

**EAVAN BOLAND AND PAULA MEEHAN: IRISH VOICES OF THE PAST**

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### **Eavan Boland and Paula Meehan: Irish Voices of the Past**

History, myth, exile, identity—for generations those have been the themes of Irish poetry, an Irish poetry written almost exclusively by male poets. As women moved in to claim a voice the themes were often the same, though reworked in essential ways. The key to that reworking, the pivot for an Irish women's poetry, was the development of a female poetic identity. Eavan Boland led the way. In particular, Boland's struggles as the first prominent female poet of modern Irish Literature emphasize a search for self-identity. At the forefront of this movement and a precedent for those around her, she establishes themes that pave the way for Irish women writers.

In her Prologue to *Objects and Lessons*, she speaks of the supposed distinction between a woman and a poet and her desire to combine the two into one entity. She explores cultural conventions and political desires, carried out through the notion of myths and legends. Through her work, Boland hopes to reform her own identity and that of many other Irish women, who have been symbolically placed into exile in search of a self. In her collections, *Domestic Violence* and *Against Love Poetry*, Boland develops themes of nature, myth, womanhood, and love, culminating in an internal conflict that must be resolved. Key poems, such as "Anna Liffey", "Quarantine", and "Suburban Woman" emphasize experiences that define the life of the Irish woman and illustrate her need to escape silence. These experiences, infused with history and myth, allow Boland to incorporate past, present, and future in determining a life journey. She focuses on the voice of the woman writer and

her enclosed role in the domestic sphere. While Boland highlights the once marginal role of the suburban woman and explores the female self in relation to experience and creativity, she focuses on the importance of both the voice and the vision. A vision of becoming a prominent poet-speaker creates the necessity for a voice, her self-identity. While silence can mark a woman's assent to alienation from the patriarchal tradition, Boland sees it as a useful tool in challenging oppression. She urges movement and action to counter this silence, a process she encourages by sharing her private experiences in public texts.

With Boland, comes a hopeful recovery of the contemporary female literary experience, with the perspective and approach towards self-identity endlessly evolving over time with each new poet. Inspired by Boland, but a generation younger, Paula Meehan explores similar themes of female constraint, yet raises her own distinctive concerns, in particular the division of male and female roles and generational conflict, exploring what is real and ordinary. Having come after Boland, a strong female inspiration, Meehan appreciates individuals of the female generation, including her own mother and grandmother who served as shapers of her own work. While her characters are oftentimes females who find themselves already having submitted to domesticity, they are warriors willing to fight for independence. According to Eileen O'Halloran and Kelli Maloy, Meehan's poetry "simultaneously celebrates and laments lost moments of childhood, intertwining memories of family members and lovers with urban landscapes... Yet Meehan does not romanticize or sentimentalize the past" (2). The tragic power struggles that ensue from these moments allow Meehan to build upon Boland's initial cry for attention, and transform this hopeful cry to a much more cynical and negative outlook on the female condition. Through her poems, beyond the cry of a woman, Meehan asserts the cry of a mother figure, a lover, and daughter, not only with a need to escape the household tradition, but also her silence. In poems such as

“*Not your Muse*”, “*Troika*”, “*Zugzwang*”, “*Folktale*”, and “*The Pattern*”, Meehan explores themes of self-identity regarding domestic tragedy, drawing ideas of support and liberation from the female community. Particularly in the realm of love, Meehan suggests the helplessness of the wife or mother figure by the hardening of a female heart through generations of strife. As such, she attempts to break free and in turn, diminishes her need for love altogether. Through the beauties and obstacles of nature, myth, and love, Boland is the first to enlighten us on the fact and fiction of the female experience, while Meehan furthers this necessity of self-identity in her own unique ways. Together, the cultivated works of Boland and Meehan compare and contrast the recovery of the female experience through a poetry that speaks and shares their minds.

“Listen: This is the Noise of Myth” is a resolute rewriting of a conventional myth about two lovers. Boland integrates the beauty of nature and the imaginative aspects of myth and storytelling to demonstrate feminine power through symbolism and creation. As myth is dispelled, through the author’s words we begin to question what is truth and what is fiction. Ultimately, however, the power of creation is in Boland’s hands, and we, as readers, are simply inclined to listen to her tale. While she undoes the lessons encoded in the traditional courtship plot, more importantly, she controls the fate of her two lovers. Boland claims an authoritative grasp on her characters from the very beginning: “This is the story of a man and woman / They are fugitives. Intimates of myth / Fictions of my purpose” (*New Collected Poems* 152). While the poet utilizes customary characters that have been passed down by word through generations, she boldly casts them in a new light. In fact, there are three female figures present in this poem: the lover, Nature, and the poet. Together they are placed under Boland’s control in the first person narrative—“I ought to tell their story and I will”. Through

this, Boland achieves an acute self-consciousness, as she writes a poem about writing a poem in ways that accentuate her command.

As she shares the journey of the two lovers, Boland utilizes her imagination to subvert the submission of women to men. She discards any notion of sexual desire between the two and highlights an unwelcoming natural environment: “They could not eat where they had cooked, / nor sleep where they had eaten / nor at dawn rest where they had slept” (*New Collected Poems* 152). Paradoxically, this dearth of emotion, in addition to a lack of consistency within their lives, translates into the audience’s sympathy for them. Without a traditional domestic routine of female obedience that yields household stability, they are dislocated in society, searching for a way out. As they move through the dead of winter, never resting or stopping to think of intimacy, survival overrides sexual desire. This sustained movement through the woods indicates harshness and danger, as well as an escape from the traditional gender roles of society in an unfamiliar place. With no light to surround them and no light to guide them, they are forever in darkness.

Interestingly, this wild darkness is no different than the darkness in the suburbs. Although the suburbs yield a geographical location, it suggests an unremarkable and conventional atmosphere, outside the usual bounds of literary representation. In her account of Boland’s “Suburban Woman” poems, Pascale Amiot explores the uncertainty associated with the dusk, “ ‘a darkness which no domesticity, no household, no love and no security is safe from’ ” thereby gives “ ‘unsettling time, space, order, and sense’ ” (Amiot 5). Just like the suburban woman, the female lover who journeys into the wilderness is entirely stripped of a domestic order, a romantic relationship, or a household. The two are always in hiding, yet paradoxically, always on the run. Time, space, and order never settle, and neither can the characters. With each changing aspect of nature and each new modification brought about by

legend, the characters are never destined for a happy ending. Instead, they are wholly subjected to the author's discretion, as if they were puppets under the relentless control of a greater being.

