constant motion; they are always located in blurred and dissolved landscapes, in diffused and tenuous lights. In order to do this, Boland develops a characteristic style of writing. First of all, the poet uses plenty of present participles and progressive verb forms referring to the poetic speaker, either in the present tense (as in "Self-Portrait on a Summer Evening", "The Bottle Garden", "Suburban Woman: A Detail", "The Briar Rose", "The Women", and "Canaletto in the National Gallery of Ireland"), or in the past tense (as in "The Oral Tradition", "The Unlived Life", "There and Back", "The Fire in Our Neighbourhood", "The Wild Spray", "The Journey", and "Fond Memory"). Her use of the progressive should not be underestimated. As Querreda Rodríguez-Navarro (1997: 123, 133) explains, the speaker uses both the present and past progressive in order to introduce us into a situation, whether within or distant from his/her present perspective, "as if it were in-the-middle-of-its-process". As these actions are always presented as

⁴⁶ "Volume without Contours" is the title of one of Irigaray's essays (1991: 53-67).

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in their middle of their development, they can never “be seen in their entirety, since they have not finished yet” (p. 124). This is applicable in a way to the obsessive usage of present participles in Boland’s poetry. By means of these participles and progressives, Boland presents her women in constant movement, in the middle of an action that has not been completed. The fact that the reader of her poems cannot grasp these women’s action “as-a-whole” also enhances the feeling that Boland’s women can never be perceived in their totality. In their constant mobility and unfinished actions, they avoid being solidified by the reader’s ‘gaze’. This use of participles and progressives, although maintained in other volumes of poetry such as *Outside History* and *In a Time of Violence*, is more reiterative in *The Journey*, where there is a higher emphasis on the woman speaker’s movement. As we will see in section 7.4.5., *Outside History* presents a higher emphasis on the Irish past, and on the poet’s inability to grasp it. In contrast to *The Journey*, in some poems in this collection, the poetic images are neither fluid nor in movement. In poems such as “Our Origins are in the Sea”, “Midnight Flowers”, or “The Photograph on my Father’s Desk”, Boland avoids using present or past progressives, and the woman seems to be entrapped in a sort of ‘timeless’ present tense. On the other hand, in *In a Time of Violence* Boland is more interested in leading her women into death and nothingness, something that I will explore in the final section of this chapter. In contrast to these two volumes of poetry, *The Journey*, as the very title indicates, places a special emphasis on the speaker’s movement and her act of travelling from one place from another. She is never at the origin or at the destiny of her trip, but always in the middle of a literal or imaginary journey.

Secondly, Boland’s poetic language in *The Journey* enhances the fluidity and motion of her women. Almost all the poems in this collection are constructed upon very long sentences, mostly at the end, that unfold down the page by means of strong enjambments. This technique, although present in some poems from *Outside History* and *In a Time of Violence*, will gradually disappear as we approach Boland’s latest productions, *The Lost Land* and *Against Love Poetry*, where language will be more fractured and the poetic style will be plainer. Finally, Boland locates all her women in evening settings, when light is fading and colours become more diffused (as in “Lace, “The Bottle Garden”, “The Briar Rose”, and “Nocturne”). Although some of the poems start at dawn, this landscape gradually changes at the end of the poem to dusk (as in “Suburban Woman: A Detail”), in order to record the passing of time and the versatility of her images.

Boland’s characteristic style responds, as explained, to a clear intention to escape the artistic (mis)representation of women in poetry, by presenting women who, in their constant movement, cannot be solidified in her poems. In order to study this aspect, I will analyze “Self-Portrait on a Summer Evening” (*The Journey*), where Boland focuses on a particular painting,

which like those engravings, photographs, and maps of the previous poems, stands as one form of artistic representation where human images are being solidified or totally omitted. The object of attack is now Jean-Baptiste Chardin, Boland's favorite painter, as she makes explicit in *Object Lessons*:

In the genre painters of the French eighteenth century, in Jean Baptiste Chardin in particular – I saw what I was looking for. Chardin's paintings were ordinary in the accepted sense of the word. They were unglamorous, workaday, authentic. Yet, in his works these objects were not merely described, they were revealed. The hare in its muslim bag, the crusty loaf, the woman fixed between menial tasks and human dreams – these stood out, a commanding text. And I was drawn to that text. Romanticism in the nineteenth century, it seemed to me, had prescribed that beauty be commended as truth. Chardin had done something different. He had taken truth and revealed its beauty. (Boland 1996a: 253)

Boland praises Chardin for revealing his images not as glamorous but ordinary, for showing the beauty of what is commonplace and everyday. Nevertheless, her stance on this painter's work is more complicated. We have seen how as early as in "From the Painting 'Back From Market' by Chardin" (*New Territory*), Boland showed her interest in Chardin's paintings. In this poem, Boland maintained the painter's authority over his artistic images and merely described the woman at the market from a detached position. It will be twenty years later, in "Self-Portrait in a Summer Evening" (*The Journey*), when Boland will adopt a more critical stance on Chardin's work.⁴⁷ Although this Romantic painter, unlike his contemporaries, did not emphasize the eternal youthfulness and beauty of his female images, his very desire to 'fix' women in his paintings involves already, according to Boland, a threatening simplification. As she makes explicit when commenting "Degas's Laundresses" (*Night Feed*),

[t]he problem is, art itself is a form of restriction. And a powerful one. [...] The poem is about the painter watching the toil of these two laundresses. And how much control – almost predatory control – is needed to turn these living, shiftless, struggling women into fixed images. (Interview with Villar Argáiz 2005a)

In the first stanzas of "Self-Portrait", Boland precisely criticizes Chardin's "predatory control" over a woman's portrayal:

Jean-Baptiste Chardin
is painting a woman
in the last summer light.

⁴⁷ For an interesting comparison between "From the Painting 'Back From Market' by Chardin" and "Self-Portrait on a Summer Evening", see Martin (1993) and McGuckian (1993).

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All summer long
he has been slighting her
in botched blues, tints,
half-tones, rinsed neutrals.

The artist himself is accused of falsification, of seeing the woman only partially. There are significant direct objects that indicate that the woman is merely an object of the male painter (“Jean-Baptiste Chardin/ is painting *a woman*”; “he has been slighting *her*”). The pejorative verb ‘slight’ rhymes with ‘light’, with the suggestion that the artist’s denigration results from his perception of this woman under a limited ‘male gaze’. In Moi’s phrasing, “[t]he gaze enacts the voyeur’s desire for sadistic power, in which the object of the gaze is cast as its passive, masochistic, feminine victim” (1991: 132). Thus, Chardin’s gazing at the woman and fixing her in his painting suggests his inner desire for mastery. Subverting the traditional psychosexual concept of the gaze, Boland offers a counter-reading of how Chardin had gazed at the woman. Following Hagen and Zelman’s (2004: 101) line of argument when discussing “The Women”, the tenuous colours and dusky lights (“botched blues, tints,/ half tones, rinsed neutrals”) that Boland presents in this passage are metaphors of her poetic enterprise of subverting conventional perceptions, of re-making conventional boundaries. The things that we think we see in the dusk may not be what they really are. Boland warns us that our perceptions might be constantly unreliable, and she encourages us to revise them all the time. In this sense, the ‘male gaze’ is only a “prism”, a medium that inevitably misrepresents whatever is seen through it:

What you are watching
is light unlearning itself,
an infinite unfrocking of the prism.

Before your eyes
the ordinary life
is being glazed over:
pigments of the bibelot,
the cabochon, the water-opal
pearl to the intimate
simple colours of
her ankle-length summer skirt.

Like in “Exhibitionist” (*In Her Own Image*), where the woman attempted to bring to the fore a “light which is unyielding”, here the poetic speaker “unlearn[s]” Chardin’s light, depriving and “unfrocking” him of the right to ‘freeze’ women in his artistic creation. This poem, as in most of Boland’s painting poems, indicates the damage that art inflicts on women whose ordinary life “is being glazed over” and whose landscape is, as she later argues, “reduced to detail”. The use of these passives is very common in her poems, as “Fever” and “The Unlived Life” (*The Journey*)

exemplify. They are employed in order to emphasize the result of an action, as well as the affected subject. In this sense, they remind of the oppression, violence, and objectification involved in any form of artistic representation. "I remember" (*The Journey*) records the moment when Boland's mother made a portrait of her, and how "an eyebrow waited helplessly to be composed". The focus on parts such as "an eyebrow" and later "the scattered fractions" of a face, suggests that painting cannot capture Boland's entire self. In these poems, Boland deliberately focuses on how the painter scrutinizes his/her images to the extent that they are merely objectified as bodily parts. In "Growing Up", a poem about the painting *On the Terrace* by Renoir, the girls are just mentioned by "[t]heir two heads, hatted, bowed" (see illustration 4). "Self-portrait on a Summer Evening" also exemplifies the painter's limited access to the ordinary woman. She is only mentioned by "her ankle-length summer skirt", and even the sky becomes to Chardin's eyes an "odd shape of apron". The totality of the woman's identity is "reduced" and fractured under the male gaze, who wishes to immortalize her in painting. It will be Boland herself who will reveal the "truth", showing what is hidden from the painted panel:

Truth makes shift:
The triptych shrinks
to the cabinet picture.

This reliance on what is 'true', as we have seen in *In Her Own Image*, will be problematic for Boland, because it was precisely this emphasis on what is 'real' that made her carry out an essentialist project in this volume. In *The Journey*, the word 'truth' is repeated six times, as in "The Oral Tradition" (where the speaker experiences "a sense/ suddenly of truth"), "Listen. This is the Noise of Myth" (where the poet intends to set "the truths to rights"), or in "Envoi", (where the woman speaker utters "I have the truth and I need the faith"). As we will comment in section 7.4.5., Boland is a very traditional poet, and she believes that there are 'true images', authentic portraits of women, that must be brought to the surface of Irish poems. Nevertheless, as I will argue, she will dismantle authoritarian ideologies by expressing her own limitations and access to 'the real'. In this sense, she will avoid adopting an essentialist stance.⁴⁸

With the aim of undermining the relationship of power between male artist and female 'object', Boland identifies with the woman in the painting. As Showalter (1999: 259) has argued, one distinctive feature of the woman artist in her 'Female' phase is to "animate the inanimate". The static and passive image of the previous lines suddenly becomes the poetic speaker herself, a living entity that avoids being solidified and appears to move:

⁴⁸ As Boland's poetry develops, she will avoid using this term. In fact, *Outside History* does not include the word 'truth' a single time, indicating that Boland is gradually undermining her poetic authority and her access to 'the real'.

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before your eyes
before your eyes
in my ankle-length
summer skirt

crossing between
the garden and the house,
under the whitebeam trees,
keeping an eye on
the length of the grass,
the height of the hedge,
the distance of the children

This change from third person narration to first person narration in the middle or at the end of the poem is a typical movement in Boland's mature work, as reflected in poems such as "Fever" (*The Journey*), "The Shadow Doll", "The Making of an Irish Goddess" (*Outside History*), and most often in painting poems such as "Domestic Interior" (*Night Feed*), where Boland ends up identifying with the woman that Van Eyck has painted. In this poem, this movement is again put into practice. As in those poems from *Night Feed*, in "Self-Portrait" Boland blurs the division between 'the self' and 'the other', through the speaker's established link with the woman in the painting. Although Boland does not now yearn to be inserted into a pre-Oedipal union with the child, she wishes to connect her own life with other women, women who have been objectified in art. Like the woman in the painting, Boland wears an "ankle-length/ summer skirt". Women's clothes, usually skirts (as in "Suburban Woman: A Detail"), are constantly referred to in Boland's mature work in order to show the decorative quality of art and its desire to cover women with 'garments'. As hinted earlier on, the artist merely focuses on clothes, which may indicate that the woman's self is fractured by the painting. In this sense, it shows the superficiality of art, and its transformation of 'real' images into mere decorative emblems. These references also indicate the plurality and richness of women's experiences. Boland's poems show an incredible variety of textures and fabrics, the most common ones being lace, silk, and linen. Boland is familiar with sewing and praises it as a particular female activity, a rich and precious one.

Nevertheless, the woman speaker is not only linked to Chardin's woman by her vulnerability to the damaging consequences of artistic solidification. The repetition of "before your eyes" enhances the fact that both women are united by their role as mothers, as subjects who keep "an eye" on "the distance of the children".⁴⁹ In spite of the similarities between both women, Boland offers Chardin a counter-representation. Now, the new woman is not framed inside a "cabinet picture", but outside her house, a living entity in motion. The speaker, "crossing between/

⁴⁹ Distance is a recurring word in Boland's poetry. As we will see in "Suburban Woman: Another Detail" and "The Making of an Irish Goddess", it usually indicates the child's separation from her mother, a separation that was advanced in *Night Feed*. Nevertheless, this word, as we will see, also has other connotations in Boland's poetry: the distance between Boland's own present, and an unrecorded past of suffering and distressful experiences.

the garden and her house",⁵⁰ presents herself in constant movement, as the preponderance of present participles indicates. On the other hand, Boland insists on the fact that the diffused dusk and faint colours (half-tones, rinsed neutrals, opaque, optical greys, etc.) where this new woman is located are 'true' lights, in contrast to "the reflected light" of the "prism" and the "cabochon" of the painting. These lights keep changing even as the painter attempts to capture them. Furthermore, as Hagen and Zelman (2004: 79-80) explain, "the *length* of the grass", "the *height* of the hedge", and "the *distance* of the children" are dimensions that vary depending on the speaker's position and perspective, and as such, painting cannot offer an ultimate viable representation of them. This volatile landscape, together with the woman's indefinite shape, is something that, according to Boland, cannot be grasped by Chardin's visual representation. In "Growing Up" (*The Journey*), Boland similarly attempts to describe a landscape of constant change, in which women are "indefinite and infinite". This also occurs in "Listen. This is the Noise of Myth" (*The Journey*), where Boland liberates those women entrapped in mythical constructions by creating a poetic space in which "[t]he shifts and fluencies are infinite./ The moving parts are marvellous". Boland implies that the only way the female image can escape the artist's solidification (either in myth or in painting) is by describing her as beyond artistic representation, as outside "the bereavements of the definite" ("Listen. This is the Noise of Myth"). Similarly, in "Self-Portrait", Boland works against the solidification of women in art, questioning artistic representation, and its desire to define an object or image. In this sense, her endeavour is aligned with Cixous's and Irigaray's theories, in which the female figure is conceptualized as fluid, outside those "frontiers" of male logic (Cixous 1994: 44; Irigaray 1985: 214). Nevertheless, this fluency Boland aspires to seems to come to a sudden stop at the end of the poem. Present participles are suddenly substituted by passive structures and diffused lights give way to the male artist's restrictive use of light:

I am Chardin's woman

edged in reflected light,
hardened by
the need to be ordinary.

The use of the genitive here ("I am Chardin's woman"), also present as early as "From the Painting 'Back from Market' by Chardin" (*New Territory*), indicates that the woman is still

⁵⁰ As was commented on previously, the poems in *The Journey* make greater use of a word such as 'house' rather than 'home'. The evolution Boland's poetry experiences from self-assertion to self-dissolution causes this substitution of terms. Whereas 'home' indicates security, rootedness, and affection, 'house' is more neutral and it merely refers to the physical place where one lives. Boland's own disintegration of the self carries with it a disintegration of terms such as what it is to be "at home". That is why the speaker here crosses "between/ the garden and the house", as the narrator in "Suburban Woman: A Detail", who prefers to use 'house' rather than 'home'. In subsequent volumes of poetry, both references to 'house' and 'home' decrease compared to *The Journey*, as if Boland is avoiding their use.

entrapped as an object of male possession. In contrast to the diffused and unstable setting Boland described in the preceding verse lines, the poem ends by emphasizing a sharp and outlined landscape where the woman is “edged” and “hardened” by Chardin’s need to define her as ordinary. Under Chardin’s “reflected light”, the portrait gives an illusion of a definable and stable self, and of a landscape where the boundaries between people and other objects are fixed and clearly defined. As Boland has argued in “At the Glass Factory of Cavan Town” (*In a Time of Violence*), “reflection is the first/// myth of loss”. Like in other poems such as “The Women” (*The Journey*), Boland presents a fluid woman in a dissolved and changing landscape, only to eventually describe her as entrapped and solidified in a domestic world. This movement is characteristic of Boland’s mature work, and it responds to her intention to highlight at the end the woman’s oppression in art rather than her liberation from it, or her inability, as we will see, to move beyond the opposing pulls of womanhood and poetry.

Nevertheless, there seems to be an “undersong” (as Boland says in “Before Spring”, *Night Feed*), beneath this final description of Chardin’s woman. As in most of the poems included in *The Journey*, “Self-Portrait” is constructed with stanzas of different length and no rhyming scheme. Whereas at the beginning they are more or less short, by the end of the poem, they gradually become longer and spread out by means of very strong enjambments. This linguistic feature, together with a clear lack of punctuation at the end, intensifies the poem’s loose movement. This lack of punctuation, very rare in Boland’s mature work as compared to *In Her Own Image*, also occurs at the end of other poems in this volume, such as “The Oral Tradition”. On the other hand, and in contrast to the general style of Boland’s mature poems, it is significant how the conjunction ‘and’ does not appear even once in the poem. It is as if Boland is deliberately creating a flowing language which is not even hindered by conjunctions. All these linguistic features emphasize Boland’s description of this new woman as unrestrained: the woman is as fluid and loosely defined as the very verse form of the poem. In this sense, language creates a ‘counter-reading’ to Chardin’s stable ordinary woman. While the final image is delimitating, the way “Self-Portrait” is constructed emphasizes Boland’s ability to describe a woman that escapes the artist’s representation.

In this sense, Boland always represents her poetic images as fluid entities that are impossible to be grasped. The versatility and mobility that characterizes her women is present throughout *The Journey*, in poems such as “The Women” and “Suburban Woman: A Detail”. But it is in *Outside History*, in poems such as “Doorstep Kisses”, “A Different Light”, and “Hanging Curtains with an Abstract Pattern in a Child’s Room”, where Boland more openly focuses, not only on her women’s instability, but also on their very dissolution.

As the very title of "Doorstep Kisses" suggests, one of Boland's main interests in her mature poetry is to portray herself or her poetic images always on the margins of established boundaries. As Ashcroft (1994: 34) notes, postcolonial texts are always located "on the verandah", a concept which, by itself, connotes the liminality of hybrid positions. Note that "doorstep" situates the speaker at the entrance of her house: neither inside nor outside, but in a sort of interstitial location. This focus on peripheral locations is typical of *Outside History* and *In a Time of Violence*. Notice the very title of poems such as "Spring at the *Edge* of a Sonnet" (*Outside History*), in which Boland describes "lovers at the *doorways*" (my emphasis). In other poems such as "Ghost Stories", "Our Origins are in the Sea", and "Midnight Flowers" (*Outside History*), Boland continues to place her poetic images in an interstitial location: candles lighting in the "*doorstep[s]*" of an Iowa town, the very speaker standing "at the *edge* of our grass", or the plants in her garden "at/the *margins* of light". This focus on marginality, which begins to be appreciated in this volume, will be continued in *In a Time of Violence*, in poems such as "Inscriptions" or "Anna Liffey", where Boland repeatedly describes herself, especially in this last poem, as a "woman at the *doorway*" of her house. Occupying these border-lines allows Boland to escape visual representation, because she is placed outside or 'in-between' definite contours. She becomes, in this sense, Irigaray's revolutionary "The/A Woman", a new entity that, by her persistent location in a "threshold", is a "stranger to dichotomy" (Irigaray 1985: 175). It is this very position that the speaker in "Doorstep Kisses" occupies. She is situated in "the last days of summer in the last hour of light". Under dusky lights, nothing is clear and distinguishable, and even the poetic speaker senses that she is becoming, like the landscape surrounding her, indistinct:

If I stay here long enough I may become –
since everything else around me is –

the sum of small gestures, choices,
losses in the air so fractional
they could be

frangrances which just fell from it –

a musk of buddleia, perhaps, of this fuchsia
with the drip,
drip of whitby jet

The modal 'may', together with the hypothetical construction that opens this sequence indicate a certain degree of likelihood or possibility. Boland's poetry becomes, as she says in "Listen. This is the Noise of Myth" (*The Journey*), a "sequence of evicted possibilities". Like the new heroine Boland envisages in this poem, the woman in "Doorstep Kisses" "may or [...] may not". Boland disturbs the view of the subject as unified and stable: her character is uncertain, and like those

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drops and fragrances of the plants in the garden, she is threatened with dissolution. The disintegration threatening the speaker also paradoxically liberates her from artistic solidification. Like the water dripped from the flowers, the woman is able to run free from any form of visual representation that, like Chardin's, would attempt to "harden" her.

This same emphasis on dissolution occurs in "A Different Light". This poem narrates the moment when an unexpected power cut took the speaker and her husband unawares, with "[n]o candles and no torch". The speaker argues how, as the light went out, "everything we knew how/ to look for had disappeared". In this context, shadows make the familiar seem foreign to the speaker's eyes:

Afterwards we talked of it for days –

how it felt at the upstairs window,
to stand and watch and still miss the moment
of gable ends and rooftops beginning

to be re-built. And that split second when
you and I were, from a distance,
a neighbourhood on the verge of definition.

Like the woman in "Doorstep Kisses", both the speaker and her addressee appear "on the verge of definition", just as the plants inside their house, which are described "just off-centre". This marginal location is positive rather than negative. Under such diffused lights and within this border-line, the speaker and her husband can be grasped neither by a male gaze, nor by the mature poet who is remembering this ordinary incident. The common experience of the power cut becomes an allegory of Boland's poetic enterprise. These shadows and versatile images are the starting point from which her poetry can open up new interpretations, new possibilities. This power cut allows Boland to look afresh at the familiar suburban landscape around her, and to open a new arena of signification that cannot apparently be seen in regular light. As she argues in this poem, "[a]ll depends on a sense of mystery;/ the same things in a different light". As we have seen in "Self-Portrait", Boland attempts to view the painter's subjects in a different light, forcing us to understand the danger of 'fixing' in art the complexity of lived experience.

This focus on dissolved images also occurs in "Hanging Curtains with an Abstract Pattern in a Child's Room". This poem begins by presenting a mother who looks from an upstairs window, after hanging some curtains in her child's room. The present participle of the title indicates that the action that Boland carries out is in the middle of its progress. This woman is moving rather than static, and the landscape she perceives in the "winter dusk" is equally inconstant and changeable. As we have seen, Boland defines poetry as a place of ambiguities, a

place where nothing is stable and definite. In contrast to paintings such as those by Chardin, Boland conceives that the task of poetry is to dismantle, rather than create, fixed boundaries and parameters. The curtains and their abstract pattern are an emblem of Boland's artistic enterprise. First of all, as Hagen and Zelman (2004: 83) have also considered, these curtains highlight the border line between the inside and the outside, between the domestic and the public world. In choosing the curtains, Boland is, then, deliberately occupying an intermediate terrain. On the other hand, their abstract pattern suggests Boland's wish to create an art in which women rather than being 'fixed' in pictorial and concrete representations, appear only as abstract and geometric shapes, as "signals of enigma:/ Ellipse. Triangle. A music of ratio". Boland's poem proposes rather than affirms. Unlike Chardin's paintings, Boland does not wish to define and "harden" images, but to open a place of potential where the creative act takes place. As Hagen and Zelman (2004: 84) argue, "words are fluid signifiers" for Boland. I agree with these critics, for I think that Boland's poetry in this phase constantly tries to deconstruct Saussurean binary oppositions. As Sarup (1993: 33) explains, Saussure saw that the signifier and the signified are related in such a way that the sign is conceived as a unit. The signifier (for instance, the sound image made by the word 'apple') always refers to an "ideal concept" (i.e. the concept apple). In Boland's poetry, there is never a one-to-one correspondence between the signifier and the signified. In this sense, she is aligned with that poststructuralist thought according to which meaning is "never tied to one particular sign" (ibid). When readers come across Boland's "signals of enigma", they can imagine her images in illimitable ways. Boland seems to suggest that one sign always leads to another sign, moving along on a chain of signifiers, to the extent that the signified can never be grasped. Boland's lack of specification when describing herself at the end of the poem not only suggests that her reality escapes any form of artistic representation, but also invites us, as readers, to become active creators in Boland's imaginative art. The woman, imagining how she would look from the road of her house, describes herself as follows:

my blouse off-white and

my skirt the colour of
all the disappointments of a day when

the curtains are pulled back on
a dull morning.

The end only focuses on her clothes, "my blouse", "my skirt", which are, by the way, portrayed with diffused colours. Furthermore, the presence of the passive structure indicates that the woman poet deliberately omits herself as agentive subject, with a wish to avoid presenting her

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as definite and stable, as a unitary self. For Boland, in this sense, poetry is never a transparent medium that allows access to an inner truth, to her distinguishable female self. The loosening of language at the end of the poem parallels the speaker's dissolution. In this sense, the speaker becomes, just like the geometric shapes of the curtain, an abstract entity, that, in its indeterminacy, cannot be defined or established within contours that would capture her.

7.4.4.3.2. In-between womanhood and poetry

As we have seen, Boland's fluidity responds to her desire to avoid the objectification that artistic representation entails. But, as I intend to show, she also attempts, by means of this fluency, to undertake a more ambitious project. Boland seeks to open an 'in-between' space, a place of potential, where she can openly talk about her own contradictions and ambivalences as an Irish woman poet, and where she can exert her own agency.

The dislocation that pervaded Boland's diasporic poems is also observed in those poems where she focuses on her experiences as a grown-up woman finally back in her home-country. As has already been explained, Boland begins writing within the framework of a canon which excludes her. She feels she didn't have, as a woman, the required permission to write, a feeling that was increased when she talked to male poets or when she opened a book of poetry (Boland 1996a: 109). In this context, Boland feels homeless as a woman poet. Her anxiety to repossess a tradition, a female voice in poetry, is in fact a desire to find her home as a woman poet, for, as she explains, "[i]n the middle of an emblematic nation, at the heart of a formidable tradition of writing, I was lost" (p. 111). Together with this spiritual dislocation, Boland (1996a: 156) has also recorded the physical displacement she felt when leaving the very centre of society (Dublin) and moving to the suburbs. In these initial years, she describes Dumdrum as "visible and oppressive and at a distance from the love I would come to feel for it". Due to this dual (spiritual and geographical) dislocation, Boland inhabits what she calls "an interior exile [...] which is more subtle than the physical statement of leaving" (interview with Villar Argáiz 2005a). This interior exile, as she admits, is produced by her sense of estrangement when attempting to bring to the centre of her poems her own life as a suburban woman, a subject matter not particularly "sanctioned by the Irish tradition" (ibid). But, as in the case of those poems where she reflects on her early imposed exile, Boland transforms her sense of alienation and displacement into a positive space from which to counteract essentialist identity-claims.

According to Maguire (1999: 63), the conflict between femininity and being a poet is the dilemma Boland is more clearly interested in. Showalter (1999: 35) has argued that, like in the 'Feminine' phase, the 'Female' phase in the career of a woman writer is still concerned with the

conflict involved between her life as a woman and her commitment to literature. Whereas in the first phase the woman writer deals with this issue by hiding her womanhood (under the masquerade of a male poetic voice, for instance), in this phase, this concern is dealt with directly, by recording the tensions involved in becoming an Irish woman writer. As Boland (1996a: xi) asserts in *Object Lessons*,

I know now that I began writing in a country where the word *woman* and the word *poet* were almost magnetically opposed. One word was used to invoke collective nurture, the other sketch out self-reflective individualism. Both states were necessary – that much the culture conceded – but they were oil and water and could not be mixed.

The very subtitle of Boland's semi-autobiographical book, "The Life of the Woman and the Poet in Our Time" already indicates an imminent separation between what seems to be two irreconcilable poles: it is not "The Life of the Woman Poet" but "The Life of the Woman *and* the Poet". The conjunction, more than uniting both categories at the same level, stresses their distinctive nature. Even the names of two of the chapters in this book express the troubling duality that Boland faces. In "The Woman The Place The Poet" (pp. 154-174), the categories of womanhood and poetry are separated by "the place", presumably Ireland. In the final chapter of the book, "The Woman Poet: Her Dilemma" (pp. 239-254), this binary is not resolved, for, although the noun phrase "Woman Poet" seems to indicate at first a resolution of contrasts, the following phrase "Her Dilemma", indicates that Boland faces a situation that requires a choice between options (womanhood or writing) that seem mutually exclusive of one another.

As Boland (1996a: xiii) explains, *Object Lessons* is constructed "in turnings and returnings", in "parts which find and repeat themselves and restate the argument until it loses its reasonable edge and hopefully becomes a sort of cadence" (p. xiii). The reason for this insistent repetition is that Boland finds it difficult to clarify, even as a mature poet, the inherent tension of being a woman and a poet, and each returning to the same subject is intended to resolve, though unsuccessfully, this conflict. As Haberstroh (1995: 20) has argued, the repetitive ideas of *Object Lessons* demand that "the reader travel with the poet repeatedly over the same terrain", a terrain which, in my view, involves the distance between two supposedly irreconcilable arenas. Boland's decision to accept the title of a "woman poet" ("to be effective and useful as an Irish woman poet you have to be willing to pick up that tab", interview with Wilson 1990a: 86), is but an attempt to reconcile both separate realms. Nevertheless, Boland does not wish to establish an easy bridge between these categories. It is the unresolved tension between womanhood and poetry that is more valuable for Boland. As she states: "[i]t is these very tensions, and not their absence, and not any

possibility of resolving them, which makes me believe that the woman poet is now an emblematic figure in poetry” (1996a: xiv-xv). More recently, Boland has argued: “I was a woman poet *and* I was an Irish poet. I felt both identities could interpret and re-interpret each other in some rich, demanding ways” (interview with Villar Argáiz 2005a). By recording the difficulty involved in being a woman *and* a poet in Ireland, Boland manages to change the way Irish poetry has been constructed. Like in her poems on exile, the ambivalence that assails Boland is not an impediment, but offers many possibilities.

In order to justify this hypothesis, I will analyze “The Women”, one of the most quoted poems from *The Journey*. This poem introduces us to the mind of a woman poet who is inside her house watching the external landscape from her window. This description of the woman looking outside is very recurrent in Boland’s mature work, as we have seen in “Hanging Curtains with an Abstract Pattern” (*The Journey*), and as other poems as “Midnight Flowers”, “A Different Light”, and “What Love Intended” (*Outside History*) exemplify. This location indicates Boland’s wish to blur the boundaries between the private and the public setting, traditionally the female and the masculine domains par excellence. The borders between home and world become confused; and both arenas become part of each other. This displacement, according to Bhabha (1995: 9), forces “us [into] a vision that is as divided as it is disorienting”. It is in this confusing border line location where the speaker finds her inspiration to write:

This is the hour I love: the in-between,
neither here-nor-there hour of evening.
The air is tea-coloured in the garden.
The briar rose is spilled crepe-de-Chine.

The first stanza draws us into a beloved “in-between” space, “neither-here-nor-there”. This significant interchange of deictic forms is characteristic of Boland, as we can also observe in “Listen: This is the Noise of Myth” (*The Journey*), where the speaker proposes her own version of an Irish myth as “not there, not here,/ not anywhere”. The adverb ‘there’ in this poem indicates the mythological world, whereas the adverb ‘here’ is more explicitly connected to the woman’s ordinary world. Boland’s revision of the Irish myth intends to unite both of them, and seems to suggest that ‘that’ mythological life and ‘this’ actual one are not so different from each other. Whereas in “Listen. This is the Noise of Myth” Boland yearns to construct her poetry between two apparently opposite worlds (the world of myth and her own ordinary world as a woman), in “The Women”, Boland explicitly locates her work in the interstices between a public space (an exclusively male domain such as poetry) and a private space (her everyday life as a housewife and mother). This blurring of well-established boundaries is also perceived in the scenery that the

woman speaker describes: this is a landscape of diffused lights and tenuous colours, in which the air is “tea-coloured” and the silks, as she later describes in this poem, are “stove-coloured”.⁵¹ In this setting, shapes dissolve to the extent that the simple briar rose of Boland's garden loses its consistency and becomes silk crepe. Boland is proposing what Boyce (1994: 15-16) would call a “borderland consciousness” in which the subject, like the flowers in her garden, is in a conscious transition.⁵² She inhabits border spaces that are locations of contest, flux, and change. It is in this in-between space where Boland achieves the summit of her creative potential:

This is the time 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.

For the first time in *The Journey*, we find lines of complete assurance that remind one of *In Her Own Image* and *Night Feed*. Lines in the simple present such as “[t]his is the hour I love”, “[t]his is the time I do my work best”, denote an assertive woman speaker who knows that her identity and her place is within this landscape of in-betweenness.⁵³ But, in contrast to those two volumes of poetry, the woman does not claim her body as her identity,⁵⁴ nor her union with her child as the source of her true self. It is in a landscape of indefinite contours, where she can express the ambiguity she experiences by her living in “two worlds” at the same time. As commented above, Boland's mature poetry attempts to record the tension between two antagonistic aspects of her identity: her life as a woman and her desire to write poetry. After moving out to the suburbs, Boland (1996a: 18) begins to realize that for being a woman, she enters into a life “for which poetry has no name”. As she explains, the poet's life “had been edging away” from the ordinary life, “the life lived in houses, parishes, settled communities” (p. 110). With the realization that womanhood and poetry occupy “two separate kingdoms of experience and expression” and with the threatening prospect of not being able to “live in both” (p. 114), Boland decides to occupy an intermediate position, a subversive hybrid space where both categories keep their unresolved

⁵¹ This emphasis on vague and diaphanous colours runs throughout most of the poems in *The Journey*. In poems such as “The Oral Tradition”, “Listen. This is the Noise of Myth”, “The Unlived Life”, and “Lace”, Boland records “a sort of dun/ a distressed ochre”, “mauve eaves”, “[d]aylight greys”, and other kinds of diffused lights and shadows.

⁵² This feminist postcolonial critic particularly mentions Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/ La Frontera* (1987) as one of the best examples of “borderland consciousness”. *The New Mestiza* Anzaldúa talks about, Boyce (1994: 15-16) asserts, inhabits more than one place at the same time. Gloria Anzaldúa's theorization of border and border lines has exerted a tremendous influence on feminist writing. See, for instance, Brah (2003: 625).

⁵³ This use of syntactic constructions to emphasize the poet's longing for the in-between is common in Boland's poetry. See, for instance, “The Rooms of Exile” (*Against Love Poetry*), where the poet, in a night setting of diffused lights, argues “[t]his is the hour when every ornament/ unloads its atoms of pretence”.

⁵⁴ Notice that, in contrast to *In Her Own Image*, first person pronouns are not used to talk about the speaker's body, but in order to mention what she considers as her ‘true’ possession, “my work”, or as she will later argue, “my desk”, “my time of sixth sense and second sight”.

tension. “The Women” records precisely this tension, by focusing on a woman’s split identity, a subject who is troubled by “two minds” and who inhabits “two [separate] worlds”. Poetic creation is therefore achieved by her own ability to occupy an intermediate space between the habits of suburban motherhood and the habits of the writer. It is in this very unresolved tension where the woman artist’s potential lies. Boland (1996b 137) has argued that one way to liberate the Irish poem is by making a new version of that “important negotiation between an inner and outer world”.⁵⁵ “The Women” offers this mediation between her inner world as a poet, and her outer world as an ordinary mother and housewife. The speaker’s position in the staircase of her house situates her between these two worlds, the world of the ground floor, where she carries out her own domestic tasks, and the upper floor, where she writes her poems. Therefore, the stairwell becomes an interstitial passage between fixed identifications, ‘in-between’ the designations of identity. This liminality, according to Bhabha (1995: 4), “opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy”. Bhabha illustrates this notion of cultural hybridity by mentioning Renée Green, an African-American artist. These are her words, quoted by Bhabha (1995: 3):

I used architecture literally as a reference, using the attic, the boiler room, and the stairwell to make associations between certain binary divisions such as higher and lower and heaven and hell. The stairwell became a liminal space, a pathway between the upper and lower areas, each of which was annotated with plaques referring to blackness and whiteness.

Whereas Green uses the staircase to displace the binary logic “Black/ White” through which identities of difference are often constructed, Boland’s employs this metaphor with a view to disturbing the dichotomy man (as writer) and woman (as mother and housewife).⁵⁶ By so doing, she occupies what Bhabha (1995: 25) calls a “Third Space”, a space that disturbs the symmetry of designated male and female domains, and allows the speaker to give voice to her own creative potential:

The hour of change, of metamorphosis,
of shape-shifting instabilities.
My time of sixth sense and second sight
when in words I choose, the lines I write,
they rise like visions and appear to me:

⁵⁵ Boland (1996b: 137-140) finds in the poetry by Irish women born in the 1950s, this fresh attempt to change the terms of this negotiation. Male poets such as Paul Muldoon, Tom McCarthy, Theo Dorgan, Sean Dunne, Dermot Bolger, Dennis O’Driscoll, and Aidan Carl Matthews have also posed successful challenges.

⁵⁶ Another example in which Boland describes herself in the middle of the staircase, in a moment of transition, is in “Monotony” (*Night Feed*).

women of work, of leisure, of the night,
in stove-coloured silks, in lace, in nothing,
with crewel needles, with books, with wide open legs

In this transitional and unstable context, the poet encounters a new landscape: neither openly public nor exclusively private, where different kinds of women “rise like visions” to Boland. The poetic muses that the speaker chooses to follow are varied: they are middle-class workers, upper class women, and also prostitutes. According to Spivak (1988a: 211), decolonization involves, above all, a persistent acknowledgement of the heterogeneity of lived experiences. “The Women” makes explicit Boland’s desire not only to write about mothers, housewives, and suburban women, but also about more heterogeneous women: “women of work” with “crewel needles”,⁵⁷ well-educated women that are free from time-consuming domestic duties, and women “of the night [...] with wide open legs”. Notice that Boland’s title avoids generalizing about those subjects: it is not “Women”, but “The Women”. The article does not refer to ‘womankind’ in general, but it emphasizes a specific and concrete heterogeneous reality that Boland presumes that we, as addressees, are able to recognize. Although she has been criticized on the grounds that her work reflects a “class myopia” (O’Donnell 1995: 2),⁵⁸ Boland constantly attempts to bring to the fore a plurality of experiences. It is true that upper-class women are present in poems such as “We Were Neutral in the War” and “The Shadow Doll” (*Outside History*),⁵⁹ but this fact is compensated in all those poems where she attempts to grasp other realities, such as those of lower-class women, who are countrywomen most of the time (as in “The Achill Woman”, *Outside History*). The different kinds of women that Boland focuses on in this poem are related to mythological figures like Daphne,⁶⁰

who fled the hot breath of the god pursuing,
who run from the split hoof and the thick lips
and fell and grieved and healed into myth,

Daphne was a nymph who was saved from the pursuing of Apollo (God of the sun, but also of music, poetry, and all fine arts) by being turned into a laurel tree with the aid of Cupid (Falcon

⁵⁷ Sewing as a typical female activity is constantly praised in Boland’s poetry from *Night Feed* onwards, as in poems such as “Patchwork” (*Night Feed*), “The Unlived Life” (*The Journey*), and “We Were Neutral in the War” (*Outside History*).

⁵⁸ We have seen how, in poems such as “The Briar Rose” (*The Journey*) and “The Game” (*Outside History*), she implicitly identifies herself as belonging to an upper-middle class family.

⁵⁹ In these two poems, Boland focuses on an upper-class couple immersed in Dublin social life of the 1940s, and on a rich Victorian bride-to-be respectively.

⁶⁰ The mythological figure of Daphne is constantly present in Boland’s mature work, as in poems such as “Daphne with her Thighs in Bark” (*Night Feed*), “Daphne heard with Horrors the Addresses of the God”, and “Nights of Childhood” (*Outside History*), in this last poem, with implicit references such as when the speaker finds in the garden “gelded shrubs” that have been silenced and cannot mate.

Martínez et al. 1980: 163). As Foster (1999: 4) explains, the myth of Daphne exemplifies the fate of women: either this female creature “can be defined by male experience (in this case, raped by a god), or she can be saved, [and thus,] her identity *as woman* destroyed” (as she is turned into a tree). In this poem, Boland reminds us that women predominantly appear in myth as victimized figures, subject to male aggression. What unites Boland’s poetic muses to this Greek mythological nymph is their existence outside history. Their real lives and experiences are omitted from cultural records, which turn them instead into passive, bodiless (and virginal) emblems. The poet uses all the media she has at hand (“a sweet quartet,/ the physical force of a dissonance”, and “the fission of music into syllabic heat”) to give voice to these new women. By doing so, her poem opens a space where previous “mute images” can take some active part (Boland 1996a: 196).

After such a consuming endeavour, the end of “The Women” offers an image of a woman poet who, exhausted, decides to leave this enterprise for later:

and getting sick of it and standing up
and going downstairs in the last brightness

into a landscape without emphasis,
light, linear, precisely planned,
a hemisphere of tiered, aired cotton,

a hot terrain of linen from the iron,
folded in and over, stacked high,
neatened flat, stoving heat and white.

The proliferation of present participles linked by the conjunction ‘and’ in the first two verse lines quoted above is significant. These two linguistic features enhance the speaker’s movement, a subject constantly in motion, who does not want to be solidified, framed into any sort of artistic representation as those women who were “healed into myth”. After “going up the stairs” and “carrying”, and “bringing” something with her, now she is portrayed as “getting sick”, “standing up”, and “going downstairs” again. The landscape that she encounters is described in “the last brightness”, a common description in *The Journey* to reinforce the state of in-betweenness in which the speaker is immersed.⁶¹ With the exception of the first three stanzas, the poem is constructed almost entirely in tercets, surprising if we take into account that Boland usually prefers more open poetic forms, or as she says in this poem, “the sweet quartet”. “The Women” begins with very short sentences, and as the poem progresses, they become longer and longer. The language of the poem gradually becomes looser, not stuck to formal parameters. In this sense, verse favours both

⁶¹ The word ‘last’ is recurrent in *The Journey*. See “The Briar Rose”, where the narrator describes her garden flowers as “the last thing/ to go out at night”; “The Journey”, where the speaker mentions how her children “slept the last dark”; and other poems such as “Suburban Woman: A Detail” and “Self-Portrait on a Summer Evening”, which similarly focus on “[t]he last dark”, “the last light”, and “the last summer light” respectively.

the in-between space that Boland advocates and the speaker's own wish to avoid solidification. As I have already mentioned, this flowing language with which the poem finishes is a typical technique in *The Journey*, as we can observe in poems such as "The Bottle Garden", "Nocturne", "The Glass King", "Canaletto in the National Gallery of Ireland", "Lace", or "An Irish Childhood in England: 1951".

Nevertheless, in contrast to the blurred and productive landscape that the poet had encountered upstairs, the poem ends, in a similar way to "Self-Portrait on a Summer Evening", by introducing us to a domestic world of well-established boundaries. This is a landscape "without emphasis", "linear", and "precisely planned" that stands in opposition to the multidimensional and imaginative place her poetry has previously explored. Shapes are no longer shifting, unstable, and indefinite, but well delineated. In this sense, the domestic world is presented in all its crudeness; it is an asphyxiating "hot terrain" different to the radioactive "heat" that her poetry grasped by means of "the physical force of a dissonance". In this landscape, "cotton", "linen", and "iron" are arranged, "tiered" according to different categories and ranks. Boland's need to set a contrast between her own flowing imaginary world as an artist and her well-demarcated domestic world as a housewife is also observed in other poems such as "The Wild Spray". Whereas her poetry records a landscape that is moving smoothly, a "haphazard" place characterized by "the fluencies/ of colours", there is also another landscape, "a sharp" and delineated one that threatens her own poetic enterprise. By emphasizing this contrast, "The Women" ends with Boland's unresolved tension between two contrary pulls: her commitment to literature and her ordinary life (as a woman). As is typical in Boland's mature work, the feeling one is left with is of displacement and dislocation, of a woman who is still haunted by the contradictions of being a woman poet in Ireland.

The transformative power that Boland finds in recording her own ambivalence as a woman *and* a poet is also found in other poems from this collection such as "Nocturne". As the narrator suggests in this poem, the "ambivalence" and "complexities" of her life as a woman poet allows her to open an in-between poetic space in which she can give voice to her own creative potential. The setting that this poem offers is very similar to "The Women". The poet is equally drawn to "[t]he house at night" and "[t]he way it draws like atmosphere or evening". In later poems such as "Midnight Flowers" (*Outside History*), this ambivalence between both roles is still maintained. The speaker argues, as a housewife in a domestic environment, that she "could be undone every single day by/ paradox". As all these poems suggest, Boland's work is therefore characterized by the sense of an enabling ambivalence.

7.4.4.3.3. In-between myth and history

As we have seen in “The Women”, Boland advocates an ‘in-between’ space between poetry and womanhood, a place where the tension between both categories is maintained, and where she can find her source of artistic creativity. In what follows, I intend to show how Boland’s poetry also moves with a subversive project in mind into another interstitial space, this time between the two polar opposites of *myth* and *history*.

Boland’s mature work exemplifies the poet’s ability to live in two worlds at the same time. As we have seen, Kearney (1985a: 9) suggests that “the Irish mind” may be seen to favour a dialectical logic of *both/and* in contrast to the orthodox dualistic logic of *either/or* encoded in Western philosophy. It is this dialectical logic that Boland puts into practice in her poems. As she asserts in *Object Lessons*, “[t]here is a duality to place”, “there is the place that happened and the place that happens to you” (1996a: 154). The second place that Boland refers to is the place where she lives, whereas the first one exists more in the poet’s mind, independent of the passing of time: “the place which existed before you and will continue after you have gone” (ibid). On this point, Praga (1996: 261) notes that Irish women poets do not find their roots as easily as men do in physical and geographical locations. While male poets explore the external territory in order to clarify and reassert their identity, women poets tend to do the contrary: they explore their own self, the interior of their minds, in order to decipher their external world, their external reality. In this sense, Irish women’s poetry extends the notion of place as mere geographical location, by focusing on new spaces, new territories, not necessarily physical (p. 246). Boland in fact puts into practice what Heaney (1984a: 132) considers an internal exile, the ability to live in two places at the same time, either in time or in space (quoted by Praga 1996: 280). Thus, although Boland inhabits a suburban world, she is capable of imagining new places outside the realm of geography. This “duality to place” is constantly present in her poems. In them, Boland constantly describes Dumdrum, the Dublin suburb where she lives. But there is also another world, an innovative one that haunts her:

In my thirties I found myself [...] in a suburban house at the foothills of the Dublin mountains. Married and with two little daughters. [...] But at night the outer landscape yielded to an inner one. Familiar items blanked out and were replaced by others. (Boland 1996a: 17)

Rather than call this second place an imaginary place, I would simply like to refer to it as “a world of vision” (p. 192), for Boland has asserted that what she proposes is not as “an act of imagination”, but as a “brute, choiceless fact” (p. 163). These two places are difficult to be separated, “hard to disentangle from each other” (p. 155). Whenever she describes the beauty of

the landscape surrounding her (mostly by looking outside the window of her house), she is suddenly haunted by an Irish past, a bygone world no longer recoverable. Boland's poetry creates a middle space between both places, in an attempt to record "not exactly the suburbs, not entirely the hill coloured with blue shrubs, but something composed of both" (p. 172).⁶² As Fulford (2002a: 209) argues, "Boland imagines getting to 'a sort of interior moment' which is a liminal moment between universal and individual spaces, public and private realms".

In constantly making the move to this second place, Boland's poems offer spaces of productive hybridity. Her poetry is located, as she argues, at "the very borders of myth and history" (Boland 1996a: 172). Her intention is to open an in-between realm on the margins of official "mythical" and "historical" spaces. It is in this liminal space where Boland transforms the following damaging opposition: presence of monumental images of women in myth and no presence of real women in history. In order to study how Boland resists the homogeneous views of both myth and history, I will refer to Julia Kristeva's theories in "Women's Time" (1986c).

In this essay, Kristeva (1986c: 191) links female subjectivity to *cyclical* time and *monumental* time. Women's cyclical time involves repetition,

cycles, gestation, the eternal recurrence of a biological rhythm which conforms to that of nature and imposes a temporality whose stereotyping may shock, but [which offers a] regularity and unison with what is experienced as extra-subjective time, cosmic time, occasion vertiginous visions, and unnameable *jouissance*.

On the other hand, as a consequence, woman's time is also monumental, in the sense that it involves eternity, an "all-encompassing and infinite [...] imaginary space" (ibid). Both types of temporality, cyclical and monumental, are linked to female subjectivity in so far as both are ways of conceptualizing time from the perspective of motherhood and reproduction (p. 192). In this sense, woman's time as theorized by Kristeva is associated with the female body.

Kristeva (1986c: 192) positions women's time against 'History', characterized as *linear* time: "time as project, teleology, linear, and prospective unfolding: time as departure, progression, and arrival". This linear time of history is also that of language, as long as this is considered as the enunciation of a sequence of words with "a beginning" and "ending", and is characterized by logical connections and linearity (ibid). In this sense, women's time remains outside language.

⁶² The colour blue is a characteristic metaphor of Boland's poetry to talk about the Irish past, those men and women who are unrecorded by historical and nationalist accounts. A possible explanation for this is that the colour blue is generally related to the sky, a place where women's past lives may be more truthfully recorded. Remember Boland's use of constellations in "Monotony" to signify women's cultural and historical displacement. Like the stars in the sky, women have always been there, their presence is unquestionable, but they have generally been unnoticeable to the contemporary world. The colour blue will become significant in volumes such as *In a Time of Violence* (see, for instance, "A Sparrow-Hawk in the Suburbs"), and in particular poems such as "Home" (*The Lost Land*).

7.4.4. A deconstruction of the poetic self

Kristeva distinguishes between two generations of feminists, whose identities are structured in terms of these two notions of time (time as cyclical and monumental; and time as linear). The first is composed by those egalitarian feminists who demand equal rights, and their right to occupy a place in linear time:

In its beginnings, the women's movement, as the struggle of suffragists and of existential feminists, aspired to gain a place in linear time as the time of project and history. In this sense, the movement, while immediately universalist, is also deeply rooted in the socio-political life of nations. The political demands of women; the struggles for equal pay, for equal work, for taking power in social institutions on an equal footing with men; the rejection, when necessary, of the attributes traditionally considered feminine or maternal in so far as they are deemed incompatible with insertion in that history – all are part of the *logic of identification* with certain values. (Kristeva 1986c: 193-194)

Kristeva argues that the problem with this first generation is that, in their identification with power in order to consolidate it, these feminists perpetuate received oppressive structures. They demand the right to 'possess' the symbolic order, and their entry within linear politics and history "comes down to fabricating a few 'chiefs' among them" (p. 202).

The second generation identified by Kristeva emerges after 1968, and is formed by those feminists who emphasize women's radical difference from men and demand recognition of "an irreducible identity which has no equal in the opposite sex" (1986c: 194). In their wish to remain outside the linear time of history and politics, they embrace the cyclical and monumental temporality. They reject the (male) symbolic order and focus on the discovery of the specificity of the female, mostly found in the sexual (pp. 195-196). Kristeva (1986c: 202-203) also discards this radical form of feminism, because it runs the risk of turning into a counter-ideology, or an inverted form of sexism. As she argues, "the very logic of counter-power and of counter-society necessarily generates, by its very structures, its essence as a simulacrum of the combated society or of power" (p. 203).

Finally, Kristeva (1986c: 195) distinguishes a further, third generation of feminists which was emerging at the very same time she was writing. Their main task was to reconcile maternal time (motherhood) with linear time (political and historical time). It is this form of feminism that Kristeva strongly defends. She advocates, via this third generation of feminists, the addition of a female time as fluid, cyclical, and monumental within the linear progression of history, in order to

subvert the patriarchal from within. As she argues, women's time as a "space-time of infinite expansion" can subvert linear versions of history (1986c: 192).⁶³

It is this new notion of time (simultaneously female and historical) that we encounter in Boland's mature work. As we have seen, Kristeva defines woman's time as a temporality characterized by repetition and eternity, and linked to maternity. This cyclical and monumental time shapes many of Boland's poems, mostly in those where she relies on myth. The Ceres and Persephone story, for instance, is associated with the seasonal cycle of spring, summer, autumn, and winter. The female figures in this myth, furthermore, are eternal and monumental: they exist outside time, and the moral that their story communicates is for Boland, a self-evident truth, an eternal lesson that explains mother and daughter relationships. On the other hand, history is also essential for Boland. Her need to place women (whether mythological or ordinary) within the official annals of Ireland's past, within the chronological narrative of events that have shaped her country, is of paramount importance. Therefore, her poetry, as has been explained, enters "at the point where myth touches history" (Boland 1996a: 166). Without entirely discarding either myth or history, Boland advocates the parallel existence, within the same historical moment, of all three concepts of time: cyclical, monumental, and linear. According to the woman poet, both opposing notions of time are fundamental for her subversive project of describing her women (Boland 1996a: 172).

In what follows, I focus on how Boland manages to unite these different visions of time. Firstly, I will show how Boland exploits in "A Suburban Woman: A Detail" (*The Journey*) the benefits of cyclical and monumental time. The speaker's fluidity in this poem helps her to be immersed in a 'timelessness' that allows her to establish a connection with those women from the Irish past. Secondly, I will show how, although Boland finds this traditional notion of woman's time highly productive, she also views the danger in identifying complacently with mythological features, because that would mean electing myth over history. In this sense, I will demonstrate, by focusing on "The Making of an Irish Goddess" (*Outside History*), how Boland subversively aligns this notion of time, typically female, with linear time. It is here where the poet puts into practice Kristeva's advocacy of a temporality which is at once cyclical, monumental, and historical. Thirdly, I will focus on how Boland, specifically in those poems from *In a Time of Violence*, takes her poetic figures into death and erasure. In this sense, as her work progresses, she feels the urgent need to move from cyclical and monumental into linear time, that is, from myth into history. By

⁶³ Feminist critics such as Irigaray (1991: 217) have also envisaged a possible female imaginary with its own time-space modality, according to which women conceive the concepts of time and space as "interminable", as "[d]imensions that go beyond the sideral, [...] beyond the imaginary of any consciousness". Irigaray would be what Kristeva labels a radical feminist, for her desire to remain outside the linearity of historical time.

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doing so, Boland aligns herself with that first generation of feminists that Kristeva talks about, and whose main concern is to find their place as women within men's linear time. Nevertheless, I will show how, in spite of the dangers that Kristeva identifies in such action, Boland manages to avoid the perpetuation of the discourse of power. Her attempt to locate herself within history does not respond to her wish to identify with male power, but to her desire to subvert man-made representations from within.

7.4.4.3.3.1. The benefits of cyclical and monumental time

Boland never entirely rejects the traditional view of woman's time, a temporality which is cyclical and monumental. In her poetry, this notion of time, characterized by repetition and eternity, appears in order to refer to women's reality, an aspect acknowledged by critics such as Meaney (1993a: 143) and Fulford (2002a: 204). Although the woman poet identifies the dangers of such a conception of female subjectivity, as it posits women as 'outside history', and therefore outside official records, her poetry exploits the benefits of such a temporal location. Repetition and eternity, two defining features of myth, can be used subversively. Boland (1996a: 172) has argued how myth is very helpful for her project of describing women's reality, because it provides "healing repetitions, the technology of propitiation", and a conciliation between past and present (Boland 1996a: 172). For Boland, women's time cannot only be recorded in a sort of lineal alignment, but also in repetitive and recurrent events. As Boland (1996a: 170) asserts, her life in the suburb is marked by repetition:

Now here, in front of me everyday, were repetitions which had almost exactly the same effect. The crocuses under the rowan tree. The same child wheeled down to the shops at the same time everyday. A car returned home, with the same dingy on its bumper, every night. And the lamps which sprang into symmetries across our hills at dusk in November.

These repetitions Boland finds in life have their correspondence in her poetry. She comes to understand the value of "linguistic patterning" in poetry, which "both lulle[s] the mind and facilitate[s] the meaning" (p. 170). For Boland, sequences and repetitions allow "deeper meanings to emerge", transcendental meanings such as "a sense of belonging, of sustenance, of a life revealed, and not restrained, by ritual and patterning" (ibid). The cadences and "melodies of renewal" that Boland finds in the suburbs, reveal women's silences, an unrecorded "unglamorous suffering" (pp. 171-172). In this sense, it is this transcendental notion of woman's time, time as circularity and monumental, that enables Boland to overcome the distance between her own present and the past of other Irish women. For Boland, women's experiences have, across time and

place, some common factor. As we have seen in "The Pomegranate" (*In a Time of Violence*), Boland finds in the Ceres and Persephone legend an appropriate representation of the complexity of mother and daughter relationships. In her prose account, Boland (1996a: 165-166) seems to suggest that what unites women of the past to present women is their domestic roles as mothers and housewives. In this sense, womanhood, according to Boland's view, surpasses historical time; it is characterized by repetition and maternity, which links it to biology. On this point, Meaney (1993a: 143) criticizes Boland for suggesting that the "continuity of female experience" can only be grounded in "the most biological sense". In fact, motherly experiences become, as we have seen, extremely important in Boland's volumes of poetry after *Night Feed*. Nevertheless, Meaney ignores the second aspect of Boland's project: to place these women in linear time by leading her poetic figures to death and erasure, something that I will comment on in due course. By so doing, Boland manages to overcome that dream of a woman's community united in a transcendental way.

Boland's perpetuation of this traditional notion of woman's time as cyclical and monumental does not only intend to bridge the gap between past and present, but it also becomes a subversive technique with which to avoid essentialist and simplified views of women in art. Yielding to this repetitive and circular notion of time gives Boland an essential advantage. As she asserts in an interview, she is interested in "how the same thing can be seen differently over and over again" (Schmidt 2001). In this sense, recurrence enables Boland to perceive women differently every time she describes them, moving away from the essentialist trap of definitions. As we have seen, it is in changing landscapes, hybrid zones, where women can be truly represented. Women in Boland's poems are not static; they change constantly. By recording the fluidity of space and time, she tries to avoid a simplification of women as mere static and monumental objects. Taking this into account, I disagree with critics such as Riley (1997: 25), who argues that for Boland "myths offer women limitations, not possibilities, simplistic stories rather than fluctuation narratives, thus limiting the potential for active female subjectivity". As I will demonstrate, Boland exploits the benefits afforded by myth, and its notions of time (cyclical and monumental), in order to bridge the distance between past and present, and record a woman who locates herself, in her constant movement, outside masculine parameters.

In order to explore how Boland exploits the resources of myth, I will concentrate on "Suburban Woman: A Detail" (*The Journey*). As in "Self-Portrait on a Summer Evening", this poem focuses not on a private setting as in "The Women", but on a more open landscape. The first section of this poem offers a static description of a suburban environment that seems to be suspended in time and where no action is perceived:

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The chimneys have been swept.
The gardens have their winter cut.
The shrubs are prinked, the hedges gelded.

The last dark shows up the headlights
of the cars coming down the Dublin mountains.

Our children used to think they were stars.

The parallel structure observed in the first stanza and the use of passive syntactic structures indicate that there is no motion and progression in the scene described. No linear time is recorded in this passage: the domestic world and its inhabitants seem to be immersed more in mythical than in historical time. Boland's reference to prinked shrubs and gelded hedges directly reminds one of Daphne, the Greek beautiful nymph who avoided having sexual intercourse with Apollo and was therefore transformed into a laurel tree. The women who inhabit this suburb are pseudo-Daphnes, entrapped in a monumental and cyclical time of reiterative domestic labours. But it will be this notion of time, apparently oppressing, that Boland will use subversively, as we will see. The following lines offer some movement to the stable moment depicted above. Although Boland locates the scene at dawn, as in most poems included in *Night Feed*, there is a significant change here. The coming of a new day is perceived by a reference to "the last dark". As darkness gradually disappears, the only light that is perceived is by "the headlights/ of the cars coming down the Dublin mountains". The speaker nostalgically recalls the time when her children believed the car lights to be stars in the sky. There is an impression that her children are no longer with her, that, she, like Ceres, ultimately has lost her daughter. On the other hand, the use of the first person plural 'our', characteristic of Boland's mature poetry to include within the same enunciation herself and her husband, indicates that the woman has constantly her marriage in mind.⁶⁴ Boland's role as a wife, together with her role as a mother, is an important aspect of her mature work. As Showalter (1999: 35) advances, the woman writer in her 'Female' phase intends "to unify the fragments" of her own life as housewife, wife, mother, and poet "through artistic vision".

In the second section of "Suburban Woman: a Detail", Boland seems to establish a clearer identification with the Earth goddess Ceres:

This is not the season
when the goddess rose
out of seed, out of wheat,
out of thawed water

⁶⁴ This is a characteristic feature of Boland's poetry from *The War Horse* onwards, excluding, of course, *In Her Own Image*. See "On Holiday" and "The Wild Spray" (*The Journey*), "Object Lessons", "The River", "A Different Light", and "What Love Intended" (*Outside History*), and almost all the poems included in *Against Love Poetry*.

and went, distracted and astray,
to find her daughter.

The season this passage records is autumn, the period when Persephone was kidnapped by Hades, the King of the Underworld. In *Object Lessons*, Boland (1996a: 18-19) records how she is drawn to that season between September and October:

September is a time of mild weather in Ireland. Great swathes of light are draped across stone and fields; there is a misleading stillness. October is different. The zone between the two months can seem to be a season in itself, an emblematic journey from fruition to menace.

As Boland makes explicit here, she is drawn to this period of the year because of its transformative power. In later poems such as "The White Hawthorn in the West of Ireland" (*Outside History*) or "A Sparrow-Hawk in the Suburbs" (*In a Time of Violence*), Boland explicitly advocates a time of constant change: "the season between seasons", a moment when "two seasons heal into/ one another". It is this transitional and in-between moment that Boland records in "Suburban Woman: A Detail". Located at the interstices of seasons, Boland suddenly faces a menace, the loss of her daughter. Spring will be the time when Ceres will rise, as the Earth goddess, in search of her daughter; but, at present, this goddess seems to be hidden. Like the Earth goddess, Boland does not embark on her search of her daughter, and more importantly, she feels dispossessed. The imminent coming of winter enhances the woman's spiritual impoverishment and alienation:

Winter will be soon:
Dun pools of rain;
ruddy, addled distances;
winter pinks, tinges and
a first-thing smell of turf
when I take the milk in.

By identifying with this Earth goddess, Boland is immersed in a cyclical and monumental time that enables her to have access to a transcendental understanding. She has an instinctive knowledge of the recurrence of seasons and of the inevitability of her separation from her daughter. As the woman returns from her garden after taking the milk, she describes the suburban landscape from a painter's perspective: the reddish colour of the horizon is merged with the brownish gray colour of the "pools of rain", and the pinks and tinges of her own surroundings. This description of the landscape, in which everything is seen in terms of the same range of

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tenuous colours (shades of red), presages the imminent dissolution the woman is going to experience:

Setting out for a neighbour's house
in a denim skirt,

a blouse blended in
by the last light,

I am definite
to start with
but the light is lessening,
the hedge losing its detail,
the path its edge.

Although she seems to be a separate entity in this landscape, her blouse blending into the last light anticipates that she is going to become indistinguishable. Her definite shape is going to lose its detail, as night is approaching. She senses that she is becoming, together with the hedge and the path, shapeless. The earlier distinguishable surroundings and her previous definite form are going to be blurred. In *Object Lessons*, Boland (1996a: 167-168) narrates the moment described in this poem:

At what point does an actual, exact landscape – those details which are recurrent and predictable – begin to blur and soften? Sometimes [...] walking between my house and a neighbour's, past the whitebeams trees and the bicycles left glinting in the dusk, I could imagine that I myself was a surreal and changing outline, that there was something almost profound in these reliable shadows, that such lives as mine and my neighbour's were mythic, not because of their strangeness but because of their powerful ordinariness. [...] Then I would feel all the sweet, unilliterate melancholy of women who must have stood as I did, throughout continents and centuries, *feeling the timelessness of that particular instant* and *the cruel time underneath its surface*. They must have measured their children, as I did, against the seasons and looked at the hedges and rowan trees, their height and the colour of their berries, as an index of the coming loss. (My emphasis)

In this passage, Boland is explicitly fusing in a single moment cyclical and monumental, and historical time. Immersed in “the timelessness of that particular instant”, the speaker feels that she is linked in a transcendental way to those mythological figures such as Ceres who went in search of her daughter. This blurring of imaginative and real worlds is common in Boland's poetry, as “This Moment”, “The Pomegranate” (*In a Time of Violence*) and “Daughters” (*The Lost Land*) exemplify. In “Suburban Woman: A Detail”, the poet, once again, approaches the ordinary details of women's lives from a revisionary mythological approach. This allows her to connect her own personal experience with that of other women in the past. By linking past and present, legends and real lives, Boland implies that myth has its roots in the familial and the domestic. There is, for the

poet, something about the repeated action of a woman (lifting a child, clearing a dish, and walking in her neighborhood) which reveals a deeper meaning to existence. But, as she has also argued in the passage above, she is also drawn to “the cruel time underneath its surface” (1996a: 168). Boland wants to incorporate both mythical and past women into linear time, which also implies the passing of time and the loss of beauty. Nevertheless, what Boland wants to capture in this poem is cyclical and monumental time, rather than linear time. Whereas in other poems she is more concerned with bringing her own images to the corruptive and the damaging consequences of the passing of time, in “Suburban Woman: A Detail” she is interested in recording the ‘timelessness’ that freezes both mythical figures and those women from a remote Irish past:

Look at me, says the tree.
I was a woman once like you,
full-skirted, human.

Suddenly I am not certain
of the way I came
or the way I will return,
only that something
which may be nothing
more than darkness has begun
softening the definitions
of my body, leaving

the fears and all the terrors
of the flesh shifting the airs
and forms of the autumn quiet

crying “remember us”.

Boland's feeling of shapelessness, of being a surreal and changing outline, is going to parallel her sense of timelessness. Thus, the woman-speaker does not feel anymore as if she is inhabiting a certain place at a certain time. Rather, she is suspended in time and place, as that wounded warrior in “An Old Steel Engraving”. This location in cyclical and monumental time is highly subversive. Firstly, it enables her to establish a connection with past lives, with all those women who stood as she is standing right now, “throughout centuries and continents” (Boland 1996a: 168). Boland is here implying that myth and reality are intrinsically connected, that past and present, history and legend are associated by the very ordinariness of human lives. In this context, the woman senses the call of one female voice, stemming from a tree. This tree may be Daphne, transformed into a laurel tree, or Ceres, the Earth goddess, previously out of sight, but now speaking to the woman. The fluidity that overwhelms Boland allows her to open a space where multiplicity of voices can be heard. Irigaray (1985: 209) has advocated a form of language in which “[b]etween our lips, yours and mine, several voices, several ways of speaking resound endlessly, back and forth [...].

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And how could one dominate the other? Impose her voice, her tone, her meaning?”. Boland’s vulnerability as a subject prevents her from dominating and eclipsing other women’s voices. Her own fluid speech does not overshadow the language of women in the past, but enables the emergence of different voices, without imposing one over the other. When she says to be experiencing “something/ which may be nothing”, she does not only imply the rejection of historical accounts of the ordinary, whereby the ordinary is undervalued as a mere “darkness” or rejected at all as “nothing”. Boland also expresses her refusal to make “grandiose claims” in her statements, as Hagen and Zelman (2004: 59) explain. As we will explore in section 7.4.5., Boland will emphasize the poet’s powerlessness, her impossibility to capture the past, rather than her power and ability to do so. Nevertheless, the resulting shapelessness and loss of self-confidence leads to a compensating gain: the remembrance of a universal community of women (mostly mothers), who have lived, or are still living, in a similar ordinary landscape. The definite shape of her surroundings disappears in order to allow this woman to enter a new place, unaffected by linear time and determined by repetition and maternity. This place is the country of the mind, the imagination, where the woman feels free to declare her solidarity with all those women who, like her, went in search of their daughters.

Secondly, with the dissolution in space and time that Boland experiences, she surpasses “the fears and all the terrors” that linear time would mean for her own body. In contrast to *In Her Own Image*, the speaker’s body does not involve assertion but rather the contrary. There is no connection between text/creativity and body; her female body is not the source of her woman’s identity anymore. Her “flesh” reminds the speaker of her vulnerability, and therefore, she is terrified at the fact that she will grow older and lose her beauty. As we will see in later poems, Boland will be very interested in presenting a damaged female body inserted in linear time, by describing ageing women who have scars and wounds all over their bodies. In “Suburban Woman: A Detail”, Boland does not praise her own body, but brings it to dissolution, implying that the poet’s creativity lies in her ability to overcome sexual boundaries. By “leaving/ the fears and all the terrors/ of the flesh”, the woman senses a temporary feeling of eternity, similar to that enjoyed by Ceres. Shapelessness allows both immortality and the escape from any form of artistic representation. Boland puts into practice a woman’s art in which, according to Irigaray (1991: 136), “there would be no longer either subject nor object”, and which “preclude[s] any distinction of identity, any establishment of ownership, thus any form of appropriation”. This is a “double syntax” where an articulation between conscious and unconscious, male and female is possible (ibid).

The ending of the poem with a single-line stanza is a characteristic feature of Boland's mature style, as other poems from *The Journey* exemplify ("Lace", "The Briar Rose", "The Emigrant Irish", and "The Unlived Life"). The presence of the present participle 'crying' at the beginning of the last line highlights the motion and fluidity of both the speaker and the outer landscape described, leaving us with the impression that both the woman and the scene cannot be captured by any sort of artistic representation. On the other hand, Boland advances what is going to be one of her most important tasks in her poetry. After experiencing the bond which links her existence with the lives of women in the past, she feels bound to keep them in mind, to consider and recognize their efforts and struggles to survive. This last line "remember us" leaves the end open, showing the speaker's main concern in her mature poetry: the need to bring women out of silence and shadows, in other words, her desire to rewrite women's lives from a female perspective which will bear witness to their ordinary experiences.⁶⁵ In this sense, and although I have identified the woman with the Earth Goddess, it seems that Boland is reversing the role in the Ceres-Persephone myth by becoming a daughter in search of her (historical) foremothers.

In fact, Boland's intention to adopt an elegist's act of remembrance is observed in the language of the poem. Her tendency to use long sentences and enjambling lines, even stanzas, produce what Gelpi (1999: 221) identifies as an "unwinding, devolving movement from line to line down the page" which retards the speed and enhances the melancholic tone of the poem. As this scholar has noted, Boland's intention is "to slow down the pace from the characteristically brisk clip of Irish verse" (ibid). On the other hand, Boland's attempt to escape linguistic representation is also observed linguistically. As in "The Women" and "Self-Portrait on a Summer Evening", the language of "Suburban Woman: A Detail" leads us into a space outside artistic representations. Whereas at the beginning everything is well structured (there are short sentences and no hyperbatons), the language gradually becomes looser. The lack of conjunctions reinforces the verse's flowing movement. Furthermore, the simple present verbal forms with which the poem opened are substituted as the poem progresses by plenty of present progressives and present participles, which become more predominant at the end. The woman is in constant movement, and not even 'language' can grasp her.

In short, in poems such as "Suburban Woman: a Detail" Boland shows how woman's cyclical and monumental time can be used subversively. Myth allows her firstly, to establish a comradeship with an imaginative community of women and secondly, to enjoy the state of

⁶⁵ 'Remember' is one of the most recurring words in *The Journey* (see "I Remember", "There and Back", "The Wild Spray", "The Journey", "Listen. This is the Noise of Myth", and "Canaletto in the National Gallery of Ireland"). This repetition of the word 'remember', together with others from the same semantic field (as 'memory' and 'remind'), is continued in other volumes of poetry such as *Outside History*.

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eternity, of an infinite time in which she will be able to survive, and escape the negative consequences of linear time. Nevertheless, the general tendency in her work is to insert this conventional concept of time within history. Linear time is also very important for Boland, for it enables her to locate her women ‘out of myth into history’. Although Boland’s poems record women as engaged in repetitive actions (such as searching for their children in a twilight setting), there is suddenly what she calls a “violent and random event” (1996a: 172) that reminds them that they are fragile subjects, affected by the passing of time and the loss of beauty. By mixing myth with history, Boland relocates women’s private lives within public history. The following section addresses this aspect of Boland’s work.

7.4.4.3.3.2. A revolutionary place between myth and history

In order to observe how Boland’s poetry combines “myth and history”, by advocating Kristeva’s notion of a temporality which is simultaneously cyclical, monumental, and linear, I will focus on a poem included in *Outside History*, “The Making of an Irish Goddess”. In this poem, Boland seeks to redefine the unreal and mythic image of Ceres, the goddess who lost her daughter to Hades, in order to offer a more accurate image representative of contemporary Irish women. As the very same title indicates, the woman poet is going to make, or rather, to re-make, an Irish goddess. The present participle of the title refers to an action in process.⁶⁶ In this sense, the vocabulary is of movement rather than stillness, indicating, in Fulford’s words (2002b: 142), that for Boland, ‘real’ women are “associated with the living stream rather than with the monumental”. The first stanzas introduce us to Ceres who inhabits, as a mythological woman, a monumental and sacred time, in other words, she is timeless:

Ceres went to hell
with no sense of time.

When she looked back
all that she could see was

the arteries of silver in the rock,
the diligence of rivers always at one level,
wheat at one height,
leaves of a single colour,
the same distance in the usual light;

a seasonless, unscarred earth.

⁶⁶ The same type of title is also present in poems from *In Her Own Image* (“Witching” and “Making Up”), and also in one poem from *The Journey* (such as “Growing Up”).

The first verse lines record the literal descent of the goddess into the Underworld.⁶⁷ When Ceres looks back, all she can see is a “seasonless, unscarred earth”. The world that the Greek myth portrays is, according to Boland, an unreal world. Ceres is not affected by the passing of time. There are no seasons evolving into one another. Furthermore, it may be funny or ironical that the goddess of agriculture is unable to perceive the cycle of birth, growth, and death in nature. The mythical world is unchangeable: “the diligence of rivers” are “always at one level”, the “wheat” is always “at one height”, the “leaves” are “of a single colour”, and there is always “the same distance in the usual light”. This world seems to be frozen in time, and consequently, the goddess Ceres becomes a lifeless emblem. Metallic imagery appears to portray the unreality of this mythic world. Like “the arteries of silver” that the speaker finds, this woman has been inscribed “in the cold rock” (1996a: 39) of myth, as a solid, compact, and hard emblem, an unreal and lifeless entity. That is why the speaker cannot identify with this goddess. Her descent entails the sense of time:

But I need time –
My flesh and that history –
To make the same descent.

In my body,
neither young now nor fertile,
and with the marks of childbirth
still on it,

in my gestures –
the way I pin my hair to hide
the stitched, healed blemish of a scar –

As we have seen in poems such as “Self-Portrait”, this change from third person narration to first person is typical of Boland's mature work. The speaker becomes a new Irish goddess who, in contrast to the mythological Ceres, is characterized by four main factors, all of them interrelated: “[t]ime”, “flesh”, “history”, and “scar”. First of all, ‘time’ is very important for the speaker and this noun is repeated three times in the poem. In contrast to Ceres, who is positioned in ‘no time’ and inhabits a “seasonless” and “unscarred earth”, the speaker is a mortal and vulnerable subject affected by the passing of time. As Boland (1996a: 234) has argued, the dismantling of the traditional fusion between the erotic and the sensual in Irish poetry, offers “a radical and exciting chance to restate time in the poem”. By restating time in the poem, Boland moves away from the traditional notion of woman's time as cyclical and monumental (Kristeva 1986c: 191). Rather than using the poem as a vehicle of timelessness (something that she had done in “Suburban Woman: A

⁶⁷ The trip with which Boland starts the poem is, as Thurston (1999: 240) explains, a trip the goddess does not make in classical sources.

