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"This sudden Irish fury": beleaguered spaces in Eavan Boland's *Domestic Violence*

Bertrand Rouby

- 1 Since the 1960s, many are the poets who have tackled the period known as The Troubles, though few with as much emphasis on domesticity as Eavan Boland. Together with Seamus Heaney, Derek Mahon and Michael Longley, she is one of a handful of Irish writers who have managed to address the issue of domestic conflicts with an equally concise and vivid style of writing, using tropes related to personal and shared experience¹. Drawing on metaphors and metonymies from everyday life and her immediate surroundings, Boland eschews the pitfalls of oblique or circuitous writing, even though her use of personal imagery makes for an indirect approach. Accordingly, most of her poems focus on the intersection of personal and political, with intimate memories revealing collective traumas.
- 2 As such, the title of her collection *Domestic Violence* (Boland 2007) is self-explanatory, with the Northern Ireland conflict being likened to a case of physical abuse between partners. The tone, as can be expected from a collection published in 2007, is not urgent or impassioned. Writing at a time when IRA decommissioning was complete² and plans for a devolved government were well underway, Eavan Boland reflects on the aftermath of the Troubles and their imprint on the collective psyche. Examining the 1970s with the benefit of hindsight, she adopts a tone which is not so much one of moral outrage as, to borrow from Wordsworth, "emotion recollected in tranquillity" (Wordsworth 111). Partly for this reason, *Domestic Violence* was quickly heralded as one of Boland's most significant achievements in the way that it traces the subtle delineations of public and private, social and domestic, both in physical and mental spaces.

Between political and personal: Irish poetry and the Ulster conflict

- 3 Any investigation into the tensions between public and domestic inevitably involves issues of history and gender. In these respects, Eavan Boland holds a unique position as one of a few poets whose literary output spans the entire period of the Troubles and, even more significantly, as the leading female poet of her country. Should one attempt to trace a genealogy of Irish poets, as Frank Ormsby did in "Ulster Poetry and the Troubles", one would identify three successive stages. First, Louis MacNeice addressed Irish history in his *Autumn Journal* through childhood memories, with deep personal undertones:

And I remember, when I was little, the fear
Banded among the servants
That Casement would land at the pier (MacNeice 131).

- 4 For all that, MacNeice favours a broad perspective—this is not History seen through the small end of the telescope; the fears perceived as a child soon give way to a bitter examination of MacNeice's Irish legacy in 1939, at a time when he had been living in England for twenty-two years. Mention should also be made of John Hewitt, whose work examines common legacy through personal history. *The Bloody Brae*, a dramatic poem written in 1936, broadcast in 1954 and performed on stage in 1957, is about the massacre of Roman Catholics by Cromwellian soldiers. Although Hewitt's starting point is obviously less intimate than MacNeice's, his approach also consists in examining a shared inheritance through personal recollections: "This is my country; my grandfather came here / and raised his walls and fenced the tangled waste" (Hewitt 407).
- 5 The late 1960s was a seminal period for Irish poetry as it saw the blossoming of a new generation led by Seamus Heaney, Michael Longley and Derek Mahon. That this coincided with the beginning of the Troubles, notably the civil rights march on Londonderry in 1968 and the Battle of the Bogside in 1969, reveals the close-knit interconnection between poetics and politics in Ireland at the time. In *North* (Heaney 49-91), probably the most famous collection about the Troubles, Seamus Heaney takes an autobiographical stance to discuss the impacts of the conflict on memory and sensibility. Heaney focuses on *loci memoriae* where private and public intersect, such as "Bogland" (Heaney 17), both a place laden with personal associations and one where the preservation of History is made palpable. What was only hinted at in MacNeice's *Autumn Journal* becomes a full-fledged reflection on how a violent background can shape the author's relation to language. This is mostly apparent in the concluding sequence, "Singing School," which examines how poetic language bears the traces of cultural alienation: "I tried to write about the sycamores / And innovated a South Derry rhyme / With *hushed* and *lulled* full chimes for *pushed* and *pulled*" (Heaney 82).
- 6 Thirdly, Ulster poets such as Ciaran Carson, Paul Muldoon, or Tom Paulin, all of whom published their first major collections in the late 1970s, displayed an unprecedented tonal diversity ranging from sympathy to gallows humour when addressing the Ulster conflict. In "The More a Man Has the More a Man Wants," a driver setting up a booby trap is described in macabre detail:

Once they collect his smithereens
he doesn't quite add up.

They're shy of a foot, and a calf
which stems
from his left shoe like a severely
pruned-back shrub (Muldoon 93).

