



PROJECT MUSE®

Contemporary Irish Women Poets

Lucy Collins

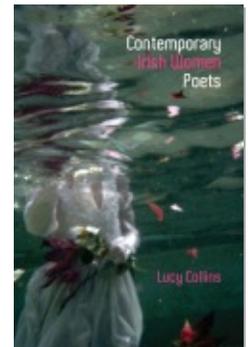
Published by Liverpool University Press

Collins, Lucy.

Contemporary Irish Women Poets: Memory and Estrangement.

Liverpool University Press, 2015.

Project MUSE.muse.jhu.edu/book/72667.



➔ For additional information about this book

<https://muse.jhu.edu/book/72667>

I

Concepts

CHAPTER ONE

Lost Lands

The Creation of Memory in the Poetry of Eavan Boland

The importance of a specifically Irish identity is central both to the critical trajectory Eavan Boland has traced for herself as a poet and to the way in which her work has been received and read. Boland's earliest investigations of the process of identity formation are shaped by her awareness of the concept of nation as foundational to her sense of self. An important facet of these explorations is Boland's perception of the exclusion of Irish women from the political and the cultural history of their nation. Her work registers the desire to draw attention to this act of exclusion and to the sense of loss it has created for later generations of women. Estranged from the national narrative of the past, women create alternative ways of articulating their relationship to history, both individually and collectively. Implicated in this project is Boland's presentation of her own experience as an Irish woman, and more specifically as an Irish woman writer. In her writing the relationship between creativity and literary tradition assumes an enduring importance.¹

The concept of memory has been crucial to Boland's developing political thought for many years; it is with reference to memory that the interwoven states of private and public in her work must be problematized. This dynamic highlights the importance of gender to larger debates on memory, as Marianne Hirsch and Valerie Smith have indicated: 'What a culture remembers and what it chooses to forget are intricately bound up with issues of power and hegemony, and thus with gender.'² As well as providing inspiration for Boland's work, the process of memory is reflected upon directly: as Catherine Kilcoyne has suggested, her oeuvre constitutes 'a critique of memory as poetic,

linguistic device'.³ As this chapter will argue, Boland first privileges the personal significance of memory before placing remembrance and memorialization at the centre of a larger debate on the limits of a national tradition. This progression is not a naturally evolving one, however, but rather a strategic reinforcement of the validity of lived experience as a foundation for cultural authority; it is Boland's early estrangement that legitimizes her continued identification with a marginalized position in spite of her creative and critical reputation. As a young child Boland was brought to live in London, and was educated there and later in New York before returning to Dublin to complete her school and university education. These London years, though representing a brief period in Boland's biography, are portrayed as formative of the child's sense of self and therefore significant for Boland's developing identity as a poet. This early experience of difference is linked to the poet's later preoccupation with cultural estrangement, and her determination to explore it in her work. The complex relationship between personal memory and intellectual exploration shapes this discussion of the poetry.

The Spaces of Memory: Creating Childhood

The urban environment as both historical entity and life experience has exerted an important influence on the writing of poetry in the modern period. The city is a space of acknowledged heterogeneity, and London, at the time that Boland experienced it, presented a geographically extensive and historically rich environment. It was also a city in a state of profound transition, owing to the period of reconstruction that followed the end of the Second World War.⁴ Though the damage left parts of London derelict, these were years of high employment and comparative prosperity. The large-scale immigration that was a feature of the post-war decade was beginning, yet the child of Boland's prose and poetry remains remote from these contexts, seeing the experience in deeply personal terms.⁵ Living at the Irish Embassy, Boland was at once sheltered from the normal life of the post-war capital and continually reminded of the significance of its political relationships. The cultural differences that she senses have a striking effect on her both at the time and later. Indeed, her memories of London are shaped by the feeling of strangeness, of otherness, that permeated her childhood as a whole; this is understood by Boland primarily in linguistic terms – 'I had moved around as a child. I had lived in other cities. I had learned no dialect of belonging; I knew no idiom of attachment to place or its purpose.'⁶

Such disengagement from the living environment can create obstacles to the formation of normal human bonds, but it can prompt more positive processes too, including a reflective, observant position. For James Conlon, 'the bountiful confusion of reality' that the city condenses into one place leads the mind to rethink its assumptions, to philosophize.⁷ So it may be that the confusion that Boland experiences as a child – this lack of an adequate 'dialect' or 'idiom' – is as much a feature of the life of the city itself as it is a circumstance of her sudden uprooting from her birthplace. That memory rewrites the text of the past to produce a form of representation that can be 'read' suggests that it offers an essential ordering process for the adult poet, who can use her formal skill to retain disorder within her method.⁸ The function of memory as representation reinforces both its conceptual richness and its strategic purpose for the poet. It permits her not only to reflect on the processes of identity formation but to change them at will. For this reason Boland's use of personal memories in her writing helps to consolidate her critical identity at the same time as it permits her to remain in a productively marginal position in relation to Ireland's poetic tradition.⁹

A crucial aspect in the literary construction of London for Boland is her use of the dynamics of place as a way of debating ideas of inclusion and exclusion. By invoking both the physical spaces of the city and the interior of the house in which she lived during her time in the British capital, Boland gives visible contours to the process of identity formation:

My childhood, certainly in the London years, wasn't happy. That isn't to say it wasn't a privileged childhood, because it was. But it was fictional and desolate in an odd way ... there was this huge, compartmentalised house. And I felt thoroughly displaced in it. I never believed I belonged there. I never felt it was my home. Some of the feelings I recognise as having migrated into themes I keep going back to – exile, types of estrangement, a relation to objects – began there.¹⁰

Since concepts of home, in particular of the unified family, have been central to the construction of an Irish national imaginary, it is noteworthy that Boland expresses her unease through the metaphor of the compartmentalized house. Her sense of displacement is double: the family of the diplomat is identifiably Irish, yet always at a distance from Ireland, and within this complex dynamic Boland is further displaced by the lack of permanence and intimacy of this life. To call her childhood 'fictional' is to draw attention to its creative potential; rather than these memories 'migrating' into her poetry, therefore, they are formed by her adult preoccupations. Although English experiences and education have

had an impact on the poet – and are seen to shape the day-to-day lives of her child protagonists – they are used in her work to confirm the sense of cultural difference that lies at the core of the perceiving self, and that later validates Boland's persistent, yet questioning, location of herself in an Irish cultural tradition. Though recapturing the instinctive experiences of childhood and youth, these processes of remembering form part of a body of work with distinct aesthetic and political aims.