The darkness that enshrouds the two lovers foreshadows their inevitable doom, as the natural imagery surrounding the fugitive pair hints that "Something is near; something is about to happen" (*New Collected Poems* 153). As they attempt to escape, "all the time it was cold: / the fields still gardened by their ice, / the trees stitched with snow overnight, / the ditches full; frost toughening lichen" (*New Collected Poems* 153). These raw and bitter descriptions illustrate a snapshot in time, through which the season is fixed and the lovers are frozen without freedom or reprieve. Nature offers no warm welcome. In her other poems, Boland often associates nature with beauty and intimacy. However, this particular narrative stresses the ill-fated relationship between the man and the woman, whose ambiguous gender roles in a feral society strips them of their identity. With this doomed relationship, their love affair cannot blossom. The female character is unable to fulfill her domestic duty in an ever-changing landscape and is reduced to one who must be saved. Yet the male character cannot be made her hero. Mother Nature, personifying the maternal, parallels the female character as a feminized entity, but one who possesses the power to control. The triple coding of the female firstly presents Nature as a character to boost the weaker female character, with the poet apart to create the story. At the very end of their journey, through all this uncertainty, Nature shields them from trouble, as "here we are where we started from – / The woman and the man have come to rest". Though Boland's intention is not to retell a traditional historical love story consummating in marriage, she hints at the possibility of a future love between the two only feasible under Nature's supervision.



This uncertainty about the future in the second half of the poem arises from conjectures at the endless possibilities of the outcome. Myth is often predestined, but Boland makes it clear that she is actively crafting the story, for anything can happen. Boland revels in her power of creation: “Invention. Legend. Myth. What you will. / The shifts and fluencies are infinite. / The moving parts are marvelous. / She may or she may not. / She was or wasn’t” (*New Collected Poems* 154). Yet, with all this new, unfamiliar authority, Boland also seems to proceed hesitantly and is ambivalent about her authority—leading to the conjectures representing her thought processes. From this point onwards, Boland makes a clear intervention to shift the focus on the poem towards the female. Because Boland does not want to sustain the traditional representation of female obedience, she allows the female character to rise over the male, indicating that “She never turned to him; she never leaned / under the willow over to him”. Because “they never made love; not there; not here / not anywhere; there was no winter journey; / no aconite, no birdsong and no jasmine, / no woodland and no river and no weir” (*New Collected Poems* 153). As Boland confiscates any notion of sexual intimacy, she removes the beauties of nature too so that female sexuality stands out against the desolation of the natural world. In this world, only women—with the help of Mother Nature—can bring forth beauty and provide bodily warmth. In a way, Boland takes the setting of a traditional elopement story between two lovers—the hidden forest—and exposes them to the unmerciful supremacy of Nature. Nature becomes an important female character that backs the heroine in times of need. As she links the beauty in nature with the level of intimacy, the power of the female in both place and being is elevated. Amidst all the poem’s uncertainties, Boland has succeeded in creating a heroine who is empowered by myth and creation: he becomes *her* lover and “the old romances make no bones about it” (154).

Boland likewise demonstrates an empowerment arising from her use of myth and storytelling. As an author crafting her story, she can create meaning and alter that meaning at any instant. Nature also has the power to create a haven or a hazard at any time, promptly changing its seasons at a whim. However, Boland realizes that while she seemingly fabricates a poem about poetry and one against love poetry, she was never entirely in control: “they were never mine”. These characters, rewritten time and time again, eventually find their future paths. Like the heroine of her myth, Boland wants to be in control, but “when the story ends the song is over”. The interplay between nature and myth is a bittersweet reminder that although women have a tendency to repeat history, their attempt at independence is ultimately governed by Nature. Through “Listen: This is the Noise of Myth” we see the necessity for women to rise up and dominate the male-female relationship in the natural environment, if only for an instant.

The physicality of Boland’s nature creates a landscape that places the male and the female in an uncivilized world devoid of principles or truths, where the workings of myth instead determine the final outcome. By contrast, Paula Meehan tightly encapsulates nature within the sphere of domesticity through her use of the garden located just outside the home. With this perspective, we are brought from the wild natural world of Boland into the ordered home of Meehan. And within this domestic sphere of influence, traditional gender roles come into play and highlight the unrestricted dominance of the male over that of the female.

Zugzwang, a German term used to define a situation where one is compelled to move, yet in moving gets put into a weaker position, parallels the state of the domestic woman. In “Zugzwang”, Meehan illustrates the complexity of the trapped condition of the female—one who actively seeks equality with the opposite sex, yet is defeated in this impossible desire. The female wants to escape her domestic position, but physically finds herself fulfilling this

role with no way out; she moves through these domestic chores in a cyclic and unremitting manner. The poem opens with a woman filling “jugs of water at the sink / for flowers...for their scent and pretty form...a token of domestic tragedy, a wound” (*Mysteries of the Home* 28). Immediately, the beauty of nature represented by the flowers contrasts the darkness of the woman’s restraint within the home. This framework of domestic tragedy places the woman in an auxiliary position, and sets the beauty and centrality of the flowers against the ugliness and peripherality of female experience. As the man casually looks up to offer a glance, he compares her to his current game of chess; he catches her in a state of Zugzwang as she is seen “murmuring to herself, framed by the door”. This subtle, one-sided glance symbolizes the loss of companionship and mutual desire. The woman, alone, plants herself firmly within a physical doorway, trapped between domesticity and freedom. Framed by the door, she is afraid of the thought of walking through and the uncertainty of experiencing an unfamiliar world—a public world that will not accept her. Her state of “Zugzwang” forces her to make a move that will ultimately end in disaster. Through her window, she sees that “the sky is an ocean / where clouds like spacecraft or Cuban cigars / float towards the mountain”, which grants her a biased view of a carefree world she desires.