- 7 Whether with causticity or compassion, the interlacing of historical violence and private memory is a thread running through Irish poetry from the late 1960s to the end of the Troubles, with specific emphasis on questions of place and memory. Unlike Heaney, however, these writers focus on streets and other public spaces rather than home and family.
- 8 Eavan Boland's first collection, *23 Poems*, coincided with the outbreak of the Troubles in 1968. She gradually turned away from Greek mythology and focused increasingly on Ireland, exploring the layering of history and unrecorded experience: "I ought to tell their story and I will" (Boland 2008, 52); "I am writing / a woman out of legend" (Boland 2008, 237). Born and raised in Dublin, hers is admittedly not a first-hand experience of the conflict. Yet, bearing in mind that most Ulster poets left Belfast before the beginning of the Troubles to pursue their studies in Dublin—where Boland made friends with Longley and Mahon—the question of legitimacy appears secondary to that of mutual influence and emulation when addressing the Ulster conflict.
- 9 Leafing through later collections like *In a Time of Violence* or *The Lost Land*, both published in the 1990s, one would be forgiven for thinking that Boland speaks from a time capsule set in the 1970s. At first sight, her approach reminds one of Heaney's insofar as she captures the reflection and distortions of History through the lens of personal recollection, with a similar interest in language. Sound and texture, so important in the works of Heaney and Muldoon, seem however to be downplayed in favour of semantic content and invocation:
all of it
ending up almost every evening
inside our speech—
coast canal ocean river stream and now mother" (Boland 2007, 36).
- 10 The poem begins as a recollection of the speaker's mother, so that the words "our speech" refer just as much to the language of Irish women as to the Irish brogue, a language presented as recitation and litany by way of parataxis. Boland's unique perspective is not just a matter of historical circumstance; it is closely linked to her position as Ireland's foremost female poet.

"Domestic violence"—metaphor or metonymy?

- 11 Issues of gender are indeed central to Boland's poetry as she has consistently explored the role of women in History and their understated legacy. Such is the case in "Inheritance," a poem tracing
a history of want and women who struggled
to make the nothing which was all they had
into something they could leave behind (Boland 2007, 39).
- 12 As Michaela Schrage-Früh writes, Boland "places the Irish situation in a metaphorical relationship to a woman's life" (Schrage-Früh 30), thus connecting political conflict with all cases of violence against women. Womanhood in Ireland has long been coterminous with confinement, whether in the domestic sphere—with an emphasis on

self-sacrifice also shared with Victorian England, as evidenced in Coventry Patmore's "The Angel in the House"—or in institutions like the Magdalene Asylums providing for "fallen" women. No wonder then that metaphors involving domestic life and handicraft should frequently surface in Boland's poetry: spinning and weaving act both as references to the daily occupations of numerous Irish women and a textile metaphor common to many women writers from George Eliot to Toni Morrison. "Silenced" broaches the theme of weaving, with a reference to the rape of Philomela (Boland 2007, 21), while "Irish Interior," after an illustration published in 1888, contrasts the image of a woman spinning with a troubled political background (Boland 2007, 25). In both poems, the numerous caesuras created by full stops impart an impression of confinement:

Afterwards, she determined to tell a story
another way. She began a tapestry.
She gathered skeins, colors.
She started weaving. ("Silenced")

The woman sits and spins. She makes no sound.
The man behind her stands by the door.
There is always this: a background, a foreground.
This much we know. They do not want to be here.
The year is 1890. The inks have long since dried. ("Irish Interior")

- 13 As portrayed in Boland's poetry, there is however more to home life than just routine and domestic chores. Drawing the line between indoors and outdoors is a major theme in her recent collections and entails questions of preservation and identity, especially as the onset of the Troubles meant that public spaces were no longer safe. Such is the disruptive power of war that it turns what was a place of subjection into a possible shelter. Safeguarding an intimate, cocoon-like space in the face of adversity thus involves a redefinition of home as a place of refuge rather than constraint. Throughout *Domestic Violence*, Boland shows how conflicts are likely to encroach on the private sphere and contaminate the family unit of husband and wife, most tellingly in the eponymous poem staging a couple overhearing their neighbours quarrelling while pictures of battle and bloodshed are shown on television (Boland 2007, 13-15).
- 14 The association of private quarrels and public conflicts is made in two ways, one metonymic and one metaphorical. The former represents the land as an extension of the family unit, while the latter describes the warring factions as a feuding couple. Like any war fought on shared ground, the Irish conflict is seen as a family quarrel, a trope originating in Greek tragedy but possibly more blatant in a place where society was organised around kinship groups. Consequently, the perception of the British Isles, or of Republicans and Unionists, as a discordant couple was not new when Boland published *Domestic Violence*. A precedent was made by Seamus Heaney in "Act of Union" (Heaney 74-75), a poem presenting a cartographic vision of Britain and Ireland as husband and wife, with Ireland resolutely turning her back on Britain ("Your back is a firm line of eastern coast"). British coastlines are pictured as the outstretched limbs of an assertive male conqueror ("I am still imperially / Male"), while Ireland is the passive sufferer ("your tracked / And stretchmarked body"). Interestingly, Britain is personified and made to speak through prosopopoeial—not an easy choice for an Ulster poet to make—in alternating tones of guilt and wanton cruelty. The "union" is imposed on a reticent partner and results in images of sexual violence ("a gash breaking open the ferny bed") and unwanted pregnancy. In the second stanza, an apparently forced