The city space remains a significant dimension of Boland's handling of these ideas. Roland Barthes figures it as the place where we come face to face with difference: 'The city, essentially and semantically, is the place of our meeting with the other.'¹¹ This 'other' is both conceptual and individual, encompassing the notion of difference as well as the living being that embodies these characteristics, a combined identity that will later prove important to the poet in her use of particularized female experience to interrogate larger political positions. The city provides a locus for the arriving stranger, historically and metaphorically, creating an environment in which the other can be accommodated without either forced assimilation or an exaggerated sense of difference. The inclusive dimension of this experience is reinforced by Boland's diplomatic background; in personal terms, though, the transition is far from seamless. 'Hospitality means the right of a stranger not to be treated in a hostile manner by another upon his arrival on the other's territory', writes Kant,¹² yet if, as Derrida argues, crossing the threshold is always a transgressive step, then both visitor and guest experience this sense of transgression when moving into a space in which they do not (yet) belong.¹³ Such a contravention may have been liberating for Boland, at least in retrospect, offering her new ways of construing the poetic subject. It also forms the basis of the ethical turn in her work: her use of these memories suggests an enduring concern with otherness and exclusion that contextualizes her later interrogation of the place of women within the Irish literary tradition:

Writing about the lost, the voiceless, the silent. And exploring my relation to them. And – more dangerous still – feeling my way into the powerlessness of an experience through the power of expressing it. This wasn't an area of artistic experiment. It was an area of ethical imagination, where you had to be sure, every step of the way – every word and every line – that it was good faith and good poetry.¹⁴

In contrast to Emmanuel Levinas, for whom the ethical challenge is presented to the spontaneous, free subject,¹⁵ Boland's moral questioning

is part of a continuous process, one that is designed to broaden the intellectual and historical contexts of her work as well as to refine her ideas through evolving forms of reflection and representation. Boland's repeated return to key memories and themes in both her poetry and her prose works reveals the deliberate nature of her construction of ethical and political questions.

This questioning has its roots in an emotional response to place, however, and the continuing importance of spatial metaphor in Boland's work draws attention to the problematic dynamic of incorporation and expulsion that is closely linked to the issue of hospitality.¹⁶ For Levinas, the ethics of proximity invoke the interpersonal dimension of hospitality, the need for it to exist on an experiential rather than a conceptual level, and in Boland's case the state of difference invoked by her London childhood creates a productive tension not only for her personal creativity but also for her understanding of ideas of community and belonging. In this way, Boland's repeated return to these scenes of childhood insists on the all-encompassing character of this dynamic for ethical debates in both gendered and post-colonial settings. This form of memory reflects the prevailing power structures, and Boland's concern for the exclusion of women from cultural and political history in Ireland reveals her awareness of the effect this exclusion has on all acts of representation: it is thus 'neither marginal nor specialist' but 'concerns all of poetry, all that leads into it in the past and everywhere it is going in the future'.¹⁷ As identity is shaped both by individual experience and by a web of social and behavioural expectations, so public narratives reveal the texture of private experience. The importance of both personal and collective identities in the formation of memory is demonstrated in the subtle ways in which Boland investigates the relationship between subjective perception and shared understanding, as well as in her contemplation of the lives of earlier generations.

The yearning for origins is also the yearning for self-knowledge. As the child grows and questions, so she increasingly turns to the past, in search of a crucial dimension of her identity which remains occluded in her present life. This need to construct the self, not from an ongoing series of life experiences but from a barely reclaimable past, and from the personal histories of one's parents and grandparents, is itself a source of challenging inspiration for Boland. Especially important is her formation of the female continuum that will later provide her with a personally and politically sustaining narrative. She begins her autobiographical work, *Object Lessons: The Life of the Woman and the Poet in Our Time*

(1996), not with the story of her own experiences, but instead those of her grandmother, acknowledging the complex temporality of identity formation, especially in contexts of hardship and dramatic social change. While the urge to form a unified self – and the political significance of this urge – appears to motivate much of Boland's writing, it is always overshadowed by doubts; doubts that reflect both the impossibility of the coherent subject and the limited perspectives that the attempt to construct it might perpetuate. This dynamic is important to an understanding of Boland's conviction that her writing should connect with the lives of other women, of both past and future generations. The presence of these women – who are at once 'other' to Boland's sense of selfhood and indicative of the importance of relational understanding – becomes a central part of the poet's own narrative, with an ambiguity suggestive of Julia Kristeva's exploration of the foreign:

With the Freudian notion of the unconscious the involution of the strange in the psyche loses its pathological aspect and integrates within the assumed unity of human beings an otherness that is both biological and symbolic and becomes an integral part of the same. ... Uncanny, foreignness is within us: we are our own foreigners, we are divided.¹⁸

The incorporation of otherness within the self testifies to the permeability of the subject and to the resultant complexity of the singular being. Boland's interest in the hidden lives of her female relatives, and the composite nature of women's identity more generally, is matched by a growing awareness of the self-division that is an inevitable part of this identity. In this way, her representation of childhood instincts prefigures her later interrogation of gendered positions. Boland's mother, however, chose to distance herself from her past:

Unlike most people, she treated the past as an opportunity for forgetfulness rather than a source of definition. She had no photographs, not one, of herself as a child. No copybooks from school. No pantomime tickets. She talked of her childhood rarely and without sentiment. Almost, it seemed, without interest ... Childhood was a place of unreadable signposts and overgrown roads. The language could not be retrieved.¹⁹

By contrast, Boland's own early experiences of estrangement must be both expressed and interiorized in order that they can be transformed into conscious political thought. London plays an important role in the psychic development of the biographical and, indeed, fictional self for Boland in the way that it propels the speaker towards identification with her Irish past yet impedes her from embracing this past without

equivocation. We know that the process of childhood identification with Ireland has been substituted by the poet's actual adult life in Dublin, and that Boland's relationship to London is shaped by the temporary nature of her time there. The brevity of this experience is at odds with its creative significance in expressing the personal condition of estrangement that, for Boland, provides the foundation for her investigation of the marginalization of women in modern Irish culture. For the attentive reader of Boland's work the repeated tropes of her London childhood will become more resonant as the poet's parallel exploration of the fate of women in Irish history proceeds.

Remembering the Self: Text and Image

In chronological terms, the first consideration of Boland's childhood outside Ireland occurs in the poem 'After a Childhood away from Ireland' in the 'Domestic Interiors' sequence from *Night Feed* (1982). In *The Journey and Other Poems* (1986) these experiences begin to exert an important shaping force: 'I Remember' is the first poem in this collection and gives an important indication of how the space of the volume will be defined. Light is an immediate consideration here and it will become a significant compositional technique for Boland, both at this stage and later. In this poem light is used to aestheticize the past, extending the imagery of painting outwards from the mother's easel to encompass the entire scene. This scheme reveals not only the resonance of childhood memories but also their susceptibility to conscious manipulation. The influence of life beyond the windows – 'the iron railings and the ruined evenings of / bombed-out, post-war London' (J 9) – is slight, though its mood is crucial to the heightened sensual awareness of the anxious girl. Boland has often referred to the significance of her mother's artistic practice to her, both as a child and as a young writer, and here this world of making creates alternative energies to the post-war city in which it takes place.²⁰ Identity is under construction in this poem: the face on the canvas is only a partial representation of the sitter who arrived and left, and its 'scattered fractions' testify not only to the fact that the representation is incomplete but to the conviction that selfhood is inherently fragmented. This fragmentation is further realized in the alienation of the child:

and I remember, I remember

I was the interloper who knows both love and fear,
who comes near and draws back, who feels nothing

beyond the need to touch, to handle, to dismantle it,
 the mystery; and how in the morning when I came down –
 a nine-year-old in high, fawn socks –
 the room had been shocked into a glacier
 of cotton sheets thrown over the almond
 and vanilla silk of the French Empire chairs.²¹