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Detail”), Boland uses it to record change and decay as brought upon a woman’s body which will eventually die. Secondly, ‘flesh’ is fundamental for the poetic speaker, too. In contrast to the bodiless image of the goddess, the poetic voice is a corporeal entity. In *In Her Own Image*, Boland glorified the female body as a site of worship (remember “Solitary”); here, she tries to show its wounds and scars.⁶⁸ As Thurston (1999: 240) notes, unlike the old Greek and Roman stories of immortal beings, this is a mortal mother experiencing the effects of the passing of (linear) time. Because her body is marked, scarred, and blemished by childbirth, this woman is identified as a real and non-mythical being, in contrast to those legends (whether Greek or Irish) that depend “on her to be young and beautiful” (“Story”, *In a Time of Violence*). The woman in the poem is “neither young nor fertile”. She makes “gestures” which show up her “scars”, with the effect that her image is constantly changing rather than static and timeless. Thirdly, ‘history’ is an essential constitutive part of this new goddess. Note the use of demonstratives such as “that history” and later “that agony”, which help to indicate that Ceres is separated and excluded from official historical accounts. Whereas this goddess stands outside history, the speaker tries to become a representative voice of the past in the present, inside history. In *Object Lessons*, Boland (1996a: 146) explains how history and nation are always for her “rough graphic[s] of an ordeal”, and how “[i]n some subterranean way I felt myself to be part of that ordeal; its fragmentations extended to me”. Boland becomes an emblem of this painful experience in this poem. In contrast to Ceres, an insufficient model, her wounds and scars bear witness to Irish women’s “agony”. In this sense, the woman’s body is treated as a paradigm for women’s history.⁶⁹ Its wounds recall the Great Famine of the 1840s and how women suffered in those times. In this sense, the scars and wounds of her body

must be

and accurate inscription
of that agony:

the failed harvests,
the fields rotting to the horizon,
the children devoured by their mothers
whose souls, they would have said,
went straight to hell,
followed by their own.

Boland’s new goddess recalls by means of her own body the Famine’s horrific consequences for women, suggesting that she can make “an accurate inscription” of a national

⁶⁸ In Boland’s mature work, the female body is only mentioned in order to talk about how injuries are inscribed in it. See, for instance, “We are Always too Late” or “The Shadow Doll” (*Outside History*).

⁶⁹ For a similar approach to the woman’s body, see “The Famine Road” (*The War Horse*).

trauma. In contrast to the goddess of agriculture, the woman speaker is able to perceive a world marked by scars stiffening on the earth. The previous perfect nature and idealized landscape of myth gives way to a more damaged and unpleasant landscape. In contrast to Boland's initial work (see section 7.2.4.) where the poet praised the Irish landscape, her mature poetry constantly rejects the romantic view that myth portrays: the "seasonless, unscarred earth", or as she says in "Carousel in Park" (*Outside History*), the "seasonless canter". As she argues in other poems from this volume, such as "A False Spring" or "We are Human History. We are not Natural History", the poet prefers to record instead "the topsy-corvy seasons of hell" or "the stashed-up debris of old seasons". In "The Making of an Irish Goddess", the earth is portrayed as rotten and blemished as the woman's body. Just as in "Mise Eire" (*The Journey*) and "Mother Ireland" (*The Lost Land*), Boland perpetuates the long-held association between earth/country and women. She portrays a non-idealized Mother Ireland: an old and injured woman who cannot hope for salvation because she is too wounded and injured by her (historical) past. On the other hand, Boland writes about the most dreadful outcome of the Great Famine: mothers devouring their children and condemning the children's souls to hell. As Coughlan (1991: 95) explains when talking about John Montague's poetry, the destroying mother is part of the general topos in literature. Boland recreates the woman-hating myths about the Woman the devourer, or the familial Irish archetype of the cannibal Mother,⁷⁰ in order to portray an Irish goddess affected by the horrid events which have unfolded over time in Ireland. This new Irish goddess is an allegory of those victimized women, who, like their children, have gone to hell. In this sense, Boland manages to destroy conventional images of women by inserting them within the particular historical narrative of the Great Famine. Fulford (2002b: 147) has argued that Boland "presents herstory in terms of a material time and space peopled with the flesh of rotting corpses, and the cannibalism of 'children devoured by their mothers'". By doing so, this critic goes on, the poet is able to produce a "differential and materialist" version of history (p. 146). Indeed, Boland criticizes history as a master narrative that has excluded women's stories. By presenting her body as an emblem of women's past, she includes them within Ireland's official narrative of events. In the process, myth is also attacked, for it can freeze women within lifeless emblems. Redefining the timelessness that characterizes the mythical image of Ceres, the speaker locates herself at the end of the poem within a 'linear' temporality. She is a new Ceres walking in a

March evening
at the foothills of the Dublin mountains,
across which the lights have changed all day,

⁷⁰ This murderous mother might be understood as an Irish version of the Greek myth of Medea. Medea was a princess who, as revenge for the infidelity of her lover Jason, murdered her two sons (Falcon Martínez et al. 1980: 409).

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holding up my hand
sickle-shaped, to my eyes
to pick out
my daughter from
all the other children in the distance;

her back turned to me.

The last lines of the poem focus on a particular moment in time which is subject to change. The present participle at the end enhances the fact that the woman speaker is constantly moving. Boland relocates the mythological and monumental image of Ceres within linear time. The woman, who goes to pick up her child from school, is depicted in a fluid landscape, with the effect that her image, as in the case of “A Suburban Woman: A Detail”, is similarly unstable and unfixd. As Fulford (2002a: 206) explains, “[a]t ‘the foothills of the Dublin mountains’, time does not stand still, with the effect that neither time nor space nor the women are represented as static or unchanging”.

Although Fulford emphasizes Boland’s wish to insert Ceres within the ‘linear time’ of a volatile suburban landscape, this critic forgets that she also relies on myth in her search for an “utopian transcendence” (ibid). Boland continues to identify herself with Ceres at the end. Like this mythological figure, the speaker’s hand is “sickle-shaped”, showing that she is the goddess of agriculture and the harvest, as well as a person searching for her abducted daughter.⁷¹ Linear time is thus combined with monumental and cyclical time. In the speaker’s mundane experience of looking for her daughter in a March twilight resides the experiences of those women, those mothers who have come before her. Once again, repetition (a traditional notion of female time) appears. Collecting a child becomes for Boland, therefore, a ritual act that is important both for the Irish mother and for the Greek goddess. Myth and reality, Boland implies, are linked by this very ordinary act. Like Ceres, this Irish mother anticipates the loss of her daughter, for her child fails to return her gaze, as “her back [is] turned to me”.⁷²

By identifying with Ceres and also by recording a scarred and damaged female body located in a volatile landscape, Boland puts into practice Kristeva’s advocacy of the parallel existence of the three notions of time. The considerable interchange of verb tenses in this poem is typical of Boland’s mature production, where she constantly crosses those temporal and spatial

⁷¹ Haberstroh (1996: 82) reads this image as an oblique reference to Father Time, although I think it better identifies with Ceres as Mother Time, the grim reaper, seeking her own daughter “from all the other children in the distance”.

⁷² Campbell (2003: 17) offers a different interpretation to this poem’s last line. According to this critic, Boland cannot “avoid the use of the body” in order to represent the nation. Boland feels bound to explain the national trauma caused by the horrors of the famine through the metonym of the woman poet’s body. In this sense, the fact that the poem finishes with a vision of Boland’s daughter and “her back turned to me”, is read by this critic as a hope that future generations of women poets can move freely away from a persuasive Irish national legacy that equates the feminine with the national (ibid).

boundaries that separate myth and the ordinary, past and present, one landscape from another. In this poem, the speaker has travelled from 'myth' (described in the past tense) to her own reality (describing her damaged body in the present tense); from 'history' (recording the Great Famine in the past tense), to her own suburban and ordinary world again (described in the present tense). By so doing, Boland locates her present reality 'in-between' myth and history. Myth and maternal time are juxtaposed with the particular historical event of the famine, and both are, in turn, connected to the ordinary suburban landscape. In this sense, both myth and history are present within a single female image, herself, a contemporary Irish woman. It is this insertion of cyclical and monumental time within the linear progression of history that, according to Kristeva (1986c: 192), is subversive. By telling the local story of a suburban woman, Boland disrupts both myth as a timeless account, and history as a linear narrative, subverting the patriarchal from within. Rather than describing the historical event of the famine as a narrative from beginning to end, Boland interrupts this story by inserting the individual experiences of mother and daughter.⁷³ In this sense, the poet moves away from the idea of "an overall pattern in history", sharing the poststructuralist and postmodernist critique of historicism (Sarup 1993: 2). Poststructuralists like Michel Foucault and postmodernists such as Jean-François Lyotard attack the legitimacy of modern age myths ('the grand narratives') and draw a sharp critique of the historical notion of progress (p. 132). Sarup (1993: 59) has explained how Foucault conceives of history in terms of "genealogy":

Whereas traditional or 'total' history inserts events into grand explanatory systems and linear processes, celebrates great moments and individuals, and seeks to document a point of origin, genealogical analysis attempts to establish and preserve the singularity of events, turns away from the spectacular in favour of the discredited, the neglected, and a whole range of phenomena which have been denied in history.

"The Making of an Irish Goddess" focuses on the singular event of picking up a child from the playground. This ordinary experience stands outside 'master' historical narratives such as those which record the Great Famine. By linking both stories within the same poetic sequence Boland (1996a: 172) is able to write of a woman "at the very borders of myth and history". This allows her to revise both the timelessness that characterizes myth and simplistic and reductionist versions of history.

⁷³ Note that a similar disruption of history occurs in "Daphne Heard with Horror the Addressees of the God" (*Outside History*). The mythical story of Daphne is intermingled with a local story Boland hears about a woman and her bridegroom, a merchant from Agyll. These two stories are, in turn, associated with the speaker, a woman located in the garden of her house. In this sense, these two poems establish a connection between mythical women and past Irish women. Both figures equally stand outside linear history: the first because she inhabits myth, and the second because her life story is unrecorded in official historical accounts. For a similar intermingling of local and historical stories, see "A Model Ship Made by Prisoners Long Ago" (*Against Love Poetry*), where Boland juxtaposes the story of her grandfather, a "Master of the Union", with those oppressed Irish prisoners forced to make a model ship.

7.4.4. A deconstruction of the poetic self

7.4.4.3.3. Out of myth into history: towards the death and erasure of the poetic self

So far, we have observed how in poems from *The Journey* and *Outside History* Boland is interested in creating a poetic space that can record both myth and history. Boland's concern with the possibilities afforded by cyclical and monumental time is continued in *In a Time of Violence*, in poems such as "The Pomegranate", where she reflects on motherly roles through the Ceres and Persephone myth, "the only legend I've ever loved". Nevertheless, in this volume, we start to appreciate a greater focus on the speaker's linear time. Boland equates linear time with death, pain, and suffering, but she prefers this notion of time to the timelessness of cyclical and monumental time. As Boland's mature work progresses, the issues of dying and ageing become, interestingly enough, more predominant.

Mills Harper (1997: 188) has noted that Boland, unlike her poetic predecessors, consciously writes herself as a vulnerable subject, "as small and mortal, subject to absence and death". In her essay "First Principles and Last Things", this critic identifies connections that can certainly be established between Boland and the African-American writer Audre Lorde.⁷⁴ Mills Harper explains how Boland's main poetic concerns, such as "[d]omesticity", "oral history", and "children", are linked with "illness, silence, and death" (p. 189). In order to resist the trope of 'eternal life' that has long objectified women in poetry, as everlasting young and beautiful emblems, Boland represents the self (her 'womanhood') in terms of erasure. That is why in most of the poems in *In a Time of Violence*, the theme of ageing and dying is constantly present.⁷⁵ This emphasis distinguishes this volume of poetry from all the others. In "Moths", the speaker records how she is "perishing" as she perceives her "child's shadow longer than [her] own". This similarly occurs in other poems from this volume such as "A Sparrow-Hawk in the Suburbs", "Legends", "Story", and "The Water-Clock". The beginning of "The Water-Clock", for instance, shows Boland's increased interest in recording linear time. The title itself summarizes her main concern: to transform her poems into clocks, instruments for measuring the passage of time:

Thinking of ageing on a summer day
of rain and more rain
I took a book down from a shelf
and stopped to read

⁷⁴ Lorde is also what might be labelled a postcolonial writer, struggling against racism and sexism as a black woman poet.

⁷⁵ Not surprisingly then, in this volume lexical items such as 'death' and 'perish' do recur significantly.

As is typical of her mature work, the poem begins with a present participle that situates the woman speaker in the middle of an action.⁷⁶ The disruption of lay-out and the rainy landscape enhance what is going to be the speaker's desire: to record the passing of time and the perishing of things. Like in "Bright-Cut Irish Silver", the speaker is drawn to take down, this time, a book from the shelf, and read about "the absurd creation of the water-clock", a clepsydra used by the ancient world in order to measure time by the passing of water from one container to another one. Fascinated by this rare invention, the speaker wonders how they could have

Taken an element, that is.
Which swallowed faces, stars, irises, Narcissus.
And posed as frost, ice, snow.

As in poems such as "Lava Cameo" where Boland questioned her own ability to record "the flux of hell" in a firm and compact poetic representation, here the speaker questions the ancient ability to place in a specific position something that is constantly flowing rather than solid. Water is a very recurrent metaphor in Boland's poetry. As she has recently asserted, it has strong family associations for her, because her grandfather was a sea-captain and he drowned on the Bay of Biscay (interview with Villar Argáiz 2005a). But this image is more than a simple anecdote in Boland's life. As we will see, rivers, seas, lakes, streams, and raining are constantly present in her work, in order to suggest the fluidity of a life that cannot adequately be grasped by the artist. Thus, the irony of the very creation of the water-clock: an instrument that can measure time by 'freezing' as frost, ice or snow an element that is constantly eroding the earth. Like the speaker who is inevitably "ageing on a summer day", the landscape that Boland describes in this poem is inevitably dissolved by a constant drizzle. In contrast to the water-clock that cannot record the change of weather, Boland's poem becomes a more suitable instrument to measure linear time. Recording how rain suddenly stops, the poem ends by presenting a completely different landscape, as the sun comes out and the afternoon clears. In this sense, the poem becomes a suitable site that can bear witness to the constant change that affects both the speaker and her surroundings.⁷⁷

This emphasis on linear time is more explicitly manifested in "Anna Liffey", "Time and Violence", and "A Woman Painted on Leaf" (*In a Time of Violence*). In these three poems, Boland follows what Fulford (2002a: 215-216) has explained as her characteristic way of setting a poem. Firstly, Boland criticizes monumental and static representations of Irish women in art; secondly,

⁷⁶ Note the beginnings of poems such as "A Different Light" ("Talking just like this") or "Contingencies" ("Waiting in the kitchen for power-cuts") (*Outside History*).

⁷⁷ Note, for instance, the evolution of the seasons that three poems from *Outside History* record ("Spring at the Edge of a Sonnet"; "The Carousel in the Park", and "What Love Intended"), and the change from late afternoon to evening and from dusk to night that "Lava Cameo" and "Time of Violence" record respectively (*In a Time of Violence*).

Boland “re-imagines [...] alternative and more authentic female experience[s] which risk[...] misrepresentation”; and finally, “with only misrepresentation available, she takes her female figure[s] into death or ‘nothingness’”. Indeed, this process from construction to destruction of identity is a feature of most of Boland’s poems in her mature work. In this sense, I disagree with Hagen and Zelman (2004: 20), who argue that “Boland’s poetic ‘repossession’ is [...] a fluid process of de- and re-construction”. These critics consider that Boland manages to have access to “real women never seen in the Irish literary tradition” (p. 39). But, as we will see, Boland’s attempt to imagine ‘real’ women’ inevitably leads to dissolution. In contrast to *In Her Own Image*, Boland increasingly subjects ‘the real’ to scrutiny. By taking her figures into death at the end of the poem, she consequently reveals that even her own poetic representations run the risk of been misrepresentative, and therefore, her movement is always from reconstruction to destruction, and not vice versa.

In contrast to the preference that Boland has shown in previous volumes for quartets and tercets, “Anna Liffey” is exemplary of Boland’s increasing concern for more open poetic forms. In this poem, the woman poet invokes the traditional connection between river and woman in man-made myth and slightly changes Joyce’s celebration in *Finnegans Wake* of Dublin’s river Liffey “as the feminine principle eternal in its cycles” (Gelpi 1999: 225).⁷⁸ Boland begins by narrating the mythological story of Life, the daughter of Cannan, who, after arriving at Kildare, is so amazed by the beauty of “the flat-lands and the ditches” that she “asked that it be named for her”. Here is where Boland traces the origin of how

The river took its name from the land.
The land took its name from a woman.

Whereas all poems of Boland’s mature production are constructed with verse lines which begin with lower case, “Anna Liffey” stands as a rare exception. The formality and measured structure of this initial stanza reminds one of those stories Boland narrated in *New Territory*, as “The Winning of Etain”. Nevertheless, there is a change here, for the poet is going to carry out a significant subversion of the myth of Anna Livia. Boland is drawn to this figure for its national importance. Anna Livia has become so popular that it has even become a symbol of Dublin city (Hurtley et al. 1996: 8).⁷⁹ Proof of this is the sculpture, popularly known as “The Floozie in the Jacuzzi”, that,

⁷⁸ For an interesting comparison between Joyce’s and Boland’s treatment of gender and language in their work, see Pérez Valverde (2001).

⁷⁹ In poems such as “Canaletto in the National Gallery of Ireland” (*The Journey*) and “The Scar” (*The Lost Land*), Boland continues to use the river Liffey as an emblem of Dublin and nationhood. In this last poem, Boland, as in “Anna Liffey”, similarly establishes a parallelism between herself and this ‘monumental’ image in order to show how

until very recently, was erected in O'Connell Street, in the very heart of the city. It was a fountain depicting the figure of a woman with sheets of water pouring over it. Originally conceived as a tribute to the goddess of the river, this sculpture has been highly controversial; Irish feminist critics such as Martin Gray (2000: 275) view it as an instance of "the sexual exploitation of women's bodies".⁸⁰ Even though this woman is lying on her back with water running from head to toe, she is, as all those women in artistic representations, frozen in monumental time. In this sense, Boland finds the need to reconstruct this image. She shows how the mythological association river-land and land-woman turns active and bodily women into passive, bodiless, and desexualized beings. Myth and art, in their attempt to define and mould their emblems, destroy the complexity and totality of lived experiences, which, as a consequence, can only be perceived fragmentarily as

One body. One spirit.
One place. One name.

As in volumes such as *Outside History*, one of the main interests of *In a Time of Violence* is to show the destruction and fragmentation that art produces on the images it represents. Poems such as "The Death of Reason", "The Art of Grief", and "The Dolls Museum" are constructed upon very short sentences, some of them incomplete in order to emphasize the solidity rather than the fluidity that imprisons women in paintings, sculptures, or a simple child's toy. This technique is also manifested in "Anna Liffey". Boland shows how the body is not connected to the spirit, and how place is totally detached from Life's name, in spite of the myth's attempt to stress the connection between land and womanhood. In this sense, her identity is fragmented into different pieces. As typical in her mature poems, Boland identifies with this mythological creature who shares all the "[f]ractions of [Life's] life". By "[b]ecoming a figure in a poem" and "[u]surping a name and a theme", the poetic speaker herself turns out to be a new Life who is now described as

A woman in the doorway of a house.
A river in the city of her birth.

Standing in the "doorway" of her house is in itself an interstitial location, 'in-between' the public version of the myth, and the rather private account of a housewife and mother. It is significant to note how "doorway" is repeated five times in this poem, together with other words such as "edge", "threshold", and "boundary". Locating herself in a line of intersection is, as hinted

both female figures have been simplified by artistic nationalist images and how, in their fluid and complex nature, they are able to escape this solidification.

⁸⁰ Ailbhe Smyth's "The Floozie in the Jacuzzi" is another interesting example of the Irish feminist controversy around this female figure (1989).

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earlier, extremely important for Boland. Like those famine roads at “the borders of Connacht” (“That the Science of Cartography is Limited”, *In a Time of Violence*), here, no map can offer an “apt rendering” of her image. This boundary line stands on the margins of all sorts of representations. Once again, Boland describes herself within a place that stands outside definite contours, a landscape in which “[d]usk is coming” and “[r]ain is moving east from the hills”. As in “Suburban Woman: A Detail” (*The Journey*), Boland situates the scene in autumn, a moment of transition ‘in-between’ the warmest and coldest seasons of the year:

Autumn rain is
Scattering and dripping
From car-pots
And clipped hedges.
The gutters are full.

As we have seen in “The Water-Clock” and as other poems from *The Journey* exemplify,⁸¹ Boland’s landscapes are constantly softened by the rain. Fulford (2002a: 217) has noted how rain stands in Boland’s poetry as “a national characteristic which is appropriately fluid”, suggesting “little foundational sense of ‘Irishness’”. The poet’s persistent reference to raining suggests this is the best (and perhaps the only) feature that properly defines ‘Irishness’, the Irish nation. The “hard rock” (1996a) she mentions in *Object Lessons* might be understood as a metaphor of national identity, an identity founded on myths and legends such as Life’s. By focusing on the power of the rain to change the ‘hard rock’ of the Irish landscape, Boland attempts to dissolve ‘consolidated’ national emblems such as Anna Livia. This reliance on the potential of water has been observed in “On the Gift of ‘The Birds of America’ by John James Audubon” (*Outside History*), where the speaker utters “we need/ this re-phrasing of the air,/ of the ocean”; and also in “White Hawthorn in the West of Ireland” (*Outside History*), where Boland argues that the “fluency” that “only water has” is the only thing that can “re-define land”. Similarly, in this poem, the speaker praises the “gifts of the river”, for

Its shiftless and glittering
Re-telling of a city,
Its clarity as it flows

In this sense, Boland finds bodies of water such as seas, lakes, or rivers necessary to acquire more than one perspective of national identity: as it is fluid, it escapes definite and restrictive ideologies and impositions. In this sense, although she subverts the Joycean link

⁸¹ See “The Wild Spray”, “Envoi”, and “The Glass King”, where Boland constantly makes reference to a rainy landscape.

between the river Liffey and an immortal female goddess, she is drawn to this equation of woman and water, as she makes explicit in the following passage:

A river is not a woman.
 Although the names it finds,
 The history it makes
And suffers –
 The Viking blades beside it,
 The muskets of the Redcoats,
 The flames of the Four Courts
Blazing into it
 Are a sign.
 Any more than
A woman is a river,
 Although the course it takes,
 Through swans courting and distraught willows,
Its patience
 Which is also its powerlessness,
 From Callary to Islandbridge,
 And from source to mouth,
Is another one.

Boland finds water an appropriate medium through which to describe the suffering, patience, and powerlessness that has characterized womanhood throughout centuries. But she is also drawn to this image of Anna Livia because, as a river, it is constantly running freely. Therefore, Boland conceptualizes womanhood, as Cixous and Irigaray have done, in terms of liquefaction and diffusion. As she has recently argued, water is “the great feminine element” (interview with Villar Argáiz 2005a). It is my contention that Boland is drawn to this rather traditional image because, in her view, womanhood cannot be objectified, and like water, it is a fluid and unstable category. In “Growing Up” (*The Journey*), Boland has described how the objectified sisters in Renoir’s painting wish to move as free as ocean tides: “their waist-high tides of hair/ pair hopes”. In “Daphne Heard with Horror the Addressess of the God” (*Outside History*), the poet has depicted those nymphs from Greek mythology as “fleet-river daughters” who run freely and therefore, can escape myth. We have seen as well how in “An Old Steel Engraving” (*Outside History*), Boland showed her preference for the fluidity of the river rather than the solidity of land, “the origin and reason for it all”. The image of the water is diluted, not oppressive and enclosed as ‘land’. Similarly, in this poem the river Liffey is reminiscent of a female reality that cannot be solidified within any sort of mythical representation. As in “The Water-Clock”, the disruption of the lay-out of this passage suggests the versatility of her poetic images. In contrast to the initial stanzas, the lines increasingly become longer, unfolding down the page. Unlike those figures represented in engravings and paintings, Boland attempts to write verse which is as

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unstable as the new Anna Livia she portrays. By doing so, Boland forces us to see the misrepresentations involved in all sorts of national representations.

But national representations are not only dismantled by turning to the fluidity of water. Boland also uses her own example of fragmentation and dispossession in order to suggest how notions such as ‘being at home’ are relative, rather than absolute and pure. Rather than founding her ‘sense of place’ on a “nation” that, as she says, “elude[s]” her, Boland connects ‘home’ with her role as a mother:

My country took hold of me.
My children were born.

I walked out in a summer dusk
To call them in.

One name. Then the other one.
The beautiful vowels sounding out home.

As the verbal parallelism of these lines indicate, “my country” is equated with “my children” and “the beautiful vowels” of their names with “home”. Boland’s sense of Irishness is only rooted in her role as a mother looking after her children. But even this notion of stable identity is going to be deconstructed as the poem proceeds. As is typical in Boland’s motherly poems, Boland does not praise her union with the children as she did in *Night Feed*, but rather stresses her distance from them. Once her children are away from her, she loses all sense of being ‘at home’:

I feel it change.
My children are
Growing up, getting older.
My country holds on
To its own pain.

I turn off
The harsh yellow
Porch light and
Stand in the hall.
Where is home now?

In this sense, Boland’s female identity is perceived in terms of loss. We have seen how in those diasporic poems, Boland felt a tremendous sense of uneasiness. In “In Which the Ancient History I Learn is not My own” (*In a Time of Violence*), Boland, as a young girl in London, suddenly wondered “where exactly/ was my old house?”. The question that troubled this exiled child still disturbs the speaker who, even though she is now located inside her house, wonders “Where is home now?”. In this sense, the grown-up mother, now back in her home-country, feels a

similar estrangement and dispossession. It is significant how references to the speaker's surroundings increase in *In a Time of Violence*: words such as 'suburbs', 'neighbourhood', 'Dublin', 'city', 'the Four Courts', 'Kildare' become more predominant as Boland's mature work progresses. This indicates that the woman poet is much more concerned with finding a place of her own. The insistent link between 'place' and 'name' that this poem, as others in *In A Time of Violence* (i.e. "Inscriptions", "The Parcel"), exemplifies, is a sign that Boland wishes to re-establish this connection between identity and place, and to find her name within historical annals. In spite of this, the poet realizes that having "neither/ Children nor country" is a disguised blessing. By not being grounded in a particular place, the speaker is "free"

To imagine a spirit
In the blues and greens,
The hills and fogs
Of a small city.

'Place', as the very word suggests, denotes a space of definite boundaries, boundaries that become even more enclosing in "a small city". Thus, at the end of the poem, Boland, as in her diasporic poems, advocates exile as the best place to construct her poetic self:

Follow the rain
Out to the Dublin hills.
Let it become the river.
Let the spirit of place be
A lost soul again.

The subject, constantly in exile as "a lost soul", is able to surpass and cross established boundary lines, and as postcolonial theorists such as Bhabha (1995: 278) and Said (1994: 385) advocate, can subvert those authoritarian ideologies that confer identity in terms of nation, class, gender, and/or race. Like Anna Livia, the poet envisages herself as a "[s]pirit of water" who can escape national stories, whether historical or mythological. The end of "Anna Liffey" emphasizes precisely how marginality, the lack of a firm identity, is positive rather than negative:

In the end
It will not matter
That I was a woman. I am sure of it.
The body is a source. Nothing more.
There is time for it. There is a certainty
About the way it seeks its own dissolution.
Consider rivers,
They are always en route to
Their own nothingness. From the first moment
They are going home.

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As “Anna Liffey” shows, Boland’s representation of identity is neither grounded nor fixed. Like the identity of the river, Boland feels that her identity is “en route to its own nothingness”. The woman in the poem claims in the last lines of the poem that

In the end
Everything that burdened and distinguished me
Will be lost in this:
I was a voice.

Having a fixed sense of place, a stable identity is nothing but a “burden” for the woman poet. In this sense, as Fulford (2002a: 217) argues, Boland “deterritorializ[es]” rather than “reterritorializ[es]” identity. The “real subject” of “Anna Liffey” is, in Boland’s own words, “that progress from individuality to dissolution which happens with age” (interview with Villar Argáiz 2005a). As Boland grows old, she realizes that, whereas her body will eventually perish, the only thing that manages to survive is the “voice”. As Cixous (1994: xviii) has expressed, “[p]ure I, identical to I-self, does not exist. I is always in difference. I is the open set of the trances of an I by definition changing, mobile, because of living-speaking-thinking-dreaming”. The deconstruction of identity that Cixous advocates is also emphasized by the speaker in “Anna Liffey”. Because of “speaking-thinking-dreaming” and mostly because of “living” and, therefore, ageing, Boland cannot represent the self in solid and stable grounds. As the speaker puts it in “The Singers” (*In a Time of Violence*), the main concern becomes, therefore, to “find a voice where [she] found a vision”. It is this very voice that succeeds over the body at the end of “Anna Liffey”. In this sense, Boland bases her identity not on biology as in *In Her Own Image*, but on her very ability to transcend the limits imposed on gender, as in Virginia Woolf’s (1974: 139) androgynous vision. The end of “Anna Liffey” connects sexlessness and dissolution with artistic freedom. As Boland has recently expressed, “[t]here is something very liberating in the idea that art can release you from the restrictions of the identity you already have or have inherited” (interview with Villar Argáiz 2005a). By dissolving the image of the apparently solid statue of Anna Liffey, Boland moves towards a representation of the self that surpasses the binary self/other and reconfigures those singular identities that nationalism and feminism reinforce. Fulford (2002a: 218) has praised Boland for dissolving her sense of identity, forcing readers to understand how “authentic notions of the ‘real’ are part of the misrepresentation of History”. By focusing on the versatility of her identity, Boland also manages to abandon “the pathos of authenticity that has informed first-generation nationalist and feminist projects alike” (p. 213). In fact, Boland’s disintegrated self opens up a place of future potential where new identities, not founded this time on ideas of authenticity, can emerge.

In this sense, Boland's act of speaking always leads to absence and death, as in another poem from this collection "Time and Violence". Here, Boland follows a similar movement to the one we have just observed: from reconstruction to deconstruction of traditional female images, from cyclical and monumental time into linear time. The poem begins by describing a general setting that reminds one of "The Photograph on my Father's Desk" (*Outside History*): "The evening was the same as any other". The main difference is that the image now, rather than fixed in the timelessness of a photograph, represents a vulnerable subject who is overwhelmed by "the melancholy/ of growing older". In contrast to those plants that she finds in her garden, the coming of spring will not mean the speaker's 'blooming'. Recording a similar moment to "The Making of an Irish Goddess", the speaker stands in "the very place/ where I would stand in other dusks" in order to "pick my child in the distance". This landscape is a place of rapid change where the speaker, together with the landscape, is threatened with dissolution. This fluidity, as in "Suburban Woman: A Detail" (*The Journey*), becomes the starting point from which different mythological voices and presences magically announce themselves to the speaker. Suddenly, the boundaries of Boland's suburban landscape begin to extend in order to incorporate a "world of vision" (Boland 1996a: 192) inhabited by a pastoral shepherdess, a legendary mermaid, and Cassiopeia, trapped in the night sky constellations. The shepherdess represents the land, the mermaid the sea, and Cassiopeia the sky. All these mythological figures have been frozen and silenced into icons in all possible planes of existence. In contrast to the speaker, they cannot experience the consequences of linear time upon their bodies, condemned as they are to inhabit a cyclical and monumental time of youthfulness and beauty. Cassiopeia is not only a constellation that stands for those mythological women portrayed in legends. She is reminiscent of those Irish women from the past who remain outside official historical accounts. Boland's use of constellations is a common one, as in the title poem of *Outside History*, where she mentions stars in order to refer to the distance between Ireland's past and what 'History' records. In this poem, Boland chooses "out of myth into history", recalling as in "The Making of an Irish Goddess", the famine roads, a putrefied landscape inhabited by dying victims. If Boland is to choose between the conditions of the stars (in their eternity) and the human condition, she explicitly announces her choice of the second one. As the title "Time and Violence" suggests, linear time is not as pleasant as monumental and cyclical time: instead of eternity, it only brings a painful 'violence' over the speaker's body. But it is precisely this pleading for humanity that these mythological figures make at the end of this poem:

We cannot sweat here. Our skin is icy.
We cannot breed here. Our wombs are empty.
Help us to escape youth and beauty.

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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.

The vulnerable speaker becomes a desired model for these women entrapped in myth, who want to experience motherhood and humanity in all its rawness. In order to cease being eternal and lifeless emblems, they invoke a poetic space where they “can grow old and die in”. In this sense, deletion and therefore death is the only way these images can be “written out” of legend.

In fact, Boland’s poetry constantly engages with death, as in her poem “A Woman Painted in Leaf”,⁸² where the poetic voice claims: “I want a poem/ I can grow old in. I want a poem I can die in”. In particular, this poem focuses on a woman’s profile inscribed on a leaf, and how the poet makes explicit her task to return this image “to its element [...] of ending”. Giving bodily form to the leaf, Boland allows her subject not only to be human and grow old, but even to die:

I want to take
This dried-out face
[...]
so that [it]

will be from now on,
a crisp tinder underfoot. Cheekbones. Eyes. Will be
a mouth crying out. Let me.

Let me die.

The very short sentences and clipped language of the final lines parallel the gradual dissolution of the poetic voice. As Boland argues in “Story”: “I am writing/ a woman out of legend. I am thinking/ how new it is – this story. How hard it will be to tell” (*In a Time of Violence*). Despite this difficulty, Boland manages to liberate the woman at the end of this poem by bringing her to death. The fragmented body described becomes in this way, “a crisp tinder”, an easily combustible material ready to be set on fire. In “The Death of Reason”, another poem from *In a Time of Violence*, Boland destroys the painter’s objectified female image by burning her at the end of the poem. Boland realizes the painter’s difficulty in this poem when making “the skin/ blush outside the skin”. By burning the artist’s object of creation, Boland not only returns the woman to “its element of ending”, as she says in “A Woman Painted in Leaf”, but also enables her to record more accurately what was going on at that moment in Ireland: the violence and fires

⁸² For an interesting comparison of Boland’s “A Woman Painted in Leaf” and Yeats’s “Sailing to Byzantium”, see Hagen and Zelman (2004: 103-104).

created by Agrarian sects such as the Peep-O-Days.⁸³ Similarly, "A Woman Painted in Leaf" draws on fire as a mechanism to destroy women's solidification in art. These burning images can bear witness to the destiny that awaits us all: death and erasure. On the other hand, by dissolving this image into "[c]heekbones", "[e]yes", and "a mouth", the speaker suggests, as in "Anna Liffey", that the body is but "a source" and nothing else. The woman's "voice" is the only thing that will pervade at the end. As is common in Boland's poetry, the poem finishes with a profusion of the modal 'will' indicating certainty. This is a confident speaker that knows that articulation allows agency, that by allowing these 'mute' images to speak, positive changes can be brought about in Irish poetry.

7.4.4.4. Conclusion

Rather than on essentialist notions, Boland's search for a new identity is based on what Hall (1990: 230) has called a "strategic" politics of positioning. In her search for identity, Boland has to position herself as regards three vectors, very similar to the ones that Hall talks about: in her case as an Irish citizen, as a woman, and as a poet. She does not want to give up one on behalf of the other. In order to position herself as regards these vectors, Boland's Irish and female subjectivity is constructed more in terms of fluidity and else-where-ness, rather than in terms of domination and subordination. Her poetry should be read as a series of boundary crossings, beyond fixed geographical, national, and cultural borders. As the preceding sections have shown, Boland asserts agency, to use Boyce's (1994: 37) words, as she "crosses, journeys, migrates, and so re-claims as it re-asserts". The positive effects of conceiving 'agency' in such a way have been well theorized by Foley et al. (1995: 10), who argue when discussing contemporary women's poetry:

Relations between the construction of 'gender' and 'colonialism' are seen to throw into crisis the identity-thinking which characterizes the ideologies of patriarchy, imperialism and bourgeois nationalism, the apprehension of these relations may be at least potentially productive of a more fluid and politically versatile sense of identity, one which can be used more effectively as an agent of resistance.

Boland's act of resistance lies precisely in showing that all forms of identitarian politics are authoritarian and restrictive. Her poetry constantly shows how any act of representation already involves a simplification and misrepresentation. By suggesting that any process of rendering an image is itself erroneous, Boland dismantles imperialist, nationalist, and feminist representations. As she has argued, real artistic decolonization lies in the poet's ability to carry out an "anti-

⁸³ The Peep O'Day Boys was a secret agrarian society founded in Ulster in the 1780s and composed entirely by Protestants. Its main objective was to react against the loosening of Penal Laws, and in particular, against a new law passed in 1782 that allowed the Catholic community to buy and transfer land properties (Hurtley et al. 1996: 257).

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authoritarian exploration of identities of place and margin as against the set texts of canon and nation” (Boland 1996b: 139). It is here where the woman poet finds a productive place to exert her agency, without imposing her own artistic images as more ‘real’ and ‘truthful’ representations.

7.4.5. The subaltern in Boland's poetry

7.4.5.1. The importance of the past in Boland's poetry

7.4.5.1.1. Introduction

In their preface to *New French Feminisms: An Anthology*, Marks and de Courtivron (1981a: xi) establish an interesting comparison between French and American feminists. These critics assert that, whereas in France feminists have usually reacted against the danger of theoretical paradigms and argue for a radical change as inseparable from women's liberation, American Feminists are more "interested in going back, in resurrecting lost women, in reevaluating those who managed to survive, in reconstructing a past – 'Herstory'. They are engaged in filling in cultural silences and holes in discourse".

In general, Irish feminism resembles American feminism in its desire to describe the material, social, and psychological conditions of women in the past. Daly (1997: 107) explains that in recent decades in Ireland there has been a growing interest in women's history, and that, as in other countries, this has been a direct outcome of the women's liberation movement. The writing of women's history, this critic claims, has also been strongly influenced by women's studies which seek to emphasize the continuity of the past in the present (p. 111). The first major pioneering work on Irish women's history was the 1978 publication *Women in Irish Society: The Historical Dimension* by MacCurtain and Ó Corráin. This book set the agenda of later studies which have challenged traditional images and concepts of women's place and experiences. The increasing interest in women's past is exemplified by women historians such as MacCurtain (1997), who has written on religious women; Murphy (1997), who focuses on Irish female emigration to the United States of America;¹ Ward (1997), who studies women's role in the nationalist struggle; and Hill (2003: 12), whose study stresses the "multifaceted nature" of women's lives over the course of the twentieth century. All these studies have brought about a fundamental shift in the ways in which we think about Ireland's past.

Among contemporary women writers in Ireland there is also this compelling desire to rewrite their past. Bourke (1997: 305-306), a woman fiction-writer, makes the following claim:

We have urgent need of stories in Ireland at the moment, as our society comes to terms with painful memories. All at once, it seems we are trying to cope with the famine of the mid-nineteenth century, when a million people died of fever or starvation and another million emigrated; with twenty five years of violence in

¹ Murphy's study illustrates an increasing interest in the history of emigrant Irish women. Some organizations, such as *Carlann Bann Eireann*, created in 1995, are exclusively dedicated to the study and recovery of the private stories of exiled women after the Great Famine (González Molano 2000: 45).

Northern Ireland, followed by a sudden possibility of peace, and then more violence; and with a heartbreaking series of revelations about betrayal of trust, about domestic violence, and about cruelties secretly inflicted on women and children. The old narratives will no longer serve. [...] The literature and oral tradition of the Irish language were used for so long in the service of self-righteous patriarchal nationalism. [...] More and more, as silenced voices speak, the need for different kinds of language is being acknowledged.

Eavan Boland is one of these women writers who wishes to provide a map of the past that better fits the contours of fact. Her poetry tries to make room for women, both in general history and literary history. Women's involvement in Irish historical events such as emigration and the Great Famine becomes almost an obsession in her work.² Reclaiming history involves addressing the significance of personal histories within the larger history of the Irish nation. Boland's project responds to her belief that, for her poetry to be faithful to her reality as a woman, it must bring womanhood from the margins to the centre of history.

Before focusing on Boland's work, some explanation is needed about the ways in which women's real past has been obliterated from official historical and literary records, in order to gain some insight into the reasons which prompt this woman poet to rewrite their history. The private lives of women have generally seemed to be irrelevant to historians. Women have been absent in historical accounts, because these accounts were almost exclusively concerned with events whose protagonists were admired male heroes, influential politicians, rebellious peasants, and revolutionary workers, among others. Well-known women writers (such as Jane Austen, Charlotte Brontë, George Eliot, and Virginia Woolf) have self-consciously explored the ways in which history as a 'master' narrative has only indirectly affected women because it has been mainly concerned with external issues "never experienced at first hand in the privatized lives of women" (Gilbert & Gubar: 2000: 132-133). Woolf (1974: 67) sees women's obliteration from historical accounts as a direct consequence of women's social circumstances: "by no possible means could middle-class women with nothing but brains and character at their command have taken part in any of the great movements which, brought together, constitute the historian's view of the past". One of the manifestoes included in *New French Feminisms: An Anthology* (Marks & de Courtivron 1981: 189) read as follows: "We who are without a past/ Without history, outcast/ Women lost in the dark of time/ Women whose continent is night" (sic). Women have been denied a place in history, and thus, "absent from its pages", they tend to see this hegemonic masculine

² Poems like "The Emigrant Irish" (*The Journey*), "Distances (*Outside History*), "In a Bad Light" (*In a Time of Violence*), "The Lost Land" (*The Lost Land*), and "The Rooms of Exile" (*Against Love Poetry*) show Boland's concern with the historical event of emigration. On the other hand, the famine is recorded in "The Famine Road" (*The War Horse*), "The Journey" (*The Journey*), "The Achill Woman", "The Making of an Irish Goddess" (*Outside History*), "That the Science of Cartography is Limited" (*In a Time of Violence*), and "Quarantine" (*Against Love Poetry*).

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history “from the disillusion and disaffected perspective of the outsider” (Gilbert & Gubar 2000: 134).

As outsiders in history, women writers find the need to search for their own stories, so that they make their own contribution to official accounts. Mohanty (1991a: 34) has argued that a central concern of postcolonial literature by women is “to rewrite and remember history”. This process is significant not only for correcting the empty spaces and misrepresentations of a male-dominated history, but also “because the very practice of remembering and rewriting leads to the formation of politicized consciousness and self-identity” (ibid). In this sense, women's potential to rewrite and invent their past responds to a desire to define their reality as women. The quest for history is, therefore, a quest for self-definition, for self-assertion: knowing their origins is essential for explaining their identity. As Cixous (1981: 252) states, “in woman, personal history blends together with the history of all women, as well as national and world history”. In this sense, women writers, mostly at their final stage of artistic decolonization, have been compelled “to rediscover the past anew” (Showalter 1999: 11-12). If they are to gain a deeper understanding of their female reality, they need to remember the history of their sisters. Thus, the female artist, on her journey towards self-definition as a woman, begins a process of remembering the lost mothers, their silences, sufferings, and struggles to survive. Woolf's imaginary story about Shakespeare's sister, Judith Shakespeare, in *A Room of One's Own* (1974: 70-73) and Walker's essay “In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens” (1984) are two significant examples of this trend.

7.4.5.1.2. Boland's unveiling of a new woman in history

The past is a recurring preoccupation for Boland. The woman poet feels the urgent need to reinvent the past: “for all our violations, the past waits for us. [...] Again and again, I visit it and reinvent it” (1996a: 5). In order to understand Boland's approach to this issue, it is essential to consider the distinction that she makes between history and the past:

In my own case, when I was young, one of the real shaping influences was my gradual discovery of the difference between the past and history. In Ireland, there's a wide and instructive distance between those two. I believe history is an official version of events – it is itself a constructed narrative. But the past, at least as I came to see it, is a place of silences and losses and disappearances. That gap, that distance between those two narratives – and my own gradual understanding of it – has been a powerful motive for me to make certain arguments and to challenge certain concepts. (Interview with Villar Argáiz 2005a)

In this sense, Boland views history as an imposed narrative constructed at the expense of the sufferings and silences of those neglected voices that existed in the past. One of her main

objectives is to attack narrow versions of history and re-tell those historical events which have previously obliterated women's lives and experiences, in order to include them. As Fanon (1990: 180) puts it, the final stage of writing in the decolonization process goes "against the current of history", for the writer decides to embody history in his/her own person, a history formerly defined both by imperialists and nationalists alike. Similarly, Boland at this stage denounces the absence of women from those English and Irish nationalist historical records. National literature is, according to her, an accomplice in this enterprise, not only because it has simplified women as emblems, but also because it has deprived women of a real past, "women whose silence [Irish poets] should have broken" (Boland 1996a: 153). In this sense, Boland feels bound to rewrite a true version of Ireland's past, to right the "violation" that both history and art have exerted on Irish women.

Ever since *Night Feed*, Boland's mature work attempts to speak for all those women who could not speak for themselves, showing that women must be present in the history of a country. Boland's task is important, for, as she argues in "It's a Woman's World" (*Night Feed*):

It's our alibi:
for all the time
as far as history goes
we were never
on the scene of the crime

So when the king's head
gored its basket-
grim harvest-
we were gristing bread

or getting the recipe
for a good soup
to appetize our gossip.

As Hagen and Zelman (2004: 22) explain, within historical records, "gristing bread" is of no significance, "despite its overwhelming importance in sustaining life". Thus, women's world is undervalued as recipes for "a good soup" and "gossip". On the other hand, it seems that, in their spiritual and physical confinement, women have had no other choice than to cook and spread intimate and private rumours. In this poem, Boland focuses on the distance between the male world and the female world, the separation, in Boland's terms, between "hearth [and] history", *her hearth* and *his story*, of both the literary tradition and the historical accounts. The split or gap between "history" and "hearth" is so immense that whereas men have always had "wheel[s] to read [their] world" (as she says in "A New Pastoral", *Night Feed*), women are left with nothing to define themselves. The different use of verb forms in this poem (from present perfect to simple present, and then from present progressive to simple past and past progressive at the end of the

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poem) indicates that everything is still the same in the speaker's present context. As Boland has recently argued, history has always been "male", because it has mainly been composed of heroic stories of men. On the contrary, the past "with all its silences" has always been "female" (interview with Villar Argáiz 2005a). In this poem, women's world, if perceived at all, is confined to the margins of *his* story, the celebration of battles and big 'important' events. As the poetic speaker asserts at one point,

It's not the same.
By night our windows
moth our children
to the flame

of hearth not history.
And still no page
scores the low music
of our outrage.

History has been founded on the premise that the commonplace and the important are opposing and exclusive categories, an assumption, according to Hagen and Zelman (1991: 446), which "justifies omitting women's experiences from the records even today". In the process, women's aspirations, sufferings, and, most importantly, their resentful anger are rendered invisible for their very ordinariness. Even contemporary "appearances" of women encourage historians to keep them apart from official records:

Appearances
still reassure:
that woman there
craned to the starry mystery

is merely getting a breath
of evening air,
while this one here –
her mouth

a burning plume –
she is no fire-eater,
just my frosty neighbour
coming home.

The last verse lines of the poem enhance the boundaries between the historian's reading of women and the speaker's reading of them. The woman speaker subverts official historical reductions by allowing us to see women, as she has previously described them in other verse lines of this poem, as "star-gazers/ fire-eaters". A star-gazer is a day dreamer, but also an astronomer and astrologer who knows how to study and interpret the current position of the celestial bodies. Boland employs the starry imagery both to enhance that women's existence is, like the celestial bodies, always

present but largely ignored, and also to suggest their innate ability, also unnoticed, to interpret the position of the stars. In other words, these women have a female creative potential to dream, hope, and create an imaginary world. As Praga (1996: 246) explains, Irish women poets enrich the male "sense of place", by locating themselves in new spaces and territories, not necessarily geographical. Boland's poetry typically relies on constellations as a suitable imaginary place where those women's lives as housewives and mothers are represented. As outsiders from history, no trace of them can be found in the speaker's geographical landscape, but she can capture some glimpses of them simply by looking at the stars. On the other hand, the speaker also portrays these women as "fire-eaters", belligerent and quarrelsome women, with a potential to fight, to rebel against their current situation. Thus, the woman poet's definition of women (as day dreamers and militant partisans) distances itself from the traditional and trivialized reading of them. The adverbs 'merely' and 'just' are highly suggestive. As Hagen and Zelman (2004: 22) notice, whereas the woman speaker is able to see the 'star-gazer' in the first woman described, who is stretching her neck to decipher the mystery of the celestial bodies, the hidden voice of the historian dismisses her as "merely" getting a breath of air. On the other hand, whereas the speaker defines the other woman as having intense emotions and a passionate commitment to artistic creation ("her mouth/ a burning plume"), the historian depicts her as "no fire-eater", and "just" a neighbour. Both women are still ordinary women, but ordinary is no longer for the speaker a belittling concept, no longer meaning simple and unimportant (Hagen & Zelman 2004: 22). As we have seen mostly in *Night Feed*, Boland's poetry seeks to grant the trivial and domestic world of women great significance and relevance, giving women's lives a sacramental value. Bhabha (1995: 148) has argued that the transformational power of marginal subjects such as women and the colonized "depends upon their being historically displaced". In fact, Boland's displacement from 'master' historical narratives has allowed her to turn the conventional Irish poem upside down, by declaring the public relevance of women's private lives. Nevertheless, the overall tone of the poem is elegiac. The proliferation of long sentences that unfold at the end enhance the speaker's melancholy in realizing that, due to the official simplification of women as grieving voices and ornamental emblems, actual lived experiences have been omitted, and they are no longer recoverable.

7.4.5.2. The dangers of presenting oneself as a spokesperson

With the painful realization that women have been outsiders from history, Boland tries to become a spokesperson of an (unrecorded) Irish female past. As Showalter (1999: 13) and Fanon (1990: 192-193) imply, the (gendered) colonized writer at this stage no longer addresses the oppressor with the intention of praising (1st phase) or denouncing (2nd phase) him. Fanon explains how the

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recrimination and the violent writing of the previous phase is now substituted by a kind of writing strictly addressed to his/her people (Fanon 1990: 192-193). According to Fanon, the native writer at the final stage of liberation identifies with the “wretched of the earth”, that is, those “have-nots of the countryside”, those affected and punished by imperialism and nationalism. With a clearer understanding of him/herself, the writer becomes a communal voice, a voice from and for his/her people. In a similar way, Boland's poetry moves towards the possibility of speaking on behalf of a lost and unrecorded Irish community, mostly female.

One of the central problems that has emerged from postcolonial and feminist debates is that of representation. When approaching Boland's work, we should consider the risks involved in her becoming a representative of a women's community. The difficulty for women writers to speak ‘on behalf’ of their oppressed ‘sisters’ has been addressed by Boyce (1994: 36), who argues the following when discussing Black women's writing:

Scholarship and theoretical writing by Black women, because they exist in an academic context, have become distant and removed from the day-to-day lives of most people. But it is not only the fact of the critic distantly removed from the people which is the issue, but the ways in which Black women as writers, academics, teachers, who live lives of multiple oppression, still end up paradoxically unintelligible to those who are unschooled in critical discourses and also to those who are.

Because of the dangers of misrepresentation that such an act entail, Boland's poetic ventriloquism has been highly contested. As McCallum (2004: 41) has argued, questions of authenticity in the criticism of Boland's verse result from the risk that critics run nowadays in laying claim to Irishness and Ireland:

[A]ll poets who address their nation's history and culture – even Seamus Heaney, whose Irishness has not been called into question in the same manner – face charges of being voyeuristic or opportunistic in their choice of subject and must confront the technical difficulty and ethical question of how, as an individual, one can speak convincingly to history and for a people.

Several critics have questioned Boland's right to be the speaking witness of Irish women's past. Fulford (2002a: 215) has acknowledged the danger of misrepresentation involved in Boland's project. As this critic asserts, using Bhabha's terminology, “[s]peaking for marginal voices or the subaltern carries with it the difficulty of how to make this a malleable or performative articulation, rather than just another pedagogical formation of identity and temporality” (ibid). Meaney (1993a: 139) and Longley (1994: 188) have also criticized Boland on the grounds that, by acting as a spokesperson, the woman poet repeats the political nationalist discourse. According to Meaney

(1993a: 139), "the relationship between poet and community" characteristic of the nationalist tradition recurs in Boland's poetry, for she constantly tries to bear witness, to speak on behalf of a lost community of women. Meaney's (1993a: 140) main argument is that, by acting as a spokesperson, Boland undermines difference, because "nationality, gender, or indeed womanhood" do not have "the same meaning" for all women.³

Being aware of accusations such as this, Boland has recently defended herself by arguing that she is not interested in being representative (interview with Villar Argáiz 2005a). Nevertheless, her poetry comes worryingly close to surrogating that nationalist discourse attempting to speak on behalf of a nation. Although, as we will see, Boland will show the difficulty involved in any act of recovering the past, her work is moulded according to an "ethical" imperative that demands the poet to chronicle accurately, without simplifying. For Boland (1996a: 127), every poet must make an "ethical choice": "what he or she nominates as a proper theme for poetry, what selves poets discover and confirm through [their] subject matter".⁴ Furthermore, Boland believes that "[a]ll good poetry depends on an ethical relation between imagination and image. Images are not ornaments; they are truths [...]. [If] the image is distorted, the truth is demeaned" (p. 152). Therefore, Boland's objective is "to formalize the truth", that is to say, to recover the silences of Irish women in the past (Boland 1996a: xv). By relying on the 'truthfulness' of images, Boland seems to suggest that the poet has the ability to grasp the 'real', a project akin to the one she carried out in *In Her Own Image*. Because of Boland's affirmation that poetry has the ethical function to convey 'truth', Haberstroh (1996: 88-89) has remarked that "for all the emphasis on Boland as a new and different voice, she is in many ways a very traditional poet, a judgement that I do not think she would object to".

Boland's belief in the existence of a 'truth' that the female poet must be able to bring to the surface of her work is observed in "Envoy" (*The Journey*). This poem seems to justify Meaney's (1993a: 139) critique that Boland perpetuates the nationalist rhetoric in her reliance on the conventional relation between the poet and his/her community. As regards linguistic techniques and poetic content, this poem stands as an exception in Boland's mature phase. First of all, in contrast to the unfolding language and melancholic loose movement between stanzas of most of the poems in *The Journey*, "Envoy" is composed of very short sentences (such as those found in *In Her Own Image*) which make the speaker's message clear and straightforward. Secondly, it is

³ As Griffiths (1994: 70) has argued, "[t]here are real dangers in recent representations of indigenous peoples in popular discourse, especially in the media, which stress claims to an 'authentic' voice. For these claims may be a form of overwriting the complex actuality of difference".

⁴ According to Boland (1996a: 127), the poetic ethics are always present in a country that has suffered the consequences of colonial displacement. As she argues, they "are evident and urgent in any culture where tensions between a poet and his or her birthplace are inherited and established".

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perhaps the only mature poem where Boland regards the male sex as what Woolf (1974: 139) would call "the opposing faction". Even though her mature work ultimately rejects the negative consequences of adopting a separatist stance, in this poem Boland emphasizes the dichotomy between male poetry and her own work:

My muse must be better than those of men
who made theirs in the image of their myth. [...]

She must come to me. Let her come
to be among the *donnée*, the given.
I need her to remain with me until
the day is over and the song is proven.

Surely she comes, surely she comes to me –
no lizard skin, no paps, no podded womb
about her but a brightening and
the consequences of an April tomb.

What I have done I have done alone.
What I have seen is unverified.
I have the truth and I need the faith.
It is time I put my hand in her side.

If she will not bless the ordinary,
if she will not sanctify the common,
then here I am and here I stay and then am I
the most miserable of women.

In this poem, Boland grants herself permission to bear witness to women's ordinary lives in poetry. This is an authoritative speaker casting herself as a messenger who apparently distinguishes herself as a bard: she is a "donnée", a "given". Like those figures in "Solitary" and "Exhibitionist", the narrator is alone in her task: she and only she knows the "truth". Notions such as the 'real' are no longer scrutinized and poetry does not stand as an ambiguous and contradictory terrain. In contrast to poems such as "The Women", the speaker seems to have united the words 'woman' and 'poet' without difficulty. The use of imperatives, the repetition of adverbs such as "surely" and first person pronouns, typical linguistic features of *In Her Own Image*, both place emphasis on what the speaker is saying, and highlight her assurance and confidence. The only difference from those feminist voices in Boland's second phase is that the speaker now clearly rejects praising the sensuality of the female body. She refuses to see her muse in bodily terms, discarding the "lizard skin", her "paps", and "podded womb". Although by doing so, she moves away from a poetry conceived in strictly biological terms, Boland nonetheless adopts the radical feminist stance that she generally rejects in her mature work. The speaker of "Envoi" advocates the superiority of her female muse, and therefore perpetuates the difference between sexes that patriarchal tradition has maintained. In this sense, while Boland's tendency is to reject notions of

superiority and inferiority, poems such as this one instinctively praise women's extraordinary qualities of seeing what is "unverified". This self-adulation and superiority may be needed in a country where women have traditionally been on the margins of both history and literature. By blessing the ordinary and sanctifying the common, Boland stands as a spokesperson of those realities omitted in official accounts, those "wretched of the earth" as Fanon (1990) would put it. Boland's "ethical choice" (1996a: 127) is nonetheless risky. As we have explained, the trope of Mother Ireland has become an essential figure in a political discourse where the poet is a spokesperson for the community. Boland reiterates the process by suggesting that she is the only one who can speak on behalf of a lost and undervalued female community.

7.4.5.3. Boland's limitations when acting as a spokesperson

Despite the radicalism of poems such as "Envoi", it is important to note that the woman poet has acknowledged, both in her prose work and in her poetry, her limitations when acting as a spokesperson, something that critics such as Longley (1994: 188) and Meaney (1993a: 140) have ignored. As Hagen and Zelman (2004: 6), have argued, Boland's "poems are not merely about the past, but about the investigator and the limits of investigation as well". In order to study this aspect of her work, I will turn to Spivak (1994) and her controversial assertions as regards the impossibility of recovering the "native voice". As we will see, this postcolonial critic implies that there is ultimately no possibility for the poorest and most marginalized community to make themselves known to anyone and themselves. Young (1992: 164) argues that this is Spivak's "most far-reaching argument of all"; indeed, this is not an exaggeration, for the theoretical implications of her formulations are extremely important.

7.4.5.3.1. Problems in constructing a subject position for the colonized: "Can the Subaltern Speak?"

As we have seen, critics such as Bhabha, Said, and Hall believe that postcolonial agency is located in hybrid discourses. It is when the postcolonial subject adopts a liminal position and embraces rather than suppresses difference and heterogeneity, that a viable strategy of resistance is created. Spivak also believes in the power of hybridity to deconstruct homogenizing views of identity. Nevertheless, her theories are exclusively applied to the postcolonial (feminist) academic or writer who is settled in the West. Spivak faces a problem when attempting to construct a place of resistance for the colonized subject living in his/her native land. Unlike the previous postcolonial theorists, she draws a sharp difference between the diasporic communities in the First World, and that poor postcolonial reality in the Third World, which she generally labels as the "subaltern"

(Papastergiadis 1997: 274). As Landry and Maclean (1996: 6) explain, Spivak's main goal is that "the subaltern, the most oppressed and invisible constituencies [of socialized capital], as such might cease to exist". But, as her model of decolonization merely focuses on those diasporic intellectuals, her theories do not specify how the most marginalized of all can actually liberate themselves from their oppression. Whereas "negotiation" and "hybridity" can act as a strategy of decolonization for the diasporic subject living in the West, it is of no use at all for the colonized 'subject-in-place'. In an interview with several Indian women critics, Spivak refused to answer what "pragmatic political usefulness" her work has for Third World struggle (Bhatnagar et al. 1990: 71). In this sense, Spivak's vision of hybridity distances from Bhabha's, Said's, and Hall's, for she views that the subaltern and diasporic are incomparable worlds. As Papastergiadis (1977: 277) asserts, "Spivak, unlike [the former theorists], seems to limit the concept of hybridity as a metaphor for cultural identity".

In what follows, I intend to focus on why and how Spivak emphasizes that there is no actual place from which the marginalized community can speak. Said (1994: 277) believes that one culture can represent another in non-coercive terms, even when a relation of power is involved.⁵ Like Said, Hall's (1996a: 446) perspective presupposes that translation across cultural difference is always possible. Unlike Said and Hall, Spivak (1994: 80) believes that the realities and experiences of the Indian subaltern cannot be grasped by Western categories, on the grounds that we can never understand a culture whose own references differ so greatly from ours. As she asserts, "there can be no representation of real subaltern consciousness" (ibid). One of her main arguments is that we cannot represent a culture whose historical past and origins have been damaged by the colonial encounter, and the possibility of dialogue or communication no longer exists (ibid). Spivak also distances herself from Bhabha's argument that subaltern resistance, and the possibility of a native voice, begins with the ambivalent nature of the imperial text. As Chow (2003: 330) has explained, since Bhabha has emphasized the colonial text's hybridity, he has also presupposed that "the subaltern has spoken".

"Can the Subaltern Speak?" contains Spivak's most controversial assertions about the subaltern 'Third World' woman.⁶ Her central concern in the essay is if the "lowest strata", the subaltern, can know and speak their conditions (Spivak 1994: 78). As Said (1988b: 3) explains, the word 'subaltern' is first coined by Gramsci in the *Prison Notebooks* (1996) [1947] in order to

⁵ Several critics, such as Moore-Gilbert (2000: 53) and Young (2001: 391), have noticed an ambivalence in Said's theories as regards this point. Whereas in *Culture and Imperialism*, Said implies that authentic representations are in fact possible, he is powerfully convinced, as stated in *Orientalism* (1995: 272), that it is impossible to represent other cultures with accuracy, and that "we must be prepared to accept the fact that a representation is *eo ipso* implicated, intertwined, embedded, interwoven with a great many other things besides the 'truth', which is itself a representation".

⁶ Although I am here using the essay included in an anthology of postcolonial criticism published in 1994, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" dates back to 1988. Spivak has later revised this essay in *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* (1999).

define the oppressed, the minority groups, in particular the proletariat and rural labour. Therefore, the term has political and intellectual connotations, and its implied opposite is 'dominant' or 'elite', that is, the groups in power. The (Indian) *Subaltern Studies* group has also employed the term to refer to non-elite sectors of Indian society (Young 1992: 160). The idea behind the *Subaltern Studies*' work is that orthodox and authoritatively national and institutional versions of history tend to consolidate highly disputable versions of history into official identities, obliterating the reality of many men and women belonging to the lowest strata (Guha 1997: ix-xxii).

In invoking the subaltern, Spivak is influenced by Gramsci and the *Subaltern Studies* group. Nevertheless, she employs the term somewhat ambiguously. In "Can the Subaltern Speak?", Spivak uses the term 'subaltern', like Gramsci, to signify "the margins, [...] men and women among the illiterate peasantry, the tribals, the lowest strata of the urban subproletariat" (Spivak 1994: 78). The subaltern is composed by those social groups at the bottom of the social scale, almost invisible to colonial and Third World national-bourgeois historiography alike. In this sense, Spivak uses this notion in "Can the Subaltern Speak?" and in *Outside in the Teaching Machine* (1993: 267) in order to suggest a 'real' and concrete historical category. Nevertheless, Spivak realizes that the subaltern is a very flexible concept, encapsulating different meanings. That is why she is drawn to this category:

I like the word "subaltern" for one reason. It is truly situational. "Subaltern" began as a description of a certain rank in the military. The word was used under censorship by Gramsci: he called Marxism "monism", and was obliged to call the proletariat "subaltern". That word, used under duress, has been transformed into the description of everything that doesn't fall under a strict class analysis. I like that, because it has no theoretical rigour. (Interview with Dienst et al. 1990: 141)

From this angle, then, the subaltern seems, for Spivak, to be a conceptual category that is "inaccessible" because it cannot be categorized within any "class analysis" and stands in an empty space.⁷

"Can the Subaltern Speak?" starts from the premise that the subaltern, be it male or female, cannot know and speak their conditions, for they cannot criticize what they inhabit intimately (1994: 78). As Hall (1990: 222) explains,

⁷ Spivak's flexible attitude in her treatment of categories such as the 'subaltern' has led Moore-Gilbert (2000: 100) to identify her analytic procedures as "cognitive failures".

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recent theories of enunciation suggest [...] that, though we speak, so to say 'in our own name', of ourselves and from our experience, nevertheless who speaks, and the subject who is spoken of, are never identical, never exactly in the same place.

Spivak is one of those theorists who stress the difficulties and contradictions in constructing a 'speaking position' for the subaltern. When Spivak claims that the subaltern "cannot speak", she means that, once they raise their voices, they would move from the margins to the centre, and thus, they would no longer occupy a subaltern status:

If the subaltern were able to make herself heard [...] – as has happened when particular subalterns have emerged, in Antonio Gramsci's terms, as organic intellectuals and spokespeople for their communities – her status as a subaltern would be changed utterly; she would cease to be a subaltern. (Spivak 1994: 78)

In this sense, Spivak moves away from Foucault and Deleuze, who argue that the oppressed can act self-resistently, can have full self-awareness and can speak for him/herself (p. 71). Spivak accuses them of having "an essentialist, utopian politics" (ibid). Unlike Bhabha, whose notions of mimicry and parody suggest that the subaltern has in fact spoken, and that through a proper reading of the colonial text, the native voice can be retrieved, Spivak (1994: 84) asserts that the subaltern people cannot speak.

Furthermore, Spivak argues that the subaltern as such cannot be heard by the privileged of either the First or Third World (Spivak 1994: 84). Therefore, she is very critical of Ranajit Guha's *Subaltern Studies* project, which is based on the assumption that there is a 'pure' and 'essential' form of subaltern consciousness that can be recovered:

The[ir] task of research [...] is to "investigate, identify and measure the *specific* nature and degree of the *deviation* of [the] elements [...] from the ideal and situate it historically". "Investigate, identify, and measure the *specific*": a program could hardly be more essentialist and specific. (Spivak 1994: 80)

In this sense, Spivak suggests that the recovery of a subaltern voice is a kind of essentialist "fiction". Her main view is that one cannot construct an 'essentialist' category of the 'subaltern' without ignoring its inevitable heterogeneity (ibid). She believes that it is better to preserve the subaltern experience as an "inaccessible blankness", as an empty space, than to objectify it as the "Other" (p. 89). Therefore, a subaltern collective consciousness is impossible to grasp, and there is no determinate position from which they could speak.

Spivak's analysis focuses particularly on the figure of the female subaltern, who is described as doubly colonized both by economic marginalization and by gender subordination (p.

82). The “sexed” female subaltern has been remoulded both as the object of imperialism and patriarchy (ibid). Everyone speaks for her and writes about her, and consequently, she is described as “even more deeply in the shadows” (p. 83). For Spivak, the most marginalized people of all are those rural Indian women subject to sati, the widow’s ritualistic self-sacrifice on her husband’s funeral (p. 93).⁸ Even when “benevolent” Western outsiders attempt to speak on behalf of the postcolonial subaltern, their project fails (p. 84). Spivak subjects this ‘benevolence’ to rigorous critical scrutiny, as when she attacks First World feminism for ignoring the reality of Third World women (interview with Threadgold & Bartkowski 1990: 118). In *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, Spivak describes these benevolent intermediaries as “native informants”. In this study, she aims

to track the figure of the Native Informant through various practices: philosophy, literature, history, culture. Soon I found that the tracking showed up a colonial subject detaching itself from the Native Informant. After 1989, I began to sense that a certain Postcolonial subject had, in turn, been recording the colonial subject and appropriating the Native Informant’s position. (1999: ix)

From her own words, we find that Spivak’s characterization of the “native informant” moves away from the figure of the “colonial subject”, and thus, the possibility of subaltern representation remains painfully unresolved. Furthermore, Spivak argues that there is a danger in becoming a native informant. She is very suspicious of the possibly benign identification with the subaltern, for, taking the rural and landless poor of India as examples, subalternity is not a condition to be desired. As Papastergiadis (1997: 276-277) asserts, “[t]he subaltern condition cannot even bear the privilege of its own ‘organic intellectuals’[...], as [Spivak] reminds us, to be in position to speak for the subaltern is both impossible and unenviable”. Furthermore, Spivak ponders on the danger of acting as a spokesperson for the Third World, admitting that as an Asian woman educated in India and in the US, she is usually considered as a suitable representative of the ‘Third World Woman’ (interview with Gunew 1990: 63). “Clinging to marginality”, she later argues, runs the risk of homogenizing and misrepresenting the reality of subaltern communities (Spivak 1993: 9). Spivak takes up, once again, the history of sati as an instance of the difficulty of recovering the silenced voice of women by migrant intellectuals like herself.

Spivak not only denies the ability of “benevolent” outsiders and “native informants” to record female subaltern consciousness. She also describes the subaltern woman as incapable of speaking for herself (1994: 93). Therefore, Spivak allows her no subject position. As Young

⁸ Recently, Spivak has extended the scope of the term female subaltern “to include the female urban [...], whether in the Third World or in the metropolis” (Moore-Gilbert 2000: 80).

(1992: 164) explains, “[t]he problem is not that the woman cannot speak as such, that no records of the subject-consciousness of women exist, but that she is assigned no position of enunciations”. In this sense, Spivak's argument implies that the history of the female subaltern community cannot be recovered. This means, as Young (1992: 163) further argues, that “the gendered subaltern amounts to a historical trace that cannot easily be retrieved in the production of subaltern consciousness”.

“Can the Subaltern Speak?” has been highly controversial among postcolonial critics. Very few defend Spivak's formulations, for most postcolonial voices tend to stress the contradictions, as well as the imminent pessimism implicit in its formulations.⁹ Chow (2003: 326-333) stands out as one of the few postcolonial voices who defends Spivak's argument. In “Where Have all Natives Gone?”, Chow (2003: 326-329) has complicated the possibility of finding an authentic ‘native’ voice. Such recovery, she contends, can end up perpetuating the construction of the native as an ‘alien’ category outside the ‘standard’ and ‘normal’ subject of Western modernity (p. 329). According to this critic, anti-imperialist texts which try to replace bad/inauthentic images with good/authentic images of the native will not solve this problem (p. 333). In this sense, Chow agrees with Spivak that it is impossible and undesirable to recover and/or discover the true native.

Nevertheless, the general tendency among postcolonial critics is to question and/or reject Spivak's formulations altogether. Moore-Gilbert (2000: 104) criticizes Spivak for perpetuating the binary opposition between the First World and the Third World, a binary opposition that she precisely seeks to deconstruct, because she actually “ends up constructing the subaltern as the West's ‘silent interlocutor’”. But, perhaps, the fiercest critiques made of Spivak have been as regards her formulations on the subaltern agency. In fact, to assert that the subaltern cannot speak can dangerously be conceived as denying any possible resistant and self-liberating agency on the part of the most marginalized people. As Moore-Gilbert (2000: 107) asserts,

In so hastily discounting the possibility of class-based modes of solidarity and alliance politics as an option for the subaltern, Spivak at times seems to present him/her as a forever passive and helpless victim of forces beyond his/her control.

This critic accuses Spivak of legitimizing “political apathy” and of ignoring the numerous effective instances of subaltern's mobilization, in particular subaltern women's emancipation (ibid). Parry (1987: 34) has similarly criticized the work of Gayatri Spivak (although her attack includes also Homi Bhabha and Abdul Jan Mohammed's theories), on the basis that “the protocols

⁹ Spivak herself acknowledges the constant contradictions of her arguments, as when she declares: “[a]s for contradictions [...] I'm not afraid of them” (interview with Threadgold & Bartkowski 1990: 127).

of their dissimilar methods act to constrain the development of anti-imperialist critique".¹⁰ Furthermore, this postcolonial critic accuses Spivak of assigning absolute power to the imperialist discourse, and argues that the native woman can actually speak through multiple voices:

Since the native woman is constructed within multiple social relationships and positioned as the product of different class, caste, and cultural specificities, it should be possible to locate traces and testimony of women's voices on those sites where women inscribed themselves as healers, singers of sacred songs, artisans and artists, and by this to modify Spivak's model of the silent subaltern. (Parry 1987: 35)

Similarly, Tiffin and Lawson (1994: 10) argue against those theories that state that the subaltern cannot speak, on the grounds that they ignore the extent to which the subalterns "are speaking" in much postcolonial literature. These critics locate subaltern agency in the hands of postcolonial writers who open up new liberating spaces by "engaging with canonical texts [and] rewriting not just the tradition but the episteme which underpins it" (ibid). Perhaps the strongest critic of Spivak is made by Freadman and Miller (1991: 39), who argue that Spivak

wants to help reconstruct the history of female literary marginalization whilst denying the possibility of authentic histories; she wants to assert the claims of emancipation whilst at the same time repudiating ethics and postulating only the most minimal conception of individual agency imaginable; she wants to employ psychoanalytic concepts without conceding, at least in principle, a real history of her analysee; and so on. (Quoted in Moore-Gilbert 2002: 111-112)

One could indeed argue that Spivak's (deconstructive) vision of the postcolonial subject as doomed, and blessed by an absence of self-identity, disparages attempts to forge any group consciousness. Her critique of the *Subaltern Studies*'s project suggests it is impossible to work for any cohesive politics of community: a vision, in my opinion, catastrophic for the colonized population. On the other hand, and although Spivak's work exerts a fierce critique of contemporary forms of imperialism, by asserting that "[t]o ignore the subaltern today is, willy nilly, to continue the imperialist project", the position she seems to adopt is in fact "imperialist" (1994: 94). As it is ultimately impossible to have access to the subaltern's reality, to "the consciousness of the people", the only solution left is to ignore them (ibid).

Realizing the problems that her theoretical premises posit for any sort of subaltern active resistance, Spivak (1988a: 205) defends, contradicting some of her statements, what she calls an

¹⁰ To this critique, Spivak answers as follows: "When Benita Parry takes us to task for not being able to listen to the natives, or to let the natives speak, she forgets that the three of us, postcolonials, are 'natives' too" (Spivak 1990b: 227). In fact, it is not so much that Spivak doesn't let the natives speak, but that, according to her, the colonial system doesn't provide them with the choice to speak.

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occasional “strategic” use of essentialism. Spivak’s notion of “strategic essentialism” has its antecedent in Fanon’s defence of ‘negritude’ in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1991: 133-138) and in *The Wretched of the Earth* (1990: 179). Like Fanon, Spivak asserts that the construction of essentialist forms of ‘native’ identity is a legitimate and necessary stage in the process of decolonization (for the national culture).

