Boland and Yeats: Poetical Irish Dialogues

Boland e Yeats: Diálogos poéticos irlandeses

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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