(J 9)

The 'I' of this poem, as in so many poems by Boland, is a layered and complex position. In the present, the 'I' is the adult recalling the past, so that the act is not just one of remembering but of creating out of that past – an imagined synthesis of the present consciousness of the speaker and her earlier experiencing self. In the process the contexts of feeling become unclear: 'I *was* the interloper who *knows*' the 'voice' of the poem asserts. It is not the child who feels the need to dismantle the mystery, however, but the adult, the poet: yet both are caught between the need to live with ambiguities and the equal need to expose and understand them. At the moment of writing it seems that Boland uncovers a fruitful trope for the collision of cultural and personal divisions: the Irish girl in London, privileged yet excluded; one country recovering from the trauma of war and another building its identity independent of this harrowing experience. In this opening poem the focus is on the room – the locus of creativity where the making of meaning is central, both in the London of the poet's childhood and in the memory of that place. This containment facilitates not only the impression of separation from the culture in which the family now lives but also the distillation of the image: the self-conscious transformation of life into art. These moments of stillness become touchstones in Boland's art, beside which the broader experiences of childhood are situated with care.

Both at that time and today London differs from Dublin in key political and aesthetic respects: it is large enough for the act of defamiliarization to take place, and is often termed the 'strange city' in Boland's work. Despite its familiarity over the creative span of Boland's career, it retains this strangeness and the child's experiences there are intense, at once alienating and formative. They are resonant because they are 'other' to her Irish identity, but they are carefully particularized and recurring memories that mark moments of self-realization, even symbolic meaning. In 'The Source', the initial search for where a river rises yields instead an altogether different starting point: the image of a mirror in which a kneeling child is shown discovering a coil of her mother's hair,

saved carefully in a box. For the poet this image is both inescapable and compelling: it marks a surprising release of the past, freighted with private meaning and with suggestions of lost youth and beauty. Yet in conjuring up this image the poet also contemplates the gap between it and the real circumstances of the life it reveals, and considers the impossibility of rendering existence in simplified forms:

As the light goes,
I hold in my hand the coarse weight and
hopeless safe-keeping

and there comes back to me
the adult language for mystery:

Maybe. Nearly. It could almost be.

(TV 37)

This ‘hopeless safe-keeping’ speaks of the pointlessness of holding on to the past, when its meanings remain so elusive.²² Yet it may also suggest that the attentiveness of the discovering imagination is capable of raising to significance the least promising of objects or narratives. It is this capability that convinces Boland of the importance of retrieving the lost narratives of women of preceding generations, and her return to the life and memories of her mother is a testament to her sense of herself as facilitating this important act of witness – what Boland would call ‘that shining I. That obdurate and central witness of the poet’.²³

In spite, or perhaps because, of the complexity of the child’s response to her early displacement, London itself would be a site of awakening for Boland, though not always consciously so. ‘The Briar Rose’ evokes a child on the brink of knowledge. The link that is made here – and repeated in the poem ‘The Women’ which follows it – is between the flower and the crêpe-de-Chine of sophisticated underwear. It is the presence of the roses in a Dublin garden that evokes sudden and vivid memory within the speaker:

I could be
the child I was, opening

a bedroom door
on Irish whiskey, lipstick,
an empty glass,
oyster crepe-de-Chine

and closing it without knowing why.

(J 26)

These are suggestive details, yet the child is not consciously aware of the sexual intimacy that they imply, but rather of the sense of a private space into which she has strayed. In this case the child's innocence includes unconscious impressions, which are vital in testing the boundaries not only of childhood and adult experience but also of innocence and sophistication, tradition and modernity. Even the speaker's continuity with her own past is conditional – 'I *could be* / the child I was' (my italics); she acknowledges the past as the matter of both memory and invention. While subjective experience is significant here (only the child glimpses the scene, though the adult reader interprets it) there is always the sense in Boland's work of larger currents just beneath the surface of the text. The deliberate simplicity of the poem – its short lines, two balanced sentences, its refusal to complicate the moment of discovery – maintains the directness of the child's observation and openness to experience. Yet it also displays its own artifice: the isolation of the phrase 'I could be' tantalizes the reader and its 'oyster crepe-de-Chine' is too painterly for this naive form.

The negotiation between the desire to record loss and estrangement, and the level of poetic self-possession required to express it, has always been a delicate process for Boland. In her London poems the layering of adult and child selves and the repetition of key images and experiences from childhood are vital to the realization of the child's experience, while permitting the synthesizing consciousness of the adult poet a significant presence. This is important, not only in drawing attention to the sophisticated framing of experience that is so central to the relationship between Boland's work in poetry and prose, but in emphasizing the temporal nature of this understanding. Temporality is an important aspect of Boland's construction of herself as a poet: she positions herself as at once part of a continuum (of carefully documented experiences) and excluded from one (the continuum of valid poetic tradition). So the passage of time exerts a significant force not only on how the individual poet situates herself but also on how these very problematic traditions are constructed and reconstructed in contemporaneous critical narratives. It is possible to construe questions of belonging and estrangement, of hospitality and exclusion, in these terms too, as Clive Barnett writes:

what is most at issue in the encounter between Levinas and Derrida is the temporality of intersubjective relations. Figures of temporality – of memory, inheritance, anticipation and surprise – are central to the alternative, non-hierarchical evaluation of the value of proximity and distance that emerges in this line of thought.²⁴

The complex relationship between self and other in Boland's work emphasizes at once the sameness and the difference that the singular subject, located in time, can encompass. It also creates an important sense of proximity to past generations and a commitment to understand and represent them with care. The past and history have a complex relationship with one another, as Boland herself points out, and the divergence of lived experience from the narrative that records it is a significant preoccupation for the poet. Maurice Halbwachs draws attention to the break in continuity 'between the society reading this history and the group in the past who acted in or witnessed the events', and it is this break that Boland seeks to address.²⁵ Her reclamation of individual figures from the past suggests that proximity to key experiences alters the ethics of self-expression: the memory of participants is an important way in which an alternative understanding of events may be reached. Memory is inevitably selective, where history attempts coherent analysis: 'memory is by nature multiple and yet specific; collective, plural, and yet individual', writes Pierre Nora, 'history belongs to everyone and to no one'.²⁶ For Boland, history belongs more specifically to those with continued political agency.²⁷ Her earliest realization of this occurs at the interface of British and Irish histories, where the narrative of empire predominates. Later, it is the foundation of the Irish state and its shaping of social values that is the focus of her attention. Both the complexity and the fragility of personal recollection offers a counterbalance to the certainties of a male-dominated republic, and a poetics of reflection emerges in place of fixed narratives of national identity.