The scenery outside the door suggests hope for the future, as the ebbing and flowing of the dynamic ocean point to rebirth and endless possibilities outside the home. Yet, in contrast to this dynamic flow, the woman’s static position within is illustrated by the overbearing husband, who “conjures a painting half made – *Woman Surrounded by Flowers at a Sink*” all the while imagining Dutch paintings, “*Woman Washing, Woman Setting a Table, Woman Bending over a Child*...himself at an easel mixing pigment and oil” (28). This not only aligns artistic tradition with his mastery, but also focuses on the stark disparity between action and inaction. While other well-known Dutch paintings emphasize womanly

actions of “washing”, “setting”, or “bending over”, his very own imaginary painting of her is completely motionless. As she stands there, he strips away her intellectual and physical capacity, leaving her objectified—merely “surrounded” by flowers at a sink. Instead of finding a higher social position of being appreciated, she is demoted to a motionless object. Here, the flowers are given *her* breath of life as they surround her. The overbearing husband becomes the dominant artist, with the power to mold her into whatever pleases him. Following the belief that household duties are not real “work”, the husband overlooks her role; she fades into the scenery instead of becoming the central mother figure. Luz Mar González-Arias explores the distribution of space in relation to the gender dichotomy of “Zugzwang” (40). Quite simply, the world of the woman is defined by her role as an observer and exactly by what she can see—the space enclosed within the doorway—and what she imagines—a world outside the window. Within these spatial confines, “transgression is...an ‘unbridgeable gap’” where the women’s non-discursive dimension can be accounted for in two ways: they can be “found talking in close proximity to their homes, as if prevented from moving beyond an invisible border” or “although working in the open—never partakes of the public world of the males” (40). Although the two possibilities distinctly separate the private against the public spheres, limitations exist in both. González-Arias confirms the woman’s state of zugzwang, where she is put at a disadvantage no matter her next move. Inside the home, she is trapped from finding a self-identity. Outside the home, she is classified as someone who can never participate in the public affairs of men. The woman’s role in Irish society is symbolized by this spatial limitation that regulates her inability to find a place to speak out, beyond her need to find a voice.

In “Zugzwang”, the realm of Nature is almost entirely replaced by the domestic home, except for the little plot of land outside. As generations of domestic confinement

define the female experience, the woman longs for an attempt to break free from this routine. This silence and inability to escape delineates a domestic woman who is, in fact, dead. Longing for her own voice, the narrator repeatedly hears “*her* dead mother’s voice / tumbling in the drier with the wash: / *I told you so, I told you so, I told you so*” (*Mysteries of the Home* 28). During the domestic task of laundry, she is haunted by her mother’s voice of regret for years of routine domestic duty, which shockingly starts to make her realize the parallels in her own life. Through the introduction of the ghost mother, Meehan highlights the haunting of the past female experience. Yet, on a more positive note, she claims the power of female solidarity through overlapping experiences. Hearing the dead voice as a voice of regret calms the cry for help—the woman longs for a female companion because she can no longer depend on her husband. The constant reminder of “I told you so” relates the insignificance of where the woman ends up: the public sphere or the private sphere. In fact, the women who have seemingly escaped from this burden—the ones “on the TV in their business suits / and white teeth transmit coded messages, / escape maps buried in their speeches”—speaking out to others give nothing but cryptic messages. While their public speeches contrast the housewife’s silences, the public women harbor a false, misleading image of “business suits and white teeth”. Their speech formulates coded messages regulated by others. Deep down, they are still women controlled to do the work they are expected to do. Later on, the televised search “for a desperate man and his hostage” names the male figure a “desperate man” and the female character “his hostage”. The trapped condition of the female and her unfortunate role as hostage of the home indicates that she has been duped into the domestic life. The desperate man—her husband—is one desperate for her obedience rather than her love. This desperation of the male to get what he desires yields hopefulness, while the female’s toil is one of hopelessness. As all choice recedes, she is forced to follow a code of obedience.

González-Arias portrays this female objectification as a blank state whose body is reduced “to the status of a *tabula rasa* with no discursive value...upon which gender asymmetries would be imposed” (34). A woman who submits to this silence and abides by this code of obedience unwittingly contributes to the strict division the public and private realms. Furthermore, the grounded nature of space, where “culture (gender), and not biology (sex), would be responsible for the pervasive space distribution that related Women to the private spheres and Men to the public world” points to the division apparent in “Zugzwang” (34). The Irish patriarchal culture highlights men’s role in the public world. Meehan’s inclusion of the ghost mother appearing before the woman doing laundry emphasizes her epiphany of hopelessness during the unwavering cycle of restriction. Biologically, men are not necessary stronger or more efficient than women, but culturally, Ireland upholds the patriarchy.

The daughter’s cry in response to her dead mother’s voice is necessary because she is otherwise dissolved; she is not portrayed as an autonomous female entity, but instead, her existence depends upon other objects. For example, she carelessly “stepped straight into a Cretan mosaic” as though conceding to death, while her husband becomes “a mosaic worker fingering a thousand fragments until he finds the exact shade of blue with that green undertow to fit his pattern” (*Mysteries of the Home* 29). She becomes just one of many thousand pieces who strives to be remembered, but in actuality, represents an unessential, easily replaceable tile. Although the Minoans ruled by matriarchy, her role here in the text as “priestess in a Minoan rite” is not a highly revered one. Instead, she is demoted from priestess to barbarian, immediately found “digging in the garden, her nightgown / drenched through, / muck smeared on her arms, / on her legs, / the rain lashing down”. Here, Meehan frees the female companion into nature when she submits herself to the outside world; yet, it does not matter that she escapes the private world to place herself out in the open. This image

of a garden easily destroyed by rain presents her unavailing efforts. Her actual garden, out in nature, is not so lovely like those she imagines. Rather, her gardening efforts are not appreciated or acknowledged, just like her efforts to escape. What pushes her to step beyond the doorway and into the garden of nature are her mother's haunting words, from which she decides to give up all hope. Kathryn Kirkpatrick acknowledges the way the garden is "rendered as failed domesticity. Confined by the garden, the female lover suffers both from the containment and from her efforts to extricate herself" (53). Although Kirkpatrick treats the garden as a simple extension of the home, what she misses is the savagery and devastation of the female experience within the garden. The garden does not represent failed domesticity, but rather, an acceptance of her fate and a desire to escape the living to be with the dead. It is precisely out here in Nature, with mud all over her, that the woman longs to reenter into the earth and longs for a physical burial that will unite her with her mother. She loses herself to insanity and sympathizes with lost ones who "are so cold and lonely in the earth / and they long for the warmth of the living". Ironically, though living, she feels no warmth, for there is no home. In the house, she is objectified as her husband's personal piece of artwork; outside, "the garden is the site of a half-crazed acting out as the woman digs in the night rain for her dead" (Kirkpatrick 53). In digging, she does not tend the garden. Rather, she digs furiously deeper within the earth to uncover her true purpose, simultaneously destroying the garden that gives her false hope in a fit of anguish.

