

Transforming Spaces in Evan Boland's Selected Poems: A Feminist Perspective

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Abstract—Although it may appear to readers that she is a poet of nationalist sentiments, Evan Boland's (1944-2020) rejection of Irish national history suggests otherwise. Her powerful Irish female voice challenges the traditional notion of belonging to one's nation, specifically women's connection to her land. Despite the emotional depth of her poems concerning women's place in Ireland, the focus of these emotions is consistently detached from the common sense of the nation and in support of the female experience in the face of a patriarchal society. By examining her selected poems, this paper underlines that Boland's poems about Ireland exist within a feminist sphere. It also argues that they can be classified as traditional feminist poetics, which provides a retreat from the totalizing tendencies of ethnic nationalism.

Index Terms—Boland, spaces, transnational, feminist, national

I. INTRODUCTION

Transforming spaces for Boland means transcending places, times, and social and national boundaries through her ability to utilize imagination, which allows her to move from one space to another, from a specific time to another. She strives to overcome historical constraints and progress into the present, challenging societal norms to empower women, particularly in advocating their rights within traditional Irish society. Thus, comes the meaning of transnationality by which place and time can no longer hinder or restrict women from building the identity they aspire to achieve or the mind they tend to voice.

Boland's initial examination of the process of identity formation is a crucial theme in her poetry, which is influenced by her understanding of the nation as fundamental to self-construction. A significant element of her concern is Boland's acknowledgment of the exclusion of Irish women from their nation's political and cultural narrative. Her writings reflect a determination to highlight and deconstruct this exclusion along with the deprivation experienced by subsequent generations of women. Disconnected from the traditional national narrative, Boland employs new methods of expressing women's connection to history, both on personal and collective levels.

The poetry of Boland challenges traditional gender roles and reimagines spaces, whether physical or metaphorical. Her feminist perspective of space transformation explores identity, womanhood, and societal roles of women in depth. By defying conventional notions of gender and power dynamics, she aims to offer a nuanced portrayal of women's experiences and perspectives. Boland strives to give voice to voiceless women, not only in the present but also across time, from the past to the future. Boland delves into various spaces in her poetry, encompassing both the private and public spheres, historical settings, and the natural environment. Drawing inspiration from Gaston Bachelard (1884-1962) and Martin Heidegger's (1889-1976) concept of space, she transforms these spaces, infusing them with fresh significance. Through her work, she amplifies women's stories and establishes their existence in spaces that have historically been controlled by men.

II. DISCUSSIONS

To reclaim the concept of a nation, Boland contests the traditional representations of the past, she revitalizes the perception of womanhood and national identity. She highlights the quest for autonomy as a dual challenge faced by both the nation and its female citizens (Boland, 1990). By challenging the traditional perception of the powerless woman, Boland provides a critical examination of the Mother Ireland myth. She recognizes the significant impact of culture and history on a poet's work, focusing on the historical suppression of Irish women. By intertwining the everyday experiences of women with modern concerns, mythology, and nationalism, Boland's poetry offers a fresh perspective on traditional Irish verse.

Boland has often been interpreted as targeting to replace the restrictive feminine imagery of the Irish nationalist tradition with more inclusive representations of the nation. Dedicated to bringing to light the experiences of those who have been marginalized in the past, she integrates their narratives into Irish literary history to create a more comprehensive and representative narrative. A multitude of female authors have explored Irish history through the lens of its cultural

contradictions. Irish men express their devotion to Mother Ireland by making the ultimate sacrifice, whereas Irish women embody the very spirit of the Irish nation. Heather Ingman, a critic, notes that "A specific female conduct, rooted in chastity and purity, ensured the integrity and distinctiveness of the Irish nation" (Boland, 1990). Accordingly, Ireland seemed in literary tradition as either the mother or the Virgin Mary. Her role as an Irish female poet, Boland claims is to unearth the stories of women who were previously silenced and integrate them into Irish literary heritage. She employs historical concepts and imagery to question the traditional perception of the current state. In doing so, she reexamined the essence of womankind as well as national distinctiveness through vividly portraying the battle for self-determination as a shared challenge for both the nation and women (Boland, 1990).

Heidegger proposes that human beings should be understood as *Dasein*, a term in German that translates to "existence" in English but means "being there." By replacing "consciousness" and "mind" with *Dasein*, Heidegger aims to convey that humans exist in the world by "uncovering" and revealing other entities, as well as themselves. *Dasein* represents the "there" or the space of being, where entities manifest themselves as they truly are. Rather than being confined to a separate mental compartment, the functions previously labeled as "mental" now define human existence. This notion is equivalent to Bachelard's conception of space which entails the emotional connection between an individual and the space they inhabit as he explores in his *The Poetics of Space* (1958). He delves into the meaning of imagination and the way it imbues a space with significance and how the space, in turn, elicits emotions, memories, and fantasies in the occupant's mind. Recognizing the limitations of empiricism in understanding subjective emotions, Bachelard adopts a phenomenological approach in his work. Phenomenology, as the study of affect, perception, and cognition from a first-person perspective, allows Bachelard to emphasize the importance of imagination. According to him, a simple sensory stimulus like a scent can trigger a cascade of associations and memories, shaping one's consciousness and perception. This interplay between perception and imagination highlights the creative nature of consciousness, constantly giving birth to new experiences through mental images (Kearney, 2002).

