ABSTRACT

Ekphrasis and Ethics in the Poetry of W.B. Yeats and Eavan Boland

Bethany J. Smith, Ph.D.

Director: Richard Rankin Russell, Ph.D.

This study argues that W.B. Yeats is an important poetic precursor for Eavan Boland, and particularly for her sophisticated engagement with the age-old subgenre of ekphrasis, in which a poem responds to a work of visual art. I explore how both poets explode the boundaries of poetic form and ekphrastic tradition to re-imagine ekphrasis not as an abstract rivalry between modes of representation, but rather as an ethical encounter between the poet and the work of visual art. The openness and fluidity of such encounters for Yeats and Boland affirm the dignity of individuality and re-frame ekphrasis as a mode capable of the aesthetic and ethical creativity necessary to respond to the political and social exigencies of twenty-first century Ireland.

For both poets, the aesthetic and ethical possibilities that arise on the boundary of voice and vision parallel the transformative potential of other threshold spaces between public and private life, the city and the country, Ireland and Britain, and even life and death. Despite Boland's outright rejection of Yeats's ideas about a unified Irish nation and cultural tradition, she continues his poetic legacy of exploiting the liminal

potential of ekphrasis to re-imagine Ireland as a community bound by common loss rather than by common suffering and injustice. Ekphrasis is a response to suffering, but the work of both poets argues implicitly that a poem does not itself heal the actual wounds of body, mind, or spirit; rather, it mediates the healing process by keeping questions open, resisting the violence of closure. Boland's ekphrasis develops distinctly from Yeats's as it responds to concerns unique to her place as a woman poet, engages the dynamic of empathy between a speaker and a work of art, and explores intensively the relationship between individual and communitas. This study ends by affirming ekphrasis, in its potential for re-imagining aesthetic forms and ethical relationships, as a viable mode for the future of Irish poetry.

Ekphrasis and Ethics in the Poetry of W.B. Yeats and Eavan Boland

by

Bethany J. Smith, B.A.

A Dissertation

Approved by the Department of English

_____

Dianna M. Vitanza, Ph.D., Chairperson

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of
Baylor University in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree
of
Doctor of Philosophy

Approved by the Dissertation Committee

_____

Richard Rankin Russell, Ph.D., Chairperson

_____

Luke Ferretter, Ph.D.

_____

James E. Barcus, Ph.D.

_____

Joshua S. King, Ph.D.

_____

DeAnna M. Toten Beard, Ph.D.

Accepted by the Graduate School
August 2010

_____

J. Larry Lyon, Ph.D., Dean

Page bearing signatures is kept on file in the Graduate School.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

The works listed below are cited in the text by abbreviation and page number.

Au W.B. Yeats, *Autobiographies* (New York: MacMillan, 1955).

CP W.B. Yeats, *The Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats,* ed. Robert Finneran, Reb. 2nd ed. (New York: Scribner, 1996).

OL Eavan Boland, *Object Lessons* (New York: Norton, 1995).

NCP Eavan Boland. *New Collected Poems* (Manchester, Carcanet, 2005).

DV Eavan Boland. *Domestic Violence* (New York: Norton, 2007).

UP W.B. Yeats, *Uncollected Prose.* Vol. 2. (New York: Macmillan, 1976).

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

When Dr. Linda Mills Woolsey allowed me to get in over my head with an honors project on William Blake's illuminated manuscripts at Houghton College, she unwittingly facilitated an interest in poetry and the visual arts that would take me through this dissertation. Dr. Woolsey encouraged my interdisciplinary pursuits and always pushed me to excel. Art professors at Houghton, especially John Rhett and Ted Murphy, taught me to see the world differently by drawing it with pencil and paper, and they impressed upon me the necessity of attention and hard work for honing a craft.

My most immediate and profound expression of gratitude, however, must go to the chair of my dissertation committee, Dr. Richard Russell, whose patience, close-reading, and unceasing confidence in this project have sustained me throughout the process. From a seminar on W.B. Yeats in 2005 to the completion of this project in 2010, Dr. Russell has invested in my scholarly development, challenging and encouraging me along the way. For his attention to my work, his keen critical eye, and the kindness and sensitivity of his scholarly guidance, I am deeply grateful. My appreciation extends to other members of my committee—Luke Ferretter, James Barcus, Joshua King, and DeAnna Toten Beard—gracious readers of this project whose time and attention to my work and thoughtful comments will be invaluable for the future of this project. Beyond those at Baylor, Jody Allen Randolph was gracious for corresponding with me about Boland's poetry and prose and for taking the time to answer my questions. And Lisa

DeBoer, whose 2008 lecture at Houghton College gave form to my thoughts about the spiritual implications of an art of mourning, guided my thinking in subsequent discussions and e-mail exchanges.

My dear friends Amy Elisabeth, Stephanie, and Ellen have had listening ears and words of wisdom during the writing process. Friends, your love and loyalty challenge me to be better than I am, even from across the country. I would not be able to write about community without having experienced it in the body of Christ at Hope Fellowship in Waco, Texas. I want especially acknowledge Luis Matias-Cruz and family, whose songs, arising from grief, name and embolden our community and have grounded my own thinking about art and mourning. My family has always been a source of unconditional love and support, especially my husband J.B. whose dedication to the craft of writing has been an inspiration, and who has patiently cultivated our garden while I have been finishing this project. Getting married in the middle of this project did not do anything to speed it along, but our marriage is a constant source of deep richness and joy that can only have made my writing better. Now it's my turn to go out and get my hands dirty.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

> Responding responsibly to the work of art means attempting to do justice to it as a singular other; it involves a judgment that is not simply ethical or aesthetic, and that does not attempt to pigeonhole it or place it on a scale of values, but that operates as an affirmation of the work's inventiveness.
>
> –Derek Attridge, *The Singularity of Literature*

When W.B. Yeats wrote "The Municipal Gallery Revisited" in 1937, he gave poetic form to the experience of being "ambush[ed]" by the painted images of events and friends in the public context of a modern art gallery. While the phrase "an ambush" is employed in line two to describe an event depicted in a painting—probably *The Men of the West* by Sean Keating (Finneran 509)—it also captures the violence with which the images intrude on his memory:

> Around me the images of thirty years;
> An ambush; pilgrims at the water-side;
> Casement upon trial, half hidden by the bars,
> Guarded; Griffith staring in hysterical pride; (*CP* 319)

Edward D. Pickering reads the speaker being "ambushed by history" as he gazes upon the paintings (80), but the ambush might just as easily denote the immediacy of the visual medium in which history is represented. If "ambushed" is read in terms of visual immediacy, then "Guarded" two lines later, which further describes Casement "half hidden by the bars" evokes the veiled resistance of the visual image to being read. These visceral—and varied—encounters with images lead the speaker into a reverie of remembrance, bestowing upon the rest of the poem a tone that Daniel Albright calls "the

resonant vagueness of memory" (799). But the paintings are more than mere catalysts for imaginative reverie: they confound and confront the poet throughout the poem even as he remembers each friend and event represented.

While for much of Yeats's career he sought spiritual unity in the arts, this poem becomes a form for mourning the still unbreachable barrier between art and life as well as a form for mourning the Irish past represented in the portraits. Yeats's longing to imagine a spiritual community of mourning through art is, I will argue, the artistic legacy that contemporary poet Eavan Boland has continued to develop despite her outright rejection of Yeats's ideas about a unified Irish nation and cultural tradition. This study figures Yeats as a precursor to Boland's sophisticated engagement with the age-old subgenre of ekphrasis, in which a poem responds to a work of visual art, and explores how both poets explode the boundaries of poetic form and ekphrastic tradition and re-imagine ekphrasis as an embodiment of the ethical encounter of the poet with the other, the work of visual art. The openness and fluidity of such encounters for Yeats and Boland affirm the dignity of the "inventiveness" of the other, as Attridge puts it in the epigraph to this chapter, and re-frame ekphrasis as a form capable of the aesthetic and ethical creativity necessary to respond to the political and social exigencies of twenty-first century Ireland.

I choose to pair Yeats and Boland in this study in part because of their similar commitments to exploring the boundaries between voice and vision, poetry and visual arts, and their belief in the parallel ethical relationship between the subject and the other. For both poets, exploring the aesthetic and ethical possibilities that arise on the

boundaries of voice and vision parallels their exploration of other boundaries or threshold spaces between public and private spaces, city and country life, Ireland and Britain, and even life and death. I will argue that Boland's Yeatsian inheritance of the fundamental tensions between permanence and impermanence, medium and mutability, physical and spiritual reality offer grounding and enrichment for her thinking about the visual arts, but her ekphrasis also develops distinctly from Yeats's, engaging a dynamic between individual and community that responds to concerns unique to her contemporary milieu and her position as a woman.

While scholars have already recognized to a limited extent Boland's debt to Yeats's themes and aesthetics, the depth of the connections have not yet been fully mined. As I will show in Chapter three, Steven Matthews dedicates a few pages in his book *Yeats as Precursor* to Yeats's influence on Boland, noting their common dedication to poetic craft and re-making ancient myths, and Margaret Mills Harper suggests at the outset of her article "First Principles and Last Things," Yeats's influence on Boland's poetry of death. This project does not strive to finish the work of tracing Yeats's influence, but I hope it will contribute to the ongoing conversation. In this introduction, I will briefly trace some biographical and thematic connections between the two poets that justify studying their work together. In a later chapter I will trace specific poems in which Boland's re-working of Yeatsian themes and images is evident. As she articulates in her memoir *Object Lessons*, Boland's poetic relationship to Yeats is characterized by a strong—and perhaps energizing—ambivalence between admiration and inevitability of influence on the one hand and an antagonistic need for separation on the other.

Boland's childhood and adolescent experiences with poetry were steeped in Yeats's life and work: her memoir has her retreating with Yeats's poetry in the morning and evening at boarding school at age sixteen (24), and explains that although she formally began writing poetry in 1960s Dublin, her earlier writing under Yeats's influence is almost a rite of passage. She explains, "I had been there or thereabouts for years: scribbling poems in boarding school, reading Yeats after lights out, reveling in the poetry on the course" (249).

But as much as Yeats motivated her early excitement about the power of language and influenced her understanding of the poetic self, as she grew older, "a pervasive sense of unease" colored this reading (25). She started to see how different her situation was from Yeats's, not least because she was a young woman whose experience would be unavoidably different than Yeats's. She explains the difficulty of finding her own way in Yeats's shadow: "Before he even lifted his pen, his life awaited him in poetry. He was Irish. A man. A nationalist. A disappointed lover. Even his aging was recorded. The values were set. I was to learn how hard it would be to set different values" (25). Boland's relationship with Yeats's poetry is always one of conscious tension and antagonism, but she never denies her admiration for his work. In an early essay, "The Weasel's Tooth," written soon after the 1974 Dublin bombings, Boland calls Yeats the writer "I have admired and loved most in my life," but then argues that as part of Yeats's poetic legacy, she and other Irish writers are implicated in the perpetuation of the "damaging fantasy…of cultural coherence" that has been part of his social bequest (Randolph 86). She writes, "Once and for all I feel we should rid

ourselves of Yeats's delusion: let us be rid at last of any longing for cultural unity in a country whose most precious contribution may be precisely its insight into the anguish of disunity; let us be rid of any longing for imaginative collective dignity in a land whose final and only dignity is individuality" (88). She does think a kind of healing will be possible, but not easily and only over time as evil can be revealed rather than masked. She contrasts the panacea of temporary healing and immediate public response represented by a poem she published in the *Irish Times* in response to a photograph of the bombings to the deeper healing that will come with time and seeking the source of the individual evil at the heart of violent acts, a quest to which she hopes her poetry will contribute.