Although Spivak criticizes the *Subaltern Studies* program, she nevertheless admits to being sympathetic to their project:

To investigate, discover, and establish a subaltern or peasant consciousness seems at first to be a positivistic project – a project which assumes that, if properly prosecuted, it will lead to firm ground, to some *thing* that can be disclosed. (Spivak 1988b: 10)

Spivak suggests that the idea of a ‘pure’ and accessible subaltern history, although it is ultimately impossible, is a “necessary theoretical fiction”, for it enables the critique of dominant colonial and national-bourgeois historical models (ibid). Thus, in contradiction to her view that essentialism is a trap, she reads the group’s project as “a *strategic* use of a positivist essentialism in a scrupulously visible political interest” (Spivak 1988a: 205). Critics like Smyth (1998: 23) have read Spivak’s ‘strategic essentialism’ as “a system of imaginative negotiations in which the decolonizing subject” strives to transform from within a situation they are, as Spivak (1990b: 72) explains, “obliged to inhabit”. Although this subject operates within a system of thought belonging to the hegemonic discourse, the terms of this discourse are changed through articulation in subaltern contexts (Smyth 1998: 23). This stance displaces and reverses the opposition colonizer/colonized. Young (1992: 172) agrees with Smyth, for he argues that Spivak’s effective colonial resistance lies in her forging of strategies to “contest and inflect the more far-reaching implications of the system of thought of which they form a part”. In this sense, and following these critics’ argument, Spivak’s notion of ‘strategic essentialism’ would be an extension of Bhabha’s concept of hybridity and the ‘Third Space’.

Boland’s separatist stance in “Envoi” is certainly the result of adopting that ‘strategic essentialism’ Spivak defends. Her attempt to recover the past of Irish women, those stories neglected by imperialist and nationalist historical accounts, resembles the work of the *Subaltern Studies* scholars. Like them, Boland becomes “a subversive historian” (Boland 1997b: 26). Said (1988: vi) had established an interesting analogy between the *Subaltern Studies* work and women’s work, asserting that

[a]s an alternative discourse then, the work of the Subaltern scholars can be seen as an analogue of all those recent attempts in the West and throughout the rest of the world to articulate the hidden or suppressed accounts of numerous groups – women, minorities, disadvantaged or dispossessed groups, refugees, exiles, etc.¹¹

For Boland, who as an Irish woman poet attempts to recover women's contribution in history, this strategic use of essentialism has tremendous implications, because it opens up the possibility of fighting back, even if this means perpetuating, as she does in "Envoi", the binary logic male vs. female muse.

Nevertheless, Boland's poetry emphasizes more the poet's powerlessness to recover the "subaltern" than her ability to do so. Like Spivak (1994: 83), who describes the gendered colonial subject as "deeply in the shadow", Boland frequently characterizes women from the Irish past as "shadows". Boland should be considered, according to this critic, as "a native informant" who is irremediably distant from the colonial past. It is this distance between her present reality (as a woman poet) and an Irish (male and female) past that her mature work constantly highlights.

7.4.5.3.2. Boland's refusal to act as a 'benevolent' spokesperson

Boland has consistently emphasized in prose accounts and interviews the limitations involved in presenting herself as a spokesperson. First of all, she feels that the recovery of women's past is inadequate, for it is impossible to recover what has already disappeared. We have observed in the previous section how Boland (1996a: 33-34) questioned her ability to record a life in a poem without simplifying or holding it fixed "in the cold rock". Nevertheless, it is not only simplification at stake. She also feels limited by the fact that she cannot make a statement about something which has been destroyed, "something which was already a statement of random and unsparing destruction" (ibid). That is why she always refers to Ireland's past as an "unreachable" and an ungraspable terrain (interview with Villar Argáiz 2005a). Secondly, Boland believes that "[n]o artist can really represent their past. They can only represent their own view of it" (interview with Villar Argáiz 2005a). The poet's view, as her poetry constantly exemplifies, is always partial and incomplete, for no one can ultimately offer a final and viable version of what really happened. As Boland has recently argued, "[w]hat you construct from your past is usually a process of selection rather than a construction; there is no actual model on which to build a past or a present" (interview with Villar Argáiz 2005a). In this sense, Boland's historical sense is selective, and as such, it requires the acceptance of some stories as valid, and the discrimination of others as invalid.

¹¹ Young (1992: 160) also employs the term 'subaltern' to designate any critic or historian (whether male or female) who traces the activities of those subjects ignored by the dominant forms of academic historiography.

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Thirdly, Boland has acknowledged that, by recovering women's reality, she runs the risk of objectifying and simplifying it, as national literature has done in Ireland. For Boland (1996a: 178), there is a "real danger" in taking a private emblem (i.e. any woman of the past), because it "immediately takes on communal reference against a background of communal suffering". This is a way of aestheticizing violence and defeat, as the nationalist tradition in Ireland has done, which Boland sharply criticizes in her attack on the Irish political poem. In this sense, Boland faces the following problem: in taking any "subaltern" woman as an emblem of an Irish past, she runs the risk of turning her into "a communal reference", what would irremediably erase her distinctiveness and individuality. As she wonders in *Object Lessons*, how can we prevent "the difficult 'I' of perception [from becoming] the easier 'we' of a subtle claim"? (Boland 1996a: 178).

The answer to this question lies in Boland's ability to become a powerless poetic voice rather than a powerful and authoritarian one. Boland discards the idea of the Irish poet as a subject gifted with an inherited power of expression, an idea that goes back to that bardic belief that "poetry and privilege [are] inflexibly associated" (Boland 1996a: 191). Boland does not seek her authority as a poet from a privileged or historical stance. Much the contrary, her poetic subjects always stand out for their limitability of access, for their inability to bridge that gap between past and present. Instead of writing "from the centre, with the whole weight of authority and bardic force behind", Boland decides to "displace that centre" and write from the "margin" (interview with Villar Argáiz 2005a). In this sense, Boland puts into practice Spivak's belief that "[i]n seeking to learn to speak to (rather than listen to or speak for) the historically muted subject of the subaltern woman, the postcolonial intellectual *systematically* 'unlearns' female privilege" (Spivak 1994: 91). According to this postcolonial critic, this lack of privilege, this powerlessness, is in itself a subversive strategy. In fact, Boland's vulnerable, marginalized, and fragile poetic self allows her to change those foundational parameters on which Irish poetry has been based. The woman poet dismantles that nationalist discourse which encouraged the subject to be representative and the object to be ornamental. As we have seen, Bhabha (1995: 148) believes that being "historically displaced", suffering from a "social ellipsis", is positive rather than negative, for it allows the colonial and/or gendered subject to occupy a marginal position from which to contest fixed forms of national narratives. Boland is one of those marginal voices for whom historical exclusion becomes a source of resistance. As Boland (1995: 487) has argued, "I have never felt I owned Irish history; I have never felt entitled to the Irish experience. There have been Irish poets who have written the political poem with exactly this sense of ownership and entitlement". Boland's marginalization from historical accounts allows her to subvert the traditional Irish political poem that inspired the poet to act as an "envoy [...] of dispossession"

(ibid). It is her position of powerlessness, of 'subalternity' as an Irish woman, that enables her to write a more truthful political poem. As Boland (1996a: 185) has put it,

I do not believe the political poem can be written with truth and effect unless the self who writes the poem – a self which sexuality must be a factor – is seen to be in a radical relation to the ratio of power to powerlessness with which the political poem is so concerned.

It is the very tension between power and powerlessness that, according to Boland (1995: 487), grants the poet an empowering authority.¹² Now the speaker in the poem, in order to be subversive, must feel powerlessness not outside the poem, but within it. By remembering those women's silences that Irish poetry has created and sustained, her sense of power as a female speaking subject is imperfect:

If she writes as object-turned-author, her sense of power inside the poem must be flawed and tempered, not just by a perception of powerlessness outside it, but also by the memory of her traditional and objectified silence within it. (ibid)

In order to observe how Boland's poetry reflects a powerless poetic speaker, who, in Spivak (1994: 91) words, "unlearns [her] privilege" when attempting to recover a subaltern history, I will discuss some significant poems from *Outside History*. This volume of poetry stands out for its emphasis on the speaker's disconnection with, her physical and spiritual distance from, the Irish past. One significant feature of *Outside History* is its obsessive repetition of words such as "shadow(s)" and "distance(s)": for Boland past figures only appear as shadows and she is irremediably distant from them. Although these references had already appeared in *The Journey* and they continue in later volumes of poetry, their use are not as reiterative as in *Outside History*. In fact, Boland has recorded that her project of "writing about the lost, the voiceless, the silent" and "exploring [her] relation to them" started in *Outside History* (1990), whereas the previous volumes were mainly concerned with "artistic experimentation" (interview with Allen-Randolph 1993b: 129).

One of the poems in which Boland highlights her difficulty of access to the Irish past is "The Achill Woman" (*Outside History*). This poem recalls an encounter with an old woman in Achill, an island on the northwest coast of Ireland which, according to Thurston (1999: 235), was "a region hit hardest by the deprecations of the 1840s Famine and still largely impoverished". This

¹² As Boland (1995: 487) asserts, "[p]aradoxically, that authority grows the more the speaker is weakened and made vulnerable by the tensions he or she creates".

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encounter is highly significant for Boland, for she was the first person to talk to her about the “great people” of the Famine (Boland 1996a: 124). The poem does not specify the content of this conversation. Boland's prose account in *Object Lessons* (1996a: 124) narrates with more accuracy the details of that encounter, and therefore, it is useful to look at it before going on:

She was the first person to talk to me about the famine. The first person, in fact, to speak to me with any force about the terrible parish of survival and death which the event had been in these regions. She kept repeating to me that they were great people, the people in the famine. *Great people*. I had never heard that before. She pointed out the beauties of the place. But they themselves, I see now, were a subtext. On the eastern side of Keel, the cliffs of Menawn rose sheer out of the water. And here was Keel itself, with its blond strand and broken stone, where the villagers in the famine, she told me, had moved closer to the shore, the better to eat the seaweed.

In this passage, we can observe what the poem does not recount: that the two women talked about, what Eagleton (1995: 23) considers, “the most important episode of modern Irish history”. The old woman encourages Boland to read the “sub-text” (Boland 1996a: 124) of the landscape natural beauty; to understand the implicit meaning, the suffering and misfortunes, experienced by the people who lived in that village. As Boland has recently argued, the famine is a “fairly representative example of the exclusions that come with a story of heroes” (interview with Villar Argáiz 2005a). In this poem, Boland, therefore, tries to recover the force and significance of that encounter, because she feels that this woman “came from a past which affected me” (Boland 1996a: 125). This encounter has marked her life in a similar way as Cixous (1981: 246) was marked by another encounter: “I have been amazed more than once by a description a woman gave me of a world all her own which she had been secretly haunting since early childhood”.

The first two stanzas describe how this old woman brought water to the borrowed cottage where Boland was staying and where she intended, as a young student from Trinity College, to study the English court poets:

She came up the hill carrying water.
She wore a half-buttoned, wool cardigan,
a tea-towel round her waist.

She pushed the hair out of her eyes with
her free hand and put the bucket down.

These sentences are carefully constructed: they follow the normal English syntactic arrangement, and they are separated by punctuation, such as commas and stops. It is as if the woman speaker is trying to faithfully recover the exact moment when she saw her. She avoids any

possible ambiguity and plainly exposes the facts. The subject 'she' is placed, in all the three sentences, in initial position. 'She', the Achill woman, is the main focus of attention, the element occupying the most important position, as if in a painting. There is nothing, at first sight, extraordinary about this woman; she is even portrayed in an ordinary way, wearing a woollen cardigan and a dishcloth around her waist. But a closer look gives us some insight into the hidden power of this figure. We saw in "The Making of an Irish Goddess" (in the same volume of poetry), how the mother pinned her hair "to hide/ the stitched, healed blemish of a scar – [...] an accurate inscription/ of that agony". In the same way, the Achill woman pushes her hair out of her eyes with her free hand. Her routine gesture is representative of women's lives and experiences. In "The Making of an Irish Goddess", the speaker's body was scarred and wounded by the suffering and agonies of the women of the past. Similarly, in "The Achill Woman", the image of the Great Famine is a paradigm for women's history. The famine's consequences are allegorized in this figure, in this woman who knows about the catastrophic event which affected the villagers of the region. In this sense, Boland apparently presents this figure as a woman who can bear witness to the sufferings and anguishes of the "*Great People*" of the famine (Boland 1996a: 124), a woman who stands for all those women in the past, and whose reality has been widely ignored in the official historical accounts.

In the third stanza, the woman speaker tries to recover the beauty of the landscape, which she, as a young student, failed to notice:

The zinc-music of the handle on the rim
tuned the evening. An Easter moon rose.
In the next-door field a stream was
a fluid sunset; and then, stars.

As Boland (1996a: 124) explains in *Object Lessons*, the Achill woman was pointing out to her the outstanding features of the landscape, which were "subtexts" of all those villagers who suffered the famine. Praga (1996: 37) makes an interesting remark as regards the Irish poets' emotional affiliation with the land. This critic asserts that the poets' relationship with the Irish landscape might be represented around two axes: a horizontal one, in which they consider their sense of belonging to, or exclusion from, a place, their degree of possession or dispossession of a territory; and a vertical axis, characterized by the relation between past and present, the importance that poets give to history. This vertical axis is constantly present in Boland's poems. Her mature work is loaded with references to actual places in Ireland. Local and parochial names resonate throughout her volumes of poetry: the landscapes of the Burren ("On Holiday", *The Journey*); Meath, Westmeath, and Longford ("Listen. This is the Noise of Myth", *The Journey*); the hills of

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Clare ("On the Gift of 'The Birds of America' by John James Audubon", *Outside History*); the Wicklow hills ("The Source", *In a Time of Violence*); Youghal and Cahirmoyle ("My Country in Darkness", *The Lost Land*); Dun Laoghaire ("The Harbour", *The Lost Land*); and Connemara ("Happiness", *The Lost Land*). In these poems Boland, by recalling real geographical spaces in Ireland, not only exposes her love, emotion, and affection for the Irish landscape, but also her desire to extract from these places a past of humiliation, oppression, and silence.¹³ It is well known that the landscape is a recurrent metaphor of "the inscape of national identity" (Bhabha 1995: 143), and therefore, it is not surprising to find that in Boland's work an afflicted past, an Irish history of ordeal, is recorded in its countryside, its local Gaelic names and places. In poems such as "Midnight Flowers" and "White Hawthorn in the West of Ireland" (*Outside History*), plants, flowers, and rivers are reminiscent of a subaltern reality, of an Irish past unrecorded and omitted from historical accounts. Similarly, in "The Achill Woman", the Irish landscape of rivers and mountains hides messages which Boland wants to decode in her poetry. Her attempt is reminiscent of John Montague's aspiration in "A Lost Tradition" to read the historical messages that Irish landscapes contain: "All around, shards of a Lost Tradition. [...] The whole landscape is a manuscript/ We have lost the skill to read" (quoted in Kiberd 1996: 617). Whereas her earlier self, as we will see, was merely preoccupied with reading the Court poets, the woman speaker, now a more mature person, has "the skill to read", as Montague would argue, those "subtexts" in nature. The speaker describes the beauty of the landscape around her: how the evening "tuned" by the metallic sound of the bucket when its caretaker sets it down, and how the sky and landscape are united by the reflection of the rising "Eastern moon" and stars in a stream. The tune she is now able to hear is the melody of the past, a past of men and women who are outside history, like the stars in the sky (always present but largely unnoticed). Nevertheless, this romantic view of nature distances itself from that destroyed and scarred landscape that Boland portrays in "The Making of an Irish Goddess". The beauty that Boland describes cannot be (like in this other poem) an epitome of the catastrophe's remnants in the land and in the Irish collective memory. Boland's idealization of the natural landscape brings her closer to that nationalist romantic view of the Irish landscape, especially of the Western regions, that writers such as W.B. Yeats (1989: 35) offered in poems such as "The Lake Isle of Innisfree", and that Collins and de Valera defended, when imposing an ideal of Ireland as a rural and agricultural community (Butler 2001: 215). In poems such as "White Hawthorn in the West of Ireland" (*Outside History*), Boland seems to suggest that an 'authentic' and 'pure' Irish past lies in an ideal Western setting. In this poem, the speaker is drawn to the

¹³ As Kiberd (1996: 599) explains, there is a revived fashion in contemporary Irish poetry of what he calls a "poetic geography", according to which the poet is "self-cast as an archaeologist", in search of material evidence remaining from past human life and culture.

Western Irish countryside, not only for its beauty and for the “subtexts” that she can perceive in those hills full of hawthorns, but also because it is a place where the Irish language survives, “the only language spoken in those parts”.¹⁴ Likewise, “The Achill Woman” induces us to think that for Boland this Western region of Ireland still harbours a truthful representation of Ireland's past. This fact, together with her emblematic description of the old woman she encounters there, will prompt a wide and controversial debate as regards Boland's perpetuation of nationalist images in her reclaiming of an unrecorded Irish past.

The fourth stanza directs our attention, once again, to the old woman, who is described now in more detail:

I remember the cold rosiness of her hands.
She bent down and blew on them like broth.
And round her waist, on a white background,
in coarse, woven letters, the words ‘glass cloth’.

The words “glass cloth” that the poet remembers being woven into the woman's tea-towel are highly suggestive. These words sewn into the old woman's cloth are the only inscriptions perceived to identify her. She is given no name whatsoever. It is as if the only historical record of this woman, representative of the past of all Irish women, is her stereotypical role as a housewife, caretaker, custodian of the house, and performer of all sorts of domestic labours. ‘Glass’ is also a mirror, and the fact that the woman is identified by this mirror indicates that the legacy of the Irish past encourages us to see women as through the looking glass of their role as housewives and caretakers. There is nothing that records their sufferings and hardships. This old woman is “glassed”, put into the container of the domestic sphere, a “coarse” place “woven” by patriarchy. Nevertheless, in contrast to ideal nationalist emblems such as Mother Ireland, this woman is depicted realistically. Boland describes the routine gesture of a woman who tries to warm her hands by blowing on them.

In the following stanza, the speaker makes explicit her situation in the scene. She is no “Achill Woman”, but a young immature girl:

And she was nearly finished for the day.
And I was all talk, raw from college –
week-ending at a friend's cottage
with one suitcase and the set text
of the Court poets of the Silver Age.

¹⁴ Similarly, in later poems such as “Happiness” (*The Lost Land*), Boland seems to suggest that authenticity lies in the Western regions of Ireland. This poem records a Connemara summer in 1940 when her father is learning Irish. The poem ends by presenting a speaker who, mourning the loss of this language, melancholically argues “*never again, never again*”.

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We stayed putting down time until
the evening turned cold without warming.

Her encounter with this emblematic woman was completely accidental, as she had gone to this island in order to study for the exams. After holding the conversation about the famine, the old woman heads for home and the speaker goes inside and tries to study. As Foster (1999: 3) notes, “[t]he poem gains its tension – and its power – through the contrast with what the speaker *now* sees”. In this sense, the woman poet emphasizes the difference between the moment remembered then and the significance that this moment has for the more mature woman. Her earlier self, the poetic voice implies, not only failed to read the woman and the landscape as “subtexts”, with their own past and meanings, but also missed understanding the ambitious and flattering language of English Court poets such as Wyatt and Raleigh. By recording this tension, Boland highlights the necessity to retrieve a past that lies outside recorded history, an unglamorous life experience that also forms part of Ireland's national past. As Thurston (1999: 237) notes, the sequence demands from us, as readers, that we “learn the lesson with the poet”, in order to avoid “oblivion”, and welcome the “awareness” encouraged by the Achill Woman.

Boland has received wide criticism for her depiction of the Achill woman as an ideal representative emblem of Ireland's past. Critics such as Fulford (2002a: 215) and Longley (1994: 188), for instance, see this figure as looking “remarkably like the Sean Bhean Bhocht”, and argue that, although Boland's new muse is supposedly based on the heterogeneous historical experience of Irish women, she is “subsumed into a single emblematic victim-figure”.¹⁵ Furthermore, Meaney (1993a: 140) questions Boland's ability to present herself as a spokesperson of the Achill Woman's memories. By making this woman an “emblem” of womanhood, Boland ignores the “differences of class, economic power, and differential access to education, to literature and to language” that separate not only the poet and the Achill woman, but also Irish women in general.

Nevertheless, these critics ignore how the end of the poem highlights the poet's difficulty accessing to this woman's reality; and in doing so, her ability to act as a spokesperson is undermined. Regretting her earlier ignorance, and her inability to understand the significance of this encounter with the Achill woman, the woman speaker nostalgically records,

how I fell asleep
oblivious to
the planets over in the skies

¹⁵ Longley (1994: 188) further claims the following:

[Boland] feels unnecessarily guilty for (as an apprentice poet) having read ‘English court poetry’ on Achill, and having imitated the English ‘Movement’ mode of the early sixties. To whom, to what avatar, to what icon, is she apologizing? In fact, it is to Mother Ireland herself. [...] Because she does not blame Nationalism, her alternative Muse turns out to be the twin sister of Dark Rosaleen.

the slow decline of the Spring moon

Boland's younger self, falling asleep, is unaware of the irony of reading poems of servility and flattery of a canon which is predominantly male. As Foster (1999: 3) explains, "[t]he English, masculine, mythologizing, and subtly misogynist poetry, emblematic of her literary education, limits the younger woman's ability to see the whole woman in her wholeness". The fact that her younger self falls asleep enhances her state of unconsciousness, her inability to perceive the "subtexts" the Achill woman showed her at the time (Boland 1996a: 124). As is characteristic of Boland's work, constellations (the planets and the Spring moon) are reminiscent of another life, a life that Boland's younger self is unable to grasp. Nevertheless, Boland, as a more mature self, experiences a similar inability when recovering this woman's reality:

but nothing now can change the way I went
indoors, chilled by the wind
and made a fire
and took down my book
and opened it and failed to comprehend

the harmonies of servitude,
the grace music gives to flattery
and language borrows from ambition.

Note how the lines become longer than at the beginning of the poem, and how additive conjunctions become more predominant. These linguistic features create a cadence effect as the speaker gets increasingly more melancholic. There are hardly any punctuation marks, and the sentences unfold with the aid of an enjambment which enhances the elegiac tone of remembrance and sorrow. By asserting that "nothing now can change" her lack of awareness, Boland highlights her difficulty to obtain access to this woman's reality; and in doing so, her ability to act as a spokesperson is undermined. As Mill Harper (1997: 187) has also noted, Boland decides not to adopt poetic power, by acknowledging that neither as a young and inexperienced student nor as a grown up woman, is she in command of that experience. On the other hand, within the poem the Achill woman does not speak, not because she is allowed no subject position, but because of the difficulty of recovery. Instead of recounting the conversation between this woman and the poet, the only thing that we know is that the two of them "stayed putting down time", a phrase that, according to Mills Harper (1997: 187), "avoids sound and the passage of time involved in speech". As Spivak (1994: 89) and Chow (2003: 329) have argued, the recovery of an authentic 'native' voice ends up perpetuating the construction of the native as a differentiating 'Other' outside the normative subject in Western discourses. By questioning her own authority as a poet, Boland also

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avoids creating a dominant discourse that would replace inauthentic images with authentic portrayals of the Irish native. In her inability to capture this subaltern woman in her entirety, Boland moves away from those essentialist attempts to construct a category that would undermine heterogeneity. Boland cannot approach this figure, and therefore, she allows differences between women to emerge. There seems to be an uncrossable distance between the two women in the "The Achill Woman", a distance that will be emphasized in other poems from this volume such as "Our Origins are in the Sea", "Outside History", and "We are Always too Late".

In "Our Origins are in the Sea", Boland tries to picture the grandfather she never knew who drowned in the Bay of Biscay. Like the Achill Woman, this figure stands as a metonymy of an Irish past unrecorded within historical accounts. The poem focuses, once again, on the distance between the speaker and this subaltern reality:

I live near the coast. On these summer nights
the dog-star rises somewhere near the hunter,
near the sun. I stand at the edge of our grass.

I do not connect them: once they were connected –
the fixity of stars and unruly salt water –
by sailors with an avarice for landfall.

In contrast to what Boland has accustomed her readers to expect, she is not depicted in movement and she uses the present tense in order to suggest motionlessness and a well-established location. Like that spring moon in "The Achill Woman", the dog-star is here the turning point for reflecting on a past life, the life of those sailors who were able to read, as those "star gazers" in "It's a Woman's World", the constellations in the sky. In this sense, Boland attempts to recover not only those Irish women from the past, but also a more diverse subaltern existence. Spivak (1993: 228) has argued that attempts such as this are bound to fail, because the metropolitan lifestyle that postcolonial literature records is different from that subaltern reality in the colony. In fact, "Our Origins are in the Sea" records a contemporary subaltern woman who, although she lives "near the coast", has not experienced sailing the "unruly salt water". From where she stands, as the speaker later argues, "the sea is just a rumour" and the only stars she can see are those "put out by our streetlamp". In this sense, and as Spivak (1994: 80) would say, Boland's search for "subaltern consciousness" is inevitably impossible. Whereas sailors were able to connect "the fixity of stars and unruly salt water", the speaker can "not connect them". As a suburban woman, she is grounded in a certain place, a place where light and seawater are well separated. Unable to share this ability, the speaker is not only excluded from the Irish past, but she also stands as an inappropriate spokesperson for her grandfather's story:

And how little

survives of the sea-captain in his granddaughter
is everywhere apparent. Such things get lost.

The use of the conjunction and the enjambment that unites both stanzas enhance, as in “The Achill Woman”, Boland’s melancholic and elegiac tone. Distant from a past that directly affects her, Boland is unable to go back to her roots, to recover what is “lost”. According to García García (2002: 232), the sea is always a point of reference in Boland’s poetry to reflect on her ancestors, on figures like her grandfather who, in his constant navigations, exemplified that Irish experience of displacement from the land, those evictions and emigration. This critic’s main argument is that Boland shares, by remembering these experiences, a similar sense of displacement and uprootedness. I agree with this critic. As we have seen in “Anna Liffey”, Boland places all notions of ‘being at home’ under rigorous scrutiny. Even her role as a mother, as a grown-up woman who finally finds her own place within her home country, is dissolved at the end of the poem by advocating the river Liffey as both the origin and the end of life. Water in this sense stands as the only appropriate medium to represent an identity which is neither grounded nor stable, but which is rather “in exile”, constantly changing and evolving. In “Our Origins are in the Sea”, Boland recurs to a similar metaphor. The very title dismantles those myths of ‘origin’ on which all sorts of identities are based. There is no origin as such: and only water is what the speaker finds on her journey towards her own past, her own roots. But Boland is also suggesting something else. The past is, for the woman poet, as difficult to grasp as the water of the ocean her grandfather navigated: it is fluid and constantly dissolving just as the speaker tries to recover it. Here, once again, the possibility of recovering a subaltern subject is lost and overdetermined.

Boland’s use of constellations is recurrent to record an Irish past which, although visible by the speaker, remains largely unnoticed to historians. In “Outside History”, Boland is drawn, as the very title indicates, to those marginal voices that are occluded from national accounts:

There are outsiders, always. These stars –
these iron inklings of an Irish January,
whose light happened

thousands of years before
our pain did: they are, they have always been
outside history.

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The stars that the speaker sees in the night constellations are remote and distant from her own reality. They do not only suggest the separation between present and past, but are also the starting point from which the poet can reflect on her own mortality:

They keep their distance. Under them remains
a place where you found
you were human, and

a landscape in which you know you are mortal.

The stars' eternity is contrasted with the speaker's vulnerable human condition. In contrast to those mythological figures that Boland brought to death in poems such as "Time of Violence" and "A Woman Painted on Leaf" (*In a Time of Violence*), here the speaker feels unable to do so. Time and space separates the speaker from these stars, whose light was radiated "thousands of years before", and which are located at a great distance for her. But, even if her mortal condition separates Boland from those mythological and starry figures such as Cassiopeia, her humanity allows her to establish a connection with those men and women who, like her, were subject to death. This time, the speaker might not be able to bridge the gap between myth (cyclical and monumental time) and her ordinary world (linear time), but she seems to find no difficulty in linking her present with an Irish past of painful experiences:

I move to be
part of that ordeal
whose darkness is

only now reaching me from those fields,
those rivers, those roads clotted as
firmaments with the dead.

The fields, rivers, and roads are full of corpses as numerous as those stars in the sky. The difference is that now the speaker is able to surpass the limits imposed by time and space when recalling the famine. As in "The Making of the Irish Goddess", Boland's mortality and vulnerability apparently allow her to establish a connection with those dying victims. Nevertheless, the use of deictic such as "that" and "those", common in other poems from this volume such as "Distances", indicates that the speaker continues to be far away from this reality. Although at first she seems to establish an astonishing proximity with those Irishmen and women who suffered the famine, this is immediately counteracted by the speaker's assertion that "we are always too late":

How slowly they die
as we kneel beside them, whisper in their ear.
And we are too late. We are always too late.

As is typical in Boland's poetry, the poet introduces an afterthought, in this case by a double tag-line, which overturns the previous meaning of the poem. Like in "The Achill Woman", Boland is able to hear those songs "crying out their ironies", in this case, a soft voice coming from the past. Nevertheless, these are only whispers, and even worse, she ultimately fails to establish any sort of communicative exchange. Boland is "always too late" to answer back, to solve those injustices committed by constrained versions of history. The use of the adverb 'always' and the present simple (which acquires here a timeless reference) make us see that the poet's inability cannot be overcome by any possible means. Boland's constant project to change what has already happened is ultimately impossible. As in "Our Origins are in the Sea", the woman poet cannot retrieve the Irish past. Fulford (2002a: 215) has argued that "Boland's title "Outside History" becomes a wry parody of the inability of the female artist (or any artist) to get beyond representation to the 'real'", in this case the "real" would stand for those famine victims of the Irish past.

The final tag-line of "Outside History" becomes the title of another poem in *Outside History*. In "We are Always too Late", Boland recounts a scene of a woman weeping at a New England coffee shop. Her way to go back to this remembrance is, for the poet, a dual process of returning to the scene and reconstructing it:

Memory
is in two parts.

First, the re-visiting:

the way even now I can see
those lovers at the café table. She is weeping.

On her journey towards this local memory, Boland describes the background setting as well: a winter landscape of white pines in which the snow gradually loses its balance on the branches and falls down. Deciding to enter the scene, Boland walks away from her own table and approaches the woman.

Then

the re-enactment. Always that –
I am getting up, pushing away
coffee. Always, I am going towards her.

The flush and scald is
to her a forehead now, and back down to her neck.

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The use of the present progressive situates the speaker in constant movement. This, together with the adverb 'always', indicate that Boland has done this action more than once and has attempted to go back to this situation consistently in her mind. Nevertheless, the speaker has apparently been unable to finish the action, for it can only be perceived in the middle of its process. By entering the scene, Boland focuses on the woman more closely now. Her emotional excitement is perceived physically on her forehead and neck. Whereas in her first re-visiting, Boland described the scene more superficially, by going back a second time Boland is able to see the woman almost in her totality. It is as if the speaker can understand the woman's sorrow. Hers is a body apparently injured by scalding, like that wounded woman in "The Making of an Irish Goddess". Boland's movement from a superficial reading to a more profound one is characteristic of her mature work. Remember how in "An Old Steel Engraving" the poet first invokes the reader to "[l]ook" at the engraving, if only to demand later that we should analyze it "[m]ore closely now". The fractured, short sentences of "We are Always too Late" parallel the speaker's gradual and careful journey into the past. Having eventually arrived at the scene, the speaker, now close to the woman, addresses her with the intention to relieve her grief:

I raise one hand. I am pointing to
those trees, I am showing her our need for these
beautiful upstagings of
what we suffer by
what survives. And she never even sees me.

Boland attempts to tell her that her suffering, although private and personal, is upstaged and insignificant. Like that snow that is falling and constantly changing the outside landscape, this woman's grief is only temporal, and what will "survive" will be rather more important things. As Foster (1999: 10) explains, Boland "offers the possibility of renewal, an awareness that our own plight is not the universe". But, as in "Outside History", her proximity to this woman is only an illusion. The fact that the woman does not even look at the speaker, indicates that she cannot eventually help and instruct her. Once again, the poem finishes with Boland's characteristic tag-line, an afterthought that reformulates the previous meaning. Although the speaker has knowledge, she cannot communicate it to her intended addressee, and so, Boland's poetic authority is undermined. The speaker is, once again, "too late" to carry out any significant change, to retrieve that scene and address the woman again. For Boland, it would be very easy to reconstruct the scene and end the poem with a more convenient outcome that would give her back her poetic authority. As Boland argued in the poetry reading she offered on June 19th 2004, in the National Concert Hall, Dublin, she finds a paradox when going back to the past, a sense of unease "of how

free we go back to the past, how free we travel those lives which are so complicated, suffering lives in their times, and simplify them for our own purpose".¹⁶ In order to avoid this simplification, Boland prefers to finish "We are Always too Late" by emphasizing her powerlessness as a poet. When talking about her need to establish a contact with one of her favourite woman poets, Anna Bradstreet, Boland (2001b: 14) argues:

The poet of the present may invent the poet of the past all too easily: may wrench them from the disciplines and decisions of the world they lived in with such care and pain, and disfigure them in a more convenient present.

Under the realization that Bradstreet is "illegible", Boland avoids "the possible corruptions of invention", by creating a lyric that is as fragile and full of doubts as her very process of reconstruction (ibid). This is made explicit in "We are Always too Late", where the speaker's "re-visiting" and "re-enactment" seem eventually to be unsuccessful. As Spivak (1988a: 253-254) has argued, "whatever the advisability of attempting to "identify" (with) the other as subject in order to know her, knowledge is made possible and is sustained by irreducible difference, not identity". For this postcolonial critic, decolonization involves, first of all, a recognition of the "irreducible difference" that separates people from each other. Any attempt to grasp this 'difference' would inevitably perpetuate the homogenizing views of identity defended by imperialism and nationalism, and therefore, it would hinder back the process of decolonization. It is this "irreducible difference" that separates Boland from this woman in the New England café. The poem finishes with the speaker's failure to communicate with the woman, but this failure is in itself Boland's own recognition that, despite our knowledge and wisdom, one cannot totally advise the 'Other' in our own terms. This woman's grief is too personal and private for anyone to claim that he or she has the right and eventual solution, the remedy to relieve her pain.

As poems such as "The Achill Woman", "Outside History", and "We are Always too Late" exemplify, Boland favours the movement from an apparent ability to connect with the Irish past to an ultimate impossibility to do so. In fact, Boland's inability to act as a spokesperson is constantly emphasized in those poems from *Outside History*. In "Midnight Flowers", lilacs and fuchsias stand as "subtexts" of a "subaltern" and unrecorded past: they are located at "the margins of light" and "they have no roots". In an attempt to record them within her poem, Boland walks towards them, but she cannot ultimately establish a connection: "I reach out a hand; they are gone". The very title of poems such as "Distances" and "What We Lost" draw us into those gaps that Boland encounters

¹⁶ This reading was recorded with the permission of Eavan Boland.

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between past and present, recovery and representation. Phrases like “what we lost”, “get lost”, “such a loss for now”, “nothing else, nothing more”, “nothing to look forward”, and “elegy”, recur throughout *Outside History*. Rather than bridging those gaps by a “possible corruption of invention” (Boland 2001b: 14), Boland decides to leave the past as “unreachable”, as she has recently argued (interview with Villar Argáiz 2005a). This is the reason why her poetic authority is constantly undermined. In poems such as “On the Gift of ‘The Birds of America’ by John James Audubon” and “A Different Light”, Boland specifies by using constructions such as “from this angle anyway” or “it seemed” that her view is particular, and that others might have another different opinion. Undermining the traditionally power of the poet's (male) gaze to immortalize his images in visual representation, Boland never states with assurance, she only suggests, without imposing her assertions as transcendental truisms. As has been hinted at earlier on, Boland conceives poetry as a terrain where she can express her own ambiguities and contradictions, not as a place to exert her own authority. That is why her poems are loaded with questions indicating uncertainty and sentences that indicate that the speaker lacks access to knowledge. Foucault and the French poststructuralist model on the relationship between discourse, knowledge, and power are significant in this respect. Foucault (1980: 196) has explained the link between power and discourse as follows:

The apparatus is [...] always inscribed in a play of power, but it is also always linked to certain coordinates of knowledge which issue from it but, to an equal degree, condition it. This is what the apparatus consists in: strategies of relations of forces supporting, and supported by, types of knowledge.

Foucault shows that the establishment of knowledge and academic disciplines is never innocent, because knowledge always engenders power, not only by determining specific inclusions but also by reinforcing overt and covert exclusions (Lewis & Mills 2003: 1). Boland's poems, mostly in *Outside History*, constantly show a poetic speaker who lacks sufficient knowledge of what she is talking about. By doing so, Boland avoids entering what Foucault would call “the apparatus”, and adopts an anti-authoritarian poetic stance which does not lead to exclusion or seclusion. As Spivak (1988a: 201) asserts, “the greatest gift of deconstruction [is] to question the authority of the investigating subject without paralyzing him, persistently transforming conditions of impossibility into possibility”. In this sense, whereas an adverb such as ‘perhaps’ is recurrent in poems such as “White Hawthorn in the West of Ireland”, “In Exile”, and “Doorstep Kisses”, other poems display more explicitly how the speaker is not in command of the experience she is talking about: “no way now to know what happened then” (“The Black Lace Fan my Mother Gave me”) or “I never knew” (“In Exile”). It is also significant how the word “truth” does not appear a single time in

Outside History, in contrast to the profusion of this word in previous volumes such as *The Journey*. It seems that, as Boland's mature work progresses, the woman poet is gradually "unlearn[ing her] privilege", as Spivak (1994: 91) would argue, in her attempt to speak on behalf of Ireland's history and its women.

This volume's emphasis on a defeated and powerless poet who is unable to retrieve Ireland's past is in itself a subversive strategy. Boland (1996a: 129) has argued that, by creating "archive[s] of defeat", her poems try to dismantle the belief the Irish poem must record action, resistance and "a diagram of victory". As she has argued, the problem with much Irish poetry is that it transformed the losses into victories, and rephrased the humiliations as triumphs. This betrays Ireland's history, for

[a]t a far deeper level – and here the Achill woman returns – [the Irish experience] was about defeat. The coffin ships, the soup queues, those desperate villagers in the shoreline – these things had actually happened. The songs, persuasive, hypnotic, could wish them away. Poetry could not. (Boland 1996a: 130)

Boland's vulnerable and defeated poetic selves stand in direct opposition to those authoritarian nationalist voices which claim to speak on behalf of the "imagined community" Anderson (1983) talks about. Unlike Daniel Corkery in *A Hidden Ireland* (1924), Boland is not a spokesperson for "a pure, untouched and somehow golden land of saints and scholars" (interview with Villar Argáiz 2005a). Hers is not a "pure Ireland", but rather an Ireland which cannot be grasped, an Ireland whose heterogeneous reality and "fragmentations" stand beyond the poet's artistic representation (ibid). By showing her inability to recover an Irish "subaltern" reality, Boland avoids simplifying it. Furthermore, only by recording her powerlessness and failure when attempting to go back, can her poems offer "a more accurate inscription", as she says in "The Making of an Irish Goddess", of an Irish history of defeat and agony.

Therefore, Boland's impossibility to recover a native voice, rather than a failure (as most contesters to Spivak's theories would argue) is an achievement. Speaking for "a lost consciousness that cannot be recovered" (Young 1992: 164), allows Boland to avoid simplification, to subvert the traditional assumptions on which canonical poetry has been based, and also, funnily enough, to draw us into a past of defeat that parallels the speaker's failure. In her recent introduction to an anthology of German women poets who reflect the devastation of World War II in their poetry, Boland (2004: 5) expresses her belief that "[i]t is the very powerlessness of these [women] which becomes, with hindsight, both a retrieval system and a searing critique of power". In the following section, I will continue demonstrating with the critical example of Boland's poetry, how the

powerlessness that Spivak ascribes to the postcolonial writer is, rather than politically ineffective, highly subversive. By recording that only 'silences' is what she encounters on her journey towards the past, Boland is able to dismantle those 'authoritarian' (imperialist and nationalist) languages that claim to be able to "speak of and for something" (interview with Villar Argáiz 2005a).

7.4.5.4. Silence as a politically effective strategy

7.4.5.4.1. In search of a language

Boehmer (1995: 234) has argued that postcolonial writers at times introduce to their work an "untranslatable strangeness". According to this critic, this obscurity of the postcolonial text is due to the mingling of traditional indigenous and European forms which makes it strange both to Western and Eastern eyes.¹⁷ But this "untranslatable strangeness" can also refer to the fact that postcolonial writers face a troubling limitation when attempting to express themselves within the imperial language. Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (2002a: 82-83) refer to this aspect when explaining how, due to this linguistic displacement, the postcolonial writer struggles with language in order to overcome the inarticulacy and the silence imposed on him/her by the imperial centre. Even though postcolonial writers have "the literal freedom to speak", they can find themselves "languageless" and constrained by the imposition of the English language.

It is precisely this point that Deane emphasizes in "Dumbness and Eloquence: A Note on English as We Write it in Ireland". In this essay, Deane (2003: 114) argues that Irish writing in English has been, and still is, obsessed with the problems of representation, how to record in an exemplary mode an Irish community or communities that are supposed to have always been misrepresented. The English language seems to be "ultimately insufficient for the purpose[s] of representation": whereas it provides a metropolitan sophistication and eloquence, there is also a native aspect, an "index of authentic feeling", which is left inarticulate (ibid). Using psychoanalytic terminology, Deane (2003: 117-118) argues that the acquisition of language that all human beings experience differs from the acquisition of a new language. For the colonized Irish, the acquisition of the English language leaves a vacuum that is impossible to verbalize: what he calls "the language of the unconscious" (p. 117).¹⁸

This endeavour to speak "the language of the unconscious", to express "an index of authentic feeling" as an Irish woman poet, is observed in Boland's work, because she is constantly

¹⁷ According to Boehmer (1995: 248), this difficulty and "Otherness" in the postcolonial text can only be overcome by "textual and extratextual research", the retrieval of "oral, ritual, [and] popular knowledge".

¹⁸ Deane (2003: 118) observes this condition of inarticulacy in central works of the Irish Revival such as Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and Synge's *Playboy of the Western World*. The languages that Stephen Dedalus and Christy Mahon have inherited are "authoritarian in structure": they stand for the claims of the Roman Catholic Church, Irish patriotism, and British political and cultural imperialisms (p. 118). For both figures, achieving freedom and linguistic independence involves an act of imagining and forging a new language (ibid).

attempting to find a proper language by means of which to articulate Ireland's past and her own contemporary and ordinary reality. For the woman poet, having a language of one's own is extremely important, for, as she argues, language is "home truth" (1996a: 45), that is, it gives her an identity, and illusion of belonging somewhere.¹⁹ Nevertheless, Boland has always faced the loss of language, and this is the reason why she constantly struggles with "the Trojan horse of language", as Hagen and Zelman (2004: 53) put it. As we have seen, Boland (1996a: 55-56) has recorded how, when returning to Ireland after a long exile at the age of fourteen, she was tormented by a feeling of inadequacy as regards language and ownership. As a more mature poet, Boland feels the same. One of the problems she identifies within Irish poetry is "the odd and abrasive disjunctions between the Irish reality and the Irish poem" (1996a: 136). This disjunction between language and reality, between the sayable (poetic) and the unsayable (unpoetic), is well explained in an interview with Consalvo (1992: 96):

In Ireland we've always had this terrible gap between rhetoric and reality. In the void between those two things some of the worst parts of our history have happened. The reality is that people have been wounded, murdered, degraded in this so-called freedom struggle. But the rhetoric grinds on relentlessly. It says that we are one nation, one territory. That we need to get the British out and resume the purity of Irish nationhood.

Boland's attempt to get to "the void between those two things", language and reality, is, as we will see, not an easy project. Deane (2003: 118) has argued that in Ireland, the language of "the real" is the Irish language, but that this language, especially for Irish writers with no knowledge of Gaelic, only "emerges as silence", "dumbness", and "aphasia". The English language is, for these writers, the only language of "the possible", but, as it stands in opposition to 'the real' (the reality conveyed in the native language), the English language is an "index of hypocrisy [and] moral vacuity" (pp. 118, 114). According to Deane (2003: 119-120), the "silence" of the Irish language "haunts" Irish literature.²⁰ Boland's inability to express herself within poetic language can be interpreted from this postcolonial perspective. Boland's silences, like her colleagues', can certainly respond to her own wish to express herself in the Irish language, her native tongue. In her prose account, Boland (1996a: 73) has insisted on how she had to do the General Certificate of the British System, because she had no knowledge of Gaelic. Nevertheless, Boland's situation as an Irish woman poet is more complex than that of male writers'. As an Irish woman, Boland has been

¹⁹ In another passage of *Object Lessons*, Boland (1996a: 102) narrates how she is drawn to the power of language, in the belief that "the idea of place [is] something language could claim even if ownership had been denied".

²⁰ Deane (2003: 119-120) justifies his argument by asserting that in Beckett's *All That Fall*, the Irish language operates as "the language for that which is unsayable in English, or simply unsayable as such"; and that Brian Friel's *Translations* similarly poses the question of the language loss.

doubly silenced: whatever the language used, Gaelic or English, there is a further vacuum, a silence inscribed within the very nature of poetic language itself. As Boland (1996a: 153) asserts, national literature has not only simplified women as emblems but it has deprived them of a past, and therefore, it has “silence[d]” them. In this sense, Boland's project is to break women's silences, to search for a poetic language that records women's reality in a more truthful way. Her concern is, as she asserts, to recover what the Irish poem has not grasped, that which has always been excluded (Boland 1996b: 146). For Boland, the “visible place”, the final draft of the poem (what is heard, published, known) owes its existence to “the invisible one” (ibid). In order to study how Boland's poetry always attempts to make the “invisible” (or unsayable) “visible” (and therefore poetic), I will draw on Kristeva's “Revolution in Poetic Language” (1986a).

7.4.5.4.2. Recording the ‘unpoetic’: Boland's silences and dissonances

Boland's objective to articulate what has usually been unrecorded in Irish poetry is linked to Kristeva's insistence on inserting the “semiotic” within the “symbolic” realm of the poem.²¹ As Moi (1986a: vi) has pointed out, Kristeva's project has been from the outset “[t]o think the unthinkable”. In “Revolution in Poetic Language”, Julia Kristeva (1986a: 89-136) discusses (mostly following Freud's and Lacan's theories) how poetic discourse constantly breaches the “thetic” boundary between the symbolic realm of language and a semiotic unarticulated realm.²² For Kristeva, the semiotic is the “feminine” and “enigmatic”, that realm indifferent to language and “irreducible to its intelligible verbal translation” (p. 97). In contrast to the symbolic, the semiotic is prior to language (sign and syntax), and therefore, is not cognitive (ibid). It is a phase dominated by the space of the mother's body, what is called the *chora* (p. 93). The *chora* (a term borrowed from Plato's *Timaeus*) is defined by everything that precedes the symbolic: bodily eroticism, melodies, and maternal rhythms. Although Kristeva equates the ‘semiotic’ and pre-Oedipal with femininity, she does not identify the ‘feminine’ with a biological woman or the

²¹ The most obvious similarity between Boland and Kristeva is that both reject radical feminism. Kristeva's uneasy relationship with feminism stems from her fear that any sort of political discourse “will necessarily reveal itself as another master-discourse” (Moi 1986a: 10). Kristeva moves away from feminist attempts to homogenize ‘Woman’ under what she calls the “totalizing use” of the plural “we” (Kristeva 1986c: 199), and adopts a sceptical attitude to any notion of a universal sexual identity. Likewise, Boland (1996a: 234) has declared her fear that feminism threatens her project as a poet. As we have already seen in those poems where Boland focus on the simplification involved in any sort of artistic representation, her work constantly exemplifies the fallibility involved in recuperating a woman's essence. Boland's mature work is located outside the realm of essentialist ideologies such as feminism and nationalism, for they construct identity on differences and opposition. As a result of this, both Kristeva and Boland, adopt a politics of marginality.

²² By means of these two orders, semiotic and symbolic, Kristeva transforms Lacan's distinction between the imaginary and the symbolic. Whereas Lacan insists on a definite separation between the imaginary and the symbolic, Kristeva stresses a continuation between these two orders (Sarup 1993: 123).

'masculine' with a biological man.²³ The pre-Oedipal mother actually encompasses both 'masculinity and 'femininity'. In her emphasis on marginality, Kristeva defines the 'feminine' more in terms of "positionality" (occupying a position of marginality) than in terms of "essences" (Moi 1997: 112). On the other hand, the symbolic is used by Kristeva to refer to the paternal zone, an Oedipalized system regulated by the Law of the Father and "established through the objective constraints of biological (including sexual) differences and concrete, historical family structures" (Kristeva 1986a: 97). The symbolic is an order superimposed on the semiotic; in other words, it controls the various semiotic processes (p. 98). Whereas the semiotic maternal realm is unrepresentable, the symbolic phallic realm is always articulated (pp. 99-100).

Kristeva's main thesis is that, in poetry, the semiotic surpasses its boundaries and disrupts the symbolic realm: "In 'artistic' practices the semiotic – the precondition of the symbolic – is revealed as that which also destroys the symbolic" (Kristeva 1986a: 103). By transgressing the boundaries of the symbolic order, the poet is able to articulate what is usually unspoken. It is here where Kristeva locates resistance to the conventional (and symbolic) patriarchal culture through which we experience the world (p. 113).²⁴ The return of the semiotic is manifested, for example, in the 'marginal' discourse of avant-garde literature. Kristeva (1986a: 89) applies her theory to the texts of two early modernist poets: Mallarmé and Lautréamont. Their work provides, according to Kristeva, a more direct manifestation of the semiotic than is usually possible in more conventional symbolic representations. In their close involvement with the unconscious and the semiotic, these poets challenge the traditional gender divisions that are at the core of the symbolic. According to this critic, these marginal and repressed aspects of language surface in poetry by means of several techniques, techniques that happen to appear in Boland's poetry.

One of the ways by which the semiotic can surface within the symbolic is by means of negation, which involves the existence of a "death drive" (Kristeva 1986a: 120).²⁵ The poet introduces a "death drive" that threatens to reduce the subject to non-existence, something that the symbolic order suppresses. As Kristeva (1986a: 120) argues,

'art' takes on murder and moves through it. It assumes murder in so far as artistic practice considers death the inner boundary of the signifying process. Crossing that boundary is precisely what constitutes 'art'. In other

²³ As Sarup (1993: 123) has argued, Kristeva "does not have any theory of 'femininity' and 'femaleness'. [W]hat she does have is a theory of marginality, subversion, and dissidence".

²⁴ Bhabha's definition of minority discourse is helpful here: the "in-between of image and sign, the accumulative and the adjunct, presence and proxy" (1995: 307). Like Kristeva, to whom Bhabha is greatly indebted, Bhabha understands the subversive as located outside the limits of conventional language. By referring to what is "in-between image and sign", Bhabha refers to an unidentifiable and inarticulate void, which lies in what Kristeva has called the semiotic.

²⁵ As Kristeva (1986a: 95) explains, the semiotic *chora* is the place where the subject is both produced and threatened with annihilation: "the semiotic *chora* is no more than the place where the subject is both generated and negated, the place where his unity succumbs before the process of charges and stases that produce him".

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words, it is as if death becomes interiorized by the subject of such a practice; in order to function, he must make himself the bearer of death [...]. Through themes, ideologies, and social meanings, the artist introduces into the symbolic order an asocial drive.

The existence of this semiotic “death-drive” that would ultimately dissolve the identity of the subject is clearly observed in Boland's poetry. As we have seen in poems such as “Anna Liffey”, “Time and Violence”, and “A Woman Painted in Leaf” (*In a Time of Violence*), Boland's act of speaking always leads to death and absence. In this sense, Boland's ‘self’ in these poems (her ‘Irishness’ and ‘womanhood’) is always represented in terms of erasure.

Another way by which the *chora* is perceived within the symbolic realm of language is, according to Kristeva (1986a: 89) by ‘subversion’, which implies the presence of an unfixed, volatile, and subversive writing subject, which she calls “the subject in process”. This writer subverts the symbolic by means of “contradictions, meaninglessness, disruption, silences, and absences” (Moi 1986a: 13).

This unfixed, volatile, and subversive writing subject, these silences, contradictions, and absences that Kristeva mentions, surface in Boland's poetry. One way to escape the symbolic is by means of adopting a subversive attitude towards the rationality of language. By means of silences and dissonant gaps, Boland creates what Fulford (2002a: 214) calls “a differential space” to counteract the authoritarian languages of nationalism and imperialism (which have in their own ways simplified and distorted women's reality). Boland's poetry constantly alludes to an absence which cannot be written with the effect of questioning the “authenticity” of imperialist and nationalist representations alike.

It is significant how Irigaray (1991: 176), like Kristeva, also conceives the ‘feminine’ as a category outside the symbolic, and therefore connected to silence: “in the most extreme moments of sensation, which still lie in the future, each self-discovery takes place in that area which cannot be spoken of, but that forms the fluid basis of life and language”. According to this feminist, language is masculine, in a system exclusively constructed around one fundamental signifier: the phallus. As women remain outside “the father's discourse”, their moment of articulation also occurs outside the very margins of language and, as such, it can only be grasped as “that strange word of silence” (p. 175). In this sense, Irigaray suggests that it is because of their fluid female sex that women turn out to be not only mysterious to the male, but also silent in the very moment when they attempt to express their inner selves/sensations.²⁶ Nevertheless, the main difference

²⁶ French feminist Gauthier (1981a: 164) has also identified women's language with silences and wordlessness:

And then, blank pages, gaps, borders, spaces, and silence, holes in discourse: these women emphasize the aspect of feminine writing which is the most difficult to verbalize. [...] If the reader feels a bit disoriented in this new space, one which is obscure and silent, it proves perhaps that it is women's place.

between both feminist critics is that whereas Irigaray refers to women more explicitly, Kristeva does not locate the "feminine" in terms of sex but, as we have seen, in terms of occupying a position of marginality. Rather than to her fluid sexuality, as Irigaray would say, Boland's silences and disruptions in language respond to the marginal position Kristeva refers to. The two constitutive aspects of Boland's identity, her 'Irishness' and her 'womanhood', have always been marginalized and oppressed, just like the semiotic realm, both in imperialist and nationalist accounts.

If one looks closely both at her prose accounts and her poetry, whenever Boland talks about 'Irishness' (in particular the Irish past) and 'womanhood' (women's experiences), they only stand as powerful metaphors for types of humiliation and types of silences. In this sense, Boland views these two categories more in terms of marginality, like Kristeva, and not in terms of essences. Throughout *Object Lessons*, Boland defines 'Irishness' and 'womanhood' by means of words such as "silence", "dispossession", and "suffering". She narrates how, when she set herself to write a poem, she came to the table with "an Irishness which was not bardic or historic but full of silences" (Boland 1996a: 114). For Boland, "silence" is what defines Irishness. The colonial attempts to define 'Irishness' are not adequate for Boland, for they are loaded with racist and distorted accounts that do not bear witness to the reality of the Irish. But these silences that Boland finds in 'Irishness' also recall women's silences, their omission from national and historical accounts. Later, Boland (1996a: 135) asserts that what unites Irishness and womanhood are their common features of dispossession and suffering: "The wrath and grief of Irish history seemed to me, as it did to many, one of our true possessions. Women were part of that wrath, had endured that grief". In an interview with Wilson (1990b: 84), Boland makes even clearer the explicit association between both terms: "Womanhood and Irishness are metaphors for one another. There are resonances of humiliations, oppression, and silence in both of them and I think you can understand one better by experiencing the other". Here, Boland seems to be uniting in the same description both sorts of colonialisms, the imperialistic and the patriarchal. Fulford (2002a: 205) is indeed right when she sharply criticizes Boland for "eliding the differences between patriarchal victimization and colonial exploitation". Nevertheless, Boland here is not only linking both forms of colonial oppression, she is also questioning the very nature of identity-making itself. Boland exposes the ways in which language has worked as a vehicle of oppression. Colonial and imperialist attempts to define the Irish as an inferior race have oppressed and silenced their reality. Similarly, nationalist attempts to heal the damage caused by imperialism in their construction of Irishness have fallen into the same trap. In a country that has suffered the colonial presence, the construction of a national identity has run the risk of reiterating the similar structures of oppression

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found in colonial and racist representations, by simplifying images of women in its literature. Boland's own way of defining womanhood and nationhood as 'silences' clearly shows how she tries to move away from authoritarian defining procedures, which could lead to further simplification and misrepresentation. By focusing on her inability to express herself within language, Boland avoids using her own poem as another form of oppression.

As early as *Night Feed*, we start to perceive in poems such as "The Muse Mother", Boland's need to find another language which can express more truthfully women's ordinary world. The 'symbolic' language seems to be insufficient for the poet's purpose of describing, in this case, mother and daughter relationships. As Irigaray (1991: 39-40) has argued, the exclusively masculine symbolic world avoids the representation of "the relationship with the placenta", of that "first bodily encounter with the mother". Boland's desire is, therefore, to create a new language that gives voice to the relationship with the primitive mother, just as feminists such as Irigaray (1991: 160) advocate. In this poem, the speaker is standing, as is typical in Boland's poetry, inside her own house, watching from her window. Suddenly, she glimpses an ordinary scene: "a woman hunkering/ her busy hand/ worrying a child's face". The narrator is suddenly captured by the mother's simple act of wiping her child's face and taking him to her lap. Drawn to this 'vision', Boland attempts to create a poetic place that can shelter this scene:

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.

Whereas the poem starts with no enjambments between stanzas, at the end there are very strong enjambments and long unfolding sentences that parallel the speaker's melancholic tone. The poet's main purpose is to return to a "mother tongue", to a primitive language that gives voice to mother and child relationships. As Hagen and Zelman (2004: 54) explain, this language would express the routinized gesture of a mother wiping her child's face; it would connect past and present, by the

common and ordinary rituals of motherhood. In this sense, this language is also connected with a subaltern world, an Irish "past", the speaker's "roots". Nevertheless, Boland faces the impossibility of her project. This new language stands out of her reach: it is a "lost noun/ out of context", a "stray figure of speech". In this sense, the language Boland aspires to belongs more to a semiotic realm than to a symbolic one, a pre-Oedipal space where, as Kristeva (1986a: 97) notes, mother and child are not separated. As Boland can only express herself within the symbolic language, she can only imagine what it would look like to be "able to speak at last/ my mother tongue". The presence of the conditional 'if' as well as modals such as 'could' and 'might' of the passage quoted above indicates that, for the speaker, recovery becomes a matter of conjecture. Boland can only, as she says in "Listen. This is the Noise of Myth" (*The Journey*), create a "sequence of evicted possibilities". She has no access to a more 'authentic' idiom, a language of "pure syllables". Her "roots" become as unstable and volatile as that rain that is constantly described in her poems. In this sense, she stands, once again, for an inappropriate spokesperson, an unsuitable "sibyl" of the women's past. In her rejection of an authoritative stance, she is at least, as a powerless poet, able to draw us into a language of 'silences' that expresses the remnants of unrecorded lives.

Boland's interest in creating a woman's language of 'gestures', a past idiom of 'silences', is continued more strongly and consistently in *The Journey* in poems such as "Fever". As in "Our Origins are in the Sea" (*Outside History*), the woman poet attempts in this poem to come to terms not only with the Irish past but also with her family heritage. In particular, "Fever" focuses on Boland's grandmother, who died in a fever ward leaving five orphan daughters behind. Haberstroh (1996: 215) notes that the new generation of women poets in Ireland is usually concerned with "the sacrifices that mothering demands". This trend among Irish women writers responds to a desire to counteract the conventional ideas of motherhood of the Irish national tradition, by presenting the sacrifices of women in the past, in raising their children alone and creating "a home without a man" (ibid). In fact, Boland's grandmother is an emblem which stands for all those Irish women who suffered hardships in the past. Her forgotten death represents the lost history of women's lives, ignored by the legacy of the Irish past. Both in her prose work and in poems such as "What We Lost" (*Outside History*), "Lava Cameo" (*In a Time of Violence*), and "Called" (*Against Love Poetry*), Boland finds the need to remember her grandmother's life, for she realizes that "the story of Irish history is not her story. [...] Inasmuch as her adult life had a landscape, it was made of the water her husband sailed on and not the fractured, much-claimed piece of earth she was born to" (1996a: 32). The only evidence the woman poet has from the life of her

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grandmother is, funnily enough, her death certificate, as Boland (1996a: 29) explains in *Object Lessons*:

Here is her name. Written in a sloping, florid hand across her death certificate, the letters of the name thick and thin by turns- [...] It is a wretched document. What else could it be? [...] The National Maternity Hospital was not a natural place for her. She could only have come there in some out-of-the-ordinary way. With disease or fever. The cause of death – peritonitis – is consistent with a complication of puerperal fever, which that year had swept the lying-in wards of the city. If she did not have it when she entered the hospital, she was likely to get it during her stay.

As the *Subaltern Studies*' project, Boland's main objective in "Fever" is to recover those traces of a life that remain on the margins of imperialist and nationalist accounts. The first stanza significantly starts with the omission of the grammatical subject:

is what remained or what they thought
remained after the ague and the sweats
were over and the shock of wild flowers
at the bedside had been taken away

The absence of the noun phrase in the initial position is telling. On the one hand, the title "Fever" may be understood as the subject of the sentence: the contagious disease, the fever of the speaker's grandmother, is the only thing that was left after her death; her perishing only brought more infection and illness. On the other hand, the woman poet is deliberately omitting the subject in order to suggest that nothing has remained after her terrible death. In other words, there is no official evidence of her sufferings, her painful febrile condition. Even the "wild flowers" at her bedside, which could have been the only possible indication that someone cared for her, had been taken away. From the very first stanza, the woman speaker makes explicit that the fever which killed her grandmother represents a misplaced story, unrecorded by official accounts. Note how there are hardly any punctuation marks. Both here and in the following stanzas, clauses and phrases juxtapose without the use of conjunctions; the sentences are long, and there are enjambments between lines and even stanzas. The outspreading movement from line to line down the page enhances the elegist's act of remembrance, the melancholic recollection of the facts and experiences of her grandmother's life. On the other hand, the repetition of subjectless clause structures in subsequent stanzas indicates that the woman speaker is constantly entering the past, in her obsession to bring back this local story.

Nevertheless, the poet's task is not only difficult but impossible as well, because, as Boland (1996a: 5) explains in *Object Lessons*, she tries to give evidence to "a woman I never knew and

cannot now recover". As she later argues, "whenever I tried to find the quick meanings of my day in the deeper ones of the past, she interposed a fierce presence in case the transaction should be too comfortable, too lyric" (p. 171). The main problem Boland faces is that she finds no appropriate language to reconstruct women's past. As Boland argues in "Lava Cameo" (*In a Time of Violence*), a poem that similarly tries to capture the life of her grandmother, this woman's story only stands as "a rumour or a folk memory,/ something thrown out once in a random conversation,/ a hint merely". In a similar way, in "Fever", her grandmother's past only makes itself explicit to the woman speaker in ghostly terms:

Names, shadows, visitations, hints
and a half-sense of half-lives remain.
And nothing else, nothing more [...]

Since Boland lacks the necessary facts to give an accurate description of her grandmother's life, she decides to reinvent her life, in order to give voice to her suffering and anguish as she died in a fever ward:

I re-construct the soaked-through midnights;
Vigils, the histories I never learned
to predict the lyric of; and re-construct
risk; as if silence could become rage,

as if what we lost is a contagion
that breaks out in what cannot be
shaken out from words or beaten out
from meaning and survives to weaken

what is given, what is certain
and burns away everything that this
exact moment of delirium when
someone cries out someone's name.

Haberstroh (1996: 78) believes that these stanzas "probably" contain "Boland's most direct statement of intent". Indeed, these lines exemplify the woman poet's purpose to make her grandmother and all the women from the past more than mere "names, shadows, visitations". The first person plural pronoun indicates that, when the woman is addressing her audience, she deliberately includes us, as readers, to make us aware of the inevitability of this loss. Her attempt to "re-construct the soaked-through midnights/ Vigils, the histories" of Irish women within the poem is connected to Kristeva's project of recording the semiotic within the symbolic. Her project is difficult, because, like the semiotic realm, women's past has not been recorded through language. Boland searches for a reality that lies outside the symbolic, a reality that "cannot be /shaken out from words or beaten out/ from meaning". There is no information whatsoever on

which to rely, and mixing facts, memories, rumour, and imagination are the only possible means Boland has to bring women's past into the present context of the poem: "And the way I build that legend now is the way I heard it: out of rumour, fossil fact, half memories [...]. I must become a fictional interventionist" (Boland 1996a: 10). Rumours and half memories stand in contrast to the authoritarian language of British imperialism, Irish nationalism, and the Roman Catholic Church, 'languages' which, in their various forms, have simplified and distorted women's reality with images such as 'Hibernia', 'Mother Ireland', and the 'Virgin Mary'. The fragmented pieces of information that Boland recovers seem to belong to a semiotic realm more than to a symbolic one. They recall the existence of an oral tradition which is connected to women's lives, and which, in Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill's (1992: 29) words, is more "in touch with the irrational" than with the rational aspect of language. Nevertheless, in spite of having access to these fragments of oral tradition, Boland cannot recover her grandmother's reality. Boland can only create a world of possibilities, "a pastiche of what is/ real and what is/not", as the speaker in "Lava Cameo" argues. Hagen and Zelman (2004: 5) explain that the kind of art Boland favours is that which "offers an air of conditionality and possibilities". In fact, as we have seen, conditional clauses are typical in Boland's evocation of the Irish past.²⁷ The repetition of the tentative 'as if' in "Fever" indicates the speaker's limitations in her act of reconstruction. Fiction and imagination do not guarantee recovery, and Boland's attempt "to cry out someone's name" in "Fever" inevitably leads to "silence" and "to what we lost". Nevertheless, and as Kristeva (1986a: 89) has pointed out, silence in artistic representation is one manifestation of the semiotic, and as such, it can subvert the symbolic. Furthermore, as Sarup (1993: 124) has explained, Kristeva also believes that "madness" together with poetry, is another "privileged moment" when the semiotic surpasses its boundaries and disrupts the symbolic. "Fever" not only ends with silence, but also with a woman's unreasonable and incoherent cry, just as in "A Woman Painted in Leaf" (*In a Time of Violence*). The new language Boland speaks is uttered in a state of fever; it is full of anxiety and hallucinations. The lack of punctuation of the whole poem reinforces the state of uncontrolled excitement and emotion in which the speaker is immersed. By recording in the poem her grandmother's "silence" and "delirium", Boland's project is as subversive as Kristeva's, for she manages to "weaken/ what is given, what is certain", to counteract the 'certainty' and 'truthfulness' of colonial and nationalist narratives. The feminist postcolonial critic Chow (2003: 333) has suggested that silence, rather than a failure, is the best evidence of the existence of a subaltern female figure which has suffered imperialist and nationalist oppression:

²⁷ It is significant how, when Spivak (1994: 103) narrates in "Can the Subaltern Speak?" the local story of an Indian girl who committed suicide, her discourse is constructed upon words such as "perhaps" and "possible".

The native's victimization consists in the fact that the active evidence – the original witness – of her victimization may no longer exist in any intelligible, coherent shape. Rather than [...] restoring her to her 'authentic' context, we should argue that it is the native's silence which is the most important clue to her displacement.

By focusing on the 'silences' that Boland encounters on her journey towards the past, she is able to bring to the fore women's displacement in history. This is one of the benefits Boland encounters in her impossibility to retrieve the past: although unable to recover the life of her grandmother, she manages to show the deficiency of historical accounts. It is significant how the poem favours the movement from a personal to an impersonal voice, something typical in Boland's poetry as observed in "Lace" (*The Journey*). The repetition of "someone" at the end of "Fever" indicates not only Boland's difficulty to give a name, to consign an identity to the person who is crying out, but also her reluctance to define her poetic images. Poetic definition, as we have seen, runs the risk of being misrepresentative. On the other hand, silence can suggest the existence of another life, rather than categorize it.

Therefore, and with Kristeva in mind, Boland's poems focus on a female subjectivity and an Irish past which cannot be articulated in language. The very title of poems such as "The Unlived Life" (*The Journey and Other Poems*), "We are Always too Late", "What we Lost", and "Outside History" (*Outside History*), indicate the inadequacy the female artist finds to represent reality by means of poetic language. This aspect of Boland's work has been unexplored within Irish criticism, with the exception of Meaney (1993a) and Fulford (2002b). Meaney (1993; 150) has argued that gaps and silences occupy the centre of Boland's poems, as if there is something "which cannot be troped", put into language. Fulford (2002b: 147) has also noted this aspect in her poetry. This critic asserts that Boland attempts to record a woman's time/space that is by implication ungraspable, and that in her poems "[d]isruptions in the syntax, usually in the form of a hyphen, offer the sense of a silent space being alluded to in the language [...] at moments when it is as if the poet swallows her own tongue" (ibid). In fact, the reiterative use of hyphens in Boland's poetry signal an absent meaning, the fact that Ireland's past cannot adequately be told within the symbolic.

As was hinted at in "Fever", Boland attempts to reconstruct an appropriate women's history by relying on the oral tradition. The importance of the oral tradition is acknowledged by other Irish women poets such as Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill (1992: 29), who praises it as follows:

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I love this aspect of our culture. It is one of the main things that drew me back to live here, after seven years on the shaughrawn. It is infinitely more exciting and much more a human challenge to live in a country which is even just intermittently in touch with the irrational than in one which has set its face resolutely against it.

Although both Ní Dhomhnaill (1992: 29) and Boland (1997/1998: 155) have acknowledged the inherent danger of the Irish oral tradition in denying the incorporation of the lives of women as being fit subject matter, they both believe that women's oral tradition stands as an appropriate medium to counteract the narratives of the Irish nationalist tradition. In "The Oral Tradition" (*The Journey*), Boland focuses on a local story she hears by chance in order to offer an alternative to those traditional heroic tales. This poem starts by recalling the moment when, "at the end of a reading/ or a workshop or whatever", the speaker starts to reflect on the contrast between the poems she has just heard and the vulnerability of less sophisticated forms of oral expression:

only half-wondering
what becomes of words,
the brisk herbs of language,
the fragrances we think we sing,
if anything.

For Boland, the oral tradition is far removed from the language of poetry. Whereas the written word is immortalized in poetry, the spoken word seems to disappear in the air. Not recorded within symbolic representation, the remnants of an oral tradition stand as cultural remains that can only be perceived, "if anything", as "fragrances", or as the speaker later says, "in the suggestion of a texture/ like the low flax gleam/ that comes off polished leather". It is typical of Boland to record women's language in terms of texture. In "The Unlived Life" (*The Journey*), the speaker describes herself in the middle of a conversation about sewing with her neighbour. Their interaction revolves around "the texture of synthetics as compared/ with the touch of strong cloth/ and how they both washed". It is as if women's language cannot be grasped within the symbolic language. In "The Oral Tradition", Boland tries to capture a similar moment. The speaker, "only half-listening", suddenly overhears two women in conversation:

Two women
were standing in shadow,
one with her back turned.
Their talk was a gesture,
an outstretched hand.

They talked to each other
and words like "summer"
"birth" "great-grandmother"
kept pleading with me,
urging me to follow.

Once again, women's oral tradition is described in terms of gestures ("an outstretched hand") rather than in symbolic terms. The speaker is magnetically attracted to the story of a woman giving birth to her son in an open field. Boland is drawn to their talk because she feels that their story contains something which connects her with an Irish female past. Nevertheless, the fact that one of the speakers has her back turned to Boland advances the poet's exclusion from this conversation and her later impossibility to reconstruct this tale. Boland can only hear scraps and fragments of their talk: "summer", "birth", and "great-grandmother". Nevertheless, in the following stanzas, these separated words seem to be put finally in their context:

"She could feel it coming" –
one of them was saying –
"all the way there,
across the fields at evening
and no one there, God help her,

"and she had on a skirt
of cross-woven linen
and the little one
kept pulling at it.
It was nearly night ..."

(Wood hissed and split
in the open grate,
broke apart in sparks,
a windfall of light
in the room's darkness)

"...when she lay down
and gave birth to him
in an open meadow.
What a child that was
to be born without a blemish!"

Boland incorporates in the poem an important fragment of the women's actual conversation. Nevertheless, the interruptive use of hyphens in the first stanza and the flickering parenthesis in the story emphasize, as Johnston (1997: 199) explains, the fragility of the woman's retelling. Boland has always been drawn to the power of women's oral tradition. In another poem from *Outside History*, "Contingencies", the poet tries to capture "the way women spoke in my childhood". But, as the very same title indicates, Boland lacks actual facts to recover this tradition. Whenever she wants to incorporate women's stories, there is an air of uncertainty in her reconstructions. Since oral tales are composites of facts, legend, and folklore, the poet can only guess what might or might not have happened in the past. In "The Oral Tradition", Boland attempts, once again, to reconstruct the scene where this 'subaltern' woman gave birth. As in "The Achill Woman", the poet feels compelled to record "the musical subtext" of a summer landscape

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of mauves eaves on lilac
and the laburnum past
and shadow where the lime
tree dropped its bracts
in frills of contrast

where she lay down
in vetch and linen

The lack of punctuation of these verse lines together with the unfolding movement of language suggest that the speaker's reconstruction is an act of melancholic and elegiac recovery. While the speaker tries to narrate this story in her own words, she feels that something is lost in the process. Indeed, as this woman from the past lifts her son from the ground, both figures are suddenly inscribed in

the archive
they would shelter in:

the oral song
avid as superstition,
layered like an amber in
the wreck of language
and the remnants of a nation.

The sheltering "archive" becomes "the oral song", a residuum that lies hidden under the rhetoric of the nation. Because of the relegation of women's lives to poetic obscurity, ordinary stories such as this are of no importance. Dispatched by what is symbolically relevant, they enter a semiotic terrain on the margins of official languages. This local story about a girl giving birth is like an unpolished fossil resin, "an amber", that lies hidden under a rather polished and sophisticated poetic tradition, a tradition merely concerned with singing the heroic glories of nationhood. As the speaker at the end of the poem leaves the workshop and returns home, she encounters another landscape that contrasts sharply with the story's summer setting: "It was bitter outside,/ a real winter's night". By describing the place where she is located as "real", Boland seems to imply that the landscape of the oral tradition is 'non-real'. Like those poems she was listening to in the reading, this oral tale seems to be a mere rhetoric construction with its own conventions, an artificial mingling of fiction and folklore. She realizes that the story she hears is more a legend than a 'truthful' account. Nevertheless, as she heads home by train, she suddenly feels that the scattered fragments of this oral conversation contain an authentic vestige of the Irish past:

I had distances
ahead of me: iron miles

in trains, iron rails
repeating instances
and reasons; the wheels

singing innuendoes, hints,
outlines underneath
the surface, a sense
suddenly of truth,
its resonance.