intercourse ("leaving you with the pain, / The rending process in the colony, / The battering ram") spawns a "fifth column" whose fists already "beat / at [the addressee's] borders." In those lines, Heaney portrays the legacy of Anglo-Irish conflicts in terms of infiltration, with a possible reference to the collusion between British forces and loyalists. In its latter half, the poem displays an aggressive outlook culminating in a harrowing vision of delivery as a process leaving the female body "raw, like opened ground, again." As to poetic form, "Act of Union" is divided into two parts of fourteen lines each with two significantly shorter lines on either side of the break. Each part reads like a truncated English sonnet, with three quatrains of alternating rhymes and a couplet, a neat separation which belies the "union" promised in the title. Far from consenting to the "act of union," the two partners are locked in frozen antagonism, their positions no more likely to change than the contours of either island on the map.

- 15 Like Heaney, Boland also tackles the issue of mapping and conquest. Map-making is a recurrent motif in recent Irish poetry as barricades had turned Belfast into a city of labyrinthine complexity, both in terms of cartography and allegiances cutting across families and severing time-honoured loyalties. In "Becoming The Hand of John Speed," the speaker literally retraces the English cartographer's gesture of delineation and appropriation: "I take down my book and then I am / the agile mapping hand of John Speed / making *The Kingdom of Ireland, 1612*" (Boland 2007, 64). The same concern had been voiced thirteen years earlier in "That the Science of Cartography is Limited" (Boland 2008, 204), a poem about the "famine roads" which starving Irishmen were forced to build. Their labour resulted in a skein of criss-crossing lines leading nowhere, all of which were left out of official maps. In both poems, the speaker aims at reclaiming past history, adding a third dimension to an otherwise flat representation. Much in the same way as the anthropomorphic depiction offered by Heaney, the maps described in Boland's poems present a two-dimensional picture, all hills flattened, all voices silenced: "Forests collapse, flattening all their wolves"; "its gannets, gulls, cormorants all stopped / from flying by their own silhouettes" (Boland 2007, 64-65). Accordingly, the land is pictured as a female body in a supine position, ready for the conqueror's sword or the proverbially mightier pen—"ready and flat and yearning to be claimed" (Boland 2007, 65). As in Heaney's poetry, mapping the land in anatomical terms is perceived as the first example of conquests breaking into women's privacy.
- 16 As one would expect from a collection entitled *Domestic Violence*, Boland perceives Irish conflicts in terms of sexual assault and rape. That vision is merely suggested in the opening poem, with its quarrelling couple living next door to the speaker—

Their voices high, sharp:
nothing is ever entirely
right in the lives of those who love each other (Boland 2007, 13)

- 17 —and expanded in the next one, "How the Dance Came to the City." Barring the title, the pronoun "it" used in the opening lines might very well refer to war: "It came with the scarlet tunics and rowel spurs," taking "the same route as / the blight or with the nightly sweats that said *fever*" (Boland 2007, 16). The formal dances brought from overseas by "a sail riding the empire-blue haze" (Boland 2007, 16) end up in the picture of a naked girl being reflected in a man's sword, "her face flush and wide-eyed" (Boland 2007, 17). While the speaker moves from the collective space of the ballroom to the private world of the bedrooms, such emblems as "the boots, the gloves, the whips, the flash of the cuirasses" (Boland 2007, 16) imply that civilization and violence are contiguous, not mutually exclusive, and that military presence results in violence

against women. Boland bridges national politics and private concerns by means of metonymic extension more than metaphorical mapping, as her poems show how political tensions reverberate in the domestic sphere. Internal strife is seen as, quite literally, an invasion of privacy, best conveyed by images of burglary and rape.