Boland response to violence in Ireland with "The Weasel's Tooth," published June 7, 1974, less than a month after the May 17, 1974 car bombings, despite her reluctance to directly engage politics with art echoes Yeats's prompt response to the Easter uprising with "Easter, 1916," written within the first few months after the executions of the uprising's leaders. While Boland's piece was published and therefore absorbed by the public soon after she wrote it, Yeats did not allow "Easter, 1916" to be published until three years later in 1919, long after the controversy over the heroic stature of the rebels had calmed in the public imagination. Yeats allowed a select few, including Maud Gonne, to read the poem in September, 1916 when it was finished, but his decision to delay publication (perhaps in part due to Gonne's angry response to what she perceived to be Yeats's failure to adequately acknowledge the heroism of the rebels) suggests that Yeats necessity of time and distance for public reception of literary

responses to violence (Foster *W.B. Yeats, Vol. 2* 63-64). In their responses to the horrors of political violence, Yeats and Boland both articulate the possibility of beauty emerging in the brokenness around them through their own artistic commitments to craft. Yeats's "terrible beauty" born from the ashes of the Easter week executions is solidified by his poetic act of "writing out in verse" the names of those who died (*CP* 182). Likewise, Boland ends her reflection on the violence in Dublin by calling herself and other artists to the "boredoms of craft": "by such a disappointingly private search do I feel I will discharge whatever public responsibility I have in this country as a writer at this time" ("The Weasel's Tooth" 90).

In her pictorial biography of Yeats (written with Michael Mac Liammoir), Boland, perhaps unwittingly, emphasizes some of Yeats's life experiences that are most similar to her own: Yeats's father was a painter as was Boland's mother and they both had rather unhappy childhoods exiled from their beloved Ireland in London. Yeats and Boland both live and write some of their best poetry about the visionary qualities of domestic, interior environments, as opposed to the rural Ireland of Patrick Kavanagh, Seamus Heaney, J.M. Synge, and Brian Friel. Yeats's domestic retreat at Thoor Ballylee, where he brought his wife Georgie Hyde-Lees and raised their children, and Boland's suburban neighborhood contrast also with the public necessities of urban environments which Boland describes as having a more fixed identity than the suburbs: "There is, after all, a necessity about cities. By the time you come to them, there is something finished and inevitable about their architecture, even about their grime. You accept both" (*Object Lessons* 160). Spaces removed from the public fray in Yeats and Boland are

liminal spaces, open and closed to the outside world at varying times, and more defined by the flux and movement of private lives than in the city, where, as soon as one steps outside, one is surrounded by and at the mercy of public schedules—traffic lights, bus schedules, opening and closing hours. For Boland, "A suburb is altogether more fragile and transitory…it is composed of lives in a state of process" (160). Both poets' experience dwelling and writing in a liminal physical space lead to a sophisticated engagement with imaginative space: the pull of Ireland from afar and their conflicted Anglo-Irish identities cause them to develop imaginative identities separate from clear political, geographical, environmental, or religious contingencies.

Ekphrasis in Yeats and Boland

Yeats and Boland are not alone in their interest in the realm of visual art among Irish poets. Poets of the Irish Republic or Northern Ireland including Seamus Heaney, Paul Durcan, Derek Mahon, Paul Muldoon, Mebh McGuckian all share a fundamental interest in the visual with Yeats and may themselves be inheritors of the Yeatsian dialectic between voice and vision. Edna Longley and Hugh Haughton have both written engaging essays that mention Yeats as a precursor for poems about paintings by contemporary Irish poets. Haughton argues that contemporary Irish poets, taking their cues from Yeats, incorporate paintings "for their iconographic resonance rather than their formal inspiration as twentieth-century American poets have tended to do" (92). Boland's deep engagement with Yeats's work on the visual arts has allowed her to respond to paintings as sources of iconographic, formal, and ethical inspiration.

I will take James Heffernan's and W.J.T. Mitchell's theories of ekphrasis as starting points for exploring how the poetry of Yeats and Boland engage with the visual arts in their verbal medium. My initial points of departure engage two claims made by these critics: first, both poets challenge, in different ways, Heffernan's overarching characterization of the relationship between visual and verbal arts as an essential and "gradually intensifying struggle" between rival modes of representation. Secondly, I will show how their claims that the tensions in ekphrasis are traditionally, and by implication unavoidably, gendered, fail to do justice to the variety and possibility of ekphrasis, especially when written by women. In Heffernan's understanding of ekphrasis, direct visual experience (of a painting, sculpture, etc.) is essentially "other" to verbal experience, so when the visual is represented in words, it resists the limits of interpretation, allowing the visual new *possibilities* for construing meaning and new *dangers* for being misconstrued. Heffernan explains,

> Ekphrasis, then, is a literary mode that turns on the antagonism – the commonly gendered antagonism – between verbal and visual representation. Since this contest is fought on the field of language itself, it would be grossly unequal but for one thing: ekphrasis commonly reveals a profound ambivalence toward visual art, a fusion of iconophilia and iconophobia, of veneration and anxiety. To represent a painting or sculpted figure in words is to evoke its power–the power to fix, excite, amaze, entrance, disturb, or intimidate the viewer–even as language strives to keep that power under control. (*Museum* 7)

This definition would suggest that Yeats's "Municipal Gallery" might be read as an embodiment of the rivalry between word and image: even as he invites his readers to consider the power of portraits in a gallery, he reminds us in this reading, perhaps out of fear, that the images will overpower his own work, that it is his "glory" as a poet we will

reflect on for posterity. And yet surely the relationship between poem and painting in Yeats's poem is not that simple. The poet's deference to his friends at the end of "Municipal Gallery" is not completely disingenuous. The further the verbal/visual metaphor is taken in this poem, the further it seems from the essential antagonism between word and image that defines ekphrasis for Heffernan. The "ambush" of the visual as a fixating medium within the poem is secondary to the emotional impact of the actual content of the pictures and the memories they elicit for the poet as viewer; these layered responses, wordsmith responding to wordlessness and man moved by memories, defy the one-dimensionality of word and image antagonism, and put that dynamic in the context of the complex exchanges that energize Yeats's friendships.

Heffernan's definition of ekphrasis depends on the relationship between the poem and the painting existing apart from the poet's own human response to the painting as a viewer. When a poet self-consciously refers to the nature of his personal response like Yeats does in "Municipal Gallery," a more dynamic social space opens up between poet and painting, poet and painter, or poet and the figure represented in addition to the basic rivalry between word and image. The power of the visual to "excite, amaze, entrance, disturb, or intimidate the viewer" does not invite uniform responses among poets and writers, and their self-consciousness of this struggle must be taken into account. Boland has described her initial response to the power of the visual arts as a hesitancy, or shyness: "I consider myself diffident and easily distracted in the world of the visual arts," she writes in an essay on the visual work of the late Irish artist Aileen MacKeogh ("The Art of Grief" 10). Mitchell recounts a similar phenomenon in

the case of Edward Said, for whose own response to the visual arts Mitchell uses the same word: "diffidence" ("Secular Divination" 105). In an essay written in the wake of Said's death, Mitchell recalls his long intellectual friendship with Said and explains that the visual arts seemed to be the only area of the humanities in the face of which Said found himself dumbfounded, baffled, without a vocabulary. Mitchell recalls Said's declaration in an interview that "just to think about the visual arts generally sends me into a panic" (qtd. in "Secular Divination" 105). Despite Said's diffidence, his reflections on artists from El Greco to Goya and Picasso are insightful and articulate, as are Boland's reflections on MacKeogh's work, and Yeats's in "Municipal Gallery." In each case, however, the move from bafflement to eloquence is not so much characterized by aesthetic defiance as ethical "deferral," to borrow Mitchell's word (106); the pause of wonder and uncertainty before a work of art makes the writer receptive to the visual other. According to Mitchell, Said's "bafflement" or "mystification" represents his "coming to the limits of his thought and recognizing that encounter in his own discourse," which Mitchell calls a "deeply ethical gesture, a kind of deferral of authority, a public confession of uncertainty" (105-106). Gestures of humility based on the uncertainty of encountering the visual and ethical other accompany Yeats's response to images in the Municipal Gallery, as I will show in Chapter two, and motivate the formal loosening of Boland's poetry as it opens to receive the visual other.

At the heart of the energizing dialectic proposed by scholars of ekphrasis lies a potential for violence and an emphasis on difference, and Yeats and Boland both explore this possibility. Boland, for instance, remembering the map of the British empire her

teacher displayed for so many of her grade-school years, imagines the map speaking its visual message of political oppression and possession through her teacher, whose tone of "certainty and precision" reinforced the fantasy in the poet's mind. She explains that she found herself "often entering the strange illusion and that the teacher was mute and the map was speaking through her. *Look what I own* it said. *See what you have lost*" ("A Question"). In Boland's memory, the image and the teacher's words reinforced the sense of alienation she felt being Irish in Britain. Sato's sword in Yeats's "Meditations in a Time of Civil War" (*CP* 202-203), which Boland has professed in *Object Lessons* to be a profound influence on her own thinking about violence in Ireland, similarly connotes both violence and art (*OL* 187-189). On the one hand, the sword is a work of art crafted as an inheritance and an object of beauty, but Yeats's poem also implies the potential violence still present in the sword's form.

For Irish poets especially, the political power struggles of Irish nationalism British Imperialism and between nationalism and loyalism in Northern Ireland have been so prominent and violent in the last century that poets cannot avoid them, but have more often articulated metaphors for alleviating struggle, not extending it. Dillon Johnston uses Yeats's "ironic escape poem," "Sailing to Byzantium" to argue that despite his resistance, Yeats ultimately knows the impossibility of an antithetical art that does not engage the reality of politics, language and culture. Johnston identifies the irony of Yeats's image of escapist art in "Sailing to Byzantium," a poem in which the melancholy of human desire trumps the artificial reality created in his imagination: "Although it may transform reality, antithetical art cannot retreat from or reject the

world we inhabit" (28). Boland continues this line of reasoning further, showing in a recent essay that the antagonism at the heart of language between "power and non-power," between "limitations and possibility" – the same antagonism that is at the heart of ekphrasis—cannot be abstracted in poetry from individual experiences, forcing the antagonism to wrestle with personal experiences and move toward reconciliation. She explains that the power struggles she experienced as an individual are inextricably linked to the way language engages those struggles in her poetry:

> The crucial, at times tense, dialogue between power and non-power, between limitation and possibility, may have been inherent in the first syllables and the first sounds. But the fact is that in an individual life there is nothing generic about the fractiousness: it feels sore and particular and unique. And so it was with me. ("Virtual Syntax" 169)

For both poets, the relationship between poetic and visual form takes on some of the ethical implications of representing subjectivity and alterity in Irish history and culture. Yeats and Boland challenge the potentially oppressive subjective gaze by recognizing their own appropriation of it as poets looking at visual art. Whereas associations and assumptions about minorities—the Catholic in Northern Ireland, the Protestant in the Republic, the woman poet in the North or the Republic, for example—are often deeply entrenched in Irish culture, looking at the "other" as a work of visual art distances the poet from her own political assumptions, and frees her to imagine alterity in a different context.

Heffernan's definition of ekphrasis is useful, but ultimately limiting for understanding poems as complex as Yeats's "Municipal Gallery" with which I opened this chapter. In this view, even as he falls to his knees before these paintings in a gesture

of humility and veneration, he triumphs with his own poetic response, further shaping the reader's response to his art and to the portraits in the Municipal Gallery. But the connection between image and text in this poem is more fundamental than this—Yeats, in his search for deep-rooted things, seems to think of his own art as fleeting, impermanent. His art is nothing without that of Synge and Gregory—their portraits force him to confront the impermanence of his art and bring him to a position of humility at the end of the poem. Their spiritual presence in their portraits literally forces him to his knees, in recognition of the way he has shaped the representation of Ireland for posterity. Yeats repeats the movement between seeing and saying multiple times in this poem as if to emphasize the struggle between the two rival media. After the visual "ambush" of the first stanza, Yeats the speaker inserts his own speech into the poem as though he were speaking directly to the paintings in the gallery: "'This is not,' I say, / 'The dead Ireland of my youth, but an Ireland / The poets have imagined, terrible and gay' (*CP* 320). In the third stanza, however, the visual power of the portraits confronts him again: "Heart smitten with emotion I sink down, My heart recovering with covered eyes" (*CP* 320). He almost seems to fear how his poetry has shaped Ireland and Irish history—and fear how viewers will judge him and his poetic legacy after seeing these paintings. The image of the "noble and the beggarman" demonstrates Yeats's goal, of establishing a "spiritual democracy," along with Synge and Gregory, through art in Ireland (Schuchard 399). His desire for spiritual democracy is also illustrated as he lowers his poetic position in relation to the painted portraits on the wall by falling to his knees.