If the city is a bearer of history, and a showcase for the achievements of a culture, it is unsurprising that London should express the contrast between Britain and Ireland in pronounced ways. Boland – as the daughter of a diplomat – is an invited guest, not an unexpected visitor, so her presence does not threaten to destabilize the self-possession that renders Britain capable of hospitable action. The historical relationship between the two islands is a vexed one, however, and these tensions underpin Boland's growing determination to bring to light the limited perspectives that certain historical representations encode. Maps hold a particular fascination for Boland in this respect. They are pictorial references to the historical terms in which the world is seen yet they give only a partial view and a static one, refuting the dynamic nature of the world and its relationships. The linen map that features at the opening of 'In Which the Ancient History I Learn is Not My Own' has this air of permanence, yet seems newly fragile – it is 'cracked in

places' and suspended by knotted cotton (*TV* 28). The colours of empire are faded out, indicative both of the length of time these assumptions of power have been in circulation and of the fact that they may now be diminishing – a view supported by intervening events which have helped to shape the vantage point of the poet. The temporal aspect of the relationships on the map is marked by the speaker's own conviction that Ireland is 'farther away every year', as its significance in her life is overtaken by her English education and her absorption of English history. That 'God's grace' should shape history suggests that a divine wish determines the acquisition of power, and that a moral imperative underpins the fate of nations. Ireland's ancient history cannot take the place of Classical narrative and thus it cannot be reclaimed: no Oracle exists to validate its meanings and the fatedness of its events. The Roman Empire is described as the greatest 'until our time of course', noting the satisfaction of British confidence, though the date named in the poem, 1952, reveals just how precarious that self-confidence is. The child's need to repeat the place names of her own country, to use language to bring this experience to reality and to locate her home with its sensory identity – the flight of steps to the door and the scented lilac tree – is noteworthy. But this yearning for what is almost lost is challenged by the final mention of the Oracle, and the ambiguity of its messages to those who travelled far to consult it. Even as Boland draws out the emotional intensity of lost experiences, she doubts the certainties that such emotions may suggest, both for the child-subject and for her readers. By leaving the interpretation of these elements open, she avoids over-determining the interpretation of the past, while continuing to affirm the importance of the act of remembering itself.

The inevitable entanglement between emotional states and political realities, and the tensions inherent in this relationship, will be an enduring concern for Boland. Her contemplation of subjectivity is always inflected by an awareness of the complex cultural forces shaping the self, and by a sense of the contingent nature of self-realization. In this respect the intersection of spatial and temporal concerns help to shape both the experiencing and the writing self. This is especially evident in 'The Game' from *Outside History* (1990). The perspective on the world outside is important in drawing attention to the forces brought to bear on the child. Important too is the need to stress cultural particularity – the English spring that by inference is so different from the Irish one. The poem begins as the fog is clearing, and the vision of the speaker asserts itself, and with this, her ability to see herself and to locate herself in a

sensory world: 'I was a child in a north-facing bedroom in / a strange country' (OH 16).²⁸ The observations of the child are acute, yet her vision is doubly limited by circumstance – when the fog has cleared, the railings become visible, both containing the child and protecting her. At night what she hears is 'quarrelling and taffeta creaking and the clattering / of queens and aces on the inlaid card table': tensions made manifest in discord, in the strain of social fabric and the anxieties of risk-taking. These sounds, like the visual image of the late winter fog, are strangely timeless: it is as though the child is trapped, not just in a place, but also in a time not her own. These effects combine to create an atmosphere of foreboding; a stillness that heightens the child's feeling of entrapment. The illusion of flight that the wakeful child conjures up is her way of escaping these fears, yet she has to return from this clear created space, stimulating to the senses and without imaginative boundaries; she must go back to the sharply delineated world of her London home, full of edges and surfaces, with the cards of chance scattered. This is a life of hierarchy and social order: the King is prayed for in chapel, a king notably missing from the pack of cards that provides a recurring trope in the poem. Likewise the sculpted archangels are part of the structure of the church, at once transcendent and trapped in space and time. Yet this is a poem that shows the will and imagination that are necessary for the child herself to transcend circumstance, and to gain perspective on the life she is living. And its impulse matches the collection from which it is taken: *Outside History* explores the exclusion of women from recorded history, while at the same time suggesting both the imaginative freedom that this exclusion might take and the freshness of perspective open to a poet such as Boland who is free from some of the weight of established narrative.

Boland herself notes the difficulties in her writing process in the early 1990s. In spite of increasing metrical skill on her part, she 'lost command' of her working methods and began to work in circular ways, endlessly rewriting poems.²⁹ Yet this creative disturbance may have been the direct result of a newly emerging voice in her poetry and a growing confidence in her formal powers: 'I was always a hand-to-mouth technician and command of the line was never exactly mine'; without such command, 'I don't think you have confidence that you can put together the poem you want in the voice you want'.³⁰ Her sense of speaking clearly, as though for the first time, emerges decisively in the decades that followed as does her awareness that those women who did live and write before her have their own distinct understanding of

these creative challenges. The subjectivity that we encounter in Boland's poems through the nineties is an increasingly complex one, and its relationship to its 'others' is deliberately unfixed. Though much of the material of Boland's work from *Night Feed* (1982) onward can be linked to biographical detail, there is no transparent connection between the life of the poet and the position of the speaker in her poems. Anne Fogarty has problematized 'the assumption that the voice of the lyric poem is coterminous with the poet's all-informing subjectivity', arguing instead that Boland's speakers combine aspects of both subject and object.³¹ In this scheme the voice bridges the gap between self and other: it 'renders audible, but never pretends to embody or comprehensively envision' the experience of another.³² Earlier, Catriona Clutterbuck had noted that Boland's 'ideology of estrangement is paradoxically present in the very language of "solidarity" that is used by the poem's politically capable speakers',³³ so that an underlying detachment persists, and is cultivated in sophisticated ways, even when the broad thrust of the work affirms strong female connection.³⁴

Many exiles, as Derrida argues, see language as 'their ultimate homeland',³⁵ but for Boland this position is complicated. The language with which she identifies is Hiberno-English, expressive of her own experience and noticeably different from the language of her London years:

Language. At first this was what I lacked. Not just the historic speech of the country. I lacked that too, but so did others. This was a deeper loss; I returned to find that my vocabulary of belonging was missing. The street names, the meeting places – it was not just that I did not know them. It was something more. I had never known them. I had lost not only a place but the past that goes with it and, with it, the clues from which to construct my present self.³⁶