Realizing the bind she is in, the woman believes that she deserves to escape her own zugzwang and rejects an obligation to move. Because she cannot win the fight, she chooses to "surrender herself to the ecstatic freefall"—a grotesque suicide where "when she hits bottom / she will shatter into smithereens" (*Mysteries of the Home* 29). Throughout the poem, she becomes so objectified, so heavily degraded to the status of a mere object, that her entire

self-image shatters. She loses a part of herself and can thereby never be whole again. As an object, different shards that represent her past—“the room, the flowers, / the chessboard, and her beloved sky beyond / like a calm ocean lapping at the mountain”—do not fit nicely together anymore because she refuses to accept and embody different components of something she is not. While Boland utilizes Nature as a backdrop for the empowerment of myth, Meehan looks to Nature for hope and comfort—a Nature that goes beyond the enclosures of the garden and into the earth. For Kirkpatrick this hope regulates “the image of an unbounded natural world—beyond the garden and its socially constructed frames—the broader movement of Meehan’s poems towards ecocentric relations with the land give rise to more liberatory relations between men and women” (53). In an interview with Paula Meehan, when she is asked about the atrocities that happen in her poetry, Meehan confesses that she writes from a perspective where “poetry is a political act, an act of resistance, an act of survival” (O’Halloran & Malloy 7). It is precisely these “acts” that heavily shape and portray the power struggles associated with confrontation and self-liberation. As such, when “the arts have always been considered the forum for self-liberation...we expect them to operate very differently outside the norms of the bigger culture” (11). From this perspective, Meehan bluntly confesses that as women writers, they should not have expected their eventual emergence to be different from that of women arising in any other field. When comparing the female literary experience to that of the male, she pleads for a chance to overlook the notion of gender and appreciate the obstacles both males and females had to endure. Yet, she does not confess that these obstacles were the same. In many of Meehan’s other poems, the elements of nature stress a much-needed liberation: in her poem, “Sea”, the body of water is often femininely characterized, described as having “no needs, / nor worries, / nor wants” (*Painting Rain* 24). The power of the ocean evokes remorse and remembrance of



a lost soul, yet allows for the possibilities of rebirth and renewal. Only when the woman is not trapped on Irish land and escapes into the sea, can she be free of the patriarchal system to experience that empowered ecocentricism Kirkpatrick recommends. Meehan's poems do not suggest more liberatory relations between men and women, although she believes in the transgendered nature of her works. Often, a more tragic relationship ensues where the women accept their fate in the private sphere of influence only to rebel in a fit of anger. In "Zugzwang", the trapped woman who disappears into the dullness of the household may liberate herself in death, but never quite escapes domesticity.

This notion of a harsh natural world that offers no comfort or sympathy parallels a period in Irish history where a clash of natural disaster and social hierarchy led to the single most traumatic catastrophe in Irish history: the Potato Famine. Also known as the Great Famine of the early nineteenth century, harrowing effects of starvation, emigration, and disease, brought death to the Irish people who were forced to blame the land in hopes of avoiding personal blame. In "Quarantine", Boland works against love poetry, yet all the while explores aspects of love between a man and a woman, and a love between the people and their land. This private experience of love framed by a love story occurs in the public display of an Irish political poem (*New Collected Poems* 282). In a 2001 *Caffeine Destiny* Interview, Eavan Boland discusses her book, *Against Love Poetry* (129). She mentions the sequence of eleven marriage poems, but dwells on "Quarantine", as it brought together this entire collection for her:

It's about an incident in Ireland in the nineteenth century: a man and a woman left the workhouse at the time of the 1847 famine...The man and woman walked north, back to their cabin. They died that night. In the morning when they were found, her feet

were against his chest. He had tried to warm them as she died—as they both did.

When I thought of that account, when it came into the poem in the sequence, it was no longer a local, Irish incident. It had become a dark love story, and an exemplary one. And that tied together things for me. All the things I wanted to get at—the stoicism of dailiness, the failure of conventional love poetry—all came together there (*A Critical Companion* 129-130).

The powerful story that develops in “Quarantine” does not fit the traditional framework of a man confessing his love to a woman, but instead, illustrates a doomed relationship. The setting of the poem draws our attention to the beginning of a historical trauma—the Great Irish Famine. The harsh conditions are emphasized by the alliteration of the letter “w”, where “In the worst hour of the worst season / of the worst year of a whole people / ...from the workhouse with his wife. / He was walking” (*New Collected Poems* 282). Yet, while the repetition of the “worst hour of the worst season / of the worst year” introduces a period of hopelessness, it puts the characters out of place and out of time. It requires a modern-day narration that compares this event to others. Only by looking back in time, can it eventually be deemed “the worst”. Therefore, it illustrated a time where the people’s love for their land was at its worst. The dependency of hour, on season, on year, hints at the confusing passage of time, when suffering through days seemed like suffering through years. This ambiguity removes us from reality and leads us to the surreal, dreamlike conditions surrounding denial. As this love poem starts with only the worst, things can end with only the worst. The poem does not explicitly say where they are walking, but simply that they walk away from the workhouse, which insinuates a desperate fleeing from the famine with no aim but death. In her interview, Boland makes it clear that their final destination is the cabin, but the tragedy

arises from the fact that they never make it back home to domesticity, and were thereby conquered by the cold. In order for us to understand the love dynamic between the two, Boland initially places the man and woman on equal ground: “He was walking – they were both walking – north”. When Boland introduces the female character as a strong individual, she suggests female autonomy, but moments afterwards, admits that, “He lifted her and put her on his back” (*New Collected Poems* 282). This act of chivalry places masculinity over femininity, and indicates the dependency of the female on the male. While he dominates her fragile being, this act ultimately figures her as a burden he must endure until the end. When she submits to his care and depends upon him to get back home, she not only loses her will for independence, but also her will to live. At nightfall “under freezing stars they arrived” while death simultaneously arrives at their door. Although the man’s act of personal sacrifice towards his wife highlights his passion and warmth, her opportunistic power over him through this journey illustrates the cruelty of emotional dependency.