Visual art challenges the hubris of the poet—the poet's confidence in the written or spoken sign to represent truth to an audience. Yeats associates poetic images with humility in a 1914 writing: "The whole movement of poetry is toward pictures, sensuous images, away from rhetoric, from the abstract, toward humility" (*UP* 414). Significantly, he is not contrasting poetic music with poetic images, but the specificity of images and language in poetry with the abstraction, the generalizing effect of rhetoric, and it is with this specificity that he associates the ethical value of humility. I will argue that Yeats and Boland are each self-aware to some extent of the power struggle between the verbal and the visual, but instead of accepting their logocentric role in the conflict, they use intermedial struggle metonymically for mining their own and their culture's understanding of subjectivity and otherness and for exploring possibilities for healing. Instead of continuing to ask what ekphrasis *is*, contemporary poets seem more interested in asking what it *can be:* what is the potential of ekphrasis to shape poetics and further fulfill the task of art, as articulated by Robert Rehder, to "explore the boundaries of consciousness" (132)? Writing ekphrasis can put the poet in a position of openness to the other that allows the poet to cross the boundaries of poetic and social consciousness where aesthetic and the ethical considerations are one.

The Ethics of Ekphrasis

While ekphrasis may be said to be the driving force behind some of the most revered lyric poems in modern English—from Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn" (1820) to Browning's "My Last Duchess" (1842) and Auden's "Musée des Beaux Arts" (1939)—

ekphrasis has also been among the most reviled of poetic subgenres, and as Edna Longley argues, sometimes with good reason. She responds to Kingsley Amis's declaration in 1955 that "nobody wants any more poems about paintings…or art galleries," arguing, "I think Amis has a point: possibly more poems about paintings than about almost anything else are likely to end up in a *Pseuds' Corner* column. Also, addiction to the practice (e.g. Wallace Stevens) can be a form of imaginative auto-eroticism" (227). Poems about paintings often tend to reinforce a hierarchical relationship between subject and object, viewer and viewed by representing painting as the object of the poet's subjective gaze. Poems like this, Longley argues are "parasitic upon another medium in proportion as they are deficient in their own. This indicates an impaired relation to the tradition which they implicitly and explicitly evoke" (231).

Susan Sontag's argument in *Against Interpretation* resembles the kind of argument that is sometimes made against ekphrastic poetry—that the visual work of art should be allowed to have its own unique visual power without a poet presuming to give it meaning through words. She argues that works of art should be allowed to speak for themselves without interpretation by critics and theorists who tend to use art to validate their own ideas. Ekphrasis, in this view, is always a lesser variety of poetry for its presumed inferiority to the visual work it tries to capture. Granted, ekphrastic poems that dwell on their inferiority tend to seem satisfied with that lot. But the poet need not be limited to a simplistic choice: either speak for the work or let the work speak for itself. Scholars of visual-verbal relations such as Heffernan and Mitchell have shown how more sophisticated ekphrastic poems, like the Keats, Auden, and Browning poems

mentioned above exhibit tensions and movements to which the relationship between the verbal and visual is central. Good ekphrasis, like good interpretation, approaches the work of art with humility and seeks to learn from the visual work, but ultimately demonstrates excellence in its own form. Ekphrasis at its most sophisticated, again like interpretation, understands itself to be a medium, not the end in itself, of the fullness of artistic experience. Ekphrasis at its best has the potential to teach us to "look" more keenly through the fullness of poetic form. Yeats's and Boland's major ekphrastic poems work in such a manner.

Through ekphrasis the poet seeks the power unique to the silence and hiddenness of the other, which, as Sontag suggests in "The Aesthetics of Silence," becomes an almost mystical search for truth. She writes that just "as the activity of the mystic must end in a *via negativa*, . . . so art must tend toward anti-art, the elimination of the 'subject' (the 'object,' the 'image'), the substitution of chance for intention, and the pursuit of silence" (5). While in the long view Sontag's 1966 essay seems to glorify the minimalism of modern art to the exclusion of many of the more developments in recent contemporary literature and visual art, her ideas seem to have particularly apt application in understanding the power of the visual arts for poetry. In this view, even as the poet reaches outside of himself toward the silent other for understanding, the other closes itself off: "practiced in a world furnished with second-hand perceptions, and specifically confounded by the treachery of words, the artist's activity is cursed with mediacy. Art becomes the enemy of the artist, for it denies him the realization –the transcendence—he desires" (5). As Mitchell argues, ekphrasis is characterized by this

problem of transcendence in art: the source of "ekphrastic hope" for Mitchell is its potential to transform "the dead, passive image into a living creature" (167), or in other words, for art to reach beyond itself into the experience akin to an imaginative resurrection. But for Mitchell as for Sontag, this hope is thwarted because the ekphrastic poem always refers to itself even as it points beyond itself to the other living art, which is exactly Yeats's dilemma with being gathered into the "artifice of eternity" in "Sailing to Byzantium."

Heffernan's and Mitchell's work has shown that the poetics of ekphrasis are fundamental to appreciating the aesthetic and ethical implications of representation in broader contexts. Mitchell shows how ekphrasis, as one of the "keys to difference within language," "focuses the interarticulartion of perceptual, semiotic, and social contradictions within verbal representation" (*Picture Theory* 180). He shows that throughout literary history, ekphrasis in its many forms tends to challenge hierarchical representations by revealing the power relationships inherent within them. Their theories, however, are limited by their understanding of the subject-object relationship as inevitably one of antagonism and power struggle. My dissertation will therefore be framed by investigation into the ethical implications of ekphrasis characterized by a more fluid subject-object relationship. How, then, do the specifics of Yeats's and Boland's engagement with the visual arts change or nuance the claims already made about literature and ethics?

Heffernan's explication of a famous example of ekphrasis demonstrates his theory of inter-art rivalry, but the limitations of his reading also highlight the

deficiencies of his theory. He argues that understanding the irony and layers of representation in Auden's "Musée des Beaux Arts" demands that we read the "assertive power of the word over the image" in the speaker's voice rather than a "straightforward reading of an art work" (*Museum* 151). Heffernan's reading calls the reader's attention to the aggressive interpretation the speaker enacts. Indeed, Heffernan argues that "even with its title, nothing in the painting itself compels us to think about the suffering of Icarus"; Breughel's painting could just as easily be interpreted in light of the folly of Icarus, rather than his suffering, as Auden does in his poem. Heffernan, however, does not mean to argue against the speaker's interpretation of the painting; rather, he places the speaker's stance toward this painting in the context of the modern public museum that ever-more-aggressively textualizes (and thereby interprets) paintings for us with titles, curatorial notes, and commentary. The speaker represents the distanced, subjective interpreter of art in the public sphere, who cannot escape the logocentric museum presentation of the painting. Heffernan sees the poem as an example of "a gradually intensifying struggle for mastery between the language of interpretation and the impenetrable silence of what [John] Ashbery calls 'the strict / Otherness of the painter in his / Other room'" (Heffernan 8). The poem may be then, finally, somewhat critical of the assertive interpretation the speaker submits, which might be heard in the speaker's flippant reference to the horse's backside or even, if our ears are sensitive, a hint of the ridiculous in the speaker's authoritative tone.

Heffernan's reading of the poem is perhaps not entirely intuitive, but it consistent with his theory of ekphrasis. If we are able to think outside of the fear of the

painting's dominance implicit in Heffernan's reading, however, and imagine the poet open to the painting's agency, then the speaker emerges in all the melancholy of his fallible humanity, not as a voice of insidious verbal authority. The speaker may be flawed and his interpretation of Brueghel limited, but however much we may disagree with his interpretation, the speaker's observations about suffering also remind us of the openness of the painting to reception. The speaker's opening—"About suffering they were never wrong, the old Masters"— reveals the speaker's humanity—perhaps even the tiredness of experience—but to read in his voice overbearing power is to put a theory of ekphrasis before a close reading of the poem sensitive to the ethos the poet creates.

This dissertation will argue that Yeats's and Boland's practice of ekphrasis stretches the boundaries of the mode by utilizing the exchange between ethics and aesthetics unique to a poet's engagement with the visual arts. The dilemma of transcendence and materiality in ekphrasis might be compared to the tradition of religious icons in Orthodox Christian tradition. Visual icons used in worship are not meant to be gazed upon as objects of a viewer's fascination or even desire; rather, the religious icon, usually a picture of Christ or Mary, is understood to "look back" at the viewer, establishing an exchange of glances that calls the viewer to spiritual meditation or ethical reflection. At their best, ekphrastic poems act as a kind of secular icon, calling the reader to reflection on her relationship with the other rather than reinforcing calcified notions of the subjective gaze.

Relational exchange is at the heart of an ethic based on the humanity of the imaginations involved in ekphrasis—the poet and the space of visual art—rather than a purist antagonism between rival media. For poets whose work continually negotiates the public/private divide and the relationship between the individual and the community in various ways, as Yeats's and Boland's does, there should be a theory of ekphrasis that accounts for how they have developed the sub-genre as a social one uniquely fit for exploring the relationship between ethics and aesthetics. Through meditation on the visual arts, both poets imagine ethical encounters as the basis of a more fluid sense of subjective identity. Ekphrasis forces Yeats to confront the tension between the pride of his art and the humility and limitations of his humanity, thus making him more open and receptive to what the other of the work of art has to offer his own imagination. Boland's work echoes the receptivity of Yeats's stance, but develops it by further questioning the poet's ability to speak publically and proposing a still more fluid subjectivity that opens itself first in empathy to the visual other and then, in her later poetry, in an attitude of communitas that does justice to the singularity of the visual and ethical other. Her later ekphrasis imagines the visual/ethical encounter as a basis re-defining a communal, yet non-bardic and localized "we" for lyric poetry.

Roberto Esposito's *Communitas* suggests one direction for exploring a relational ethic that does justice to the singularity of the other without denying the subjective bias of reflecting on the other. He make the distinction between material exchange based on property ownership that basically defines "community" as a public designation and the relational exchange of communitas based not on possessions but on a common

"obligation or debt" or a "gift that is to be given" (6). The relationship defined in the older Latin term *communitas* is characterized not by the "addition" of another but by a "subtraction" or lack of subjectivity when brought into relationship.

> "'obligation' in the sense that we say 'I owe you something,' but not 'you owe me something.' This is what makes them not less than the masters of themselves, and that more precisely expropriates them of their initial property (in part or completely), of the most proper property, namely, their very subjectivity" (7).

Boland and her critics have acknowledged the importance of acknowledging the lyric voice as a fragmented subjectivity, but fragmentation and brokenness often implies a break-down of social relationships along with social structure so that the idea of community becomes as contentious as unified subjectivity. What Boland's later poetry does, and what Esposito helps articulate, is represent the fragmented subject in relationships with other fragmented subjects—relationships based not on common characteristics or even common history, but rather on a common loss of identity, experience, nation and other loved ones. The poet's, and the speaker's, identity becomes open to and inextricably bound to the others she encounters in the space of literature and art.

Communitas recognizes the subject's fragmentation as a necessary step in ethical encounters and relationships, not a unique characteristic of the post-modern subject. Esposito re-iterates that an ethic of communitas does not necessarily characterize real life communities, which are often based first on shared resources or common characteristics that expand the possessions (imagined or real) of those within the community. Communitas, he writes, "isn't the subject's expansion or multiplication but its exposure

to what interrupts the closing and turns it inside out: a dizziness, a syncope, a spasm in the continuity of the subject" (7). While the individual is characterized by an interruption or loss, communitas also acknowledges the gift that each singular individual has to offer to other broken individuals. And it is that gift that Boland seeks to give of herself and find in women of the past in her best poetry. Boland's development of the subject as a singular, characterized by loss, and yet with potential to be a gift within a community, which I will develop more in Chapters five and six, is also important as a response to the scholars who have criticized Boland's representation of women, as I discuss in the next section.