Yet the loss of language is not a personal one only: language itself is already compromised by a history that records the decline of Irish and its superimposition by English. The loss that Boland experiences as a child, therefore, is recognized by her adult self as indicative of the larger losses of the Irish, and more specifically of the Irish woman, in history. The third section of the volume *The Journey and Other Poems* (1986) contains two poems on school experiences in London, modelled closely on material that Boland recalls ten years later in *Object Lessons* (1996). One locates itself clearly as 'An Irish Childhood in England: 1951'. Language is the first consideration in this poem, and it will be the last. It begins with the 'bickering of vowels' heard on London

buses, the important auditory shift that the child's relocation from Dublin to London occasions. It is part of a strange sensory landscape – the glimpse of the navy-skirted ticket collector, the taste of the 'ration-book pudding', the sound of English songs. The child's awareness of difference is limited, however; she suffers from 'some malaise / of love for what I'd never known I had' (*J* 50). The temporary nature of human perception becomes important here. The moment of recollection extends to encompass the present – the child becomes the mother, caught in a passing reverie. 'We are what we have chosen' marks the power of individual decision-making, yet it remains a question, and the powerlessness of the child's perspective re-emerges. The elliptical structure of the poem is important here. The digression prompted by memory is reprised in another return to the conditions of the poet's London childhood:

Did I choose to? –

[...]

let the world I knew become the space
 between the words that I had by heart
 and all the other speech that always was
 becoming the language of the country that I
 came to in nineteen-fifty-one

(*J* 50)

The relationship between remembered experience and its representation in language is addressed here in complex terms, deliberately made convoluted by the turn of the line, the passage of poetic time, and the variable interpretations it generates. The poem addresses the varieties of representation itself – the difference between words known 'by heart' and the practical evolution of lived language. In doing so it hints too at the historical loss of the Irish language and traditions in favour of English, the language of modernization, of commerce, and of international literary representation. Yet the lost world of the speaker's Irish childhood is also 'the space / between the words' – what is ultimately incapable of representation. England becomes no more than a record of loss, in a poetic move that makes the 'freckled six-year-old' indicative of a culture that must see its neighbour as a corrective to its own limitations. This corrective is placed finally in the mouth of the teacher, rectifying the speaker's grammar, so a Hibernicism becomes wrong, and the need to abandon the language of the Irish past is emphasized.

Without the language of the past, how can its experiences be rendered with honesty and exactness? Much of Boland's developing

style as a poet, and as an essayist and memoirist, reveals the inevitable self-consciousness of language use, the extent to which language cannot 'match' the world it interprets but creates a unique world, a world of the imagination that shares characteristics with the lived past but is not the same as it. 'Fond Memory' inhabits some of this same territory. Again it begins in the past, in a setting of styleless uniformity, 'a school where all the children wore darned worsted' (*J* 52). Though the speaker is part of this anonymous scene, she is separated, in thought and syntax, from the rest: she too 'ate rationed food' and 'played English games', a description setting her apart from the rest, and one that echoes the old distinctions of cultural nationalism. History, it seems, is slanted in favour of the English but poetry is suggestive of more neutral positions – 'measure' and 'complexity'. In opposition to these considered processes is placed the speaker's father and his rendition of the 'slow lilt' of Tom Moore. But this happens in the margins of the child's experience, only occasionally, and 'at a piano pushed into a corner of the playroom' (*J* 52). The apparent return to cultural innocence seems at first to hint at the sentimental nature of Moore's work, but the speaker is brought close to tears not by the easy emotions that her father's performance evokes, but by the cigarette smoke drifting up from between his fingers. Nostalgia is troubled by modernity, though this may be an adult construct: as Boland would later write, 'it never occurred to me that eventually the power and insistence of a national tradition would offer me only a new way of not belonging'.³⁷

'Let Me Repeat Myself': Later Sequences

The preoccupation with childhood experience confirms the pivotal role that memory will play in the formation of Boland's poetic and critical persona. Her repeated return to the landscape of loss, exemplified in London's post-war strangeness, indicates her early imaginative grasp of the combined effects of individual experience and cultural distinctions in shaping the self as writer. More importantly, in this case, it revealed the resonance of particular tropes and images in recapturing the personal and historical past, and inaugurated Boland's practice of reiterating these images in the course of her creative life. She intends this act of creative return to disclose the past to present readers – not only the past of Irish history but also the past of her own texts. Her desire to create a space in literary tradition for those hitherto excluded from it also remains

a strong one. For Clair Wills this is a questionable aim: she argues that a more fundamental critique of the relationship between private experience and the dominant tradition is warranted; inclusivity is not in itself sufficient.³⁸ Yet though Boland seeks to articulate the kinds of experience elided by narrative history, she wishes to retain this flawed version; the gap between present and past must remain, even as it is imaginatively bridged:

The past – in its silence and inconvenient completeness – should not be remade. It should not be open to version-making. That is what history is. The past is not a version of events. It is a record of reality. For that reason, if we are to be true to the experience of a people, the past must remain the past. It must remain in the suffering, powerless place it surely was and is. Let me repeat myself. The relation between the past and history – that awkward, charged, and sometimes mysterious distance – should be a crucial care of postcolonial studies.³⁹

This view of history as a fixed entity has important ramifications for how Boland's poetry is read, not least because of the tension that emerges between the 'facts' of the past and the aesthetic success of their rendering. Her strategy of repetition has divided critics: some believing it a necessary means to highlight the injustices of the past; others judging it evidence of Boland's incapacity to evolve as a poet, either formally or thematically. *The Lost Land*, published in 1998, was the collection that crystallized these critical differences. Appearing less than three years after *Object Lessons*, *The Lost Land* returned to the themes and images of *Outside History* (1990) and *In a Time of Violence* (1994) to reinforce the rejection of exclusionary mechanisms in national and cultural history; it did so by adopting many of the same aesthetic strategies of Boland's recent prose work – repeated images and phrases, declarative modes and the use of sequences and circular narrative patterns. Its polarization of critics indicated the extent to which these strategies, far from being universally judged intellectually demanding and politically necessary, were often dismissed as limiting or indulgent. Katie Conboy, writing in *Poetry Ireland Review*, reinforces this view:

Even when [Boland] tries to accomplish something new with her material, she continually echoes her own earlier subjects and styles. The images of wounding and scarring, of heroism and its discontents – the themes of poetic surrogacy, of recovering 'what we lost', of divided languages and loyalties – have already been so thoroughly explored in both her poetry and her prose that, for her loyal readership, these poems read almost like a parody of her earlier work.⁴⁰

For better or worse, *The Lost Land* indicates clearly Boland's conviction that the literature of political confrontation requires a style of relentless reinforcement. This, as the volume's title suggests, is a new aesthetic territory formed from old, and the deliberate invocation of geographical metaphors here will come to dominate Boland's later poetry. Her aim, as the form of *Object Lessons* suggests, is the integration of specific memories within larger political and personal constructs: 'the lost land is not a place that can be subdivided into history, or love, or memory'.⁴¹ The representation of childhood estrangement in earlier poems can therefore be seen as a necessary precursor to its realization as a link between the personal and the political, and to the acknowledgment that political awareness must have a counterpart in instinct and experience. Yet in this scheme the landscape of Boland's personal and creative past also becomes fixed, closing down productive self-reflection and creative dialogue. From this unmoving position the vivid recollections of childhood can take on a filmic quality, their predetermined course confirming, rather than challenging, the reader's understanding of the role of memory here. Yet Boland herself refutes this impression by suggesting that even the familiar image has the power to elicit fresh meaning. 'Watching Old Movies as Though they were New' uses the grey and white half-tones of the old films to invoke the speaker's muted apprehension of her earlier life – as though the story they tell could only now be realized by the adult woman recalling them.⁴² Maturity can only be attained by confronting the question of identity, Boland seems to suggest here; likewise the transition towards a self-conscious creative act is a marker of artistic development.