As I have already said, Boland is a traditional poet who feels compelled to record 'truthful' images. At the end of this poem, the speaker feels that this oral story is authentic, that it can bear witness to what really happened in the past, without distorting or simplifying reality. As in "The Unlived Life", a poem where the train stands as an "iron omen/ of another life passing, passing", the reiterative and prolonged sound of the wheels of the train in this poem offer a "musical subtext" from which an unrecorded 'subaltern' past comes back to life.²⁸ These echoing and semiotic sounds, although "underneath/ the surface" of those national and historical accounts, open a whole new visionary world where Boland can locate her 'origin' as a suburban ordinary woman, where she can establish a link with those women from the past. But this sound is only perceived "suddenly". As in "Fever", where the speaker's cry was abruptly addressed in a "moment of delirium", this moment of semiotic revelation is for the speaker temporal and fragile. The sound will quickly fade away, just as the poet attempts to grasp it within the poem. Boland, once again, stands out as an unsuitable "sibyl": she cannot sing the past in "pure syllables". Her enlightenment is only momentary, and as such her authority to act as a spokesperson is undermined. Nevertheless, in recounting her difficulty in giving voice to what lies "underneath/ the surface", in a semiotic realm which is inarticulate and full of 'silences', Boland is able to be subversive. By inserting within the symbolic realm of her poem this local and ordinary story, Boland calls into question the authority not only of imperialist accounts of Ireland's history, but also of "pedagogical" nationalist discourses (Bhabha 1995: 147), by exposing their gaps and incongruities. As a form of representation of those who have stood on the margins of power, the oral tradition is in fact what Bhabha would call a "performative" representation, a counter-narrative of more heterogeneous stories (ibid).

The importance of women's oral tradition becomes also the topic of a poem included in *Outside History*, "What We Lost". The poem introduces us into the richness of a female domestic world: the images are of cambric bodices, lavender sachets, love letters, bed linen, and "scented closets". Although it is clearly a private sphere, all these images suggest women's rich lived

²⁸ The sound of the wheels of a train also stand as a musical subtext for a subaltern past in "Happiness" (*The Lost Land*), where the speaker hears "the wheels/ saying [...] *never again, never again*".

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experiences, an Irish female collective memory of quotidian stories. In this setting, Boland focuses on an ordinary woman who is sewing in the kitchen:

Dusk. And the candles brought in then.
One by one. And the quiet sweat of wax.

There is a child at her side.
The tea is poured, the stitching put down.
The child grows still, sensing something of importance.
The woman settles and begins her story.

As Hagen and Zelman (2004: 54) note, these verse lines are constructed like “stage directions for a play”. The curtains have opened, and the candle light gradually brings both actors, mother and child, to the foreground of the stage. The woman is about to start addressing her child, as we, the readers and audience, also wait for “something of importance” to happen. But unlike “The Oral Tradition”, no dialogue or dramatic soliloquy is recorded within the poem. Instead, the speaker takes us directly into the end of the play:

The woman finishes. The story ends.
The child, who is my mother, gets up, moves away.

In the winter air, unheard, unshared,
the moment happens, hangs fire, leads nowhere.
The light will fail and the room darken,
the child fall asleep and the story be forgotten.

The fields are dark already.
The frail connections have been made and are broken.
The dumb-show of legend has become language,
is becoming silence [...]

The moment has happened so fast that the woman's story is left unrecorded within the poem. The conversation between mother and child is already lost, as a “dumb-show of legend” which is “unheard, unshared”, and “forgotten”. Boland yearns to speak, once again, a ‘mother tongue’, a lexicon of women, but as we learn, her attempt fails and she can only speak a language of “silence[s]”. The inheritance that the poet's mother could have passed on to her is fractured and is no longer recoverable. As Boland declared in a poetry reading on June 19th 2004, in the National Concert Hall, Dublin, her mother “never referred to her history and she never discussed it with me. No matter how I tried, and no matter how much I would be interested, she would turn it aside”.²⁹ In fact, Boland's poems always stress the disconnection between mother and daughters, as we

²⁹ This reading was recorded with the permission of Eavan Boland.

have seen in "The Making of an Irish Goddess" (*Outside History*).³⁰ That is why Meaney (1993a: 150) has expressed her belief that Boland usually exposes in her poems an inadequacy "to represent the maternal", the unity between mother and child. But Boland is not only emphasizing the separation between mother and child. She is also focusing on her detachment from women's oral tradition, from a more viable and suitable representation of 'subaltern' consciousness. Boland's attempt to get to "the void between [...] rhetoric and reality" (interview with Consalvo 1992: 96) is not an easy project. As "What We Lost" indicates, language and reality cannot be reunited.

In any case, the very absence of the actual conversation between mother and child is in itself the best evidence that "something of importance" actually happened, for the speaker recalls: "Believe me, what is lost is here in this room/ on this veiled evening". Once again, Kristeva's semiotic realm emerges and disrupts the symbolic domain. The "silence" that Boland records is not ineffective, for it forces us to focus on the gap between the nationalist rhetoric and a subaltern unrecorded past. Speechlessness is the best evidence that national narrations are incomplete in their exclusion of women's stories. On the other hand, the richness of women's lived experiences is not left inarticulate in the poem. Boland manages to give voice to women's language by a catalogue of ordinary objects, palpable pieces of evidence of her grandmother's life:

who will know that once

words were possibilities and disappointments,
were scented closets filled with love-letters
and memories and lavender hemmed into muslin,
stored in sachets, aired in bed-linen;

and travelled silks and the tones of cotton
tautened into bodices, subtly shaped by breathing;
were the rooms of childhood with their griefless peace,
their hands and whispers, their candles weeping brightly?

The presence of this rhetorical question indicating uncertainty undermines Boland's authority to give voice to her grandmother's story. No one can know the actual conversation. The poet's difficulty in her recovery of subaltern female consciousness prompts the constant hesitations and doubts abounding in her poetry. As in the previous poems, the mood here is distinctly elegiac. The change from present tense into past tense, so typical of Boland's poetry, is

³⁰ This disconnection is also observed in other poems such as "Night of Childhood" (*Outside History*). Although it is not declared as explicitly as in "What We Lost", the fact that the first stanza focuses on the poet's mother, and then this figure is overshadowed in the subsequent lines by a child remembering an ordinary incident in her garden, seems to suggest that both figures are equally separated.

used to indicate melancholy.³¹ On the other hand, sentences become longer at the end of the poem, as if the speaker deliberately stretches language to suggest what apparently escapes linguistic representation. As in "The Oral Tradition", women's language is recorded by means of textures (what can be touched) and fragrances (what can be smelled) rather than by means of spoken utterances (what can be heard). Her grandmother's "words", although silent now, can be perceived by the richness of her fabric and textures (i.e. linen, silks, and cotton), and also by the fragrances of her "scented closet" filled with lavender and the smell of candle wax.³² As Hagen and Zelman (2004: 56, 58) notice, Boland is drawn to express a woman's world by "a non-verbal 'grammar'", by a language "neither oral nor written, but rather a shadowy rhetoric of relics, gestures, silences". This "non-verbal 'grammar'" is in fact a semiotic terrain: having no appropriate words to talk about women and their ordinary tales, Boland can only record them by other means, which, as is typical in her mature work, suggest (but not state) the existence of another life. That is why Boland also describes her grandmother's conversation by means of "whispers", and not as a high declamatory language. As we have seen in poems such as "Whose" (*The Lost Land*), the woman poet, in contrast to the patriot, could only whisper, showing her inability to express herself with eloquence. Unlike the nationalist rhetoric, Boland avoids exerting poetic authority and writing what can be understood as another dominant discourse. Whispers are in fact constantly present in Boland's work, in poems such as "Outside History", "Contingencies" (*Outside History*), "Beautiful Speech", and "The Dolls Museum" (*In a Time of Violence*). Like in these poems, the "whispers" that we hear in "What We Lost" recall a lived existence which is unrecorded, and therefore belongs more to a semiotic realm than to a symbolic one.

This powerlessness of language, these gaps and silences Boland encounters in her process of reconstructing women's past, is constantly present in her mature poetry. In "The Journey" (*The Journey*), we similarly come across the feeling that there is something that cannot be recovered. As Gelpi (1999: 221) explains, this poem occupies a privileged place in Boland's work because it brings together the woman poet's most important concerns. One of the concerns in "The Journey" is the destabilization of the mythological image of women as passive objects, for a more truthful portrayal of women as speaking voices and poetic authors. Its second concern is the portrayal of the ordinary details of women's lives, and their suffering and anxieties as mothers and housewives. The third concern which is made explicit in the poem is the importance of giving voice to the lives of women in the Irish past, usually omitted from historical and literary accounts. In an interview with Wilson (1990b: 86), Boland makes explicit her response to the Irish past:

³¹ See for instance "On the Gift of 'The Birds of America' by John James Audubon", "Doorstep Kisses", and "A Different Light" (*Outside History*).

³² As in "Contingencies" (*Outside History*), the candles act as references to women's oral tradition.

You have to understand that you enter a society and a history at a point where it is urgently talking to itself about the meaning of this experience in its own life. A woman poet is part of Irish history. She is, first, part of the ordeal, and second, part of the meaning. And that society has to argue out the ordeal and the meaning in terms of poetry by women, just as much as poetry by men.

History is, for Boland, an "ordeal", a difficult and painful experience. Her poetry records her private account of an afflicted national history, of the suffering and distress of all those colonized men, and especially, women. Poetry becomes for Boland the place where those repressed historical women come back to live, where the wounds inflicted by national history may find their healing.

"The Journey" alludes, as its epigraph shows, to Book VI of Virgil's *Aeneid*, where Aeneas descends into the Underworld, across the banks of the Styx. The Underworld is the world of the dead, where the male hero encounters the wretched but voiceless shades, the "infant souls" killed by the various diseases and plagues that throughout history have ravaged Europe. On the other hand, the poem also refers, in an implicit way, to the myth of Ceres, going into the Underworld in her search for Persephone (remember "The Making of an Irish Goddess" in *Outside History*). Agha-Jaffar (2002: 115) understands the Underworld to be "a metaphor for the personal and collective unconscious". It is a place that shelters the images, patterns, instincts, and feelings that we share in common with all humanity. In this sense, the Underworld is also a place that transcends both time and space, a place of liminality where the past and those hidden 'truths' are harboured. Taking the above into consideration, it is therefore unsurprising that Boland exploits this metaphor in her poetry in order to talk about a subaltern past, an unrecorded and more truthful version of Ireland's history.

The poetic speaker in "The Journey" is a mother who is watching over her children at night, and who has just finished reading Sappho's poems. The context of the poem is based on the genre of the medieval 'dream vision' (Gelpi 1999: 221). The speaker falls asleep and dreams of the weeping children described in Book VI of the *Aeneid*. Unlike Virgil's, in Boland's poem, the woman is going to share the grief of the terrified mothers who must deal with their children's death. Most postcolonial theorists point out that one of the dominant motives of many postcolonial works is their forms of cross-cultural contact and interaction. As Bhabha (1995: 185) and Said (1994: 261) have argued, the postcolonial text is always a complex and hybridized formation, because it records a clear combination of forms derived from pre-colonial, nationalist, and European (imperialist) literary traditions. It is significant how Caribbean poets such as Derek Walcott and Irish writers such as James Joyce have rewritten Greek epic poems such as Homer's *Odyssey*. In Book VII (Chapter 58) of his *Omeros*, Walcott's poetic speaker, like Boland in "The Journey", similarly travels into the Underworld of the dead (Walcott 1990: 289-294). Like in

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Joyce's *Ulysses*, Walcott's use of this classical epic is subversive, for he attempts to construct a counter-epic with non-heroic figures such as Achille. Joyce's *Ulysses*, as Lloyd (1993: 104-109) explains, is similarly subversive. This work mingles stylistic elements, pastiches of different modes (biblical/liturgical, medieval, epic, legal, scientific, and journalistic) in order to parody biblical invocations as well as Ireland's nationalist conservatism.

Like Walcott and Joyce, Boland rewrites the classical epic tale with a subversive project in mind. She uses Virgil's story in order to refer to an Irish event, in particular the Great Famine, and to women's involvement in it. Although Boland is influenced by the national literary tradition, classical literature has a remarkable impact on her work (remember her use of the Ceres and Persephone myth in poems such as "The Making of an Irish Goddess" in *The Journey* or "The Pomegranate" in *In a Time of Violence*). Greek and Latin traditions are constantly intermingled in her poems with Irish myths, exemplifying the hybridity that Bhabha and Said identify in postcolonial literary works. In contrast to the nationalist emphasis on creating a singular and homogeneous voice, Boland is able to dismantle this voice by recurring to different literary traditions.

Whereas in Virgil's *Aeneid* the male pilgrim is led to the Underworld by a male guide, in "The Journey", the woman-speaker follows Sappho, "her female literary mentor" (Haberstroh 1996: 75). In this sense, Boland appropriates the male heroic journey motif (using elite conventions of poetry) from a female perspective. The choice of Sappho as guide for the woman speaker to the Underworld is significant.³³ Sappho was a female Greek lyric poet from the sixth century B.C., and, although few fragments of her romantic lyrics survive, she is considered one of the greatest poets of antiquity. Thus, Sappho stands as an exemplary woman poet, a plausible muse for Boland, as she reveals to the woman speaker in the poem a vision of deprived mothers cradling their dead infants.

The poem is constructed exclusively in quatrains. It is a narration and it intermingles two different voices: the woman speaker and her guide into the Underworld, Sappho. "The Journey" begins with the mother's reflection about the role of poetry and its usefulness:

And then the dark fell and "there has never"
I said "been a poem to an antibiotic:
never a word to compare with the odes on
the flower of the raw sloe for fever

"or the devious Africa-seeking tern
or the protein treasures of the sea-bed.

³³ The emblematic figure of Sappho has also been the source of inspiration for contemporary male poets in Ireland, such as Theo Dorgan, who in *Sappho's Daughter* (2001) establishes an imaginary dialogue between Sappho and her lover.

Depend on it, somewhere a poet is wasting
his sweet uncluttered metres on the obvious

“emblem instead of the real thing.
Instead of sulphur we shall have hyssop dipped
in the wild blood of the unblemished lamb,
so every day the language gets less

“for the task and we are less with the language.”

The poet starts in *media res* with the conjunction “and” followed by the adverb of time “then”. This indicates that the setting of the poem is already established: the classical epigraph where Aeneas descends into the Underworld is going to be the main topic of the poem, although, as has already been commented, it is going to be revised in order to incorporate the woman-mother's experiences. The woman speaker is giving free rein to her thoughts at night, the best period for the poet's creativity to flourish (as she has finished all her domestic labours). At this moment, the speaker realizes that there has never been a poem which has had the healing effects of an antibiotic, “the modern medicine which could have prevented the death of the infants in the *Aeneid*” (Haberstroh 1996: 75). Although the contemporary woman speaker knows that her children may be safe because of antibiotics, she is still able to share the fear and loss her female ancestors had to undergo. No poem, the woman implies, has been a sufficient witness to the sufferings of women in the past, to their struggles in preventing the death of their children with healing herbs such as “the flower of the raw sloe for fever”, or “the protein treasures of the seabed”. Instead, the woman suggests, male poets like Virgil were more concerned with representing an idealized hero, an “emblem” for the nation, than with giving voice to the “real thing”. As Bieler (1982: 207) explains, Virgil's Aeneas stands as the ideal representative of a Roman community; he becomes a communal figure who lacks individual features, and is raised as *magnanimus* and *pius*. These honorary titles, *magnanimous* and *pious*, present him as the typical epic hero of divine ancestry, who was endowed with great courage and strength. This legendary hero was portrayed by Virgil as an exemplary warrior who was favoured by the gods. Thus, epic poetry, according to the woman, is loaded with sacred images, such as the “hyssop dipped/ in the wild blood of the unblemished lamb”. The hyssop is a Eurasian plant of aromatic leaves, usually mentioned in the Bible, and used for purifying rites.³⁴ This image, together with the “unblemished lamb”, has religious and divine connotations, in contrast to the drug substance “sulphur” which has more Pagan connotations. Thus, the woman poet is explicitly criticizing the mythological figure of Aeneas, who was celebrated by his bold exploits, and who was allegorized as the “unblemished lamb” (a saviour, Christ), or the healing “hyssop”. In this sense, traditional epics and lyrics have

³⁴ *The American Heritage Dictionary*, Third Edition Version 3.6a. SoftKey International Inc. 1994.

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not employed language to represent reality (reality is allegorized by “sulpha”), but quite the contrary, to represent an idealized world of heroic figures and powerful gods: “so every day the language gets less/ for the task and we are less with the language”. Once again, Boland reflects on the disjunction between “rhetoric and reality” that has characterized the (Irish) poetic tradition: while an elevated and dignified poetic language (nice rhymes, beautiful poetic forms, and neat metres) were intended to celebrate the feats of the legendary hero, a more accurate representation of the ‘real’ (those men and women struggling to survive) was left unrecorded. Boland's poetry aims at creating a language that can represent this reality, that can give voice to the actual experience and ordinary details of women's lives, so that, paraphrasing the speaker's words, “we could be *more* with the language”. But as we will see, her project is bound to fail as well.

Once the woman speaker finishes her speech, her “anger fade[s]”. After her long diatribe, she focuses upon her current situation, describing her disorderly room and the landscape outside:

The poplars shifted their music in the garden,
a child startled in a dream,
my room was a mess –

the usual hardcovers, half-finished cups,
clothes piled on an old chair

As in “The Women” (*The Journey*), this woman's world seems to revolve around two poles: her interest in literature (as the presence of books indicates) and her preoccupation for her children's health. Once again, there is in the landscape Boland describes a ‘musical subtext’, a suggestion of past and unrecorded life experiences. This anticipates the poet's vision. Falling asleep, she dreams of Sappho suddenly appearing to her:

she came and stood beside me
and I would have known her anywhere
and I would have gone with her anywhere
and she came wordlessly
and without a word I went with her.

The verbal parallelism of these lines gives emphasis to the encounter with this female literary mentor, increasing its importance and significance for the speaker. Obediently, the woman in the poem follows her without hesitation. Punctuation marks disappear, to indicate that the woman speaker is in a sort of trance, a cataleptic state, in the face of her powerful muse. In fact, Boland frequently imagines her journey into the past in ghostly terms, as the following stanzas indicate in their portrayal of the poet's descent into the Underworld:

down down down without so much as
ever touching down but always, always
with a sense of mulch beneath us
the way of stairs winding down to a river.

The repetition of lexical items and the presence of present participles indicate that the woman is in a period of transition, moving from the earthly world to the world of the dead. This is the journey the title records, from consciousness into unconsciousness, from her ordinary life to the obliterated world of the past. Boland's descent into the Underworld can be identified with what Said (1994: 261) has called the "voyage in", one of the most important features of postcolonial writers. Said's notion of the "voyage in" refers to those postcolonial writers who strive to "enter into the discourse of Europe and the West, to mix with it, transform it, to make it acknowledge marginalized or suppressed or forgotten histories".³⁵ In fact, by entering a male story, Boland transforms it, and gives it a new dimension. Her descent into Aeneas's Underworld preludes a world of vision and revelation for the woman speaker. Following Sappho, her "scholastic nightingale", the woman eventually comes to a rest. To the reader's surprise, the Underworld is described as "an oppressive suburb of the dawn", the actual place where the woman poet lives. Once again, Boland links myth and reality, implying that real myths happen in the ordinary landscape of the suburbs. As has been explained in section 7.4.4.3., the suburban landscape reveals a world of vision for the woman poet. There is a dormant potential in the suburb which has to be exploited by the artist. In "The Journey", the woman speaker goes to a mythical world which turns out to be precisely the suburbs where Boland lives. There, Sappho reveals a vision of unhappy mothers sucking and cradling their children, who were killed by multiple diseases and plagues:

"Cholera, typhus, croup, diphtheria"
she said, "in those days they racketed
in every backstreet and alley of old Europe.
Behold the children of the plague"

Although the woman speaker describes a terrible and horrid scene, the "terrible pietas" awoken in the poet "the grace of love"; the mystery that, even in the world of the dead, mother and child are united. The female guide teaches the woman that human bonds do not perish with death. Once Sappho shows her women and children, she warns the woman,

³⁵ Said (1994: 261) notes this tendency in Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* (1998) [1988], and Aimé Césaire's *Une Tempête* (1974) [1969]. In these "voyages in", Said (1994: 295) states, "the separations and exclusions of 'divide and rule' are erased and surprising new configurations spring up".

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“be careful.
Do not define these women by their work;
not as washerwomen trussed in dust and sweating,
muscling water into linen by the river's edge

“nor as court ladies brailed in silk
on wool and woven with an ivory unicorn
and hung, nor as laundresses tossing cotton,
brisking daylight with lavender and gossip.

These women are not to be portrayed as simple washerwomen, court ladies, and laundresses, because if so, their female reality is inevitably demeaned.³⁶ As we have seen, one of the greatest concerns of Boland's mature poetry is to portray her life experience as complexly woven between her different roles as a mother, housewife, lover, and creative artist. If the poet only focuses on women's role as washerwomen, court ladies, and laundresses, their feelings, anxieties, and sufferings would be omitted. In this sense, the woman speaker, with the aid of Sappho's advice, feels identified with the women of the past: like her, these women were also mothers

who went out like you
when dusk became a dark sweet with leaves,
recovering the day, stooping, picking up
teddy bears and rag dolls and tricycles and buckets

In this sense, Boland links the reality of the contemporary woman, the reality of Irish women in the past, and the implicit presence of Ceres, the Earth goddess wandering at dusk in her search for her daughter. Myth, history, and reality are, once again, reconciled in Boland's mature poetry. On the other hand, the domestic details of her ordinary life, her child's toys, constitute “love's archaeology”, emblems of those remnants of the universal bond mother-child. The reason why Boland identifies with these women she encounters in the Underworld is because, as she explains, effective images must “have a life outside the poem” (1996a: 143). By connecting her own contemporary reality as a woman with these ‘subaltern’ women from the Irish past, Boland achieves the outside life she talks about.

Nevertheless, the union between the past and the present the poet seems to establish eventually fails. The woman speaker realizes that the Styx, the “melancholy river”, inevitably separates the world of the dead from the world of the living. Boland encounters a reality that has not been recorded previously, a reality that she feels the need to insert within artistic

³⁶ In “Degas's Laundresses” (*Night Feed*), Boland criticizes the fixity of the male artist's gaze as he paints some women, laundresses, arrested in their domestic labours. “Domestic Interior” also decries Van Eyck's portrayal of Signora Arnolfini. Both poems, together with “The New Pastoral” and “Pose” (after the painting *Mrs Badham* by Ingres), also in *Night Feed*, decry the male myths which bind women within certain roles, such as the domestic routine labours and procreative sexuality.

representation. When realizing this, the woman speaker implores: "let me be/ let me at least be their witness", but Sappho immediately tells her that what she has seen is "beyond speech,/ beyond song". As Meaney (1993a: 148) states, "[w]hatever it is that Boland wants to record and pass on, it is always 'beyond speech'", and, consequently, there is always a sense of loss in Boland's continuous quest for 'the real thing'. Returning to the world of the living, as they "emerged under the stars of heaven", Sappho proclaims the woman speaker as her special sibyl, with these prophetic words about the limits and obligations of the poet:

I have brought you here so you will know forever
the silences in which are our beginnings
in which we have an origin like water

In this sense, Boland creates a tension between her act of witnessing and her impossibility to give testimony. Whereas Sappho consecrates her "as my own daughter", Boland still stands as an inappropriate spokesperson: one who finds no words to communicate what she has seen. "[A]n origin like water" is an important metaphor for Boland. In fact, she has used this passage for the title of the American edition of her *Collected Poems* (Boland 1996c), and also, as we have seen, she has employed a similar metaphor in "Our Origins are in the Sea" (*Outside History*). The source of inspiration for Boland is the lost past of Irish women. Her origins are as essential for her as water is for animals, plants, and human beings. But this metaphor suggests something else. Ireland's past is as diffusive, fluid, and difficult to retain as the water in the ocean. Gelpi (1999: 221) explains this metaphor as follows: "The well-spring of her words of remembrance is the worldless of the lost: mother and child, generation after generation 'beyond speech,/ beyond song'". In contrast to much historical writing, Boland discards neatly defined origins and linear narratives. It is significant how in poems such as "The Proof that Plato was Wrong" (*In a Time of Violence*), Boland also records water as the origin of life, by arguing that the "roots and sinews" [of these trees]/ are only – after all –/ rain". In this sense, for Boland, identities cannot be grounded in any essence or myth of origin because there is no origin as such. That is why, whenever Boland attempts to go back to a source, her project ultimately fails. In "What Love Intended" (*Outside History*), Boland tries to visualize the place where she was born, "the room where all began", but this seems to be impossible. This poem ends with the voice of a confused speaker whose origin is diffused and darkened. It is no coincidence that the landscape the poet portrays is always described as constantly changing and with diffused lights. As Boland (1996a: 172) argues, she is drawn to these liminal and unstable contexts, because in them "ideas of belonging take on the fluidity of sleep". Similarly, in "The Source" (*In a Time of Violence*), Boland describes the adults'

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disappointment when failing to find the source of the river. The only thing the poet, as well as the characters in this poem, can do is to imagine where the origin can be: "Maybe. Nearly. It could almost be".

In this sense, Boland aligns herself with postmodernist and poststructuralist visions of history. As Sarup (1993: 58) has explained, postmodernists such as Jean-François Lyotard and poststructuralists like Michel Foucault are adamantly against traditional forms of historical analysis, such as the Hegelian model which views history dialectically, as an evolutionist narrative. Lyotard understands that "grand narratives" such as history have "totalizing ambitions", and as such they are reductionist and simplistic (pp. 146-147). Under the influence of Nietzsche, Foucault conceives of history more in terms of "genealogy" (p. 58). For Foucault, there is a gap and discontinuity between past and present (ibid). Furthermore, he views "historical beginnings as lowly, complex, and contingent" (p. 59). As poems such as "The Achill Woman" and "Outside History" (*Outside History*) exemplify, Boland constantly stresses the discontinuities between past and present, the disruptions of history. On the other hand, in poems such as "The Journey" and "The Source", Boland rejects the pursuit of the origin in favour of a "contingent" past, a past that is liable to have occurred but not with certainty. Nevertheless, and as Russell (2002: 116) has claimed, in contrast to the claims of postmodernism, Boland does not claim "that history or meaning do not exist", because as we have seen, she is a traditional poet who believes that there is something 'truthful' she must be able to decipher. What her poetry implies, though, is that the recovery of 'real' history is fraught with difficulty. By expressing her doubts in reconstructing Ireland's past, Boland reveals the fragility of historical accounts: there are no essences and constants behind official historical narratives. The project the poet sets for herself in "The Journey" is a difficult task, perhaps impossible, because in her voyage into the past she encounters a troubling "silence", an "origin like water". As she has asserted, "[t]he way to the past is never smooth. For a woman poet it can especially be tortuous. Every step towards an origin is also an advance towards a silence" (Boland 1996a: 23-24). In the Underworld scene Boland witnesses in "The Journey", the force of language disappears; the figures Boland encounters there cannot speak, they are silent, and much worse, Boland cannot record their voices either. But this silence, this impossibility to recover 'subaltern consciousness' is, once again, another manifestation of the semiotic, and therefore, it can act subversively. As Boland (1996a: 167) has noted, the "world of vision" her poetry opens is "never so powerful as when it is suffered in silence".

This passage from the *Aeneid* has always caught Boland's attention, as she makes explicit in *Object Lessons*:

For that moment I could make a single experience out of the fractures of language, country, and womanhood that had brought me here. The old place of power and heroism – the stairs and bricks of an alien building, the sting of exile – were gathered into a hell with old inscriptions and immediate force. [...] In the face of the underworld, and by the force of poetry itself, language had been shown to be fallible. The heroes had spoken, and their voices had not carried. Memory was a whisper, a sound that died in your throat. Amidst the triumphs of language and civilization it was a moment of sheer powerlessness. It was something I would look back to when I became a poet. (1996a: 86-87)

Here, Boland is not only linking her own imposed exile as a child with this Underworld, as she has done in poems such as “The Pomegranate” (*In a Time of Violence*). She is also using this image, as “The Journey” indicates, as an emblem of other lost and unrecorded Irish stories. Several poems revolve around this Underworld imagery. In “The Bottle Garden” (*The Journey*), Boland narrates the moment when she decided to keep different plants in a container: feather mosses, begonias, ferns, etc. As in “The Botanic Gardens” (*The War Horse*), this wide variety of plants co-existing in the same place act as a metaphor for the different communities (whether Anglo-Irish, Irish, Catholic, or Protestant) that co-habit Ireland. Boland uses the garden bottle as an ideal emblem where warring factions can live together in peace. In her “sweet, greenish, inlaid underwater” (a clear metonymy of Ireland), the relationship between the “rock spleenwort, creeping fig/ and English ivy” is one of concord and harmony. But, unlike “The Botanic Gardens”, Boland does not use these plants only as a reference to the Troubles, but also in order to talk about Ireland's past. The speaker suddenly records herself, as

a gangling schoolgirl
in the convent library, the April evening outside,
reading the *Aeneid* as the room darkens
to the underworld of the Sixth book –

the Styx, the damned, the pity and
the improvised poetic of imprisoned meanings;

The wide variety of plants that Boland keeps in the bottle garden also suggest an Irish past that is composed of heterogeneous experiences. The past is composed by so many diverse and multiform realities that any attempt to grasp it will inevitably simplify it. If Boland is to act as a communal voice, she will create a uniform and therefore incorrect version of what happened. In this sense, she locates her poetry not on the side of the privileged (those who are allowed to act ‘on behalf’), but on the other side of the river “Styx”, in the place where “the damned” and “the pity” live. By situating her own work in the Underworld, she is able to experience the same powerlessness. The hollow voices of Aeneas's rivals in the Underworld not only represent the silence of an Irish past,

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but also the poet's inability to find words to record this reality. Boland's is a poetry of "imprisoned meanings", an art in which the content (what the poet wishes to convey) and rhetoric (what the poet is able to express) are irremediably disconnected.

The great influence that Virgil's story exerts on Boland even as a school girl is also reflected in "The Latin Lesson" (*Outside History*). This poem is mainly constructed upon very long unfolding sentences that parallel the speaker's immersion in the Underworld. The poet depicts herself as a young girl at school, reading the Sixth Book in the original version. As Boland gradually deciphers those "strange" and "beautiful" words on the page, she slowly walks along the pathway to hell. There, the poet is able to witness once again dead "shadows in their shadowy bodies", "signalling their hunger". Boland feels compelled to act as their spokesperson, to relieve their pain at least by giving voice to their anguish. Nevertheless, the end of the poem focuses on her limitations:

And how
before the bell

will I hail the black keel and flatter the dark
boatman and cross the river and still
keep a civil tongue
in my head?

By finishing the poem with a question indicating uncertainty, Boland shows her own powerlessness to act as a communal voice. As she returns to the world of the living, she is as muted as that mob she saw in the Underworld. In one of her numerous essays, Boland (2003a: 26) has explained how she was drawn as a child to the Latin language:

I would never forget those evenings. I would never forget that I had been alone and enchanted in a space mastered by language, deluded by verbs, kept at bay by the compressions of gerundives and ablatives. [...] That I had felt my local, frail contemporary moment dissolve in the power of a syntax made somewhere else, and thousands of years later.

What Boland feels strongly attracted to is the power of the Latin language to survive after so many centuries, its magic and strength to open up a whole new world of difference, the world of the past and the Underworld. But Boland lacks this "civil tongue", that powerful language that would entitle her to speak about the past with such force and authority. Once again, she encounters a troubling inadequacy to express 'reality' in language. The disruption of the lay-out indicates an absent meaning which cannot be grasped.

In other poems such as "A False Spring" (*Outside History*) and "Love" (*In a Time of Violence*), Boland continues focusing on the powerlessness of language that she encounters in the Underworld, and by extension, her own failure to give voice to Ireland's past. In "Love", Boland expresses her own limitations as a poet in an interesting manner. This poem is addressed to her husband in the present tense, and focuses on those years when the couple were living in Iowa, and their daughter almost died of meningitis (Gelpi 1999: 225). This event becomes the turning point from which Boland establishes a link with those who had lost their lives in Virgil's Underworld. Unlike them, the speaker's child "spared". Nevertheless, in her recollection of the event, Boland becomes also a voiceless shadow. When she asks her husband "[w]ill we ever live so intensively again?", she realizes that her "words are mere shadows and you cannot hear me./ You walk away and I cannot follow". As the communication between the speaker and her husband fails, even their shared married life seems to be lost. As is typical, her poems end with desolation. Boland's questions are always left hanging, with "[no] answer in the air", as she says in "The Scar" (*The Lost Land*), not so much because they are not heard, but because she fails when addressing them. Like Aeneas's comrades in hell, her mouth has opened, but her voice has been ineffective.

The inadequacy of language to record the 'real' is constantly present in Boland's poetry. "The River" (*Outside History*) evokes that moment when the speaker was taken by her husband to a "mouth of a river/ in mid-October". She describes a beautiful landscape full of maples and swamps. Remembering that moment, the speaker declares

how strange it felt –
not having any
names for the red oak
and the rail
and the slantways plunge
of the osprey.

What we said was less
than what we saw.

As is typical in Boland's poetry, the disruption of the lay-out suggests fluidity and volatility. Reading Boland's poetry is to enter a text of multiple signifiers, of images that suggest in limitless numbers of ways the reality that Boland wants to convey. In this sense, the poem becomes an unwinding path that leads to those 'subtexts' underneath the Irish landscape. But Boland's reading of nature is apparently insufficient, for she lacks the necessary words to describe what it really suggests. What she actually sees (which is in fact a remembrance of an Irish subaltern past) cannot be put into language, and therefore, there is a feeling that something is left out of reach.

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Thus, if Boland is to be faithful to her own limitations as a poet in her access to the 'real', her poetic images must similarly express her own failure and powerlessness. In "The Glass King" (*The Journey*), Boland subverts those nationalist icons, such as Mother Ireland or Cathleen ni Houlihan, by electing as an emblem a figure which cannot be objectified and made passive by the poet. In particular, she focuses on King Charles VI. Charles VI, also called "the Foolish", was King of France between 1380 and 1422. He was defeated by Henry V of England at the Battle of Agincourt in 1415. His inefficacy as a king was due to the fact that, from 1392 onwards, he suffered from fits of madness (Lenman 2001: 158). In "The Glass King", Charles's madness turns him into a figure out of the speaker's control:

My prince, demented

in a crystal past, a lost France, I elect you emblem
and ancestor of our lyric; it fits you like a glove –
doesn't it? – the part; untouchable, outlandish,
esoteric, inarticulate and out of reach

Like that Irish past that Boland attempts constantly to grasp in her poems, Charles stands beyond the poet's symbolic domain. Rather, he is located in a semiotic order, and as such, he is "untouchable, outlandish,/ esoteric, inarticulate and out of reach". This prince is occult and silenced under those prescriptive layers of nationhood and poetry. He has no place in official narrations, and he is another victim, stuck and "demented in a crystal past". Despised by his madness, he becomes a symbol of those marginalized figures that Boland is drawn to in her poetry. But even as she attempts to bring him out of his shadowy past, Boland lacks the means to do so: her poem is, like the traditional Irish "lyric", an inappropriate linguistic medium that inevitably transforms 'reality' into a false 'rhetoric'. By focusing in his irrational madness and the silences that surround him, Boland brings the semiotic into the (rational and loquacious) symbolic order of her poem, forcing her readers to understand those voices which are left unrecorded in official colonial and nationalist historical accounts. Within the Irish academic context, Smyth (2000: 52) has embraced 'silence' as a viable strategy of resistance. Attacking Bhabha on the grounds that he absorbs too easily concepts such as hybridity and rejects the usefulness of other coherent discourses of resistance, Smyth draws attention to a more effective form of resistance to institutionalized power: silence.³⁷ For Smyth (2000: 52), subaltern silence might represent "the subject's active withdrawal from the colonizer's discourse rather than a passive acceptance of the

³⁷ Although this Irish critic ends up embracing the ability of employing hybridity for transgressing the borders between supposedly established and essentially different categories, Smyth (2000: 46, 51) asserts that Bhabha's employment of hybridity is a "merely critical rationale [...] for the new phase of global capitalism into which we have moved rather than an explanation of the non-West's mode of resistance and survival".

range of marginalized roles on offer". It is this voluntary retreat from dominant (imperialist and nationalist) discourses that Boland constantly shows in her poems. Silence acts as a viable form of resistance to essentialist ideologies that wish to delineate what it means to be 'Irish' and how 'womanhood' is to be described in artistic representations.

This uncrossable gap between reality and language is not only manifested in those poems where Boland attempts to recover an Irish past, but also whenever she tries to bear witness to women's ordinary life experiences. In "The Art of Grief" (*In a Time of Violence*), Boland records the moment when, as a child, she saw her mother crying. The figure of her mother runs consistently throughout Boland's volumes of poetry ever since her initial work, with poems such as "On Giving a Cyclamen 1961" (*Eavan Boland Poetry/ Prose Joseph O'Malley*) to more mature poems such as "I Remember" (*The Journey*), "The Parcel", "The Source" (*In a Time of Violence*), and "The Last Discipline" (*The Lost Land*). As Boland declared in a poetry reading on June 19th 2004, in the National Concert Hall, Dublin, her mother has been "a tremendous heroine for me. [...] I remember that wonderful world that somehow my mother had had with her".³⁸ This poem, constructed upon 11-lines stanzas, focuses on the contrast that Boland finds between her grieving mother, a living and 'real' entity, and a statue of a woman with a veil covering her face:

I saw a statue yesterday. A veiled woman.
Head and shoulders only. Up on a pedestal.
A veil of grief covering her whole face.
I stood there, caught by surprise, my
car keys getting warmer in one hand,
both of us women in our middle years,
but hers were fixed, set and finished in
a mutton-fat creaminess, a seamless flutter in
marble

The statue that the speaker refers to actually existed, as Boland has told me in an interview (Villar Argáiz 2005a). Ever since she saw it as a child in Iveagh House (the Department of Foreign Affairs in St. Stephen's Green), this old sculpture has stayed in her mind. For Boland, this figure, like that fixed profile arrested in the lava cameo, is an emblem that stands for woman's solidification in any form of artistic representation. Unlike the speaker, the carved woman stands outside linear time: both her age and her gestures are fixed by the artist (notice the use of the passive constructions, so common in Boland's poetry to talk about the objectification that artistic images exert on women). While the speaker's hands are warm, this icon stands as a lifeless entity frozen in the cold marble. Even the veil which is covering her face, the only possible sign that this woman is mourning, is an aesthetic representation that deprives her of giving voice to her grief:

³⁸ Recorded with the permission of Eavan Boland.

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From there upwards –
chin, lips, skin lines, eyelids all –
had been chiselled out with the veil in
the same, indivisible act of definition
which had silenced her. No sound. Not one.
No dissonance of grief in a small room on
a summer evening. Just a mineral grace
in which she had found a rhythm to weep by.

Boland implies that it is the very artist's wish to define this woman, to delineate her "chin, lips, skin lines, eyelids" in marble, which has immediately turned her into a lifeless and silenced entity. For Boland, no artist can really represent with accuracy an image, for in the very process of grasping it, her complexity is simplified. Boland makes a contrast between this artist's wish to inscribe the woman's grief in marble, with her own inability to do so. In this sense, her mother's sorrow can only be described by Boland as beyond artistic representation, something that Fulford (2002a: 211) has also identified:

I saw my mother weep once. It was under
circumstances I can never, even now,
weave into or reveal by these cadences.
As I watched, and I was younger then,
I could see that weeping itself has no cadence.
It is unrhythmical, unpredictable and
the intake of breath one sob needs to
become another sob, so one tear can succeed
another, is unmusical: whoever the muse is
or was of weeping, she has put the sound of it
beyond the reach of metric-makers, music-makers.

First of all, Boland shows her limitations when accessing the feeling of her mother. As in "We Are Always too Late" (*Outside History*), the poet and this woman are separated by what Spivak (1988a: 253-254) would call an "irreducible difference". Unlike the sculptor, she lacks the authority that would allow her to fix her images into artistic representation. As Boland tries to describe her mother's grief, she realizes that her cadences are imperfect, because, to start with, they cannot reveal what made her mother cry in the first place. As she later argues, "I could not ask her, she could not tell me/ why something had once made her weep". Like in "Love", the communication between the speaker and her companion fails. In this sense, she tries to grasp what she does not know. Moreover, Boland also feels limited by language in her attempt to represent the 'real'. She tries to say the unsayable, the unpoetic, that which lies "beyond the reach of metric-makers, music-makers", but this can only be done, as Fulford (2002a: 211-212) notes, within the poetic "limits of composure". Kristeva (1986a: 110) has explained that the semiotic can only be thinkable within the symbolic; in other words, in order to be understandable, the semiotic (however subversively) needs to be written within the symbolic order. Like Kristeva, Boland

attempts to record grief through art, but this can only be done by means of dissonance: it is “unrhythmical”, “unpredicable”, and “unmusical”. In this sense, grief can only be defined as an absence, as that which is not ‘rhythmical’, ‘predictable’, and ‘musical’, in other words, as something outside poetry, and therefore, symbolic representations. Dissonance is, in fact, very important in Boland's mature work. As she has recently expressed in the interview, she is interested in breaking auditory and linguistic expectations, and this involves creating at times “a subtle disorder of sound” (Villar Argáiz 2005a). In “New Wave 2: Born in the 50s; Irish Poets of the Global Village”, Boland (1996b: 141) has declared that, although there are “real thematic radicals” in contemporary Irish poetry, that is, innovations as regards arguments, she regrets the fact that there is no linguistic experiment: “[b]ut the technical colour, as it appears in poem after poem, is conservative. The short line is rarely used as a dissonance – more often it's an orphaned iamb”. This dissonance is what Boland tries to capture in this poem. By doing so, she shows how we cannot record a woman's simple act of crying by using language. As the woman poet does not find words to record grief, she emphasizes the inadequacy of language to represent reality, to get to the ‘real thing’. We have seen how poems like “Anna Liffey” and “Time and Violence” (*In a Time of Violence*) highlighted the possibility of finding “a voice” that would succeed over the poet's death. In “The Art of Grief” we see that this voice is composed of what it cannot say, rather than what it actually says. Boland's is a language of silences and dissonances, a language that makes us think about the dangers involved in “speak[ing] of and for something” (interview with Villar Argáiz 2005a). At the end of the poem, the speaker invokes an interstitial space, a daylight composed of “black-/ and-white and menial in-betweens”, an “hour between planets”. This blurring of boundaries and the fluidity of sentences at the end of the poem is Boland's attempt to push language to the limit, to move away from essentialist definitions, in this case of her grieving mother. It seems that dissolution and fluidity are the only possible means by which categories such as ‘womanhood’, with all its complexity, can be grasped.

As “The Art of Grief” shows, it is not only the Irish past that escapes linguistic representation, but also female lived experiences. Therefore, Boland stands out as an inappropriate representative not only for a ‘subaltern’ consciousness, but also for the woman's ordinary world. In “Woman in Kitchen” (*Nigh Feed*), we come across a woman whose life seems to be frozen and solidified in her role as a housewife. The kitchen is portrayed as an enclosing and burying landscape. It is significant how the colour white invades the whole poem, as in the second stanza:

White surfaces retract. White
sideboards light the white of walls.
Cups wink white in their saucers.

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The light of day bleaches as it falls
on cups and sideboards.

The continuous references to this colour (not so much a colour but the combination of all of them) are significant. Gilbert and Gubar (2000: 613-621) explain that in the nineteenth century white was a distinctively female colour, frequently chosen as emblematic by, or of, women. Some of the examples which they give to illustrate this point are interesting. Gilbert and Gubar (2000: 613) explain that Emily Dickinson literally got dressed in white (for she took to wearing a white dress for almost all her mature life), and also wrote poems in which she figuratively covered herself in a white garment.³⁹ For Dickinson, whiteness figuratively and literally represented various things. Firstly, white was for this woman poet “the ultimate symbol of enigma, paradox, and irony” (p. 614). In her poetry, white frequently represents both the potential (the white heat) of Romantic creativity, and the isolation (the polar cold) Romantic creativity may demand (p. 615). In this sense, whiteness is both flame and snow, “the passion of the bride and the snow of the virgin” (ibid). Secondly, this colour also suggests, for Dickinson, “the pure potential of a *tabula rasa*, a blank page, an unlived life” (ibid). In order to understand Dickinson's symbology, we must understand the Victorian iconography of female whiteness. Gilbert and Gubar explain that the traditional ideal of feminine purity was usually represented as a woman in white (ibid). She was the white ‘angel in the house’, the passive and submissive woman (note the prototype of Snow White in the fairy tale). Whiteness symbolized virginity and purity. As these critics explain, “[i]n its absence of colour, the childish white dress [of this angel in the house] is a blank page that asks to be written on just as her virginity asks to be ‘taken’, ‘despoiled’, ‘deflowered’” (p. 616). Thus, whiteness implied an invitation for someone to finish with the woman's virginity. On the other hand, and paradoxically, the ‘frigid’ colour white also meant refusal and resistance. If we analyze the morphology of the word ‘virginity’, we may gain some significant insight on this point: “the word *virginity*, because its root associates with the word *vir*, mean[s] manliness or power” (ibid). Thus, whiteness is ambiguous: it suggests both virginal fragility and virginal power (p. 617). Furthermore, whiteness, according to the complex Victorian symbolism, was an emblem of death: a woman in white is “a dead *objet d'art*” (p. 616). White is the colour of the dead, of ghosts and shrouds, of the unknown. By recurring to the colour white, women writers were figuratively implying that they were buried alive in their own society. In short, and as Gilbert and Gubar (2000: 613-621) explain, whiteness could suggest, according to Victorian aesthetics, two

³⁹ Gilbert and Gubar (2000: 262, 328) also mention Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* and Charlotte Brontë's *The Professor*. For Emily Brontë, the snowy landscapes symbolize the female, an angry goddess who manifests its potential by shaking locks of ice. Her sister also recurs to the image of the wintry forest in order to suggest, instead of female potential, female desolation and lovelessness.

paradoxical extremes. On the one hand, it implied virginity, feminine purity, and powerlessness, and also death and aesthetic isolation. On the other hand, white was the garment of the female imagination, of the unknown, worn by a mad woman who had the potential of writing on a *tabula rasa*.

It is clear that Boland exploits the complex and traditional symbology of this colour. She is here deliberately incarnating the paradox of the Victorian woman poet: there is both entrapment and liberation in the whiteness surrounding her. On the one hand, the woman feels surrounded by the white cups and sideboards, and, along with them, she is just another “dead *objet d'art*”, a sort of ghost, or ‘angel in the house’, enclosed in a living burial. The whiteness of the kitchen symbolizes the powerlessness of this woman, imprisoned in her own society by the demands imposed on her gender. By fulfilling her role as a housewife, she is both excluded from public life, and also denied the opportunity to exploit her creative potential and her artistic skills as a poet. Once again, we encounter the troubling paradox that overwhelms Boland as a woman poet: whether to follow the routines of domesticity that womanhood demands, or whether to dedicate herself to her routines as a writer. On the other hand, the whiteness of her kitchen also shows that her environs have the pure potential of a *tabula rasa*. This woman's reality is perceived as enigmatic, something that waits to be written, as that blank page that Gilbert and Gubar mention. Boland needs to find a language, a ‘mother tongue’ that would give voice to this woman, without further simplifying her as an ‘angel in the house’. Nevertheless, the last stanza of the poem shows the impossibility of her project:

The wash done, the kettle boiled, the sheets
spun and clean, the dryer stops dead.
The silence is a death. It starts to bury
the room in white spaces. She turns to spread
a cloth on the board and iron sheets
in a room white and quiet as a mortuary.

It is significant how the woman, like “The Achill Woman” (*Outside History*), is granted no speaking voice. It seems that her essence is inarticulable. The poem finishes with “silence”, which is also indicative of “death”. Her white kitchen becomes, therefore, a funeral place: this woman is shrouded in her own society. The shortness of sentences, in contrast to the linguistic fluidity that characterizes Boland's mature poems, enhances this woman's enclosure and impossibility of movement. It seems that death and silence are the only means that Boland finds to define ‘womanhood’.

This impossibility to give voice to women's reality, to “speak of and for something” (interview with Villar Argáiz 2005a), is further emphasized in “Code”, a poem included in

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Boland's latest volume of poetry. As its epigraph explains, "Code" is an ode to Grace Murray Hopper, the American creator of the computer compiler and verifier of COBOL.⁴⁰ Boland identifies with this woman, for she is also a language-maker:

Poet to poet. I imagine you
at the edge of language, at the start of summer
in Wolfeboro, New Hampshire, writing code.
You have no sense of time. No sense of minutes even.
They cannot reach inside your world,
your gray workstation
with *when yet now never* and *once*.

Like Hopper, Boland also writes "at the edge of language", because, as we have seen, she conceptualizes 'the real' as a semiotic domain on the margins of symbolic official languages. The disruption of the lay-out indicates the subversive nature of both discourses. While this woman compiles binaries and zeroes on the blue screen, Boland assembles silences and dissonances on the page. Both forms of 'languages' are 'codes', systems of signals that must be constantly deciphered. Nevertheless, Hopper's language stands outside time itself, it will always be valid, and therefore, "minutes" and temporal adverbs such as "*when yet now never* and *once*" lose all their significance. This woman's syntax, just as the Latin language, can survive, can remain alive and persist throughout different epochs. As Boland (2003a: 27) has put it, this "true architect of the computer" had been able to create a

[h]igh-level language [...] that made an abstract of machine language, that issued declarations and control statements. [...] And compilers that took the source code made by a programme and turned it into a machine code; something that the machine could work with.

This abstract language has the capacity to release power, by its ability to offer "exemptions to the process of time" (p. 27-28). Nevertheless, Boland does not wish to locate her own 'code' outside a spatial and temporal continuum. As she argues in the poem, "I never made it timeless as you have". In this sense, "Code" sets an interesting contrast between the power of this computerized language and Boland's own powerless language. As Boland says in "Anna Liffey" (*In a Time of Violence*), "[a]n ageing woman/ Finds no shelter in language". Boland wants to incorporate a new language that can bear witness to the passing of time and the loss of beauty. This is difficult to do in a poem, for once words are written, the female body is fixed both in time and space. That is why

⁴⁰ COBOL is "[a] language based on English words and phrases, used in programming digital computers for various business applications" (*The American Heritage Dictionary*, Third Edition Version 3.6a. SoftKey International Inc. 1994).

Boland becomes a powerless poet whose language carries, as she says here, only “shadows” on to the page. Whereas Hopper's computer language leads straight to power, her own language is frail and brings us directly to losses and disappearances.

7.4.5.5. Conclusion

Marginalized figures are constantly present in Boland's work. Her poetry focuses on those “subaltern” figures Spivak (1994) refers to, those (Irish) victims that have suffered most terribly the consequences of imperialism and nationalism alike: the Achill woman, her grandmother's life, or male and female shadows in the Underworld. As Hagen and Zelman (2004: 1) put it, “[t]o read Boland [...] is to enter into a quite world, one in which the poet aspires to amanuensis, bringing to the fore shadowy and mute subjects”. While Boland attempts to become a suitable spokesperson for an oppressed community, she shows that she lacks the ultimate authority to grasp the past, to recover lost voices. In this sense, Boland constantly talks about a subaltern consciousness that cannot be recovered. It is not only that these lives have been lost, but also that Boland wishes to leave them as ungraspable. For the poet, every process of recovery itself involves an inevitable misrepresentation. Rather than becoming a loquacious representative of the Irish past, she becomes a powerless speaker that shares the wordlessness of figures like those in Virgil's Underworld.

That is why silences, dissonances, and dissolution abound in Boland's poetry whenever she attempts to reconstruct a more ‘pure’ subaltern Irish past, and whenever she wants to incorporate ‘real’ female experiences. In this sense, her poems move towards that “inaccessible blankness” or “*untranslatable strangeness*” Spivak (1994: 89) and Boehmer (1995: 234) identify in postcolonial texts. Boland tries to record those lives marginalized in powerful nationalist and imperialist discourses (Kristeva's semiotic realm) within the poem (the symbolic realm), but her project is ultimately impossible. As language is an insufficient medium of representation, ‘reality’ can only be suggested by other means, such as textures, gestures, hints, repetitions and echoes, irrational and incoherent cries, dissonances, and, above all, silences. Three years after the publication of *In a Time of Violence*, Boland (1997b: 24) declared that she “still need[ed] to find a language with which to approach that past”. In this very same essay, she also said that “at the end of the day, what matters is language. Is the unspoken at the edge of the spoken” (p. 23). In this sense, Boland's new language is defined by what has always been unheard (“the unspoken”), rather than by what has been heard (“the spoken”). Unsurprisingly, Boland's new concerns nowadays continue to be to write about “the untold and the untellable” (interview with Villar Argáiz

7.4.5. The subaltern in Boland's poetry

2005a).⁴¹ This apparent inability to find an appropriate medium of expression is indeed one of Boland's great achievements in her poetry. As Deane (2003: 121) states,

The political requirement is not that we become eloquent in a language that is our own, whether that be Irish or English or both; it is to become eloquent in a language that we never had, but which is believed to exist, if only because of our dumbness in it. That is the language of freedom.

Boland's linguistic independence, her "language of freedom" as an Irish woman poet, lies in her attempt to speak the inarticulate, the unspeakable, the (semiotic) realm where Irish lives are more truthfully recorded. Boland's "dumbness" in expressing herself is itself a subversive strategy. First of all, her silences force us to perceive those gaps between what has happened and what official historical accounts tell us happened. Boland describes 'the real' (Ireland's past) in such a way that it always stands in a subversive relation with the (nationalist) sanctioned 'rhetoric'. Secondly, Boland manages to criticize the adequacy of language to grasp categories such as 'Irishness' and 'womanhood', and therefore shows the fallibility of those essentialist and singular identities defended by hegemonic discourses. As Fulford (2002a: 213) contends, Boland abandons "the pathos of authenticity" of imperialist, nationalist, and feminist projects by representing identity as unfixed and differential. In this sense, Boland carries out a deconstruction of identity similar to the one advocated by feminists such as Kristeva in "Women's Time" (1986c: 209) and by postcolonial critics such as Spivak (1993: 5).

⁴¹ The new book she was working on at the time I was writing this thesis contains a section entitled "Domestic Violence", based on the memory of that suburban violence that was going on in the 70s and 80s in Ireland (interview with Villar Argáiz 2000a).

7.4.6. Boland's mature exile in the US: An 'Orientalist' writer?

7.4.6.1. Introduction

Boland's life records a process of constant exile and emigration. As a child, she spent part of her childhood in London and New York. As an adult, she has been living in California since 1995, when she replaced Denise Levertov as a professor of English at Stanford University. In 1998, she took the directorship of the Stegner Poetry Workshop at this university's Creative Writing Program.¹ Although she keeps a house in Ireland, Boland lives most of the time in California, and only returns to her native country in summer.

Boland recently declared that her living between the two countries, the US and Ireland, has not affected the way she writes poetry on the grounds that by the time she moved to California her life was already set and her "sense of poetry was confirmed" (interview with Villar Argáiz 2005a). Nevertheless, the extent to which her penultimate volume of poetry, *The Lost Land*, is shaped by her mature exile is significant. This section will explore this aspect of Boland's work, which until now has been overlooked by critics.

7.4.6.2. The exiled postcolonial writer: An 'Orientalist'?

For various reasons, from political exile to professional choice, some writers from once-colonized nations have taken part in the twentieth-century condition of migrancy (Boehmer 1995: 233). This is the case of the exiled Bombay-born Salman Rushdie and Derek Walcott, born in St Lucia, and now a commuter between Boston and Trinidad. This migration has also been recorded by writers as diverse as V.S. Naipaul and Bhatari Mukherjee (Walder 1998: 80). Of course, not all postcolonial writers live outside their countries of origin. But what is true is that many contemporary influential writers have, sooner or later, emigrated. As Boehmer (1995: 238) explains,

Because of their connections or their upbringing, they have tended sooner or later to win acceptance in metropolitan elites. Essentially, they have been able, by migrating, to secure for themselves a different, more comfortable location in the wider neo-colonial world.

Taking the aforementioned into account, it is not surprising that critics such as Brennan (1989: 47) have categorized as "Third-World Cosmopolitanism" the work of Salman Rushdie, Derek Walcott, Isabel Allende, Gabriel García Márquez, and Bharati Mukherjee.

¹ For further information on Boland's professional activities in Stanford University, see Boland (1999b).

Much contemporary Irish poetry can also be pigeonholed as 'cosmopolitan'. It is remarkable that there exists a great number of contemporary Irish poets who have lived and worked away from Ireland. This fact has prompted scholars such as Campbell (2003: 6) to argue that "the best" Irish writing during the second half of the twentieth century has taken place in exile. Irish poets such as Matthew Sweeney, Bernard O'Donogue, and Eamon Grennan have developed their own poetic career in London, Oxford and the USA (Campbell 2003: 3). On the other hand, it is important to note that many Irish poets have worked, or are currently working, in American universities. During the 1980s and 1990s, Seamus Heaney taught at Harvard, and Thomas Kinsella maintained a temporary teaching position at the university of Southern Illinois and Temple University, before his relatively recent return to Ireland (Faggen 2003: 230). Paul Muldoon is now frequenting a place in the writing program at Princeton University, and Derek Mahon has also been in residence at New York University and Yaddo (ibid). Like these writers, Sara Berkeley left Ireland and is currently living in San Francisco (Fulford 2002b: 215).

One single explanation for the exiled nature of all these Irish poets is that American universities offer, not only more job opportunities, but also more money (Fageen 2003: 230). Buckley (1985: 213) once described this phenomenon as follows:

What do Irish poets hope for? To be thought number one. America. What do they fear? To fall down the competition table. Never to be thought number one. To be denied America. [...] Irish poets in general are like ambitious youngsters trying to escape from the working class. America is the upper-middle class. Their vertu, however, their source of their energy and appeal, is in the Irishness which they are trying to escape; they have therefore to emphasize this or some version of it. Their destiny, their complex fate, is not to become Americans, but to be Irish in relation to America.

According to this critic, Irish poets fall very easily into the temptation of 'selling' their 'Irishness' in America, for this gives them an important source of income. In this sense, the strong link between Irish poets and American academics is not only intellectual but also "economic". According to Buckley (1985: 216), they 'feed' each other. Whereas academics organize associations for the study of their work, run conferences, circulate reading-lists, and edit anthologies; Irish writers have their own American contacts in universities and publishing companies. Nevertheless, another important and less pragmatic reason why Irish literature holds such a special place in America, as Faggen (2003: 229) has put it, stems from the fact that

[f]or Americans, the Irish poet represents an ideal of bardic authenticity: rustic, romantic, mystical, embattled, and vatic. Poetry *is* Irish. For Americans, divided and troubled Ireland itself is an antidote to its own

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unbearable lightness of prosperity and power (despite recent horrors). Christ-haunted with a deep and mysterious history, Ireland is an exotic but unthreatening presence for Americans.

In fact, it has been claimed by critics such as Ahmad (1992: 128) that native 'authenticity' has a market value in the West, and that postcolonial writers exploit an 'Orientalist' consumer demand in their novels or poems by offering images of the exotic East.² Mohanty (1991a: 34) has also denounced the fact that the growing demand among publishers of stories by postcolonial women might be "the search for more 'exotic' and 'different' stories in which individual women write as truth-tellers, and authenticate 'their own oppression'". Like Ahmad (1992: 128), this critic suggests that the proliferation of Third World's texts in the West is partly due to the demands of the marketplace.³ Here, the novels of Salman Rushdie, Arundhati Roy, and the work of Nobel Prizewinners such as Wole Soyinka from Nigeria, Nadine Gordimer from South Africa, Derek Walcott from St. Lucia, and recently J.M. Coetzee from South Africa come interestingly into play (Walder 1998: ix). All these writers have attracted commercial (and Booker Prize) success. Chinua Achebe's success with *Things Fall Apart* (1958) is also significant. The book's prominent status has long become guaranteed: it has given its author many prizes and awards; it has been translated into numerous languages and read worldwide; and it has become an essential text for "the English-speaking diaspora" (Walder 1998: 11).⁴

This demand for more 'authentic' and 'romantic' stories would justify the strong reception that Irish poetry has had, and is still having, in the United States. This demand probably becomes stronger if we consider the large American community of Irish stock, anxious to read stories about the homeland of their ancestors. According to Graham (1999: 24), North America is both "a consumer and producer of Irishness".⁵ In 1996, the Irish-American writer Frank McCourt published *Angela's Ashes*, a book that was very successful in the United States, but not that much in Limerick (despite the tourist business around the book's geography) (Campbell 2003: 3). The Irish male poet John Montague is also very well known all over North America from his visits on

² By the same token, as we have seen in section 2.4., Ahmad (1992: 173) accuses postcolonial theorists such as Said of adopting a Western perspective. As we have seen, according to this critic, because Said addresses postcolonial issues within the terms of the Western discourse, in particular Western poststructuralism, he is unable to theorize resistance to dominant discourses such as nationalism. Parry (1987: 30) carries out a similar critique, this time of Bhabha, on the grounds that his postcolonial theory is intended to serve more the needs of the Western academy rather than those of actual decolonizing societies.

³ This partly accounts for the Rushdie Affair. His critics saw India and Islam as being portrayed for Western consumption, offering the Western readers the 'Orient' of their imagination.

⁴ For an insight into the way the writings of the "Third World" are consumed in the West, see Sangari (1990), who particularly focuses on the work of Gabriel García Márquez and Salman Rushdie.

⁵ Graham (1999: 19) has also argued that old claims for authenticity (like those by nineteenth-century Irish cultural nationalism) have been revived in Ireland, because of the tourist industry. He analyzes, for instance, contemporary tourist brochures that advertise Ireland in America as a "modern" country which preserves an "authentic [...] European culture" (p. 20).

“reading-circuits” (Buckley 1985: 214). Boland has also become a prominent voice within the American literary panorama. Thus, the welcoming reception of these Irish poets by the American audience can respond to what Faggen (2003: 230) calls a way of “welcoming otherness”. By responding to the outsider’s longing for an ‘exotic’ world of bards where romanticism and mysticism seem to be undamaged, it seems that Irish poets can secure a place for themselves both economically and intellectually in the United States.

Taking the aforementioned into account, one might wonder if Boland perpetuates the ‘Orientalism’ that Said (1995) so profoundly criticizes. The fact that Eavan Boland is currently living in the United States might be used to charge her with being Westernized. By leaving her country of origin and writing about Ireland, her work might participate of what Boehmer (1995: 238) has called “the wider neo-colonial world”. I intend to address this issue in the following section.

7.4.6.3. Boland’s success in the US: Is she commercializing Ireland abroad?

Boland has acquired both critical respect and a large readership in the US, to the extent that she has become, as American critics such as Daniels (1999: 390) say, “one of the most celebrated poets writing today”. Indeed, her work has had a tremendous reception in the United States: American publishing companies have opened their doors to her poetry and her photograph was even featured noticeably in the newspaper *Los Angeles Times* (Faggen 2003: 231). Among her honours and awards, she has received a Lannan Foundation Award in Poetry and an American Ireland Fund Literary Award.⁶ Thanks to the New York City Transit Authority, excerpts of “Ceres Looks at the Morning” (*In a Time of Violence*) were read on New York buses and subways in 2001 (Hagen & Zelman 2004: 118). Boland is, in this respect, one of those poets for whom America has become an important source of income.

A close look at Boland’s essays gives us some insight into how deeply involved this woman poet is in the American culture. It is amazing the wide range of critical articles she has published in American magazines.⁷ She is a regular contributor to the *New Yorker*, the *Atlantic Monthly*, and *American Poetry Review*. Boland (2001b: 12) has explicitly declared how comfortable she finds herself in this new setting: “I came into this country where I found a New World and new manners, at which my heart rose”. In fact, she has praised various American

⁶ From *Literature Online biography*. Adapted from data developed by the H. W. Wilson Company, Inc. Copyright © ProQuest Information and Learning Company 1996-2002 and H. W. Wilson Company, Inc. Read on September 3rd, 2004.

⁷ See, for instance, Boland (1995; 1997b; 1997c; 1997/1998; 1998; 1999a; 1999b; 2000a; 2001b; 2003a). It is interesting to note how some of these essays are clearly addressed to her American audience, explaining carefully the actual geographical places she mentions. In a “Visionary Element”, for instance, Boland (1997/1998: 154) explains that “Galway is set on the west coast of Ireland, [...] open on the coastal side to Atlantic weather”.

women poets for their experimentalism and also for their ability to write about their ordinary lives, subverting the boundaries between what is traditionally conceived as public and private. In some of her American essays, Boland declares how she has found in women poets as varied as Denise Levertov (Boland 1997/1998), Adrienne Rich (1997b: 26), Sylvia Plath (1999a: 5), and Anna Bradstreet (2001b) inspirational models to follow. Whereas American poetry, in her own words, offers "that sense of not knowing where the next upsetting of the apple cart is coming from" (interview with Allen-Randolph 1999b: 303), Boland cannot find within Irish poetry that experimental change she is looking for.⁸

Nevertheless, it is not only women's poetry that Boland admires in the United States. She also finds that American literary criticism is highly professional. American scholars such as Albert Gelpi are for Boland (1998: 19) appropriate examples to follow. This critic has written extensively not only on Boland's work, but also on Irish poets such as Cecil Day Lewis. According to Boland, Gelpi is "a true authority" within American literary criticism, and his biography of Day Lewis serves as a reminder "that the critic, scholar, reader of poems, and lover of poetry can still be one and indivisible" (ibid). By contrast, Boland finds in Irish literary criticism more fault lines. In my interview, she has recognized that in contrast to her American audience, her Irish audience has been more confining and restrictive in certain ways. Boland sharply criticizes Irish scholars, especially *The Field Day's*, and she suggests that she still finds some restrictions when writing in Ireland (interview with Villar Argáiz 2005a). As Sammells (1993: 12) has argued, the *Field Day* debate becomes almost an obsession ("a persistent bruise") for Boland, and in fact she refers to women's exclusion in their 1991 anthology in almost all her interviews. It is as if she feels more comfortable with her American audience, more confident that her work will receive a more positive feedback there.

In fact, Boland has received amazingly flattering criticism by American women poets such as Jamaican-based McCallum (2004: 39), who argues, "[t]he more I read Boland's poems, the more she becomes a model for me in thinking through how a woman and a poet can position herself within a history and culture and on some level seeks to dismiss or contain her experiences". Another American woman poet, Betty Adcock (1994: 806), offers overwhelming praise of Boland's critical essay "The Woman Poet: Her Dilemma", arguing that, "I am grateful to Eavan Boland for her essay, the first I have seen by a woman whose thoughts about the separatist feminist poets, male tradition, and female silence so closely parallel my own". Although in Ireland, women poets such as Paula Meehan and Mary O'Malley have publicly exposed their

⁸ As Boland (2001b: 13) has declared, "there [are] no figure[s] in Irish poetry" like Anna Bradstreet, for instance.

indebtedness to Boland,⁹ one notes how quickly and fervently she has ascended to the highest ranks within the American literary panorama.

One of the reasons why her poetry has been so successful in the United States might be because of an increasing consumer demand for more 'exotic' and 'different' stories that record a native (in this case bardic) 'authenticity'. In this case, it is not surprising that one reviewer of *The Lost Land* has praised Boland on the grounds that she

is intensely engaged with the ancient bardic lineage of her homeland, giving her poems an ineluctable moral gravity. [...] Her poems offer a curative gift of merciful vision to a country blinded by its own blood and pain, as her narrators wait more or less patiently in their "difficult knowledge" for the healing of their country's wounds. (*San Francisco Examiner and Chronicle*)¹⁰

This critic seems to explicitly focus on "My Country in Darkness", the only poem in a volume of twenty-nine poems where Boland engages "with the ancient bardic lineage of her homeland". This tendency to generalize and simplify Boland's wide concerns in *The Lost Land* is a clear indication that this critic wishes to label this volume as indisputably "bardic". For other American critics such as Adcock (1994: 793), Boland has been "able to come to the subjects she felt to be most hers, as well as to her *authentic* relation to the Irish poetic tradition" (my emphasis). This critic argues that her poetry can reflect the "authentic", without questioning, as Boland constantly does in her work, all notions of Irish purity. For the two American critics mentioned above, fervent readers of 'native' and 'exotic' stories, the myth of "authenticity" is not interrogated at all. Indeed, Boland has recently recognized for the very first time that her American audience, in contrast to the Irish one, has "a more tenuous sense of whether the poem is Irish or not" (interview with Villar Argáiz 2005a). In this sense, it is unsurprising that it was with the publication of *The Lost Land* (1998) that Boland made "her first substantial American appearance".¹¹ The positive feedback this book has received in the US is a sign of the extent to which the American audience is drawn to colonial and postcolonial issues. Since then, she has been referred to as "Ireland's Best", the title of one American article on her work (Daniels 1999). Essays such as this one, and others, exclusively focus on Boland's *The Lost Land*, praising poems such as "Daughters of Colony", "Imago", and "Heroic" (Daniels 1999: 391-393).¹²

⁹ Probably because of her affinity with Meehan and O'Malley, Boland (2003b) has recently published an anthology containing some representative poems of the three of them.

¹⁰ From Norton Poets Online (<http://www.wwnorton.com/catalog/fall99/lostland.htm>). Read on September 3rd, 2004.

¹¹ From *Literature Online biography*. Adapted from data developed by the H. W. Wilson Company, Inc. Copyright © ProQuest Information and Learning Company 1996-2002 and H. W. Wilson Company, Inc. Read on September 3rd, 2004.

¹² In fact, poems such as "Heroic" (*The Lost Land*), have had a tremendous reception in the US (see, for instance, McCallum 2004: 40).

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Without taking into consideration if Boland is doing it deliberately or not, what is clear is that she writes about something that is in vogue. It is significant how, in contrast to previous volumes of poetry, in *The Lost Land* she more explicitly addresses colonial and postcolonial issues. If we analyze the times that words such as 'Ireland', 'Irish', 'England', 'London', 'colony', and 'empire' are repeated throughout Boland's collections of poetry, we realize that there is an increasing amount of references in *The Lost Land*. The following chart traces the appearance of these lexical items in Boland's poetic production. Her volumes of poetry *Poetry Eavan Boland/Prose Joseph O'Malley* and *New Territory* appear under the heading 'Initial Work'. The subsequent volumes of poetry are referred to by means of acronyms: *The War Horse* (WH), *In Her Own Image* (IOI), *Night Feed* (NF), *The Journey* (TJ), *Outside History* (OH), *In a Time of Violence* (TV), *The Lost Land* (LL), and *Against Love Poetry* (ALP).

WORDS	INITIAL WORK	WH	IOI	NF	TJ	OH	TV	LL	ALP
Ireland	1	-	-	1	2	1	4	5	1
Irish	1	5	-	-	4	6	6	11	9
England	-	-	-	-	2	-	-	1	-
London	1	-	-	-	2	-	4	1	-
Colony	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	9	-
Empire	-	-	-	-	1	-	4	2	1

Whereas colonial and postcolonial issues do not constitute Boland's main concern in her initial work and in her feminist volume *In Her Own Image*, as her work progresses, they become interestingly enough more preponderant. The repetitive use of the adjective 'Irish' in *The War Horse* stands out as an interesting exception. As we have seen, Boland's main concern in this volume is the Northern Irish conflict, and the forging of viable alternatives in which warring factions can co-habit together. In *The Journey*, *Outside History*, and *In a Time of Violence*, the increasing use of these lexical items responds mostly to those diasporic poems where Boland focuses on her own imposed exile from Ireland as a young child (i.e. "An Irish Childhood in England: 1951", "Fond Memory", and "In Which the Ancient History is not my Own") and also to Boland's concern with an Irish 'subaltern' reality, a past on the margins of official historical and nationalist accounts. It is not until the *Lost Land* that Boland more explicitly addresses Ireland from a colonial and postcolonial perspective, as a country largely affected by a history of colonization and with, what she believes to be, a constraining national literary tradition. The idea of Ireland as 'colony' has always fascinated Boland (interview with Villar Argáiz 2005a), but it is

significant how this concept is not manifested until 1998. The repetition of words such as 'Ireland', 'Irish', and 'colony' in this volume indicates that Boland feels a greater necessity to specify that she is talking about her native land. This fact might prompt anyone to consider that Boland has her American audience in mind, that she might be explicitly commercializing Ireland abroad. Although Boland would justify her use of postcolonial issues by pointing out, as she has recently done, that, "the various narratives of colony really enrich Irish writing" (interview with Villar Argáiz 2005a); it could indeed be argued that Boland starts writing more explicitly about colonial issues through the demands of the American market place. In this sense, she would be regarded by critics such as Buckley (1985: 217) as an example of "Irish Amerigophile" just as John Montague and Thomas Kinsella, Irish poets who revolve around two contradictory feelings. On the one hand, they want to have a metropolitan sophistication, and above all, experience and income. On the other hand, they also want to be "native", because it is that quality "which attracts the tourist attention; subsidized scholars are the tourists of our time" (ibid). Thus, Boland can easily be accused of participating in a form of neo-colonialism, as she writes about Ireland's oppression in history for Western consumption. In her latest collection of poetry, *Against Love Poetry*, Boland changes her poetic concerns, and she becomes more interested in other issues, especially marriage. This abrupt change might respond to her own wish, now as a prominent poet in the States, to test the American feedback of other less 'Orientalist' issues.

7.4.6.4. *The Lost Land: Ireland as a colony*

Some critics, interestingly enough none of them North American, view *The Lost Land* as a mere parody of Boland's earlier work. García García (2002: 202) and Hagen and Zelman (2004: 143) have criticized this volume of poetry on the grounds that Boland returns to many topics that she has already mentioned, and that her use of poetic language is not as elaborated as in previous volumes of poetry, but rather full of "plain, unadorned statement[s]". In particular, Hagen and Zelman (2004: 143-144) argue that

[t]here is no doubt that *The Lost Land* is a flatter and narrower collection of poems, both stylistically and thematically, than any other of Boland's earlier volumes. This flatness may be a flaw born of exhaustion – many of the poems in *The Lost Land* seem repetitive, paler versions of lyrics she has already written.

As we might observe here, these critics' assertion falls into an implicit paradox: on the one hand, they identify a boring continuity in Boland's thematic concerns; on the other hand, they acknowledge that there is a radical discontinuity as regards the use of language. Significantly enough, both features are deemed as unoriginal. The main problem with their criticism is that they

view Boland's "unadorned statement[s]" as fault-lines in themselves, without noticing that the poet might be deliberately creating a new poetic language. Indeed, there is a change of style in *The Lost Land*. Boland purposely strips away the dense syntax and complex strings of modifiers that characterize her earlier volumes of poetry. The poems in this volume are constructed upon very short sentences, some of them incomplete and beginning with the conjunction 'and'. The complex unfolding sentences that she favours before give way to numerous verbal parallelisms with very few qualifiers. This change of style, rather than "a flaw born of exhaustion" as Hagen and Zelman (2004: 143) define it, signals the poet's own wish to reflect a fragmentary and wounded self, a poetic speaker who, more deeply than before, is powerless and victimized by women's exclusion from history. On the other hand, as Boland's mature work progresses, she feels a more impending need to grasp 'the real', the semiotic realm on the margins of hegemonic discourses. This is going to be reflected in the plain style that Boland uses in her latest two volumes of poetry, *The Lost Land* and *Against Love Poetry*. As she has argued, "[t]he art of grief offers nothing to the bystander; no ornament, no hook on which to hang a pleasurable detachment" (Boland 1991: 17). For Boland, as we saw in "The Art of Grief" (*In a Time of Violence*), the very simple act of her mother's weeping is understood as 'the real'. Boland's latest work tries to move away from an elaborated syntax, which could be identified as 'artificial', 'bombastic', and 'false', in favour of a plainer style that would get closer to 'the real'. In her introduction to *The Christmas Show* by Harriet Levin, Boland (1997d: xii) praises this American woman poet on the grounds that she writes with "no ornaments" and, therefore, her poetry avoids a "false rhetoric". It is this stripping of linguistic adornment that the poet looks for in *The Lost Land* and *Against Love Poetry*.