Ekphrasis and Gender

One of the current problems with connections being made between ekphrasis and ethics is best embodied in Mitchell's provocative but unaddressed challenge concerning ekphrasis and gender. He admits, toward the end of a recent study, "the semiotic structure of the imagetext, the image identified as feminine, the speaking/seeing subject of the text identified as masculine . . . would look quite different, of course, if my emphasis had been on ekphrastic poetry by women" (*Picture Theory* 181). What happens to ekphrasis, in other words, when the woman is the poem's author and/or speaker and not the "dangerous other"? Mitchell does not completely ignore the fact that this understanding of ekphrasis would be different for a woman poet, arguing that "the difference [. . .] would not be simply readable as a function of the author's gender" (181). But on the other hand, he does not consider the woman poet's experience

of ekphrasis in his own theory. Heffernan also characterizes the *paragonal* relationship between the two arts as a "commonly gendered antagonism" ("Museum" 7) but fails to consider how ekphrastic poems with female speakers might complicate this "duel between male and female gazes" (1). The female poet's experience would seem to challenge the gendered implications of these critics' arguments. Eavan Boland, for one, does not seek to transform women's otherness into unified subjectivity; rather, she sees that the association of the other with a simplified binary of beauty or danger belies the reality and complexity of both women's experience and the experience of visual art.

The visual and literary representation of women in Ireland is especially significant because of the long history of representing Ireland as a woman in various guises, which Edna Longely delineates helpfully as the figure of Mother Ireland in depictions of Cathleen ni Hoolihan, Dark Rosaleen, and others. Each of these figures is inadequate to the complex reality of the nation she represents and to Irish womanhood, which is then expected to fit back into these models. Longley's main point in her important pamphlet, *From Cathleen to Anorexia* is to challenge the unified idea of Irishness and the Irish Nationalism that is preventing Ireland from moving forward. She uses the image of the famished, empty, and diseased Cathleen ni Houlihan, or Anorexia, as a better metaphor for Irish Nationalism than any of the more hopeful but dangerous images called upon for the sake of the cause. Writing from a Northern Irish perspective, Longely allows that nationhood is an almost meaningless designation for either the North or the Irish Republic:

> I think its time to admit that both parts of Ireland are failed *conceptual* entities. That is, the ideas which created them and the ideologies which sustained them have withered at the root. If 'Northern Ireland' has visibly broken down, the 'Republic' as once conceived has invisibly broken down. And since 1969 each has helped to expose the inner contradictions of the other. (Longely 173)

Boland's engagement with representing women in her poetry is more complicated than a simple equation of nationhood and womanhood from the start. Her place as a woman and a poet, which she discusses at great length in *Object Lessons,* has attuned her to the contradictions of such rhetoric, but critics like Edna Longley and Clair Wills have criticized the ethics of Boland's representations of women's experiences in her poetry. Boland has expressed her desire to speak to the wounded experiences of women in Ireland and their relative silence in the poetic tradition. Before she found her own forms for revealing the truth of ordinary women's experiences, she found examples in visual arts rather than a poetic tradition that seemed trapped between "traditional romantic elitism" on the one hand and "the new feminist angers" of highly politicized poetry on the other. She even uses painting imagery to explain how she saw herself as a poet apart from either of these tendencies. She describes the conviction that "I stood at the center of the lyric moment itself, in a mesh of colors, sensualities and emotions that were equidistant from poetic convention and political feeling alike" (*OL* 252). In this statement, Boland coalesces three points important for my argument: she suggests the affinity between the visual and her poetic practice, she sets up her desire to make her own experiences as a woman and a poet the subjects of her poetry, and by placing

herself in the "lyric moment," she foreshadows the influence these subjects will eventually have on the formal aspects of her poetry.

The tensions Boland encounters in ekphrasis, between giving voice to the voiceless and respecting the silence of the visual, are echoed by the tensions inherent in representing anything in art, and Boland has been criticized for the way she has handled the representation of women in her poetry. The issues arising from distinctions of representing and being in art are pervasive throughout criticism of Boland's poetry and prose, and it has been argued that she does not always manage these issues well. The controversy concerns her attempt to redefine the images structuring current understandings of Ireland, especially the "Mother Ireland," Dark Rosaleen, and the Shan Van Vocht (poor old woman) figures that appeal to sentimentalized images of Ireland as a nurturing homeland or a victimized state. Boland seeks to reframe Ireland in terms of the ordinary and routine—mostly in terms of the silent Irish women's experience—rather than the heroic and mythological, but some say that even as she critiques the process of mythmaking and historicizing, she is creating her own mythic view of history in different terms. Critics argue that, especially in her memoirs collected in *Object Lessons*, Boland presumes to make her own experience speak for or represent the experiences of all Irish women, homogenizing their experience. Edna Longley, for instance, who also critique Boland's version of nationalism, accuses Boland of re-figuring the Mother Ireland myth she critiques in *A Kind of Scar* (Longley 17). Longley singles out *A Kind of Scar* for failing to recognize "the extent to which the North has destabilized the 'nation'" (187). Her criticism of Boland effectively supports her own

thesis about the importance of reflecting this destabilized nation in writing, but only works in a limited way when applied as a critique of Boland's work as a whole. In fact, Longley hardly mentions the poetry at all; she disparagingly appeals to "Mise Eire" by labeling it a "feminist poem," arguing famously that it "destabilises Mise but not Eire" (173). She cites the line, "my nation displaced / into old dactyls" to support her claim for Boland's nostalgia for a unified Irish tradition. But in this line as elsewhere in Boland's poetry, the idea of the nation is more defeated than triumphant.

Boland's later poem "In Our Own Country" from *Domestic Violence* imagines the literal destabilization of the nation as the excavations begin for globalization: machines from "the Netherlands or Belgium" are "dragging, tossing, breaking apart the clay / in which our timid spring used to arrive" and "tearing away the road to our village—/ bridge, path, river, all / lost under an onslaught of steel" (*DV* 27). Instead of nostalgia for a unified Ireland of the past, the speaker aligns herself with a people in the present tense, looking ahead for the potential, the new possibilities the excavations might unearth: "We are here to watch. / We are looking for new knowledge." And the poem's last image of the old Ireland is less than homogenous: the machines are "breaking apart the clay / in which our timid spring used to arrive / with our daffodils in a single, crooked row" (27). The destabilizing process of excavation represents new possibility for the speaker, although the new reality—the "onslaught of steel"—seems an impersonal, unfortunate substitute for the daffodils in a "single-crooked row." The process of opening the ground, destabilizing the foundations, becomes a fecund metaphor of imaginative possibility in Ireland in Boland's later poetry.

Beyond critiques of Boland's representations of nation, Clair Wills has more recently criticized Boland's privatization of myths of women's experience for not being a radical enough departure from public association of the nation with the feminine, and implies that Medbh McGuckian's poetry is a better example of a radical women's poetry because it eschews the very idea of opening the poem to women's experiences as a surrender to the politically charged lyric voice inherited from British Romanticism: Wills writes of McGuckian, "Openness connotes betrayal; she wants to tell a personal narrative, the story of giving birth, or of a marriage, but she is wary of 'opening herself up' to be probed by a public readership" (62). McGuckian's poetics of parody reflects her resistance to confessional poetry with its dense imagery that continually suggests meaning while remaining out of reach to the probing of the traditional critical scapula.

Wills's argument concerning McGuckian's achievement is helpful, but she goes too far when she uses Boland to represent those poets simply inserting the "content of the feminine experience" into traditional lyric poetry rather than experimenting with incorporating the obscurity of women's silences into their forms. For Wills, as for Longely, the ultimate critical reference point is the political sphere, so that "radical departure" becomes the highest category of poetic achievement, and their arguments rely—ironically, considering their championing of formal innovation as a political tool—only in a very limited way on actual readings of poetic form. Boland is too quickly dismissed by these critics from being a formal innovator and committed, thoughtful feminist of the highest caliber. In Wills's reading, McGuckian and Boland are measured almost solely on their ability to represent a radical feminist poetics, and while

McGuckian may be more far-reaching in her innovations with the lyric voice, a closer look at Boland's formal experimentation (and by citing more poems than just "Mise Eire," which both Longely and Wills depend on almost exclusively) shows her to be finding alternative ways of exploring the ethical implications of giving voice to the voiceless women, dead and living in Ireland, a purpose both poets have stated explicitly.[1]

Yeats may not be the first poet one thinks of for sophistication in issues of gender, but as Margaret Mills Harper has argued, even in terms of gender, Boland's poetry can be traced in part back to Yeats: he "is an important model for Boland not least in the unrest with which issues of gender permeate his most powerful, because his most vulnerable, poems…." (185). She suggests that the instability of gender in Yeats's later poetry—when he takes on the persona of Crazy Jane, for instance—allowed the poet to live fully as "a foolish, passionate man" through the vulnerability of his old age. The mask allows Yeats a recklessness and fluidity of identity that Boland gleans for many poems that voice other women. Critics such as Andrew Auge have recently sought to show that throughout her work, Boland has been engaged with complicating and questioning oversimplified notions of Irish womanhood and its connection with the likewise fissured historical and national identities of Ireland. Anne Fogarty, too, argues that one of the key features of Boland's poetry is a "poetics of absence" and its "resolute refusal to bridge the gap between lived experience and poetic form, between the past

[1] Wills records McGuckian as stating in a personal interview, "I'm trying to make the dead women of Ireland, who I am the living memory of, I'm trying to give them articulation, if anything" (68).

and history, between the female author and her subjects, and between the Irish woman writer and her literary foremothers" (257).

Boland engages issues of representation on so many levels in her poetry that it would be oversimplifying the matter to say that she is replacing old homogenies with new ones. The drama Boland sets up in her ekphrastic poetry between her speaker and a silent painted subject illustrates how her poetry is more consciously engaged in the complexities and problems of representation than it is often given credit for. She also explores more diverse conceptions and models of community for representing her nation that reflect its destabilized nature, but reject the fallacious supposition that representations of nation or women are doomed to over-simplification. The importance of respecting the complex individuality of women and the obscurity of their silences that critical arguments often insist upon too-often fails to take into account the complexity of the communities, real and imaginative, in which women participate and through which they speak.

Methodology: Breaking with Ekphrastic Tradition

Because my thesis argues that ekphrasis explores both the ethical and the formal relationship between poetry and painting, this dissertation will emphasize close readings and formal analysis of individual poems that show how engaging the visual can influence structure, sound, and the sense of empathy and relational responsibility in each poet's work. Boland ends her memoir *Object Lessons* with an idea that captures the

relationship between artistic form; the role of the poet as maker; empathy; and finally, justice:

> Artistic forms are not static. Nor are they radicalized by aesthetes and intellectuals. They are changed, shifted, and detonated into deeper patterns only by the sufferings and self-deceptions of those who use them. By this equation, women should break down barriers in poetry in the same way that poetry will break the silence of women. In the process it is important not to mistake the easy answer for the long haul. (254)

For Boland, as for Yeats, neither visual nor poetic art forms are prescriptive, theory-based structures into which individual artists fit their crafts; rather, art only exists as a craft emerging from the labor of those who make it. Boland is always aware of her craft as a medium for truth—a medium that without care, attention, and brutal honesty can easily manipulate the truth.

Yeats's "The Three Beggars" and Boland's "Athene's Song" articulate the poets' commitment to the power of the aesthetic at a remove from the machinations of striving after war and peace. The power of the responses to political violence offered by poetry and song lies not in direct appeals to peace but in the impenetrability of the aesthetic remove. In "The Three Beggars," the crane of Gort, whatever his other flaws, remains at a distance from the "exorbitant dreams of beggary, / That idleness had borne to pride" (*CP* 112) in the three beggars as they strive to keep each other from the king's offer of a fortune. King Guaire's promise of a thousand pounds to the beggar "who is first asleep…before the third noon sounds" has been compared to the elusive reward of Irish independence that various groups in Ireland want to shape. Like each beggar in Yeats's poem, who stays awake "to keep his fellows from their sleep," thus relinquishing his

reward, the violence of the Irish struggle gets the best of all groups in the end. The futility and pride of this striving is presented in stark contrast to the crane, who has watched the beggars from a distance, standing "as I were made of stone / and seen the rubbish run about," and hoping for a humbler goal: to catch a trout. The crane's almost voyeuristic sense of watching and waiting, like the perceived cowardice of the poet's refusal to engage the political fray, is mitigated in contrast to the futility of the beggars' violence.