What is most significant in *The Lost Land*, however, is the role of the sequence in reflecting the poet's own realization that the return to Ireland does not assuage, but instead deepens, the feelings of estrangement registered by the child in London. The dynamics of loss, around which the collection is shaped, express just this: that the growth to emotional maturity – and in this case to aesthetic achievement – involves the recognition that personal experiences of loss are indicative of the grief inherent in the human condition itself. Yet in Boland's understanding this realization is more complex: the extent to which cultural loss fuels her art, yet prevents its complete attainment, creates the unresolvable tension at its heart. Critical recognition is an important dimension of Boland's engagement with the national tradition, and is an integral part of the success of such an interaction: in order to redress the historical imbalance of power, the validity of her ideological and artistic position

must be agreed. Such an endorsement, however, inevitably reduces the emotional power of her appeal. In other words, the broader the support for Boland's ethical and artistic position, the less reason she has to continue advocating it.

These tensions are played out in the sequence of twelve poems with which *The Lost Land* opens. Titled 'Colony', this group traces the relationship between the geography of the past and the lives dramatized there. One text in the dozen refers explicitly to her childhood experience in London as formative of such an enquiry – that is 'A Habitable Grief'. By the time this poem is written Boland is sure of the resonance of these memories; rather than writing her way into meaning, she finds it already present in the moment of recall: 'Long ago / I was a child in a strange country: / / I was Irish in England. / / I learned a second language there' (LL 29). The fairy-tale construction of 'Long ago' reminds us that this is a story told before, and that its preliminary facts can now be presented without embellishment. This stylistic attenuation limits the emotional power of the material, however, and the painful process of acquiring a new language is diminished here: in 'Mise Eire' it struck readers forcibly but now it is a familiar trope.⁴³ The grief, the scar, the nation: all now constitute a familiar network of meaning in Boland's work and become, for the reader, a form of memory. Yet this is a deliberate strategy on Boland's part, giving her own texts the power of popular recall. 'A Habitable Grief' is in direct dialogue with 'Mise Eire' and the achievement of that earlier poem is made the greater by this recognition. The value of repetition, then, is not only to articulate the political position anew, but also to give her earlier poems an almost incantatory power. 'A Habitable Grief' confirms this emphasis: its incontrovertible statements concerning the past give way to awareness of the contingent relationship between language and experience; it is not the life lived but the life expressed that creates lasting dynamics of intellect and emotion:

A dialect in which
what had never been could still be found:

That infinite horizon. Always far
and impossible. That contrary passion
to be whole.

(LL 29)

The creative force of language is shown to extend into the past and future here, uncovering a history that never existed and projecting an unattainable desire. Conversely, though, the intertextuality that is now

part of Boland's practice reminds us that this has already happened, that new poetic forms will stage this 'far and impossible' state and render it no more attainable than before.

The sequence expresses this sense of duration, of living (and reading) through a series of historical circumstances that not only shape the creative sensibility but the literary culture of Boland's time. To open the sequence she returns to the darkness of seventeenth-century Ireland and to the decline of the Gaelic order.⁴⁴ Here she endorses the need for poetry to engage with the brutality of experience, rather than its metaphorical substance only. Cautioning the reader against believing poetry to be 'a gentle art', the speaker argues instead that it must confront the bitterness of personal suffering and cultural loss. The sequence as a whole does not engage long with this period of history but goes on to confront the mixedness of the colonial heritage: the next three poems use the image of Dublin Bay to express the links between the two islands in spatial terms and in doing so to signal the radical differences between these cultures. The harbour conveys the dichotomy of safety and risk; made 'by art and force', it reveals Boland to be increasingly attuned to the necessity of these two processes – acts of creation and discipline that both mirror historical circumstance and permit it to be rendered in good faith by the poet. The act of making is an important one: the harbour itself took more than 25 years to build and the stone used was locally quarried, emphasizing the materiality of Boland's use of history. The poem's neat four-line stanzas at first exemplify a carefully maintained order but this structure cannot contain the force for change: 'the Irish Sea rising / / and rising through a century of storms' (LL 14). Here the energies of revolution overtake the stanza break – an enjambment that once more subsides into regularity yet continues to shape the poem, together with the ships that remain beneath the water as 'slime weed and cold salt and rust' (LL 14). Declaring herself a citizen of Dublin, the speaker ends 'The Harbour' by recording the city's 'contradictions' and returns in 'Witness' to 'its old divisions' (LL 15). She again affirms herself as part of its compromised history, describing her speech acts as expressing both dispossessor and dispossessed. The form of the poem captures this doubleness – its stanza length reducing from six lines to four then to two. After its central acknowledgment of the divided self the poem builds again towards its six-line exploration of its own mixed language, alerting us to the power of this combined contraction and expansion in the construction of the poetic voice.

In 'Daughters of Colony', the harbour is again invoked and the solidity of the built environment is set against the mobile and ephemeral figures of the colonial women, whose faces are sheltered by hats 'made out of local straw' yet who remain entirely remote from their environment.

I see the darkness coming,
The absurd smallness of the handkerchiefs
they are waving
as the shore recedes.

I put my words between them
and the silence
the failing light has consigned them to

(LL 16)

The speaker has the benefit of hindsight; she situates the women within the larger trajectory of history, knowing that their fate is to leave Ireland and to be unremembered, thus twice removed from the national imaginary. The sea creates a perspectival instability though; for a moment it is difficult to discern what is moving and what is staying still and this means that both the poet and her subjects are temporarily past and present. Their shared contingency is the means by which Boland signals her affinity with them but also the way in which she ensures that she, as poet, remains the object of her own poem.