Boland's poems do not always take a negative view of place. Although location and being somewhere can sometimes imply belonging, place is also associated with immobility. Above all, it is critical to understand that human presence is a prerequisite for both place and space and that one cannot exist without the other. Without a concept or a sense of space (since sense is always understood as perspective and consciousness), a place would exist only as a lost single spot without any intrinsic sense of movement or change. Alternatively, space would simply be the theoretical justification for existence; in the absence of the individual locations that make it up, it would be empty, everywhere, or nowhere. Numerous areas where people walk and live make the area lively and alive. This goes with the concepts of space and place by the philosophers, Bachelard and Heidegger, where Boland is influenced. For Heidegger, the idea of existence, existing in the world, interacting with objects in the world, coexistence, time, space, and the structure of concern. He considers dwelling as a deep ontological concept, where a person's existence is intertwined with the act of "being". Dwelling is not just a behavior, but the very essence of human existence. Being and dwelling are inseparable. Bachelard proposed that areas like the bedroom, the loft, the upper room, or areas where objects reside, such as drawers, chests, and closets, are personal spaces and occasional refuges, and have the ability to evoke emotions and recollections and serve as a valuable instrument for uncovering the human psyche and essence. For both the importance of place lies not in our direct experience of it, but rather in how our experiences are rooted in place, demonstrating that our connection to place is not a mere coincidence of human life. It is the use of imagination that enables the individual to break the boundaries of time and space.

Exploring her sense of being in places and time Boland's transnational perspective is treated to blur boundaries of identity. Throughout her poetry, she strives to discover her voice and position within a tradition that predominantly centered around men, where women were portrayed as idealized objects and transformed into myths. They were celebrated in songs, yet never allowed to express themselves through their singing. Boland's quest to find her identity as a female poet appears to articulate the uncomfortable predicament experienced by other Irish women writers who were denied the chance to speak. According to the assertion of Patricia Boyle, the poetry of Boland documents a manner of self-definition through imagination and emotions related to physical locations but taken beyond her personal life. That is to say, she establishes new connections with previous generations of women within Ireland. This implies both a personal and generational transition, reflecting the erosion of certainties, the emergence of a new form of poetry, and the journey toward discovering her authentic identity (Boyle, 1996).

Redefining the female poet and citizen as authentic individuals with genuine voices, Boland draws on her experience of residing in various locations such as London, Ireland, and the United States, she experienced a sense of disorientation and detachment from a specific homeland or motherland, nevertheless, it does not diminish her longing for a sense of belonging in any possible manner.

The depiction of anorexic women in Boland's poetry is revealed in her unorthodox poem "Anoxeric" in which women are compelled to maintain a state of emptiness, invulnerability, and freedom under the influence of food or sexuality. "Anoxeric", is a penetratingly emotional poem of biblical allusions; unorthodox, self-rejections, forsaking abundance, references to Adam's anatomy, sacred and pure, without sin, without sustenance, maintaining a close bond with his soul, python's requirements. The dimensions of her, the female speaker in the poem, relational realm correspond to the extent of Adam's rib, situated on his slumbering side. This alluring enclosure delineates the limits of the individual's identity, or perhaps the feminine identity establishes its own. Despite her desire for emotional intimacy, the female speaker refuses to engage in "the song of his breath." This decision to separate herself from the other person leads to a shutting down of

her senses and a denial of her physical needs. Doing so, she does not only reject sexual activity but also any other form of agency where she is an active participant. The speaker documents her disintegration as a result of this choice:

Thin as a rib
I turn in sleep.
My dreams probe
a claustrophobia
a sensuous enclosure.
How warm it was and wide

and in his sleeping side.
I will slip
back into him again
as if I have never been away.
Caged so
I will grow
angular and holy. (Boland, 1995)

The female speaker comes to the realization that choosing to isolate oneself "within a limited area" eventually transforms into a type of mental imprisonment. In this scenario, one experiences solitary confinement and enforced bed rest, along with the absence of mental stimulation and sensory experiences, which are commonly employed as methods of treatment for political prisoners. The poem concludes with a violent act of self-destruction, accompanied by the deliberate disposal of one's body parts, which are believed to embody the perceived wickedness of the sexuality of female. She descends:

into forked dark,
into python needs
heaving to hips and breasts
and hips and heat
and sweat and fat and greed. (Boland, 1995)

It could be argued that the female speaker in the poem submits to the system of disciplinary control, adopting its punitive techniques and ultimately accepting the overt monitoring of her own body. She appears to be a wounded victim, whose physical integrity and coherence have been called into question and violated. No longer regarded as an embodiment of male longing, she simultaneously loses her power over the male gaze, rendering her undistinguishable and slowly but surely obliterated from the discourse outside the socially and culturally approved symbolic/paternal order.

The female speaker of the poem transforms herself into an outcast, devoid of protection from any rules or laws, even those dictated by men. She becomes susceptible to looting, plundering, rape, and even murder. The space in her relationships diminishes further. The voice speaking observes: "I have stopped bleeding/ I look down. / It has gone" (Boland, 1995). The idea of transformation, here, is a matter of getting liberty or true identity which agrees with Heidegger and Bachelard being free in the use of imagination rather than being committed to a specific place. Through using imagination, the female speaker envisions depriving herself of being in a male form, reversing the creation story of Eve emerging from Adam's rib. Ultimately, she envisions starving herself into her supposed "original" state as Adam's rib itself. Denying herself sustenance acts as a means of spiritual purification, a state in which she attains a condition of being "sinless", liberated from the "heretical" flesh, the body she refers to as a "witch". This idea of holiness and fasting is elaborated upon in the following lines of the poem, as the speaker imagines herself in a pre-fall condition, prior to when a woman's bodily desires start to symbolize everything that is base.

The female speaker's perception of her identity as separate from her physical "other" mirrors the division between self and the other present in discourses that her body seeks to question. This highlights the influence of a poetic tradition that requires women to be disembodied to represent Ireland and prompts an examination of its impact on Irish women. Boland portrays the Irish anorexic as someone struggling to reconcile with a discourse that negates her physical self in its ordinary experiences of hunger and sexual desire. In this light, Boland's portrayal of the anorexic woman in the poem represents the extreme manifestation of a tradition that consistently insists on women being spiritualized and separated from their material bodies. In the poem, the female speaker starves her body to become "thin as a rib", and it is this phallic rib image that guides her throughout the remainder of the poem (Belanger, 2000).