In Boland's early "Athene's Song," which is more overtly about the remove of art, the aesthetic power of the "pipe of bone" through which Athene's song is transformed from one of war to one of peace remains at a distance from the peace it impels. Although Athene declares in the first line the method of her own divine birth—"From my father's head I sprung,"—she creates her instrument of peace in echo of the biblical narrative of human creation in which God creates Eve from one of Adam's ribs (*NCP* 23). Athene declares the power of peace in her creation saying, "When I played my pipe of bone, / Robbed and whittled from a stag, / Every bird became a lover." In stanza three, Athene loses the pipe, however, as her own pride leads her back to the adulation of the people: "I dropped my pipe / Remembering their shouts, their thanks." The last stanza is a beautiful meditation on the mystery of the aesthetic remove where the lost pipe exists safe from human hands but still a source for the human heart.

> Beside the water, lost and mute,
> Lies my pipe and like my mind
> Remains unknown, remains unknown
> And in some hollow taking part

With my heart against my hand
Holds its peace and holds its own.

This imaginative space where the instrument of peace exists in a real yet untouchable reality, is the space in which Boland's poetry, like Yeats's, develops at an aesthetic and ethical remove from the continual violence that surrounds them in Ireland.

Given Boland's explicitly and convincingly stated commitment to the aesthetic before political concerns, approaches to reading Boland that force her work to make ideological statements inevitably err. Boland has said in a recent interview, as she has said before, that her first commitment as a poet is to aesthetics, not an ideological stance: "I'm feminist. I'm not a feminist poet. I think poetry begins where certainties end. Even the finest ethics and collective historical movements or aspirations can't come to the space between the page and the pen and the poet's mind" ("Eavan Boland Live Discussion"). If ethics have anything to do with Boland's poetry, they should, by her own estimation, emerge as ethical implications of what the poems do as art, not as the motivation for the poem's creation. Postcolonial approaches to poetry come first to mind when thinking of ethical approaches to literary study, and Irish Studies has benefited from careful and nuanced arguments about how Ireland's history as a colony of Great Britain influences its contemporary social, political, and literary life. It has also been argued convincingly that Ireland is not postcolonial, and that in order to be considered postcolonial, "both political and ideological dependence on Britain must disappear" (Russell "Postcolonial" 103). On the other hand, Pilar Villar-Argaiz chooses

to appropriate postcolonial theory in her recent book-length study of Boland's poetry, arguing that the tensions of postcolonial thought can be seen in Boland's writing:

> Boland's emancipating force is grounded precisely in her reconceptualization of nationality, and her desire to preserve, rather than reject, modernist categories such as "Irishness." On the other hand, she tries to transcend the essentialist constraints of dogmatic nationalism by challenging the fixity of categories and envisaging new forms of resistance that overcome the Western binary thought. (8)

In some ways, Villar-Argaiz's argument seems to respond to Longley's criticism of Boland's failure to destabilize "nation" like she does the feminine subject: Villar-Argaiz tries to show that this is not a failure at all; rather, Boland is trying to negotiate between breaking down artificial categories of "nation" and "woman" on the one hand and preserving or creating a new, more fluid sense of identity for both. While the complications of "nation" are important in Boland's poetry, I want to show that even more fundamental to Boland's ethic, and to Yeats's, is the singularity of literature itself apart from but derogating its political, historical, and ideological meanings.

Seamus Heaney articulates how poetry is above all else—including political or ideological concerns—responsible to the needs of its own linguistic medium. He argues that poetry's redress works not as an "agent for proclaiming and correcting injustices" or "silence-breaking" but to "redress poetry *as* poetry, to set it up as its own category, an eminence established and a pressure exercised by distinctly linguistic means" (*Redress* 6). Boland's "Violence Against Women," from her most recent volume, *Domestic Violence,* engages these political issues, but more important, Boland reveals her attempt to carve out a separate place for her poetry between "art" and "empire." The poem ends

with an elegiac apostrophe to the shared complicity of sound and sense in reinforcing power relationships between men and women, subject and object of the artistic gaze. She proclaims,

> …O art,
>
> O empire and the arranged relations,
> so often covert, between power and cadence,
> tell me what you have done with
> the satin bonnets and the pastel sun, with
> the women gathering their unreal sheep
> into verse for which no one will weep? (*DV* 76)

While her apostrophe may seem ironically formal for the criticism of the formal tradition the sense implies, she undercuts the irony by separating "O art" and "O empire" with the break between two stanzas, a gesture representing the fracture between art and the empire of form in which her poetry lives. She calls up traditional cadences with this archaic apostrophe, but in the context of the rest of the volume, the speech becomes a declaration of her own ability to take the formal English lyric, break it, and use the pieces to build new forms in which to explore the relationship between herself as a poet and the hidden lives of the women poetry has forgotten.

Because Boland is free from the far-reaching traditional distinction, articulated first and most famously by Lessing in the eighteenth century, between visual art as a static medium and poetic art as a temporal, narrative one, she is able to explore how the vibrancy and flux of the spatial imagination might engage on equal footing with elastic poetic forms. Sophisticated engagement with visual arts are in evidence across the centuries despite a long history of theoretical adherence to Lessing's archaic distinctions

and the long tradition of *ut pictora poesis*, which attempts to reflect the similarities in content between a painted and poetic narrative. A deficiency of theory has not stopped the development of the form. In *Laocoon: An Essay on the Limits of Painting and Poetry* (1766), Lessing expresses a disdain for ekphrasis, arguing that since the different modes of representation occupy different realms of reality—poetry uses conventional, temporal signs to depict actions and suggest bodies, while painting uses "natural" spatial signs to depict bodies and only suggest actions—attempts to combine the two are in bad taste (Lessing 78). Only in 1967 did scholars finally start revising Lessing's original thesis on poetry and painting. Murray Krieger argued then that in ekphrasis the work of visual art becomes a *symbol* for "the frozen, stilled world of plastic relationships which must be superimposed upon literature's turning world to 'still' it" (265-66). And still decades later Heffernan takes issue with Krieger's foundational formulation, wanting finally to flee the dichotomous association of stillness with the visual and movement with poetry. Heffernan wants to show how the layers of representation between visual and verbal art inform each other in a productive antagonism.

Recent scholarship in word and images studies has even challenged Heffernan's notion of "productive antagonism," finally beginning to understand the relationship between word and image to be as varied in ekphrasis as relationships between painters and poets are in real life. The proceedings of the 2005 International Association of Word and Image Studies conference, *Elective Affinities,* takes for its title Goethe's work of the same name, in which the distaste he expresses for the co-mingling of various art forms demonstrates the widespread influence of Lessing's argument about the distinct spheres

of conventional and natural signs. Goethe's 1798 work assumes the affinities between various art forms to argue that "true artists" should help maintain the autonomy of each form by keeping them separate. The editors of *Elective Affinities* do not start with Goethe's assumption of affinities between the arts to *prescribe* how artists should proceed, but to *describe* and explore the variety of ways that literature and other arts interact and the cultural contexts that influence their interaction (MacLeod et. al. 12). The editors of the volume ask, "Do words and images enjoy a harmonious kinship, yield to adulterous passion, engage in border skirmishes, or seek to annihilate one another?" (12). The essays compiled in *Elective Affinities* address this question in the cases of individual authors and artists, but as the editors acknowledge, the field is open.

Another strand of word and image scholarship in the last decade has shown how visual art, especially of the early twentieth century, defies Lessing's formulation by foregrounding movement on canvas and in clay. Sarah Wyman takes this approach in her 2010 essay, "How Paul Klee and Frank O'Hara used Painted Image and Printed Word to Signify Worlds in Motion," and Seeta Chaganti observes the performative exigence and dynamic interaction of Anglo-Saxon text and the "ritually implicated artifacts on which it is inscribed" (49). Most relevant to the present discussion, Calvin Bedient takes on the traditional temporal/spatial distinction between literature and visual arts in *The Yeats Brothers and Modernism's Love of Motion* (2009). Bedient argues that the monumentalizing impulse of Yeats's poetry is energized by a "restlessness" of form and content that refuses the temptations of order, closure, and stillness.

Yet another direction for the study of interart relationships reaches beyond word and image to a growing interdisciplinary interest in what are broadly categorized as *intermedial* relationships between artistic media such as literature and music, spoken and printed word, or text and image in graphic design. However these various forms of intermodal art differ, they all foreground the relationship, the interaction, or the conversation between two autonomous art forms. Even within literature, the varieties of interactions abound: graphic novels, ekphrastic poems and novels, concrete poems, art books, collaborations between poets and photographers or illustrators, and the ancient Chinese art of calligraphy all ask us to set aside our assumptions about reading as a non-material act. Ekphrasis is simply one of the oldest formalized traditions of intermodal art in Western literature and criticism. Even the tradition of ekphrasis itself, though, varies across literary genres and throughout literary history. John Banville has developed novelistic ekphrasis in complex works like *Athena* (1995), in which a painting comes to life as a mysterious, seductive woman in the imagination of the narrator. In drama, playwrights and directors are faced with the decision of allowing the audience to see works of art central to their plays, as in Yasmina Reza's *Art* (1994) and Tom Stoppard's *Indian Ink* (1995).

Ekphrasis and New Formalism

While scholars tend to agree that Heffernan's "productive antagonism" is at least part of the relationship between visual and verbal art, they tend to disagree on how strictly ekphrasis should be defined. In its strictest form, ekphrasis refers to literature

containing a passage of description, narration, or reflection on some specific work of representational art, as in Yeats's "On a Picture of a Centaur by Edmund Dulac" or even Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn." In these examples, Yeats and Keats propose a particular representational work of the artistic imagination, not just any visual object like a drinking glass or a kitchen chair. Heffernan's strict definition—ekphrasis is the "verbal representation of visual representation"—would exclude most of Yeats's poems about the visual arts. "Sailing to Byzantium" imagines a future form for the poet as a kind of artifice, but Yeats deliberately avoids associating his "artifice of eternity" with visual representation saying, "once out of nature I shall never take / My bodily form from any natural thing" (IV. 1-2). Heffernan argues that if we broaden the definition to include this kind of pictorialism, as Krieger does, we risk stretching ekphrasis "to the breaking point" so that it "merely becomes a new name for formalism" (*Museum* 2).

This dissertation, however, takes the broader view of ekphrasis to explore the representational antagonisms in Yeats and Boland that do not always fit Heffernan's stricter definition. The visual realm is so fundamental to Yeats's understanding of art that the issues usually associated with strict ekphrasis can be applied more broadly across his work. And while Boland writes ekphrasis that fits more neatly into the narrowly defined category, as her writing matures, it increasingly reflects an engagement with the more fundamental issues of representation that recall Yeats's looser engagement with the visual arts. Her most recent poetry blurs the line between art and craft, thus pushing the boundaries of ekphrasis as a museum-based form. Recent scholarship that reflects an archeological approach to material culture in Ireland

will also challenge the more restrictive definitions of ekphrasis. In Heffernan's formulation, a kitchen chair, as I said, would not be considered a work of art unless a representational scene, for instance, were painted on the back. But Claudia Kinmonth's work in Irish Country Furniture reflects a wider definition of art that blurs the line between art and craft and considers the kitchen chair itself as an artifact of a regional strand of human creativity and skill.

Heffernan's argument against a broader definition of ekphrasis also impels a re-evaluation of the relationship between ekphrasis and formalism; I argue that while they are not one and the same, ekphrasis and formalism are fundamentally compatible and even inseparable approaches to studying contemporary poetry and the visual arts. It is not coincidental that some of the same critics who have written on the movement in new formalism are also critics of ekphrasis. Krieger and Mitchell, for instance, are conversant in both fields and use similar arguments about the importance of literary form and the relationship between visual and verbal art forms. Krieger argues that the study of form might be reinvigorated if we "stop defining form as inherently totalizing" (qtd. in Levinson 563), seeing it rather as "a power to complicate that is also a power to undermine" (Krieger 258), which by now should be recognizable as a function of visual representation on poetry. Edna Longley puts it well when she says, "Poetry's consciousness of painting inevitably highlights and measures its *aesthetic* self-consciousness, tilts the see-saw away from history" (227). Instead of *re-presenting* a work of visual art in words, Yeats and Boland both *re-imagine* visual art in the lyric mode, opening up a relational space of aesthetic and ethical reflection.