Ironically, to be in quarantine means to be in compulsory isolation—yet, the couple, as they suffer in quarantine, still have each other. And while being in quarantine prevents the spread of something dangerous, it is here that her death spreads to him: “In the morning they were both found dead. / Of cold. Of hunger. Of the toxins of a whole history” (*New Collected Poems* 282). The couple died from the famine, but their journey back home together suggests their death to be a result of excessive love. This ruthlessness of love and its outcome between this man and his wife parallel the ghastly history of Irish people who died from a love for their land and their simultaneous inability to escape its entrapment. In either case, Boland suggests the necessity for the restraint of excessive love, through her work against love poetry. The wife’s emotional dependence on her husband makes her a burden, while the man’s emotional dependence on her leads to his downfall. He chooses to be in quarantine by

submitting to her lack of independence, thereby isolating himself in death. Without love, intimacy is useless, as “the last heat of his flesh as his last gift to her” is vainly forced upon her (*New Collected Poems* 282). Through the physicality of their intertwining bodies on ice, the lovers’ emotional dependency on each other parallels the dependency of the Irish people on one crop. One land and one love limit their survival.

Boland withholds a sympathetic response from her audience, warning, “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” (*New Collected Poems* 282). Although presented as a poem against love poetry, “Quarantine”, in essence, embodies an unforgiving relationship of love between the land and its people, and a love between a man and a woman, framed by a love story. Stef Craps explores the extent of Boland’s poetry in addressing the famine and the experience of Irish emigration. He claims, “the suffering of the Irish women with whom Boland seeks to align herself is often linked, whether directly or indirectly, with the Famine of the 1840s” (167). She mourns the betrayal of the victims of the Famine, and often “accuses it of denying the traumatizing impact of this pivotal event...her own poetry sets out to bear true witness to this traumatic history” (167). Rightfully, we, as readers of “Quarantine”, bear true witness to the death of two lovers in history. Although Boland denies a love poem, she depicts the fortitude of daily life during the period of the Famine, where survival becomes more important than love. Through her account, love prevails: the lovers walk back enduring the harsh winter, a love for their land makes them stay, and ultimately, their love together leads them to death. Perhaps what Boland suggests is that mutual suffering through hardship is not love, but a tragedy that must be witnessed. In her poem, the mechanical descriptions highlight this tragedy numerically. With no time for rescue, there “is only time for this merciless inventory: / Their death together in the winter of 1847. / Also what they suffered. /

How they lived” (*New Collected Poems* 282). In remembrance of the one million deaths that arose from hunger and disease, and another million that fled, she adds this couple’s death to a long list of others, counting numbers through history. Once documented, history does not forget or change. Although Boland characterizes “Quarantine” as a work against love poetry, it *is* poetry, and it *is* entirely about love—a love that fails to save them from tragic reality.

The image of the man carrying his wife on his back is utterly unheroic. The poem’s focus on “what there is between a man and woman. / And in which darkness it can best be proved” emphasizes Boland’s sense of regret. In actuality, “what there is” left is a relationship of solitude. Even in marriage, there is no reciprocal love between the two, only a love to their land that ends in doom. The dependency between these two lovers becomes their ultimate weakness, just as the dependency of the Irish people on the beloved potato crop. While one explanation points to the harshness of the land leading to the failure of the potato crop, another interpretation points to the social downfall of the Irish population’s dependence upon a monocrop. At that time, the tenant farmlands were limited in size, which forced Ireland and its people into monoculture. In “Quarantine”, the apparent darkness foreshadows an end where submission to the land results in death, under the cold stars of Mother Nature. Although this poem explores female submission to male authority at the outset, the husband is the one who eventually submits to his wife. Through this journey, she relies on his strength just as he relies on her love, but together, they hauntingly merge into a single entity towards doom. Boland’s darker sense of love illustrates the beautiful, yet shocking way in which courtship ultimately yields to the natural world as part of the Irish historical tradition.

From Meehan’s point of view, a more violent and disturbing relationship is developed between two lovers and their land—one in which the woman actively exerts authority over the male, and wins, by siding with Nature. In Meehan’s poem, “The Man who

was Marked by Winter”, the female figure embodies the harsh realities of nature to become Winter herself. Winter—the female lover—seduces him into a parasitic relationship where he falls ill as she survives. As the male journeys into the unknown, he suffers horrible disfigurement and mental diminution “heading for Bridal Veil Falls” (*The Man* 52). Seemingly a marriage quest of love, it is actually one likely to descend into disaster. Meehan creates a female character unable to love, one full of revenge, coldness, and hate, yielding “a tracery of ice...the secret current underneath”. As she “clutched him to her breast, that beast of winter. / One look from her agate eyes and he abandoned / hope”, the man falls weak after a single look by her (*The Man* 52). The proximity of his body to her breast is again a misleading intimacy we have seen before. Is it a longing for a female dominance that has been nonexistent from many generations of oppression? Or is it a vengeance full of manipulation that speaks out against female dependency? Her simple look grants an authority and a vengeance that diminishes the need for a female voice. Although we are drawn back to the verbal silences of “Zugzwang”, here, one look is all that is needed to conquer him.

Upon meeting Winter, the man becomes a lone figure amongst female figures of independence, as Meehan confirms the cruelty of Nature by merging Winter and the female figure into a single entity. With this potency, she traps him both mentally and physically as he loses all ability to act. Instead, *she* acts, tossing him “like a scrap on the bank, / hours or years or seconds later. / She made her mark below his heart, a five-fingered gash— *Bondsman*” (*The Man* 52). He becomes her victim, her slave, with time and Nature both in her hands. While Boland’s forced love in “Quarantine” is exemplified through a failure of intimacy in death, Meehan’s forced love here highlights the necessity for retribution through which the female escapes the domestic enclosure and yearns for dominance. Beyond Winter, she is symbolized as the free-flowing river, unbounded by her actions or words. This time,

when the male enters the female terrain—one with undertones of a new domesticity—he is unable to escape her enclosure until she is finished with him. The traditional gender roles are ultimately reversed: she becomes powerfully familiar with her surroundings, while his very eyes, devoid of understanding, suggest an apparent blindness to an unforeseen experience. In this way, Meehan plays with the fantasy of a gender-reversed world, where the prior wrongdoings committed towards the domestic female are justly returned. Today, as an older self, looking back, Meehan notes that all her familiar surroundings—“with its habitats, with its buildings, with its streets, with its statues” define a city central to her life (Allen-Randolph 244). In this city of Dublin, she makes her mark as a contemporary Irish women poet, one who is not afraid to voice her opinions on controversial subjects. As in her poem, it is within this highly familiar environment of winter, that the mark she makes below his heart represents her desire to make her female experience known. It simultaneously serves as Meehan’s cry for female independence and her lash against a presupposed female obedience. Cold to the idea of love, the embodiment of Winter denies a life of marriage or consent. Alternatively, she holds him close for as long as she likes, toys with him as she wishes, and then simply ruins him. Unlike Boland’s “Quarantine”, “The Man who was Marked by Winter” allows the female heroine to emerge victorious, with suffering brought only upon the man. There is no passion for love here, only a passion to kill. Meehan implies that the love women once harbored for men, is now hardened by years of oppression and regret. This abhorrence of love is reinforced in Meehan’s other poem “Valentine”, where the words “*paula meehan kiss kiss love love*” turn from an innocent confession to a strong denial on her part: “Never again. I’d sooner eat my / words, the wall they’re written on. I’d sooner die” (*Painting Rain* 60). The phrase “never again” highlights the generational experience and her choice to stand firm for what she believes. This interplay between love and death highlights

the tragic history of women who have continually been dependent upon men and unexpectedly abandoned, who now wish to make a mark through denial and restraint.