Depriving herself of food serves as a method of spiritual cleansing, a condition where she achieves a state of being "sinless", free from the "heretic" flesh, the body that she labels as a "witch". This concept of sanctity and fasting is further explored in the subsequent verses of the poem, as the speaker envisions herself in a pre-Fall state, before when a woman's physical cravings begin to represent all that is lowly:

Keeping his heart
Such company
as will make me forget
in a small space
the fall

into forked dark
 into python needs
 heaving to hips and breasts
 and lips and heat
 and sweat and fat and greed. (Boland, 1995)

The "Exhibitionist" challenges and reevaluates the argument put forth by Laura Mulvey in her essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." Mulvey asserts that the male viewer derives pleasure from a narcissistic identification with his image on the screen, while the female protagonist is reduced to a passive object of voyeuristic and sexual fantasies for both the viewers and the heroes on screen (Mulvey, 1975). In contrast to the male spectator, the female star, heron, is unable to actively drive the narrative forward. Instead, she is limited to being either degraded or objectified as a fetish within the realm of Hollywood Cinema (Threadgold, 1997). In both scenarios, women are subjected to objectification through the narrative structure and the perspective of a masculine, phallogocentric audience that unquestioningly identifies with it.

Boland subverts the conventional representation of women in mythology, Mother Ireland, by employing the technique of revisionist mythmaking, to correct myth as it is embodied by gender stereotypes to picture women poets creating myths (Kadihm, 2024). "The Making of an Irish Goddess," part of the *Outside History* (1990) series, reflects on *The Journey* (1983) as a poem depicting a descent into the underworld, along with its reference to the Ceres myth. Ceres, in Roman mythology, is revered as the goddess of agriculture and the harvest. Her blessings ensured bountiful harvests and abundant crops for humankind, while her anger could result in blight, drought, and famine. Often portrayed as a matron figure, she is associated with symbols such as the sickle, grain shafts, and the cornucopia. It is a well-known myth involving Ceres in her relentless search for her daughter Proserpina, who was kidnapped by Pluto, the god of the underworld. According to Roman mythology, Ceres' sorrow upon Proserpina's annual descent to the underworld was believed to explain the death of plants during the winter season. The previously mentioned myth connects the poem "The Journey" with the central part of "Suburban Woman: A Detail" from *The Journey*, as well as with "The Pomegranate" from "In a Time of Violence": "The only legend I have ever loved is / The story of a daughter lost in hell" (as cited in Abdulaal, 2021). Nevertheless, this poem emphasizes the act of reinterpreting the tale of Ceres, who "went to hell / with no 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—
 must be

an accurate inscription
 of that agony.... (Boland, 1990)

The term "inscription," naturally establishes a connection between the mortal decline and the poem's progression on the page. In both this instance and the subsequent lines, the sentence unfolds with parataxis, apposition, and qualifying modifiers, as if the author is reluctant to conclude. This transformation of recollected particulars into elegy is achieved through the deliberate, extensively enjambed verses:

Myth is the wound we leave
 in the time, we have—
 which in my case is this
 March evening
 at the foothills of the Dublin mountains,
 across which the lights have changed all day,
 holding up my hand
 sickle-shaped, to my eyes
 to pick out
 my own daughter from
 all the other children in the distance;
 her back turned to me. (Boland, 1990)

Language serves as the mark that both mends and seals, yet also signifies the everlasting wound of human mortality. The term "sickle-shaped" designates the mother, whether willingly or unwillingly, as Mother Time, the personification

of death. The composition captures the essence of the present, yet it is written in the past tense, describing the individuals as "a man and a woman." Similar to other poems, it evokes the concept of "nostalgia for the present," a phrase coined by the American critic and Philosopher, Frederic Jameson (1934). The initial depiction of an "October morning" gradually transforms into a somber atmosphere, signifying that the present moment has already slipped into the past. As dusk falls, the suburban environment, filled with children and neighbors, becomes an eerie realm of shadows. Here, transnationality is concerned with time in which the boundaries between past and present are broken. According to Bachelard and Heidegger, time provides significance to all our moments of existence by giving us the present, the past, and the intertemporality of the world of things. Thus, it is the experience one has given meaning to time as well as to the place where the person is. In both cases nationality no longer belongs to the nation-state, rather it is the place and the time one experiences things in, having hope in the future for change.

Boland explores the concept of national space and identity by analyzing domestic violence within the male-controlled Irish society. She also delves into the inherent violence present in gender as well as national individualities. Boland draws parallels between the relationship of a biological mother as well as daughter to that of a female citizen and the nation. Boland's interpretation of Irish conflicts concerning sexual assault and rape is evident in her analysis of *Domestic Violence*. The titular poem, "Domestic Violence", subtly alludes to this vision, portraying a couple embroiled in a fierce argument living in proximity to the speaker: "Their voices high, sharp:/ nothing is ever entirely/ right in the lives of those who love each other (Boland, 2007)," which is further elaborated in the subsequent poem, "How the Dance Came to the City". Excluding the title, the pronoun "it" in the opening lines refers to war: "It came with the scarlet tunics and rowel spurs," following "the same route as / the blight or with the nightly sweats that said fever". The formal dances imported from abroad by "a sail riding the empire-blue haze" culminate in the image of a naked girl reflected in a man's sword, "her face flush and wide-eyed" (as cited in Rouby, 2019). As the speaker shifts from the communal setting of the ballroom to the private sphere of the bedrooms, various symbols arise: "the boots, the gloves, the whips, the flash of the cuirasses" (Boland, 2007). This implies that civilization and violence are intricately linked, rather than being distinct entities, and that the military presence contributes to violence against women. Boland effectively links national politics and personal issues through metonymic extension rather than metaphorical mapping in her poetry, illustrating how political conflicts have an impact on the home environment. The poems portray internal conflicts as a direct violation of personal privacy, vividly depicted through imagery of burglary and rape. This is in contrast to the notion that women poets are constrained in their choice of subject and are fixated on the experiences of women in particular (Hamad, 2015). Such analysis does not work on Irish women only but it transcends it to women in general for Boland does not only experience the Irish society but different societies in different places.