Another important space of memory that this sequence confronts is that of the city street. Throughout *Object Lessons* Dublin's geography, as well as its history, shapes the poet's treatment of the process and material of memory, and in these poems the city is also the locus of the political and military past – 'the long ships, the muskets and the burning domes' that the poet summons from history ('The Scar', LL 19). In some cases these are visionary moments: 'Suddenly, / without any warning, I can see them. / / They form slowly out of the twilight. / Their faces. Arms. Greatcoats. And tears' ('The Colonists', LL 25). In others, human figures are turned to stone, commemorating the past in the city's monuments. The dynamics here are very different: the ephemeral figures emerge and fade in the mind of the poet, whereas the statues testify to a version of history that privileges the heroic male past – 'a lost land of orators and pedestals' ('City of Shadows', LL 21) and then 'a street of statues: / iron orators and granite patriots. / Arms wide. Lips apart. Last words' ('Unheroic', LL 23). The key contrast here is not between the colonial and the national, between Ireland before and after independence, but between the fixed power structures of

history and the mobile figures of ordinary men and women: the man 'on the road from Youghal to Cahirmoyle' (*LL* 13), the speaker walking through 'City of Shadows' or bound for home. It is a contrast that evokes the dichotomy between the fixed forms of the printed text and the repeating images we find there.

The sequence continues to be an important dimension of Boland's recent work. *A Woman Without a Country*, published in 2014, has a title sequence of thirteen parts – seven poems and six prose 'lessons'. Again it revisits key tropes and stories from the past 30 years of her writing: her grandfather's life as a seaman; her grandmother's death in the National Maternity Hospital; her mother's marriage; Irish women born and made. The structure of the sequence charts a movement between poems that paradoxically calls attention to the difficulty in bridging these glimpsed encounters with the past. The prose lessons are condensed pieces exhibiting a characteristic combination of statement and question; they encapsulate Boland's desire to restate the details of her personal history at the same time as she questions its place in the larger cultural context.

The spaces of the past here move progressively from the experiential to the symbolic, while the idea of legacy informs the whole. 'Sea Change' questions the poet's inheritance from her grandfather: 'What did he leave me, my grandfather, / [...] / / With his roof of half-seen stars / His salty walls rising higher and higher / [...] / He built nothing that I could live in' (*WWC* 29). The importance of the habitable space, serving past, present and future is contrasted here to the mobility of the ocean and its ever-changing perspectives:

And no one lay at night
 Seeing these unfold in their minds with
 That instinct of amendment history allows
 Instead of memory.

(*WWC* 29)

The suggestion here that history is open to revision, in a way that memory cannot be, places the apparently fixed points of the national past in question. Yet the 'remembered hatreds' of the landscape and its buried dead are persistent in Boland's imagination, making her unable 'to bring land and ocean together' (*WWC* 29). It is the power of experiential memory that separates the generations here and that stimulates the prose reflection on her grandmother's life that follows. She died in 1909 at the age of 31 and the details on her death certificate form Lesson 2 of this sequence. Before that, though, the silence that surrounded her life is

contemplated in 'Art of Empire'. The end of empire is made possible by the contingent nature of memory: 'If what was not said was never seen / If what was never seen could not be known' (*WWC* 31). Acts of witness are conditional here. The course of history is changed, it seems, by the deliberate diversion of memory and the silencing of speech.

There are images to be gleaned from these fractured histories, though, and these combine those already familiar from Boland's earlier writings and the new poems to which we bear witness for the first time as we read. The late nineteenth-century photograph compels the grandmother not only to silence but also to stillness. For once the compulsion of history ('our old villain') is not to blame; instead it is the photographer himself, 'muttering under black cloth' (*WWC* 32). Increasingly in this sequence it is not the narrative of history that excludes marginal experience but the specific acts of representation that fix the past: the carved figurehead; the 'figures in glass cases'; the 'whole woman' as a copperplate figure of destitution. Boland's endless return to the processes of representation, then, may be seen as a desire to keep the past always in motion, always in productive exchange with the present.

Boland's achievement as a poet is closely linked to her realization of these complex relationships and to her awareness of the necessity for continuous re-engagement with the processes of memory. Her representation of childhood experience is an important means of linking personal and cultural memories and thus of transforming a remembered experience into an interrogation of the nature of memory itself. Halfway through a recent essay on the woman as citizen-poet, Boland states that her real subject is reading: 'How we read a poem. How we fail to read it. Beyond that, my subject is the moral responsibility of the poetry reader.'⁴⁵ The significance of the reader's position – and its close proximity to that of the poet – are essential aspects of Boland's poetic imaginary, reflecting the importance of relationships in all aspects of her personal and creative life. The personal past comes to embody the precarious nature of both emotional attachment and the intellectual processes needed to interpret it. It is a testament also to the interwoven conditions of remembering and being remembered which are crucial to how Eavan Boland is positioned in Irish poetry criticism today.

Notes

- 1 Jody Allen Randolph, in the introduction to her study of Boland, explores the significance of the poet's work – and her critical reception – in setting the agenda for many of the debates on Irish women's poetry in the past 30 years. See Jody

- Allen Randolph, *Eavan Boland* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press; Cork: Cork University Press, 2014), pp. xv–xxxii.
- 2 Marianne Hirsch and Valerie Smith, 'Feminism and Cultural Memory: An Introduction', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 28.1 (2002), p. 15.
 - 3 Catherine Kilcoyne, 'Eavan Boland and Strategic Memory', *Nordic Irish Studies* 6 (2007), p. 90.
 - 4 The profound changes in Britain's social and cultural life in the immediate post-war period can be traced in the diverse responses of writers living and working in the capital during these years, from texts that reflect anxiety at the loss of political power to those exploring avant-garde modes to engage directly with the processes of cultural change. See Alistair Davies and Alan Sinfield (eds), *British Culture of the Postwar: An Introduction to Literature and Society, 1945–1999* (London: Routledge, 2000) and Robert Hewison, *In Anger: Culture in the Cold War 1945–60* (London: Methuen, 1988).
 - 5 Boland's isolation from the more dynamic aspects of London's culture during this period is due both to her geographical location and her social position within the city. She lived at the Irish embassy in Grosvenor Place and went to a convent school in Hampstead and in this way she remained largely insulated from the lives of the less privileged. Just as the embassy itself is Irish 'territory', so Boland's experiences are markedly different from those of other London citizens. I am grateful to Jody Allen Randolph for clarifying some details concerning Boland's early years.
 - 6 Eavan Boland, *A Journey with Two Maps: Becoming a Woman Poet* (Manchester: Carcanet, 2011), p. 48.
 - 7 James Conlon, 'Cities and the Place of Philosophy', in Sharon M. Meagher (ed.), *Philosophy and the City: Classic to Contemporary Writings* (New York: State University of New York Press), p. 203.
 - 8 For further elucidation of the transition from memory as reproduction to memory as representation, see Richard Terdiman, *Present Past: Modernity and the Memory Crisis* (Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell University Press, 1993).
 - 9 Catherine Kilcoyne has suggested that Boland's movement from margin to mainstream has the potential to threaten the poetic authority she derives from being outside Ireland's (male-dominated) poetic tradition. Kilcoyne argues that memories of Boland's own past exclusions allow her continued identification with a marginal position. Kilcoyne, 'Eavan Boland and Strategic Memory', p. 90.
 - 10 Jody Allen Randolph, 'Interview with Eavan Boland', *Irish University Review* 23.1 (Spring/Summer, 1993), p. 117.
 - 11 Roland Barthes, 'Semiology and the Urban', in Mark Gottdreiner and Alexandros P. Logapoulos (eds), *The City and the Sign* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), p. 96.
 - 12 Immanuel Kant, *Towards Perpetual Peace' and Other Writings on Politics, Peace and History*, trans. D. L. Colclasure (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 2007), p. 82.
 - 13 Jacques Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, trans. Rachel Bowlby (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), p. 75.
 - 14 Jody Allen Randolph, 'Interview with Eavan Boland', p. 129.
 - 15 Simon Critchley, *Ethics-Politics-Subjectivity: Essays on Derrida, Levinas and Contemporary French Thought* (London and New York: Verso, 1999), p. 63.
 - 16 Clive Barnett discusses the ways in which Derrida problematizes this dynamic