As for the criticism of her lack of thematic innovation, it is indeed true that *The Lost Land* returns to many topics that she has already dealt with, such as the mother-child separation, and her need to re-establish a connection with a lost, unrecorded, and dismissed Irish past. Nevertheless, to focus only on this aspect would be both unoriginal and limiting. A closer look at this volume shows that Boland's poetic production experiences a change, mostly as regards content. Her immersion within the American culture exerts a tremendous influence on what Boland writes about in 1998. Colonial and postcolonial issues, as I hinted earlier on, become more important.

The interesting thing about *The Lost Land* is that, for the first time, Boland exploits the idea of Ireland as an oppressed colony, offering different versions of colonization: imperialist, nationalist, and patriarchal. Boland attempts to move away from the radicalism of that sort of anti-colonial writing that merely attacks the imperialist source as the unique form of oppression. It is interesting to note that, in contrast to *In a Time of Violence*, for instance, here she avoids using concepts such as 'empire', and she prefers to refer to Ireland as a 'colony'. On the other hand, if

we compare this volume to *The Journey* and *In a Time of Violence*, we notice that Boland does not refer so many times to 'England' or to 'London'. This indicates that Boland, in her analysis of Ireland's history and culture, tries to avoid a politics of blame that merely singles out the English as the cause of all sorts of atrocities. Furthermore, she is more concerned with the victim, rather than the origin of victimization. In fact, the Great Famine, an important motif in her mature work, is not mentioned even once in this volume. The reason why she avoids referring to this tragic event is because it is widely acknowledged that it was caused in part by the harshness of imperialist policies, as Eagleton (1995: 26) explains:

It can be reasonably claimed that the Irish did not die simply for lack of food, but because they largely lacked the funds to purchase food which was present in abundance in the kingdom as a whole, but which was not sufficiently available to them.

In poems such as "The Famine Road" (*The War Horse*), Boland suggested that the system that the British sustained was ultimately responsible for the disaster of the famine. In *The Lost Land*, on the other hand, Boland tries to avoid creating an oppositional politics against the English imperialist force. She offers instead a rich amalgam of imagery and motives in order to explain the different ways in which Ireland and its people have been colonized and dispossessed. In what follows, I intend to analyze the various notions of colony she develops in the first section of *The Lost Land*, entitled "Colony". The second section, "The Lost Land", will be dealt with in due course.

The first poem of this sequence is "My Country in Darkness". This poem is perhaps the only one in the volume where Boland explicitly develops the traditional version of colony: the idea that, because of imperialism, the Irish language and its culture has disappeared and they are no longer recoverable.¹³ The poem opens with an introspective reflection of a poet who tries to recount the exact moment when the Gaelic world perished: "After the wolves and before the elms/ the Bardic Order ended in Ireland". As is typical in Boland's mature work, this moment can only be described as non-specific, as if the poet is unable to capture that instant in which her 'authentic' roots became damaged. Note how Boland inserts the first person pronoun in the title ("My Country in Darkness"), describing herself as a victim affected by the loss of the Gaelic Order. Boland avoids the separatist stance of *In Her Own Image*, by considering the Bardic tradition also *her* lost tradition. As the past fades, Boland recurs to reconstructing the scene, in an attempt to envisage

¹³ In poems such as "Happiness" (from the second section of *The Lost Land*), Boland also mourns the loss of the Irish language.

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how native Irish poetry became "a dead art in a dying land". In this sense, the past tense of the initial lines is substituted by the present tense, which will bring more vigour to the scene:

This is a man
on the road from Youghal to Cahirmoyle.
He has no comfort, no food and no future.
He has no fire to recite his friendless measures by.
His riddles and flatteries will have no reward.
His patrons sheath their swords in Flanders and Madrid.

Reader of poems, lover of poetry –
in case you thought this was a gentle art,
follow this man on a moonless night
to the wretched bed he will have to make:

The Gaelic world stretches out under a hawthorn tree
and burns in the rain. This is its home,
its last frail shelter. All of it –
Limerick, the Wild Geese and what went before –
falters into cadence before he sleeps:

He shuts his eyes. Darkness fall on it.

For the first time after *New Territory*, Boland recurs to the image of the male bard, that romantic and homeless artist who is in a constant exile in search of his patrons (remember poems such as "The Pilgrim" or "The King and the Troubadour"). It is significant how this figure remains occluded throughout Boland's volumes of poetry until 1998, volumes in which she was mostly concerned with reassessing women's ordinary lives, and with recovering past Irish events such as the Great Famine and emigration. Having her American audience in mind, Boland now shifts her attention to the perishing of native Irish poetry, to that bardic 'authenticity' which is lost and is no longer recoverable. In contrast to *The Journey* and *Outside History*, sentences do not unfold down the page. "My Country in Darkness" is rather constructed upon shorter sentences with verbal parallelism. The aim is neither to avoid the solidification of artistic images by creating a fluid language, nor to look for a semiotic and subversive language with which to record 'the real'. Boland's main objective now is rather to show the destruction and annihilation of a whole people and their culture.

On the other hand, it is important to note that Boland explicitly links the oppression the Irish nation has experienced under colonial rules with the silencing of Irish literature. In particular, she refers to the Treaty of Limerick in 1691, which seemed to bring into an agreement the English and the Irish armies after decades of war (Foster 1989b: 134). This Treaty ended the war in Ireland between the Jacobites, the Catholic supporters of James II (the Catholic Stuart king of Britain) and the Irish and Anglo-Irish Protestants, on the side of the Dutch Protestant William of Orange. At first, the treaty guaranteed the rights of the Catholic Irish (ibid). After that, the Irish Jacobite army,

known as “the Wild Geese”, sailed to France (Welch 2000: 383). Yet, the Protestant Ascendancy would never respect the Treaty of Limerick (McCormack 2002: 128-129). Instead they enforced the Penal Laws, a harsh legal code that stripped the Irish Catholics of their land, persecuted them for their religion, and deprived them almost of every right of citizenship (p. 129). For Boland, the course of these imperialist politics inevitably shaped the destiny of Irish literature. As the Wild Geese are exiled from Ireland, sheathing “their swords in Flanders and Madrid”, the bardic poet finds no patrons to “recite his friendless measures by”. The literary tradition that flattered and sheltered him disappears, and with it the riddles of this male figure and the richness of the whole Gaelic world. As Hagen and Zelman (2004: 142) state, this poem “locates the end of an ideology in the loss of an art that had represented it”. Boland implies that colonial history has determined the silence of Ireland's native art, and with it, the death of its primitive culture. In this sense, politics, literature, and cultural identity are intrinsically linked. At the end of the poem, the bard can only “falter”, which indicates that he has lost his potential to bear witness. This is a lost language, no longer authoritarian, but unsteady and hesitant. The single line stanza that concludes the poem, very typical in *The Lost Land*, enhances this feeling of demise and extinction. As the male figure closes his eyes, “darkness” is the only thing that is left at the end. In her inability to act as a spokesperson, to retrieve the past and change the course of events, Boland resembles these powerless literary figures. Furthermore, she is as rootless and dispossessed as the homeless emigrant. In fact, in her poetry, the idea of place is always connected with shadows or darkness. Hers is always “a country in darkness”, a “darkening Ireland” (“The Death of Reason”, *In a Time of Violence*), a “city of shadows” (“The Harbour”, *The Lost Land*). We have seen in some poems from *Outside History* how Boland preferred to use deictic determinatives indicating distance, in order to emphasize the speaker's disconnection with the Irish past. By contrast, in *The Lost Land* we find the opposite, lexical items such as ‘this’, ‘these’, ‘here’, and ‘now’.¹⁴ In “My Country in Darkness”, Boland makes use of this linguistic device emphatically (“*This* is a man”; “*this* was a gentle art”; “*this* man”; “[*t*his is its home”), in order to increase the intensity of the experience she is talking about. The speaker is near, she is witnessing the event closer, and she is also telling the story as if it is happening now. The ‘wounds’ created by colony are still perceived by the woman, and she wants the readers to perceive them as closely and intimately as she does.

In this sense, in “My Country in Darkness”, Boland presents herself as an Irish woman poet who is affected by the loss of her native ‘roots’, even though these roots are male rather than female. The poet here envisages Ireland as a postcolonial country which, because of imperialism, has irremediably suffered the destruction of its (Gaelic) culture and literature. This is *The Lost*

¹⁴ Note the different uses of ‘this’/‘these’, ‘here’, and ‘now’ in poems such as “The Harbour”, “A Habitable Grief”, “Witness”, “Imago”, “The Mother Tongue”, “The Lost Land”, “Escape”, and “The Last Discipline”.

Land of Boland's title, an Irish past that is ultimately unrecoverable. In any case, this vision of colony is going to be counteracted in poems such as "Heroic" and "Unheroic", in which Boland focuses on those granite and bronze patriots of Irish nationalism (see section 7.4.4.2.3.). These figures, as we have seen, represent a national 'pedagogical' representation, an unchanging and fixed narrative that attempts to counteract the claims of colonialism. Boland shows how this form of nationalism also acts as a powerful colonizer. In its need to define Ireland's culture and traditions, it has created a very restrictive and limited version of what it means to be 'Irish'; in the process, the fragmentary story of her childhood and the 'unheroic' and ordinary account of a simple hotel receptionist are left excluded. By focusing on these divergent and 'performative' experiences, Boland stresses the ambivalence of these monumental images, and dismantles the belief in a united Ireland. Similarly, most of the poems in *The Lost Land* attempt to stress, rather than the negative consequences of imperialism, how the two inter-influential forces of nationalism and the Catholic religion have both affected and displaced her own female reality. As Boland admits in an interview, Irish women have been doubly colonized: "we were outsiders using someone else's language, fighting our way through someone else's history, finding ourselves in the space between exclusion and possession, [we] have been outsiders within an outsider's culture" (Allen-Randolph 1999b: 304). In this sense, one of her main objectives in this volume is to see the traditional notion of "political colony" through the eyes of what she calls "sexual colony", in other words, female dual oppression within colonialism and nationalism (p. 302).

It is this vision of "sexual colony" that Boland develops in "Mother Ireland", a poem that, as we have seen, deals with the legacy that nationalist emblems such as Mother Ireland have on contemporary flesh-and-blood women (see section 7.4.3.5.). In another poem from this volume, "Imago", Boland sees the extent to which idealized portraits of women have reduced them to mere decorative souvenirs, ornaments which stand for a nationalist ideal:

Head of a woman. Half-life of a nation
 [...]
 Anti-art: a foul skill
 traded by history
 to show a colony

the way to make pain a souvenir.

Rewriting traditional interpretations of women as ageless, beautiful, and silent objects is, as we have seen in section 7.4.3., a prerogative for Boland. The woman poet offers alternative images: her women are not erotic objects anymore, but ordinary women who are survivors of a harsh past, and who can exert their own agency. This issue becomes central in "City of Shadows".

This poem is constructed upon quartets, something exceptional in a volume of poems which are almost exclusively built upon irregular stanzas. As González Arias (2000b: 210) explains, this poem is based on an autobiographical event when Boland was a student at Trinity College. The poem refers to a period in November when a very intense fog covered the whole city of Dublin for days.¹⁵ Boland's father goes to pick up her child at college, situated in the very centre of the city. The poem records the confusion of this man, who cannot see through the mist and feels therefore unable to bring his daughter home:

When I saw my father
buttoning his coat at Front Gate
I thought he would look like a man
who had lost what he had. And he did:

Grafton Street and Nassau Street were gone.
And the old parliament at College Green.
And the bronze arms and attitudes of orators
from Grattan to O'Connell. All gone.

What the father has lost, as González Arias (2000b: 211) explains, is nothing but the authority to guide Boland through the mist. As a male figure and as an Irish ambassador, her father stands as a metonymy of an authoritarian nationalist discourse that sings the glories of Irish heroes and defends a country from the imperial invader. His loss of authority, therefore, parallels the dissolution of national emblems.¹⁶ The old parliament at College Green as well as those bronze patriots erected downtown seem to disappear in the mist. The father cannot see these figures, and therefore, he has no point of reference on his way back home (ibid). As they get into the car, the girl waves her hands and motions him to take "the only/ straight route out to the coast". Suddenly, Boland realizes that it was she who "had brought [her] father to his destination". As she walks alone to the flat and the fog is lifting slowly, the girl extracts the significance of this ordinary event, arguing at the end of the poem:

I would know from now on that in
a lost land of orators and pedestals
and corners and street names and rivers,

where even the ground underfoot
was hidden from view, there had been
one way out.
And I found it.

¹⁵ Misty and foggy landscapes are recurrent in *The Lost Land*, as in "The Scar" and "The Last Discipline". These brumous atmospheres both emphasize the contradictions and confusions Boland faces as an Irish woman poet, and they also allow her to dissolve 'solid' nationalist images.

¹⁶ In "Called" (*Against Love Poetry*), there is a similar dissolution of 'pedagogical' national monuments. In this poem, historical sites such as Glass Pistol Castle, Baltray, and Clogher Head (places close to the estuary of the Boyne) gradually disappear, in order to grant some space to the unrecorded and unheroic story of her grandmother.

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As a woman, Boland stands as a marginal entity who plays no active part within authoritarian discourses such as nationalism and Catholicism, 'languages' in which women have only stood as passive icons, (i.e. Mother Ireland, Cathleen ni Houlihan, and the Virgin Mary), and in which they have been idealized in their roles as mothers and housewives. By finally guiding her father, Boland takes an important agentive part, dismantling nationalist and religious beliefs. In this sense, Boland, as a 'performative' entity, subverts women's 'pedagogical' representations. The end of "City of Shadows", in contrast to what is usual in Boland's mature poems, stresses the speaker's triumph rather than her defeat. She has found "one way out" of oppressive nationalist and religious portrayals of women. On the other hand, she stands as the saviour of her father, implying that women's role is not only to create a more inclusive national identity that embraces their own ordinary experiences, but also to 'save' those who still rely on idealized and unrealistic nationalist images.

In this sense, by denouncing the absence of women as active agents within Irish national representations, Boland moves away from that sort of anti-colonial writing that merely accuses imperialism. But it is perhaps the poet's identification with the colonizer in poems such as "The Colonists" and "Daughters of Colony" that clearly indicates that Boland wishes to dismantle traditional versions of Ireland as only an oppressed colonial country. Her focus on imperialist figures is not new in Boland's poetry. In "March 1 1847. By the First Post" (*In a Time of Violence*), Boland adopts the perspective of an English, or perhaps Anglo-Irish, woman who is writing to "Etty", a friend or a relative in London. Nevertheless, Boland here identifies with this woman in order to denounce her indifference towards the Irish famine. Rather than confronting and understanding this event, this (imperialist) woman turns at once to evasion. It is not until *The Lost Land* that Boland shows how colonization is destructive not only for the colonized but also for the colonizer. As Memmi (1990: 111-142) advanced, the colonizer is a figure as oppressed as the colonized. First of all, 'he' is constantly assailed by a sense of guilt and blame which results from 'his' acknowledgement that the only way to maintain 'his' high status is by "usurp[ing]" the native's privilege (p. 118). On the other hand, 'he' is unsure of 'his' nationality: on the one hand, 'he' needs to be loyal to 'his' mother country, but on the other, 'he' does not totally identify with it by living in the colony (p. 134). It is this image of the colonizer as a dispossessed figure who 'belongs nowhere' that Boland develops in *The Lost Land*. She attempts, as hinted earlier on, to move away from counter-hegemonic discourses that exclusively denounce Ireland's oppression under the empire. By focusing on other heterogeneous realities, Boland eludes maintaining a politics of polarity, and allows, as Spivak (1988a: 211) would argue, new 'decolonized' identities to emerge.

“The Colonists” is one of the poems in which Boland identifies with the imperial ‘Other’, focusing on and trying to understand their point of view. As in “Suburban Woman: Another Detail” (*The Journey*), Boland locates herself as an ordinary woman in a dusky setting, a moment of shifting instabilities where the boundaries between her world and the past are fluid and blurred:

I am ready to go home
through an autumn evening.

Suddenly,
without any warning, I can see them.

They form slowly out of the twilight.
Their faces. Arms. Greatcoats. And tears.

The preposition ‘through’ and the adverb ‘slowly’, common in *The Lost Land*,¹⁷ enhance the moment of transition and constant change in which the woman speaker is immersed. As in “Time and Violence” (*In a Time of Violence*), this in-between space allows her “suddenly” to enter a visionary world of ghostly presences. The figures are not perceived in their entirety, but only fragmentarily as “faces”, “[a]rms”, and “[g]reatcoats”. Since they are weeping, their tears draw us into the realization that not only the Irish community was dispossessed, but that colonialism has equally affected the imperialist side. Boland describes the colonists as holding maps, and failing to find their own location within them:

Although they know by heart
every inch and twist of the river
which runs through this town, and their houses –
every aspect of the light their windows found –
they cannot find where they come from:

The river is still there.
But not their town.
The light is there. But not their moment in it.
Not their memories. Nor the signs of life they made.

The colonists cannot locate themselves in the maps. Although they know all the particularities of the Irish land, their maps cannot tell them their source of origin, “where they come from”. In “The Burdens of History” (*Against Love Poetry*), Boland recalls the moment when her parents got lost in the middle of a thunder storm in an Irish western countryside. The irony of this situation is that in spite of having a map and knowing by heart the roads they were driving on, they had become totally ignorant of their own location, unable to make their way towards their own destination.

¹⁷ See for instance “Happiness”, “The Harbour”, “A Dream of Colony”, “Ceres Looks at the Morning”, and “The Proof that Plato was Wrong”.

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Boland's parents were, in this sense, "exile[s] in [their] own country" (interview with Villar Argáiz 2005a). Like in this poem, "The Colonists" suggests that knowledge does not imply ownership. Even though they want to find their own 'sense of place' in the colony, as outsiders, Ireland only stands as foreign and unwelcoming. In *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, Memmi (1990: 134) presents us with a figure of a colonizer who both loves and loathes 'his' mother country, simultaneously feeling a sense of connection with and dispossession from it. Because of 'his' contradictory feelings, the colonizer is a figure who belongs nowhere:

The result is that the colonialist is unsure of his true nationality. He navigates between a faraway society which he wants to make his own (but which becomes to a certain degree mythical), and a present society which he rejects and thus keeps in the abstract.

As colonists, their mother country would be England, but removed from it, they cannot totally identify with it. On the other hand, the only country they know is Ireland, a country they want to 'possess' if not by birth, than by usurpation. Feeling neither entirely English nor Irish, the colonists can neither find "their town" nor an appropriate place where "their memories" are recorded. They are, in this sense, oppressed figures, victimized by a colonial and imperialist regime that demands they set their houses in an alien territory, a new place that should and should not be their 'home'.

After showing this complex picture of the colonists in her poem, they suddenly disappear:

Then they faded.
And the truth is I never saw them.

As is typical in her mature work, the visionary power of the speaker is suddenly counteracted by a statement that announces her impossibility to go back. Just like in "The Journey" (*The Journey*), Boland dismantles any possible belief that she is a special 'sybil', a suitable spokesperson of the past. These ghostly forms and indeterminate shapes were only imagined and not truthfully witnessed. Boland has not seen them, and therefore, her poetic authority is undermined. The poem, therefore, focuses on the tension between vision and blindness. If the speaker had seen them, she

[...] would have driven home
through an ordinary evening, knowing
that not one street name or sign or neighbourhood

could be trusted
to the safe-keeping
of the making and unmaking of a people.

The colonists only appear as 'absences', as that which cannot be grasped. Nevertheless, it is her blindness, her impossibility to recover these figures in their totality that paradoxically allows Boland to have access to knowledge. As we have seen in "Heroic" and "Unheroic", the patriots' statues symbolize the possibility of naming, of granting an identity and significance to the objects. They represent Ireland, a nation, a "People as One", as Bhabha (1995: 147) would say. Boland places under close scrutiny the very possibility of naming. She realizes that the names and signs that we use for referring to our country, our "street", or our "neighbourhood" cannot be relied on, for they are as unstable as "the making or unmaking of a people". As Boyce (1994: 5) states, names are provisional rather than transcendental:

The terms that we use to name ourselves (Black, African, African-American, Black British, Minority, Women of Colour, Afro-American, Third World, and so on) carry their strings of echoes and inscriptions. Each represents an original misnaming and the simultaneous constant striving of the dispossessed for full representation. Each therefore must be used provisionally.

The colonists' inability to find their own sense of home teaches Boland that, while place is fixed (as she said "[t]he river is still there"), the 'sense of place' is rather unsteady and inconstant. Love and knowledge of a place, Boland implies, neither convey ownership nor a grounded and fixed identity. As Hagen and Zelman (2004: 64) explain, this vision makes problematic her statement at the beginning of the poem that she is "ready to go home". Her sense of "home" becomes, therefore, a provisional feeling. That is why at the end of "Colonists" this term is substituted by "house", a more neutral term that does not imply any more security or happiness, but only refers to the physical place, to the building where one lives. The speaker now imagines herself entering "a house I might never/ find again", and writing

as I do now –

their human pain. Their ghostly weeping.

Like in "Time and Violence" (*In a Time of Violence*), "The Colonists" finishes with a woman writing about the humanity, pain, and suffering of past figures. Even though Boland has not actually seen the colonists and therefore cannot bear witness to the specificity of their lives, she can, at least in the abstract, inscribe their own dispossession and confusion. Her lack of authority to bring these figures back is counteracted at the end by her apparent ability to understand their feelings. After using the past tense, the poem ends with the present tense (a

typical tense in *The Lost Land*), which draws our attention back to the speaker's contemporary situation.

This sympathetic focus on the colonizer also occurs in "Daughters of Colony". In this poem Boland draws us into the dispossession of those Anglo-Irish women who, like those male figures in "The Colonists", do not know where they come from, where "their home" is. The poet particularly recalls the moment when these women were forced to return to England as Ireland broke free from colonial rule. For Boland, theirs is a silent and unrecorded experience. That is why the tone of the poem is, as in most of her mature work, elegiac. Like those famine victims in "The Journey" (*The Journey*), these female emigrants act as an allegory, not of the continuity of memory, but of their distressing absences in any official historical account. The poem starts by invoking these courageous women:

Daughters of parsons and of army men.
Daughters of younger sons of younger sons.
Who left for London from Kingstown harbour –
never certain which they belong to.

In her remembrance of those emigrant women, Boland sympathizes not with those daughters of Irish Catholic families but with those from Protestant families of Anglo-Irish descent. She acknowledges the fact that it was not only Irish families that were affected by the social and historical conditions of the colony, but also the women of English ascendancy, "never certain" which country "they belong to". These women are portrayed as taking with them their "journals" and "sketching books", their most valuable possessions, where they wrote or painted their personal records, occurrences, and experiences. They are like upper class Victorian women, who have access to culture, and who attempt to record their story. They are also portrayed as 'colonizers', anthropologists who in their "sketching books", take notes of a place and a people they do not know. These personal records, mostly lost and unrecorded, are, in this poem, resurrected and highlighted as important testimonies of women's experiences in the past. The woman speaker wants to awaken the reader's sensibility to *their* story, a story which also forms part of Ireland's history, even if they belong to the 'enemy' and 'imperialist' side. As they are boarding the ship and leaving Ireland behind, Boland describes them as wearing

hats
made out of local straw
dried in an Irish field beside a river which

flowed to a town they had known in childhood,
and watched forever from their bedroom windows,
framed in the clouds and cloud-shadows,

the blotchy cattle and

the scattered window lamps of a flat landscape
they could not enter.
Would never enter.

The image of their hats is used as the starting point for recalling these colonial women's memories of the Irish landscape. This is the only place they know, for they were born in Ireland and they have always lived there. Boland gives voice to these women's remembrances, as they watched the Irish landscape from their windows. Haven and Zelman (2004: 12) have noticed how the lengthy chain of qualifiers and subordinated structures increase the feeling of distance between these 'daughters' and the land itself. There is an implication that their female world revolved around their houses, around the domestic sphere. Whereas rivers "flowed" with unbroken continuity, whereas the public and active life was happening outside, these women were stuck in their homes. Their only possibility was to watch "forever from their bedroom windows" and, possibly, sit down at their tables and write in their journals. They are, therefore, enclosed, "framed" within their houses. They ignore what is going on outside for they have no access to the public (social, political, economic, and cultural) sphere. In the meantime, there are "clouds and cloud-shadows" outside, an image that stands for the tumult, the mass of dust and violence which was going on in the external world. These women are witnessing, from their homes, a country which is being devastated by violence. The "blotchy cattle" is symbolic of the destruction and harm done, the sufferings and the agonies of the people.

In *The Politics of Home: Postcolonial Relocations and Twentieth-Century Fiction*, Marangoly (1996: 130-137) examines the rhetoric of home in the writings of privileged women. This postcolonial feminist critic has argued that the "sense of being at home" for English women privileged by race is radically different from those Indian women privileged by class. According to Marangoly (1996: 130), English women writers find no difficulty in claiming a national status for themselves "on the basis of having successfully set up a house in an alien territory". Their racial privilege and their participation in the colonial enterprise allow them to record in their novels a "unified and autonomous subjecthood" to their English woman protagonists (ibid). On the other hand, Marangoly (1996: 137) argues that Indian women writers cannot record an authoritarian and confident female self in their work. For these writers, achieving a "sense of home" is more difficult, because they have been dispossessed from the narratives of the nation, and they have never been "as important in themselves". While English women writers seem to fulfil themselves in their domestic environment, a place where they can exert their own authority, Indian writers, on the contrary, expose a "desire for an imagined self and setting that allows escape from the mundane domestic routine of everyday life *and* from the usual alternative that a more public life

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[...] would provide" (p. 133). Therefore, this critic's main thesis is that, whereas English women writers find their 'sense of place' successfully in the foreign land, and therefore, do not find their roles as mothers and housewives as constraining, Indian women writers suffer from a deeper dispossession and lack of ownership.

"Daughters of Colony" dismantles this belief, by showing how the female colonizer is also enclosed in a domestic setting. By no possible means can their journals record a "unified and autonomous subjecthood". Rather than women who can exert their colonial authority in Ireland, as Marangoly (1996: 137) would believe, they are presented as women who are dispossessed and excluded from the public terrain. In this sense, Boland reflects on how the colonizer's wives and daughters have experienced the same exclusion as those Irish women have. Female colonists and natives have been similarly colonized by a patriarchal tradition which forbids them to enter "a flat landscape". Their presence is only made explicit by "the scattered window lamps", from which they observe the tumult outside. Like the stars in the sky (we have seen before how Boland uses celestial imagery to suggest women's dislocation in terms of history and literature), these women radiate light through their window lamps, but this light seems to be unnoticed, "scattered", and diffused within the immensity of the "flat landscape". As their lives have traditionally been regarded as insignificant and trivial, their portrayal as they leave their country is equally ridiculous:

The absurd smallness of the handkerchiefs
they are waving
as the shore recedes.

This simplistic description is counteracted in the last two stanzas of the poem, where Boland offers a more detailed and complex picture:

See: they pull the brims of their hats
down against the gust from the harbour.

They cover
their faces with what should have been
and never quite was: their home.

The gust, like those cloud-shadows outside the women's windows, suggests the outburst of violence devastating Ireland. Excluded from the public and political spheres of action, these impotent women can only turn their faces away, and protect themselves with their hats from the turmoil and convulsion. The only 'home' that these women know is a place, paradoxically, of alienation and displacement. As Marangoly (1996: 1) notes, the very word 'home' has immediate

connotations of “a private sphere of patriarchal hierarchy”, a place of conventional gendered identities such as mother and housewife. Nevertheless, even this sense of ‘home’ is snatched away from them, because they are forced to emigrate. As they are leaving Kingstown harbour, they cover their faces with hats made of local straw, emblems of Ireland, of a country of farming and beautiful fields. Their hats are both protective items from the violent turmoil of the colony, and also their figurative yearning desires to find an ‘Ireland’, a country, and a home of their own.

It is this feeling of homelessness and dispossession that prompts Boland's identification with these women. She suddenly introduces her own voice, and makes explicit her desire to open a space in her poem that can give voice to their deprivation:¹⁸

I put my words between them
and the silence
the failing light has consigned them to:

I am also a daughter of colony.
I share their broken speech, their other-where-ness.

As Boland tries to become a speaking voice, a spokesperson for these Anglo-Irish women's painful experiences, she once again faces the impossibility of her project. She shares their “broken speech”, a language which is not authoritarian, which cannot reclaim one's right to possess a certain place, but an imperfect language shattered and fragmented by a feeling of uncertainty. In fact Boland's poem reflects this broken speech. As in other poems from this volume (e.g. “The Mother Tongue”), Boland juxtaposes short sentences with longer and unfolding ones, which constantly increases and decreases the rhythmical pace of the poem. Neither her speech nor the colonist women's voices are confident and assertive enough, as Marangoly (1996: 137) would believe. Their discourse can neither be nationalist nor imperialist, for their identities stand ‘in-between’ authoritarian claims of Englishness and Irishness. The confusion Boland experienced as a child in London who neither felt entirely ‘Irish’ nor ‘English’ allows her to establish a personal bond with these women who, as Anglo-Irish, experience the same feeling. On the other hand, Boland is also a “daughter of colony” because she shares their “else-where-ness”. Firstly, as an Irish woman, she lacks a place of her own in a male-centred nation. Secondly, she has also experienced the painful experience of exile. It is significant how for Boland ‘home’ is always an unstable rather than a stable notion, a concept that is always ‘elsewhere’. We have seen in poems such as “Fond Memory” (*The Journey*) how Boland as a child in London felt a tension between her identity and her surroundings. As a more mature writer, Boland also inhabits this “other-

¹⁸ When Boland adopts the perspective of an observer, like in this poem, it is typical of her to introduce the voice of a speaker which is herself. She makes use of this technique in poems such as “Domestic Interior” (*Night Feed*) and “Formal Feeling” (*The Lost Land*).

whereness", as a woman physically and spiritually exiled from Ireland. But even in those poems where Boland describes herself as living in Ireland, notions such as 'home' are called into question. As Hagen and Zelman (2004: 11) have explained, 'other-whereness' carries a sense that home is "permanently deferred. The term connotes a disorientation whereby one is never *at home*, even if one is at home". As we have seen in those poems from *The Journey*, Boland was more interested in using terms such as 'house' rather than 'home', in order to emphasize her dispossession and "deterritorialization", as Lloyd (1993: 16) would put it. In *The Lost Land*, there are, interestingly enough, more references to 'home'. Nevertheless, a closer look at those contexts where Boland uses this term indicates that 'home' is usually perceived as a destination, more than as a place where the poetic speaker is located. As we have seen in "The Colonists", and also in other poems such as "Unheroic", "City of Shadows", "Happiness", and "Escape", 'home' is referred to as the place to which the speaker or other people are going: "I am ready to go home"; "I went home"; "I walked home/ alone to my flat"; "It is time to go home/ to the city where I have yet to be born"; and "passers-by hurrying home from offices". All these instances record Boland's difficulty in finding a 'sense of place'. As Boyce (1994: 100) notes, the theme of "returning home" always captures the narratives of migratory subjectivities.

As we have seen in this poem, Boland stands as "a daughter of colony", an outcome of a history of colonization and dispossession. It is significant how *The Lost Land*, in contrast to previous volumes of poetry, more openly focuses on the poetic speaker. Boland consciously foregrounds the 'I' in her poems, sometimes by means of verbal parallelisms as in "Daughters of Colony". In "The Harbour", the woman speaker claims that she is both the inheritor and the result of Ireland's past: "I am your citizen: composed of/ your fictions, your compromise, I am/ a part of your story and its outcome". In this poem, she not only presents herself as a victim, but also as a "witness" of women's suppression by imperialist and nationalist ideologies. In comparison with previous volumes of poetry, in *The Lost Land* Boland puts more emphasis on describing herself as a person who experiences first hand the aftermaths of colonization. This is a poet who mourns the loss of an 'authentic' past, as we have seen in "Country in Darkness", a poet who (although only partially) can act as a witness and narrator both of an oppressed Irish past, and of the colonists' experiences of displacement and dispossession in their imperial enterprise. In contrast to *Outside History*, where the speaker was troubled by a discontinuity between the past and the present, here Boland seems to find fewer problems in acting as a spokesperson, in establishing connections.

The privilege of giving testimony of Ireland's past is observed in "Witness". In this poem, Boland locates herself in the city where she was born. As we have seen in poems such as "The Achill Woman" (*Outside History*), the Irish landscape is usually a metaphor of an Irish unrecorded

past. In "Witness", similarly, the current landscape of Dublin hides messages that Boland decodes in her poetry:

Here is the city –
its worn-down mountains,
its grass and iron,
its smoky coast
seen from the high roads
on the Wicklow side.

From Dalkey island
to the North Wall,
to the blue distance seizing its perimeter,
its old divisions are deep within it.

And in me also.
And always will be.

In this sense, Dublin's bay, Wicklow mountains, and its surroundings act as starting points from which the speaker realizes that nature records Ireland's division, a history of colonization that has created disunion. But the interesting thing about it is that Boland has also inherited these "old divisions". She still perceives the effects of the colony; her body is still wounded, as she suggests in "The Scar", another poem from *The Lost Land*. The use of the present tense, the modal 'will' indicating certainty, and the adverb 'always' enhance the feeling that the speaker is sure of what she says. The short incomplete sentence starting with the conjunction 'and' (as in other poems such as "The Harbour"), introduces us to a speaker who, as the language used here, will always be fractioned and fractured by history. That is why she stands as a "witness", one who can give a first-hand account of Ireland's oppressed and colonized past:

Out of my mouth they come:
The spurred and booted garrisons.
The men and women
they dispossessed.

What is a colony
if not the brutal truth
that when we speak
the graves open.
And the dead walk?

By speaking and writing in English, Boland directly reawakens that violence and dispossession that has characterized Irish history, as Fulford (2002b: 166) has also noted. Like in "Daughters of Colony" and other poems from *The Lost Land* as "The Harbour", this seems to be a speaker who can "put [her] words" in favour of the dispossessed, 'the wretched of the earth'. Boland speaks with a language that immediately brings back those "spurred and booted garrisons",

those dispossessed Irish "men and women". In this sense, English, as an imperial language, is not neutral, but a linguistic code which is loaded with remembrance of an Irish history of ordeal. This apparently highlights Boland as someone who can bear witness to the past. Nevertheless, as a spokesperson, Boland's act of speaking can only lead to death and silence: although "the graves open", "the dead walk" but do not talk. The "brutal truth" of "a colony" is that by speaking English, Boland cannot carry out any significant change, cannot solve the injustices done. The speaker seems to suggest that artistic decolonization is not possible, that the gendered poet, especially the one for whom English is the only language, will always have to face the 'contradictions' inherent in Ireland's colonial and nationalist past. The shortness of sentences at the end of the poem, typical of *The Lost Land*, display a fragmentary and wounded self, a person who, by using the imperial language, reawakens but does not soothe violence.¹⁹ That is why language becomes for Boland "a habitable grief", that is to say,

A turn of speech
for the everyday and ordinary abrasion
of losses such as this:

which hurts
just enough to be a scar.

And heals just enough to be a nation. ("A Habitable Grief")

As Boland makes explicit in "A Habitable Grief", the use of English inevitably brings wounds and scars to the fore of the poem, painful memories of Irish dispossession. Furthermore, by speaking another language, the speaker is reminded of what is 'lost', her mother tongue. Nevertheless, and in contrast to "Witness", Boland adopts a more positive attitude towards the use of English. First of all, this new language allows the poet to dismantle that nationalist emphasis that the use of Gaelic is indispensable for an 'authentic' Irish identity. For Boland, the only foundational sense of Irishness she can experience is a scarred nationhood, wounded by divisions and discontinuous experiences. Hers is a fragmented culture, a culture that although 'Irish' in origin speaks 'English'. Her own vision of 'Irishness' not only overturns ideal and unrealistic nationalist beliefs, but also enables her to reflect a more accurate national experience of ordinary people from both sides of the Pale (the medieval dominions of the English in Ireland), who are wounded and divided. Secondly, in this poem, Boland notes that, as an "Irish in England", she learned

¹⁹ This technique is also observed in poems such as "The Harbour", "The Mother Tongue", "Dublin 1959", "The Lost Land", and "Watching Old Movies when they were New" (*The Lost Land*).

a second language there
which has stood me in good stead:

the lingua franca a lost land.

The “lost land” is of course the homeland that Boland left behind as a young child. But it is also something else: it also recalls that “pure, untouched, and somehow golden land of saints and scholars” that nationalists such as Daniel Corkery attempted to recover in their work (interview with Villar Argáiz 2005a). For Boland, there is no such a pure Ireland, because the Irish experience is an experience of fragmentation. On the other hand, and most importantly, Boland suggests that the imperial language is a “lingua franca”, a medium of communication between people of different languages and cultures. In this sense, English allows the speaker to establish a dialogue between, as Said (1994: xxviii) would put it, ‘East’ and ‘West’, in other words, colonized and colonizer.

In this sense, whereas in poems such as “My Country in Darkness” and “Happiness” Boland mourns the perishing of the Gaelic culture and of its language, her poems generally move towards the possibility of re-colonizing another language, a language that can act subversively and can reconcile warring factions. That is why the English used by contemporary Irish writers is generally acknowledged to be different from the imperialist language. As we have seen, Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (2002a: 8) identify this typical use of the colonial language as common to all postcolonial literatures written in English. Those who were once colonized by English are carving out large territories within the language for themselves. It is significant how contemporary Irish poets as different as Theo Dorgan and Eavan Boland agree on the fact that the real achievement of Irish literature is that it has been able to express the Irish experience in the English language. When Theo Dorgan was asked about his opinion on why Ireland, as a small country, has been able to generate such rich literature, he replied that

[...] the English we speak in Ireland has a suppleness and an inbuilt principle of scepticism that makes it natural for an Irish writer to speak and write in a voice, like that of her or his primary audience, which is in effect a reconquering of the conqueror. A colonized people revenges itself on the conqueror at an unconscious level by imaginatively appropriating the conqueror's language and making better use of it. I do not underestimate this drive. (Interview with Villar Argáiz 2005b)

As Boland has recently admitted, she feels very comfortable when writing in English (interview with Villar Argáiz 2005a). Like Dorgan, she argues that one of the “real” accomplishments of Irish literature has been that “the language of the conqueror” has been used by the colonized themselves to address Ireland's oppression: “[b]y doing that, we made a language in

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which every suppression occurred a vehicle of our self-expression" (ibid). Furthermore, she claims that

there [...] seems to me [that there is] something wonderfully subversive about being an Irish writer in the English language. The very injustices which made it inevitable that an Irish writer would write in English can be addressed in that writing. (Interview with Villar Argáiz 2005a)

The new and subversive use of 'english' is for Boland, in this sense, highly effective. In "The Mother Tongue", Boland reflects on how language has acted in Ireland as a source of power and oppression. As she explains in this poem, her house in Dumdrum is near the ancient border of the Pale. Her proximity to this historical site is the starting point for Boland to reflect on how she stands in a sort of cross-fire between two languages and two cultures:

The old pale ditch can still be seen
less than half a mile from my house –

its ancient barrier of mud and brambles
which mireth next unto Irishmen
is now a mere rise of coarse grass,
a rowan tree and some thinned-out spruce,
where a child is playing at twilight.

I stand in the shadows. I find it
hard to believe now that once
this was a source of our division:

Dug. Drained. Shored up and left
to keep out and keep in. That here
the essence of a colony's defence
was the substance of the quarrel with its purpose:

Land. Ground. A line drawn in rain
and clay and the roots of wild broom –
behind it the makings of a city,
beyond it rumours of a nation –
by Dalkey and Kiltarnan and Balally
through two ways of saying their names.

As is typical of Boland in *The Lost Land*, the speaker specifies her closeness to this historical frontier: the "old pale ditch can be seen/ less than half a mile from my house". Similarly, in poems such as "The Harbour" and "Escape", Boland situates herself in proximity to those historical and geographical sites that she mentions: Kingstown harbour and Dublin Bay are described respectively as "less than five miles from my house" and "only half a mile/ from my flat in Morehampton Road". She stands, in this way, as a person who can experience closely the violence that has devastated her country, as an appropriate and privileged witness to colonial and nationalist

oppression. This desire to specify her physical closeness is not perceived in previous volumes of poetry. In *The Lost Land* Boland is clearly addressing an American audience, a readership who might be anxious to read stories by 'natives' who can experience intimately the effects of colonialism. Nevertheless, it would be unfair to justify her use of her house in Dublin merely by the demands of the market place. Her close situation to the Pale is also used to draw upon the benefits that occupying a place on the very edge affords. By being near the border of the Pale, Boland is in an in-between location between warring factions: Englishness and Irishness. Being in this confrontational space allows Boland to reflect on how language has historically functioned as a medium to vindicate a certain place as one's own. As in "Witness", the Irish landscape is read as a place of conquest, re-conquest, and perpetual division. Seamus Heaney (1984a: 132) mentions in his essay "The Sense of Place", that in Irish poetry, landscapes "stir to us responses other than the merely visual, all of them are instinct with the spirit of a poet and his poetry". In "Mother Tongue", Boland's imagination seems to be awakened by the stimulus of place names: Dalkey, Kiltarnan, and Balally evoke in Boland associations that go beyond the visual pleasure: the existence of "two ways of saying their names", two languages apparently irreconcilable; two cultures, the English and the Irish, in perpetual fight.²⁰ Nevertheless, for the speaker both factions are no longer opposing. The barrier and line drawn in mud and brambles is read by Boland as "a source of our division". The use of the first person in plural is significant: Boland unites within the same term of reference colonizers and colonized alike, English and Irish tribes fighting for their pieces of ground. As in "The Colonists" and "Daughters of Colony", the poet avoids writing from an oppositional anti-imperialist stance. Standing within the border, Boland is able to recall the simultaneous processes of imperialist and nationalist identity-formations: behind the ditch, she perceives "the makings of a [colonial] city"; beyond it, she can overhear Irish "rumours of a nation". The verbal parallelism of these lines enhances the fact that for Boland, both the building of an empire and of a nation is something that is made and unmade and that, in the process, it victimizes someone. Boland views both as "imaginary construct[s]", inventions whose existence, as Anderson (1983: 15-16) and Brennan (1994: 49) explain, depends on cultural fictions that legitimize and support them. As such, they are non-real and limited, because they are defined by finite boundaries which "keep out and keep in". In this sense, Boland's physical location on the very edge is also a metaphorical positioning between two hegemonic discourses such as imperialism and nationalism. In the poem, the woman recalls how the old ditch is almost destroyed, covered by coarse grass, rowan trees and spruces. In the very place where walls were

²⁰ In another poem from *The Lost Land*, "The Harbour", Boland mentions how the harbour in Dublin was first called Kingstone and, afterwards, Dun Laoghaire. As in "The Mother Tongue", the woman poet wishes to stress the contrast between English and Irish in order to highlight how her own use of language is a mixture of two linguistic codes.

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put up, Boland instead describes "a child [who] is playing at twilight". Later she expands the picture in order to include her very suburb in which

A window is suddenly yellow.
A woman is calling a child.
She turns from her play and runs to her name.

The long and unfolding previous lines of the preceding stanzas suddenly come to a stop. By using this technique, Boland stresses the discontinuity between her own contemporary world and a past of warring factions. On the other hand, the use of the present progressives as well as the diffuse light of twilight indicates that hers is a world in which things are constantly changing, and where old divisions become similarly fluid and unstable. Now, land is not the starting point of conflict, "the essence of colony's defence", but the place where the poet lives, where she describes an ordinary and harmless scene between a mother and her child. In this sense, the speaker locates herself within this historical site in order to both stand out as an outcome of Ireland's past, and to stress how her identity is constructed 'in-between', as "the sum total of all the fragmentations, compromised, sufferings that occurred" (interview with Villar Argáiz 2005a):

I was born on this side of the Pale.
I speak with the forked tongue of colony.

Thus, Boland presents herself as a hybrid subject in terms of place, and also in terms of language. Hers is a 'non-pure' Irish identity, because she can only talk and write with the only language she knows: English. The employment of Middle English in this poem, in this sense, acquires an interesting significance. Boland uses this language in order to address Irish oppression in the very same language that was used as a vehicle of conquest. As Boland makes explicit in the second stanza of this poem, the ditch near the house was a place "*which mireth next unto Irishmen*". The archaic use of the third person singular in present indicative of verbs takes us back to the English spoken from about 1100 to 1500. As Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (2000a: 37) would explain, Boland's is a process of "*appropriation*", because she "captur[es] and remould[s] the language to new usages". Although this appropriation is more conceptual than literal (for Boland maintains the original standard code of Middle English), her project is nonetheless equally subversive, because she addresses her denunciation of the atrocities committed in the colonial epoch in the imperial language. Furthermore, it is important to note that, throughout her mature work, Boland always tries to differentiate her use of language from the colonial and imperialist code. As she says in "Daughters of Colony", hers is a "broken speech", a vulnerable and impotent language. Similarly,

in "The Mother Tongue", Boland describes her language as a "forked tongue", a 'non-pure' and imperfect language. Both notions of language are able to dismantle the authority of the imperial language. Her 'english' stands as a counter-discourse to that language that has traditionally functioned as a medium of domination and supremacy. The end of the poem reassures the subversive potential of Boland's conceptual appropriation of English. As the speaker is distant from her "mother tongue", she can only wonder,

Who came here under cover of darkness
from Glenmalure and the Wicklow hills
to the limits of this boundary? Who whispered
the old names for love to this earth
and anger and ownership as it opened
the abyss of their future at their feet?

In a way that recalls "The Muse Mother" (*Night Feed*), Boland seems to wonder what it would be like to "speak at last my mother tongue". Standing in the darkness of a winter night in Dublin, Boland imagines

my pure sound, my undivided speech
travelling to the edge of this silence.
As if to find me. And I listen: I hear
what I am safe from. What I have lost.

As is typical in *The Lost Land*, this poem ends with a profusion of short and incomplete sentences which record the speaker's fractured identity. Boland seems to mourn the loss of her native tongue, her inability to speak the Gaelic language. Distant from her mother tongue, the woman poet perceives 'Irishness' only in terms of "what is lost", as an absence rather than a presence. What is lost is an authentic idiom, a "pure sound" and "undivided speech" that can only be perceived as "whispers" and "silences". Like in "Fever" (*The Journey*) or "What We Lost" (*Outside History*), 'the real' can only be grasped in semiotic terms. Boland yearns to recover this lost speech, because this would involve acquiring a 'true' identity, "find[ing]" her authentic self. Nevertheless, a closer look indicates that what she has lost is precisely what she is "safe from". Like the imperial language, Irish has also been used as a medium of power, as a way to claim, as she says above, "ownership" itself. Only her hybrid language can stand as a subversive medium to authoritarian discourses. As her speech is powerless and non-authoritarian, it can never be used in order to repossess one place as her own, or to put up boundaries and limits. Boland's "forked tongue" does not reflect 'pure' and 'authentic' identity-claims, but expresses all the fragmentations that have characterized the Irish experience. Boland implies that something positive is achieved from the suppression of her native tongue. Her fractioned tongue is able to unite two irreconcilable cultures

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and mediums of expression. That is why the speaker argues at the end of "In Exile" (*Outside History*): "my speech will not heal. I do not want it to heal". If Boland is to be faithful to an Irish wounded history, to a past of fragmentary experiences, her language must be similarly scarred, imperfect, and powerless.

As we have seen in poems such as "My Country in Darkness", "Imago", "City of Shadows", "The Colonists", "Daughters of Colony", and "The Mother Tongue", Boland portrays various versions of colony: traditional anti-imperialist accounts of Ireland's past are counteracted by other descriptions of Ireland as a 'nationalist' colony. Boland explores the fragmented identities that followed the demise of the Gaelic Order, a fractured culture experienced by the colonized and colonizer community alike. As we have seen, Boland presents herself as an outcome of her colonized past: a wounded victim who cannot escape from a history of an ordeal. Nevertheless, *The Lost Land* does not focus exclusively on the idea of Ireland as a colony. In this volume, Boland also exploits her contemporary reality as an exiled writer living in the US, which I intend to explore in the following section.

7.4.6.5. The speaker's *Lost Land*: her exile in the US

If the postcolonial text is generally, as Bhabha (1995:185) and Said (1994: 261) explain, a hybrid text, then the texts by exiled postcolonial writers take this notion of hybridity to the limit. Postcolonial theorists such as Bhabha, Said, and Hall have acknowledged the empowering condition of hybridity for the migrant. Bhabha (1995: 209) argues that, by being in exile, any postcolonial writer or intellectual can more easily take advantage of "the productive capacities of [the] Third Space". Similarly, Said (1994: 284) believes that the exiled nature of most postcolonial writers enables them to experience the crossing of boundaries, "the charting of new territories in defiance of the classic canonic[al] enclosures". Hall (1996a: 447), on the other hand, has stated that writers that experience diaspora can easily adopt a "politics of positionality" that disturbs hegemonic discourses by a process of "recombination, hybridization, and 'cut-and-mix'". For the three theorists mentioned above, artistic decolonization implies the movement and integration of Third World thinkers into the metropolitan First World, enabling exiled intellectuals to "write back to the centre", in Rushdie's words (1992: 295).

As an exiled writer, Boland exploits the benefits that her physical distance from Ireland entails. Her living in the US allows her to maintain a psychological detachment from dominant nationalist discourses. Her poems in *The Lost Land* move towards the possibility of conceiving identity more in terms of fluidity and boundary crossing. Boland's earlier volumes of poetry show how she has also attempted to overcome hegemonic ideologies by recording a notion of identity

that is unstable rather than fixed. But it is in *The Lost Land* that she crosses national boundaries even more deeply, challenging what Said (1994: 406) calls “[t]he authoritative, compelling image” of empire and of nationalism. In order to demonstrate this point, I will focus on two significant poems included in the second section of *The Lost Land*, which, in contrast to the poems in “Colony”, are more interested in recording Boland's mature exile from Ireland.

One of these poems is “Home”. Here, Boland recalls one morning in mid-October when she went with a friend to a grove of eucalyptus in southern California. As in “Botanic Gardens” (*The War Horse*), Boland imagines that these trees were placed there by a foreign gardener:

It looks as if
someone once came here with a handful

of shadows not seeds and planted them.
And they turned into trees.
But the leaves
have a tell-tale blueness and deepness.

As is typical in Boland's poetry, nature hides historical messages the speaker feels the need to decipher. The shadowy eucalyptus' leaves are in fact a subtext of an unrecorded past; their blueness, like in other poems such as “A Sparrow-Hawk in the Suburbs” (*In a Time of Violence*), is reminiscent of a subaltern world on the margins of historical accounts. But in contrast to all those poems in *Outside History*, Boland does not limit her task to recovering this past. Her attention focuses on an unexpected incident. Suddenly, “the monarch butterflies/ arrive from their westward migration”. Thousands of insects place themselves on these leaves, changing “the trees to iron”. The migratory butterflies do not only alter and transform this apparent unpolluted landscape (suggestive of an ‘authentic’ and untouched subaltern past), but also fill it with a tremendous and magnetic energy:

Every inch and atom of daylight
was filled with their beating and flitting,
their rising and flying at the hour
when dusk falls on a coastal city

where I had my hands full of shadows.
Once. And planted them.
And they became
a suburb and a house and a doorway
entered by and open to an evening
every room was lighted to offset.

The fluttering struggle of these new immigrants, intensified by the use of present participles, attracts the speaker's attention. They exemplify the menace and radical transformation that “a

coastal city” and its native inhabitants experience by the arrival of new settlers. Boland feels captivated by this sight, because, as she recognizes, she was also an immigrant arriving in a foreign land. The planter of the initial stanza becomes now the speaker herself: her “hands full of shadows” are suddenly transformed into “a suburb and a house and a doorway” in a distant and new territory. As in “The Colonists” and “Daughters of Colony”, Boland shows the instability and relativity of apparently fixed identities such as ‘colonizer’ and ‘colonized’, by admitting that she has also been a colonist, setting her own house in an alien territory. In this sense, her arrival also meant a menace for all those native Americans, a threatening prospect that could annihilate and destroy a pure landscape filled with “a tell-tale blueness and deepness”. Boland’s use of the passive structure is significant. Her own room and house are “lighted” and “entered by” someone who is not clearly specified, a person who is not given any identity whatsoever. Boland uses her own mature experience of exile to engender it as common and universal. As Boland has recently argued, “we will always be ‘exiles in our own country’” (interview with Villar Argáiz 2005a). In “Home”, Boland rather implies that everyone is sooner or later an exile, entering a foreign territory and disrupting the dream and purity of others’ nationhood.

García García (2002: 44-45) has established an interesting distinction between the Irish emigrant and the Irish exile. According to this critic, the emigrant experiences a sense of uprooting from his/her native country and looks for a sense of belonging in his/her new destination. In this sense, this figure is overwhelmed by a deep sense of “dislocation”: he or she feels that he or she neither belongs to his/her native country nor to the place where he or she is living. On the other hand, the Irish exile never discards his/her own roots and his/her sense of belonging to the native country. He or she reflects an intense sense of “bilocation”: living in a particular place and identifying with it, while still living in his/her imagination in his/her native country. In this sense, the exile shows an ability to live in two places at the same time. These concepts of “dislocation” and “bilocation”, which do not exclude each other, also appear in Boland’s poetry. In diasporic poems such as “An Irish Childhood in England: 1951” and “Fond Memory” (*The Journey*), Boland describes a child who is overwhelmed by a deep feeling of ‘dislocation’, neither feeling Irish nor entirely English. In her mature poems, Boland also exposes a deep sense of ‘bilocation’ in her ability to live in two places at the same time. “Home” records precisely this feeling. This woman is living happily in US, and both her new house and her friends are there. Nevertheless, the end of the poem presents a speaker who nostalgically recalls her native country, her “home” and “the Irish night”:

If I could not say the word *home*.
If I could not breathe the Irish night

air and inference of rain coming from the east,

I could at least be sure –
far below them and unmoved by movement –
of one house with its window, making

an oblong of wheat out of light.

Clearly, this woman experiences 'bilocation', the ability to live physically in the US and imaginatively in Ireland. For Said (1994: 403), liberation is incarnated in the migrant "whose consciousness is that of the intellectual and artist in exile, the political figure between domains, between forms, between homes, and between languages". We have seen in "The Mother Tongue" how Boland describes herself as a hybrid subject between two languages, Irish and English. Similarly, the woman poet here is located within two homes. The rain coming from the east brings her native country back. It is here where her sense of "home" and roots are inscribed. Nevertheless, as we have seen, Boland always scrutinizes all notions of origin. As we could see in "The Colonists", Boland knows that the 'sense of place' is something relative and unstable. Similarly, in "Whose", as the very title indicates, Boland questions ownership itself, and shows the instability of claiming a land as one's own. "Home" induces us to think that even the initial planter in Ireland was a foreigner, and therefore, all those 'natural' frontiers nationalism claims are fictitious. The only thing that remains unchanged is geography itself; thus, with a desire to ground herself in a certain place, Boland imagines "one house and its window" which are "unmoved by movement", fixed both in time and space. Although the idea of 'home' is dismantled, Boland can "at least be sure" that there is a "house" and a "doorway" where she once lived.

This necessity to belong somewhere, to ground her sense of identity in a certain place, becomes the main topic of the title poem of *The Lost Land*. Like in "Anna Liffey" (*In a Time of Violence*), Boland makes explicit how her identity is constructed upon categories such as 'motherhood' and 'Irishness'. The poem starts with that plain language and unadorned style that characterizes *The Lost Land*:

I have two daughters.

They are all I ever wanted from the earth.

Or almost all.

I also wanted one piece of ground:

One city trapped by hills. One urban river.
An island in its element.

So I could say *mine*. *My own*.
And mean it.

7.4.6. Boland's mature exile in the US: An 'Orientalist' writer?

Boland's identity, as she makes explicit here, is rooted in her role as a mother, and also in Dublin, a "city trapped by hills" with its own "urban river". Her 'sense of home' is therefore shaped by the two constituent categories of femininity and nationhood. These notions allow Boland to claim "one piece of ground" as her own, so that she can allege them to be "*mine. My own*". In any case, the shortness of the sentences and their incompleteness indicate that the speaker's identity is not stable and fixed but rather fractioned and fractured.²¹ As we learn in the subsequent lines, all those foundations on which her self is based are shattered by the separation of her daughters and by her exile in the US:

Now they are grown up and far away

and memory itself
has become an emigrant,
wandering in a place
where love dissembles itself as landscape:

Where the hills
are the colours of a child's eyes,
where my children are distances, horizons:

At night,
on the edge of sleep,
I can see the shore of Dublin Bay,
its rocky sweep and its granite pier.

Motherhood is an important aspect of Boland's identity, and it becomes the main topic of poems from this volume such as "The Blossom", "Ceres Looks at the Morning", "Daughter", "The Loss", "The Bargain", "Tree of Life", and "The Necessity for Irony". Nevertheless, what these poems emphasize is the inevitable separation rather than the union of Boland with her own daughters. "The Lost Land" expresses a similar melancholic elegy on her daughters' separation. In contrast to the fragmented language of the initial stanzas, lines become longer, unfolding down the page. This linguistic technique parallels Boland's description of a more fluid identity. Separated from her daughters, Boland becomes, as a consequence, an emigrant soul "wandering in a place" of remembrance and memory. Landscape is perceived as a place where the poet tries to project a more stable sense of self. The hills are subtexts in which she imagines her children's eyes, staring at their mother. Nevertheless, they quickly disappear as "distances, horizons". As Boland's identity as a motherhood is undermined, so is her identity as an Irish citizen. Distanced from her beloved city of birth, and in a similar way to "Home", Boland nostalgically recalls "the shore of Dublin Bay,/ its rocky deep and its granite pier". Boland's 'bilocation' becomes here rather an intense dispossession and 'deterritorialization'. Because of her exile, Boland has perhaps an even

²¹ For similar linguistic techniques in this volume, see "Imago", "Mother Ireland", and "Heroic".

more strongly emotional “bond” with Ireland, and that is why memories of Irish places and landscapes are constantly evoked in these diasporic poems. Nevertheless, as this poem shows, Boland can only conceive of ‘home’ and nation in terms of distance, “loss”, and fluidity. The only way she can bring these notions back is by an act of imaginary recovery. Like in “The Journey” (*The Journey*), where Boland could have access to her vision by being “not [a]sleep, but nearly [a]sleep”, the speaker can only repossess what is ‘her own’ “on the edge of sleep”.

At this unstable and illusory moment, Boland's fluidity enables her to embrace more heterogeneous experiences. She can now identify with those Irishmen and women who were forced to emigrate from Ireland, and also with those ‘wretched of the earth’, as Fanon (1990) calls them, of Virgil's Underworld:

Is this, I say
how they must have seen it,
backing out on the mailboat at twilight,

shadows falling
on everything they had to leave?
And would love forever?
And then

I imagine myself
at the landward rail of that boat
searching for the last light of a hand.

I see myself
on the underworld side of that water,
the darkness coming in fast, saying
all the names I know for a lost land:

Ireland. Absence. Daughter.

Boland's use of fractured questions, separated by dots, is typical of *The Lost Land*, as reflected in poems such as “The Blossom”. They create an atmosphere of uncertainty and contingency in which the boundaries between past and present are suddenly blurred. Boland's displacement becomes the starting point from which to reflect on those Irish emigrants and later on those dead shadows enclosed in the Underworld. As Stuart Hall (1990: 230) has suggested, “the exiled writer is constantly *positioning* him/herself both geographically and ontologically”. It is this constant “positioning” that “The Lost Land” exemplifies. First of all, Boland describes her own reality and imagines what it would be like to have her own “piece of ground” back. Secondly, she remembers all those Irish emigrants who, like her, were displaced from all they love on earth. As this identification might be used to charge her with being simplistic and reductionist, Boland ends in the Virgilian Underworld, in a place where language has proved to be unsuccessful. In this sense, Boland undermines her own ability to act as a spokesperson, because she eventually shares

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the silences and powerlessness of the dead. The preponderance of present participles at the end of the poem enhances Boland's movement downwards. As she enters the Underworld, her identity becomes as dissolved as those shadowy figures she encounters. As she says in "Witness", the "old divisions" of Ireland's history "are deep" in her. The only way to overcome these divisions the past inscribes in her body is to take her own self to dissolution and fluidity. In this sense, this poem, as is characteristic of Boland's mature work, moves from identity to self-erasure, from the possibility of becoming a spokesperson, to her own failure to do so. Unable to express herself by means of the symbolic realm of language, the final one-line stanza records a speaker who can only talk in terms of fractions and silences. Like in "Anna Liffey", the only thing that is left at the end of the poem is Boland's voice, "saying/ all those names" she knows "for a lost land:/// *Ireland. Absence. Daughter*". These lines function both as an invoking memory and as a subversive statement. The fractured language at the end of the poem, as we have seen, is a typical linguistic technique of *The Lost Land*. It indicates the speaker's contradictions as she strives to write her own self within the poem. Absence, and therefore, silence surrounds the words "Ireland" and "Daughter" on the page. As an exiled mother who is separated from her daughters, Boland can only imagine her Irishness and her femininity in terms of effacement. As Fulford (2002b: 164) has argued, in Boland's poetry "[r]epresentation of the self is always made in the context of misrepresentation or erasure".

In Boland's subsequent volume of poetry, *Against Love Poetry*, her mature exile continues to be the starting point from which she reflects on one of the most painful experiences in Irish history: emigration to the US. Poems such as "The Rooms of Exile" and "Emigrant Letters" deal with the dispossession that leaving one's native land entails. In this latter poem, Boland recounts how, when she was heading for the concourse at Detroit airport, she suddenly overhears "an Irish voice":

Its owner must have been away for years:
Vowels half-sounds and syllables
from somewhere else had nearly smoothed out
a way of speaking you could tell a region by,

much less an origin.

As the speaker in "Daughters of Colony" and "The Mother Tongue", the language of the Irish emigrant cannot be a 'pure' speech, but rather a "broken" and "forked tongue". The speaker's Irish accent has almost disappeared to the extent that it would be nearly impossible to determine his/her "origin" and regional background. Emigration, Boland implies, creates a hybrid language, a mixed and imperfect code that turns their owners into 'non-authentic' Irishmen and women. As Boland

boards, she rises high up in the sky. Closing her eyes, she reflects on the influence that place exerts on the construction of one's language, and therefore, one's identity:

towns, farms, fields – all of them at that very moment
moulding the speech of whoever lived there:

An accent overwritten by a voice. A voice
by a place.

The woman speaker realizes how accent, voice, and place are intrinsically related. As she has recently expressed, “we are constructed by the construct” (interview with Villar Argáiz 2005a). Boland shows in this poem how geography and language are composite parts of this construct. For those emigrants, their dislocation from Ireland and their distance from their native tongues transform them into new selves, neither totally American nor completely Irish. The only point of reference that tells them that they once belonged somewhere are those letters they receive from their homeland. The rather fragmented language of the previous stanzas, loaded with short sentences, some of them incomplete, give way to longer sentences:

How their readers stood in cold kitchens,
heads bent, until the time came to begin again
folding over those chambers of light:
ice and owl noise and the crystal freight on

branches and fences and added them
to the stitchwort of late spring, the mosquitoes,
the unheard of heat, the wild leaves, snow again –
the overnight disappearances of wood and stone –

all of which they stored side by side
carefully in a cupboard drawer which never
would close properly: informed as it was
by those distant seasons. And warped by its own.

This fluid language and chains of modifiers introduce us to a world of remembrance and memory, and to the richness of these emigrant lives. Displaced in a cold New England, the ghost figures in Boland's poems remember a warmer landscape, a late Irish spring. For these emigrants, their letters were valuable possessions, tangible evidence of their personal and public history. Nevertheless, the fact that these are bound to “disappear[...]” and that their readers can only imagine “the unheard of heat” implies that, for these displaced Irishmen and women, Ireland can only be imagined in terms of silence and what is lost. Once again, Boland stresses how for those who are physically removed from Ireland, pure ‘Irishness’ is nothing but a dream, an unreal fiction. The end of the poem stresses this feeling. As these characters carefully kept their letters in a cupboard drawer, this piece of furniture becomes an emblem that is

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[...] informed as it was
by those distant seasons. And warped by its own.

What this object represents is its owners themselves. Removed from their native land, their identities are founded both on remembrance, and on all the fractures and deformations they experience by living somewhere else. While they feel the need to keep alive in their memories "those distant seasons", Irish emigrants also become corrupted and contaminated by their immersion in an alien and distant territory. As exiled Irishmen or women, they are hybrid selves who belong 'neither here nor there'.

7.4.6.6. Conclusion

In contrast to previous volumes of poetry, *The Lost Land* is more openly concerned with colonial and postcolonial issues. In this collection, Boland clearly describes herself as both a witness and victimized figure of (imperial and nationalist) colonization. It is my contention that this shift in her poetic career is partly due to the demands of the market place. The idea of the Irish woman poet as disadvantaged by an oppressed colonial past has a great reception in a country with an increasing consumer demand for 'bardic' and different stories. Nevertheless, it would be unfair and simplistic to explain Boland's achievement in the United States simply by this new 'Orientalist' demand. Boland has given a new dimension to poetry itself, by turning women from passive and emblematic objects to creative and agentive parts of the artistic process. Furthermore, her poetry has opened new ways by which a female voice can freely move beyond authoritarian identity claims. The fluid conception of identity Boland ascribes both to herself and to her characters, and the instability of notions such as nationhood and femininity in her poems are highly subversive strategies. They allow her to show the fallacy of ideologies such as imperialism, nationalism, and feminism, which defend a unitary and fixed self, an universal transcendental subject. Boland asserts herself as an exiled writer as she constantly crosses not only national frontiers, but also conventional boundaries. She adopts what Hall (1990: 447) calls a "politics of positioning", a subversive ideology which embraces heterogeneity and apparently irreconcilable differences. Her exile becomes the starting point from which to reflect on other heterogeneous and unrecorded realities. Boyce's characterization of women's migration is significant here:

My mother's journeys redefine space. Her annual migrations, between the Caribbean and the United States, are ones of persistent re-membering and re-connection. She lives in the Caribbean; she lives in the United States; she lives in America. She also lives in that in-between space that is neither here nor there, locating herself in the communities where her children, grandchildren, family, and friends reside. Hers is a deliberate

and fundamental migration that defies the sense of specific location that even her children would want to force on her. (Boyce 1994: 1)

Boland's mature exile is as subversive as Boyce explains here. Her physical removal from Ireland becomes the starting point from which the woman poet can "re-member" and "re-connect" with other divergent experiences, such as those stories of Irish, German, and Huguenot emigrants.²² On the other hand, Boland's positioning "in an in-between space that is neither here nor there", permits her to undermine the politics of polarity. Firstly, Boland shows how she is also a colonizer, by setting up her own house in an alien American territory. Secondly, her poetry teaches us that the boundaries between categories such as colonizer and colonized are not fixed, for both figures are victimized, linked in their mutual inability to "find where they come from", to find where their "home" is ("The Colonists"). Although Boland is unable to establish herself in a certain place, although hers is but a *Lost Land*, her dispossession and 'deterritorialization' allow her to occupy a productive space where new decolonizing identities can emerge.

²² In poems such as "In Exile" (*Outside History*) and "The Huguenot Graveyard at the Heart of the City" (*In a Time of Violence*), Boland has remembered the exile of German and Huguenot communities in Ireland.

7.4.7. *Against Love Poetry*: A more assertive marginal writer?

7.4.7.1. Introduction

In her latest volume of poetry, *Against Love Poetry*, Boland steers away from her previous concern with Ireland as a colonial country, as a place whose inhabitants inherit those fragmentations and dispossessions of a past of oppression and division.¹ As I hinted in the previous chapter, one reason for this change might stem from the fact that Boland is wishing to test the American reception of less ‘Orientalist’ topics. Not surprisingly, scholars from the other side of the ocean, struck by this radical change of content, have given, whilst not totally negative, at least not the kind of publicly flattering criticisms *The Lost Land* received. One of these American scholars is Murphy (2003: 347, 349), who argues that *Against Love Poetry* “is not as combative as the title would suggest”, because it is “less political than it aims to be”. Indeed, Boland moves away in this volume from the openly political idea of Ireland as a colony. Nevertheless, this does not mean that she ceases to be concerned with other ‘political’ issues. Yet, Murphy views the political as exclusively grounded in public terrains. In this volume, for Boland the political is the personal, the domestic sphere, her ordinary life as a married woman. In her disturbing the boundaries of the ‘private’ and ‘public’, she aligns her project to postcolonial theorists’ such as Bhabha (1995: 11), for whom the ‘political’ does not necessarily reside in the public sphere.

The criticism directed at *The Lost Land* as regards Boland’s repetition of poetic concerns could be addressed to this new collection of poems as well. Boland seems to be running out of topics, as she goes back to issues that have already appeared in *Night Feed* and later volumes of poetry: the importance of women’s ordinary lives and her attempt to offer a more accurate version of Ireland’s past. Nevertheless, in this new collection there are some innovations as regards content. The following sections intend to trace the different ways in which Boland’s poetic concerns experience a change in 2003.

7.4.7.2. A marriage that endures

The most interesting and perhaps defining feature of *Against Love Poetry* is that Boland is more adamantly concerned with ‘what endures’ after a married life rather than with ‘what is lost’ from an Irish subaltern past. Of course, there are poems such as “Called”, “The Burdens of History”, “Quarantine”, “Making Money”, and “A Model Ship Made by Prisoners Long Ago” in which Boland focuses on those unrecorded stories which need to be brought out of a shadowy past into the pages of her poems: the life of her grandmother, the suffering of the famine victims, and the

¹ The only poem in which Boland refers to Ireland’s colonial status is “In Which Hester Bateman, an 18th Century English Silversmith, Takes and Irish Commission” (see section 7.4.2.2., pp. 314-316).

painful experiences of Irish prisoners. Nevertheless, it is her thirty years of married life that Boland pays most of her attention to, predominantly in those poems included in the first section of *Against Love Poetry*: "Marriage". In contrast to *The Lost Land*, where the focus was more on the speaker's own dispossession as a victimized figure of Ireland's past, the use of the first person singular gives way to a preponderance of its plural counterpart: 'we', 'our', and 'us'. These forms refer mostly to the speaker and her husband. It seems that in her latest work, Boland comes back again to her own family roots, in order to focus on what she has, what she possesses, rather than on what she is dispossessed from. It is therefore unsurprising that the whole volume of poetry is dedicated to her husband Kevin, and not like in *The Lost Land* to Mary Robinson, a more openly public and political figure.²

As I hinted in section 7.4.2.2., one of the key motives of this volume is to subvert the traditional idealization of love in conventional poetry. The husband and wife in Boland's poems are no longer eternal, no longer perfect figures whose love is romanticized. Her main objective in *Against Love Poetry* is to depict a couple who are united by their very ordinariness, whose love is strengthened by their sharing everyday and apparently 'insignificant' events. In poems such as "Once" and "Thanked be Fortune", Boland defines marriage as an "ordinary, ageing human love", as a close union between two people who communicate themselves with their own "code": "*duty dailyness routine*". Boland implies that it is precisely this kind of non-idealized love which is able to survive despite the passing of time and the loss of beauty. This concern is the one which dominates poems such as "Embers", "Once" and above all, "Lines for a Thirtieth Wedding Anniversary", one of the most powerful and suggestive poems in this volume. Written in the form of one single long stanza, this poem describes Boland's own married life as follows:

Somewhere up in the eaves it began:
high in the roof – in a sort of vault
between the slates and gutter – a small leak.
Through it, rain which came from the east,
in from the lights and foghorns of the coast –
water with a ghost of ocean salt in it –
spilled down on the path below.
Over and over and over
years stone began to alter,
its grain searched out, worn in:
granite rounding down, giving way,
taking into its own inertia that
information water brought: of ships,
wings, fog and phosphor in the harbour.
It happened under our lives: the rain,

² "The Other Woman", "The Botanic Gardens" (*The War Horse*), and "Domestic Interior" (*Night Feed*) had also been dedicated to her husband. It is important to note that Boland does not merely dedicate *Against Love Poetry* to her husband: he also becomes the speaker's addressee in poems such as "The Pinhole Camera", "Embers", "First Year", "Once", "Thanked be Fortune", "Lines for a 30th Wedding Anniversary", and "Marriage for the Millennium".

7.4.7. A more assertive marginal writer?

the stone. We hardly noticed. Now
this is the day to think of it, to wonder:
All those years, all those years together –
the stars in a frozen arc overhead,
the quick noise of a thaw in the air,
the blue stare of the hills – through it all
this constancy: what wears, what endures.

This poem depicts married life by means of two opposing metaphors: the union between husband and wife is allegorized both by the rigidity of architecture and the fluidity of water. First of all, Boland describes the house as the place where “the soul of marriage” is kept (“First Year”, *Against Love Poetry*). The roof, vault, slates, stone, grain, and granite provide a firm and solid ground where the speaker’s identity as a married woman can be inscribed. Some psychoanalytic texts have stressed the proximity of home and self-identity. This is the case of Carl Jung (1969: 253), who develops a thesis that explicitly reads an individual’s home as the “universal archetypal symbol of the self”. Later feminist postcolonial critics such as Boyce (1994: 126) have identified how many postcolonial women writers metaphorically draw on their homes in order to represent self-definition: “[t]he house and its specific rooms become metaphors of self and loci of self-identification”. Similarly, in this poem Boland equates self and home. Nevertheless, the stability that architecture would provide to her identity as a married woman is dismantled by her reliance on the eroding potential of water. Instead of tracing the origin of her wedlock in the floor of the house, she locates it in the roof. Through a gutter, rain begins to filter, slowly and gradually wearing away the solidity of those foundations on which her marriage is based. The repetition of “Over and over and over/ years”, common in some poems from this collection (i.e. “Making Money” and “Is It Still the Same”), helps Boland to record linear time. The erosion of the materials in which the house is constructed parallels the gradual decrease of that passion and fervour which characterized the first years of marriage. “[P]assion” as she argues in “Thanked be Fortune” is gradually substituted by “*duty dailyness routine*”. As years pass and both figures grow old, marriage loses that sense of “wonder” and “admiration” that Irigaray (1991: 171) envisaged in the “amorous exchange”. Nevertheless, this progressive erosion of emotion and intensity does not imply detachment, but much the contrary. As stones, grains, and granites are altered and disfigured, both figures are more united than ever. Time is their witness, rather than their destroyer. There is something which remains changeless: a ‘real’ and ‘true’ love that survives the erosions of time: “what wears, what endures”. As is typical in *Against Love Poetry*, Boland ends the poem with verbal parallelism in order to emphasize the persistence of marriage despite the passing of time.³ The final image of “the stars in a frozen arc overhead” suggests eternity. On the

³ For similar linguistic techniques, see “Once”, “Embers”, and “The Pinhole Camera”.

other hand, “the quick noise of a thaw” and “the blue stare of the hills” implies dissolution and self-erasure. Firstly, water gradually melts down the solidity of their lives. Secondly, like that “blueness and deepness” Boland observed in a Californian coast (“Home”, *The Lost Land*), blueness here stands for that subaltern reality which will eventually be omitted from official accounts. As Boland and her husband's lives expire, they are also threatened with becoming mere ‘subtexts’ in nature, subjects whose lives and experiences will be forgotten. By linking the eternity of the constellations with the fluidity and erasure of water, Boland implies that as herself and her husband gradually approach death, their love paradoxically enough becomes more enduring and everlasting than ever.