Utilizing mythological settings, Boland tends to narrate tales that revolve around the experiences and struggles of women. By defying patriarchal norms, questioning gendered expectations, and employing poetic imagery and language, Boland empowers women. She relates to Persephone as a daughter, as her relationship with her mother appeared to be quite intimate, evident from her description of her being "the friend of my lifetime" (Boland, 1995). Over time, Boland herself became a mother to her daughters who, as a natural part of growing up, inevitably grew apart from her. Boland's realization dawned upon her that daughters do not only age but distance themselves too. She discovered that she was embodying the character of Ceres, fervently striving to recover her daughter from the depths of the underworld, despite the fact that only a few years prior she had still been Persephone.

The connection to both mythical figures reappears in several of her poems and serves as an apt depiction of her circumstances. Similar to her later poem "The Pomegranate," Boland assumes the roles of both Ceres and Persephone simultaneously, suggesting the dual and transitional nature of these roles as time passes. In "The Pomegranate," she openly acknowledges that this identification holds and it is encompassed in her collection *In a Time of Violence*, "the best thing about the legend is / I can enter it anywhere" (Boland, 1995). Such an idea of empowering women is a transnational one for it is not limited to a specific society, country, or even place.

The symbolic journey of Boland from being a daughter to a mother may be expanded to encompass the evolution of Irish women poets from being mere substances in male-authored poetry to becoming poets in their own right. These female poets have moved beyond the role of Persephone, who was indebted to a male-dominated tradition and metaphorically abducted by male figures to wander within the lines of poems written exclusively by men. Male poets often portrayed women in their poems, similar to Persephone wandering in Pluto's realm, a goddess displaced from her realm and consequently deprived of her own identity. These women, daughters, and mothers, were placed in an environment that did not belong to them and was subjected to the authority of male figures. To break free from this state of subjugation, which allowed them to be subjects of poetry but also subjected beings, a voice was necessary to bring Persephone and all the other voiceless women back to their rightful domain. Ceres accomplished this objective by initiating a dialogue with Pluto, resulting in a compromise that allowed Persephone to remain in the company of both Pluto (representing the male voice) and Ceres (representing the female poets' voices). This situation bears a remarkable similarity to Boland's journey of reconciling the predominantly male-oriented poetry she encountered as a student with her present female perspective. It seems that Irish women aspiring to become poets must confront this dualistic nature when choosing to pursue poetry.

The ambiguity present in her poetry is a unique theme that is also reflected in the setting. Boland revolutionizes and reinterprets conventional environments, such as the household realm, the natural environment, or historical scenery, to

magnify the voices and encounters of women. The focus of "Woman in Kitchen," is often on the location rather than the person being described. In "Woman in Kitchen," the subject is portrayed as having no specific destination and could be seen as a pedestrian in a busy street (Boland, 2007). The uncertainty of her position within her household is undeniable, not to mention her role within a nation. Andrew J. Auge highlights the prevalent "exilic sense of displacement" in Boland's poetry, while also acknowledging the presence of a deeply lyrical sensibility (Auge, 2004). Indeed, her poetry does evoke a feeling of displacement, yet it intertwines with abjection, resulting in sensations of unease or repulsion rather than the usual lyrical beauty associated with poetry. Boland employs language akin to the philosopher Julia Kristeva's (1941-) when describing the environment that envelops the rejected individuals as "never one, not homogeneous [...] but essentially divisible, foldable, and catastrophic" (Kristeva, 1982, p. 4). Boland's writing exhibits a more pronounced manifestation of this division when it comes to displacement rather than lyricism (Boland, 1990).

Boland's focus is on reclaiming the marginalized voices found within Irish poetry. She confronts the conventional representation of Ireland and attempts to engage with her, yet the "poor old woman" lacks the ability to communicate due to this restrictive traditional image; she "can only express herself with words crafted by others," rather than her own. As a result, when Boland informs her of the betrayal, she asserts, "There is still time, I will convey this to her. "We can still / grow older together," (68) the only answer she, the betrayed woman in the poem, is the refrain of the old song "Yes! Ireland shall be free, / From the center to the sea" (68).

In her poetry, Boland frequently exposes the disadvantageous role that women occupy within the male-dominated Irish poetic tradition. By re-contextualizing women's history alongside national history, she confronts the national and patriarchal structures of Irish society. She reinterprets the glorification of women to establish a platform for these women to be acknowledged and listened to. Furthermore, as Nash points out, Irish women are commonly depicted through the lens of idealized motherhood, which consequently ties them irrevocably to domesticity and tradition (as cited in Abdulaal, 2021).

In *Domestic Violence*, Boland examines the connections between self, memory, as well as family to address the notion of the nation as depicted in Irish poetry. Andrew Auge notes that Boland aims to enhance the national consciousness by broadening the cultural representation of women, substituting the mythological figures of women with a more genuine depiction of women in domestic settings (as cited in Abdulaal, 2021). Boland deconstructs the traditional image of motherhood by meticulously examining the genuine maternal experience. She highlights that her endeavors to restore the country do not imitate the forceful patriotism of those who came before her. In her poem "Mise Eire," she explicitly states, "I won't go back to it," referring to the nationalist poetry that resulted in the sacrifices made by individuals like Pearse. Similarly, in "Anna Liffey," the speaker moves away from the deadly patterns of the past, drifting towards death. Additionally, Boland declares the emergence of a fresh and distinct pattern.