Redefining the kitchen as a place of refuge

- 18 No wonder then that Eavan Boland should adopt an entirely different standpoint than the aggressively male stance voiced in "Act of Union." In *Domestic Violence* as in earlier collections, there is a clear attempt at delineating a space of refuge and protection safe from encroachment. Throughout her books, Boland has consistently sought to mark out the places assigned to women, thereby giving voice to a community of oppressed subjects. The situation of women in Ireland is illustrated through spatial imagery and more precisely the kitchen and the garden, quite literally the *topoi* of women's subjection and resistance. These spaces are thus placed at the crossroads of alienation and self-expression. In *Domestic Violence*, closed spaces are portrayed with various emblems of domesticity including plates, spinning wheels and, in "An Elegy for my Mother in Which She Scarcely Appears" (Boland 2007, 33-34), a singing kettle, a pair of brass firedogs and a wooden clotheshorse. All these items are linked to animal life, the singing kettle being overtly compared to birdsong, and point to a cyclical time pattern governed by the persistence of rituals as opposed to the chaotic effects of war. Each item is introduced by the phrase "there was," painting an intentionally drab picture of a toned-down world, as if etched in aquatint.
- 19 In the formal arrangement of the eponymous "Domestic Violence" (Boland 2007, 13-15), inside and outside seem to be clearly separated, each space being confined within a numbered section of the text. The first stanza mentions a couple moving to the suburbs where they can overhear their neighbours quarrelling. In the next stanza, reports of the Troubles are brought by the media, while the last two stanzas meditate on success and failure, both in personal and collective ways. At least on the surface, such a neat layout suggests a similar division in terms of physical space, thus offering an easy retreat into sheltered territory. That territory, in this as in several earlier poems by Boland, is the kitchen where an ironical speaker ponders on her own anonymity and marginalization. Once a place of confinement and subjection, the kitchen is turned into a meditative space offering respite, if only for a while, from the vagaries of history: "if I can be safe in / the weak spring light in that kitchen" (Boland 2007, 14). However, this feeling is tempered by the conditional clause and the run-on line foregrounding the adjective "weak," thus creating a sense of transience and insecurity. The resulting effect is one of fragile intimacy in the aftermath of the Troubles.
- 20 Precarious though it may be, the kitchen is portrayed as a possible haven from the intrusive violence of war. By virtue of synecdoche, kitchens and food appear in other poems via the recurrent motif of plates, mugs and cooking utensils, all of which are linked to various forms of sustenance, whether material or cultural. In several poems, the circular shape of plates and dishes prompts an escape from historical violence into the realm of myth. They present an alternative to linear time, either by opening a space of timeless contemplation or by creating narrative shortcuts. The alienating effects of history seem to be suspended at a time, the 1970s, when they were mainly present in the form of news reports on recent killings. The "blue plate" described in "How It Was

Once in Our Country" offers such an escape into an unchanging realm of "blueness"—merely looking at the plate becomes an immersive experience whereby one can delve into a "borderless / existence" (Boland 2007, 18). The recurrent sea imagery ("ocean-blue," "under-wave blue," "the mouth / of a harbor") conveys an oceanic feeling which, in Freudian theory, points to the preservation of an earlier stage of development. In that case, nourishment should be understood as a form of psychic compensation for the feeling of dispossession which the political situation generates. While political concerns and wars initially seem far removed from the sheer "blueness" described in the poem, they resurface on three occasions—in the title, implying that the words "our country" belong to a distant past ("once"), in the final line about a mermaid who "stayed down there to escape the screams," and implicitly in the enjambment of "borderless / existence" hinting at the border conflict. If the idyllic blue plate conjures up images of a world utterly untouched by war, the speaker also warns against the dangers of escapism, including the type of refuge sought in the mythical imagination.

- 21 A rather different shade of blue appears in the poem "In Season": the "odd azure of / apple blossom" (Boland 2007, 52), not the sheer blueness of "How It Was Once in Our Country." The poem depicts the silent drama of two painted figures chasing each other along the surface of the white and blue mug. The two protagonists are seen to pursue each other endlessly, a figure of recurrence which differs from the more tragic background mentioned in the collection. Here again, crockery and, by extension, the protected world of the kitchen, seems to promise an escape from linear time and wars. As part of a supposedly sheltered domestic space defined by "the cotton edge of the curtains" (Boland 2007, 52), plates and mugs are invested with significance, provided there is someone to uncover the narrative woven into the picture. For all that, there is no ignoring the fact that the place is marked by a history of confinement and subjection. Besides, the mention of blue earthenware is of historical import: Delftware made its way into Irish homes thanks to the first immigrant potters from the Low Countries, before being manufactured on native soil once clay deposits were found near Carrickfergus. Thus, blueness is the locus where history and myth intersect, a pigment fraught with historical undertones and yet perceived as the colour of permanence. This extends to the place where such utensils are kept, the kitchen, a world of timeless rituals and looming hostilities.