Ekphrasis embodies the tensions between materiality and transcendence being sorted out in current discussions of new formalism. Marjorie Levinson tries to make sense of the last decade's scholarship on what is often (and often contentiously) called the movement of "New Formalism" in a recent article in *PMLA*, by turns revealing both skepticism of the "movement" and hope for the reinvigorated attention to the formal aspects of literature that scholarship in this area represents. Ultimately, after a lengthy review of the scholarship on new formalism, Levinson seems to argue that the best of the criticism does not derogate either the political or the formal dimensions of literature. Rather, it seems that one promising strand of new formalism maintains an attention to form as a means of "activating thought" (Mitchell "Form" 322) rather than limiting it, a means of opening the aesthetic and ethical possibilities of literature rather than closing them. Levinson does not make many definite statements about the movement, except to highlight what seem to be its underlying values: it seeks "to reinstate close reading both at the curricular center of our discipline and as the opening move, preliminary to any kind of critical consideration. […] That form is either 'the' or 'a' source of pleasure, ethical education, and critical power is a view shared by all the new formalism essays" (560-61). Taking a formal approach is doubly justified because of both Yeats's and Boland's stated commitment to honest engagement with it. Engaging with the formal tradition was Yeats's way of writing the music of poetry. Two recent, definitive books by established Yeats scholars have emphasized the power of form in Yeats's poetry. Schuchard writes in *The Last Minstrel* that innovating poetic forms was one of the ways Yeats envisioned the revival of the Irish oral tradition against the moralism of Victorian

poetry and the "sentimental patriotism and lack of craft" in Irish poetry (xxi). As he notes, "For the bardic contrarian, only highly crafted poetry of personal, passionate utterance would be worthy of Ireland in the coming times" (xxi). And as Helen Vendler argues in *Our Secret Discipline: Yeats and Lyric Form,* Yeats was no slavish follower of the lyric tradition, but re-imagined, through the labor of craft, each form he tried. Vendler's approach to form will be important for Chapter two of this dissertation.

New formalism has also been energized by recent work on the formal "singularity" of literature: the ineffable particularity of a work's inventiveness that occurs apart from the historical, political, ideological contexts in which it is made. The term singularity clarifies what many literary theorists have articulated about the irreducible nature of the work of art and its existence before philosophy or any other lens through which literature is often read. Singularity, according to Derek Attridge, is the work's "difference from all other objects, not simply as a particular manifestation of general rules but as a particular nexus within culture that is perceived as resisting or exceeding all pre-exisiting determinations" (63). Going back to Bloom and Frye, Jon Kertzer argues that this ineffable quality of literature does not "speak" at all, but is experienced immediately and directly. Both Attridge's and Kertzer's arguments imply, as Attridge argues more explicitly that the singularity of literature occurs as an event more than it exists as an object (67). Reception then—the object as it is experienced by a reader in a particular context at a particular time—is central to the work's significance for its culture. As Attridge explains, singularity is not defined by material irreducibility; it is not a pure artifact but open to interpretation and context; it is not property but

event; and it is not captured by the word "unique," which, he argues, may characterize any object without it being the inventive work of singular art (63-64). The singular work's fluidity and openness to reception can be read in the dynamics of ekphrasis, and animates the poetic relationship with the visual arts in Yeats and Boland.

A profound understanding of singularity helps the poem resist what many poets and scholars fear about ekphrasis: the potential for the word to be subsumed by the work of visual art. In his philosophical reflection on the way we experience intimate spaces, *The Poetics of Space*, Gaston Bachelard articulates a radical philosophy of art that assumes that art cannot be subsumed by philosophy or any attempt to reduce it to cultural or historical causes; rather, art is defined only in the relation between the object and observer at the moment of observation. Bachelard's philosophy is based on the reader's attention to the "essential psychic actuality" or "essential novelty" of a work of art. "One must be receptive, receptive to the image at the moment it appears," he writes (xv). Instead of emphasizing what the reader brings to the work of literature, Bachelard's theory insists that the reader be open to receiving what the work has for her. Bachelard's subject is poetry, but his philosophy is applicable across the arts and could be applied just as effectively to the visual arts because his focus is on receptivity and psychological space rather than the unique formal aspects of poetry. Applied to ekphrasis, Bachelard's poetics allows the poet a position of receptivity to a work of visual art that precedes his writing it into ekphrasis.

The ekphrastic poem, then, does not appeal to the direct visual experience of the painting it envisions, but embodies its own direct experience as a singular poetic event.

The ekphrastic poem cannot "voice" the painting any more than criticism can successfully "capture" everything of value about a poem. Read through this lens, even as critics of ekphrasis try to articulate the difference between visual and verbal signs, they will always come back to the event of each individual instance of those signs, which resist being articulated at all.[2] Kertzer writes, using the word "unique" that Attridge rejects, that "the unique eludes the web of signification because it is not comparable or equivalent to anything else. It is solely itself; as soon as equivalence is found, uniqueness is lost" (212).

Both Attridge and Kertzer connect an aesthetic of singularity with the relationship between literature and ethics. Kertzer argues that singularity "raises a[n] …ethical challenge that sets moral generality against the dignity of the unique" (208). Ekphrasis, as the interaction of one singular medium with another, provides a fecund model for exploring ethical notions of the dignity of the "other" in broader contexts. Praciticing ekphrasis could remind the poet that the ethics of poetry are tied up in the particular beauties of its own form, and that the experience of beauty is sometimes a kind of pain—the pain of shattered ideals that enable us to recognize ourselves in the woundedness (and the wounding) of others as the forms of art open us up to new ways of knowing and living.

---

[2] Paul Crowther's 2009 book *Phenomenology of the Visual Arts (even the frame)* establishes a revisionary theoretical apparatus for studying the "singularity" of the visual arts without betraying visual signs to the limitations of discursive media to analyze them. His book focuses on the ontology and perception of the "major idioms of visual art in their own particular characters," and theorizes at the core "the ontological reciprocity of subject and object of experience" (3). While he does not delve into word/image relationships, his idea of "reciprocity" between subject and object is crucial for theorizing the similarly reciprocal relationship between the perceiving word and the visual object in ekphrasis.

Taking singularity seriously as an ethical, not just an aesthetic phenomenon, would have profound effects on theories of ekphrasis, opening both works of art to ways of interacting that defy the metaphors of antagonism that have generally defined them. One direction of the ethical turn in literature, exemplified in discussions of the singularity and the event of reading, questions the ethical grounding that literature instills in readers. This line of thinking distinguishes itself from literary moralism, which assumes that the subject-matter of a work of art imparts specific moral lessons. But scholars in literature and ethics study how reading, in Attridge's words, "involves the apprehension of otherness in the mutual opening it produces" (67). The struggle for dominance between word and image as Heffernan envisions it becomes for Attridge and inevitable ethical tension that does not have to be a power struggle that ends in violence to one or the other. Accepting the inevitable losses that occur in the encounter between the other and the same, Attridge focuses on the potentially creative and mutually beneficial outcomes that can also emerge from such encounters. The response to a singular work, he writes, "the responsible response, the one that attempts to apprehend the other as other—is a performance of it that, while it inevitably strives to convert the other into the same, strives also to allow the same to be modified by the other" (124). By focusing on the dignity of individuality, the ethical encounter between the other and same, the image and the word, emerges as a creative and invigorating experience. The poet mourns the inevitable losses that occur in such encounters, but builds in exchange a sense of the creativity of ethical engagement that informs and motivates each new encounter.

Awareness of singularity in literature and visual forms make Yeats's and Boland's ekphrases models of how visual receptivity affords poetry a fluidity of form and openness to the other that justifies ethical readings of their work. Chapter two of this dissertation will show how Yeats's early training in the visual arts develops the poet's visual intelligence and awareness of visual singularity, which manifests itself in a complex engagement with the visual arts in his later poetry that challenges assumptions about the poet's commitment to his works as stable monuments of his poetic legacy. Yeats often performs ekphrasis to model the kinds of receptive, creative encounters that he desires his readers to have with his poetry. Yeats's openness to the visual other, openness of form, and challenge to monumentalism represent the backbone of Boland's interest in his work, which I introduce in Chapter three. In that chapter I argue that Boland found in Yeats a parallel between the imaginative qualities of interior spaces, poetic spaces, and the intimate, private space of encounters with visual art, which sets the stage for the development of her sophisticated engagement with the visual arts throughout her career. Chapter four traces the early development of Boland's ekphrasis through the volume *Outside History* arguing that in her encounters with paintings, she works out her ethical relation to the women represented in paintings, empathizing with them as she does other women, the narrative of whose pasts she re-imagines through poetry. With *Outside History*, Boland's ekphrasis takes on a slightly different tone, and moves from empathy with other women to realizing poetically the reality of death as she herself ages and confronts her aging body in poetry.

Chapter five transitions from Boland's early ekphrasis based on empathy to her later ekphrasis, the subject of Chapter six, through her poetics of mourning and loss and her ethic of *communitas*, which acknowledges subjective bias in a way that empathy does not. Chapter six argues that two of Boland's later volumes, *In a Time of Violence* (1994) and *Domestic Violence* (2007), initiate an ekphrasis of relational aesthetic exchange in the intimate, liminal spaces in which art is experienced and made. This chapter explores how an ethic of communitas at the heart of artistic creation informs Boland's discerning, non-objectifying communal voice as a way of re-imagining Irish community for our contemporary world. The last chapter concludes this dissertation by suggesting, briefly, how Boland, with Yeats as exemplar, has proven ekphrasis to be a flexible mode and viable practice for contemporary poets in Ireland and elsewhere who continue to re-imagine the relationship between beauty and justice.

CHAPTER TWO

"No work can stand": Resisting Monuments in the Ekphrasis of W.B. Yeats

Yeats's conviction that artistic unity would effect social change early in his career was fundamental to his later poetic development. In his study of the sources of Yeats's concept of "artistic power," Phillip Marcus reminds us that throughout his career, "Unity of Culture" was central to Yeats's hope that artistic power would effect political and social change in Ireland. From the beginning, however, Yeats's notion of social "change" refused to be aligned with didactic morality. Marcus cites an early Yeats essay, from 1886, which states "Great poetry does not teach us anything—it changes us" (qtd. in Marcus 15). This idea developed over time as Yeats spearheaded the Irish Literary Revival hoping that a revival in Irish arts and culture would solidify a sense of "Irishness" that would ennoble his countrymen, rich and poor, to take pride in their "greater possessions" and responsibility for their own fate ("Ireland and the Arts" 210). Art and scholarship like this, Yeats writes in "Ireland and the Arts,"

> Would make love of the unseen more unshakable, more ready to plunge deep into the abyss, and they would make love of country more fruitful in the mind, more part of daily life. One would know an Irishman into whose life they had come—and in a few generations they would come into the life of all, rich and poor—by something that set him apart among men. (210)

The vestiges of Yeats's interest in the Pre-Raphaelites can be heard in this 1901 passage in the connection drawn between the worlds of the spirit, of art, and of everyday life, which Yeats saw unified in the work of William Morris and others of the mid-to-late

nineteenth-century movement. In the same essay, Yeats references Morris as an advocate for the socially transformative power of art.

> In England, men like William Morris, seeing about them passions so long separated from the perfect that it seemed as if they could not be changed until society had been changed, tried to unite the arts once more to life by uniting them to use. They advised painters to paint fewer pictures upon canvas, and to burn more of them on plates; and they tried to persuade sculptors that a candlestick might be as beautiful as a statue. ("Ireland and the Arts" 204).

Morris was a motivation in the visual arts for the changes Yeats wanted from a revival in Irish folk stories and ballads. Implicit in both of these passages is the idea that through an art allied to everyday life, cultural revival would bolster the spirits of the Irish for larger social and political changes.

The pervasiveness of Yeats's pursuit of spiritual and cultural unity throughout his career has led some scholars to suggest that Yeats's late attention to paintings and sculptures stems from his desire for permanent forms by which to imagine his poetic legacy as a unified work of art. Elizabeth Bergmann Loizeaux, for example, argues that Yeats's sense of the "interrelation" between visual arts and poetry "was so deeply embedded that he rarely conceived of them as separate" (*Yeats* 36). Discussions of Yeats and the visual arts have argued that Yeats's attention to physical monuments at the end of his life is reflected in his view of his own poetry as "monuments" that will survive beyond his death. Loizeaux connects Yeats's desire for unity in all things to his view of his poems as monuments: "His poems were to be like the sculptural monuments he so admired: round, whole, independent, of themselves, enduring" (188). But monuments signify a legacy with more definition and stability than Yeats's poems about art reveal,

especially in moments of narrative self-awareness and direct audience address. In "Sailing to Byzantium," for instance, he refuses outright the earthly "singing schools" from which he might have learned because they encourage artistic solipsism, which he associated with monuments: "Nor is there singing school but studying / monuments of its own magnificence" (*CP* 193). Permanence was, of course, desirable for the aging poet, but his later poems demonstrate his continued ability to find poetic energy in considering the contraries to his desires. As Denis Donoghue argues so well, the motivation behind all of Yeats's poetry is the continual pursuance of dialectical conflict. He explains that Yeats found in Nietzsche the possibility of retaining both sides of a conflict within the mind rather than either reconciling them together or allowing one side to overwhelm the other (*William Butler Yeats* 59).