And I make this mark:
A woman in the doorway of her house.
A river in the city of her birth.
The truth of a suffered life.
The mouth of it. (Boland, 1990)

In her book *In Her Own Image* (2000), Boland explores various themes including distorted and alienated identities, the reflection of masculine desire through the female mirror in discourse, and the interplay of women's mirrors reflecting an endless chain of signifiers. The metaphor of a mirror, which is frequently employed throughout the volume, contributes to its overall coherence. Therefore, beyond the well-constructed arguments, there exists a poignant plea for love, validation, and personal autonomy that can be discerned within the subtext. It appears that the deeply wounded inner child implored her partner not to abandon her, as her fundamental needs revolve around emotional intimacy and unconditional love, which are crucial for her to fully develop her sense of self. The phrase "famished for love" draws a parallel between the national tragedy of famine and the contemporary yearning for equal acceptance, as both have resulted in exile, whether from one's own country, physical, or meaningful discourse, metaphorical, often both.

The space for genuine connection remains open as long as the other party embraces the unfiltered reality, including its darkest aspects and regrets. This is also a transnational aspect of Boland's poetry for she is not confined to certain borders rather it is related to the whole world and all places since it is reality and the truth she is after. This applies to Bachelard and Heidegger's conception of place and space for borders here have no significance through using the imagination to trespass time and place. However, it is undeniable that the child's profound anguish and inconsolable sorrow, as well as the disappointment stemming from the other party's allowance of such frustration and helplessness, cannot be disregarded. In conclusion, the voice speaking voice asserts:

I will wake you from your sluttish sleep.
I will show you true reflections, terrors.
You are the Muse of all our mirrors.
Look in them and weep. (Boland, 1990)

The voice speaking, or Boland's represents the fictitious identities of the prodigal daughter of male bardic poetry, and the uninterested Mother Ireland as occupying the relational space. It can be inferred that the lost territory can be reclaimed and accepted without any struggles or losses, despite its unpleasant visual appearance and emotional disturbance. The question is what occurs when the authoritarian and antagonistic self forcefully penetrates the fragile spatial boundaries of

the already fragmented female presence? This external self resists being internalized as part of the whole and undermines the notions of equality and mutual recognition. Zygmunt Bauman (1925-2017), Polish-born sociologist and philosopher, laments the prevalence of aesthetic spacing in postmodern strategies, which prioritizes the subjective experiences of the spacing subject rather than the qualities of the objects being spaced. Boland echoes this sentiment by asserting that excellent poetry upholds the moral connection between imagination and image, treating these images as truths rather than mere adornments. Such is concomitant with Heidegger's correspondence theory of truth which is rooted in the presence of a primary truth phenomenon (Bauman, 1996). This primary truth is the truth of Being, which unveils the essence of beings and enables the revelation of entities, in this case, a woman.

The pristine dome in "In His Own Image" adorned with azure arches (veins) provides refuge and captivates the eye with its sheer magnificence. It incites carnal desires, tempting one to explore the inner sanctum of the temple through sacrilegious and sinful acts of aggression. However, what remains unattainable shall only result in devastation: "So they have taken off/ what slaked them first, / what they have hated since" (Boland, 1995).

The delight the female speaker in the poem/ Boland experiences from her performative deeds is twofold: voyeuristic and narcissistic. The recently awakened self takes great pleasure in its completeness, joyfully celebrating the symbolic freedom from the garments/the outward symbols of the paternal metaphor that concealed the shameful, sinful aspects of the body, which had kept her confined within the "sensuous enclosure," "ensnared her in slumber", Boland says:

Barely light
and yet –
cold shouldering

clipped laurel,
nipping the road. (Boland, 1995)

The term "clipped laurel" encompasses two meanings. Firstly, it symbolizes the visible representation of male artistic authority, characterized by neatly trimmed laurel leaves, which serve as a legitimizing symbol. Secondly, it represents her unique way of expressing quick, short sounds and an abrupt style. The path she chooses to escape is depicted in a feminine manner, being round, circular, and comforting. The speaker musters the courage to articulate verbally what she has already demonstrated physically and it is similar to Heidegger's conception of place where the self or the entity can find itself leaving all boundaries or imposed spaces:

I subvert
sculpture,
the old mode;
I skin

I dimple clay,
I flesh,
I rump stone. (Boland, 1995)

The unapologetic speaker's voice is immediately evident in the opening line of the poem that introduces the collection. This voice acts as a distinct signal of the dominant tone present in the volume, characterized by anger. In "Tirade for the Mimic Muse", Boland's speaker metaphorically criticizes and rejects the conventional depiction of beautiful and submissive female muses who motivate male artists: "I've exposed you. You promiscuous woman. You overweight fish." It is clear from the outset that the muse embodies all that Boland, as a poet, aims to confront and subvert within Irish poetry. Breaking the traditional taboos is transnationality in itself coinciding with Heidegger's self-formation identity achieving. A female poet does not require female muses who are perpetually confined to youth, beauty, and complete passivity. Ironically addressing the muse as "our" while employing deeply offensive language, Boland seems to have pinpointed the scapegoat, the individual who is equally accountable for the distortion of a woman's image and physique in Irish poetry:

Anyone would think you were a whore –
An ageing out-of-work kind-hearted tart.
I know you for the ruthless bitch you are:
Our criminal, our tricot use, our muse. (Boland, 1995)