- and Levinas’s treatment of it – in his essay, ‘Ways of Relating: Hospitality and the Acknowledgement of Otherness’, *Progress in Human Geography* 29.1 (2005), pp. 5–21. The presence of intention means that acts of hospitality are often ones of incorporation, designed to eliminate the specific otherness of the visitor. A failure on the part of a visitor to enact such a smoothing out of identity difference will result in rejection.
- 17 Eavan Boland, *Object Lessons: The Life of the Woman and the Poet in Our Time* (London: Vintage, 1995), p. 234.
 - 18 Julia Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), p. 181.
 - 19 Eavan Boland, *Object Lessons*, p. 101.
 - 20 Eavan Boland’s mother was the artist Frances Kelly. Born in Drogheda, Co. Louth, in 1908, Kelly studied at the Metropolitan School of Art in Dublin and later with Léopold Survage in Paris. Critically acclaimed from an early stage, her first solo exhibition in 1934 was praised for the ‘delicate, subtle observation of her work’. Later, her role as ambassador’s wife took precedence over her career as an artist. She exhibited no work after 1954 (*Dictionary of Irish Biography*).
 - 21 Boland recalls learning the Thomas Hood poem: ‘I remember, I remember / The house where I was born’ (*Object Lessons*, p. 38). Here she reprises part of the key phrase, replacing the comforting sense of origin with a recognition of displacement and loss. The poem also echoes Philip Larkin’s ‘I Remember, I Remember’ and its articulation of the emptiness of the past.
 - 22 It exemplifies Catherine Kilcoyne’s assertion that ‘the poetic originality of Boland’s use of memory is the gap that it creates ... between the sought after memory and the same memory unattained, the memory which is desired but always out of reach’. Kilcoyne, ‘Eavan Boland and Strategic Memory’, p. 90.
 - 23 Boland, *Journey with Two Maps*, p. 20.
 - 24 Barnett, ‘Ways of Relating’, p. 6.
 - 25 Maurice Halbwachs, *The Collective Memory*, trans. Francis J. Ditter and Vida Yazdi Ditter (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1980), p. 79.
 - 26 Pierre Nora, ‘Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*’, *Representations* 26 (Spring 1989).
 - 27 Sam Wineburg’s distinction between memory as ‘knowing the past using the ordinary sense-making capacities’ and history as ‘knowing it as the result of disciplined habits of mind’ adds support to the linking of the writing of history with specific agency. See Sam Wineburg, *Historical Thinking and Other Unnatural Acts: Charting the Future of Teaching the Past* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2001), p. 248.
 - 28 This material is elaborated upon in *Object Lessons* (1995), pp. 38–9: the vista was almost always, that first winter anyway, of yellow fog. If the windows were open, it drifted smokily at the sill. If the doors were open and you went into the street, you entered a muddled and frightening mime. Passersby were gagged in white handkerchiefs. The lights of buses loomed up suddenly. All I knew of the country was this city; all I knew of this city was its fog ... It was March, my first one in England. A swell of grass, a sort of hummock, ran the length of the window and beyond. It had been planted with crocuses, purple, white, yellow. I may not have seen them before; I had certainly never seen so many. There and then I appropriated the English spring.

- 29 Allen Randolph, 'Interview with Eavan Boland', p. 128.
- 30 *Ibid.*, p. 127.
- 31 Anne Fogarty, "'I was a voice": Orality and Silence in the Poetry of Eavan Boland', in Elke D'hoker, Raphael Ingelbien and Hedwig Schwall (eds), *Irish Women Writers: New Critical Perspectives* (Berne: Peter Lang, 2010), p. 10.
- 32 *Ibid.*, p. 18.
- 33 Cattriona Clutterbuck, 'Irish Critical Responses to Self-representation in Eavan Boland, 1987–1995', *Colby Quarterly* 35.4 (1999), p. 278.
- 34 Boland herself has acknowledged the self-consciousness of the poet, of the need 'to create an artifice to replicate the way I built my thoughts' (*Journey with Two Maps*, pp. 19–20) so that the immediacy of experience can be combined with a measure of objectivity.
- 35 Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, p. 89.
- 36 Boland, *Object Lessons*, pp. 55–6.
- 37 Boland, *Journey with Two Maps*, p. 51.
- 38 Clair Wills, *Improprieties: Politics and Sexuality in Northern Irish Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 59–60.
- 39 Eavan Boland, 'Daughters of Colony: A Personal Interpretation of the Place of Gender Issues in the Postcolonial Interpretation of Irish Literature', *Éire-Ireland: A Journal of Irish Studies* 32.2/3 (Summer/Autumn 1997), p. 13.
- 40 Katie Conboy, 'Lays of the Land'. Review of *The Lost Land* by Eavan Boland, and *Meadowlands* by Louise Glück, *Poetry Ireland Review* 60 (Spring 1999), p. 97.
- 41 Eavan Boland, quoted on cover of *The Lost Land* (Manchester: Carcanet, 1998).
- 42 Though this poem evokes the years Boland spent in America as a child, many of the techniques of recollection are similar to those describing her London experience.
- 43 'Mise Éire', from *The Journey and Other Poems*, ends: 'a new language / is a kind of scar / and heals after a while / into a passable imitation / of what went before' (J 11).
- 44 The poem was inspired by the life of Dáibhi Ó Bruadair, who was born in 1625 and, though an accomplished poet, ended his life as an impoverished labourer. Ó Bruadair was an inspiration to Michael Harnett, whose translations of his work were published by Gallery Press in 1985. See Jody Allen Randolph, *Eavan Boland*, p. 136.
- 45 Eavan Boland, 'A Woman Without a Country: A Detail', *PN Review* 41.2 (November/December 2014), p. 49. This issue of *PN Review* features a celebration of Boland's work, edited by Jody Allen Randolph and Michael Schmidt. Contributors include Mark Doty, Lorna Goodison, Máighréad Medbh and Paula Meehan.