Calvin Bedient makes a recent anti-monumentalizing argument for Yeats's poetry by drawing a parallel between the dynamic of stillness and motion in Yeats's poetry and his brother Jack B. Yeats's paintings. The critical link between the brothers is difficult to draw because the poet wrote so little about his painter brother and his paintings, but Bedient links the brothers through Modernism: both Yeats brothers, he argues, create dynamic forms to counterbalance realism and monumentality. To prove this, Bedient analyzes the dynamic of stillness and motion within the works of the Yeats brothers, but shows that they were both more influenced by Modernism as an artistic calling than by each other. Each one "shines the more by comparison," he argues, so that read in the context of Jack's paintings, Yeats's "taste for chaos, for prodigality, for violence" are all the more prominent (21). Bedient has effectively shown that motion

and stillness are at work formally and thematically in many of Yeats's major poems, but there is still more to be done to debunk the myth of the monumentality or objectiveness of Yeats's poetics. Yeats's early commitment to art and social change is transformed over the decades as he becomes embroiled in and disillusioned by politics, but the fluidity of his original theories about art as a force that forms and responds to the needs of society, never completely abandons the poet. His openness to works of visual art in his later poetry gestures into the realm of social reception. The fluidity of his approach to the visual arts models how he wants his own works received despite a changing audience—with respect and creativity.

My approach to Yeats's receptivity to the visual arts explores the formal dynamic within the poems but also between the poems and their potential audience. Yeats's meditations on paintings and sculptures put him on a threshold of receptivity that eventually enables a more fluid conception of his own poetry as being created again with each reading event. Instead of monuments to the desire for visual permanence, Yeats's ekphrastic poems become metaphors for the future reading events of his poetry. He places himself, as the viewer of a painting or sculpture, into the position of the reader and performs the kind of creative reading, responsible to the work, that he desires for his readers of his poetry. By performing ekphrasis, he acknowledges and even embraces to some extent that poetic readings are contextualized and informed by the contingencies of the moment, just as his ekphrases are informed by the gift exchange and friendship Yeats associates with visual art in the second half of his life.

Yeats conceptualized a fluid relationship between poetry and the visual arts very early in his career. In his scathing 1892 review of *Sight and Song,* a volume of ekphrasis by Michael Field, the pseudonym for Katherine Harris Bradley and Edith Emma Cooper, the poet criticizes Field for allowing paintings to overwhelm their poetry ("Rev. of *Sight and Song*" 167). In their introduction to Yeats's short review, John Frayne and Madeleine Marchaterre interpret it as "dogmatically opposed to works of art serving as inspiration for poetry," and at odds with his own later poems about art (167). Indeed, while Yeats had previously expressed esteem for Field's poems and plays, their ekphrasis amounts, for him, to criticism disguised as poetry: "a guidebook to the picture galleries of Europe" (168). The focus of Yeats's condemnation, however, is quite clearly the slavish and *un*-inspired nature of the poetry, not ekphrasis as a subgenre. Yeats does not criticize Field's descriptions and technical aspects of the poems. "All are well put together," he concedes, "with carefully chosen rhymes, out of the way adjectives and phrases full of minute observation…. There is intellectual agility in every sentence" (168-69). The spurs of his critical tongue are reserved for lack of poetic imagination: "no man will ever feel his eyes suffuse with tears or his heart leap with joy when he reads it" (168). The "two ladies," Yeats writes condescendingly, "who hid themselves behind the pen-name of Michael Field have set to work to observe and interpret a number of pictures, instead of singing out of their own hearts and setting to music their own souls" (167-8). The ekphrases "observe" and "interpret" instead of allowing the painting to inspire the full resources of the poetic imagination to action.

By the time he wrote this review, he had already tried and, by his own account, failed to write convincing ekphrasis of his own, as Loizeaux's definitive research on Yeats and the visual arts has shown. She recalls Yeats's review of *Sight and Song* as the poet's acknowledgement of the lessons he learned from his own futile ekphrastic endeavors (*Yeats* 40). The review also represents evidence of Yeats's early intimations of the potential fluid receptivity between poetry and visual art that Field prevents by allowing the visual to overwhelm their poetry. The review draws an apt parallel between the women "hiding" behind a single male pseudonym and their poetic voices concealed behind the presence of visual art. Just as the women veil their true identities, the imaginative resonance of their poetry is stifled by their slavish adherence to visual description. Yeats's review does not preclude spiritual unity in the arts, but it insists that unity is more difficult than simply subsuming the *otherness* of one art to the semiotic system of another. Loizeaux's important work on Yeats and the visual arts has set the groundwork for this study, which attempts, in part to develop a line of thinking that her study leaves open: an analysis of how "Yeats's ideas and practice affect in large ways our formulation of the debate" about interart relationships (*Yeats* 2). The radical differences in art practice and material process between poetry and painting animates a dynamic of alterity within Yeats's ekphrasis that challenges the spiritual unity of its products and charges it with ethical implications.

Yeats's "The Peacock" (*Responsibilities)* captures the potential loneliness of creative achievement done strictly for "the pride of his eye" (*CP* 121). The poem's ostensible theme—detachment from the material world achieved by a great artist—is

undercut by imagery of isolation: the artist's soul, wandering the "desolate" Irish landscape "adding feather to feather / for the pride of his eye." Yeats has attuned his ear to the solitude of artistic achievement, and weighed against the detachment he gains from it, finds it insufficient. Between isolated achievement and art made entirely for popular consumption is the beauty of a work of art in conversation with its reader or observer. The "pride" of his art is his attention to the beauty of the forms he creates, like the peacock, but he also recognizes the humility of reception necessary for the full spiritual potential of art to be achieved.

Considering Yeats's poetry in the context of artistic singularity as formulated by Derek Attridge helps conceptualize the relationship between his artistic pride, his openness to the visual other in ekphrasis, and his acceptance of the reception of his own works. As I explained in my introduction, singularity defines the work of art as an event that occurs rather than an object that exists, which thus accounts for how art is received in context as well as the inner workings of the artifact (Attridge 67). While Attridge's discussion focuses on poetry, formal singularity could readily be applied to a work of visual art like a painting or sculpture, as long as the relationship between innovative form and reception remains in the foreground. While monuments tend, in their permanence, to be read in a way that reflects a defined view of what or who it represents, many of Yeats's ekphrases approach encounters with visual art as singular events that depend on context and contingencies of reception, none of which will be stable for any given viewer. Attridge writes of singularity, "Its emergence is also the beginning of its erosion" (64). Famous lines from "Lapis Lazuli" could also be read as

voicing the anti-monumental impulse of formal singularity, and given solace by the artist's satisfaction in the process of making: "All things fall and are built again / And those that build them again are gay" (295).

Formal singularity assumes that the agency of an art work, its own inner movement, does not preclude it from reception, poetry any more than painting. The following excerpt from the 1906 essay "Discoveries" articulates Yeats's belief in the irreducibility of artistic experience:

> It is not possible to separate an emotion or a spiritual state from the image that calls it up and gives it expression. Michelangelo's *Moses*, Velasquez' *Philip the Second*, the colour purple, the crucifix, call into life an emotion or state that vanishes with them because they are its only possible expression, and that is why no mind is more valuable than the images it contains. ("Discoveries" 286)

The event of artistic encounter, the meeting of the mind and heart with the visual image, is as creative, in this view, as the artist's original creation of the work. Each image calls up a new emotion or state of mind unique to that image and the mind that receives it. Context of course also plays a role in reception, but Yeats expresses it in universal rather than personal terms. "All the old simple things have been painted or written," he laments, "and they will only have meaning for us again when a new race or a new civilization has made us look upon all with new eyesight" (287). "Discoveries" suggests that Yeats did represent visual images any more than poetic ones as permanent fixtures, talisman for their original culture, but as keenly dependent upon the role of the mind in history to interact with transcendent art.

The bulk of this chapter will be devoted to poems from *The Tower* (1928) to *Last Poems* (1938-9), volumes where the tension between singularity and spiritual unity in art are worked out in parallel with the tension between Yeats's declining body and his search for unity of body and soul. It is no coincidence that his meditations on art and life become more profound as he approaches old age and death. With the deterioration of his body he gained a deeper appreciation of the contrast between desire and the reality of death—that ability of his poetry to "look into the void of death" as Boland puts it in "The Weasel's Tooth" (88). The disembodied metaphors he uses for old age in "Sailing to Byzantium" —the "tattered coat upon a stick" and "sick with desire / and fastened to a dying animal" (*CP* 193)—separate body and soul so that the speaker's desires for transcendence manifest themselves on the level of art. For Yeats, as for Boland later, the crux of ekphrasis is the poet's hubris, his desire to control every aspect of his creation, which has its necessary and poetically enabling contrary in the singularity of the visual and bodily other.

A Yeatsian Dialectic: Voice versus Vision

Elizabeth Bergman Loizeaux's *Yeats and the Visual Arts* (1986) accomplished the feat of tracing the particular periods and pieces of visual art represented in Yeats's poetry, and her book has been the standard for studying Yeats and the aesthetics of physical vision. In the context of more recent Yeats scholarship, however, specifically Ronald Schuchard's magisterial *The Last Minstrels (*2008*)*, which promises to motivate scholarly investigation of Yeats's commitment to the aural elements of this work, the

time might seem to have passed for inquiry into verbal/visual relationships in his work. However, given Yeats's commitment to dialectical thought, Schuchard's study might be helpful in clarifying Yeats's complementary (or often antagonistic) interest in the visual realm, and may contribute to our understanding of how the visual influenced Yeats's poetics.

Yeats's dual commitments to the music of poetry and the visual image are not as incompatible as they may seem on the surface, especially acknowledging his dialectical mind. James Flannery mooted the study of Yeats's idea of musical speech in *Yeats and the Idea of a Theatre (*1976), but Schuchard's original study uncovers Yeats's deep, abiding commitment to exploring the aural effects of poetry, the veritable movement of poets and performers influenced by his ideas about the intersection of poetry and music, and the deep influence these ideas had on the later manifestations of Imagist poetry. Schuchard shows that Yeats's interest in chanting and the ancient bardic arts emerges from his first belief that poetry is "the medium for an ancient, image-invoking religion, and the poet was not a purveyor of morality and 'high-seriousness' but a priest of the magical vision of life" (192). For Yeats, the spoken word has a unique potential to revive in culture a place for the transcendent; the poet has the best chance to establish the "spiritual democracy" that he imagines to have existed in "Judaea, in India, in Scandinavia, in Greece and Rome, in every ancient land" ("Ireland and the Arts" 206)and has its closest modern champion in William Morris from whom he drew his belief that "imaginative art was a vital and essential part of life itself, not the sole province of educated readers"(Schuchard 197). Yeats's probing interest in aural poetry

reflect his hope that a return to the the ancient oral bardic arts will lead to a revival of the ancient Irish cultural, national unity—precisely the Yeatsian unity that Boland disparagingly calls "imaginary" rather than "imaginative" in "The Weasel's Tooth" (88).