"(Statistics on the radio)"

- 22 "Domestic Violence" makes it clear however that safe dichotomies are quickly undermined by the intrusive presence of the media reporting on the Troubles and their relentless death tolls. Although the mention of the conflict is textually confined within the second part of the poem, their distant rumble erupts into the private sphere when the Irish landscapes are "made to shiver / into our ancient twelve by fifteen television" (Boland 2007, 13-14). While the section opens with long clauses and soft sibilants seeming to dilute the impact of the conflict ("In that season suddenly our island / Broke out its old sores for all to see") and continues with a steady iambic rhythm ("the salt horizons and the Dublin hills, / the rivers, table mountains, Viking marshes / we thought we knew"), these devices are quickly replaced by a series of plosives ("which gave them back as gray and grayer tears") and the pounding trochaic metre of "killings, killings, killings." The media become a substitute for invading paramilitary

groups, their deceptive power enhanced by the poor quality of the pictures. Meanwhile, the symmetric use of the possessive pronoun ("our island"; "our [...] television"), far from conveying a sense of domesticity, tends to break down the barriers between near and far and to strengthen the synecdochic association of national and intimate. Even though the poem is neatly divided into four distinct parts, with the outbreak of the Troubles safely confined in the second section, the overlapping of personal and political undercuts any attempt to draw neat distinctions. Indeed, the third section concludes on a woman asking her husband the simple rhetorical question "*what else could we have done?*" (Boland 2007, 14), a stark reminder of how personal and collective quandaries can meet. Twenty years earlier, Boland had voiced a similar concern in "Naoise at Four," a poem set in a suburban kitchen where the television screen acts as a liminal space and a fragile interface: "nightly on our screen / [...] wounds open" (Boland 2008, 52). The presence of the television, substituting for open hostilities, makes the public-private boundary a very delicate one as it brings news of "this sudden Irish fury" (Boland 2008, 52).

- 23 Elsewhere in *Domestic Violence*, references are also made to the intrusive voice of the radio. In "Silenced," the mythical rape of Philomel by Tereus is brought in conjunction with an "unregarded story of violation" told by the radio (Boland 2007, 21). The substitution of "violation" for "rape" allows to stitch together myth and politics, with the added implication that Irish history is a tapestry silently woven by the dispossessed. The speaker insists that the radio "was there in the room as well" (Boland 2008, 52): as often happens in Boland's poetry, the use of place deixis contributes to blurring the lines between inside and outside. As the reports on the radio are "unregarded," the onus of telling the unacknowledged history of suffering women is displaced onto the writer. Radio is presented as a more ambiguous medium than television as it gives either a fully articulated narrative or just a string of blunt "statistics": "That was the year the news was always bad / (statistics on the radio)" (Boland 2007, 22).
- 24 In an attempt to preserve the textual space from intruding voices, "statistics on the radio" are safely bracketed, just as war reports are never rendered through direct speech. For a point of comparison, in David Harsent's recent collection *Legion*, a series of war poems is interspersed with "Despatches" presented in italics and a disjointed form. By so doing, he achieves the same effect as John Dos Passos in *The Big Money*, with fragmented "newsreels" being read aloud by a disembodied voice. In Boland's work, the reader is presented with an image of conflict after it has been woven into a narrative and appropriated. She hardly ever confronts the reader with an unmediated picture of war; instead, the speaker recollects the disruptive power of war, which has been filtered by successive layers of memory.
- 25 In 2007, at a time when Ireland was celebrated for its new-found prosperity under the triumphant moniker "Celtic tiger," it may have been tempting to brush away recent history. Does the device of textual bracketing imply that it had finally become possible to look past the atrocities of recent battles? In "Silenced" as in several other poems by Boland, layout and punctuation stand in contradiction. Parenthetical remarks often make up single lines or even one-line stanzas, thus drawing attention to the margins of discourse. Bracketing should be understood as a strategy whereby the devastating effects of wars are contained, at least in the economy of the poem, and cut off from the main body of the text. A similar technique is used in "The Botanic Gardens," where

"guns on the pages of newspapers" are placed between dashes, giving tangible form to the statement made in the first line—"leaving aside dispute" (Boland 2007, 45). Like the suburban kitchens represented in her poems, Boland's gardens appear as uncertain shelters where violence is more likely to erupt than the poetic structure implies. The written page, not the garden, is probably the only place where strict lines can be drawn between home and war.