On the other hand, watery imagery is also used by the poet, as we have seen in poems such as “The Journey” (*The Journey*) and “Anna Liffey” (*In a Time of Violence*), as a metaphor of the impossibility of describing the ‘real’, the flowing of human lived experiences. First of all, Boland implies that the origin of everything is, after all, water. In “The Journey”, she stated that we are all “an origin like water”; here she argues that her marriage began in the “small leak”, up in “the roof” of her house. Secondly, Boland suggests that her married life is like the fluidity of water, an intimate experience that cannot be grasped, fixed in terms of language. The long unfolding sentences of this single stanza enhance the fluidity of both the speaker's and her husband's identities. In contrast to those conventional love poems, Boland suggests that “what there is between a man and a woman”, as she says in “Quarantine”, cannot be solidified in any sort of artistic representation, for this would inevitably simplify the complex interweave of emotions and experiences that joins in complicity husband and wife. In this sense, whereas in poems such as “In Which Hester Bateman, 18th Century English Silversmith, Takes an Irish commission”, the artist (Hester Bateman) inscribes “in miniature a man and a woman” in a silver spoon, in “the seams of rock”, Boland envisages a new medium, not solid this time, where these images are represented more truthfully. In “the smooth/ Mimicry of a lake” the spoon is making, Boland writes “[a] flowing script”, where she can record “their names” and where she avoids solidifying the husband and the wife as silvery figures. It is, of course, impossible to write these figures in water, and in fact their names are not mentioned in the poem. In spite of this, Boland seems to imply that it is preferable to open a poetic place that avoids solidification, even if this inevitably leads to anonymity. As Spivak (1994: 89) believes, it is better to record lived experience as an “inaccessible blankness” rather than simplify it as official historical and cultural accounts have done. By describing marriage in such fluid terms, Boland shows in “Lines for a Thirtieth Wedding Anniversary”, as in most of the poems in this collection, how “[a]rt and marriage: now make a

match” (“In Which Hester Bateman, 18th Century English Silversmith, Takes an Irish commission”).

7.4.7.3. Boland’s reconciliation with Irish poetry

As we have seen, one constituent feature of Boland’s mature work is her revision and subversion of conventional images of womanhood in Irish poetry (i.e. the mythical, bodiless, and idealized figure of Mother Ireland, for instance). One striking change in *Against Love Poetry* is that now Boland seems to come to terms with the Irish literary tradition. This is clearly observed in “How We Made a New Art on Old Ground” and “Irish Poetry”, poems in which the woman poet offers a retrospective and reconciliatory view of national cultural conventions. In these two poems, Boland not only includes herself within the Irish literary community by the use of the first person pronoun in plural (‘we’), but also reflects on the ways in which literary simplifications and idealizations of “images” as “ornaments” were necessarily used at a time of national convulsion and confusion (Boland 1996a: 152).

The first of these poems, “How We Made a New Art on Old Ground”, specifically focuses on the Irish pastoral genre. As it has been explained when commenting on Boland’s initial work, the tradition of nature poetry dates back to early Irish literature, with its genre of *dinnsheanchas*, manuscripts and poems which explain place-names by reference to legends and fictitious stories (Welch 2000: 90-91). This Gaelic tradition was revived in the Irish Literary Renaissance period, with writers such as Yeats, Synge, and Lady Gregory (see section 7.2.4. for a deeper discussion on this topic).

Up to *Against Love Poetry*, Boland’s mature work has attempted to subvert the nature poem by means of two strategies. First of all, the Revival idealized and romantic view of the Irish landscape has been overturned in poems such as “The Achill Woman” (*Outside History*) and “Whose” (*The Lost Land*), which, as we have seen, describe a rural landscape that is destroyed, burned, and wounded, rather than untouched by national violence. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, her poems have not presented Ireland as a world of peasants, farms, and cattle, but as a suburban neighbourhood and a domestic environment inhabited by ordinary mothers and housewives. As Boland explains, her project in volumes of poetry such as *Night Feed* was to subvert the traditional political nature poem by becoming an “indoor nature poet”, a poet whose “lexicon was the kettle and the steam, and the machine in the corner and the kitchen, and the baby’s bottle” (interview with Allen-Randolph 1993b: 124).

For the first time in her mature work, Boland re-establishes in “How We Made a New Art in Old Ground” a close relationship with this important cultural legacy. This poem, constructed

upon stanzas of four lines, as is typical in *Against Love Poetry*,⁴ begins by invoking that silent past which remains occluded under cultural idealizations of the Irish landscape:

A famous battle happened in this valley.
 You never understood the nature poem.
Till now. Till this moment – if these statements
 seem separate, unrelated, follow this

silence to its edge and you will hear
 the history of air: the crispness of a fern
or the upward cut and turn around of
 a fieldfare or thrush written on it.

The other history is silent. The estuary
 is over there. The issue was decided here:
Two kings prepared to give no quarter.
 Then one king and one dead tradition.

As she makes explicit here, nature poetry has not represented what really happened in the past. The battle of the Boyne in 1690 between the Jacobite and the Williamite armies is one of the most important events in Irish history, for it confirmed the Protestant ascendancy in Ireland (Welch 2000: 38). Even though this is an heroic and glorious story, and, as such, would be easily inserted in Irish historical annals, Boland suggests that literature has avoided representing this event. The defeat of the Catholic army is not something to be proud of for those Irish Revivalists who attempted to stress an unbroken chain of Gaelic traditions, and who wished to hide their discontinuity towards their own 'authentic' roots. In their idealization of nature, of ferns, fieldfares, and thrushes, nature poetry, in this sense, omits representing a defeated past. In this sense, the Battle of the Boyne becomes an unrecorded story, an event which is only "written on" the Irish landscape in terms of absence, as "silence" and "air". The speaker encourages us to follow "this silence" and enter a darker reality on the other side of the river, in order to see an 'Underworld' which is situated at the edge of language. As is typical in Boland's mature work, the woman poet implies that the past still needs to be brought to the surface of Irish poetry:

Now the humid dusk, the old wounds
 wait for language, for a different truth.
When you see the silk of the willow
 and the wider edge of the river turn

and grow dark and then darker, then
 you will know that the nature poem
is not the action nor its end: it is
 this rust on the gate beside the trees, on

⁴ For Boland's preference for quartets in this volume, see "In Which Hester Bateman, 18th Century English Silversmith, Takes an Irish Commission", "Quarantine", "Then", "Marriage for the Millennium", "The Rooms of Exile", and "Code".

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the cattle grid underneath our feet,
 on the steering wheel shaft: it is
an aftermath, an overlay and even in
 its own modest way, an art of peace

Once again, Boland implies that “the gap between rhetoric and reality” needs to be bridged, in order to incorporate “the worst parts of our history” (interview with Consalvo 1992: 96). Conventional language has gradually steered away from “the old wounds”, from a subaltern past of ordeal and defeat. Nevertheless, this acknowledgement is counteracted by the speaker’s realization that the misrepresentation Irish poetry has exerted on ‘the real’ has been necessary. The “nature poem” has been “an art of peace” because it has slowly healed the wounds in the land, and wiped off the marks of battle. By allowing rust to grow on the gates, this literary convention has not intended to arouse national resistance, to record “the action nor [the] end” of Irish rebellion, but to cover and “overlay” both hatred and defeat with an utopian vision of a pure and untouched Irish landscape. On the other hand, by arguing that there is “a different truth” that needs to be deciphered, Boland avoids implying that her reconstruction of the past is the final viable, real, and authentic version. The traditional literary representation of Ireland’s past was not necessarily erroneous, not totally untruthful. The speaker suddenly introduces her own voice, and shows her conspiracy with nature poetry’s idealization of the Irish landscape:

I try the word *distance* and it fills with
 sycamores, a summer’s worth of pollen
And as I write *valley* straw, metal
 blood, oaths, armour are unwritten.

As is common in Boland’s poetry, the woman poet stresses her inability to bring a subaltern reality from a shadowy past. Her words cannot grasp the violence of the Battle of the Boyne, and, in this sense those “blood, oaths, armour” are left unrecorded. As she “tr[ies]” to uncover the “distance” between her own present and an Irish past, the only thing that spreads from her words is “[s]ilence” and “shadows”, as she later says in the poem. Nevertheless, the poet not only wishes to stress her own inability to act as a spokesperson, but also her desire to maintain a literary convention that offers exemption from hostilities. At the end, Boland makes this point even more explicit, by arguing that her poem attempts to show

[...] how this sweet corrosion
 begins to be complete: what we see
is what the poem says:
 evening coming – cattle, cattle-shadows –

and whin bushes and a change of weather
about to change them all: what we see is how
the place and the torment of place are
for this moment free of one another.

As an art of peace, nature poetry is able to separate “the place” from “the torment of place”, to forget injustices, Irish oppression and dispossession, and move forwards. Praga (1996: 35) has explained that there are almost no ‘neutral’ landscapes in Ireland, but highly sectorial ones, divided, most of them, by religious and historical boundaries. As landscape, in this sense, directly brings for the Irish writer mental associations of dispossession, violence, and suffering, a romantic idealization of nature can help him/her to leave the past behind. In this sense, the landscape Boland portrays is no longer reminiscent of a history of oppression but a volatile place which, in its constant change of light and weather, erodes and ‘unwrites’ history. The disruption of the lay-out in this poem, as in “The Water-Clock” (*In a Time of Violence*), indicates this passing of time, the natural process of weathering, dissolution, abrasion, and corrosion of those historical remnants in the Irish landscape. Hers is, in this sense, another ‘nature poem’, a “sweet corruption” that maintains the distance between what it represents and what actually happened. The demonstratives that appear in this poem (i.e. “these statements”; “these words”, “this sweet corruption”), common in *Against Love Poetry* in order to talk about Boland’s own act of writing,⁵ enhance the feeling of immediacy and proximity of the speaker to this literary legacy. The speaker now understands that, by omitting ‘the real’ one both forgets violence and oppression and moves away from the painful realization that both her “king” and her “tradition”, in other words, her ‘authentic’ and native roots, are dead and no longer recoverable. Instead of criticizing the cultural and political implications of the Revivalist idealization of nature, Boland now strongly shares their wish to erase all historical traces and to forget, at least momentarily, her desire to recuperate a subaltern past through memory and language. This is Boland’s own way, as she says in the title, of making “a new” and liberating “art on old ground”.

This new and more positive attitude towards her national literary tradition is further observed in “Irish Poetry”, the poem that closes *Against Love Poetry*. It is significant that this poem is dedicated to Michael Hartnett. For the first time after *New Territory*, Boland praises an Irish male poet, which indicates that she has a more reconciliatory attitude to the Irish literary canon. Hartnett (1941-1999) was a poet who identified greatly with Gaelic Ireland. His poems in many ways follow the tradition of the *dánta grádha*, love poems and dramatic lyrics composed

⁵ See, for instance, “In Which Hester Bateman, an 18th Century English Silversmith, Made a Marriage Spoon” (“this mediation”), “Quarantine” (“Let no love poem come to *this* threshold”), “First Year” (“Because I am writing *this*”), “Making Money” (“*this* final proof”), “Code” (“I am writing [...] composing *this*”), “Is It Still the Same” (“I wrote like that once./ But *this* is different”), and “Limits 2” (“If there was/ a narrative to my life [...] then/ let *this*/ be the sound of it”).

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around the middle of the fourteenth to the seventieth century by men with bardic training (Welch 2000: 81). He dedicated most of his life to translating early Irish lyrics and poets who exclusively wrote or are writing in Irish (i.e. Daibhí Ó Bruadair and Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill) (p. 146). Hartnett's collection *A Farewell to English* (1975) marked his desire to write poetry exclusively in Gaelic, although he returned to English years later with *Inchicore Haiku* (1985) (ibid). "Irish Poetry" is not only dedicated to Hartnett, but also addressed to him. Like in the poem commented above, Boland uses the first person pronoun in plural ('we') in order to include herself within the Irish literary tradition. The poem recalls the speaker's encounter with this writer one evening, and their conversation about Irish poetry:

We always knew there was no Orpheus in Ireland.
No music stored at the doors of hell.
No god to make it.
No wild breasts to weep and lie down to it.

But I remember an evening when the sky
was underworld-dark at four,
when ice had seized every part of the city
and we sat talking –
the air making a wreath for our cups of tea.

And you began to speak of our own gods.
Our heartbroken pantheon.

No Attic light for them and no Herodotus.

Orpheus was a legendary Thracian poet and musician of Greek mythology. His soothing music had the power to tame the wild beasts, to calm down warriors and storms, and to move even inanimate objects and plants (Falcon Martínez et al. 1980: 477). In Hades's Underworld, he was also able to paralyze momentarily the torture of those condemned in Hell (p. 478). Boland establishes an interestingly parallelism between the power and authority of Orpheus's music, and the powerlessness and desolation of Irish poets themselves. Poets in Ireland, the speaker implies, are not able to change the past, to soothe the pain of those dispossessed Irishmen and women who lie hidden under the layers of history and culture. Furthermore, there is no equal to Herodotus in Irish poetry, no historian who is able to create a narrative that can let the past speak through him/her. As we have seen, Boland's work exemplifies this inability to go back in full detail, to give voice to the plight of a subject people. On the other hand, Irish poetry is itself a lost tradition with no "gods" to rely on. As a culture based on the few remnants that have survived throughout centuries, theirs is a "heartbroken pantheon" of ancient bards and singers that can only appear in ghostly terms. As Montague (1974: 21) has noted, the "true condition" of Irish poetry is that it has been affected by the "mutilation" of its original medium of expression. According to this Irish

poet, even contemporary poets writing in Irish have to face the fact that their native tongue has been irrevocably damaged, and as such, it cannot compete in equal terms with the new literature written in the language of the conqueror. Nevertheless, and in contrast to “My Country in Darkness” (*The Lost Land*), where Boland presented Gaelic culture and language as irremediably lost, the speaker here is able to hear, with the aid of Hartnett, the music of Bardic lyric, “the sound/ of a bird's wing in a lost language”:

You made the noise for me.
Made it again.
Until I could see the flight of it: suddenly

the silvery lithe rivers of the southwest
lay down in silence
and the savage acres no one could predict
were all at ease, soothed and quiet and
listening to you, as I was. As if to music, as if to peace.

The well-constructed language in the first stanza gradually gives way at the end to longer sentences, unfolding by the only enjambment that appears in the poem. This fluidity of language parallels the blurring of past and present. Hartnett's new language is “stored at the doors of hell”, between the Underworld, the Gaelic unrecorded past, and the speaker's contemporary reality. In this sense, he becomes a new Orpheus in Ireland, who is able to bring change and whose voice suddenly paralyzes rivers and subdues “savage acres”. The moment is described as magical and hypnotic, both for the Irish landscape and the speaker herself. As in “How We Made a New Art on Old Ground”, Boland views her cultural legacy no longer as restrictive and limiting, but as a rich literary tradition that can bring “peace” and relieve the pain of an oppressed past. In this sense, she praises the ability of her Irish male colleague to find a voice that can bring an end to Irish cultural and historical dispossession.

7.4.7.4. A more assertive woman poet

As we have seen in *Against Love Poetry*, Boland offers a more positive perspective on her reality as a contemporary woman poet in Ireland. She no longer focuses, as she did in *The Lost Land*, on her victimized status as a person who still experiences the aftermaths and feels the wounds of imperialism and nationalism. Rather, she stands as a more confident writer who is able to understand that her life is not so scarred and dispossessed. Her reflections on ‘what endures’ after thirty years of being married, and on the liberating and decolonizing qualities of the Irish literary tradition indicate this. The main reason why her poetry experiences such a change stems from the fact that her status as an Irish woman poet is no longer questioned in her native country. In 1990,

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president Mary Robinson cited Boland's "The Singers" (*In a Time of Violence*) in her inaugural address (Hagen & Zelman 2004: 118). Since then, extracts of this poem can be read in the upholstery of Aer Lingus jets. Seven years later, in 1997, her poetry became part of the Irish Leaving Certificate exam. Because of this, the new generation in Ireland is getting used to the fact that there are Irish male poets as well as Irish women poets. Now that Boland has her own place within the Irish literary tradition, she has gradually ceased to feel intense restrictions when writing. In an interview, she has recently recognized that, although when she began writing, "there was almost a magnetic distance between the word 'woman' and the word 'poet'", she admits that "I don't feel that now" (interview with Destiny 2003).

This newly acquired assurance is observed in "Is It Still the Same", a poem in which Boland recalls the initial years of her poetic career. Like in "Fever" (*The Journey*), the title becomes the sentence that opens the poem:

young woman who climbs the stairs,
who closes a child's door,
who goes to her table
in a room at the back of a house?
The same unlighted corridor?
The same night air
over the wheelbarrows and rain-tanks?
The same inky sky and pin-bright stars?
You can see nothing of her, but her head
bent over the page, her hand moving,
moving again, and her hair.
I wrote like that once.
But this is different:
This time, when she looks up, I will be there.

In this poem, Boland reflects on the distance between her own past and her contemporary reality. Like in poems such as "A False Spring" (*Outside History*), in which the speaker says: "I want to find her,/ the woman I once was", Boland here feels compelled to retrieve her former (and presumably happier) years as she just moved to Dumdrum and raised her two daughters there. Nevertheless, she is unable to do so, because she is not young and her children are not with her anymore. She "can see nothing of her" now, except imagining her movement and excitement while she was writing. In spite of her failure to go back to those years in full detail, she stands as a more assured and assertive poet. Whereas her former self was constantly assailed by the contrary pulls of womanhood and poetry, she "will be there" to solve these contradictions, as a more mature poet who seems to know how to handle the complexities involved in being a woman writer in Ireland. If we compare this poem with "A False Spring", published thirteen years before, we find a significant change. In both, Boland stands as a writer affected by linear time, as someone who cannot recover what she had been before. Nevertheless, whereas in "A False Spring", Boland

failed when addressing her younger self ("I want to tell her she can rest,/ she is embodied now./ But narcissi,/ opening too early,/ are all I find"), in this poem, this "is different", because "[t]his time, when she looks back", the speaker will be able to establish a fruitful communication.

Therefore, it seems that, for Boland, age has allowed her to have more security and confidence in her poetic enterprise. She has acquired assurance and wisdom, as a result of the learned experience that usually comes with growing older. Those doubts and hesitations that abounded in volumes such as *The Journey* and *Outside History* are no longer predominant in *Against Love Poetry*. It is significant how, in contrast to *The Lost Land*, for instance, there are not so many references to lexical items such as 'country' and 'nation'. Now Boland feels more assured in dealing with these concepts, as her place within the literary canon is well grounded. Therefore, she takes these notions for granted, and does not feel compelled to mention them so often or to call them into question. On the other hand, those structures that emphasized that the speaker lacked knowledge about her subject matter are substituted by other expressions that indicate Boland is now in command of her experience. In poems such as "The Pinhole Camera" and "Once", both of them addressed to her husband, Boland proclaims herself as someone who is able to transmit some desirable piece of information: "You know/ the reason for the red berries/ darkening, and the road outside/ darkening, but did you know/ that the wedding/ of light and gravity/ is forever?"; "Did you know our suburb was a forest?". Similarly, in the first of these two poems, Boland asserts how, after thirty years of marriage, both she and her husband have spent enough time together "to know about power and nature", "to know which is which". Not only has marriage granted Boland more knowledge, but also, after forty years writing poetry, has acquainted her with the Irish literary tradition. As we have seen in "How We Made a New Art in Old Ground" and "Irish Poetry", she assertively claims that she "will know that the nature poem/ is not the action nor its end", and that she "always knew there was no Orpheus in Ireland".

7.4.7.5. A more assertive 'vulnerable' woman poet?

Boland currently enjoys a well established popularity not only in America, but also in her native country. This is reflected in poems such as "Is It Still the Same", in which she stands out as an assertive writer, confident of her writing skills. Nevertheless, this is not a general tendency in *Against Love Poetry*. In poems such as "Quarantine" and "Suburban Woman: Another Detail", Boland continues writing with that powerless and non-authoritarian stance that characterizes her previous volumes of poetry. One of the reasons why Boland wishes to continue writing from a marginal and displaced position is because, by being at the edges, she can subvert how Irish poets have traditionally written at the centre, "in courts, at the seat of power" (interview with Destiny

2003). Only by exerting her voice from the margins, can she more powerfully bring the past back and recover those silences that have characterized Irish experience.

This powerless stance is observed in “Quarantine”. In this poem, Boland returns to the topic of the famine, a motif that was occluded in *The Lost Land*. As she has recently described in a poetry reading on June 19th 2004, in the National Concert Hall, Dublin, this poem is based on a local incident that happened in Ireland in the nineteenth century, a story recorded by a man sixty years later.⁶ A man and a woman left a workhouse in Carrigstyra, West Cork, at the time of the 1847 famine. They walked north, back to their cabin:

In the worst hour of the worst season
of the worst year of a whole people
a man set out from the workhouse with his wife.
He was walking – they were both walking – north.

She was sick with famine fever and could not keep up.
He lifted her and put her on his back.
He walked like that west and west and north.
Until at nightfall under freezing stars they arrived.

In the morning they were both found dead.
Of cold. Of hunger. Of the toxins of a whole history.
But her feet were held against his breastbone.
The last heat of his flesh was his last gift to her.

Like those poems in *The Lost Land*, “Quarantine” avoids the rhetorical complexity that characterized *The Journey* and *Outside History* for instance, in favour of a plainer style with repetitions and simpler sentences, some of them incomplete.⁷ This stripping method is Boland’s own way of moving away from a “false rhetoric”, from a style loaded with unnecessary ornaments that would distance her from ‘the real’ (Boland 1997d: xii). ‘The real’ here is this local story, omitted from official historical accounts. As Boland argues, their death was caused not only by the “cold” and “hunger” of the winter famine, but also by “the toxins of a whole history”, a history that did not wish to include this story in its annals. As the very same title “Quarantine” indicates, both are ‘subaltern’ figures who inhabit an enforced isolation and restriction from national and cultural narrations. Boland, therefore, feels the need to reinsert this local story, uncovering and revealing love in one of the most tragic events in Irish history. As both figures are found dead in the morning, she explains how the woman’s feet were against the man’s chest, because he had tried to warm them. For Boland, this is “a dark love story, an exemplary one”,⁸ because it shows how the emotional attachment of husband and wife becomes stronger as they face death.

⁶ This reading was recorded with the permission of Eavan Boland.

⁷ For further evidence of this plain style, see “How We were Transfigured”, “Once”, “The Burdens of a History”, “Called”, and “A Model Ship Made by Prisoners Long Ago”.

⁸ Poetry reading, June 19th 2004, in the National Concert Hall, Dublin.

According to Boland, conventional love poetry has failed to record stories such as this, because it has mainly been concerned with portraying an idealized couple. That is why the speaker claims at the end of the poem that she prefers to create a de-romanticized story:

Let no love poem ever come to this threshold.
There is no place here for the inexact
praise of the easy graces and sensuality of the body.
There is only time for this merciless inventory:

Their death together in the winter of 1847.
Also what they suffered. How they lived.
And what there is between a man and a woman.
And in which darkness it can be best proved.

If Boland is to choose between praising the female body and creating a “merciless inventory”, she obviously opts for the second possibility. The detailed facts of their lives at the end of the poem are more accurate inscriptions of their suffering and painful experience. Any attempt to idealize their love would inevitably strip away all the dispossession and oppression of both figures. It is interesting to note how Boland, as her popularity increases, continues to be concerned with the oppression and dispossession that has influenced Irish experience so dramatically. It is as if she feels more entitled now to talk about these issues. Nevertheless, she still tries to avoid acting as a communal voice, speaking ‘on behalf’ of the past. As “Quarantine” shows, love poetry and elegy go together. Boland refuses to bring relief to both characters, and she argues that “darkness” is her best way of explaining “what there is between a man and a woman”. Instead of writing as an authoritative poet who might create a more compassionate version of the past, she decides to leave it as: a “merciless inventory”, a defeated story of death, hunger, and suffering, but also full of intense love. On the other hand, her poem is written not from the centre of the Irish canon, but from a “threshold” between what is and what has never been recorded. As Keen (2000: 27) has noticed:

Boland now possesses considerable influence within the Irish literary community as a result of her achievements, but any opportunity that this may create to retreat to the relative safety of an authoritarian voice is undermined by her insistence that the political authority of any poem “grows the more the speaker is weakened and made vulnerable by the tensions he or she creates”.

The vulnerability and fragility of both figures in “Quarantine” stands in opposition to those idealized and romantic stories recorded in conventional love poetry. It is precisely this “tension” that makes “Quarantine” a poem filled with “political authority”. For Boland, as she says in the poem, it would be all too “easy” to sing the “graces and sensuality of the body”. Instead, she

landscape of constant change. The woman cannot be solidified by the speaker, and therefore, she cannot fix and recover the woman she once was, above all because she is not that person anymore. Although both the kitchen and the child are identified at a certain point by the woman as “mine”, the inevitable erosions of the passing of time create an uncrossable distance between younger and mature selves. The disruption of the lay-out in these lines enhances the fluidity of this poetic image, and the absence that Boland finds when uttering this assertion. In contrast to previous poems, the diffused and “featureless” light of twilight does not blur the boundaries between past and present. Twilight is the only thing that Boland can actually remember, as she says in the parenthetical note, whereas the other scenes she describes can only be ‘imagined’. Nevertheless, the use of the demonstrative in “that twilight” increases the distance between the poet’s own reality and those former years she tries to recover. In contrast to *Outside History, Against Love Poetry* recurs to demonstratives such as ‘that’ and ‘those’ not to emphasize the speaker’s detachment from an Irish past, but rather her detachment from her previous self.⁹ Both herself and her children stand, in this sense, “beyond” the poet’s grasp. In “Hide This place from Angels”, the speaker advances that “soon the weight/ of the lives we lived would become inert/ house and tree shadows”. This painful realization is manifested in this poem, in which the scene she tries to retrieve can only be imagined in terms of darkness: “the neighbourhood/ is the colour of shadow”. In both poems, shadows no longer refer to an Irish subaltern past, but to Boland’s own journey to death. The end of the poem focuses on the desolation and powerlessness of the speaker:

I can see nothing now.
I write at my desk alone.
I choose words taken from the earth,
from the root, from the faraway
oils and essence of elegy:
Bitter. And close to the bone.

The poem ends with a clear melancholic tone, characteristic of Boland’s mature style. Once again, Boland’s identity is based on her role as a mother and her life in Dumdum. But, as an exiled mother living in the US, those foundations on which Boland’s identity as a woman poet is based are damaged. Her nationhood is “faraway” and her motherhood can only be imagined in terms of “elegy”. In this sense, Boland’s “root[s]”, her ‘authentic’ origins, can only be perceived in terms of absences rather than presences. She is an adult woman who, separated from her children and living somewhere else, faces both her life and poetic enterprise “alone”. After mentioning her kitchen, her window, her children, the only thing that the speaker truly possesses at the end of the poem is

⁹ See, for instance, the nostalgic use of these demonstratives in “Lines for a 30th Wedding Anniversary” (“those years together”), “Limits 2” (“in those years”), “How we were transfigured” (“In those days”), “Marriage for the Millennium” (“that street”), and “The Burdens of a history” (“that evening”).

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“my desk”, a room of one’s own where she can at least write about what she has lost. Instead of describing herself as a stable and immortal writing subject, Boland imagines herself, once again, as a woman subject to death and erasure.

This melancholic stance is continued in poems such as “Limits 2”, “How We Were Transfigured”, and “The Old City”, poems in which Boland reflects on her impossibility to go back, as a woman affected by linear time. As Boland says in “The Old City”, “[s]mall things/ make the past./ Make the present seem out of place”. Boland’s main dislocation as a woman writer in this volume does not stem so much from her own dispossession in terms of history and nationhood, but from the fact that she now feels her experiences of ageing and erasure more powerfully than ever. In “The Old City”, she describes herself as a “woman cracking and twisting”, perishing like those “[b]lack atoms falling down/ on green leaves”. Death and destruction is what defines her at the end of the day.

7.4.7.6. Conclusion

It is interesting to note how Boland, in spite of her achieved ‘authority’ within the American and Irish literary panoramas, continues to adopt in *Against Love Poetry* a strongly marginal position when writing. Boland’s movement is, therefore, symptomatic of that feminist advocacy to “unlearn[...] female privilege” (Spivak 1994: 91) or to “become minor” (Kaplan 1990: 357). A general overview of Boland’s poetic production from 1972 to 2003 shows that as she becomes more widely read, she appears more dispossessed in her poems. Boland’s literal movement from the margins to the centre of her national literary canon is, significantly enough, reflected in reversed terms. Although she wrote volumes such as *New Territory* as a woman poet disenfranchised from the national tradition, she wrote as an authoritarian poetic voice, imitating that Irish traditional poetry which encourages the subject to write with a “bardic force behind him” (interview with Villar Argáiz 2005a). As Boland gradually becomes a prominent voice within the Irish literary panorama, her poetic voice experiences an increasing powerlessness and marginalization. The reason she does this is because of the subversive possibilities that a marginal position grants her. As Boland has argued, even though “the history of poetry shows that [...] the centre dictates the margin [...], in the end the margin always defines the centre” (interview with Villar Argáiz 2005a). This acknowledgement would necessarily revise my assertions as regards *The Lost Land*. As I have explained, in this volume Boland highlighted her victimized status as an Irish woman doubly colonized partly by the demands of the market place. Nevertheless, it would be unfair to view Boland’s dispossessed poetic self simply as an outcome of an American desire to read ‘Orientalist’ and ‘different’ stories. For Boland, adopting a powerless position as a writer is

also a subversive mechanism. First of all, she consciously relegates herself to being an Irish woman poet who inherits an oppressive past in order to bring to the fore in her poems those 'silences' and painful experiences that have characterized Ireland's history. Secondly, self-marginalization allows her to avoid adopting that authoritarian and communal stance that has been at the centre of Irish poetry. Finally, by describing herself as an unstable and vulnerable subject who experiences displacement and 'deterritorialization', Boland shows the fallacy of those hegemonic beliefs in the subject's right to possess and to claim a place as his/her own. When Boland was asked recently if she has eventually come to terms with those painful childhood memories of exile and displacement in *Against Love Poetry*, she answered that she still feels an intense estrangement from her own country (interview with Villar Argáiz 2005a). Indeed, one of her most recent unpublished poems, "In Our Own Country", ends by arguing that "we will always be 'exiles in our own country'" (ibid).

8. CONCLUSION

8. Conclusion

Give her another hundred years, I concluded, [...] give her a room of her own and five hundred a year, let her speak her mind and leave out half that she now puts in, and she will write a better book one of these days. She will be a poet, I said, putting *Life's Adventure*, by Mary Carmichael, at the end of the shelf, in another hundred years' time. (Woolf 1974: 142)

Virginia Woolf wrote *A Room of One's Own* in 1929, seven decades before Boland established herself as one of the most important contemporary women poets in Ireland and abroad. In fact, Boland has become a 'poet' by having a room of her own, both in a literal and in a figurative sense. Boland's change of life as she moved from the (exclusively male) academic life in Dublin to the suburbs triggered her reaction to the dominant aesthetics of the literary tradition. Her marriage to the novelist Kevin O'Casey, based on mutual understanding and liberal ideals, the raising of her two children, and the creation of a homely atmosphere where she could both combine her roles as wife, mother and housewife, and her role as literary creator made it possible for her to own that room Woolf talks about, a room where she could write freely, where she could "let [...] her mind" speak (p. 142). From the 1980s onwards, women poets in Ireland have won more recognition and more possibilities of publication in a country where literature has been conceived as a masculine terrain. Boland has achieved a room, not only in her house, but also in the literary panorama of Ireland.

This research has aimed to show Boland's evolution in her writing career. Her 'Feminine'/'Assimilationist' and 'Feminist'/'Cultural Nationalist' phases, though of short duration, have been necessary for the quest of the woman poet's artistic decolonization, for her finding of a *new territory* in Irish poetry, a more authentic one, where her reality as an Irish woman can be more truthfully recorded. As de Beauvoir (1997: 295) says, "[o]ne is not born, but rather becomes a woman". What these two earlier stages show is that Boland has found difficulty in becoming, in her poems, that *kind* of Irish woman she wants to be: not the female muse, object of desire, and nationalist emblem of male literary texts, but a woman who becomes the speaking voice, the creative author of poems. Furthermore, these stages have been necessary for her forging of a new form of being 'Irish', for her transformation of a category which has been defended as 'pure' and 'distinctive', and her subsequent vindication of an enriching hybrid and cross-cultural form of 'Irishness' that surpasses national boundaries.

As has been hypothesized by Showalter (1999: 13), Fanon (1990: 178), and Memmi (1990: 168), members of the minority culture (i.e. women, the colonized) are initially forced to master the dominant/ hegemonic culture, in order to make themselves heard as agentive subjects. In her early years as a writer, Boland experiences this process of assimilation of the conventional parameters on which Irish poetry has been founded. In volumes such as *Poetry by Boland/ Prose Joseph*

O'Malley and *New Territory*, she becomes an "honorary male poet", a speaking voice which writes with that weight of bardic authority nationalist literature demanded from Irish writers (interview with Allen-Randolph 1993b: 118). Womanhood is not a prerogative for Boland at this stage in her literary career. She rather focuses her energy on recording 'Irishness' with the highest degree of accuracy possible. This concept is described as a coherent notion: to be an Irish poet means to be a communal voice speaking on behalf of Irish oppression under British rule; to commemorate those dead heroes that have fought for Ireland's independence; to express love and admiration for a beautiful landscape, an Edenic rural place where Gaelic traditions and native authenticity are preserved. To be 'Irish', in short, is to be 'different' and to be able to express this 'difference' by creating a distinctive national culture, just as Revivalists like Yeats advocated.

In *In Her Own Image*, Boland writes new poems, adventures along radical and different paths. In contrast to the uncritical attitude of Boland's initial poems towards the objectification of women in art, Boland starts to be fully conscious of the implications traditional literary images have for her as a woman writer. Now, the woman poet finds the Irish poetic tradition oppressive and disaffecting. She embraces feminism at the aesthetic level, a stance which she would later refuse as "separatist" (Boland 1996a: 234). Like 'Cultural Nationalism', this ideology is based on prescriptive demands, because it encourages the woman poet to defend her own reality as distinctive, unique, and different from the (masculine and imperialist) 'Other'. Boland maintains a critical attitude towards cultural feminine representations by presenting a counter-image: a woman who is fully active and who is in command of her own experience. The commonplace 'knowledge is power' becomes at this stage almost a political manifesto behind her feminist poems. Whereas in her mature work Boland subjects all knowledge to scrutiny, the speaking voices in *In Her Own Image* make explicit that they know the source of their oppression and that they are able to express with accuracy their own reality. What they know, above all, is their female body, and it is through this knowledge that they attempt to dominate and control their own existence. By placing the body as a source of resistance, as the site where women's reality can be truthfully sheltered, Boland, like Irigaray (1991: 24) and Cixous (1994: 38), returns to biology in order to counteract patriarchal discourse. In this sense, gender becomes a priory essence for Boland to reassert her own identity as a woman. As Showalter (1999: 13), Memmi (1990: 7), Fanon (1991: 11), and other feminist and postcolonial critics have explained (Minh-ha 1989: 38; Christian 1990: 45; Donaldson 1992: 11; Spivak 1993: 17), this action is bound to fail. Notions such as 'womanhood' and 'negritude' should not be defended in essentialist terms, for this ultimately leads to an oppositional affirmation that falls back into a hegemonic discourse, and reiterates the patterns of dominance and authority of ideologies such as imperialism and nationalism.

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It is not until her 'Female'/'Liberationist' phase that Boland's poetry deals simultaneously with both categories, 'Irishness' and 'womanhood'. Nevertheless, in contrast to her previous volumes of poetry, nationalism and feminism (and their corresponding views on identity), are not perceived anymore as enabling ideologies. Boland constructs a complex Irish and female identity, an identity which is not based this time on notions such as 'purity', 'authenticity', 'race', and 'biology'. In this sense, her poetry stretches beyond the boundaries of gender and nationality in which the notion of selfhood has been fostered.

First of all, Boland subjects concepts like national and cultural identity, concepts which have played an important role in the formation of anti-colonial resistance, to a process of unravelling. Like postcolonial theorists such as Bhabha (1995: 167), Said (1994: 276), and Hall (1990: 223-224), she condemns nationalism as an essentialist ideological formation, and defends the legitimacy of her own fragmented and 'performative' experience as an Irish citizen. The process by which she does so is dual. On the one hand, by legitimizing as literary what has traditionally been considered unliterary, Boland defends a more inclusive national identity, an idea of nationalism in which women's realities and experiences are not obliterated anymore. The realities of her own life (as a suburban married woman, a housewife, and a mother) become themes for her writing, and her personal experience acts as an antidote to mythical patriarchal constructs of women, and in particular, to nationalist icons such as Mother Ireland. Boland's women are neither saintly 'angels in the house' nor malevolent witches, as the patriarchal tradition has described them. Furthermore, her mothers do not correspond to the model of mother and wife as advocated by the Church, the State, and Irish society in general: these figures are highly humanized, they experience complex feelings (e.g. unconditional love, distressing melancholy, and uncontrollable jealousy), and they are affected by the passing of time and the loss of beauty. On the other hand, the idea of 'Ireland' Boland envisages is not a community composed by a "People [as] One" (Bhabha 1995: 141), an imagined cohesive 'whole'. Rather, her nation is characterized by fragmentary experiences, hybrid subjects who stand in-between 'Englishness' and 'Irishness', and whose interstitial location allow them to marry oppositions. As a consequence, Boland defends a more fluid notion of national identity. For Boland, Ireland is a map without frontiers, a free space of exploration and peregrination where the subject, constantly in exile, is able to inhabit different spaces: domestic and suburban settings of houses, urban settings inhabited by ordinary citizens, rotten and destroyed rural settings peopled by famine victims, and underworlds of emigrant Irishmen and women. Boland's interest in the meaning of Ireland is in this sense an interest in traditional 'insignificant', 'unheroic', and 'unpleasant' issues. In all these things, the poet finds the

source of her poetic creativity, as well as the strength to subvert the nationalist dream of a (pre-colonial) 'Irishness' which is pure and authentic.

Secondly, the idea of 'womanhood' is not taken for granted either. Although Boland's mature work focuses on women's experiences as wives, housewives, and mothers, her poetry is not grounded in an oppositional politics. On the one hand, the woman poet avoids universalizing women's experiences, by focusing on a wide variety of women: for example, upper class rich women, laundresses, seamstresses, prostitutes, poor farmers, and apparently privileged Anglo-Irish women. On the other hand, whereas in *In Her Own Image* Boland seems to suggest that only by defining woman in essentialist terms (as a grounded and stable self) female emancipation can be achieved, in her mature poetry it is her lack of specification and ambiguity when describing her female characters that leads to a more real and accurate representation. In contrast to her second phase, where Boland mostly focused on "sexual difference" (or the distance between the male and the female worlds), the woman poet is now concerned with another kind of distance: the significant gap between reality and artistic images. In her poetry, there is always a void between artistic representations and 'the real': art fixes and defines (female) images in its pursuit for beauty and aesthetic order; in the process, the complexity of lived experience is omitted and/or simplified. Therefore, one of the most important techniques Boland employs in her poetry to record her 'womanhood' without yielding to the temptations of feminism and its attempt to capture "womanness", as Rooney (1993: 2) would put it, is to create a landscape of 'in-betweenness'. It is in this landscape where her poetic figures are described, with the result that they avoid artistic solidification, and therefore simplification. The technique is as follows: Boland usually presents a female figure which is victimized or defeated, both by history (Ireland's oppression under colonial rule) and by poetry (women's simplification under nationalist allegories). The second step in this process is usually to establish an identification with this subject, either by ventriloquism (becoming the voice of this 'object'), or simply by sharing her grief and dispossession. When this identification occurs, a landscape of fluidity, constant change, and diffused lights invades the poem, with the consequence that the figure of the woman and/or the poet become (equally) dissolved. In this sense, the usual movement in Boland's mature work is from expression and denunciation of women's dual colonization to disintegration, and with this, paradoxically, to liberation. Only by moving away from restrictive boundaries and fixed images, Boland seems to suggest, can the gendered colonial subject be liberated.

In this sense, by describing her 'Irishness' and 'womanhood' as fluid and unstable categories, Boland's poetry both exposes the constructedness of identity itself and allows the speaker to find a place freed from authoritative ideologies. Nevertheless, if Boland apparently

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manages to find artistic decolonization so easily, one might wonder why in her latest productions (*The Lost Land* and *Against Love Poetry*), she continues refusing to describe herself as a subject liberated from the colonial and patriarchal legacy. As we have seen, she keeps presenting herself as a wounded and scarred self that is doubly colonized as an Irish citizen and as a woman poet. One of the reasons I have put forward to justify this point is that Boland, as an exiled writer in the United States, deliberately exploits an ‘Orientalist’ consumer demand in her poems by ‘authenticating’ her own oppression as an Irish woman poet, and offering images of a wounded postcolonial country. Nevertheless, this is not the only reason for Boland’s apparent difficulty in achieving artistic decolonization. Some postcolonial critics have argued that the ultimate liberation for the colonized subject can only be viewed as a process and not as an achievable goal. Rajan (1993: 8) summarizes this view as follows: “We are forced to concede that a ‘non-colonialist’ (and therefore non-contaminated) space remains a wish-fulfilment within postcolonial knowledge production”. According to Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (2002a: 195), this is due to the fact that we can never entirely discard the legacy of the past, and although we can “appropriate and transform it in infinite ways”, history is always there, as a ghostly presence. The Irish woman historian Beddoe (1998: 3) has put it as follows: “Without a knowledge of our past, we are always having to begin again” (quoted in Hill 2003: 1). This is precisely what Boland experiences. Distant from a past that, she feels, directly affects her as an Irish women poet, she constantly finds the need to recover a subaltern marginal and oppressed reality, obliterated from official national and historical narratives. She establishes a comradeship with those shadowy figures of Ireland’s past, and therefore, she continues presenting herself as a marginal and colonized entity. Nevertheless, this (obsessive) emphasis on her dual oppression as an Irish woman is itself a subversive strategy. Marginality is not only an index of suffering, but it can also be per se positive. Locating herself at the edges of the (powerful and authoritarian) Irish literary tradition gives Boland a vantage point from which to subvert all those assumptions upon which canonical poetry has been constructed. First of all, marginality allows Boland to subvert the dichotomy established between a powerful male author and a submissive female object, which is at the heart of lyric poetry. Boland scrutinizes Western literary practices and theorizing, exposing their gaps and incongruities and calling their supremacy into question. As an author, Boland becomes a powerless, non-authoritarian, and vulnerable speaker, someone who shares that displacement and ‘deterritorialization’ Irish women have experienced by simplified cultural and nationalist images. By so doing, she dismantles the power and authority of official cultural discourses in which women have neither had a place from which to speak, nor a place where to be included as an active agent. Secondly, Boland’s self-marginalization allows her to dismantle that nationalist

rhetoric which encouraged the poet to act as a representative and communal figure, speaking on behalf of Ireland's oppression. In approaching the Irish past, Boland interrogates the terms of representation. The woman poet avoids acting as an appropriate spokesperson, as someone who is able to offer more 'truthful' accounts of Ireland's past. Like Spivak (1994: 80), she believes that such an act runs the risk of being misrepresentative, of undermining difference and simplifying a subaltern reality which is heterogeneous. In this sense, she shows the fallacy involved in believing in the authority and the 'accurate' representation of official cultural and historical accounts (whether imperialist or nationalist). Boland's poetry teaches us that no one can truly speak on behalf of his/her own country, that one can never entirely be an 'envoy' of his/her own community. Thirdly, by highlighting her marginalization, Boland is, funnily enough, able to retrieve this 'inaccessible' Irish past. Her language of silences, doubts, and hesitations not only counteracts colonial, nationalist, and patriarchal discourses, but also offers a more accurate representation of the subaltern, by bringing to the fore of her poems Irish women's muteness, dumbness, and painful experiences in the past. In this sense, Boland's mature representation of herself as a marginal (and still colonized) entity is in fact a technique which allows her to achieve artistic decolonization.

I end this conclusion by stressing the two contradictory pulls which underlie Boland's poetry, mostly her mature production. Boland's mature work is symptomatic of that "anti-anti-essentialism" Arrowsmith (2000: 69) identifies in some contemporary women writers in Ireland. On the one hand, Boland stresses a postmodernist celebration of diversity and plurality, and a recognition of the multiple and fragmentary identities that constitute categories such as 'Irishness' and 'womanhood'. Faithful to poststructuralism, Boland demonstrates the artificiality of identity claims such as those defended by imperialism, nationalism, and feminism. Her mature poetry constantly overcomes binary oppositions (such as colonizer/ colonized, Englishness/ Irishness, and masculine/ feminine) by means of hybridity and fluidity. This postmodernist anti-essentialism observed in her work is simultaneously counteracted by her desire to maintain a sense of cultural identity. Her work is moulded according to an imperative to create an imagined female community, a social bond with all Irish women from the past. Boland constantly attempts to establish a dialogue with the idea of the nation, and to search for a different relationship with the past and to Irish identity.

In this sense, Boland occupies an ideological position which is paradoxical, as a woman poet who yearns simultaneously for an anti-essentialist depiction of the 'self' and an essentialist connection with national identity. Terry Eagleton (1997: 11-12) has expressed his belief that the

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richness of Irish cultural studies is that it has to analyze a category which is both pure and impure, in the sense that it is both strictly traditional, but at the same time, radically hybrid:

[...] the ideological category of Irishness signifies on the one hand roots, belonging, tradition, Gemeinschaft, and on the other hand, again with marvellous convenience, exile, diffusion, globality, diaspora. [...] With wonderful economy, it signifies a communitarism nostalgically seductive in a disorientatingly cosmopolitan world, while offering itself at the same time as a very icon of that world in its resonance of political defeat, hybridity, marginality, fragmentation.

In the plenary panel “The Politics of Irish Studies” organized by the Academy for Irish Cultural Heritages at the University of Ulster, on February 7th 2004, Eagleton expanded this argument by asserting that Ireland is “the most desirable nation to study nowadays”.¹ The reason for this, according to Eagleton, is that Ireland combines the “two most contradictory factors present in any society”: there is an “intense ‘sense of place’ and local identity, rootedness and a belief of historical uniqueness”; while at the same time, it is a society shaped by the postmodernist themes of “migrancy, displacement, and diaspora”. The dream of a spiritual homeland is a consoling alternative for those Irish writers who wish to counteract their “grooving reality” as exiled and rootless subjects, as individuals who know they belong nowhere.

Similarly, I believe that Boland’s poetry is also one of “the most desirable” literary productions “to study nowadays”. The two contradictory tendencies Eagleton identifies in Irish literature are also manifested in her poetry. The evolution Boland’s poetic career experiences from 1972 onwards illustrates in an exemplary way the tensions Irish (women) writers experience as (gendered) postcolonial subjects. Boland desires to find a stable ‘sense of place’; she yearns for a spiritual rootedness as an Irish citizen and also as a woman writer. In the process, she is constantly assailed by a profound experience of historical and cultural displacement. In this sense, Boland is divided between two identities, her Irish national identity (which demands her identification with the nation, in order to be an agent and participant of its discourse), and her hybrid identity as a migrant subject (which allows her to move freely between those ideologies which confer identity in terms of categories such as nation and gender). Out of this tension, Boland manages to present a background where new decolonizing identities can emerge, what I have called a *new territory* for the Irish woman in poetry.

¹ Recorded with the permission of Terry Eagleton.

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10. APPENDIX

10.1. AN INTERVIEW WITH EAVAN BOLAND

10.1. An Interview with Eavan Boland

Dublin

18th June, 2004



PVA: I really enjoyed your introduction to Carol Shloss' session,¹ where you have mentioned that biography is "an ethic" for yourself. I found that very interesting, because in fact reading your poetry is entering constant biographies about the past. One of the questions I wanted to ask you is related to this comment of yours. How is identity constructed in your poetry, by recording these biographies, these silences of the past?

EB: It's an interesting question. I think all human identity is fictional in some way. What you construct from your past is usually a process of selection rather than construction: there's no actual model on which to build a past or a present. Inevitably, you select what serves the construction. In my own case, when I was young, one of the real shaping influences was my gradual discovery of the difference between the past and history. In Ireland, there's a wide and instructive distance between those two. I believe history is an official version of events –it is itself a constructed narrative. But the past, at least as I came to see it, is a place of silences and losses and disappearances. That gap, that distance between those two narratives – and my own gradual understanding of it – has been a powerful motive for me to make certain arguments and to challenge certain concepts. I also came to believe that if I, as a poet, didn't

¹ Eavan Boland granted me this interview after her introduction to Carol Shloss's reading of some extracts of *To Dance In the Wake* (2004) in the National College of Ireland (Bloomsday 100: International James Joyce Symposium).

explore that difference I ran the risk of being captured by a pre-ordained version of my life. I didn't want that.

PVA: I find very interesting what you are saying, the fact that the past is full of silences and whispers, as one might observe when reading your poetry. By defining the past in such a way, can real subaltern consciousness, the native voice, be grasped? Can an artist represent in an authentic way the past?

EB: No artist can really represent a past. They can only represent their own view of it. If you want to accept the historical version of events, then you'll deduce the past by what is not said, rather than what is. Ireland is a small country. It struggled with the whole reality of oppression, colony and liberation. But when it came to construct the version of its history which would address those realities, what emerged, perhaps inevitably, was a relentless narrative of heroes. Constructing that narrative was a reflex that goes to the heart of Irish history. In 1848 there was collection of songs and ballads, published by Gavan Duffy and Thomas Davis, called *The Spirit of the Nation*. It's a stirring, musical book – it has ballads, refrains, stanzas about Irish resistance. But it was published in a year when the Irish were still dying in their thousands or perishing on coffin ships. Yet not a word in that book refers to the crisis of the famine. That's a fairly representative example of the exclusions that come with a story of heroes. When you look closely at something like that you realize that not only is there a difference between the past and history, but in certain circumstances a version of history can actually suppress what is really happening. In reality, Irish history is a hard and relentless account of suffering. It is about failure, defeat, and the harshness of the most brutal kinds of survival. It is not about heroism. The fact that Irish history chose to be about heroism opened a fault line for me. It made me question what the real Irish story was, and where I fitted into it as an Irish poet. Inevitably, all this served to gender my sense of Irishness. The history and the heroism seemed male: the past, with all its silences, seemed female. But that's a gendering by effect, not cause. In the Famine Museum in Strokestown, there's a letter from a woman, written in 1848. She is trying to get her children out of the workhouse. She may have left them there. She's writing to the middleman on an estate to try to find them. Almost certainly they were dead by then. It's a letter from the deepest regions of the underworld. I don't want a history that – by its emphasis on victory – overwrites the profound human defeat expressed in that letter.

PVA: When talking about this history of dispossession, humiliation, there is a passage in Object Lessons where you recount how you went to the table with an Irishness which was not historic or Bardic, but an Irishness “full of silences”. I was drawn to this definition of Irishness. How do you view Irishness, Irish identity? Like an easy identifiable self, or like a polyglot culture with different traditions, different selves?

EB: Ireland’s history was defined – at least when I was young – by its story of resistance. It was a small country which had bested a large one, and an empire to boot. It became an emblem of succeeding against the odds. I was never comfortable with just that and only that. I think I realized there were two possible views of Irishness. In the first, you could follow writers like Daniel Corkery – he makes a powerful case in his book *The Hidden Ireland* – which argues that below the surface of colony, below all the humiliations, there is a pure, untouched and somehow golden land of saints and scholars. A pure Ireland. It’s a surprisingly dangerous notion. Or you can believe, as I came to, that the island and all the people on it are deeply marked by the humiliation and pain of what happened. That we ourselves are the text of it. That we are, in other words, constructed by the construct of colony itself: we are the sum total of the fragmentations, compromises, sufferings that occurred. And the more real, the more substantial for being so. If you don’t have that sense, you may fall into the nostalgia for an Ireland which never really existed, and reject the present for an unreachable past. There are real, living dangers in that attitude: we had 25 years of violence in this country because some people thought that they were more Irish than others. We should have learned that whatever we stood for, whatever we were, it perished the moment somebody died for being perceived as less Irish than someone else. The real achievement of Irish literature is itself a recognition of colony: we took the language of the conqueror and made it tell our story. By doing that, we made a language, in which every suppression of who we were occurred serve? as the vehicle of our self-expression. I think that’s central.

PVA: So, in this sense, do you feel comfortable when writing in English?

EB: Yes. It’s both my language and a recognition of what happened. I’ve nothing but respect and admiration for those who write in the Irish language. But in a practical way, I was never going to write in Irish because I was educated outside of Ireland. Like many other Irish writers, I wrote in English because it was the language I was left with, both personally and historically. That being said, there also seems to me something wonderfully subversive about being an Irish writer in the English language. The very injustices which made it inevitable that an Irish writer would write in English can be addressed in that writing. It can also be

addressed in reality. I think Irish writing in the twentieth century proves that losing a language – which is always a tragedy – doesn't mean that you lose an identity. In fact identity is often a composite of all those fragmentations which caused the language to be lost in the first place.

PVA: In your essay "Daughters of Colony", you mention, when talking about Ireland as a postcolonial country, that it is very difficult to measure the colonial effects because they vary not only from one culture to another one, but also among those people belonging to the same community. According to this point, would you agree with using those theoretical paradigms as proposed by postcolonial theorists such as Homi Bhabha, Edward Said, or Gayatri Spivak to talk about Ireland, or to talk about Irish literature, and in particular your poetry?

EB: I agree with some of it. Some of it doesn't seem relevant. There can be problems with a global post-colonial template, including the fact – ironically – that it can be both oppressive and exclusive. When the *Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing* – an openly post-colonial Irish anthology – was published in 1992 it excluded many women. My work was represented in it; many others were left out. It was a striking anomaly: a statement about colonial behaviour which perpetuated it. But those contradictions can happen.

*PVA: I would like to focus now on your own evolution as a poet, an aspect of your work I am greatly interested in. There is a clear evolution from *New Territory* onwards which I think it is perceived not only as regards poetic concerns but also as regards language. I think that this evolution deserves further research. You have stated at one point that a truly important poet changes the interior of the poem together with the external perceptions of identity of the poet. Your poetry has opened the way for new concerns never talked about in Irish poetry, such as the private and domestic world of women. How do you think that these new images of femininity and nationality are reflected in your (mature) poetic language, your writing techniques?*

EB: I certainly didn't know how to reflect them in *New Territory*. By the time I finished *The War Horse* I was beginning to struggle with a different subject matter, but still uncertain. It wasn't till the very end of that book, in a poem called "Suburban Woman" that I touched on those themes, and then only briefly. It's hard to change the way you write. It's hard to unlearn the way you've learned to be a poet. Both were involved with the poems I was trying to write in *In Her Own Image*, *Night Feed* and *The Journey*. There's a lot of different ways of talking about changing a style. For me, I felt the interior of the poem could only be changed by changing where the poet stood in the poem. I felt that the Irish poem had traditionally

been written with the poet standing in one place and throwing their voice from that location only. It's an inexact way of putting it, but it's what I felt. The Irish poet had traditionally written from the centre, with the whole weight of authority and bardic force behind him. I wondered what would happen if you shifted to the margin, if you displaced that centre. A poem like *Mise Eire* was an attempt at that.

Maybe I can expand that inexact language in this way: where a poet stands in a poem – to continue with that image – isn't just arbitrary. The poet's stance is a cipher for so much more. That stance can imply privilege and an inherited, ordained poetic authority – the right to speak of and for something. I was troubled by the idea of a ready-made authority in the Irish poem: who had it, and who didn't. By those definitions I, as a woman, certainly didn't. So I had to be the source of my own authority – not easy when you're a young poet in a powerful literary tradition. By the early eighties I was thinking I could try to shift things, rearrange that interior space. "Mise Eire" is one of the poems that came out of that. I was trying to find my own place in things.

PVA: Taking into account what you have mentioned, (that poets should write not at the centre, but on the margins, at the edges, so to speak), I would like to ask you: Is marginality then at the very moment of writing positive rather than negative?

EB: That's hard to answer. I'll try to be particular about it. Years ago, I wrote a poem called "The Wild Spray". It's in *The Journey*. The poem is about flowers my mother brought me –how they looked inside the house, what they suggested about what was outside, beyond the house. That poem was central for me personally, at least at that time. But as far as the tradition of Irish poetry went then – with all its assumptions of what an Irish poem was- it could only be marginal. Too domestic, too private, too unsanctioned in terms of its subject matter. The marginality in the tradition certainly affects the centrality of the writing. There are different ways of talking about that. I was aware that some of my themes, my interests were right at the edges of Irish poetry, at the very margins. That became an additional spur for me. And of course, I was discouraged at times by being at the margins. But I also knew that the history of poetry shows that if the centre dictates the margin – at the beginning, that is – in the end the margin always defines the centre. It was easier to believe that intellectually than to feel it when I was young. The climate for a young woman poet in Ireland was relatively bleak when I began. At worst, there was a sort of intimidatory disrespect. At best, there was an unspoken assumption that a woman poet could never change the inherited Irish poem in the way a man could. That she could never own it or write it in such a way as to shift

the tradition. For me, that was a subtle and painful exclusion. But it was also a motive to think more carefully about what I was doing – more carefully than I might have done if conditions hadn't been so inhospitable. The more I thought about it – I'm not sure I had this worked out clearly then – the more it seemed that if history and the past were as divided as I thought they were, then the tension between the centre and the margin in Irish poetry was even more important. It also seemed vital to me that some two-tiered system of poetry didn't develop – with Irish poetry in one place and women's poetry in another, so that women's poetry would be isolated from having real importance. The resistances and pressures were subtle. Some of them came from the fact that the Irish poetic tradition was bardic. There was a backdrop of heroic speech in the Irish poem. So it wasn't easy to introduce a different subject matter. I've said before that it was much easier back then to have a political murder in an Irish poem than a washing machine. There was a feeling that the first was poetic and the second wasn't.

PVA: You have described yourself as feminist and not a feminist poet. Similarly, you have argued that the nation is a very important image in your poetry, but that you don't consider yourself a nationalist poet. In this sense, I think that your poetry is located between critical extremes, authoritarian ideologies such as nationalism or feminism. Is it possible not to be the result or the expression of any of these ideologies when writing?

EB: Involvement or knowledge of a particular ideology or belief doesn't require that you're constructed by it; but it does require you have a dialogue with it. That was true in my case. To be sceptical about Irishness and have no dialogue with it would have made no sense. Irish nationalism, the physical intensity of its songs, images, traditions, is not something an Irish poet could easily walk away from. There's no way to simply and intellectually disown where you come from, because it would mean disowning who you are. The dialogue with your origins is always dialogue with yourself. Joyce's statement "non serviam" seemed to me to express something central about resisting the orthodoxies of Irishness. I certainly didn't feel bound to serve in any way. I suspect most writers don't. Nationalism, of course, doesn't seem to me as enabling an orthodoxy as feminism. Feminism is a powerful, ethical ideology. As such it's been extremely important to me as a woman. But even the most enabling ethical ideologies are anti-imaginative, painful as it may be to admit it. To prescribe a poem by my feminism would be like saying to a nature poet in today's world "from now on, when you write nature poetry, you must indicate that you are an environmentalist". If I did that, I would be asking them to limit their imaginative reach. However compelling environmentalism is, it can't and

shouldn't prescribe the ambiguities, darkneses and fears of the good nature poet. Poetry begins where certainties ends. That's why I'm a feminist but not a feminist poet.

*PVA: Much of your poetry reveals that all acts of representation are necessarily partial. In fact, there is a passage in *Object Lessons* where you reflect on the difficulties involved in the process of "inscribing a profile in the hard rock". I understood that passage as the difficulties involved in describing the fluidity of a life, the changes that constantly affect women, for instance, in a poem without freezing the moment, without simplifying these images any further. I would like to ask you as regards this point, is it possible to create a place in poetry that avoids misrepresentation? How can poetry emulate or bear witness to the passing of time, to the loss of beauty? In other words, how to represent in an authentic way in poetry what sometimes runs the risk of misrepresentation?*

EB: Representation is an elusive term. Who is misrepresenting or representing? And for what purpose? And who decides the rules of it anyway? Women writers – myself among them – have often have been accused of misrepresentation. But all too often accused by a critique which has little to do with the work or its real identity. At the heart of this is the fact that women's poetry pre-existed the critique for it. Many women poets wrote fine poems. Few of them wrote any critique of what they were doing. There are outstanding exceptions, such as Adrienne Rich, whose critiques provided an essential access, not just to her own work but to wider issues about poetic authority. Women who wrote no critique ran the risk of having their work judged by a set of assumptions which had little relation to it. I wrote *Object Lessons* because I wanted to make that critique. There's a special risk factor for women poets if they don't make that critique. I'm fascinated, for instance, by those women poets of the 19th century who became labelled as "poetesses" – Rossetti and Browning in England and even Dickinson in the United States. It was a destructive context to be put in. And they had no defence against it. No intellectual, argumentative defence, that is, such as a critique would be. Without a critique of their own, they were helpless in the face of the critique – Victorian, Imperial, Anglo-heroic – which put them in a demeaning category. But the fact is that the very idea of the poetess was a corrupt construction of a society which preserved itself through that and other fictions. When I was young in Ireland I felt those fictions in a very real way. They were all around: one manifestation of them is that they represented Irish poetry as heroic and bardic. They offered no place for a poet like myself who wanted to take a different path. The only solution was to make my own statement, my own critique. If I hadn't I could see a two-tiered critique developing where there was women's poetry and there was Irish

poetry. I didn't want that for myself. I was a woman poet and I was an Irish poet. I felt both identities could interpret and re-interpret each other in some rich, demanding ways. I also felt I had the right to re-interpret the past of the Irish poem as well as the present. That brings me back to your question and the start of this answer – it isn't how women represent themselves that concerns me. It's how they are represented before they even begin to write –that's the area of conflict.

PVA: I would like to focus now on your latest volume of poetry, which I think is amazing, something for me completely unexpected.

EB: It was helpful for me to write it...

PVA: Why this change of title, from the American version to the English one?

EB: My working title was *Code*. That was the name of one of the poems. But the title was meant to flag more than one poem. The codes, protocols, arrangements of living itself are part of the book. Then more of the poems were written and my American publisher liked the title *Against Love Poetry* as did I at that stage. By then the English title was set. I prefer the American title now –but I don't in the least mind having two separate titles in two different places.

*PVA: It seems to me, and this is obviously a personal opinion, (please, correct me if I am wrong), that in this volume, you sound more assertive as regards notions such as Ireland, if we compare it to *The Lost Land*. It is my impression that you find not so much difficulty in achieving a sense of belonging in Ireland. Have you eventually found a balance with the idea of Ireland? I mean, have you come to terms with those pained memories of exile or dislocation?*

EB: It's always there – it's always a presence to me. I've been writing some new poems. One of them – it's actually a sequence of three poems – is called "In Our Own Country". It's partly about the changes in Dublin – in fact in all of Ireland. It ends by saying that we will always be "exiles in our own country". I believe that. Of course, some of that sense comes from my childhood. But it's also general, less personal. For a lot of people as they grow older, given the estrangements of modern life, the true and most poignant exile is in their own country and not beyond it.

PVA: So, in this sense, does your living between two countries, Ireland and the United States, have an effect in the way you write poetry?

EB: By the time I went to Stanford my life was set – my children were grown and my sense of poetry was confirmed. You may locate yourself in two places, but you only live in one. At least I do. All the same, I think going there has made me aware of place in a different way. I think that’s gone into the poetry in some new way. This year I’m publishing a book of translations called *After Every War*. These are poems by German-speaking women poets – from Germany, Poland, Czernowitz. They’re not necessarily poets who lived in Germany. But they’re all poets who wrote in German. All the poems are inflected, in some way, by the Second World War which devastated their homelands. Many of them are hardly at all represented in English translations, like Elizabeth Langgässer – and some are celebrated in Germany, like Else Lasker-Schüler, but not enough known in English. For me, the book closed an important circle. After the war, my mother and father brought German girls to our house in Dublin. They were two teenage sisters, and in one way or another, the girls from that family remained in our house for more than twenty years. I never learned to speak German, but I listened to it –sometimes unconsciously –for a good part of my childhood. What drew me especially to these poems, apart from childhood memory, is that they are poems about war seen from an intensely private perspective. I’m thinking particularly of a splendid poem by Else Lasker-Schüler called “My Blue Piano”. It comes from her last book, published in 1945, which has the same name. It canvasses a whole world of destruction in the guise of a broken musical instrument, which once belonged in a home. It’s such a beautiful, persuasive rendering of the link between the public event and the private loss – which is the reason that no European poem means more to me. And it was also the displacement – the sheer placelessness in fact – of some of these poets which drew me in. There’s a beautiful poem by Rose Auslander whose last line is “I do not reside. I live”.

PVA: And you were saying you were translating these poems, or editing them?

EB: I translated them. Towards the end of the process, when the poems were already translated, I had the help of a wonderful Stanford graduate in German studies, Alys George. She corrected mistakes, suggested amendments, but also had a unique feel for the poems as they were written in their time. Talking about those poems with her was an especially happy part of making the book.

PVA: Taking about placelessness, do you think that the Irish artist, or any artist in general, has to be exiled at a certain point in order to have a more critical view of things?

EB: Writers can be exiles in different ways. Some leave their country. Some don't. There can be an interior exile as well, which is more subtle than the physical statement of leaving. I think I felt something like that when I lived in a suburb and was writing a poem which didn't seem to be sanctioned by the Irish tradition. It produced a sense of estrangement in me – I think many writers experience something like that at some stage of their writing lives.

PVA: Sometimes in your poetry, Iowa, St. Louis, California, and New England stand as background settings in your work. Your actual exile from Ireland serves at times to establish a link with one of the most terrible stories of displacement in Irish history, emigration to the United States. Some critics argue when analyzing this aspect of your poetry that it runs the risk of being nationalist, in the sense of perpetuating the poet's function as a spokesperson in order to talk on behalf of the community. Let me tell you that I don't particularly agree with this criticism because, when reading your poetry, I can see that you highlight precisely the discontinuities between the past and the present, and the fact that a poet cannot experience the same experiences, and therefore, cannot easily talk on behalf of the past. I would like to know your own view as regards those criticisms...

EB: I'm not an ideological poet. I have no interest in representation. That's for another kind of writer. I'm interested in the individual – in the self as it encounters the event or the experience. There's a rich enough field there to keep me occupied. But although I'm interested in the private self, I'm not interested in conveying that through a private language. So in a way, I'm aware that I visibly transgress on the settled ideas of the public and private poem. That's part of the reason I think that there have been challenges and criticisms to my poetry. It was plain to me at a certain point that I was writing about things which were unacceptable to received notions of Irish poetry. I seemed to be elevating the life of motherhood, the life in a suburban house, the life of domesticity to be a subject matter that had a claim on the Irish poem. That wasn't acceptable to critics of a certain kind, those who felt they had already defined the Irish poetic canon – at least not when I was publishing in the early eighties. In fact, it was that disrespect for the domestic world which forced me towards my own critique. Why were these subjects so menacing to the status quo in Irish poetry? Why were they so unsuitable? Those questions sparked my interest more and more. It was still a long way from becoming a proper debate, but I found the questions compelling. I still do.

Recently I've been writing some poems and prose with the working title "Domestic Violence". It's about that time of the seventies and eighties, when Irish writing was defined in a certain way, when the Irish world was being brutally re-defined by its own violence.

PVA: What inspired you to write "Domestic Violence"? The violence happening in Ireland?

EB: Yes, the memory of the 70s and the 80s, when violence was commonplace. But more than that. There were such contradictions in my life at that time. In a private sense, those were happy times for me. I lived in the suburbs, raised my children, was happy with my husband. And yet for all that, the country, the nature, the culture beyond our four walls was poisoned. The question must be therefore –surely the life within the four walls was poisoned too? Surely no one could escape? So this is a way of looking back. In one of the poems in this sequence there is a reference to the myth of Philomel – the legendary figure, raped by her brother-in law, her tongue cut out so she couldn't tell her story. She decides to weave a tapestry to tell what really happened. That's what happened in Ireland to: a succession of brutal silencings and re-stating of the story. The new poems are experimental – and for me this is also a new way of revisiting the domestic poem.

PVA: And talking about the untold as well, right?

EB: Yes, the untold and the untellable. My generation in Ireland lived through a time of change, of challenge, of the upset of received ideas. It was a time of confusion. Now I look back I can see my own ideas being changed, but I couldn't feel that so clearly at the time. There were always poems for me which touched on this and then left it again – "The War Horse" was one. That was a poem I wrote in the early seventies. Much later there was *In a Time of Violence*. The truth is there is a subtle, mysterious and sometimes corrupt way in which people survive a time of violence –by thinking it can't touch their lives.

PVA: What is going to be the name of the new book?

EB: It's still so much in process I can't be sure. Perhaps *In Our Own Country*. Perhaps *Domestic Violence*.

PVA: Considering the feedback that your work has received as regards the number of sales, the audience that go to your poetry readings, or the academic journals on your work, would you consider that there is a difference between the American audience and the Irish audience?

EB: Yes I think so. Different audiences to start with. One audience, the Irish one, originated where I did, which was both liberating and confining. The other has a far more tenuous sense of whether the poem is Irish or not. I think the Irish audience has changed, at least critically. In 1992 when the *Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing* was published, I gave a talk at a summer conference. I made the point then, which of course I still would, that a literature without the voice and vision of women can't really be a national literature. It is centrally wanting, essentially incomplete. That point, of course, was a glimpse of what was obvious. As time has gone on, there has been a definite shift in Ireland. The work of women is on the Leaving Certificate, is well represented in anthologies. It's a different climate. But back then there were strange contradictions in attitude. The belief that you could have a distinguished post-colonial argument about Ireland – with all the exclusions and suppressions colony implies – and then end up excluding the work of women, as the *Field Day Anthology* did, makes no sense at all. I think that point was taken.

PVA: So, now with the new Field Day Anthology of women's writing, do you think that the landscape is changing in Ireland? Isn't it more welcoming for women poets?

EB: Yes I do. I'm glad the Anthology is out. It puts in the public domain some wonderful texts – although, of course, they should have been there earlier.

PVA: Going back to the theme of feedback, do you think that your message has been truthfully interpreted, or do you think that your poetry has been misunderstood in a particular or certain way?

EB: To begin with, I wouldn't think of it as a message. And then, the whole question of misunderstanding is a thorny one. Certainly – especially in the beginning – my work was read in ways which made me think some critics had fixed points and fixed views. There was an arc of association that followed me round for a while. It went something like this: because I was a woman, because my life was presumed to be not epic, not bardic, not centrally Irish – these were all unstated assumptions – I must write a lesser poem, a poem that held a smaller mirror to the Irish reality. By definition, that was the domestic poem. But I didn't see it that way at all. I didn't understand the concept of the domestic poem as an opposition to the political poem; the domestic poem *is* the political poem. I thought of that old image of a train approaching, and how the water in the glass on the windowsill shivers and announces it. That was the kind of poem I wanted to write.

10.1. An interview with Eavan Boland

PVA: Talking about the metaphor you were mentioning about the glass of water. Water is a recurrent metaphor in your poetry, the rain, the ocean, the river. There is a very suggestive metaphor in “White Hawthorn in the West of Ireland” where you mention how water is able to “redefine land”. In Against Love Poetry, in the poem “Lines for a Thirtieth Wedding Anniversary”, you also talk about water and how it erodes the rock over the years. It seems to me that whenever you talk about water, in “an origin like water” for instance, you suggest that the origin of life, or the past, is as difficult to grasp as the water of the ocean. Is water a deliberate metaphor in your poetry? I mean, does it stand for something in particular?

EB: Water certainly has strong associations for me. My grandfather was a sea-captain. He drowned in the Bay of Biscay. So I heard about that all through my childhood. Then again, I was born in a coastal city. And a city very much defined by its river – I’ve always loved rivers, and especially the Liffey. And of course, water is the great feminine element.

PVA: In “Anna Liffey”, you talk about the river, how it is connected to the image of the woman, and also how both of them are equally dissolved by the end of the poem. You were just saying that water is a feminine element. It seems to me that by the end of “Anna Liffey” you are talking more in terms of sexlessness than in terms of a feminine element...

EB: That comes at the end of “Anna Liffey” which is a poem about the river, but also a poem about my life when I was writing it. The poem is named after the river which really defines Dublin. In fact, the Liffey is one of the only feminine rivers in the world. I think it and the Amazon are the two main ones. And yes, the poem’s real subject is that progress from individuality to dissolution which happens with age. Rivers are such a symbol of that. And it’s something which interests me still – the idea of everything else being lost, being dissolved, and yet the voice remaining. That’s how the poem ends.

PVA: Is this how artistic decolonization is found? By moving beyond the restrictions imposed on the self by gender, by nationality?

EB: That’s difficult. I would like to say yes. There is something very liberating in the idea that art can release you from the restrictions of the identity you already have or have inherited. I’m just not sure it’s true. The problem is, art itself is a form of restriction. And a powerful one. In a poem called “Degas’s Laundresses” in *Night Feed* I tried to get at that. The poem is about the painter watching the toil of these two laundresses. And how much control – almost predatory control – is needed to turn these living, shiftless, struggling women into

fixed images. There's another poem I wrote called "We Are Human History. We Are not Natural History". It's just about my children finding a nest of wild bees in the garden when they were young. But it's also about something else – about the fixing of the moment. It's an odd paradox of art that it can only work by fixing the moment – whether it's painting or poetry or fiction – and yet once the moment gets fixed, everything in expression restricts it and limits it. It's one of the most interesting aspects of writing a poem. It also divides poets. There are modernists like Eliot who made part of their theme, their subject, out of the limitations of the poem. For me, the limits are the strengths. I've always found freedom in those limits.

PVA: I find very interesting what you are saying about how poetry is a limited form of expression. You have also mentioned in another interview that poetry is a more limited form of expression as compared to photographs and theatre.

EB: I believe that. The fact is – though this certainly isn't taught in the classroom – that poetry is a relatively deprived method of expression. Photography, painting, music certainly excel as methods of expression. Not poetry. It's arcane and rule-bound. It doesn't leap to the moment the way a photograph can. Where poetry excels is as a method of experience, not expression. It has a unique capacity to render an experience in a fresh, unsettling way. I don't write a poem to express an experience, but to experience it again. In a truly good poem the experience is alive, unfinished, set there by sound and meaning. What's so thrilling about that is that the reader can finish it out of their own experience. That's the real power of poetry.