A distinctly different hue of blue is presented in the poem "In Season": the "odd azure of / apple blossom" (Boland, 2007, p. 52), contrasting with the pure blueness found in "How It Was Once in Our Country." The poem portrays the quiet display of two painted figures involved in a chase across the surface of the white as well as blue mug. These two main characters are observed endlessly chasing each other, representing a recurring theme, the domestic abuse or the conflict that originates within the household, juxtaposed with the faint reverberation of a devastating war beyond the confines of this residence, that contrasts with the more tragic backdrop mentioned in the collection. Once more, kitchenware, such as crockery, presents the opportunity to transcend linear time and conflicts within the safe haven of the kitchen. In this ostensibly secure domestic environment, characterized by the "cotton edge of the curtains" (Boland, 2007), plates and mugs carry substantial meaning, provided there is an individual willing to decipher the story interlaced within the artwork. Nevertheless, one cannot ignore the reality that this location reflects a history marked by confinement and

oppression. In addition, the reference to blue earthenware holds significant historical importance: Delftware was introduced into Irish homes by the initial immigrant potters from the Low Countries, prior to local production commencing once clay deposits were uncovered near Carrick Fergus. Consequently, the hue of blue serves as a convergence point where history and myth collide, a color imbued with historical significance yet regarded as a representation of permanence. This concept also applies to the kitchen itself, a domain characterized by timeless traditions and underlying tensions. Boland conceptualizes conventional settings, like the household environment, the environment, or historical scenery, to enhance the representation of women's perspectives and encounters. Utilize these things to delve into intricate subjects of selfhood, empowerment, and societal norms imposed on women. Then she transposes those settings and places to achieve her goal, women's liberty and identity formation leaving boundaries and traditions aside.

The media's coverage of the Troubles, a time of conflict, along with the continuous death tolls, challenges the idea of secure dichotomies, as illustrated in the poem "Domestic Violence". Although the mention of the conflict is confined to the second part of the poem, its distant rumble infiltrates the private sphere when the Irish landscapes are portrayed on television. The section begins with lengthy clauses and soft sibilants, seemingly diluting the impact of the conflict, but maintains a steady iambic rhythm ("the salt horizons and the Dublin hills, / the rivers, table mountains, Viking marshes / we thought we knew") (Boland, 1995). These devices are quickly replaced by a series of plosives ("which gave them back as gray and grayer tears") and the pounding trochaic meter of "killings, killings, killings." The media acts as a replacement for encroaching paramilitary factions, their misleading influence amplified by the subpar quality of the images. In addition, the symmetrical application of the possessive pronoun ("our island"; "our [...] television"), rather than imparting a feeling of homeliness, tends to dissolve the distinctions between the near and the distant, thereby reinforcing the synecdoche link between the national and the personal. Although the poem is distinctly divided into four separate sections, the outbreak of the Troubles is encapsulated within the second part. Nevertheless, the fusion of personal and political aspects weakens any effort to delineate clear boundaries. The third section culminates with a woman asking her husband a straightforward rhetorical question: "What else could we have done?" (Boland, 1995). This serves as a poignant reminder of the intersection between personal and collective challenges.

Twenty years ago, Boland expressed a similar concern in "Naoise at Four," a poem situated in a suburban kitchen where the television screen serves as both a transitional space and a delicate point of connection: "nightly on our screen / [...] wounds open" (Boland, 1995). The delicate nature of the public-private boundary is further emphasized by the presence of television, which replaces open hostilities and delivers news of "this unexpected outburst of anger from Ireland" (Boland, 1995).

In *Domestic Violence*, the presence of the radio is also mentioned as an intrusive voice. In "Silenced," the story of Philomel's rape by Tereus, Philomela, a character from Greek mythology, sought vengeance against King Tereus who cut out her tongue after raping her, then, she ultimately transformed into a nightingale to escape, is juxtaposed with a lesser-known tale of violation told by the radio. By substituting the term "rape" with "violation," the poem forges a connection between myth and politics, implying that Irish history is a narrative quietly crafted by those who are marginalized. The speaker highlights the presence of the radio in the room, which blurs the lines between the interior and exterior, a prevalent technique in Boland's poetry. As the reports broadcasted on the radio go largely unnoticed, the duty of narrating the untold experiences of suffering women rests upon the writer. In contrast to television, the radio is depicted as a more ambiguous medium, capable of offering either a fully fleshed-out narrative or a collection of stark statistics: "That was the year the news was always bad / (statistics on the radio)" (Boland, 1995).

Boland's poetry exhibits a transitional component that can be attributed to other events, like her dual role as a mother and a poet. The issue of balancing motherhood and poetry led to finding inspiration in her motherhood, which allowed her to connect with other women who shared similar experiences. Writing within the boundaries of what was traditionally deemed as "the subject for poetry", Boland found inspiration in her everyday experiences of raising her daughters in a suburban setting. Through her writing, she elevated these domestic experiences to a level of transcendence, following in the footsteps of female poets like Sylvia Plath who had already paved the way for such boundary-pushing work. Boland credits Plath's poetry with helping her "to establish some rich, shifting and shared boundary" (Allen, 1993).

In her essay "Outside History," Boland contends that Irish women have evolved from being the subjects of Irish poetry to taking on the role of its creators (Boland, 1990). Despite Boland's acknowledgment of the existence of a real change towards empowerment and independence of Irish women, her poetry, conversely, depicts a feeling of losing one's sense of self during this period of change. She no longer embodies either the protagonist or the target of her poetry or the Irish nation. This not only distances Boland from her notions of nationalism but also places her "beyond" history, both past and present, erasing her identity. According to Boland's essay, women who were once considered part of the nation are reduced to a mere representation of a national idea, devoid of any individuality or aspirations. As a result, they are neither active participants in their own lives nor the larger national narrative. Boland emphasizes the danger of simplifying women in this way, as it erases their agency and perpetuates harmful gender stereotypes (136). Boland raises her voice in support of Irish women who are silenced. She takes issue with the persecution of women and the notion that nationalists who want to retake their homeland should use them as symbols (Reheima, 2023).

In "The Woman, The Place, The Poet," Boland fundamentally explores issues related to space. Boland claims that "there exists a duality in place," suggesting that we are both a component of space and that we are one. With it: "There is

a place which existed before you came to it, closed in the secrets and complexities of history; and there is the place you experience in the present. [...] There is the place that happened and the place that happened to you" (Boland, 1990).