The horse in the garden

- 26 The realm of gardens and sheds is often treated as a protective space in Boland's earlier poems, at least in times of peace, not so much the *hortus conclusus* of Christian iconography as a space where rituals can be observed. With its imagery of natural growth and the attendant themes of weeding and seeding, the garden points to a cyclical time based on the predictable alternation of the seasons. It is, in Mircea Eliade's words, the consoling realm of mythical time as opposed to the terrors of History. Boland's gardens are inseparable from the liminal world of suburbia ("Domestic Violence," "Suburban Woman," "Falling Asleep to the Sound of Rain"), small towns and orderly lives, a world where "Everything seems near and purposeful. / And bright. And side by side" (Boland 2007, 56) and shoes are arranged "two by two" (Boland 2007, 56). In the latter poem, the garden points to "a kinder time" of "peaceful evenings," with several -ing forms ("getting sharper, growing older") laying emphasis on steady growth, unhampered by distant wars. Suburbia is depicted as a place of tacit endurance, free as it is from the urban guerrilla and the scarred countryside of "Domestic Violence" where

the rivers, table mountains, Viking marshes
we thought we knew
had been made to shiver (Boland 2007, 13).

- 27 In times of war, however, suburban gardens are also likely to reveal the "divisive violence and fragmented identity within the individual psyche" (Allen-Randolph, 8) and the "irruption of the uncanny into the familiar, well-defined, ordered world of suburbia" (Amiot). In her haunting poem "The War Horse" (Boland 2008, 39-40), Boland charts the approach of political violence through the image of a seemingly harmless horse, or so the speaker would like to believe, ambling past a private house at night. Soon, it appears that the horse has uprooted "a leaf of our laurel hedge," a traditional symbol of peace, a rose and a crocus described as "one of the screamless dead." As in Fuseli's *Nightmare*, the horse is an objective correlative of anxiety and a visible form for the uncanny, an association strengthened by the fact that horses are perceived as psychopomps in Celtic mythology. Over the course of the poem, the line between home and war becomes thinner, from a "line of defence" to "the subterfuge / of curtains." The brutalities of war contaminate perception, invading not just gardens and kitchens but language too. The "War Horse" really is a Trojan horse, ushering military tropes into the language of the poem.
- 28 War breaks into private gardens by means of language, as shown in "Suburban Woman" (Boland 2008, 63-65). In the fourth section, warlike metaphors and tropes infiltrate the language of the poem as the female character tries to find shelter. While her house is located "between a space of truce," equally distant from "town and country at each other's throat," she discovers that she is "caught in cross-fire" instead. Retreating in

her garden, she sees "veteran dead-nettles," roses "trenched in ransoms" and her own life falling "like military tribute or the tears / of shell-shocked men." A compromise is achieved in the final section when the kitchen-blind becomes "a white flag," here again between dashes. Yet, it is also stated that "no truce will heal" the survivors, the only safe place being the blank page bearing the symptoms of contemporary traumas. The traces and scars of recent history are bound to become part of psyche and language, leading the speaker of "Naoise at Four" to wonder how they will be assimilated, if ever:

And I despair of what perspective
On this sudden Irish fury
Will solve it to a folk memory (Boland 2008, 53).

- 29 History is thus woven into the palimpsest of mythology, with the figure of Naoise clearly referring to the Ulster cycle as the eponymous character was originally one of the sons of Uisneach and the lover of Deirdre, once prophesied to bring discord among the men of Ulster.

Archaeology and storytelling

- 30 Beyond garden fences, the entire Irish landscape appears to be in turmoil, echoing the "heaving province" mentioned by Heaney (Heaney 74). Like him, Boland draws on metaphors from geology to voice the essence of the land, one which remains slippery at best, relying as it does on clay, peat and soggy grounds. Like the amber mentioned in the poem of the same title, peat is a substance that both preserves and alters what it contains. Bog bodies, signs and artefacts are damaged or trapped in "a flawed translucence" (Boland 2007, 32), so that the land is like a palimpsest bearing the half-erased traces of a long-standing history. With the spatial and metaphorical shift from the kitchen to the garden, the line of tension no longer runs between inside and outside but stretches between surface and depth, raising questions of remembrance and storytelling. Yet amber, like other inner spaces, is vulnerable, its comforts only temporary at best, deceptive at worst. As implied by the recurrent use of "as if," "as though" and "seemed," any idea of permanence is but a wilful delusion, a theme echoed by Derek Mahon in his late collections where similar devices are used to sketch out a world of Heraclitean impermanence and Buddhist volatility.
- 31 Not just an invasive force pushing at the boundaries of domestic life, war also appears as a living creature stamping the ground, leaving an imprint for future generations to uncover. The archaeological metaphor developed in several poems draws on the very ground of Ireland, one in which damp and fog make for unstable footing. Archaeology is called an art, "not a science, / nor a search for the actual" (Boland 2007, 23), a perception which unsettles the grounding of authority and meaning. By exploring the unacknowledged strata of collective memory, the speakers of Boland's poems delineate a shifting territory reminiscent of Seamus Heaney's "opened ground" (Heaney 75). As shown in "The Tollund Man" (Heaney 31-32), with its allusions to Norse sacrificial rites and parallels with the Irish conflict, Heaney's opened ground is a place where ancient traumas may resurface, a fractured psychic space where repressed contents are exposed and threaten to destabilize established structures. Yet, for all the violent imagery contained in "The Tollund Man" and "Act of Union," it is also a place of negotiation, a ground for discussion between adverse parties. It is not merely the violence of war but also the act of ploughing which may result in "opened ground,"