PVA: This reminds me of one of my favourite poems, "The Art of Grief"

EB: I'm so glad you like that...

PVA: I love that poem. It seems to me that in this poem, now that you are talking about writing poetry to experience the experience, the experience of grief is represented as beyond artistic expression. You describe it as "unrhythmical, unpredictable", something "beyond the reach of metric-makers, music-makers".

EB: The statue in that poem actually exists. I saw it as a child in Iveagh House, which was then the Department of Foreign Affairs on Stephen's Green, where my father worked. I was probably four or five then. But I remembered it. It's an old statue, maybe Italian, certainly from the 19th century. It's of a veiled woman and carved in marble. When I thought

about it later I wondered how did the sculptor put the veil on the face. Were they carved together? How did that work? And that became part of the poem's subject.

PVA: Is it still there, the statue?

EB: I think so – I gave a reading there in Iveagh House a few years ago and it was there.

PVA: How would you describe your own evolution as a poet, from New Territory to your very latest volume?

EB: That's an almost impossible question. A critic sees an arc, a line of development. A poet goes from poem to poem. For me, the thing that really brings you forward is the poem that fails. When I look back at *New Territory* there are still a few poems I connect to. One of them is "Athene's Song" – that idea that a private voice can be recruited to a public event. But by the time I came to *The War Horse* I thought – that just doesn't work for me. I began to explore the private voice in opposition to the public world, as a register of it. All of this, of course, is instinctive. A poet does have an ethical journey – I believe that – but a lot of that journey is found in working with one individual poem and not in any conscious plan. *New Territory* was my first book. It was finished when I was 22 years of age. I was in love with the power of language, and the exemption that being a poet provides – from what I wasn't sure, but I sensed some exemption. Later I felt there was an infinite danger in having any kind of exemption, especially for a woman poet. The traditional role of a poet, as it was constructed, with its historical prestige and importance, could easily exempt a woman from the far more powerless and less valued world of womanhood itself. But all of that came later. And what I learned, I learned from failed poems.

PVA: Prior to the publication of New Territory, there was a particular volume I discovered when doing research in University College Dublin; a volume that you published together with Joseph O'Malley. It said in the cover there were only 300 hundred copies.

EB: There were three of those books. More chapbooks, really. The first was called *Twenty Three Poems* and was published when I was seventeen. The second was published with a friend, Joseph O'Malley and was prose and poetry. The third was called *Autumn Essay*. They are completely unavailable, for which I'm very grateful. They're just apprentice work -

PVA: There is a poem in one of these volumes called "February 1963" that I was particularly drawn to. I think it's completely different from all the poems included in New Territory. It's such a mature poem. You talk about standing in Stephen's Green. I think the poem finishes by saying "my head upon the breast of eighteen years". You talk in the poem about your need to "be found". I think it is an amazing poem, how you say all the ambiguities of your childhood there...

EB: It's hard to get back to those poems in my mind. I haven't opened any of them in twenty or thirty years. I was a teenager, and an immature one at that. I think real feeling went into them, but no craft. But writing and publishing those books helped me at the time.

PVA: So, what is your favourite poem written by yourself? Something that still makes you feel alive when you read it?

EB: "Favourite" is not a word I connect to my own poems. There are some poems that stay with you, where you feel they accurately caught that moment, or were more complete than other poems. One of those is "The Pomegranate". Another is a more recent poem: "Quarantine". There are poems like "The Glass King", "The Blossom", and "The Journey" which are important to me in one way or another and for different reasons. But I hold by what I said earlier – the real forcing house of good poems is the poems that fail, the ones that never appear. Those are your real teachers.

PVA: In your introduction to The Christmas Show by Harriet Levin, you praise this woman poet on the grounds that she writes with no ornaments, and therefore she doesn't write a false rhetoric. And I find this movement, this stripping of any kind of ornament in The Lost Land and Against Love Poetry. There is a change as regards how you write the line, your style is plainer.

EB: That's always a difficult question. As a poet I have a love for rhetoric, ornament, language that is sinuous. In *The Lost Land* that didn't seem appropriate. In *Against Love Poetry* the same. A poem like "Quarantine", which is really the centre of the book, couldn't have been written without stripping away the ornament. The same with the "Colony" sequence in *The Lost Land*.

PVA: I admire the different versions of colony that you offer there. You move away from that anti-colonial writing.

EB: The idea of colony always holds me, always fascinates me. I'm interested in the conflicts, the arguments about it which are at the heart of the Irish canon, and the way that

contested views of our identity weave in and out of the whole idea of writing a national literature. Writers like Daniel Corkery – he wrote a beautiful, partisan book called *The Hidden Ireland* – believed that twentieth century Irish literature was flawed from the start, because “it was a national literature, but not an indigenous one”. Those are his words. He believed in a pure Ireland, a place we could get back to if we tried. I don’t. I believe the strength of Irish literature is that it’s built on those fragmentations which most injured us. That’s the reality. Yeats and Joyce recognized that. We are constructed by the construct. We can’t deny all those compromises and revisions which colony entails. The power of Irish writing, it seems to me, is precisely that we didn’t deny it. The major Irish writers used the language in which all the humiliations happened, and used it to explore the identity that language had once oppressed. That also leaves a very interesting, powerful space for Irish women writers. They are part of the narrative of oppression in interesting, subtle ways. They have a complicated story to tell about colony. You can see that in some wonderful earlier writing by Irish women. Mary Lavin’s story “The Will”, for instance, is a superb exploration of a conflict between single identity and inherited custom. There are others. So I think the various narratives of colony really enrich Irish writing.

PVA: What aspect of your poetry do you think deserves further research? Something that readers or critical studies tend to have ignored?

EB: The movement from the margin to the centre. And what it entails. To be assigned a place on the margins of literature seems to imply that your writing destiny is decided for you before you can even write. I didn’t accept that. What’s more it made me suspicious of how these things work their way from prejudices to assumptions. That in turn made me want to make my own critique, rather than live by anyone else’s. It’s always an interesting study in any literature, especially a national one – just where the centre is, and how the margin is defined.

PVA: Now that your position as a woman poet is so firmly established in Ireland, and your popularity is increasingly growing not only in the United States, but in countries like Spain, do you consider yourself a poet writing on the margins of mainstream literature?

EB: When I was a young poet I was on the margins. I felt the isolation of that, for good and ill. I felt isolated by the resistances and prejudices that seemed part of the very literature I was trying to write myself into – the unspoken assumption that a woman couldn’t write an essential Irish poem. I was bewildered and angered by that. It also made my youth as a poet

more thorny than it need have been. When you are young you want to be at the centre of a literature, at the centre of a society. It's only natural. It took me time to realize that being on the margins gives you a unique vantage point. I was able to make a critique of the tradition and its resistances that helped me, and I hope might help other writers. But that sense of isolation disenfranchised me in certain ways as well. And what stays with me now is how wasteful certain prejudices are. There could have been interesting conversations about poetry which just never happened. Instead of talking with other poets in a civil dialogue about the future of Irish poetry, I was always advocating and arguing. Because that was what was needed – at least I felt it was.

There were poetry anthologies coming out which excluded women – like Thomas Kinsella's *Oxford Anthology* in 1988 and the *Field Day* in 1992 –and it was important to contest those exclusions. And I certainly did that. But the waste of a generous discourse on Irish poetry shouldn't be overlooked or condoned.

PVA: One of the interesting aspects of your poetry is that you represent your women always in a constant movement. The time of day is usually dusk, a moment of instabilities when things are constantly changing. By the end of poems such as "Doorstep Kisses", "Suburban Woman: a Detail", or "Self-Portrait on a Summer Evening", your women are suddenly threatened with dissolution. And I think this is also observed in how the verse is constructed. It starts with very short sentences, and gradually they become longer, like unfolding by the end of the poem. Is this a conscious attempt to represent your poetic images in such a way that they avoid being simplistic, that the artistic definition of these images is not reductive in a certain way?

EB: There's a wonderful comment made by the American painter Edward Hopper. It's something about painting from a moving perspective. I think he said that when he was in a train and it flashed past an office window at night, his memory was of stillness and not movement. In fact he has a painting of an office window, with that kind of eerie non-movement. Perhaps he got that from the speed at which he himself passed the image. I'm interested in that. The mobility of images in a poem often has to do with the poet's movement, not that of the images. But it's hard to see. Poetry offers technical opportunities to change and dissolve time and space. Sometimes the best way of doing it is just to disrupt auditory or linguistic expectations. Just for an example, if you rhyme three lines, and one ends with "wore" and the other with "more" but the third ends with "star", you create a subtle disorder of sound which opens an interesting space. That said, each poem is a different eco-system and you have to mix the elements of expectation or dissonance differently every time.

10.1. An interview with Eavan Boland

PVA: A final question, out of curiosity. Have you ever thought about writing fiction?

EB: I've never had any interest in writing fiction. The elements by which time is restructured in a poem are radically different from fiction. I've never tried it for a moment.

PVA: Thank you very much. It has been really encouraging and helpful for me...

EB: I'm glad it has been...

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² Although not all the references are strictly postcolonial in outline, they are essential reference points for any critique of postcolonialism.

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10.3. SUMMARY OF THE THESIS IN SPANISH

10.3. Un nuevo territorio para la mujer irlandesa en la poesía de Eavan Boland: Una perspectiva feminista y postcolonial

10.3.1. Introducción

En el momento histórico en el que nos encontramos, se hace necesaria una revisión profunda y crítica de la literatura irlandesa, un fenómeno de gran relevancia social, cultural, lingüística y política al que es difícil acercarse por motivos extrínsecos al hecho literario en sí, debido tal vez a que la tradición literaria irlandesa se ha planteado como el cimiento en el que surge la nación. Concretamente, centraré mi estudio en la obra de Eavan Boland, considerada la poetisa contemporánea más relevante de Irlanda. La poesía de Boland ha impulsado toda una generación de escritoras que reconocen a la mujer como creadora activa y no meramente como una figura decorativa o sujeto pasivo, tal como el nacionalismo, en general, ha fomentado.

Probablemente por su relativa proximidad en el tiempo, esta poetisa irlandesa no ha sido todavía objeto de estudios exhaustivos, ni en España ni en Europa, que permitan explicar el alcance de su producción de un modo riguroso. En la actualidad, sólo existe un libro sobre Eavan Boland (Hagen y Zelman 2004), y su mención en el mundo académico se ha ceñido, hasta el presente, a meras reseñas y artículos, publicados casi exclusivamente en el Reino Unido y los EEUU. A pesar de su valor y reconocimiento internacional, la obra literaria de Boland es aún abiertamente desconocida en el ámbito académico español (sólo existen realmente dos trabajos de gran mérito, los de González Arias 2000b y García García 2002) y de ahí la relevancia de este trabajo.

En este estudio es mi intención interpretar la obra de Boland como texto literario que está inevitablemente determinado por el estatus de Irlanda como país postcolonial. La presunción en la que se basa mi trabajo radica en que, debido a la relación colonial entre Irlanda e Inglaterra, muchos de los textos irlandeses contemporáneos pueden entenderse como estrategias culturales de descolonización. Tal posición es la adoptada por Gerry Smyth en *Decolonization and Criticism* (1998), centrado en el discurso de la crítica literaria irlandesa desde finales del s. XVIII. Es difícil establecer el momento en el que Irlanda entró en una fase postcolonial, ya que hay tres momentos puntuales en su nueva etapa de independencia política: El tratado anglo-irlandés aceptado por el Dáil en enero de 1922, con el que se creó el Estado Libre de Irlanda compuesto por 26 condados; la constitución de Eamon de Valera de 1937, que más explícitamente declaró la soberanía del país; y, finalmente, la Declaración de la República de Irlanda y la secesión de la Commonwealth británica en abril de 1949.

Probablemente por lo reciente de tales hechos, para escritores irlandeses como Eavan Boland, el legado colonial todavía es relevante. Según la creencia general que mantienen la mayoría de los críticos postcoloniales en Irlanda, el colonialismo no termina con la retirada de las tropas del Imperio. Para muchos irlandeses, el periodo posterior a la independencia no trajo la liberación, sino que reforzó formas codificadas de imperialismo (Lloyd 1987: x; Lloyd 1993: 113; Deane 1994: 84; Kiberd 1996: 32; Smyth 1998: 92-93). Las razones que se dan para justificar este punto de vista son varias: (1) la perpetuación de muchas estructuras de poder de la política colonial por parte de la burguesía nacional; (2) la subyugación de la mujer en el ámbito social y político, principalmente tras la constitución de 1937; (3) la dificultad del sujeto postcolonial para imaginar nuevas formas de pensamiento, alejadas de los discursos dominantes (imperialismo y nacionalismo); (4) la persistencia del poder británico en Irlanda del Norte que dificulta el programa de descolonización a los escritores de esa parte de la isla. De este modo, muchos críticos argumentan que los efectos de dependencia cultural son todavía palpables y descifrables en muchos textos de la literatura contemporánea. Según Smyth (1998: 94), la identidad irlandesa en la época postcolonial “todavía depende de la historia colonial para dar sentido a su propia realidad” o, como afirma Kiberd (1996: 6), “es más difícil descolonizar la mente que el territorio”.¹

Muy pocos trabajos se han centrado en el estudio de la literatura contemporánea irlandesa bajo un prisma postcolonial y, por ende, han ignorado a los grandes teóricos del ámbito postcolonial: Edward Said, Homi Bhabha y Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, entre otros muchos. A su vez, la crítica postcolonial actual es reacia en gran medida a utilizar las obras de Albert Memmi y Franz Fanon como presupuestos teóricos, crítica que se ve acentuada al tratarse Irlanda de un país postcolonial que difiere de otros. La lectura de estos textos es útil para entender el trabajo de nuestra escritora. Es mi intención, por tanto, revelar la persistencia de estos resabios de descolonización en una poesía que, de hecho, considero postcolonial en gran medida. Una lectura profunda de su trabajo revelará que tanto su lenguaje como el contenido temático del mismo están determinados por el impacto histórico de la herencia colonial.

Sin embargo, un enfoque exclusivamente postcolonial no es suficiente para el análisis global de una poesía que está ciertamente marcada por cuestiones de género. Como explica Wilson (1990a: xii), las mujeres en Irlanda presentan una complejidad especial de doble signo que comprende tanto “su identidad femenina” como “la nacional”. De hecho, las irlandesas han sido colonizadas doblemente, por el imperialismo y por un nacionalismo restrictivo, fusionado éste último con el catolicismo. Según Praga (1996: 243), dicha colonización se hace más aparente si se tiene en cuenta la fusión de lo femenino y lo nacional en la tradición literaria irlandesa. En una de

¹ Estas citas, al igual que las subsiguientes, han sido traducidas al español por la autora de este trabajo.

sus entrevistas, Boland menciona este punto: “Somos un país postcolonial [y] tenemos, además, un problema postcolonial en el modo en que la mujeres somos percibidas” (Consalvo 1992: 98). En otra entrevista, Boland define la realidad de la mujer irlandesa del siguiente modo: “Hemos sido marginadas al utilizar un lenguaje que no es el nuestro, abriéndonos camino en una historia que no es la nuestra, y encontrándonos en un espacio entre la exclusión y la posesión [...], las mujeres hemos sido marginadas en una cultura de por sí marginada” (Allen-Randolph 1999b: 304). La poesía de Boland expone claramente las consecuencias del doble colonialismo que ella critica. En virtud de una serie de factores determinantes como género, nacionalidad y etnicidad, Boland se percata de que ha sido excluida, tanto como irlandesa y como mujer, de la posición de sujeto hablante en la cultura dominante. De este modo, la construcción y reconstrucción de nociones como “lo irlandés” y “la feminidad” son proyectos fundamentales en su larga carrera poética. Es por ello por lo que una lectura postcolonial de la poesía de Eavan Boland tiene que verse necesariamente complementada con una perspectiva feminista.

Al adoptar este acercamiento conjunto, debemos tener en cuenta que en su poesía Boland no establece una distinción entre ambos colonialismos. La poetisa ha expresado su convicción de que la opresión cultural e ideológica de la mujer bajo el poderoso impacto del nacionalismo y el catolicismo en Irlanda es similar a la opresión que los propios irlandeses experimentaron bajo el dominio británico: “La feminidad y lo irlandés son metáforas que se complementan. Hay resonancias de humillación, opresión y silencio en ambas, y pienso que cada una de ellas se puede entender mejor si también se ha experimentado la otra” (entrevista con Wilson 1990b: 84). Esta cita sirve para ilustrar cómo Boland fusiona bajo los mismos procedimientos descriptivos ambas formas de colonialismo: subordinación patriarcal y subordinación colonial. De hecho, su poesía muestra que el colonialismo es y sólo puede ser uno. La amalgama que Boland establece entre la opresión de las mujeres y del pueblo irlandés sólo se puede entender si se tiene en cuenta la definición que hace de tal concepto. En una entrevista concedida a Allen-Randolph (1993b: 125), Eavan Boland argumenta que “el poder se ve reflejado tanto en la poesía como en cualquier otro *modus operandi*, [...] el poder ha fijado la construcción de los cánones, la formación del gusto, la determinación de lo que deben representar los poemas en cada etapa, y así sucesivamente”. De este modo, y como explica Atfield (1997: 173), Boland define el colonialismo como “el establecimiento por imposición de sistemas de poder” en el terreno cultural. De ahí que ella se centre en cómo el colonialismo ha operado a través del arte: En primer lugar, la cultura irlandesa se ha visto afectada negativamente e incluso aniquilada y reformada por el imperialismo británico; y, en segundo lugar, la poesía irlandesa ha marginado a la mujer al estar sujeta a la iconografía femenina (emblemas nacionalistas como “Mother Ireland”, “Dark Rosaleen” o “Cathleen Ni Houlihan”). En consecuencia, su

preocupación se centrará en el modo en que el legado colonial ha determinado la representación artística, y en cómo ella puede liberarse de tal colonización a través del medio artístico.

Con excepción de pequeñas reseñas (Meaney 1993a; Atfield 1997; Fulford 2000a, 2000b), la obra de Boland no ha sido analizada desde una perspectiva feminista y postcolonial. Por tanto, ésta tiene todavía que ser estudiada de este modo para descifrar hasta qué punto las distintas ideologías (imperialista y nacional) que han dominado el rumbo histórico de Irlanda han afectado y siguen afectando a las mujeres irlandesas en la actualidad. En su ensayo “Daughters of Colony”, Boland (1997e: 18) hace un llamamiento para “una crítica postcolonial, consciente en cuanto al género”, una crítica que tenga en cuenta cómo las mujeres irlandesas han sido doblemente colonizadas, por imágenes distorsionadas y simplificadas en los discursos dominantes. Es esta crítica postcolonial, muy “consciente en cuanto al género”, la que pretendo adoptar en mi estudio sobre la poesía de Eavan Boland.

Mi trabajo se centra particularmente en la evolución poética de la autora en cuestión. La obra de Eavan Boland presenta una clara evolución desde un formalismo poético, basado en los cánones estéticos dominantes, a una progresiva reafirmación de su identidad como mujer, desafiando todo tipo de convenciones. Dicha evolución se observa tanto en el lenguaje utilizado, como en la actitud de la autora ante la historia y la cultura de Irlanda. La trayectoria poética de Boland es estudiada, por tanto, desde una perspectiva feminista y postcolonial, con el objetivo de determinar en qué medida la poetisa redefine gradualmente los términos de ser ‘mujer’ e ‘irlandesa’. Para ello, defenderé el modelo teórico postulado por Elaine Showalter en su estudio *A Literature of Their Own* (1999) [1977], con las modificaciones pertinentes. Showalter defiende la existencia de tres fases en la evolución literaria de una escritora, fases que denomina respectivamente como “Feminine”, “Feminist” y “Female”. Moi (1997: 104-116) ofrece una explicación esclarecedora sobre estos tres conceptos, a menudo utilizados indistintamente en la crítica literaria feminista. “Femininity” es un constructo social, y por tanto “feminine” viene a significar aquellos “modelos de sexualidad y comportamiento impuestos por normas culturales y sociales” (p. 108). De acuerdo con esta definición, la fase “Feminine” que Showalter identifica se entiende como aquella etapa en la que la escritora se mantiene sumisa a estas convenciones establecidas cultural y socialmente. En segundo lugar, nociones como “feminista” y “feminismo” son etiquetas políticas, es decir, se refieren al compromiso político que el individuo adopta en su lucha contra el patriarcado y el sexismo (pp. 104-106). Esta definición coincide con la fase que Showalter denomina “Feminist”, en la que la escritora protesta y aboga por sus derechos en tanto que mujer. Finalmente, “femaleness” es “una cuestión biológica”, ya que está relacionada con todos aquellos aspectos innatos y naturales que diferencian a un sexo del otro. Aunque Showalter

denomina la última fase en la tradición literaria como “Female”, dicha pensadora no pretende sugerir que hay una serie de rasgos determinados por la biología que distinguen el modo como las escritoras y los escritores desarrollan sus obras. Como veremos, Showalter define dicha fase como una etapa de independencia y autonomía artística, en la que la escritora intenta incluso sobrepasar todo tipo de barreras (las sexuales incluidas). Mientras que en inglés, tal como se ha explicado arriba, los términos “feminine” y “female” sugieren cosas muy distintas, en español no existe un par de términos que marque tal diferenciación semántica (entre el concepto sociológico y el concepto biológico), ya que ambos se traducirían como “femenino/a”. Con vistas a distinguir las fases que Showalter identifica en la tradición literaria femenina, emplearé los términos originales en inglés (“feminine” y “female”) para referirme a la primera y la tercera fase respectivamente. En cuanto a la segunda etapa, puesto que “feminist” es traducible claramente por “feminista”, emplearé el término en español. Las etapas que Showalter identifica guardan importantes semejanzas con las fases promulgadas por dos conocidos pensadores intelectuales del movimiento anticolonial de mediados del siglo XX, Albert Memmi en *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (1990) [1957] y Frantz Fanon en *The Wretched of the Earth* (1990) [1961], a la hora de conseguir una satisfactoria descolonización, no sólo física, sino también mental, del sujeto colonizado. La similitud entre ambas teorías, la feminista y la postcolonial, me ha llevado a concluir que el sujeto femenino y el sujeto colonizado coinciden tanto en la naturaleza de su opresión como en los métodos empleados para superar su estatus como entes marginados. Tal acercamiento dual permite soslayar la trayectoria poética según la cual una escritora consigue gradualmente enfrentarse y desafiar el doble colonialismo, patriarcal e imperial, que ha subyugado a la mujer irlandesa y a la propia Irlanda.

Para valorar la configuración de una identidad femenina e irlandesa en la obra de Boland, aplicaré las teorías de la formación de identidad desarrolladas en los campos de los estudios postcoloniales y feministas. De este modo, todos los postulados teóricos en los que me basaré se supeditarán siempre al análisis de los poemas elegidos. Por un lado, emplearé los postulados que se desprenden de voces postcoloniales como las de Albert Memmi, Frantz Fanon, Edward Said, Hommi Bhabha, Gayatri Spivak y Stuart Hall, al igual que de otras figuras prominentes en los estudios irlandeses (Luke Gibbons, Colin Graham, Declan Kiberd, Richard Kearney, David Lloyd, Gerardine Meaney, Gerry Smyth y Sarah Fulford). Por otro lado, haré uso de las teorías feministas propuestas no sólo por la americana Elaine Showalter, sino también por Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray y Julia Kristeva, cuyos trabajos son representativos del movimiento feminista en Francia. En sus distintas variantes, estos teóricos postcoloniales y feministas abogan por un hibridismo y una fluidez que permitan el cruce de fronteras ideológicas. Sus teorías sobre la formación de la identidad del sujeto postcolonial y femenino, y su preocupación por cuestiones como la

marginación, la resistencia, el poder, la nacionalidad, el lenguaje, la cultura y “el sentido del lugar” pueden ofrecer perspectivas importantes para descifrar las motivaciones poéticas y estéticas que subyacen en la poesía de Boland. Estas teorías nos permiten profundizar en el entramado postcolonial de una poesía que gradualmente subvierte el canon y podría en su esencia ser un ejemplo vivo de la ruptura de la subyugación tanto de la mujer como del país en el que la mujer vive, abriendo el ámbito doméstico y eliminando las fronteras psíquicas del sujeto colonizado.

A tal fin, mi trabajo de investigación ofrece un análisis exhaustivo de distintos aspectos relevantes en la poesía de Eavan Boland. En el primer capítulo se hace un repaso profundo de los estudios postcoloniales y cómo éstos se están haciendo cada vez más populares, y a la vez controvertidos, en el campo de los estudios irlandeses. Tras definir el concepto postcolonial, llevo a cabo un análisis exhaustivo de los mismos tal y como se han desarrollado en el siglo XX. A su vez se analiza la posibilidad de estudiar la historia irlandesa y su literatura desde una perspectiva teórica postcolonial. Por último, y con vistas a especificar qué tipo de acercamiento postcolonial aplico en mi estudio de la poesía de Eavan Boland, se resumen las principales estrategias de descolonización propuestas por los diferentes críticos y teóricos postcoloniales.

El segundo capítulo hace un exhaustivo recorrido por el movimiento feminista tal y como se ha percibido internacionalmente. En particular, me centro en el papel permitido a la mujer irlandesa en la creación del concepto de nación, y en su situación cultural e ideológica en el siglo XX.

El tercer capítulo se centra en los nexos de unión que a grandes rasgos se pueden establecer entre los estudios feministas y postcoloniales. Hay grandes paralelismos entre ambas áreas, fundamentalmente debido a que las dos estudian cómo determinados individuos han sido marginados y definidos como “otros”, subordinados a la ideología colonial y patriarcal.

El cuarto capítulo pretende descifrar las barreras que una escritora (irlandesa) debe superar a la hora de adquirir voz propia en una tradición literaria básicamente androcéntrica. En primer lugar, explico cómo la literatura, y en particular la poesía, ha sido un territorio denegado a la mujer a lo largo del tiempo. En segundo lugar, hago un recorrido sistemático por las distintas representaciones sociales y culturales de la mujer en la tradición literaria, centrándome con especial énfasis en la literatura irlandesa. Esta sección es fundamental para entender la revisión que Boland hace de estereotipos femeninos que ella considera como opresivos y dañinos. Por último, me centraré en el desarrollo de la poesía de la mujer irlandesa en el siglo XX, con el fin de analizar las dificultades que poetisas como Boland han encontrado para publicar sus obras y para ser aceptadas en el panorama literario de esta nación.

En el quinto capítulo, el campo de mi investigación se centra más específicamente en la autora en cuestión. Tras introducir las diferentes teorías que definen un texto como minoritario y

postcolonial, explico en qué modo la obra de Boland se puede categorizar con tales etiquetas. A su vez, llevo a cabo un análisis comparativo de la escritura de mujeres y la escritura postcolonial, tomándolas como escrituras subalternas, tal y como la misma Showalter (1999: 13) insinúa.

Por último, desarrollo el objetivo central de mi estudio: Un análisis profundo de la poesía de Boland desde sus primeras colecciones de poesía hasta sus más recientes obras. La carrera poética de Eavan Boland ilustra con gran claridad las dudas y dificultades que han acechado y continúan acechando a las poetisas irlandesas. En un principio, Boland escribe una poesía masculina, escondiendo su feminidad por miedo a ser rechazada por la comunidad poética en Irlanda. En su trabajo inicial, Boland da por hecho nociones como “lo irlandés” y “ser poeta irlandés”. La poetisa escribe de acuerdo con unos parámetros bien definidos que dictan cómo y qué debe comunicar el poema irlandés. En su etapa intermedia, Boland se convierte en una feminista radical. La principal preocupación a estas alturas de su carrera poética es defender su realidad como mujer, previamente ignorada en sus poemas iniciales. Ahora, la escritora da por sentado nociones como la “feminidad”, y se embarca en un proyecto revolucionario, según el cual esta categoría es defendida como un concepto unitario. No es hasta su fase madura cuando Boland entiende “lo irlandés” y el “ser mujer” como constructos sociales, y no como nociones trascendentales y universales. Como Showalter, Memmi y Fanon sugieren, aunque de diferente manera, el único modo por el que el individuo puede encontrar su descolonización artística es sobrepasando las imposiciones de raza y género. De forma similar, la larga carrera poética de Boland ejemplifica una gradual subversión de la autenticidad sobre la que las representaciones de “mujer” y “nación” se han fundado. De este modo, la poetisa escudriña las bases sobre las que las ideologías imperialistas, nacionalistas y feministas se han apoyado para justificar sus exigencias. Su obra madura desmantela la creencia de que el poeta debe actuar como una figura política pública, como portavoz que tiene que hablar en representación de su comunidad oprimida. Así, y en contraste con sus anteriores fases, Boland llega a la conclusión de que ella vive de acuerdo con supuestos establecidos socialmente y que nociones como “nación”, “hogar” y “ser mujer” son ficciones humanas. Trayendo a colación las premisas de Showalter, Memmi y Fanon, junto con otras teorías de la construcción de la identidad propuestas por los estudios feministas y postcoloniales, demostraré en definitiva cómo, en su poesía madura, Boland aboga por una identidad femenina y nacional más fluida, no limitada ya por ideologías restrictivas y anquilosadas. De esta forma, Boland alcanza una satisfactoria liberación artística al cruzar fronteras ideológicas, tanto nacionales como de género. Como demuestro, la poetisa atraviesa, subversivamente, todos aquellos discursos autoritarios que de algún modo han intentado limitar los dos aspectos constitutivos de su identidad: El “ser irlandés” y el “ser mujer”.

10.3.2. Los primeros pasos de Eavan Boland en el terreno literario: Fase “Feminine” y “Asimilacionista”

Según Showalter (1999: 13), la primera etapa en la carrera literaria de una escritora se caracteriza fundamentalmente por la imitación e interiorización de los parámetros imperantes de la tradición literaria dominante. Esta fase de evolución, que Showalter denomina como “Feminine”, guarda grandes semejanzas con la etapa inicial que intelectuales como Memmi (1990: 168) y Fanon (1990: 178) identifican en la trayectoria de descolonización cultural. Memmi (1990: 168) argumenta que hay una primera fase de “asimilación” o “petrificación”, según la cual “la primera ambición del sujeto colonizado es la de asemejarse al modelo espléndido que representa el sujeto colonizador hasta el punto de poder desaparecer en él”. En este momento, el individuo experimenta un proceso sistemático de abnegación, ya que no solamente intenta parecerse al hombre “blanco”, sino que a su vez reniega de todo lo que representa “su verdadero ser” (p. 187). Según Memmi (1990: 190), dicho intento resulta ser infructuoso, ya que el sujeto colonizado nunca puede conseguir asemejarse al sujeto colonizador con total exactitud. Esta fase se corresponde con la etapa inicial que Fanon (1990: 31-32) denomina “opresión”. A diferencia de Memmi, Fanon aplica con mayor especificidad dicha fase a la carrera literaria del sujeto colonizado. Como afirma este teórico anticolonial, “el artista nativo demuestra que ha asimilado la cultura del poder imperial” (Fanon 1990: 178). Éste es un periodo de una asimilación absoluta e incondicional, en la cual el escritor o la escritora, con intención de superar su estatus marginal y convertirse en un sujeto “más blanco” o “menos negro”, se ve más influido o influida por la cultura del colonizador que por su propia cultura. En palabras de Fanon (1990: 176), el artista “no se quedará satisfecho sólo con saber sobre Rabelais y Diderot, Shakespeare y Edgar Allan Poe, sino que los reforzará en su inteligencia tanto como sea posible”.

El trabajo inicial de Boland, en particular *New Territory*, publicado en 1967, a la edad de veintitrés años, puede ser enmarcado en esta fase inicial identificada por Showalter, Memmi y Fanon. La crítica tiende a considerar *New Territory* como el primer volumen de poesía de Boland, ignorando otras colecciones publicadas anteriormente, como es el caso de *Twenty-Three Poems* (1962), *Autumn Essay* (1963a) y *Poetry by Boland/ Prose Joseph O'Malley* (1963b). Aunque estos “panfletos”, como los define Boland, están agotados en el mercado y por tanto es difícil acceder a ellos (entrevista con Villar Argáiz 2005a), una lectura profunda de *Poetry by Boland* y *New Territory* puede ser suficiente para vislumbrar las motivaciones estéticas de Boland en sus primeros años como escritora. Ambas obras nos muestran a una escritora totalmente sumisa y sin sentido crítico, ya que ella interioriza, tanto formal como ideológicamente, las convenciones poéticas del legado irlandés. En sus primeros años como poetisa, la misma Boland (1996a: 218) se define como una escritora “asexuada y victoriana”, como “un producto [cultural] de las ideas del siglo

diecinueve”. Es curioso constatar que Showalter (1999: 13) identifica la fase “Feminine” con el periodo comprendido entre la aparición del seudónimo masculino en la década de 1840 y la muerte de G. Eliot en 1880. De hecho, Boland en este momento de su carrera artística está indudablemente influida por ciertas ideas románticas del XIX. Su principal preocupación es la de reflejar con claridad cuál es el papel que el poeta debe desempeñar, y cómo debe ser su relación con la sociedad y con los mitos y leyendas celtas que constituyen la identidad nacional irlandesa. El poema para Boland no es más que un vehículo para dar voz a una nación, creando una tradición literaria propiamente irlandesa, tal y como poetas del renacimiento cultural irlandés de la talla de W.B. Yeats abogaban. Por otro lado, como el mismo Fanon (1990: 178) avanza, Boland lee e intenta imitar a los escritores canónicos de la tradición poética. A lo largo de *Object Lessons*, Boland (1996a: 24, 83, 124, 138, 141, 221) explica cómo, de joven, devoraba las obras de autores ingleses como Keats, Chatterton, Byron, Arnold, Wyatt y Raleigh, y de poetas irlandeses como Yeats, Padraic Colum y Francis Ledwidge. Como ella afirma en uno de sus innumerables ensayos:

Leía todo tipo de poesía. [...] También leía sobre la vida de los poetas. Tenía dieciocho años. [...]. Leía sobre Eliot en Paris. Y sobre Yeats en Coole. Leía sobre Pound y Housman y Auden. Era la lectura de mi época y mi lugar: Demasiados hombres. Pocas mujeres. Demasiada aceptación. Muy pocas preguntas. (Boland 1997b: 24)

Aunque todos estos poetas, de algún modo u otro, habían simplificado la vida de la mujer en sus obras, Boland encuentra en ellos, en este momento puntual de su carrera artística, modelos influyentes sobre los que apoyarse para “interiorizar un sentido de poder y de control” (Boland 1996a: 191). Boland escribió la mayoría de los poemas que constituyen *Poetry by Boland* y *New Territory* en la década de los años 60, cuando ella asistía a Trinity College, en Dublín. En aquella época, el papel de la mujer seguía estando relegado a un ámbito exclusivamente doméstico, y sus oportunidades educativas y laborales eran todavía muy limitadas. Boland asume dichos valores sociales y culturales asignados a la mujer, actitud que aparece reflejada en su trabajo inicial. La escritora prefiere abrirse camino en el canon literario masculino a través de la adopción de sus convenciones poéticas, y no desafiarlas para afirmarse a sí misma como “mujer poeta”. Como joven e inexperta universitaria, Boland (1996a: 27) ha explicado su fascinación inicial cuando se reunía en pubs y cafeterías con poetas como Derek Mahon, Brendan Kennelly y Seamus Heaney, lugares en los que incluso era usual encontrarse con Patrick Kavanagh. Como la poetisa narra, “en todos los sitios, al menos a mi parecer, se respiraba un ambiente de control y dominio de la poesía” (ibíd.). Aún así, Boland admite cómo, incluso en estos mismos ambientes, ella sentía una dolorosa exclusión:

Había una cierta marginación social en esa situación, al ser una poetisa, y no quería minimizar sus efectos, especialmente por el hecho de que dicha marginación ponía en peligro la propia identidad [de la escritora]. Aunque había aspectos enriquecedores e interesantes en dicho clima, también existían verdaderas limitaciones. La tradición oral de la poesía, significativa para toda comunidad poética, era patente. Pero no se ajustaba al contenido temático. La mujer como poeta era una extraña ante esa forma de pensar. [...]. Los poetas masculinos solían hacer comentarios como “lo mejor de tu trabajo es que nunca se puede saber que está escrito por una mujer”. (Entrevista con Allen-Randolph 1993b: 118)

En este momento puntual de su vida, Boland quiere formar parte de la comunidad literaria que la rodea, pero ella sabe que tal fin requiere la ocultación de la mujer que hay en su interior, ya que sólo así ella puede llegar a convertirse en lo que denomina “un poeta masculino honorífico” (ibíd.).

La obra inicial de Boland se puede categorizar como “Feminine” o “Asimilacionista”, de acuerdo con las nomenclaturas de Showalter, Memmi y Fanon, por las siguientes razones:

(1) Showalter (1999: 19) señala que toda escritora, en esta primera etapa de su trayectoria literaria, no escribe para dar voz a su experiencia personal como mujer. El conflicto directo que experimenta entre su vocación como escritora y su estatus como mujer la empuja a esconder su feminidad, ya sea adoptando un seudónimo o bajo una voz poética claramente masculina. Con la excepción de “Athene’s Song” y “Malediction” (*New Territory*), Boland evita la incorporación de una voz poética claramente femenina. De estos dos poemas, sólo el primero ofrece una orientación abiertamente feminista. Boland no utiliza su poesía como un medio sobre el que desarrollar o expresar su experiencia como mujer. Sus poemas no reflejan una autora consciente de sí misma, sino todo lo contrario, ya que ella intenta esconder su feminidad al adoptar la máscara de una voz poética aparentemente neutral, pero que termina siendo masculina y no femenina. En consecuencia, Boland mantiene representaciones tradicionales de la mujer (irlandesa): Como criaturas poderosas y peligrosas (por ejemplo Aoife en “Malediction”, *New Territory*), o como iconos pasivos y hermosos (por ejemplo Etain en “The Winning of Etain, o la mujer que Chardin inmortaliza en su pintura en “From the Painting ‘Back From Market’ by Chardin”, *New Territory*). Como señalan Gilbert y Gubar (2000: 15), los primeros pasos en la carrera de una escritora comienzan cuando ella “explora su imagen en el espejo del texto literario masculino”. Esto es precisamente lo que Boland hace en *Poetry by Boland* y *New Territory*, intentar reproducir el “texto literario masculino” con total fidelidad, renunciando a convertir su obra en lo que ella más tarde denominará “un método de la propia experiencia” (entrevista con Wilson 1990b: 82).

(2) Boland también esconde su identidad femenina al mantenerse fiel a los temas y personajes de la tradición estética convencional. Como la misma escritora argumenta, su trabajo inicial podría resumirse a grandes rasgos como “un híbrido, influenciado en parte por el

movimiento británico y por la lírica irlandesa” (Boland 1996a: 104). Boland interioriza los dos tipos de convenciones poéticas dominantes en el contexto dublinense de mediados de los años 60. En primer lugar, se mantiene fiel al poema metropolitano que estaba marcado en gran medida por el movimiento romántico del siglo XIX. Dicho poema era el “resultado de la civilización británica” y proponía una relación radical entre el mundo interior y exterior del poeta, convirtiéndose en “un texto imponente sobre la vida íntima” (pp. 92-93). Es dicho poema el que Boland lleva a cabo en su trabajo inicial. La escritora interioriza la visión romántica del poeta, como personaje que habita una esfera alejada de la vida ordinaria, al estar dotado de una especial capacidad para visualizar y articular la realidad (Allen-Randolph 1993a: 6). De este modo, Boland ensalza sus figuras poéticas a un estatus metafísico y místico por sus aptitudes para acceder a un conocimiento del que el ser humano común se encuentra excluido. Los poetas son retratados como figuras heroicas, marineros ambiciosos en su conquista de nuevos territorios, y en constante exploración de páramos peligrosos y violentos donde experimentan su mortalidad y visualizan su muerte. En todo momento, Boland los representa como personajes poderosos, cuyas limitaciones como seres humanos sólo aumentan el valor y el logro de sus obras literarias. Fiel al Romanticismo, Boland describe estas figuras como disidentes en perpetua “lucha con el consenso social” (Kiberd 1996: 537), reaccionando con rebeldía ante reglas y convenciones. De este modo, nos encontramos con poetas que mantienen una posición evasiva en tiempo de guerra y levantamiento nacional (“Yeats in Civil War”, *New Territory*), o que más abiertamente desafían el orden social y político establecido (“After the Irish of Egan O’Rahilly”, *New Territory*). Por consiguiente, dichos personajes son descritos como peregrinos en constante emigración que sufren la soledad y el aislamiento, pero que, paradójicamente, también saben que pertenecen a un lugar concreto, a una comunidad literaria de gran cohesión que les aporta un sentido de lugar y pertenencia en el que encontrar su identidad como poetas. Como explicaré más adelante, este sentido de afinidad y afiliación entre poetas se observa en una gran variedad de poemas, como en “The Poets”, “New Territory” y “Migration” (*New Territory*).

El segundo poema que Boland (1996a: 104) define como perteneciente al “lirismo irlandés” es “más mordaz y amargo” (p. 92). A diferencia del primer poema que la escritora menciona, éste está más preocupado por el mundo exterior de la vida del poeta, que Boland (1996a: 92) define del siguiente modo:

Era la vida del bardo, del consejero del príncipe, del respetable cantante. Que se abría camino entre pueblo y pueblo, oscilando entre alabanzas e improperios según requiriese la situación. [...]. Que a regañadientes llegó a convertirse en un testigo de la totalidad de la conquista británica y de la pérdida de su lengua nativa.

En su trabajo inicial, Boland también pone en práctica este segundo tipo de poema, abiertamente “empapado de la experiencia irlandesa” (Boland 1996a: 93). La escritora interioriza la estrategia literaria irlandesa de sublimar y expresar de manera estética la confusión nacional. En “After the Irish of Egan O’Rahilly” (*New Territory*), por ejemplo, Boland se mantiene fiel al poema político irlandés por excelencia. Un portavoz alza su voz en representación de su pueblo oprimido. Su discurso está dirigido al enemigo, la comunidad protestante inglesa, a la que anuncia su inminente derrota y marcha de Irlanda. Debido al deseo de Boland por mantener el legado de sus predecesores, la autora también lleva a cabo un recuerdo memorial de todos aquellos héroes y revolucionarios que han formado parte activa de la historia de Irlanda. Por ello, la Batalla de Boyne, la huida de los condes gaélicos en 1603, el Levantamiento de Pascua, y la guerra civil irlandesa constituyen los principales eventos sobre los que se asientan poemas como “After the Irish of Egan O’Rahilly”, “The Flight of the Earls”, “A Cynic at Kilmainham Gaol” y “Yeats in Civil War” (*New Territory*). El tono de dichos poemas es en gran medida elegiaco, melancólico y sentimental, ya que en ellos Boland intenta restaurar los valores de una civilización de druidas y bardos que se ha visto irremediabilmente dañada por la empresa imperial. La “vida del bardo, del consejero del príncipe, del respetable cantante” (Boland 1996a: 92) también hacen su aparición en “The King and the Troubadour”, donde nos encontramos con un trovador en desesperada búsqueda de su patrón, y también en poemas como “The Pilgrim”, “New Territory”, “The Flight of the Earls” y “The Dream of Lir’s Son” (*New Territory*), con figuras míticas clásicas y celtas como Edipo, Isaías, Paris y el hijo de Lir.

Con independencia del tipo de poema que Boland utilice, hay dos denominadores comunes que subyacen en toda su obra inicial: El tono autoritario y acreditado de sus voces poéticas, y la actitud irreflexiva y sin criterio que la autora mantiene ante nociones como la nación. En primer lugar, la escritora hereda la asociación inflexible entre poesía y privilegio, lo que ella denomina “el remanente del privilegio y derecho natural del bardo”, que poetas irlandeses posteriores adoptaron para reclamar “una autoridad de la que habían sido despojados por los británicos” (Boland 1996a: 191). El mismo Yeats personificó esta visión del poeta como personaje visionario y representativo de un pasado remoto, tradicional y místico, un pasado irlandés más “auténtico” (Webb 1991: xxxix). La visión que Yeats tenía del poeta, y que Boland hereda en sus volúmenes iniciales, nos adentran en una Irlanda precolonial de druidas y bardos, personajes prominentes en la sociedad celta que disfrutaban de un alto estatus como consejeros de la corte, e incluso en ocasiones, como gobernantes (Green 1997: 7). En segundo lugar, Boland visualiza a los poetas como figuras que, a pesar de su idiosincrasia y diferencias, son capaces de formar un grupo de gran cohesión, una comunidad literaria homogénea. De este modo, la poetisa sigue los pasos de todos aquellos

escritores del nacionalismo cultural que intentan “inventar” una literatura nacional que integre diferencias y que una a los irlandeses mediante un vínculo inquebrantable. Como Lloyd (1993: 43) explica, según algunos nacionalistas culturales como Daniel Corkery, el escritor debe convertirse en “el representante de su pueblo”; es decir, debe llegar a representar la identidad común de todos los irlandeses. Corkery imaginó una cultura literaria que fuera “el vehículo fundamental de unificación” (p. 16). Medio siglo más tarde, Yeats continuó en la misma línea, en su intento por transmitir lo que Lloyd (1993: 60) denomina “coherencia política”, una identidad común que haga caso omiso de diferencias étnicas o sociales. Esta noción de unidad nacional aparece reflejada en la poesía de Boland, en poemas como “Appraisal” (*Poetry by Boland*), “Migration” y “The Poets” (*New Territory*). Por tanto, y a diferencia de su poesía posterior, Boland no parece estar interesada en poner en tela de juicio la ideología nacionalista, ideología que, en su interés por unificar diferencias para la consecución de la independencia política, puede llegar a convertirse en vehículo de exclusión y simplificación de una realidad que es mucho más compleja.

Fiel al legado de los poetas del Renacimiento literario como Yeats, Boland también idealiza el paisaje rural irlandés. A diferencia de su producción posterior, en la que la autora se centrará con especial énfasis en paisajes urbanos diversos, en este momento Boland mantiene la tendencia del nacionalismo cultural de poetizar algunas regiones como puras y edénicas, en tanto en cuanto la civilización metropolitana no ha podido contaminarlas y están por tanto intactas e impolutas. En poemas como “The Dream of Lir’s Son” y “Lullaby” (*New Territory*), la voz poética, claramente masculina, establece una relación muy cercana y emotiva con la naturaleza. El mundo rural en estos poemas se presenta como un hábitat ideal en el que el poeta puede encontrar inocencia, felicidad y éxtasis y, por consiguiente, donde puede alcanzar la cima de su inspiración artística. La elección que Boland hace constantemente de temas tradicionales de la estética literaria dominante refleja su deseo no sólo por alcanzar el reconociendo como “poeta” del que se cree merecedora, sino también por ser aceptada dentro de la comunidad literaria irlandesa masculina.

(3) Otro aspecto relevante de *Poetry by Boland* y *New Territory* es la importancia que Boland concede a sus predecesores literarios. Ocho de los veintiún poemas que constituyen *New Territory* están dedicados a poetas coetáneos de reconocido prestigio (Derek Mahon, Michael Longley, Eamon Grennan, Philip Edwards y Brendan Kennelly). A excepción de “On Giving a Cyclamen 1961” (*Poetry by Boland*), dedicado a su madre, todos sus poemas están dirigidos a una audiencia claramente masculina. De igual modo, Boland elogia a escritores canónicos como Yeats (“Yeats in Civil War”, *New Territory*) y Shakespeare (“Shakespeare” y “Comic Shakespeare”, *New Territory*). Como Derek Mahon explica (al que Boland dedica “Belfast vs. Dublín”, *New Territory*),

este hecho es indicativo de la necesidad que ella siente por “afirmarse a sí misma ante lo que correctamente percibía como una cultura literaria dominada por hombres” (Mahon 1993: 24).

(4) Por último, la ansiedad de Boland por ser incluida en el panorama literario de su nación también se ve reflejada en la estructura y lenguaje de sus poemas. El formalismo que caracteriza su obra inicial podría entenderse como un intento por demostrar una cierta masculinidad artística. La escritora su preocupación por los modelos y convenciones de la tradición literaria como vehículo principal de expresión. Como el mismo Fanon (1991: 18) afirma, el dominio del lenguaje opresor otorga al escritor colonizado un considerable poder: “el Negro de las Antillas será proporcionalmente más blanco – es decir, llegará a estar más cerca de convertirse en un ser humano con realidad propia – si es capaz de dominar la lengua francesa”. Según Fanon (1991: 38), el sujeto colonizado intenta conocer en profundidad la lengua impuesta con el fin de superar su estatus marginal. De igual modo, Boland cree que puede llegar a ser mejor escritora utilizando con dominio y seguridad el lenguaje de sus predecesores literarios masculinos. Sus poemas imitan la poesía lírica tradicional, adhiriéndose a estrofas de gran cohesión temática. Las rimas que finalizan muchos versos de sus poemas se complementan en ocasiones con rimas internas. Las estrofas son en su mayoría isométricas. La poetisa juega con líneas disonantes al combinar troqueos (que sugieren una tensión continua) y yámbicos (que mitigan tal tensión). Por otra parte, Boland parece mantener las formas tradicionales de la narración épica (“Appraisal”, *Poetry by Boland*), la elegía (“A Cynic in Kilmainham Gaol”, *New Territory*) y la balada (“The King and the Troubadour”, *New Territory*). El estilo de todos sus poemas es altamente retórico y ampuloso. El tono es sereno y calmado, como si la misma autora evitase dar rienda suelta a sus emociones. En todos aquellos casos donde la intensidad de la emoción parece desbordar al propio poeta, es la voz de un hombre y no la de una mujer la que escuchamos (“After the Irish of Egan O’Rahilly”, *New Territory*). En conclusión, Boland demuestra su habilidad como versificadora, siguiendo el ejemplo de poetas como Yeats, para quien el formalismo y el uso de formas poéticas tradicionales era de suma importancia (Webb 1991: xxv). Como ella misma afirma, al principio su mayor obsesión era la forma del poema, “la retórica de un aprendizaje imberbe”, “la disonancia de la línea y la necesidad de la estrofa”, el hecho de que “el poema es un proceso puro, y de que el logro técnico es lo que garantiza todo lo demás” (Boland 1996a: 132). Aunque en su poesía madura Boland se alejará de dicho formalismo, ella explica en una entrevista que sigue teniendo un gran afecto por obras como las de *New Territory*:

El proceso de creación de este libro muy intenso. Entiendo la impaciencia que algunos han expresado ante tal volumen por ser tan formal. [...] Los críticos suelen considerar el formalismo de un poeta joven como algo negativo, o como algo que necesariamente ayuda al poeta a evadirse de sus propios sentimientos. Yo no lo veo

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así. Casi todo escritor o escritora emergente experimenta un cierto miedo a la hora de expresar sus sentimientos. No estás seguro de cuál es el verdadero yo del poeta, o de lo que es una simple egolatría no transmutada. De alguna manera, mi atracción por la forma de los poemas me ayudó a separar lo uno de lo otro. (Entrevista con Allen-Randolph 1993b: 120)

Por tanto, en su trabajo inicial, Boland esconde su yo femenino al imitar e interiorizar las convenciones imperantes de la tradición poética dominante, no solamente en cuanto al contenido, sino también en cuanto al estilo de sus poemas. El título de su volumen *New Territory* es indicativo de la situación de la escritora en ese momento. Boland desea ardientemente formar parte del canon literario que se respiraba en Dublín, participar abiertamente en el círculo de poetas, y llegar a convertirse en uno de ellos. Para ella, como una joven poetisa, éste es un *nuevo territorio* por explorar. Aún así, su volumen *New Territory*, al igual que sus otras obras iniciales, no es más que un conocido *antiguo territorio* para las mujeres en la tradición literaria occidental. Como afirma Roche (1993: 1), “el título *New Territory* anunció una aspiración más que la realización de un logro”. Boland no siente que sea leal a su realidad como mujer irlandesa. La “sensación peculiar de identidad frustrada”, que Boland (199a: 105) experimenta en sus primeros intentos como poetisa, la motivará a embarcarse en un nuevo rumbo, esta vez drástico y radical, que reafirmará la trayectoria de su poesía. No será hasta los siguientes volúmenes de poesía cuando Boland será consciente del vacío existente entre las experiencias a las que ella quiere dar voz en su trabajo y las convenciones poéticas disponibles para articularlas. Al cubrir este vacío, Boland será capaz de abrir un nuevo espacio en la poesía irlandesa, *un nuevo territorio*, más auténtico esta vez, en el que tenga cabida la mujer irlandesa en la literatura.

10.3.3. Hacia una afirmación radical de su realidad como mujer: Fase “Feminista” y “Nacionalista Cultural”

Según Showalter (1999: 13), toda escritora atraviesa por una segunda etapa en su trayectoria literaria en la que protesta contra “los patrones y valores” de la tradición dominante, aboga por “sus derechos y valores minoritarios” como mujer, y exige su legitimidad para adquirir “autoridad” como sujeto creador. Esta fase se caracteriza principalmente por ser una confrontación radical con la sociedad patriarcal y por “la celebración idolatrada de todo lo que constituye ser mujer” (p. 181). Showalter (1999: 4) ejemplifica dicho periodo mencionando cómo muchas escritoras anglo-sajonas hacen un llamamiento por un separatismo sexual, explotando en ocasiones la imagen sugerente de “una utopía amazónica”. Al rechazar en su totalidad “la sociedad y cultura masculina”, estos textos feministas se alzan como “una declaración de independencia”, una escritura separatista que se define en clara oposición a la tradición literaria masculina (p. 31).

Esta fase “Feminista” se asemeja en gran medida a la segunda etapa en el proceso de descolonización que Memmi (1990: 195) y Fanon (1990: 179) identifican en *The Colonizer and the Colonized* y en *The Wretched of the Earth* respectivamente. Ambos teóricos coinciden en diagnosticar un periodo intermedio de odio y protesta sangrienta en el cual el sujeto colonizado intenta desligarse de la situación colonial. En esta segunda fase violenta, el individuo se propone como objetivo fundamental recuperar y afirmar con rotundidad su propio ser, la autonomía de su identidad. Ahora, el sujeto colonizado rechaza abiertamente al sujeto colonizador, y defiende con pasión su singularidad y peculiaridad. Esta segunda fase es una etapa “nacionalista cultural” ya que intenta construir una cultura en defensa propia, diferente y opuesta a la cultura imperial. Según Memmi (1990: 95), el colonialismo crea el patriotismo de la comunidad oprimida y fomenta la búsqueda de una exclusividad basada en una unidad nacional: “Debido a razones históricas, sociológicas y psicológicas, la lucha por la liberación del sujeto colonizado adquiere un marcado enfoque nacional y nacionalista”. En esta fase, por tanto, las principales preocupaciones del escritor son el nacionalismo y la identidad nacional.

El rasgo fundamental que unifica las dos fases intermedias identificadas por Showalter, Memmi y Fanon es la afirmación radical de la identidad. Así, mientras que la escritora feminista celebra su feminidad en términos fundamentalistas, el escritor colonizado defiende con energía todas aquellas características que considera distintivas dentro de su tradición nativa. En *White Skin, Black Masks*, Fanon (1991: 16-140) dedica todo un capítulo para analizar la lucha desesperada del sujeto de color en su proceso por descubrir todos aquellos aspectos que constituyen su esencia misma, previamente infravalorados y rechazados por el sujeto colonizador. Fanon explica que este tipo de “Negro” es radicalmente diferente a aquel “Negro” que quiere llegar a ser blanco (una figura semejante a Boland en su etapa inicial, donde desea convertirse en un poeta masculino), ya que este “Negro” “ahora quiere pertenecer a su propia gente” (p. 16). Esta actitud es similar a la adoptada por la escritora feminista que Showalter retrata. Mientras que la voz de Fanon reivindica el color de su piel, la mujer en esta fase pretende reivindicar su sexo, y ambos sujetos coloniales (determinados en gran medida por los supuestos sociales y culturales de raza y género) se enzarzan en escrituras separatistas muy similares.

El tercer volumen de la poesía de Boland, *In Her Own Image* (1980), podría ser incluido en la fase que Showalter denomina “Feminista”, o en la que Memmi y Fanon identifican como “Nacionalista Cultural”. Aun así, esta obra no es la que sigue a continuación de *New Territory*, ya que Boland publica *The War Horse* entre ambas, en 1975. Este último volumen de poesía será descrito como una obra de transición que anunciará la etapa madura de Boland, en la que la autora reconsidera su posición como escritora y redirige el rumbo de su poesía (como veremos, tanto su

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contenido temático como su lenguaje poético se asemejan en gran medida a la obra de su tercera fase). De igual modo, es importante considerar que *In Her Own Image* se escribió simultáneamente a *Night Feed* (1984). Mientras que el primer trabajo surgió de la experimentación que Boland hace con la “antilírica”, *Night Feed* es el resultado de un mayor tratamiento del lirismo (entrevista con Allen-Randolph 1993a: 10). Estos dos trabajos intermedios, *The War Horse* y *Night Feed*, demuestran, tal y como la misma Showalter (1999: 13) hace constar, que las tres fases en la trayectoria literaria de toda escritora no son estables e inamovibles, y que, de este modo, pueden superponerse parcialmente. Aunque la evolución de Boland refleja un proceso gradual de maduración poética (una imitación inicial, una protesta intermedia y una satisfactoria autonomía artística final), su desviación del legado poético no es algo fácil y, por tanto, su camino hacia una descolonización artística muestra movimientos de vaivén.

La posición radical y separatista que Boland mantiene en *In Her Own Image* puede entenderse como consecuencia directa de lo que Fanon (1991: 117) denomina un “complejo innato”. Al igual que el sujeto de color de Fanon, quien siente la necesidad de destruir las falsas aseveraciones de que “los negros son salvajes, brutos y analfabetos”, Boland también considera que existen imágenes convencionales femeninas que deben ser destruidas a toda costa. Con vistas a desafiar las restricciones de expresión impuestas a las mujeres, Boland se adhiere a la ideología feminista, atacando con rebeldía y enfado todos aquellos aspectos de la sociedad patriarcal que ella piensa que son dañinos para su propia realidad como mujer. Además, la escritora considera ahora la tradición poética que antes imitaba opresiva y alienante, y adopta por tanto una posición “separatista”, algo que ella atacará posteriormente (Boland 1996a: 234). De hecho, la misma Boland ha narrado en *Object Lessons* cómo ha sentido, en ocasiones, la sugerente llamada del feminismo:

“Empieza de nuevo” es el lema de algunas de las más destacadas poetas feministas. “Haz borrón y cuenta nueva, vuelve a empezar”. Es un eslogan con fuerza y justicia detrás de sí. Y es también una idea poderosa, empezar en un nuevo mundo, despojándolo, haciendo florecer el desierto, e incluso fomentado la lluvia.

Estos llamamientos “separatistas” requieren que Boland sea leal al movimiento feminista, que rechace anteriores tradiciones literarias y que construya sus propios criterios artísticos (p. 243). Probablemente debido a ello, y a diferencia de *New Territory*, Boland evita dedicar sus poemas a sus colegas masculinos. Ahora no escribe para un destinatario de ese género, y por tanto, su mayor preocupación consiste en explorar la experiencia femenina en toda su crudeza, en versos más breves y rimas más libres y desatadas.

Varios críticos han destacado a Adrienne Rich como la influencia más significativa para Boland en su volumen feminista (Luftig 1993; Allen-Randolph 1995; Gelpi 1999). Gelpi (1999:

210) explica que Boland leyó *Diving into the Wreck* (1973) y *The Dream of a Common Language* (1978) a finales de los años 70, antes de comenzar a escribir *In Her Own Image*. De todos modos, fue su ensayo “When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision” el que determinará en mayor medida el cambio en la trayectoria poética de Boland. Como la misma escritora explica en una entrevista, leer dicho ensayo significó para ella “una bocanada de aire fresco” (Allen-Randolph 1999: 300). Anteriormente, en *Object Lessons*, Boland (1996a: 244) afirma que “Adrienne Rich es una excelente poetisa y su ensayo “When We Dead Awaken” es testimonio de central importancia para la poesía contemporánea. Debería ser leído por toda poeta”.

Tras leer “When We Dead Awaken” es fácil entender por qué Boland estaba tan fascinada con dicho ensayo. La propia vida de Adrienne Rich coincide en más de un aspecto con la vida de Boland en aquel momento. Rich (1979: 38) explica en tal ensayo cómo su padre la motivaba a leer y a escribir. Al principio, ella empezó a escribir solamente para agradar a su “maestro literario”, y ello implicaba ajustarse a un conservadurismo respetuoso según el cual tenía que mostrarse como “recatada, elegante, intelectual y discreta” (p. 39). Su vida cambió radicalmente al casarse en los inicios de la década de los 20 y al tener tres niños antes de los 30 (p. 42). Desde entonces, tuvo que compartir su tiempo entre el ejercicio de sus labores domésticas y la dedicación a la literatura. Fue en aquel momento cuando empezó a experimentar una cierta insatisfacción por los poemas que había escrito inicialmente, ya que a sus ojos aparecían como “meros ejercicios de poemas que yo no había escrito” (p. 42). Por otro lado, Rich se percató gradualmente de que “ejercer como madre con niños pequeños en el modo tradicional [y] estar atada a un hombre en un matrimonio convencional” no estaba en consonancia con sus deseos de escribirse a sí misma, de expresar en sus poemas su experiencia como mujer. Con gran certeza, Boland se identificó con Rich cuando ella afirma: “Soy consciente de todas aquellas mujeres que no hacen lo que nosotras hacemos porque están lavando los platos o porque están cuidando de sus hijos” (p. 38).

Al igual que Rich, Boland empezó a escribir como una joven conservadora y formalista. El cambio que experimenta en su vida personal, similar al cambio que Rich narra en su ensayo, motivará su reforma radical como poetisa. A finales de los años 70, Boland se muda a un barrio de las afueras (Dundrum), abandonando la enriquecedora vida cultural y universitaria de Dublín, donde ella se había convertido en ese tipo de “poeta masculino honorífico” (Allen-Randolph 1993b: 118). Al casarse y tener dos niños, Boland comenzó a sentir que el poema irlandés tal y como estaba establecido tradicionalmente no podía expresar la vida ordinaria que ella había empezado a vivir. Dicho poema daba cobijo “a un asesinato político, pero no a un bebé. O a las colinas de Dublín, pero no a los barrios que estaban a las faldas de dichas colinas” (Boland 1996a: 119). Al percatarse de que su vida como madre en esa zona residencial no era tema sancionado por la poesía irlandesa

que le precedía, Boland se siente llamada a transformar la tradición que ella había heredado. Por tanto, el cambio de estilo de vida que Boland experimenta significó para ella ese “despertar de la conciencia” de la que Rich (1979: 35) habla en su ensayo. Según Rich, las mujeres tienen que despertar del largo letargo social y cultural al que han estado sometidas. El desafío para las escritoras, Rich afirma, es reaccionar con rebeldía en contra de esta realidad represiva, con vistas a buscar su propia identidad y explorar “toda una nueva geografía psíquica”, un territorio que pueda atestiguar con veracidad la realidad femenina (ibid).

Para discutir el toque claramente reivindicativo, radical y separatista que diferencia *In Her Own Image* de todas las demás producciones poéticas de Boland, llevo a cabo mi análisis teniendo en cuenta la evolución interna que se puede observar en dicho volumen. Como Allen-Randolph (1991: 49-53) explica, la primera mitad del volumen ofrece un análisis negativo de la sociedad: Maltrato físico tanto a menores como a mujeres (“Tirade for the Mimic Muse” e “In His Own Image”) y anorexia (“Anorexia”). La segunda mitad del volumen se aleja de dicha denuncia social para explorar más abiertamente la posibilidad de crear una forma de lenguaje basado en el cuerpo de la mujer. De este modo, los poemas nos embarcan en un recorrido desde la opresión que la mujer ha experimentado, a una celebración fundamentalista de la sexualidad femenina. Es en poemas como “Menses”, “Solitary”, “Exhibitionist” y “Making Up” donde Boland reconoce la unión entre sexualidad y textualidad tal y como Cixous e Irigaray han teorizado.

Creo necesario resaltar las palabras “defensa”, “protesta”, “ira” y “reivindicación” de las teorías de Showalter (1999: 13), Memmi (1990: 195) y Fanon (1990: 27, 179), ya que éstas están incuestionablemente ligadas al proyecto político y estético que Boland se propone en *In Her Own Image*:

(1) Boland defiende su capacidad de actuar como creadora artística, y de controlar y determinar el tema de sus poemas. El título de su volumen *In Her Own Image* es en sí mismo esclarecedor de la actitud subversiva que Boland adopta ante el discurso poético masculino. Como González Arias (2000a: 37) explica, Boland “sustituye el posesivo masculino inglés *his* por el femenino *her* en la cita bíblica que explica cómo Dios creó al hombre *in his own image*”. La escritora sugiere la existencia de una diosa que es capaz de crear al ser humano, y en particular a la mujer, a su imagen y semejanza. De igual modo, Boland insinúa que las poetisas son capaces de escribir fieles a sus propias experiencias, sin la necesidad de tener que imitar un legado literario que simplemente las ignoraba.

(2) Boland protesta abierta y subversivamente en contra de los supuestos de la literatura patriarcal y, en particular, en contra de sus representaciones femeninas. La escritora ataca con ferocidad la amada musa lírica de los poetas masculinos en poemas como “Tirade for the Mimic

Muse”. De igual modo, la dicotomía que el legado patriarcal ha establecido entre la bruja malvada y la mujer sumisa es criticada enérgicamente en poemas como “In His Own Image” y “Witching”. Este intento por demostrar las consecuencias dañinas que estos estereotipos han supuesto para el sujeto colonizado ha sido identificado por Fanon (1991: 113) como central en esta segunda fase de descolonización.

(3) Una clara indicación de que Boland no ha alcanzado esa autonomía artística, característica de la última etapa identificada por Showalter, Memmi y Fanon, es que las voces poéticas de *In Her Own Image* dan rienda suelta a su ira y su venganza. Fanon (1990: 27) argumenta que todo escritor subyugado tiene necesariamente que atravesar un periodo de aflicción, dificultad e ira no reprimida para alcanzar la liberación artística. El proceso de descolonización requiere una sustitución absoluta de las jerarquías de poder que han relegado al sujeto colonizado al último escalón de la pirámide social. La misma violencia del régimen colonial es, por tanto, adoptada por el individuo colonizado con el objetivo de superar su estatus marginal y reafirmar su identidad. Según las teorías de Fanon, la expulsión de la ira y la auto-creación son procesos simultáneos, algo que Rich (1979: 48) también ha identificado en la creación de una voz literaria femenina independiente y más segura de sí misma:

El despertar de la conciencia no es como cruzar una frontera – un paso más y ya estás en otro país. Mucha poesía escrita por mujeres se puede comparar con un blues: Un grito de dolor, de victimización, o una lírica de seducción. Hoy en día, una gran mayoría de poemas escritos por mujeres [...] están cargados de ira. Creo que tenemos que pasar por dicha ira [...] si no queremos traicionar nuestra propia realidad.

Al leer a Fanon y a Rich, uno entiende perfectamente que el enfado que Boland demuestra en *In Her Own Image* es un paso necesario en su defensa radical de todos aquellos aspectos que ella siente que, como mujer, han estado denigrados por la historia y la literatura irlandesas. Es en poemas como “Tirade for the Mimic Muse” donde Boland reacciona con ira ante su opresión cultural, y utiliza metáforas violentas a la hora de dirigirse y desafiar a la musa que los poetas masculinos han ensalzado en sus obras.

(4) Como Fanon (1991: 10) y Showalter (1999: 191) han explicado, la furia que invade al sujeto colonial y sexual en la segunda fase del proceso de descolonización artística está unida en ocasiones a impulsos y sentimientos contradictorios sobre su propia identidad. En primer lugar, Boland experimenta en *In Her Own Image* ese tipo de “maldición corporal” que Fanon (1991: 111) identifica en el sujeto de color. En poemas como “Anorexia”, por ejemplo, nos encontramos con una voz poética que, al interiorizar los opuestos binarios de pureza virginal y sexualidad pecaminosa (tal y como han sido representados por la Virgen María y Eva), termina por rechazar y

10.3. Summary of the Thesis in Spanish

quemar su propio cuerpo. En segundo lugar, Boland experimenta una clara confusión en cuanto al valor que la maternidad tiene para la mujer. Según Showalter (1999: 191), muchas escritoras feministas ensalzan en sus obras el papel esencial que la mujer ejerce como madre en la sociedad, sólo para rechazar en muchas otras ocasiones el coito y el alumbramiento. En poemas como “Menses”, Boland encuentra en su papel como madre una fuente de inspiración artística y un terreno apropiado en el que asentar su identidad como mujer. En cambio, en “In Her Own Image” y “Witching”, la poetisa presenta a mujeres que rechazan abiertamente su maternidad. En el primer poema, nos encontramos con una mujer cuya mente distorsionada y el odio hacia sí misma le llevan a estrangular a su propia hija. En el segundo poema, la voz poética acaba quemando su propio cuerpo, con vistas a rechazar su maternidad, entendida ésta como institución social a la que la mujer se ha visto subyugada a lo largo de la historia.

(5) Por otro lado, Boland reivindica su derecho a abordar temas tabú, en particular aquellos que conciernen a la sexualidad femenina, como la anorexia, la menstruación, la mastectomía y la masturbación. No es sorprendente el hecho de que un volumen de un tono tan radical como *In Her Own Image* fuera publicado por Arlen House, la editorial irlandesa feminista pionera a mediados de los 80. Boland defiende su potencial creativo para escribir sobre temas innovadores en la Irlanda de los años 80, y sugiere, por tanto, la creación de una nueva tradición literaria. Según Haberstroh (1996: 22-23), esta década experimentó el advenimiento de todo un corpus de textos poéticos en los cuales las escritoras irlandesas desafiaban diversos tabúes sexuales y ofrecían imágenes alternativas a la anatomía femenina:

La sexualidad femenina [...] se convirtió en el centro de la propia identidad. En 1980, Eithne Strong publicó *FLESH ...The Greatest Sin*, obra que se puede interpretar como una versión feminista de *The Great Hunger*, de Patrick Kavanagh; en el mismo año, Eavan Boland exploró en *In Her Own Image* los efectos que las imágenes sexuales convencionales tenían sobre las mujeres; y en 1982, Mary Dorcey retrató en *Kindling* la experiencia lesbiana, obviando el tabú homosexual existente.

Boland es una voz entre muchas otras que se alza en defensa del cuerpo femenino. La poetisa produce lo que el feminismo francés denomina “écriture feminine”, un concepto artístico basado en el cuerpo de la mujer y en el placer que ella puede encontrar en su propia sexualidad. Tanto Cixous (1994: 38) como Irigaray (1991: 24) abogan por una liberación de la mujer basada en lo que denominan “diferencia sexual”, según la cual ella pueda acceder a una identidad propia y singular, diferente de la masculina. Como Irigaray (1991: 151) afirma, “para las mujeres, es [...] una cuestión de aprender [...] la morfología del cuerpo asexuado, especialmente sus singularidades y peculiaridades mucosas”. Al defender dicha “diferencia sexual”, estas feministas establecen una

asociación directa e intrínseca entre la escritura femenina y el cuerpo femenino. Ambas imaginan un lenguaje único y propio de la mujer, que de voz tanto a su cuerpo como a su sexualidad. En su ensayo, “The Laugh of the Medusa”, Cixous (1981: 245-246) resalta la importancia de una creatividad femenina intrínsecamente sexual y carnal:

La mujer debe escribir su propio ser: Debe escribir sobre las mujeres y motivar a las mujeres a dedicarse a la literatura, de la que han sido despojadas tan violentamente como de sus propios cuerpos [...]. ¿Por qué no escribes? ¡Escribe! La escritura es toda tuya; tú eres toda tuya; tu cuerpo te pertenece, tómallo.

De este modo, Cixous e Irigaray visualizan la posibilidad de producir un discurso diferente al masculino, un lenguaje de la mujer revolucionario e iconoclastico.

Dicho enfoque feminista es sumamente apropiado para abordar la obra poética de Boland en esta fase. En la mayoría de los poemas de *In Her Own Image*, y en “Mastectomy”, “Solitary”, “Exhibitionist” y “Making Up”, en particular, Boland establece una conexión entre sexualidad, creatividad artística e identidad femenina. Esta dependencia de su cuerpo para crear su propio arte ha sido ya identificada por Fanon (1991: 112) como algo distintivo y necesario en el proceso de descolonización. Como su personaje colonizado afirma en un momento puntual, “[e]ra responsable al mismo tiempo de mi propio cuerpo, de mi raza, de mis antecesores. Me sometí a un estudio riguroso, descubrí el color de mi piel, mis características étnicas [...]. Me convertí a mí mismo en objeto de análisis”. Al igual que el sujeto de color que Fanon retrata, Boland se embarca en un análisis de su propio cuerpo como punto de partida para definir y afirmar su identidad como mujer. Precisamente por esto, su proyecto revolucionario da muestras de ese fundamentalismo sexual según el cual la poetisa revela, al escribir su cuerpo, lo que es “real” y “verdadero” de la mujer. La defensa incuestionable que Boland hace de la individualidad y el placer sexual de sus mujeres induce al lector a identificar sus voces poéticas con prototipos universales que encarnan en sí mismas todo lo que significa la “feminidad”. En *In Her Own Image*, el cuerpo parece plasmar literalmente la esencia de la mujer. Al recurrir a su propio cuerpo, lo que Boland hace en realidad es reafirmar su propia identidad como diferente al “otro” masculino, y replicar voluntariamente el pensamiento patriarcal (según el cual el sujeto masculino predica su control y dominio sobre todos aquellos que designa como diferentes), con vistas a subvertir la posición de la mujer en dicha lógica. Las mujeres que Boland retrata en *In Her Own Image* son feministas radicales: No solamente se mueven por odio y venganza, sino que rechazan cualquier encuentro sexual con sus parejas masculinas, defendiendo tanto su independencia como su capacidad para darse a sí mismas placer sexual (“Solitary”).

(6) La amalgama que Boland establece entre creatividad textual y sexualidad femenina también aparece reflejada en el lenguaje experimental de *In Her Own Image*. En primer lugar, y a diferencia de volúmenes como *New Territory*, Boland abandona los patrones convencionales de metro y rima, con vistas a transformar el lenguaje lírico de sus antecesores masculinos. La escritora juega con el lenguaje, entremezclando pronombres personales, utilizando frases incompletas y evitando el uso de signos de puntuación en algunas ocasiones. El uso reiterativo de la primera forma del singular indica que la voz poética está continuamente analizándose y definiéndose, hecho que se hace más aparente si tenemos en cuenta la constante referencia que ella realiza a partes de su propio cuerpo. También es interesante notar la recurrencia de exclamaciones y marcadores enfáticos, reflejo de la incesante e inquietante lucha de las mujeres de Boland por afirmarse a sí mismas. Finalmente, el lenguaje retórico de su producción inicial es sustituido ahora por un lenguaje más coloquial, cargado de insultos comunes, algunos neologismos, y conversiones de nombres a verbos que enfatizan la unión entre el cuerpo femenino y la identidad del hablante.