In turn, Boland not only justifies the feminine cry for help, but also depicts a more positive situation of hope where the woman is given choice and authority through individual worth. Altogether, these themes manifest Boland's search for her own self-identity, which she believes arises from one's past. In particular, her female experience and the noteworthy role of the woman poet culminate in her autobiographical poem, "Anna Liffey". From the onset, Boland approaches Ireland from two separate viewpoints: the land and the people. Yet, these two entities are not entirely distinct: "The river took its name from the land. / The land took its name from a woman" (*A Critical Companion* 28). The River Liffey, deemed *An Life* in the Irish language, flows through the heart of Dublin. Through it, Boland correlates history with nature, speaking of the River Liffey and its use for many centuries of trade. The river, named *An Ruirthech*, "strong runner", allows Boland to identify herself with her land, as she is unafraid to stand out as the foremost female voice in the Irish literary tradition.

Here, like Meehan, Boland incorporates Nature as a female character, but utilizes her as a separate entity—a role model. This female figure is boldly introduced: "A woman in the doorway of a house. / A river in the city of her birth" (*A Critical Companion* 28). The woman parallels the river of the city, both heroically born into existence. The "doorway of a house" represents the "city of her birth"—her childhood, her past, and the domestic life she was set to lead. Even through an account of these experiences, Pascale Amiot, however, finds a growing alienation in "Anna Liffey", where "the poet-speaker finds herself excluded not only from her life, but from language itself" (7). This exclusion is further confirmed by Jody Allen-Randolph, who focuses on an estrangement towards "invoking the latent idealized imagery of the Irish feminine emblem only to reject it" ("Private Worlds, Public Realities")



17). Notwithstanding these criticisms, however, Boland utilizes “Anna Liffey” as a tool to piece together her past experiences and effectively convey her position as a successful poet-speaker. For Boland, “Anna Liffey” draws from the life she led and her rejection as the domesticized figure “in the doorway of a house”. She incorporates the unique female experience and skillful poeticism to establish her existence as the first contemporary Irish woman poet. It is precisely the nearby River Liffey that gives her hope: its wide range of motion “rises in rush and ling heather and / Black peat and bracken and strengthens / To claim the city it narrated” (*A Critical Companion* 29). This city exemplifies Irish familiarities with peat, disillusionment, and motion. The woman in Boland’s poem stands in silence, watching and praising “The gifts of the river. / Its shiftless and glittering / Re-telling of a city, / Its clarity as it flows, / In the company of runt flowers and herons” (*A Critical Companion* 29). More important than the river’s motility, is its life and ability to narrate its course, which Boland has also beautifully accomplished during her time as a poet. This crafty tool of narration incentivizes the solitary woman at the doorway who often watches in jealousy and silence, looking for a change.

Although a doorway might suggest an entrance into a world of opportunities, the woman here is seen *in* the doorway—not before it or behind it, just like the woman in Meehan’s “Zugzwang”. In contrast to this motile river, she is stuck in an intermediate state, lacking the ability or freedom to explore the seas. As the woman in “Zugzwang” attempts to become one in Nature by digging furiously, her efforts to escape the domestic life end in failure. Here, through her narration, Boland takes the chance to explore the world around her and invokes a higher being to obtain the courage to share her story. As though invoking a muse from Greek mythology, Boland cries out for help in understanding her identity. She cannot go on without it: “Maker of / Places, remembrances, / Narrate such fragments for me:

/ One body. One spirit. / One place. One name. / The city where I was born. / The river that runs through it. / The nation which eludes me". The language here is significant: asking "One body. One spirit. One place. One name" to narrate these life fragments for her, are singular in nature and fragmentary too (*A Critical Companion* 29). Through the repetition of the word "one", Boland hopes to unfold an identity for herself, a being that can connect her mind, body, and spirit, together in a place she can call home.

Boland must claim her own identity by recollecting the events of her lifetime and deeming what is important and what is superfluous. She looks for inspiration from her experiences, "Make of the past / What you can" (*A Critical Companion* 30). But beyond such recollections of personal history, Melissa Dinsman believes that Boland succeeds because she draws from the history of the woman as a whole. Heavily influenced by Joyce, "Boland reimagines the famous ALP as Anna Liffey, an historical woman and struggling poet, and in the process empowers the female poet by 'round[ing] up lost histereve'" (174). This "histereve" highlights her desires "to uncover lost 'hist[ories]' through the woman ('eve')", cleverly linking back to her use of myth and historical events. In "Anna Liffey", she begins with one individual and beautifully expands that into a home. With her voice, she calls out "One name. Then the other one. / The beautiful vowels sounding out home". This home is different from an earlier restricted female domesticity. The verbal act of calling out the children's names indicates a voice to be heard, a voice with a purpose. Furthermore, the reference to "beautiful vowels sounding out home" grants linguistic competence to the narrator and justifies her claim as a poet who is not afraid to speak her mind. She grows comfortable with the language and her surrounding environment. Now, she is ready to speak out against age-old Irish domesticity for a new domesticity; she molds a once-hated domestic enclosure into a now-hopeful domestic home. It is not easy for Boland to pioneer the Irish