hence a notion of fertility often discussed in Heaney's later poems. The Irish soil serves as a trope bringing together soil, whether tilled or excavated, and writing, with the furrows traced by the plough being equated with the lines written by the poet.

- 32 Like Heaney, Boland sees the Irish soil as a place of negotiation where a dubious inheritance is passed on. She mostly focuses on sutured spaces and battle-scarred areas, such as in the poem "Inheritance," where the speaker broods on how little she has "to leave behind, to [her] daughters" while raising issues of ownership and misappropriation: "the ground I stood on was never really mine" (Boland 2007, 39). The post-conflict territories mentioned in Boland's poems testify to a difficult healing process, and though she also resorts to metaphors drawn from archaeology, the emphasis lies on accommodation and transmission more than the shock of sudden disclosures.
- 33 "Wisdom," one of the poems included in the eponymous section of *Domestic Violence*, details an archaeological finding with dramatic enjambments bridging past and present, remote and familiar: "the sustenance and restitution / of who we were once," "the dust of everything / that had happened since" (Boland 2007, 23-24). The setting is both urban and intimate, with a strong hint that the ground is a figure for private memory ("digging up a city, my life"). Archaeology is called "an art of memory," which echoes the references to Mnemosyne, mother of the nine Muses, in "To Memory" (Boland 2007, 47-48). This cross-reference helps define two uses of memory—one, which could be termed "public" or "official," consisting in lists and catalogues while the other, more personal, is unified by the virtue of storytelling. Archaeology in Boland's country is not "a painstaking / catalog of parts and bone fragments" (Boland 2007, 23), nor is it "a whole inventory of elements and fixed entities" (Boland 2007, 48), which is hardly suited to a land best defined in terms of dampness and fog. Since the art of Memory is vested in the Muses, the poet acts as a mouthpiece for silenced histories. Reclaiming "the secret history of a place" (Boland 2007, 43), including post-conflict trauma and accounts of women who were denied a place in history, implies moving away from "statistics on the radio" (Boland 2007, 22) and weaving personal narratives.
- 34 An example of such a personal narrative is found in "Still Life," an ekphrastic poem written after a painting by William Harnett (Boland 2007, 19-20). Though not directly addressing the theme of war, "Still Life" illustrates how a violent history can break through the surface of aesthetic representation. In Harnett's work as in Boland's poem, a beggar woman from Clonakilty holds a shallow dish in one hand, a baby in another. The poem then moves on to discuss Harnett's career and achievements, briefly conjuring reminiscences of the narrator's own journey to Clonakilty before unexpectedly reverting to the initial picture, tersely adding between brackets that "the child, of course, was dead." The poem creates a dramatic shortcut from past to present and representation to reality, thus presenting the result of deprivation instead of holding it at arm's length. Here again, parentheses are used to foreground an aspect that might otherwise have appeared as a mere detail in the arrangement of the picture. Initially a flat, two-dimensional painting, the picture is given depth and substance by an added narrative. In that poem as in others, Boland does not so much graft a narrative onto flat images as uncover the backstory behind the picture. "Still Life" speaks about the "surfaces of things," telling a story of difficult containment and the possible overflow of repressed memories: "the surfaces of things / can barely hold in what is under them" (Boland 2007, 20). Indeed, in a land defined by "damp" (Boland

2007, 50), "fog" and "mist" (Boland 2007, 36), there is no such thing as watertight separations. No amount of barricading will do—inherited violence is always likely to resurface.

Imported or native?