El especial hincapié que Boland hace en la unión de su sexualidad y su creatividad textual es un paso esencial que ella debe dar para dismantelar el discurso masculino dominante. Al igual que Cixous e Irigaray, la escritora aboga por una “diferencia sexual” según la cual las mujeres puedan acceder a una identidad propia, diferente de la masculina. Críticas feministas y postcoloniales como Spivak (1993: 17) defienden un uso “estratégico” del fundamentalismo sexual como un mecanismo temporal para la consecución de algunas reivindicaciones feministas. Aun así, esta pensadora advierte del peligro que acarrea el definir a la mujer a través de “una supuesta esencia femenina”, ya que, al interpretar dicho concepto como una “verdad universal”, se corre el riesgo de omitir o simplificar las experiencias y necesidades de una realidad femenina mucho más heterogénea (ibid). Como Rooney (1993: 2) explica en una conversación con Spivak:

El cuerpo es por supuesto el gran texto del esencialismo: La reinterpretación de éste como la esencia de la Mujer es, con certeza, una de las estrategias del falocentrismo [...], al depender del cuerpo [como fuerza de subversión] la ideología feminista se convierte en una réplica del esencialismo que pretende atacar.

Otros críticos feministas y postcoloniales, como Christian (1990: 45), Minh-ha (1989: 38) y Donaldson (1992: 11) han identificado de igual modo el peligro de forjar la ideología feminista a través de términos inequívocos como “diferencia sexual” y “hermandad femenina”. La defensa de la especificidad de una sexualidad femenina es limitada y engañosa a la vez, ya que convierte a todo lo que es diferente en “el Otro”, impulso que se encuentra en la base del “proyecto colonial” (Donaldson 1992: 11).

De este modo, el feminismo radical que prevalece en *In Her Own Image* es un impedimento para alcanzar una satisfactoria autonomía artística por una serie de factores obvios. En primer lugar, la dualidad hombre/mujer, que Cixous (1994: 37) identifica como opuestos irreconciliables en el pensamiento occidental, se reitera en dicho volumen, ya que Boland presenta a sus mujeres como opuestas al “otro” masculino. Un principio fundamental que subyace en la obra de Boland en esta etapa es el de dualidad. En *In Her Own Image* hay siempre una división, una clara barrera que separa al “yo” del “otro”, identificado éste último como masculino en la mayoría de los casos, o como la luna, la maternidad, o la Eva pecaminosa. Es importante constar la repetición de “self”, “myself” y “yourself”, lexemas que enfatizan aquellas cualidades esenciales que distinguen a un individuo de otro. Dicho énfasis en la compartimentación de identidades opuestas desaparecerá en la obra madura de Boland. En *Night Feed*, por ejemplo, expresará su deseo de fusionarse con su propia hija, en un terreno pre-edípico en el que el “self” y “m/other” no estén separados. De igual modo, sus posteriores volúmenes de poesía mostrarán cómo Boland sobrepasa constantemente las fronteras entre el “yo” poético y todas aquellas imágenes que ella suele representar en sus poemas (usualmente femeninas).

En segundo lugar, Boland perpetúa las relaciones jerárquicas entre hombres y mujeres que subyacen en el pensamiento patriarcal. Como explica Whitford (1991: 12), feministas como Cixous e Irigaray se enfrentan a lo que ella denomina el conflicto “modernista” y “postmodernista”; es decir, la dificultad de visualizar una emancipación sexual para la mujer sin reivindicar la superioridad femenina sobre la masculina. Éste es precisamente el dilema que Boland experimenta en *In Her Own Image*. La autora muestra los atributos femeninos (el cuerpo y la pasión, por ejemplo) como más valiosos y poderosos que los masculinos. A su vez, ensalza las voces poéticas femeninas a las que considera superiores, por ser capaces de hablar y escribir sobre sus vidas sexuales, sobre sus cuerpos y experiencias como mujeres. En la dualidad patriarcal que Cixous (1994: 37) analiza y ataca drásticamente, es el hombre el que ocupa siempre la posición autoritaria, activa y enérgica. Boland no escapa de dicha oposición, ya que, a través de su poesía, intenta adoptar una posición semejante a la masculina. La presencia de un sujeto femenino claramente dueño de sí mismo se observa en los predicados que Boland utiliza en sus poemas tales como los que se señalan a continuación: El uso frecuente de imperativos (casi siempre dirigidos al “otro” masculino); la recurrencia del modal “will” de volición (indicativo de la intención o deseo del hablante de llevar a cabo una determinada acción en el futuro); la utilización del verbo “saber” tras el sujeto en primera persona del singular; y la presencia significativa de verbos léxicos de acción. Todos estos rasgos reflejan la intención de Boland de desbancar la autoridad masculina y enfatizar la habilidad de sus mujeres para liberarse de su opresión y tomar sus propias decisiones. Por tanto,

al retratar a sus mujeres como autoritarias y fuertes, Boland mantiene deliberadamente la estructura jerárquica. Según afirma Irigaray (1985: 33), si el objetivo de las mujeres “fuera simplemente la inversión del orden de las cosas, suponiendo que esto fuera posible, la historia se repetiría a largo plazo, volveríamos [...] al falocentrismo”. Kristeva (1986c: 195, 202) también hace hincapié en el riesgo que implica adoptar la ideología feminista para fines estéticos, argumentando que, en su búsqueda de “una identidad irreducible y radicalmente diferente del otro sexo”, el feminismo peligra en convertirse “en una forma invertida de sexismo”. Como Irigaray y Kristeva anticipan, la inversión de la estructura de poder, según la cual el término “inferior” ocupa la posición del término “superior”, no alteraría la naturaleza de sus relaciones. No será hasta sus obras posteriores cuando Boland subvertirá con más éxito esta dicotomía, al recalcar la impotencia y vulnerabilidad de sus voces poéticas.

De este modo, y por muy ofensiva que sea su posición feminista radical, Boland termina reincorporando los valores estéticos patriarcales que han oprimido a las mujeres en primer lugar. La escritora no logra desafiar los fundamentos en los que el patriarcado se ha basado. Aunque su intención es reevaluar las categorías femeninas del discurso masculino, en el proceso, lo que hace es reiterar las divisiones tradicionales de género que Cixous (1994: 37) identifica. Para Boland es de suma importancia situar a sus mujeres en una atmósfera nocturna. Mientras que, en su poesía más madura, sus mujeres habitan paisajes difuminados (bien al amanecer o al anochecer), aquí sus mujeres se localizan en ámbitos nocturnos claramente determinados y establecidos (“Solitary”, “Menses”, “Witching” y “Exhibitionist”). De este modo, sus mujeres están dominadas por la luna, y su hábitat ideal es la noche, tal y como dicta la lógica binaria. Por otro lado, aunque algunos de sus personajes subvierten algunas de las oposiciones patriarcales (sus mujeres son encarecidamente activas), en su discurso irracional e impulsivo, ellas continúan exaltando el “pathos” femenino sobre el “logos” convencionalmente masculino (“Solitary” y “Witching”, por ejemplo). Por tanto, las mujeres en este volumen se dejan llevar más por su venganza, odio y rencor, que por la razón.

La reiteración (bien consciente o inconsciente) de las bases del pensamiento hegemónico es otra característica que distingue *In Her Own Image* como volumen “Feminista” y “Nacionalista Cultural”. Al igual que el feminismo radical, la ideología nacionalista, en su necesidad de construir una cultura oponente, termina dependiendo de las categorías impuestas por la misma cultura del colonizador. Tanto Memmi (1990: 201-205) como Fanon (1990: 38-39) han mostrado su reticencia ante el nacionalismo como modo viable de descolonización. Incluso después de la consecución de la liberación nacional, hay una serie de características del anterior poder colonial que se mantienen en el gobierno nacional. La razón de esto, según Memmi (1990: 291, 197), es que el colonizado continúa definiéndose de acuerdo con los mismos términos impuestos por el colonizador. En

relación a este punto, Fanon (1990: 38-39) explica que las técnicas que el escritor utiliza en esta fase para defender con exclusividad su propia identidad no son creativas en realidad, ya que son meras copias del régimen colonial anterior. Según Fanon (1990: 192), fue el colonizador el primero en motivar una escritura de autodefensa y violencia, con vistas a consolidar su poder y autoridad. De este modo, la cultura nativa mantiene sus valores en el marco de la dominación colonial. Al igual que la cultura nacionalista, las voces poéticas de Boland se crean a sí mismas con los mismos mecanismos que la sociedad patriarcal les ha otorgado. Su subversión se lleva a cabo a partir de imágenes convencionales como espejos, maquillajes, velos y máscaras. La poetisa siente que, para definirse a sí misma, tiene que hacerlo con los parámetros tradicionales dictados por el pensamiento masculino. Aunque la narradora de “Menses” afirma en un momento determinado que ella es “bright” y “original”, no será hasta más tarde cuando Boland producirá una imagería más innovadora que trate de dar voz a la subjetividad femenina. Como Fanon (1990: 192) afirma, esta fase se caracteriza por una cierta “cultura paralizada y no creativa”, en la que el escritor continúa utilizando imágenes que no son suyas. Al igual que Fanon, Showalter (1999: 215) observa cómo la fase “Feminista” es improductiva en el terreno literario: “En retrospectiva, parece que las feministas no tenían más que una historia que contar y, al narrarla, acabaron agotándose”. De acuerdo con estos comentarios, no parece ser accidental que la fase “Feminista” y “Nacionalista Cultural” de Boland abarque sólo un volumen de su poesía.

Dos últimas razones justifican el hecho de que Boland no haya alcanzado la autonomía artística a la que ella aspira como poetisa irlandesa. En primer lugar, aunque Boland sugiere en *In Her Own Image* que la sexualidad es un aspecto esencial para la vida de las mujeres, ella no da voz a otras cualidades femeninas que le serán de gran satisfacción y agrado en su siguiente fase: Su papel como madre, el amor que siente por su marido, o su necesidad de establecer una relación virtual de camaradería con las mujeres del pasado Irlandés. Hasta que Boland no hable directamente de su experiencia como escritora irlandesa, no conseguirá esa independencia artística que ella tanto anhela, aunque ello no implicará la consecución de una identidad “auténtica” como mujer, sino la desconstrucción de la misma (como veremos, Boland evitará adoptar el esencialismo de esta segunda fase, al poner en tela de juicio las bases sobre las que categorías como la “feminidad” y “lo irlandés” se asientan). En segundo lugar, sus mujeres, a pesar de ser representativas de una variada experiencia femenina, no dan testimonio de la realidad personal de Boland, ya que ella no ha sufrido anorexia, ni ha sido maltratada por su marido, como explica en una entrevista con Wilson (1990b: 82). De esta manera, este volumen nos presenta a una mujer que intenta definirse a sí misma por medio de otras mujeres. Hasta que Boland no esclarezca cuál es su verdadero yo poético (como madre interesada por el crecimiento de sus hijos, o como mujer preocupada por su

envejecimiento), no alcanzará su descolonización artística. Las crisis de identidad que sufren las enojadas voces en este volumen son consecuencia directa de la presión que Boland experimenta por desprenderse de la influencia de la tradición patriarcal. En uno de sus poemas posteriores, “A False Spring” (*Outside History*, 1990), Boland se percatará de la necesidad de calmar a la mujer furiosa que ella retrata en *In Her Own Image*: “Quiero decirle que puede descansar por fin,/ que ahora es cuando ella está encarnada”. Esta encarnación representará para Boland su deseo de escribir una poesía que contenga la totalidad de su experiencia como mujer. No será hasta su etapa madura cuando la mujer del poema, y la mujer que lo escribe, serán la misma persona.

10.3.4. Una satisfactoria independencia artística: Fase “Female” y “Liberacionista” en la poesía de Eavan Boland

Showalter (1999: 13) identifica una tercera fase en la tradición literaria femenina que denomina “Female” y que define como un período en el que la escritora se desliga de la necesidad de oponerse con rotundidad a la tradición literaria dominante. Al disipar su anterior “dependencia de oposición”, la artista ahora puede buscar con mayor “libertad” su propia identidad. Según Showalter, las mujeres en esta etapa escriben sobre sus propias experiencias, reflejando en sus obras “una auto-expresión autónoma”, y embarcándose en un descubrimiento y escrutinio de su propias identidades (p. 4). Es ahora cuando se aferran con mayor detenimiento a sus propios sentimientos, valores e insatisfacciones como mujeres. Si resaltamos el énfasis que Showalter pone en la libertad de expresión de la escritora ante la corriente literaria dominante, la obra madura de Boland se puede enmarcar con cierta certeza en dicha fase de autonomía artística. A diferencia de *In Her Own Image*, Boland ahora no reivindica su feminidad en términos esencialistas, sino todo lo contrario, ya que sus sucesivos volúmenes de poesía cuestionan la posibilidad de transmitir de manera directa la esencia propia de la mujer. A primera vista, la desconstrucción de la identidad que Boland lleva a cabo en su etapa madura parece distanciarla de lo que Showalter define como escritura “female”, y su énfasis reiterado en una identidad femenina. Aun así, un acercamiento profundo al análisis de Showalter muestra que la poesía madura de Boland no es más que un ejemplo de esa última etapa que ella identifica en la tradición literaria femenina.

Moi (1991: 7) ha criticado a Showalter por estudiar la literatura femenina bajo la presunción de que existe una escritura femenina opuesta a la escritura masculina. Según Moi, la crítica literaria feminista debe beber de las fuentes de la teoría postestructuralista del feminismo francés, y de Julia Kristeva en particular, ya que éstas rechazan abiertamente el esencialismo biológico y desconstruyen “la oposición entre masculinidad y feminidad” (p. 12). De hecho, es indudable que Showalter utiliza indiscriminadamente términos como “female” y “masculine” a lo largo de *A*

Literature of Their Own, sugiriendo que existen ciertos rasgos que se pueden encontrar de forma particular en las obras escritas por los hombres y las mujeres. Este hecho justificaría la crítica que Moi hace de la actitud pasiva de Showalter ante el binario lógico del pensamiento occidental (esto es, la masculinidad y la feminidad). No obstante, ataques como los de Moi parecen ignorar el hecho de que la intención de Showalter no es la de descifrar una esencia propiamente femenina, “una actitud sexual innata” en la tradición literaria femenina, sino la de vislumbrar el modo en que las escritoras logran alcanzar gradualmente una independencia artística, según la cual puedan libremente expresar su realidad como mujeres. Como afirma Showalter (1999: 12) al comienzo de su estudio:

Me siento incómoda con conceptos como los de “imaginación femenina”. La teoría sobre la existencia de una sensibilidad femenina que es capaz de ser transmitida a través de imágenes y formas específicas de la mujer siempre corre el peligro de replicar estereotipos familiares.

De este modo, Showalter es consciente del riesgo que conlleva otorgar rasgos específicos a las escritoras, ya que éstos podrían entenderse como naturales y exclusivos de la mujer. Esta creencia que ella mantiene acerca sus teorías a las tendencias desconstruccionistas que el feminismo más reciente ha adoptado, principalmente tras el legado de Cixous, Irigaray y Kristeva, y que enfatizan la construcción social y no natural de las diferencias de género. A su vez, Showalter (1999: 34) hace hincapié en el hecho de que, aunque la escritura “female”, como ella la denomina, se centra fundamentalmente en la búsqueda de la identidad de la mujer, esto no necesariamente implica (contradiendo algunas de sus aseveraciones, como en la página 4) articular las experiencias de las mujeres: “Paradójicamente, cuanto más ‘female’ se convertía esta literatura en el sentido formal y teórico de la palabra, menos exploraba la experiencia física de las mujeres [...], la estética ‘female’ es [...] curiosamente asexual en su contenido”. Por ello, al analizar la obra de Virginia Woolf, claro exponente de lo que ella denomina “una estética ‘female’ deliberada”, Showalter hace resaltar el anhelo de androginia que esta escritora siempre exponía en su trabajo (p. 262). Su énfasis en el deseo de artistas como Woolf por conseguir una cierta asexualidad en su obra hace que el análisis que Showalter realiza sobre la etapa “female” se asemeje al interés que el movimiento feminista en Francia ha mostrado por desenmarañar conceptos polarizados en el lenguaje dominante, como los términos “hombre” y “mujer”. A su vez, al identificar en la tercera etapa de la escritura femenina “una liberación de la dependencia de la oposición”, Showalter (1999: 13) sugiere que, a diferencia del feminismo radical de su etapa intermedia, la escritora no anhela ahora invertir las estructuras de dominación. De este modo, la identidad de la escritora no operaría

según las limitaciones discursivas establecidas por el discurso patriarcal, y se alejaría de oposiciones binarias como las de género.

En esta etapa deconstructivista, el feminismo formaría parte del proyecto político de “despertar y transformar la conciencia” del sujeto sexual (Ashcroft, Griffiths y Tiffin 2002a: 174), un proyecto similar al abogado por intelectuales anti-coloniales como Albert Memmi (1990: 198) y Franz Fanon (1990: 148). Ambos estudiosos mantienen la creencia de que la segunda fase en el proceso de descolonización es un prelude para un movimiento más “positivo” y “liberalizador”. Según Memmi, en las dos etapas anteriores, el sujeto colonizado dependía de la figura del colonizador, bien como modelo a imitar, bien como antítesis que debe ser rechazada abiertamente. Es sólo cuando esta “dependencia” entre ambos individuos se “descompone”, cuando se hace posible una descolonización satisfactoria (Memmi 1990: 7). Al igual que en Showalter, las teorías de Memmi incitan al escritor colonizado a liberarse de esa necesidad de oponerse al contrario. El individuo debe dejar de definirse a sí mismo a través de las categorías impuestas por los colonizadores, lo que implicaría sobrepasar las fronteras que separan el Este del Oeste, o al sujeto colonizado del colonizador. La llamada que Memmi (1990: 217) hace por “una revolución” y por la creación de “todo un ser humano libre” anticipa la posterior defensa que Fanon (1990: 28) hace de “la creación viable de hombres y mujeres libres”. Según Fanon, en la última fase de liberación, el sujeto colonial no lleva a cabo una resistencia antagónica (p. 182). A diferencia de su anterior etapa, el escritor en este periodo no busca reemplazar el canon literario, sino que intenta reconstruirlo al releer e interpretar anteriores supuestos opresivos, y al crear sus propios criterios artísticos. Ahora, tanto el colonialismo como el sujeto colonizado desaparecen. La división radical establecida entre oposiciones emparejadas como bueno vs. malo, verdadero vs. falso, blanco vs. negro que subyacen en las relaciones coloniales, y que Fanon (1991: 11) caracteriza como producto de “un maniqueísmo disparatado”, dificulta el proceso de descolonización. De este modo, como explica dicho teórico, la afirmación de la propia identidad (o de su negritud), que el sujeto de color ha llevado a cabo con anterioridad, no es suficiente, ya que la raza no es más que un constructo social. La única manera como el individuo puede alcanzar la liberación completa es sobrepasando las fronteras impuestas por las diferencias de raza. Como explica Fanon (1991: 231), “el alma negra no es más que una invención del hombre blanco”, el “negro no existe por sí mismo. Al igual que el hombre blanco [...]. ¿Por qué no intentamos simplemente tocar al otro, para poder sentirlo, para explicarlo y poder encontrarlo en uno mismo?”. De este modo, y como reconoce Young (1002: 119), Fanon fue uno de los escritores pioneros que supo deconstruir el pensamiento occidental y su sistema binario.

En las obras que siguen *In Her Own Image*, nos encontramos también con este intento insistente de romper las barreras establecidas por los conceptos de nación y género. Como veremos, la poesía de Boland se aleja de aquellas reivindicaciones fundamentalistas que el nacionalismo ha hecho de “lo irlandés”, y también de todos aquellos intentos feministas de construir una identidad femenina opuesta a la masculina. La autora ahora rehúsa aliarse al feminismo, ya que dicha ideología solamente motiva a la escritora a “feminizar sus percepciones y no ha humanizar su feminidad” (Boland 1996a: 245). Como ella misma afirma (1996b: 142), la importancia de las mujeres en la poesía irlandesa no radica en temas de género o de política, sino en el hecho de que su poesía “contiene elementos de justicia humana”. Según Boland (1996a: 235), el proyecto de las mujeres no es “ni marginal ni especialista. Es un proyecto de gran interés para todo tipo de poesía, ya que la encamina al pasado y la embarca a su vez rumbo al futuro”. Es significativo constatar que el discurso de Boland se asemeja en gran medida al discurso “humanista” y “liberacionista” de Fanon, tal y como se hace explícito a lo largo de *White Skin, Black Masks* y *The Wretched of the Earth*, con afirmaciones como las siguientes: “Creo que el individuo debe apoyarse en el humanismo inherente a toda la condición humana” (Fanon 1991: 12), o su creencia de que el escritor debe “utilizar el pasado con la intención de abrir el futuro, como si fuera una invitación que motiva a la acción y que fomenta la esperanza” (p. 187). El proyecto que Boland se propone en esta tercera fase no se centra solamente en cuestiones de género, sino en la transformación de la propia poesía, la reestructuración de las bases sobre las cuales la literatura canónica se ha fundado (como la asociación tradicional establecida entre “hombre” como escritor/poeta, y “mujer” como objeto decorativo o imagen sexual en el poema).

Considerando todo lo expuesto hasta el momento, creo apropiado aplicar la fase “Female” de Showalter, y la fase “Liberacionista” de Memmi y Fanon a la obra literaria de Boland entre 1982 y 2001: *Night Feed* (1982), *The Journey and other poems* (1986), *Outside History* (1990), *In a Time of Violence* (1994), *The Lost Land* (1998) y *Against Love Poetry* (2001). Como afirma Fanon (1990: 192), el periodo final en el proceso de descolonización, a diferencia de las anteriores fases, es testigo de una sobreproducción en el terreno literario. Los numerosos volúmenes de poesía que Boland publica en este período dejan constancia del proceso de expansión y madurez artística que la poetisa experimenta. Ahora, la autora expresa su insatisfacción por sus primeras obras literarias (*New Territory* en particular), donde escribía el tipo de poesía que se esperaba del aprendiz de poeta que era ella, y también por su volumen feminista de poesía (*In Her Own Image*), donde celebraba enérgicamente su feminidad y adoptaba una posición separatista en su intento por establecer su propia estética poética.

10.3. Summary of the Thesis in Spanish

En las secciones dedicadas a la obra madura de la autora en cuestión, ha sido mi intención demostrar cómo su producción más reciente se ajusta a todos aquellos rasgos que constituyen lo que Showalter (1999: 33) ha identificado como “una estética ‘female’ deliberada”, y Memmi (1999: 48) y Fanon (1990: 182) han denominado una escritura “liberadora” para el sujeto colonizado. En lugar de considerar su producción artística cronológicamente (es decir, analizando volumen por volumen), en este caso he decidido aplicar un criterio temático para explorar su obra. Aunque es tentador ubicar su evolución madura de una forma lineal, su producción poética posterior a *Night Feed* no presenta tal progresión.

En el capítulo titulado “La experiencia femenina de Boland”, mi objetivo es descifrar las principales fuentes de inspiración de la escritora. Como Showalter (1999: 35) hace constar, la escritora en su fase madura “intenta unificar los fragmentos de su experiencia femenina a través de su visión artística”. Por “experiencia femenina”, la crítica feminista se refiere a la participación activa de la mujer en la sociedad como esposas, madres y amas de casa. Esto es lo que precisamente Boland hace en su obra: Defender desde una perspectiva literaria su vida normal y corriente como madre y esposa en un barrio de Dublín. Aunque la autora en cuestión ensalza su realidad como mujer, ella evita a toda costa adoptar una posición oponente y separatista ante la tradición literaria, al reconocer la influencia positiva que el “otro” (masculino) ejerce en su vida. En primer lugar, muestro cómo Boland, en un gran número de poemas de *The War Horse* (1975) y *Against Love Poetry* (2001) se centra en su matrimonio con el novelista Kevin O’Casey como punto de partida desde el que ofrecer un estilo ideal de vida, según el cual el individuo puede mantener su “diferencia sexual” sin imponerla como radicalmente diferente y sobre todo, superior. Aunque Boland escribió *The War Horse* antes que *In Her Own Image* (1980), trato dicho volumen como un prelude a la obra madura de Boland, ya que su estética poética se ajusta a la que Boland desarrolla posteriormente. A tal fin, aplico los postulados propuestos por el feminismo francés, y en particular por Cixous (1994: 119-128) e Irigaray (1991: 115-130), quienes abogan por un “encuentro amoroso” basado en una relación equitativa entre sujetos, tradicionalmente considerados como opuestos y antagónicos. En la relación amorosa que Cixous e Irigaray visualizan, cada una de las partes encuentra en el “otro” una satisfacción personal, una armonía y paz no basadas esta vez en una relación de poder y dominación. En segundo lugar, analizo todos aquellos poemas, fundamentalmente los de *Night Feed*, en los que Boland escribe sobre los interiores domésticos que ella habita y las relaciones entre madre e hija. Las experiencias personales de Boland como esposa, ama de casa y madre son aspectos esenciales en la construcción de su identidad, y de hecho los trata de forma reiterada y consciente a lo largo de su producción literaria. Al alabar y describir como sacramental sus funciones en el ámbito doméstico, Boland parece sugerir que su experiencia

privada es universal. El hincapié que hace en su matrimonio y maternidad, como fuentes inagotables de identidad para el sujeto femenino, sería atacado por feministas postcoloniales como Spivak (entrevista con Threadgold y Bartkowski 1990: 118), Davis (2003: 353), Rajan (1993: 1-2) y Mohanty (1991a: 11), quienes mantienen la creencia de que generalizaciones como éstas pueden homogeneizar y simplificar la realidad de las mujeres. Éstas pensadoras argumentan de diferentes maneras que cualquier campaña que intente hablar en representación de las mujeres corre el riesgo de eludir diferencias contextuales como las marcadas por los rasgos culturales, históricos y socio-económicos. No obstante, es importante considerar que Boland, sobre todo en *Night Feed*, rinde homenaje al papel de las mujeres como madres y amas de casa con vistas a revalorizar una experiencia que ha sido ignorada por no ser “poética” (no con el objetivo de alabarla por encima de otras experiencias individuales). Como se demuestra en esta sección, dicha selección temática de Boland es un mecanismo subversivo con el que dismantelar idealizaciones convencionales de las mujeres en la literatura y con el que criticar una tradición nacional que ha ocultado y calificado como irrelevante las experiencias privadas de las mujeres. Por otro lado, se debe tener en cuenta que, a medida que la obra de Boland progresa gradualmente, categorías como “la feminidad” serán, curiosamente, definidas en términos difusos, a través de nociones como la fluidez y los silencios.

La segunda sección pretende discutir cómo Boland reconstruye las imágenes femeninas que el arte, y en particular la poesía, han impulsado. Boland no sólo habla desde su perspectiva como esposa, madre y ama de casa, puesto que ella también se identifica con todo tipo de figuras mitológicas y culturales: Dafne, Psiquis, Ceres, Perséfone y, en particular, “Mother Ireland”. A diferencia de su poesía inicial, y continuando con el proyecto que inició en *In Her Own Image*, la autora desafía aquellos estereotipos de género plasmados en mitos, textos literarios y otras manifestaciones culturales. Críticos feministas y postcoloniales como Cixous (1981: 258), Irigaray (1991: 118-132), Spivak (1988: 211) y Bhabha (entrevista con Rutherford 1990: 216) abogan por la revisión, y no el rechazo, de las instituciones, textos y prácticas teóricas de Occidente. Boland adopta dicha actitud, negociando con imágenes del legado patriarcal y colonial con el fin de mostrar cómo éstas han simplificado y tergiversado la realidad de las mujeres. Mi estudio se centra más concretamente en el modo en que la escritora reformula el emblema nacionalista de “Mother Ireland”, alegoría poética que representa a Irlanda como una madre derrotada y desahuciada que debe ser salvada y liberada por sus hijos de la subyugación a la que ha estado sometida. Boland lucha en contra de este emblema nacional. Aunque reconoce que fue útil en un momento histórico particular, ella lo rechaza abiertamente, argumentando que simplifica la realidad de la mujer, al presentarla como sujeto pasivo que depende del poeta para dar voz a su opresión. Al reconstruir dicha imagen en poemas como “Mise Eire” (*The Journey*) y “Mother Ireland” (*The Lost Land*),

demuestro cómo Boland aboga por una identidad nacional más fluida y global, que sea capaz de dar cabida a experiencias (femeninas) diferentes y heterogéneas.

En el tercer capítulo se analiza la desconstrucción de la identidad poética de Boland en sus poemarios *The Journey and Other Poems* e *In a Time of Violence* en particular, y también en algunos poemas de *Outside History* y *The Lost Land*. Será aquí donde las teorías desconstruccionistas de Showalter (1999: 13), Memmi (1990: 7) y Fanon (1990: 231) se ponen en práctica. Como estos pensadores afirman, la descolonización del sujeto colonizado no debe basarse en una oposición antagónica (la mujer vs. el hombre, el individuo negro vs. el individuo blanco), y éste es el punto de partida desde el que estudiar la configuración de su identidad como mujer y como irlandesa que Boland lleva a cabo en su poesía madura. Como la autora admite, “lo irlandés” y la “feminidad”, nociones esenciales para la consecución de su identidad, son meras construcciones sociales: “Creo que toda identidad humana es ficticia de algún modo, [...] estamos contruidos por constructos sociales” (entrevista con Villar Argáiz 2005a). Un claro indicio del deseo de Boland por alejarse de nociones fundamentalistas como la “nacionalidad” y la “feminidad” se encuentra en la crítica feroz que la misma Boland (1996a: 234) hace de las ideologías nacionalistas y feministas. Por otro lado, la forma en la que la escritora define su poesía es bastante esclarecedora de cómo ella intenta enmarcar su obra fuera del ámbito de doctrinas e ideologías bien definidas: “Para mí, la poesía comienza cuando todo tipo de certeza finaliza. Pienso que la imaginación es un sitio tanto ambiguo como desordenado, y sus fronteras no son accesibles para la lógica del feminismo [y del nacionalismo] por esta razón” (Boland 1996a: 254). Al definir su poesía como un terreno incierto, la escritora intenta alejarse de todos aquellos discursos hegemónicos que de algún modo han intentado determinar su realidad como mujer irlandesa. Es por ello por lo que Boland puede ser estudiada desde una perspectiva feminista y postcolonial, ya que, de formas a veces muy similares, estas corrientes críticas abogan por un pluralismo cultural y político que evite una confrontación radical y facilite la comunicación entre el “self” y el “other”. La defensa que Boland hace de la ambigüedad como terreno apropiado en el que situar su poesía “apolítica” avanza la manera en que ella va a reconstruir su identidad como mujer irlandesa. Esta ambivalencia se debe al hecho de que su identidad ha girado desde su niñez en torno a polos opuestos y contradictorios. Teóricos postcoloniales de la talla de Bhabha (1995: 278), Hall (1990: 230) y Boyce (1994: 36) argumentan que el sujeto, en particular el postcolonial, ha sido construido de forma compleja a través de diferentes categorías y antagonismos. De igual modo, al intentar definir su “nacionalidad” y “feminidad”, Boland (1996a: 252) ha explicado cómo ella se siente constantemente “bombardeada por contradicciones”. En primer lugar, como una adolescente exiliada en Inglaterra, Boland narra en sus poemas lo confusa que se sentía, pues, al no sentirse ni inglesa ni irlandesa, su identidad estaba

totalmente fracturada. En segundo lugar, como una mujer adulta asentada en Irlanda, Boland debe enfrentarse a otro tipo de ambivalencia: La separación establecida cultural y socialmente entre el ser “mujer” y el ser “poeta”. De este modo, la identidad de Boland se fundamenta en lo que Hall (1990: 225) describe como “rupturas y discontinuidades”. Su obra madura intenta resaltar, y no esconder, dicho conflicto entre esos aspectos antagónicos de su identidad. Como la misma escritora afirma, su poesía pretende inscribir “el mundo dividido del sujeto, [...], un mundo tan volátil” que colapsa y reformula “todos los significados aparentemente estables del poema” (Boland 1996a: 189). Por tanto, y al igual que la teoría postestructuralista (Sarup 1993: 96), Boland defiende la noción de “sujeto descentrado”. Las contradicciones que Boland ha experimentado como irlandesa y como mujer son productivas y no delimitantes, ya que le permiten aprovechar las posibilidades que el hibridismo y la ambivalencia le ofrecen para dismantelar ideologías anquilosadas. Con el fin de estudiar dicho aspecto de su trabajo, me centro en primer lugar en aquellos poemas en los que reflexiona sobre su exilio de Irlanda cuando tenía cinco años. En ellos, Boland refleja la confusión de una niña que no sabe a dónde pertenece verdaderamente. Al no sentirse ni inglesa ni irlandesa en el sentido auténtico de la palabra, Boland abogará por un lugar “intermedio” (“in-between”), entre ideologías nacionalistas e imperialistas que, de forma similar, reivindican una identidad inequívoca y pura. Por tanto, la autora consigue una satisfactoria descolonización artística al desafiar las barreras y fronteras impuestas por conceptos como “lo irlandés” y “lo inglés”. Para estudiar este aspecto de su obra, hago uso de los supuestos teóricos que se desprenden de la teoría postcolonial internacional (Bhabha 1995; Said 1994; Spivak 1988, 1993; Hall 1990) e irlandesa (Kearney 1985; Lloyd 1993; Gibbons 1996; Kiberd 1996; Smyth 1998; Fulford 2002b; y O’Dowd 1990), ya que esta rama defiende el hibridismo como estrategia que puede ser utilizada subversivamente por el emigrante postcolonial. En segundo lugar, mi estudio se centra en todos aquellos poemas en los que Boland reflexiona sobre su situación como mujer ya asentada en Irlanda. Demostraré cómo Boland se embarcará intencionadamente en otro tipo de diáspora, esta vez más imaginaria que real, desde la cual ella pueda transformar ideas erróneas sobre la poesía y la mujer irlandesa. La teoría feminista francesa, y en particular los postulados de Cixous (1994) e Irigaray (1985, 1991), ofrecen un marco útil sobre el que discutir cómo Boland lleva a cabo dicho proceso. Al igual que Cixous e Irigaray, Boland conceptualiza a sus mujeres como sujetos fluidos y difíciles de definir con nitidez, con vistas a socavar aquellas representaciones femeninas que el patriarcado ha fomentado. Al localizar sus imágenes poéticas como figuras difuminadas, disolutas y escurridizas, por estar en constante movimiento, Boland consigue evadir definiciones simplistas y tergiversaciones artísticas. Por tanto, la poesía de la autora en cuestión cruza todo tipo de fronteras, ya sean geográficas, nacionales y culturales. Su capacidad de resistencia se basa precisamente en su habilidad para demostrar que

cualquier tipo de ideología política que defienda con rotundidad la identidad del individuo es autoritaria, y por tanto restrictiva. A su vez, su poesía nos muestra que todo acto de representación conlleva de por sí una inminente simplificación y desfiguración de la realidad. Como Boland (1996b: 139) ha argumentado en uno de sus muchos ensayos, la poetisa debe encontrar su libertad artística al realizar “una exploración no autoritaria de las identidades unidas al lugar [...], que confronten los textos establecidos por el canon y la nación”. Es aquí donde Boland encuentra un espacio productivo donde actuar subversivamente, sin imponer sus imágenes artísticas de la “nación” y de “la mujer” como más “reales” y “verdaderas”.

El capítulo cuarto se centra en uno de los aspectos más importantes de la obra de Boland: Su intento por transmitir todas aquellas experiencias, en su mayoría femeninas, que han sido ignoradas e infravaloradas por la historia irlandesa. En particular, la escritora se interesa por las figuras “subalternas”, como Spivak (1994) las denomina, que han sufrido doblemente las consecuencias del imperialismo y del nacionalismo: La mujer que conoce en las Islas Achill (“The Achill Woman”, *Outside History*), su abuela (“Lava Cameo”, *The Journey*), o las víctimas de la gran hambruna (“The Journey”, *The Journey*). Aunque Boland intenta convertirse en portavoz de una comunidad oprimida, ella muestra que carece de la autoridad necesaria para acceder al pasado, para recobrar todas aquellas voces perdidas. De este modo, y como Spivak (1994: 66-111) argumentaría, Boland habla constantemente en representación de una conciencia subalterna que es imposible recobrar, no solamente por el hecho de que el testimonio histórico de esta realidad está destruido y por tanto no se puede recuperar, sino también por el hecho de que Boland se niega a rescatar su legado “auténtico”. Al retratar su impotencia y limitaciones como escritora, el discurso de Boland será sumamente subversivo. Como demuestro en esta sección, la autora evita actuar como una portavoz autorizada, ya que este hecho, en primer lugar, perpetúa la relación entre el poeta y su comunidad que la tradición nacionalista ha fomentado en Irlanda, y en segundo lugar, corre el riesgo de simplificar inevitablemente un pasado irlandés que está constituido por experiencias fragmentadas y heterogéneas. Para analizar este interesante aspecto de su obra, hago uso de las premisas postcoloniales propuestas por Spivak en su controvertido ensayo “Can the Subaltern Speak?” (1994) y de los postulados feministas que se desprenden de Kristeva en “Revolution in Poetic Language” (1986a). El pasado es siempre descrito por Boland como un terreno inaccesible, lleno de vacíos, silencios y sombras, e imposible de recuperar con viabilidad y certeza. En vez de alzarse como una locuaz representante del pasado irlandés y de la realidad de la mujer irlandesa, Boland se describe como un hablante sin autoridad, que comparte el silencio e incapacidad de hablar de todas aquellas figuras que la *Iliada* de Virgilio representa en el mundo subterráneo. De este modo, sus poemas nos adentran en ese “vacío inaccesible” y “rareza imposible de traducir” que Spivak (1994:

89) y Boehmer (1995: 234) identifican en los textos postcoloniales. Boland intenta dar voz a todas aquellas vidas que se han visto marginadas por los discursos poderosos del nacionalismo e imperialismo (la esfera de lo “semiótico”, tal y como Kristeva lo definiría), dentro del poema (la esfera “simbólica”), pero su proyecto termina siendo infructuoso. El lenguaje es para Boland un medio insuficiente de expresión y, por tanto, la realidad femenina y el pasado irlandés (entendidos ambos como “lo real”) sólo pueden ser comunicados a través de otros medios, como los tejidos, los gestos, llantos irracionales e incoherentes, disonancias, meras insinuaciones, repeticiones y ecos, y, por encima de todo, indescifrables silencios. Como afirma la misma Boland (1997b: 24), “todavía necesito encontrar el lenguaje apropiado con el que abordar el pasado”. En este mismo ensayo, Boland dice también que “lo que importa en verdad es el lenguaje”, definido éste como “lo que no se dice ante lo que se puede decir” con claridad (p. 23). La exposición que la misma Boland hace de su incapacidad por encontrar un medio de expresión adecuado es de hecho uno de sus mayores logros poéticos. Como expone Deane (2003: 121):

El requisito político no es que seamos elocuentes en un lenguaje que no es el nuestro, ya sea el gaélico, el inglés o ambos; sino que seamos elocuentes en un lenguaje que nunca hemos tenido, pero que creemos que ha existido, aunque sea por nuestra dificultad al articularlo. Éste es el [verdadero] lenguaje de la libertad.

La independencia artística de Boland, su “lenguaje de la libertad” como escritora irlandesa, radica en su intento por dar voz a lo que siempre ha sido obviado por el legado histórico, ese mundo “semiótico” que Kristeva (1986a: 89-136) identifica, en el que la verdadera experiencia irlandesa subyace. La “dificultad” que experimenta Boland para expresar dicho pasado es en sí misma una estrategia subversiva. En primer lugar, sus silencios nos obligan a percibir ese vacío existente entre lo que ha pasado en realidad y lo que la historia oficial nos dice que pasó. Por tanto, Boland describe “lo real” (el pasado irlandés) como diferente y opuesto a la “retórica” sancionada por el nacionalismo. En segundo lugar, Boland consigue criticar la capacidad del lenguaje para expresar categorías como “lo irlandés” y “ser mujer”, demostrando así la falibilidad de todas aquellas identidades singulares defendidas por los discursos imperialistas, nacionalistas, patriarcales y feministas.

El quinto capítulo, “El exilio maduro de Boland en los EEUU, ¿Es una escritora orientalista?”, se centra en *The Lost Land* (1998), y cómo este volumen de poesía está determinado en gran medida por el exilio actual de Boland en ese país. La autora en cuestión experimenta un cambio en cuanto a sus motivaciones poéticas, cambio que puede entenderse como resultado de la demanda generada por el mercado americano. A diferencia de sus volúmenes anteriores de poesía, *The Lost Land* se centra más abiertamente en temas coloniales y postcoloniales. En dicho poemario,

10.3. Summary of the Thesis in Spanish

Boland se describe a sí misma como testigo privilegiado y como víctima directa de la colonización imperial y nacionalista. La obsesión por el legado colonial que domina en este volumen satisface los deseos de un público atraído por temas “orientalistas”, siguiendo la nomenclatura empleada por Said (1990) en *Orientalism*. La imagen de una escritora irlandesa perjudicada por un pasado colonial opresivo es bien recibida por una creciente demanda comercial de historias que sean “diferentes”, “bárdicas” y exóticas. Analizo, por tanto, hasta qué punto Boland puede ser acusada de “vender” en el extranjero la experiencia colonial a la que la propia Irlanda y la mujer han estado sometidas a lo largo de la historia. Aun así, sería injusto y simplista explicar el éxito que la poesía de Boland ha tenido en los EEUU simplemente por dicha demanda “orientalista”. Boland ha conseguido dar una nueva dimensión a la poesía irlandesa, al transformar a las mujeres de objetos pasivos y emblemáticos en sujetos activos y creativos del proceso artístico. Además, su poesía ha abierto nuevos cauces gracias a los cuales una voz femenina puede cruzar libremente las barreras impuestas por discursos autoritarios. Al ser una escritora que vive en un constante exilio (tanto literal como imaginario), Boland se reafirma a sí misma en tanto en cuanto sobrepasa no solamente fronteras nacionales, sino a su vez, barreras convencionales. La autora se adhiere a lo que Hall (1990: 447) identifica como “una política de posicionamiento”; es decir, una ideología subversiva que permite al escritor o a la escritora reconciliar diferencias incompatibles y plasmar en sus obras una cierta diversidad de posturas. En primer lugar, su exilio es el punto de partida a partir del cual Boland puede dar voz a otras realidades heterogéneas. La caracterización que Boyce (1994: 1) hace de la emigración femenina nos ofrece un marco útil para entender el potencial subversivo del exilio de Boland:

Los viajes de mi madre redefinen el concepto del espacio. Sus migraciones anuales, entre las islas del Caribe y los EEUU, son a su vez viajes que posibilitan el recuerdo y la fluidez de comunicación. Vive en el Caribe, vive en los EEUU; vive en América. También vive en ese espacio “intermedio”, situado no solamente aquí, sino también allí, en las comunidades donde sus hijos, nietos, familia y amigos residen. La emigración de mi madre es, por tanto, deliberada y fundamental, ya que le posibilita desafiar la idea de una localización específica, a la que incluso sus hijos quieren que ella se aferre.

El exilio maduro de Boland es tan subversivo como el que Boyce explica aquí. Su traslado físico a los EEUU se convierte en el punto de partida que “posibilita [...] el recuerdo y la fluidez de comunicación” con otras experiencias divergentes, como las sufridas por emigrantes irlandeses (“The Lost Land”, *The Lost Land*), alemanes (“In Exile”, *Outside History*) y hugonotes (“The Huguenot Graveyard at the Heart of the City”, *In a Time of Violence*). En segundo lugar, la ubicación de Boland “en ese espacio ‘intermedio’, situado no solamente aquí, sino también allí”, le

permite socavar el principio de polaridad (el “yo” vs. el “otro”) que subyace en muchas ideologías políticas. Por un lado, Boland demuestra cómo ella es también un sujeto colonizador, al asentarse como una extranjera en un territorio que no es el suyo, los EEUU. Por otro lado, su poesía nos enseña que las barreras que se han alzado entre el colonizador y el colonizado no son fijas e inamovibles, ya que ambas figuras sufren una similar opresión y confusión, por su incapacidad para “encontrar su lugar de procedencia”, para localizar un “hogar” propio (“The Colonists”, *The Lost Land*). Aunque Boland es incapaz de encontrar sus propias raíces como irlandesa, aunque lo suyo no es más que *una tierra perdida*, su desarraigo y su falta de “sentido del lugar” le permitirán ocupar un espacio productivo en el cual puedan surgir nuevas identidades descolonizadas. La identidad fluida que Boland atribuye tanto a sus personajes como a sí misma, y la inestabilidad con la que construye nociones como “nacionalidad” y “feminidad”, le permiten desbancar la identidad unitaria y rígida que ideologías como el imperialismo, nacionalismo, patriarcado y feminismo han defendido.

Por último, el capítulo titulado “*Against Love Poetry*: ¿Una escritora ‘marginada’ mas segura de sí misma?”, ofrece un análisis exhaustivo del último volumen de poesía de Boland. En *Against Love Poetry*, la escritora se distancia conscientemente de su anterior preocupación por temas coloniales, con el deseo de poner a prueba la reacción americana ante asuntos menos “orientalistas”. Curiosamente, académicos del otro lado del Atlántico, impresionados por su cambio radical de interés temático, han reaccionado de manera muy diferente a como reaccionaron ante *The Lost Land*. Ahora, no alaban abiertamente su obra, sino que ofrecen críticas menos entusiastas. Uno de estos críticos americanos es Murphy (2003: 347, 349), quien argumenta que *Against Love Poetry* “no es tan combativo como Boland quiere sugerir en el título”, ya que el volumen resulta “menos político de lo que pretende ser”. De hecho, Boland se aleja de la idea política de Irlanda como colonia. Aun así, dicho distanciamiento no implica que la autora cese de involucrarse en otros temas políticos. El problema con la crítica de Murphy es que dicho académico considera lo político como exclusivamente relacionado con lo público. Para Boland, en cambio, lo político es lo personal, la esfera doméstica, su vida ordinaria como esposa. Al subvertir las barreras de lo “privado” y lo “público”, Boland se pone de lado de teóricos postcoloniales como Bhabha (1995: 11), para quien lo “político” no reside necesariamente en la esfera pública.

Es interesante constatar que Boland, a pesar de la autoridad que ha adquirido como poetisa en el panorama literario irlandés y americano, continúa adoptando en *Against Love Poetry* una posición marginal a la hora de escribir. El movimiento de Boland es, por tanto, sintomático de esa llamada feminista por “ignorar el privilegio femenino” (Spivak 1994: 91) o por “adquirir una deliberada posición minoritaria” (Kaplan 1990: 375). Como explico en esta sección, Boland alcanza

una mayor seguridad y confianza como escritora irlandesa, ya que su posición afianzada en el panorama literario irlandés y americano le permite superar sin dificultad la opresión que, como escritora y como irlandesa, experimentaba anteriormente. Aun así, Boland no consiente que la autoridad literaria que ella ha alcanzado se vea reflejada en su poesía. La autora todavía se muestra abiertamente vulnerable e impotente. Como veremos, tal mecanismo es sumamente revolucionario, ya que le permite alejarse de todos los discursos dominantes (que se desprenden de ideologías coloniales, nacionalistas y patriarcales). Una visión global de la producción poética de Boland, desde 1972 a 2003, nos muestra que, a medida que su popularidad aumenta, su voz poética se vuelve más vulnerable. El movimiento literal que la autora experimenta desde los márgenes al centro del canon literario nacional aparece curiosamente reflejado en su poesía a la inversa. Aunque escribió *New Territory* como una marginada por el legado nacional, su voz poética desprende una gran autoridad, imitando así la tradición literaria irlandesa que animaba al sujeto a escribir con una “fuerza bárdica” (entrevista con Villar Argáiz 2005a). Conforme Boland se convierte gradualmente en una escritora de reconocido prestigio internacional, sus voces poéticas experimentan inversamente una creciente impotencia y marginalización. La razón por la cual Boland adopta tal posición vulnerable y marginal es debido a las posibilidades subversivas que ésta ofrece. Como la misma escritora hace constar: “La historia de la poesía nos muestra que [...] aunque es el centro lo que dicta los márgenes, al final, son los márgenes los que definen el centro” (entrevista con Villar Argáiz 2005a). Este creencia reformularía las aseveraciones hechas con anterioridad sobre *The Lost Land*. En este volumen de poesía, Boland enfatiza su opresión como mujer irlandesa no sólo debido a la demanda comercial del público americano, sino en parte también como mecanismo subversivo. En primer lugar, la autora se relega a sí misma como mujer oprimida por el legado irlandés con vistas a destacar esos “silencios” y esas experiencias dolorosas que han marcado la historia de Irlanda. En segundo lugar, su automarginalización le permite alejarse de esa actitud autoritaria y comunal sobre la cual la poesía irlandesa se ha fundado. Por último, al describirse a sí misma como sujeto vulnerable e inestable, Boland muestra la falacia de creencias hegemónicas que otorgan al sujeto el derecho de poseer y reclamar un lugar como propio. Debido a todo lo expuesto con anterioridad, cuando le pregunté a la autora si en *Against Love Poetry* ella había conseguido por fin deshacerse de los recuerdos del exilio y el desplazamiento que habían marcado su niñez, ella respondió que todavía sentía un profundo distanciamiento de su propio país (entrevista con Villar Argáiz 2005a). De hecho, uno de sus nuevos poemas, todavía sin publicar, “In Our Own Country”, finaliza con la voz oprimida de una mujer que afirma rotundamente: “Siempre seremos individuos ‘exiliados en nuestro propio país’” (ibid).

10.3.5. Conclusión

Otógale unos cien años más, concluí [...], permítele tener un estudio propio y quinientas [libras] al año, deja que dé rienda suelta a su mente y que suelte todo lo que ahora la reprime, y de esta manera ella escribirá un libro mejor uno de estos días. Será con certeza una poetisa, dije, volviendo a colocar *Life's Adventure*, de Mary Carmichael, al fondo de la estantería, cuando transcurran unos cien años. (Woolf 1974: 142)

Virginia Woolf escribió *A Room of One's Own* en 1929, siete décadas antes de que Boland se consagrara como una de las poetisas contemporáneas más importantes de Irlanda y del extranjero. De hecho, Boland se ha convertido en una “poeta” con cuarto propio, tanto en el sentido literal como figurado de la palabra. El cambio en la vida de Boland, al abandonar el ambiente académico de Dublín (exclusivamente masculino), y trasladarse a un barrio de las afueras, desencadenó su reacción ante la estética dominante de la tradición literaria. Su matrimonio con el novelista Kevin O’Casey (basado en una comprensión mutua y unos ideales liberales), la creación de una familia y un ambiente hogareño, (donde podía combinar sus funciones como esposa, madre y ama de casa con su creación literaria), hizo posible que Boland adquiriera ese cuarto propio del que Woolf habla, un lugar en el que diera “rienda suelta a su mente”. Desde la década de los 80 en adelante, las poetisas en Irlanda han ganado mayor reconocimiento y posibilidades de publicar sus obras en un país en el que la literatura ha sido terreno casi exclusivamente masculino. Boland ha logrado tener ese “estudio propio”, no sólo en su casa, sino también en el panorama literario de Irlanda.

El objetivo fundamental de este trabajo ha sido estudiar la evolución que Boland ha experimentado en su larga carrera literaria. Sus fases “Feminine”/ “Asimilacionista” y “Feminista”/ “Nacionalista Cultural”, aunque de corta duración, han sido necesarias en su búsqueda de la descolonización artística, de un *nuevo territorio* en la poesía irlandesa, más auténtico esta vez, donde su realidad como mujer pueda ser expresada de manera abierta y desinhibida. Como afirma de Beauvoir (1997: 295), “uno no nace, sino que se hace mujer”. Estas dos primeras fases en su trayectoria poética nos muestran que ha sido difícil para Boland convertirse en sus poemas en ese *tipo* de mujer que ella quiere ser: No la musa, objeto de deseo ni emblema nacionalista de los textos literarios masculinos, sino una mujer con voz propia, con independencia para crear su propia estética literaria.

Como Showalter (1999: 13), Memmi (1990: 168) y Fanon (1990: 178) han teorizado, los miembros de una cultura minoritaria (es decir, las mujeres y los sujetos colonizados), se ven inicialmente forzados a llegar a dominar la cultura dominante, con el fin de hacerse notar como sujetos activos. En sus primeros años como escritora, Boland experimenta ese proceso de asimilación de los parámetros convencionales en los que la poesía irlandesa se ha asentado. Su

anhelo es convertirse en “un poeta masculino honorífico”, alguien cuyo privilegio, heredado de sus predecesores bardos, le permita escribir con autoridad sobre su nación y su gente (Allen-Randolph 1993b: 118). La feminidad no es una prerrogativa para Boland a estas alturas de su trayectoria poética. La escritora centra su energía en transmitir “lo irlandés” con la mayor fidelidad y exactitud posibles. Este concepto se describe como una noción coherente: Ser un poeta irlandés significa convertirse en una voz representativa del pueblo, alguien que actúa como portavoz de la opresión irlandesa bajo el dominio británico. Ser un poeta irlandés significa también conmemorar y honrar la muerte de los héroes que han luchado por la independencia política de Irlanda. Ser poeta irlandés implica a su vez expresar amor y admiración por los edenes rurales donde se preservan las tradiciones gaélicas y la autenticidad nativa. Ser “irlandés”, en definitiva, es ser “diferente”, y ser capaz de expresar esta diferencia al crear una cultura nacional distintiva, como abogaban renacentistas literarios como W.B. Yeats.

En *In Her Own Image*, Boland se embarca en un nuevo rumbo, escribiendo poemas radicalmente distintos. A diferencia de la actitud sumisa que la escritura mantiene en sus poemas iniciales ante la simplificación de la mujer en el arte, Boland ahora comienza a tomar conciencia de las implicaciones que dichas imágenes tienen para ella como escritora. La autora considera opresiva la tradición poética irlandesa que ha heredado. Por tanto, se adhiere al feminismo en su obra, actitud que ella más tarde rechazará al calificarla de “separatista” (Boland 1996a: 234). En su denuncia de las representaciones culturales de la mujer, Boland presenta una imagen opuesta: Sus mujeres son enérgicas, activas y poderosas, y se describen en todo momento como personas que dominan el rumbo de sus vidas. El tópico “saber es poder” se convierte a estas alturas de su carrera en una especie de manifiesto político en sus poemas feministas. Mientras que en sus obras subsiguientes, Boland cuestiona todo acto de conocimiento absoluto, las voces poéticas de *In Her Own Image* hacen en todo momento explícito que son conocedoras de aquello que las ha oprimido, y que son capaces de expresar con precisión y exactitud su propia realidad como mujeres. Lo que dominan, ante todo, es su propio cuerpo, y es a través de dicho conocimiento como intentan controlar su propia existencia. Al situar el cuerpo como principal fuente de resistencia, como el lugar donde dar cobijo a la realidad de la mujer, Boland, al igual que Cixous e Irigaray, se apoya en la biología para contrarrestar el discurso patriarcal. De este modo, el sexo se convierte en la esencia prioritaria desde la que la escritora reafirma su identidad como mujer. Según Showalter (1999: 13), Memmi (1990: 7) y Fanon (1991: 11), dicho acto está determinado al fracaso. Nociones como la “feminidad” y la “negritud” no deben ser defendidas en términos fundamentalistas, ya que ello inevitablemente reitera los discursos dominantes de ideologías como el imperialismo, el nacionalismo y el patriarcado.

No es hasta su fase “Female” y “Liberacionista” cuando Boland trata simultáneamente de dar voz a ambas categorías de su identidad: “lo irlandés” y la “feminidad”. A diferencia de sus anteriores volúmenes de poesía, el nacionalismo y el feminismo (y sus respectivas visiones sobre la identidad del sujeto), no son percibidas ya como ideologías útiles y factibles. La escritora transmite una identidad irlandesa y femenina bastante compleja, una identidad que no está basada ahora en nociones como la “pureza”, la “autenticidad”, la “raza” o la “biología”.

En primer lugar, Boland cuestiona conceptos como nacionalidad e identidad cultural, conceptos que, de algún modo u otro, han jugado un papel muy importante en la resistencia anti-colonial. Al igual que teóricos postcoloniales como Bhabha (1995: 167), Said (1994: 276) y Hall (223-224), la autora condena el nacionalismo como una formación ideológica fundamentalista y describe su propia experiencia irlandesa como fragmentada y “performativa”. En primer lugar, al legitimar como literario aquellos temas que tradicionalmente han sido considerados como no aptos para la literatura, Boland defiende una identidad nacional más global, una idea de nacionalismo en la que las realidades y experiencias de las mujeres corrientes no sean ya omitidas. Las experiencias de su propia vida (como mujer-esposa, mujer-ama de casa, y mujer-madre en un barrio dublinense) se convierten en temas adecuados para su poesía, y su realidad personal actúa como un antídoto para todos aquellos constructos de la mujer que el patriarcado ha creado y, en particular, para iconos nacionalistas como los de “Mother Ireland”. Las mujeres que Boland retrata no son ni “ángeles del hogar” ni brujas malévolas, tal y como la tradición androcéntrica las ha descrito. Además, sus personajes no se corresponden con el modelo de madre y esposa impulsado por la Iglesia, el Estado y la sociedad irlandesa en general: Sus mujeres son sumamente humanas, ya que, por un lado, experimentan el paso del tiempo y la pérdida de la belleza y la juventud, y, por otro, se ven abrumadas por una complejidad de sentimientos hacia sus hijos (un amor incondicional, una melancolía angustiada y unos celos incontrolables). En segundo lugar, la idea de “Irlanda” que Boland defiende no es ya una comunidad compuesta por “una gente unificada” (Bhabha 1995: 141), un todo imaginario y cohesivo. Su nación se caracteriza más bien por experiencias fragmentadas, por sujetos híbridos que son tanto ingleses como irlandeses, y cuya posición intersticial les permite aunar opuestos binarios. Por consiguiente, Boland defiende una identidad nacional más fluida. Para la autora, Irlanda es un mapa sin fronteras, un espacio libre en el que explorar y peregrinar, y donde el sujeto, en constante exilio, puede habitar diferentes espacios a la vez: Escenarios domésticos cargados de jarras, cafeteras, cunas y juguetes para niños; paisajes urbanos habitados por ciudadanos corrientes; escenarios urbanos podridos, destruidos y poblados por las víctimas de la gran hambruna; e infiernos abarrotados de emigrantes irlandeses. Por tanto, el interés que Boland muestra por Irlanda se refleja en su interés por asuntos que tradicionalmente han sido considerados

como “insignificantes”, “no heroicos” y “desagradables”. En todos ellos, la poetisa encuentra la fuente de su creatividad artística y la fuerza para desbancar el sueño nacionalista de una Irlanda precolonial pura y auténtica.

En segundo lugar, Boland no da tampoco por sentado ideas como la “feminidad”. Aunque su obra madura refleja una clara preocupación por las experiencias de las mujeres como esposas, amas de casa y madres, su poesía no adopta ahora una política reaccionaria y militante. En primer lugar, la escritora evita universalizar sobre la vida de las mujeres, al ofrecernos una gran variedad de imágenes, muchas de ellas prácticamente opuestas: Mujeres ricas de la alta sociedad, lavanderas, costureras, prostitutas, pobres granjeras y mujeres anglo-irlandesas que disfrutaban aparentemente de un privilegiado estatus social. Por otro lado, mientras que en *In Her Own Image* Boland parece sugerir que sólo al definir a la mujer en términos fundamentalistas (como un ser estable con las bases de su identidad bien consolidadas), en su poesía madura es más bien la falta de especificidad y ambigüedad al describir a la mujer la que lleva a una representación femenina más real y exacta. A diferencia de su segunda etapa, donde Boland muestra su interés por la “diferencia sexual” (o la distancia que separa al hombre de la mujer), en su fase madura, la autora se preocupa más por la distancia que subyace entre las imágenes artísticas y la realidad humana. Según Boland, la representación artística no es un espejo transparente con el que reflejar lo que es “real”. El arte, de por sí, fija e inmortaliza las imágenes en su deseo por alcanzar una belleza y un orden estético. En tal proceso, se simplifica y omite la complejidad de la experiencia humana. Por tanto, una de las técnicas más importantes que Boland utiliza en su poesía para inscribir su “feminidad”, sin caer en la tentación del feminismo (y su intento por capturar una esencia propiamente femenina), es la de crear un paisaje difuminado y versátil, en el que todo fluye y cambia constantemente, hasta el punto de que ni siquiera el poeta es capaz de representarlo inmóvil. Es en dicho paisaje donde Boland sitúa a sus mujeres, lo que evita que ellas sufran una solidificación artística, y, por tanto, la simplificación. Su técnica es la siguiente. En primer lugar, Boland nos presenta un personaje femenino, descrito como marginado o derrotado, tanto por la historia (la opresión Irlandesa bajo el dominio colonial) como por la poesía (la simplificación que las mujeres han sufrido por alegorías nacionalistas). El segundo paso de Boland en este proceso es el de establecer una identificación con este sujeto femenino, bien a través de ventrilocuismos, o simplemente al compartir su dolor y marginación. Cuando esta identificación ocurre, un paisaje de constante fluidez, cambio y luces difuminadas, invade el poema con el resultado de que tanto la imagen de la mujer como la propia poetisa acaban diluyéndose. De este modo, la evolución usual que presentan los poemas más recientes de Boland es desde la expresión y denuncia de la doble colonización a la que la mujer irlandesa ha estado sometida, a una gradual desintegración de dicha figura, y con esto,

paradójicamente, a su liberación. La escritora parece sugerir que sólo al rechazar fronteras restrictivas e imágenes rígidas e inalterables, el sujeto colonial y el sujeto femenino pueden ser liberados.

De este modo, al describir su “nacionalidad” y su “feminidad” como categorías fluidas e inestables, Boland expone la artificialidad de la identidad del sujeto y encuentra un lugar libre de ideologías autoritarias. Aun así, si la autora consigue en apariencia encontrar su descolonización artística tan fácilmente, nos podemos preguntar por qué en sus producciones más recientes (*The Lost Land* y *Against Love Poetry*), ella rehúsa describirse a sí misma como un sujeto liberado por fin del legado colonial y patriarcal. Como hemos visto, Boland continúa describiéndose como una voz poética herida y doblemente colonizada, tanto como irlandesa y como mujer. Una de las razones expuestas que justificarían este hecho es que Boland, como escritora exiliada en los EEUU, explota deliberadamente la opresión de Irlanda y de la mujer por motivos “comerciales”. Aun así, ésta no es la única razón de la supuesta dificultad que encuentra para alcanzar su descolonización artística. Algunos críticos postcoloniales han argumentado que el deseo del sujeto postcolonial de alcanzar una satisfactoria descolonización es, más que una meta que se puede lograr fácilmente, un proceso interminable. Rajan (1993: 8) resume esta creencia del modo siguiente: “Estamos obligados a reconocer que un espacio “no colonizado” (y por tanto, puro y no contaminado) continúa siendo una ilusión y una utopía en las producciones postcoloniales”. Según Ashcroft, Griffiths y Tiffin (2002a: 195), esto se debe al hecho de que nunca podremos deshacernos del legado del pasado, y de que, aunque podamos “apropiarlo y transformarlo de infinitas maneras”, la historia siempre estará ahí como una presencia fantasmal. La historiadora irlandesa Beddoe (1998: 3) lo expresa de este modo: “Sin un buen conocimiento del pasado, nos vemos forzadas siempre a empezar de nuevo” (citado en Hill: 2003: 1). Esto es precisamente lo que Boland experimenta. Al estar alejada de un pasado que le incumbe directamente como escritora irlandesa, ella encuentra la necesidad constante de recuperar una realidad marginada y oprimida, un mundo subalterno ignorado en todos los textos oficiales. La poetisa se ve obligada a reestablecer una relación próxima con todas aquellas figuras omitidas del pasado irlandés, y continúa, por tanto, representándose a sí misma como un sujeto colonizado y marginal. De todos modos, este énfasis, tal vez obsesivo, en su opresión dual como mujer irlandesa, es en sí mismo una estrategia subversiva. La marginalidad no es solamente un índice de sufrimiento, ya que puede ser a su vez positiva. Su deliberado posicionamiento al margen de una tradición literaria poderosa y autoritaria le permite transformar todos aquellos supuestos que la poesía canónica ha mantenido a lo largo de la historia. En primer lugar, la marginalidad le posibilita subvertir la dicotomía establecida convencionalmente en la poesía lírica entre un autor poderoso masculino y un objeto femenino sumiso. Como escritora, ella se describe vulnerable,

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impotente y sin autoridad alguna, alguien que comparte la marginación que otras irlandesas han experimentado antes debido a la existencia de imágenes simplistas culturales y nacionalistas. Boland cuestiona los fundamentos sobre los que la literatura occidental se basa, mostrando sus incongruencias y lagunas, y desafiando, por tanto, su supremacía. En segundo lugar, su automarginación le permite dismantelar la retórica nacionalista que motivaba al poeta a actuar como representante de la comunidad irlandesa. La poetisa evita ejercer de portavoz apropiada, de alguien que puede ofrecer un informe más veraz de lo que ocurrió en el pasado. Al igual que Spivak (1994: 80), Boland cree que dicho acto corre el riesgo de tergiversar los hechos, de obviar y simplificar una realidad subalterna caracterizada por realidades muy divergentes. De este modo, la escritora denuncia la creencia de que textos (bien imperialistas o bien nacionalistas) pueden actuar como espejos certeros y rigurosos del pasado. Su poesía nos enseña que nadie puede hablar con veracidad en representación de su país, que nadie puede actuar como mensajero especial de su comunidad. En tercer lugar, al resaltar su marginación, Boland es capaz de recuperar ese pasado irlandés que suele describir como “inaccesible”. Su lenguaje de silencios, dudas y constantes vacilaciones no solamente contrarresta los discursos coloniales, nacionales y patriarcales, sino que ofrecen una representación más acertada del mundo subalterno, al destacar en sus poemas el fracaso y el dolor que han experimentado las mujeres en el pasado. De este modo, la representación que Boland hace de sí misma como un sujeto abiertamente marginado es de hecho una técnica que le permite alcanzar su descolonización artística.

Considerando todo lo dicho anteriormente, creo conveniente finalizar esta última sección resaltando las dos principales motivaciones (antagónicas) que subyacen en la obra de Eavan Boland. Su poesía, primordialmente en su etapa madura, es sintomática de ese “anti-anti-esencialismo” que Arrowmith (2000: 69) identifica en muchas escritoras contemporáneas en Irlanda. Por un lado, Boland recalca una diversidad y pluralidad “postmodernista” que reconoce las identidades múltiples y fragmentarias que constituyen “lo irlandés” y la “feminidad”. Fiel al postestructuralismo, la autora demuestra la artificialidad de todas aquellas identidades que el imperialismo, el nacionalismo y el feminismo reivindican. Su poesía más reciente aboga por un hibridismo que sobrepasa constantemente las oposiciones binarias (como el sujeto colonizador vs. el sujeto colonizado, lo inglés vs. lo irlandés, y lo masculino vs. lo femenino). Este “anti-esencialismo” y postmodernismo que aparece reflejado en su obra está contrarrestado a la vez por el deseo de Boland de mantener un cierto sentido de identidad cultural. Como hemos visto, la escritora siente una necesidad imperiosa de crear una comunidad femenina imaginaria, de forjar una vinculación afectiva con las mujeres del pasado irlandés. Por tanto, la poetisa intenta entablar un diálogo con la idea de la nación, reconsiderando su actitud ante el pasado y la identidad irlandesa.

De este modo, Boland ocupa una posición ideológica que es bastante contradictoria, ya que por un lado anhela describir su propia identidad de forma fluida, y por otro, intenta establecer una conexión con la identidad nacional. Como Terry Eagleton (1997: 11-12) explica, la riqueza de los estudios irlandeses radica en el hecho de que el crítico tiene que analizar una realidad que es pura e impura a la vez, en el sentido de que es estrictamente tradicional, pero radicalmente híbrida al mismo tiempo:

La categoría ideológica de “lo irlandés” significa, por una parte, raíces, pertenencia, tradición. *Gemeinschaft*, y, por otra parte, según convenga la ocasión, exilio, difusión, globalidad, diáspora [...]. De forma excepcional, “lo irlandés” significa una cohesión nostálgicamente seductora para un mundo cosmopolita desorientado, mientras que se ofrece al mismo tiempo como icono de dicho mundo en sus resonancias de [...] hibridismo, marginalidad y fragmentación.

Más recientemente, en la conferencia plenaria titulada “The Politics of Irish Studies”, organizada por la *Academy for Irish Cultural Heritages* en la Universidad de Ulster, el 7 de Febrero de 2004, Eagleton continúa profundizando en este mismo asunto, al afirmar que Irlanda es “hoy en día la nación que puede fascinar más a los académicos”.² La razón, según Eagleton, es que Irlanda combina “los dos factores más contradictorios presentes en toda sociedad”: Por un lado, existe “un intenso ‘sentido del lugar’ y de identidad local, arraigamiento y una creencia en una singularidad histórica”; mientras que, al mismo tiempo, es una sociedad marcada por los temas postmodernistas de “emigración, hibridismo, desplazamiento y diáspora”. La utopía de una patria espiritual es una alternativa reconfortante para todos aquellos escritores que desean contrarrestar su realidad “desgarradora” como sujetos exiliados y desarraigados que no pertenecen a ninguna parte.

De igual modo, mantengo la creencia de que la poesía de Boland es también la producción literaria que “hoy en día puede fascinar más a los académicos”. Las tendencias contradictorias que Eagleton identifica en la literatura irlandesa también se ponen de manifiesto en su poesía. La evolución que Boland experimenta en su carrera poética ilustra de manera ejemplar las tensiones a las que las escritoras irlandesas están sometidas como sujetos postcoloniales y de género. Boland desea encontrar un “sentido del lugar” estable; anhela arraigarse espiritualmente como ciudadana irlandesa y también como mujer escritora. En el proceso, se ve constantemente bombardeada por una profunda experiencia de desarraigo cultural e histórico. De este modo, la escritora se encuentra dividida entre dos identidades, su identidad nacional irlandesa (que la llama a identificarse con la nación, para participar activamente en su discurso), y su identidad híbrida como sujeto emigrante (que le permite sobrepasar las fronteras de todas esas ideologías que defienden la identidad del

² Conferencia grabada con el permiso de Terry Eagleton.

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individuo a partir de categorías como la “nación” y el “género”). Como resultado de dicha tensión, Boland consigue abrir un espacio de subversión donde nuevas identidades descolonizadas puedan crecer, lo que he denominado *un nuevo territorio* para la mujer irlandesa en la poesía.

10.4. ILLUSTRATIONS



Illustration 1. *The Return from Market* by Jean-Baptiste-Siméon Chardin (1739).

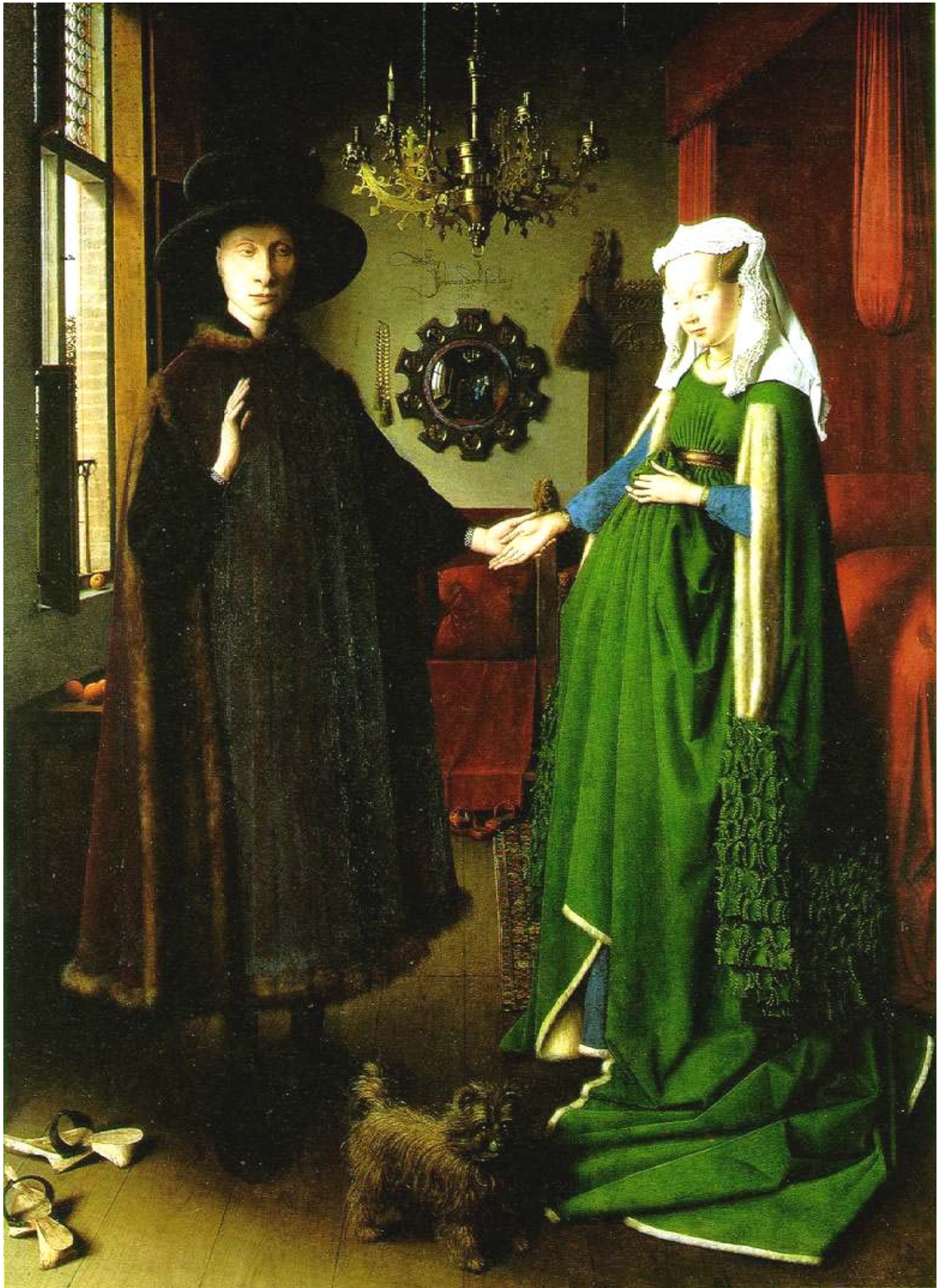


Illustration 2. *The Arnolfini Marriage* by Jan Van Eyck (1434).



Illustration 3. *The Arnolfini Marriage*, the ornate mirror on the back wall.

“The mirror is painted with almost miraculous skill. Its carved frame is inset with ten miniature medallions depicting scenes from the life of Christ. Yet more remarkable is the mirror's reflection, which includes van Eyck's own tiny self-portrait, accompanied by another man who may have been the official witness to the ceremony”.¹

¹ <http://www.ibiblio.org/wm/paint/auth/eyck/arnolfini/>



Illustration 4. *On the Terrace* by Pierre-Auguste Renoir (1881).