The first poem of *Object Lessons*, titled "The Tirade for the Mimic Muse," presents a complex and potentially distressing process of forming one's identity. This is demonstrated through the use of pronouns that highlight the distinction between the poet, the Muse, and the collective "we". Rather than asserting complete control over language and meaning, the poem explores the ongoing negotiation and construction of these elements. This construction heavily relies on subversive and parodic performances. The term "performance" encompasses both the authenticity of the writer/speaker's embodied self and the subversive parody of a stylized identity. This aligns with the American philosopher and gender studies scholar Judith Butler's (1956-) argument regarding the subversive redefinition and proliferation that surpasses dualistic frameworks. Additionally, it draws upon the French feminist Luce Irigaray's (1930-) concept of mimesis, which involves presenting women in a way that reinforces stereotypical perceptions of women, to challenge these very perceptions. The serious accusations are brought forth through a thorough examination of her limitations, failures, and deficiencies. Initially, the poetic inspiration is blamed for prioritizing the act of portraying rather than the actual content being portrayed. By disregarding the anguish endured by those who witnessed the atrocities of war or suffered losses, the muse distorts their reality by transforming it into a captivating yet misleading spectacle:

With what drums and dances, what deceits
Rituals and flatteries of war,
Chants and pipes and witless empty rites
And war-like men
And wet-eyed patient women. (Boland, 1990)

The poem employs a striking juxtaposition between a casual, everyday language and a structured format, reminiscent of a religious chant. The feeling of discord, the internal conflict that shatters the smooth surface of the mirror where the speaker's voice "captures" its reflection, is heightened by directly addressing the subject, using parallel sentence structures, dividing the poem into regular stanzas, incorporating alliteration, repeating the initial phrases, and employing extensive lists and catalogs. This is also an attempt at transnationality through utilizing language.

"Tirade for the Mimic Muse" by Boland portrays the speaker's anger as they urge the muse to reveal her true self by shedding the facade of makeup and poetic conventions that have distorted the perception of women and their bodies. Despite this, the poem also reveals the speaker's disgust when they confront their reflection in the mirror each morning: "How it's dulced and shrouded!" (Boland, 1990). She seems to require making her "new" face more pleasing to the male gaze, yet once she has completed the process of "creating" her new face, she cautions to "take nothing, nothing / at its face value" (71). According to Boyle, this woman suggests that "images of women, in culture and literature, are frequently as 'constructed' as the face she applies each morning" (Boland, 1990). The representations of women's "thigh and buttock / that they prayed to" (Boland, 1996), along with those that "they" (male artists) have molded for their own desires over centuries, represent yet another "deception" in the perception of this woman. The well-worn assertion that "myths / are created by men" (Boland, 1996), which follows her vehement protest, is one of the central themes that Boland's poetry consistently seeks to confront. In the final lines of the poem, the lyrical subject appears somewhat resigned as she implies that her female identity is unfortunately predominantly associated with and diminished to an idealized portrayal of her face and physique. It seems that this woman internalizes this depiction and remains confined within the realm of male fantasies and ideals (Boland, 1996).

In the poems "Exhibitionist" and "Making Up", the speaker boldly addresses the issues of her aging face and body. Boland intends to challenge the male gaze that objectifies women and is internalized by those oppressed by patriarchy. By invoking the muse once again, Boland aims to reverse this gaze. The owner of the gaze is trapped to a similar degree as the cage portrayed in "Anorexic" by their masculine deepest desires. The message she aims to communicate is the importance of embracing the absence, scarcity, and recognition that these desires can never be fulfilled. She represents illumination, an unwavering self, unyielding (not submissive), detached from their sexual fantasies, and encompassing a multitude of meanings and forms. She associates political conflict with all instances of violence against women. In Ireland, the concept of womanhood has historically been intertwined with confinement. This can be seen in the domestic sphere, where women were expected to prioritize self-sacrifice, similar to Victorian England's ideals portrayed in Coventry Patmore's "The Angel in the House." Additionally, institutions like the Magdalene Asylums were established to cater to "fallen" women. It is not surprising, therefore, that Boland's poetry often incorporates metaphors related to domestic life and handicrafts. The actions of spinning and weaving symbolize the everyday experiences of numerous Irish women. In her poem "Silenced," Boland delves into the concept of weaving, linking it to the story of Philomela's assault (Boland, 2007). Similarly, "Irish Interior," inspired by an illustration from 1888, juxtaposes the image of a woman spinning with a setting marked by political turmoil (Boland, 2007, p. 25). Both poems utilize a sequence of full stops, creating several caesuras that amplify the sense of entrapment:

Afterwards, she determined to tell a story
another way. She began a tapestry.
She gathered skeins, colors.
She started weaving. ("Silenced")
The woman sits and spins. She makes no sound.

The man behind her stands by the door.
 There is always this: a background, a foreground.
 This much we know. They do not want to be here.
 The year is 1890. The inks have long since dried. (Boland, 2007)

Home life is depicted in Boland's poetry as more than just a routine and domestic chores. The division between indoors and outdoors is a prominent theme in her recent collections, a transnational one that explores issues of preservation and identity. The Troubles made public spaces unsafe, highlighting the disruptive power of war. This transformed what was once a place of subjection into a potential refuge. In the face of adversity, safeguarding an intimate and cocoon-like space requires redefining home as a sanctuary rather than a constraint. In her collection *Domestic Violence*, Boland illustrates how conflicts can infiltrate the private sphere and taint the marital bond. One notable poem in the collection portrays a couple overhearing their neighbors' quarrel while witnessing images of battle and bloodshed on television (Boland, 2007).