- 35 There is nonetheless a measure of ambiguity as to the origin of violence, and whether it is imported or native. Heaney's "Act of Union" seems to locate the origin of the Troubles in the intervention of an imperial power and the partition of Ireland. In Boland's "Domestic Violence," an initial description of Ireland "[breaking] out its old sores" (Boland 2007, 13) would suggest that violence is endemic, lying dormant until it flares up in periodical outbursts—a family problem, as it were. On the other hand, "How the Dance Came to the City," which immediately follows "Domestic Violence," seems to state the contrary. Dances were imported along with "the boots, the gloves, the whips, the flash of the cuirasses," travelling "on the same route as / the blight and with the nightly sweats that said fever" (Boland 2007, 16). While the "blight" obviously refers to the failure of potato crops resulting in famine, "fever" is another word that defines Irish wars in Boland's poetry—a fever once imported into Ireland, in this case. "Fever" is mentioned as a label imposed from outside and involving images of contagion and ruptured tissues: "contagion waiting for us / at every turn" (Boland 2007, 73), "its skin a map of wounds, its history a treatise of infections" (Boland 2007, 51). However, it is also embraced as part of Irish identity: "Ours was a nation of fever" (Boland 2007, 73). Boland envisions violence as, originally, the result of an external agency breaking into a familiar space and, as History unfolds, an inherited pattern repeated by the next generations. Once assimilated, it becomes an atavistic trait, a half-buried impulse which may surface in the most familiar surroundings. As such, it is a feature that both defines and threatens domesticity.
- 36 Taken as *topoi* of domesticity, the two series of spatial metaphors used by Eavan Boland, kitchens on the one hand and fields and gardens on the other, help define two stages in the interplay of war and private life. From an external force breaking into domestic spaces, violence becomes an inherited tendency implanted in the soil, which makes it all the more likely to erupt within families. From the private garden in "The War Horse" to the layered townscape of "Wisdom," the references to the land construct a polarity of above and below rather than inside and outside. In both cases, Boland explores brittle surfaces and tell-tale indentations disclosing unheeded stories of violation. In terms of poetic form, the use of metonymy and synecdoche tends to ease out the tensions resulting from the use of self-contained stanzas and formal bracketing. Thus, the latent contradictions between public testimony and domestic recollection, craft and novelty, the fabulous and the familiar, find a formal resolution in the portrayal of metonymic spaces. By engaging with such liminal spaces and lines of tension, Eavan Boland manages to create the sense of a hard-earned truce or, at the very least, a difficult compromise best voiced in "Indoors":

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I have always wanted a world that is cured of the outdoors.

A household without gods.

Walls arriving, entrances taking shape, verticals meeting
horizontals: a *where* fetching a *now*. (Boland 2007, 51).

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NOTES

1. In this paper, the adjective "Irish" is used in a geographical sense.

2. In the words of John de Chastelain, who was responsible for overseeing the disarmament process, the last remaining weapons had been "put beyond use" two years earlier ("IRA arms decommissioned", *The Guardian*, 26 September 2005).

ABSTRACTS

In her collection *Domestic Violence*, Eavan Boland examines the resonance of public conflicts in the private sphere, with specific emphasis on the Troubles. The link between political and domestic is made through an image also present in Seamus Heaney's poetry, the antagonists as a feuding couple trying to negotiate a difficult truce. Building on that premise, Boland develops two series of images already contained in her previous work: kitchens and utensils, which symbolize a retreat or an escape from war into private spaces, and fields and gardens, which bear the traces of past conflicts. The former set of images elicits a vision of war pushing at the boundaries of domestic life, hence an inside-outside dichotomy. The latter, which is rooted in Irish soil, implies a polarity of above and below, preservation and revival. This double vision also corresponds to a historical sequence of invasion and assimilation, so that any outburst of violence is perceived as a resurgence of ingrained atavistic tendencies. In either case, Boland depicts an intimacy under siege, suggesting that the only place where violence can be contained is the written page.

Dans son recueil *Domestic Violence*, Eavan Boland examine les échos des combats civils dans la sphère privée, en s'intéressant tout particulièrement au conflit nord-irlandais. Le lien entre politique et vie familiale se tisse à l'aide d'une image également présente dans la poésie de Seamus Heaney, où les antagonistes apparaissent comme un couple essayant tant bien que mal de mettre fin à ses querelles. Dès lors, Boland développe deux séries d'images déjà contenues dans ses précédents recueils : d'une part, face à la guerre, cuisines et ustensiles symbolisent le repli ou la fuite dans les espaces privés ; de l'autre, champs et jardins gardent les traces des conflits passés. La première série inspire une vision de la guerre mettant à l'épreuve les frontières de la vie familiale, d'où une dichotomie entre intérieur et extérieur. La seconde, enracinée dans le sol irlandais, implique une polarité entre surface et profondeur, conservation et renouveau. Cette double vision correspond aussi à un processus historique d'invasion et d'assimilation, si bien que tout regain de violence est perçu comme la résurgence de tendances ataviques profondément ancrées. Dans les deux cas, Boland dépeint une intimité assiégée, dans l'idée que le seul lieu où la violence peut être contenue est le texte écrit.

INDEX

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