woman poet, for she confesses, “It has taken / All [my] strength to do this. / Becoming a figure in a poem. / Usurping a name and a theme” (*A Critical Companion* 30). As she transforms herself into a figure in a poem, she becomes the center of attention, the subject. Unlike the static female character surrounded by flowers in “Zugzwang” or the dead wife in “Quarantine”, the narrator here possesses a story of importance to be shared. Boland’s advantage in poetic expression is twofold: not only does she craft the burden of female domesticity, but also documents her own life for future generations. She seizes a name, commandeers her life, and commits to sharing her journey as a mother, wife, writer, and Irish woman. Through Boland’s past exilic experience, she gained an understanding of Ireland and was able to “find her poetic voice...only after removing herself and her family to the margin—the suburbs of Dublin” (Dinsman 174). In an interview with Boland, she portrays, “The front door is my front door. The hills I see are the ones I have seen from that doorway for twenty-two years. The Liffey rises there as it always has. All that has changed is that I feel more confident that the private, downright vision is the guarantor of the political poem” (Raschke 2). Boland has progressed both as an individual and a poet. Her observations and familiarity grant her the confidence needed to speak out against the political realm. In contrast to the dynamic scenery of “Anna Liffey”, the backdrop here is static—“The front door is my front door. The hills...are the ones I have seen...for twenty-two years”. And though the Liffey rises, it does so “as it always has”, which suggests that Boland has broken free from societal constraints. At this point, she realizes that Nature does not change as dramatically as she had once perceived. Everything is where it is supposed to be. More remarkable for Boland is what *has* changed: her inner being and confidence for a poetic vision to make a mark in Irish literature and Irish history.

Through this realization, Boland makes her mark and explores “The truth of a suffered lie. / The mouth of it” (*A Critical Companion* 31). Notwithstanding an insufferable silence, Boland rejects an Irish society she criticizes for one she creates. She obtains a “mouth” and employs her ability to speak by means of poetry. In essence, she recognizes the distinction between the Irish people and the Irish land, and encourages the female entity to make herself known, rather than to be objectified. She recognizes that “A river is not a woman...Any more than / A woman is a river”, to qualitatively distinguish a natural body of water from the civilized body of a woman. Boland’s careful use of the prose poem plays a role in retelling memories of the past, “An ageing woman / Finds no shelter in language. / She finds instead / Single words she once loved / Such as ‘summer’ and ‘yellow’ / And ‘sexual’ and ‘ready’” (*A Critical Companion* 32). Here, the imagery of “shelter”, “dwellings”, “rooms” and “roof”, are domestic icons indicating entrapment and confinement. Therefore, the only way to break free from enclosure is through education and language. The role of language in the life of a woman is simple: she starts out knowing easy words like “summer” and “yellow”, and grows into understanding the terms “sexual” and “ready”. The happiness the language once brought her grants a curiosity for the language that eventually heightens her maturity—both as a woman and as a writer. By exploring the place of language in memory, Boland opposes wordlessness.

As Boland reflects on her surroundings, the natural world reminds her of her place in life: the blues and greens of the country, the hills of the city, and the places beyond the garden do not change. This stability acts as the foundation through which she can alter her inner being to uncover her own purpose. Rather, *she* changes. She experiences movement, “[I] turn off / The harsh yellow / Porch light and / Stand in the hall” (*A Critical Companion* 33). Rather than accepting her initial displacement in the doorway, she now definitively

stands in the hallway of the home. While here, she imagines herself in nature—just as playful and free. She wanders out to “Follow the rain / Out to the Dublin hills. / Let it become the river. / Let the spirit of place be / A lost soul again” (*A Critical Companion* 33). The woman figure, now finding her place, interacts freely with the river without fear of losing her self-identity. She becomes motile and takes whatever course she wishes, harboring regret for her lost soul of the past. In the end, Boland powerfully relates the former disappearance of her body and identity—a chilling thought that lingers, “I was a voice” (*A Critical Companion* 33). The use of the past tense, “was”, indicates her former existence as a voice—not in the present, and definitely never again in the future. She is no longer a voice, but much more, as she has obtained a self, a body, and a being.

The path to nonconformity and a clear self-identity is brought full circle when she states, “In the end / It will not matter / That I was a woman. / I am sure of it”. This suggests two distinct meanings: first, patriarchy may forever dominate and the fact that she was a woman is useless, since her womanly existence essentially means nothing. Secondly, the more striking interpretation of her confession is an outright acknowledgement of her success. Later on, it will not matter that she was a voice, because she has persevered and will only be defined by her present achievements. It will not matter that she was a woman alongside Irish male figures, because she boasts equally curious experiences. Therefore, this uplifting female experience creates a confidently progressing physical and intellectual body. In part, Boland attributes her success to nature, which now finally offers its consolation to back the female experience. The rivers and oceans that fascinated her as a child continue to remind her of her own internal fluctuations, with each encountered obstacle. As for Ireland, an island surrounded on all sides, she too has the chance to find reason for existence and leave a legacy. Boland seizes the opportunity to make a difference and sets herself apart from a river

bound for nothingness because she is bound for success. There is a certainty to her route and her story of life as illustrated in “Anna Liffey”: she boldly sets the stage for future contemporary Irish poets who seek to utilize the language as a means for comfort and escape.

Boland was one of the first female poets to achieve success and prominence in Ireland—one who was forced to endure the hardships of nonconformity and valiantly extinguished the domestic framework for a new tradition. “Anna Liffey” culminates in her hope for success as a female poet, backed by the comforts of nature and commanding observation. However, it is puzzling that subsequent writers like Paula Meehan are not as optimistic as Boland in voicing the success of the female individual. Meehan, instead, is more cynical, emphasizing the deadened theme of cyclic restriction and female generational conflict to challenge female empowerment. In “The Pattern”, Meehan explores a female’s inability to break free from a generationally established pattern to give up and yield to a safer, more structured, domestic way of life. Here, the “fate of the eldest daughter” is described by the passing down of heirlooms, such as “a sewing machine, a wedding band, / a clutch of photos” (*The Man* 17). Because these objects are tagged as specific reminders of the past, Meehan imagines a world of “women without tags like *mother, wife, sister, daughter*” (*The Man* 17). This labeling—“mother, wife, sister, daughter” strips the female of her identity and classifies her in relation to someone else. The mother is further labeled by her daily routine: “First she’d scrub the floor with Sunlight soap, / then start again at the door with lavender polish”. Through all this cleaning, the daughter watches her mother “as she buffed the wax to a high shine / did she catch her own face coming clear? / Did she net a glimmer of her true self? / Did her mirror tell what mine tells me?” (*The Man* 17). This inner reflection arises from her desire to question why her mother must lose her self to monotony as she spends her days doing chores. By looking into her mother’s mirror, the young daughter

harbors her own questions of self-identity. When she mentions the possibility of her mother's mirror reflecting her own, she realizes that she falls victim to the same lifestyle. In an interview concerning this mother-and-daughter relationship, Meehan emphasizes the importance of an individual soul's journey, which allows us "to look at the world through another's consciousness, physical as well as intellectual" (18). She parallels this to Boland's use of re-experiencing, yet delineates the subtle difference for she wants the reader to experience through other's body and mind, in order to cross gender, class, and language lines.