There remains a certain level of uncertainty regarding the source of violence, whether it originates from within or is brought in from external sources. In Boland's "Domestic Violence," the initial portrayal of Ireland as a place that exposes its old wounds suggests that violence is inherent, lying dormant until it erupts periodically - almost like a family issue. However, the subsequent poem "How the Dance Came to the City" seems to contradict this notion. It implies that dances were introduced alongside imported items such as boots, gloves, whips, and the glimmer of armor, suggesting an external influence "on the same route as / the blight and with the nightly sweats that said fever" (Boland, 2007). The term "blight" clearly signifies the devastating impact of potato crop failures leading to famine. On the other hand, in Boland's poetry, the term "fever" represents the Irish conflicts—a fever that was brought into Ireland from elsewhere. It is believed to have originated in Ireland and is considered a severe form of typhus, but it also functioned as a stigmatizing label. The term "fever" refers to a designation applied from the outside, conjuring ideas of contagion and injured tissues: "contagion waiting for us / at every turn" (Boland, 2007), "its skin a map of wounds, its history a treatise of infections" (Boland, 2007). Nevertheless, it is also accepted as an integral aspect of Irish identity: "Ours was a nation of fever" (Boland, 2007). Boland perceives violence as initially stemming from an external force intruding upon a familiar environment. Over time, this pattern is perpetuated by successive generations, becoming ingrained and instinctual. Women's voices, hopes, and participation in Ireland's social and political destiny have all been brutally suppressed (Taha, 2015). Consequently, women's voices's suppression can resurface unexpectedly even within the most familiar settings. Thus, violence becomes a characteristic that simultaneously shapes and endangers the concept of domesticity.

Her apathetic and careless absence within the outskirts' boundaries resulted in the exclusion of abused women and children from engaging in meaningful conversations and expressing their distressing cries:

How you fled
 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. (Boland, 1990)

The speaker seems to undergo a purifying cathartic experience; that requires the assistance of a benevolent force. This force, represented by the outstretched hand of God/Creator, possesses divine power that can redefine her flawed female physique, her primal desires, the origin of sinful enticement, and the wellspring of sensual gratification. The voice of the speaker seems ready, or at least sufficiently obedient, to take part in the creative process. But the line "such a simple definition / how did I miss it" reveals a literary device mentioned in the preceding poem. They seem to invoke the misogynistic cliché that says someone should be punished for misbehaving, or acting in a way that is characteristic of a woman. It is worth highlighting that the male presence in the poem is confined to the metonymic space, which represents the entirety. Either his hands are him, or he is his hands. He possesses the self-legitimizing "artistic" ability to "scald her cheek" and "mould her mouth," which proves to be a bitterly illuminating power: "Was this concussion/ by whose lights I find/my self-possession, /where I grow complete" (Boland, 1995).

The poem "In Her Own Image" explores the multifaceted nature of domestic abuse, portraying violence through intricate and enigmatic imagery. The speaker of the poem consistently refers to an unidentified recipient, who could potentially represent her poem, her artistic expression, or her symbolic daughter. As the poem progresses, the speaker reveals that:

I will not disfigure
 her pretty face.
 Let her wear amethyst thumbprints,
 a family heirloom,
 a sort of burial necklace. (Boland, 1995)

Similar to "In Her Own Image," the poem "Mastectomy" delves into the concept of the forceful reduction of relational space to the dimensions of the breast, encompassing both its nurturing and sensual implications. The speaker reminisces: "blue-veined /white-domed /home/ of wonder / and the wetness/ of their dreams" (Boland, 1995). She systematically

eliminates the sexually suggestive elements and characteristics of male fantasies that have been imposed on her. That is to say, the speaker dismantles the hierarchal effects of aspects and beliefs, exposing the deceptive social norms within the alluring and restrictive realms of slumber, directing the artist who transforms women into their likeness to avert their gaze. Their longing and desire are now under her control:

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. (Boland, 1995)

In her poetry, Boland seeks to redefine the concept of domesticity by drawing parallels between the violence experienced by women in their homes and the violence inflicted upon them in the public realm, both socially and politically. In her poem "Domestic Violence," Boland portrays the domestic environment as fraught with turmoil, emphasizing the conflict with the nation as the central theme of the entire collection. She endeavors to connect the personal and public spheres, illustrating the domestic strife rooted in the home alongside the distant reverberations of a horrific war occurring beyond its walls. Boland reflects on the challenges of establishing a private life and family within a household where the small television broadcasts "grey and greyer tears / and killings, killings, killings / and moonlight-colored funerals" (Boland, 1995, p. 69).

Eventually, the narrator in "Domestic Violence" inquires her circumstances, repeatedly asking, "what else could we have done?" (Boland, 1995). Helen Kidd articulates that the notion of a house or home is dependent on the types of domestic silence that exist within both the physical home and the broader concept of home as a nation. She states: "Once the silence and (long) sufferings of colonization are brought to light, gender issues, along with the institution of home that is supported by these, which also relies on naturalized concealments—these continue to disrupt the narratives surrounding home, nation, and history" (Kidd, 2003).

III. CONCLUSION

Boland's poetry provides a fertile platform for examining the intricacies of women's lives and the socio-political environments they navigate, whether it be through her exploration of gender, power, or national identity. Boland's poetry has the intersections between literature, feminism, and societal transformation. It represents a promising endeavor that enhances the readers' comprehension of Boland's impact on feminist literary discourse.

Boland revolutionizes and reenvision spaces like the home environment, the natural realm, and historical scenery to empower women's stories and viewpoints, which can provide significant revelations into her feminist poetry. Her utilization of language, imagery, and symbolism within these settings, leads to obtaining a sophisticated comprehension of how Boland shapes her feminist ideals and confronts conventional gender norms and national traditions. It is an endeavor to transcend the boundaries of tradition that are imposed on Irish society in general and Irish women in particular. Aiming at going beyond the limits of a specific place, time, and social norms Boland tends to create new identity formation, vision, and reality for the Irish individual outside his/her national sphere.

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