In "The Pattern", the mirrors not only represent the limit of the physical bounds of the character's understanding, but also a reflection of past female generations. The lesser female experience prevails because "history has brought her to her knees" through years of submission and obedience to men. As the mother reflects upon her own past, she remembers being caught with a boy by her dad, who "shoved [my] whole head / under a kitchen tap, took a scrubbing brush / he scrubbed / every spick of lipstick and mascara off my face" (18). This act of scrubbing, done under the kitchen sink, foreshadows the scrubbing she would have to do later on in domestic life. As he removes her lipstick and mascara, he criticizes her for hiding her true identity and dressing up as someone she is not. Therefore, through the maternal voice, Meehan depicts the risks and uncertainties of rebellion, and champions a pattern of familiarity and comfort. Furthermore, the passing down of clothes, heirlooms, and tasks, highlight an acceptance between insignificant females of this patterning.

Yet, the daughter's desire to break free from this generational bond and discover her identity arises in the mentioning of the River Liffey. Dinsman suggests that Boland's 1994 poem "Anna Liffey" is a re-visioning of Joyce's famous river-woman and mother, Anna Livia Plurabelle (172). Just as how Boland was influenced by Joyce's use of Anna Livia Plurabelle, Meehan was likely influenced by Boland's use of the empowering Liffey. She,

too, allows her young female character to gain inspiration and comfort from nature as she searches for the truth and will to break free. Wanting to know what lay beyond the familiar, she spent time “sizing / up the world beyond [our] flat patch by patch / daily after school...[I’d] watch / the Liffey for hours pulsing to the sea / and the coming and going of ships, / certain that one day it would carry [me] / to Zanzibar, Bombay, the Land of the Ethiops” (*The Man* 19). While the narrator observes the dynamic sea, she is, once again, the stationary one. The fluidity of the Liffey fuels her curiosity for travel, escape, and freedom. Instead of spending hours with her mother learning household tasks, she would rather spend hours with the pulsing Liffey—a pulse that gives her the breath of life. This unpredictable pulsing grants her the excitement needed to break free from the pattern and utilize her imagination to escape to a place far away. She compares what she knows against the unknown. Yet, in this short-lived instant, with “the world beyond her already a dream, already lost” the young girl accepts her fate and claims her thread within this pattern of cyclic restriction (*The Man* 19). The ocean offers her a fleeting sense of hope, but with her mother in mind, she acknowledges her duty to follow her mother’s footsteps—a recurring design of the pattern with shape and control. This designed pattern of life correlates with the household knitting she must do, as she listens for “steel needles [that] sparked and clacked, / the only other sound a settling coal / or her sporadic mutter” (*The Man* 19). In contrast to Boland’s “Anna Liffey”, the woman figure here is silent; the only observable sound is the unintelligible complaints of the mother, masked by the busywork of knitting. The young narrator who admits having “to kneel / an hour before her by the fire, / a skein around my outstretched hands”, is trapped in the interior of the room, far away from her imaginary ploys. She, too, like her mother, is brought forth unwillingly. On her knees, she enters a female history of submission and must thereby follow the path that has been laid out for her.



While Meehan claims that Eavan Boland had a huge influence on her, one who “outlines pitfalls [I] was able to avoid...no doubt there were others [I] stumbled into in the dark, so to speak, or that were of [my] own making” (247). These pitfalls highlight risky paths taken towards the unknown—ones that deviate from the known patterns.

Meehan invokes our pity for the daughter when she emphasizes this feminine inability to break free. If her dreams flew too high, her mother would “reel [me] firmly / home, she’d land [me] at her knees”. The young daughter’s dream to fly, to escape, to explore the unknown, is halted not by patriarchal authority, but by her own mother. Although Meehan repeatedly claims that she “doesn’t want to romanticize that part of [my] childhood”, the compassion we feel for the daughter is wholly attributed to her own romanticization of escape (240). While Meehan herself may have wanted to avoid the pity associated with such romantic ideals, by contrasting these whimsical dreams with the rigidity of patterning through her poetry yields hopelessness. The overbearing mother figure hauntingly warns with “Tongues of flame in her dark eyes, / ‘One of these days I must teach you to follow a pattern’” (*The Man* 20). Hauntingly, that is what the young daughter, too, will eventually learn to pass down. The depiction of “tongues of flame” in her eyes indicates her possession by a higher being. The confusion in speaking through her mouth and being heard, and speaking through her eyes and being understood, yields mistrust. This cyclic restriction will forever trap them in restrictive labels of “mother, wife, sister, daughter”, as they get married, become wives, have daughters, and teach these daughters to stay within the domestic sphere. Meehan’s “The Pattern” highlights female generational conflict that overrules Boland’s belief in pursuing your identity by utilizing your skills to make a brighter future. Whereas Boland’s characters learn to rebel and stand up for what they believe in, Meehan’s female characters dwell upon change, but are ultimately trapped by generational and internal struggles. In

intertwining elements of Nature, love, history, and self-identity, Boland establishes a cause for an independent female experience. Her hopefulness has encouraged many others to follow this cause, yet with each new generation, they begin to uncover crucial details of such a transformative change and what it means in the course of Irish history. Even though Boland was “chosen by deterritorialization” from Ireland in her early years, she manages to come back and master an exclusive literary heritage for herself. Lacking female literary predecessors, Boland cures this one lament for her followers, by serving as an inspiration to them (Dinsman 174). As such, Meehan’s cynicism emphasizes bitterness towards the challenge of recovering the female experience, which suffered much oppression of years past. She appropriates a loud cry for independence but harbors a perceived reality not so easy to change. Meehan’s inability to romanticize the past yields power struggles that mirror Boland’s public battles, but looks to a futuristic definition of independence. As such, an analysis of the female role through the crafted words of contemporary Irish women poets encapsulates both a dismantling and a restoration of poetic identity. In their attempt to claim a voice and continue the talk for generations to come, together, Boland and Meehan metamorphose from objects of Irish poems to noteworthy authors of empowering works.

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