Yeats went so far with his commitment to aural poetry that in many of his early lectures he derided the printed word, having been devastated by his failure to establish a national library and the seeming impossibility of making books accessible to many of his Irish countrymen, and having put his confidence in reclaiming an oral cultural tradition (Schuchard 199).[1] As usual with Yeats, however—if anything can be usual with Yeats—dialectic is never very far from his championing of an extreme. In Yeats's view the Imagists seem to have set up a false dichotomy between aural and visual poetics. They argued that in modern print culture, the sounds of poetry read or chanted aloud were less important than the poet's manipulation of visual images through written language. The visual, non-metrical verse of the first wave of Imagists, led by T.E. Hulme and practiced by Ezra Pound and F.S. Flint, among others – deliberately provoked to do so, significantly, by Yeats's artistic collaborator and friend, Florence Farr – discarded the aural to champion the visual image. Eventually, Schuchard argues, it was Yeats's influence that led the later Imagists, and especially Ezra Pound to "compose

[1] Schuchard records a report from *The Pall Mall Gazette*, December 4, 1905: "[Yeats] said he was in revolt against the printed book, which made the world ignorant. In the olden days, he said, refinement was acquired by plays and by hearing of great people and great things when sitting among friends" (qtd. in Schuchard 191).

in sequence of the musical phrase, not in sequence of the metronome"[2] and maintain that "Poetry is a spoken and not a written art" (xxiii).

Unlike the Imagists, then, Yeats did not consider the image as essential to poetry; poetry was, for Yeats, fundamentally musical. This commitment to the fundamental singularity of poetry as a sonic art made his interactions with the visual arts, then, all the more profound. Yeats had respect for painting as a distinct art with forms and exigencies of its own; in ekphrasis poetry and painting might be in conversation, or antagonistic to each other, or working toward mutually beneficial goals, but they are always distinct, singular forms with their own agency and power. When he writes in "Ireland and the Arts" (1901) that "The Arts have failed," he uses the degradation of paintings as his first example, on par with the depleting quality of the public's interest in books. An inability to appreciate pictures and books causes Yeats to mourn for what he calls a "forgotten faith" (203).

Daniel Albright's discussion of Yeats's poetic images in his edition of the *Collected Poems* does not specifically address Yeats's ekphrasis, but his argument helps to draw a distinction between poetic images of Yeats's own imagination and the singularity of artistic images from the imaginations of others that he sets in dialogue with each other. Albright suggests that Yeats imagines some unimaginable totality from which all of his poetic images are grasped: "some impalpable field of energy" (37), which shifted from Irish legend in his earlier poetry to a "cosmic poem" of his own

[2] Schuchard cites Yeats contrast in *Explorations* between the varied music of Chaucerian verse and modern verse that is "monotonous in its structure and effeminate in its continual insistence upon certain moments of strained lyricism" (qtd. in Schuchard 220).

discovery that he communicated, however incompletely, in *A Vision* (1925, rev. ed. 1937). An artistic image like a painting or sculpture, by contrast, has a being outside of this totality as a product of someone else's imagination that Yeats discovers more as a gift than resulting from a labor of his own. Albright argues that Yeats's notion of the poem as a holistic act, not just a document—"not a set of words written on a sheet of paper, but a record of its origin and a guide to its destination"— finally fails because of uncontrollable factors like time and audience. This desire for totality represents, for Albright, "the final phase of the poet's hubris, this desire to control every aspect of a poem's operation" (43). Yeats's ekphrasis then represents the challenge of visual art to the poet's hubris: a painting or a statue represents images that the poet cannot completely control, even by incorporating them in a poem, because they are works of another imagination. Ultimately, Yeats may have hoped that his dialogue with works of visual art would further his reach toward totality and dissolution, in which his own soul is caught up and enveloped by the great soul of the Anima Mundi. Albright emphasizes Yeats's failure to reach or even fully articulate these goals before his death. Instead of focusing on his failure, my discussion shows how Yeats's attention to the works' singularity—its openness to movement and reception—presented a particularly enabling challenge to totality that motivated the poet's rich and persistent dialogue with the singularity of the artistic images.[3]

[3] Despite Albright's attention to the breadth of Yeats's corpus and his generally convincing argument in the context of other modernist writers, his disregard for close readings of whole poems to support his argument suggests the limits of an argument that focuses strictly on poetic images out of structural context.

This chapter will develop how three aspects of literary and visual singularity are at work in Yeats's ekphrasis. First, visual agency shows that visual singularity has equal standing with literary singularity in Yeats's poetry, and second, visual alterity shows how despite Yeats's respect for visual agency, visual singularity is other to the singularity of his own chosen medium. To demonstrate visual agency I will look at poems that show visual art, like poetry, as an "active set of relations" put in play in reception (Attridge 77). Visual alterity emphasizes, on the contrary, the otherness of the visual as an encounter with "some sense of strangeness, mystery, unfathomability" (77). I will show how Yeats's unique development of the traditional *ottava rima* form for ekphrasis reflects his engagement with an artistic form other to his own. And finally, the last section focuses on the performance of singularity. The awareness of singularity erodes the monolithic character frequently ascribed to Yeats's ekphrasis. While Yeats may initially look to the visual as a representation of the permanence he desires for his own art, by performing ekphrasis he models the creative and responsible engagement that he ultimately hopes his poetry will encounter in its afterlife.

Visual Agency

Yeats's early training and experiences in the visual arts introduced the poet to the tension between singularity and monumentality by developing his sense of visual agency as distinct from the agency of his poetic voice. Evidence for this distinction in Yeats's early writing is hardly forthcoming, however: Yeats is all but dismissive of the dual influences on his sense of visual agency: his art training under the tutelage of his

painter-father and at the Dublin Metropolitan School of Art.[4] These influences are also less evident in his early published poetry, and his more self-motivated Pre-Raphaelite enterprises of the 1890s are so much more present in his *Autobiographies* and his early published works that the early art training is often overlooked. By his own account, his art training was hardly inspiring. A tone of dissatisfaction dominates Yeats's autobiographical recollections of the DMSA; there his roving mind hit the road blocks of expediency and his passions were all but stifled by the requisite style of "neatness and smoothness" (*Au* 52). "The work I was set to bored me," he writes. "When alone and uninfluenced, I longed for pattern, for pre-Raphaelitism, for an art allied to poetry" (53-54). And the company of fellow students was not more stimulating than the work: "I would say to my fellow-students at the Art School, 'Poetry and sculpture exist to keep our passions alive'; and somebody would say, 'We would be much better without our passions' (57).

Despite his rejection of the pragmatic market-driven methods of his almost three years of art training, Yeats demonstrated excellence in visual production at the DMSA, and, as Bernadette McCarthy's research suggests, the rigor of his training, however he chafed against its conservative, repetitious nature, "contributed to a heightened visual intelligence, one that helped shape his poetic vision" (521). Training at the DMSA, and later at the Royal Hibernia Academy, would have made him immune to the diffidence

[4] Bernadette McCarthy has laid the foundation for further research into Yeats's early visual training, of which he was often dismissive, with her original research into the details of Yeats's enrollment at the Dublin Metropolitan School of Art (DMSA) from May 1884-July 1885 and the Royal Hibernian Academy until March 1887. Another task for scholars, she suggests, is to examine "the impact of his own visual training on his poetic and dramatic vision" (521).

other writers have expressed in approaching the visual arts,[5] and would have allowed him to understand from experience the tactile and cognitive differences between the practices of the two arts. Yeats's friend Cecil Salkeld recalls being surprised by the poet's trained visual awareness. After Salkeld presented Yeats with his water-color painting of a centaur in response to an early draft of "On a Picture of a Centaur by Edmund Dulac," Yeats took the picture and studied it carefully, only raising his head to ask Salkeld if he knew about "values." Salkeld, taken aback by the question, remembered suddenly that Yeats had been an art student. When Salkeld asked Yeats to explain "values," Yeats demurred, saying only, "values were the bane of my youth" (qtd. in Jeffares 249). The poet's dismissive answer suggests that he uses the visual intelligence his training afforded him against his will; he acknowledges the power along with the burden of his eye for art.

Yeats's 1901 essay "Ireland and the Arts," showcases another example of his keen eye for visual art. His hope for a distinctly "Irish" art is based on appeals to stylistic innovation attentive to the properties unique to the painted medium. Painting scenes from Irish life must offer stylistic innovations, which emerge from love and attention to the distinctiveness of Ireland from other countries:

> And I cannot believe that if our painters of Highland cattle and moss-covered barns were to care enough for their country to care for what makes it different from other countries, they would discover, when struggling, it may be, to paint the exact grey of the bare Burren Hills, and of a sudden, it may be, a new style, their very selves (208-209)

[5] I am referring to the "diffidence" articulated by Boland and Edward Said when confronted with the visual arts, as I explained in Chapter one.

Yeats demonstrates an awareness of the labor and individual agency of the visual arts, as much as in poetry; as painters labor to find "the exact grey" of the local landscape, they find their agency as Irish artists.

Yeats's desire for artistic unity should not be underestimated by overstating the case for visual agency. The Pre-Raphaelites embodied Yeats's ideal of artistic unity for a formative period in his artistic development. This mid-nineteenth century neo-medievalist movement represented, in part, a way for Yeats to distance himself from his father's considerable but more conservative artistic influence, and Yeats's jaded attitude toward the static, technical aspects of his pedantic art training at the DMSA made Pre-Raphaelite art, with its appeals to the heart and imaginative view of history, all the more attractive. Yeats judged his father's portraits as accomplished, but still lacking the passion he sought in the arts. "All displeased me," he writes, "In my heart I thought that only beautiful things should be painted, and that only ancient things and the stuff of dreams were beautiful" (*Au* 54). William Morris, a leader of Pre-Raphaelite movement, was a special idol of the young poet as an adept in "ancient things" and "the stuff of dreams," as well as an engaging personality. As an adept in poetry, visual arts, and social theory, Morris accomplished an artistic unity that Yeats never could, having given up on visual production. While he seems to have excelled in his art training to some extent, Yeats perceived in his own drawing and painting a lack of the imaginative impulse with which his labor in poetry rewarded him. His self-assessment in *Autobiographies*, in Loizeaux's view, is more or less supported by the few paintings and drawings by Yeats still available. Yeats gave up on his own practice of the visual arts,

writing, "I did not care for mere reality and believed that creation should be deliberate, and yet I could only imitate my father" (55). John Butler Yeats's biographer William Murphy agrees that the influence of his father was so strong that the possibility for originality was extremely limited (139).

All the while Yeats was attending the DMSA, his reputation as a poet was starting to blossom. Murphy cites an 1884 dinner party at which Yeats was first recognized publicly as a promising poet after reading a portion of what would later become *The Wanderings of Oisin.* Having given up on being a painter himself, Yeats tried his hand at using ekphrasis to engage the world of Pre-Raphaelite art. The subjects of these early ekphrases were contemporary Pre-Raphaelite-influenced works, not those he would have seen as a frequent visitor to the National Gallery of Ireland.[6] His championing of Jack Nettleship, a Pre-Raphaelite-influenced artist whose declining reputation Yeats had tried to revive, shows that he understood the work of ekphrasis as akin to the work of criticism: to advance the work of artists by speaking for them. Nettleship's early designs, Yeats writes, "though often badly drawn, fulfilled my hopes….Something of Blake they certainly did show" (105). His ekphrasis on a Nettleship drawing, however, makes the same judgment errors he criticizes in Michael Field's ekphrases some years later.

Eventually, Yeats found the Pre-Raphaelites to be a limited source of the passion for unity he continued to seek throughout his career in the occult and later in his own

[6] McCarthy's research reveals that Yeats signed in to the National Gallery ninety-three times and he went repeatedly to look at Turner's *Golden Bough* (521). At the time, she shows, the National Gallery had but one Pre-Raphaelite painting.

mythology outlined in *A Vision*. Yeats's early artistic training through his father and the DMSA contributed to his awareness of literary and visual agency in the later part of his career, which has been overlooked because of the overwhelming influence of the Pre-Raphaelites early in his career. Even after he distanced himself from the movement, his early interest in the Pre-Raphaelites still represented a key step in a well-traced trajectory toward artistic unity he continued on throughout his career, and his art training represented only the kind of mechanized market-driven art production with which he tried never to re-associate himself. The heightened visual awareness his early training afforded him, however, influenced Yeats's later ekphrastic poems, and perhaps even spurred his interest in Japanese arts, where repetition and stylization are privileged over the originality and creativity of Western high art.

Visual agency pervasiveness across Yeats's many artistic ventures is manifested by its central role in his posthumously published, unfinished, and largely autobiographical early novel *The Speckled Bird*, which he wrote sporadically in the late 1890s. His main character, a boy named Michael Hearne, becomes so obsessed with a reproduced painting of the Virgin Mary he finds that he refuses to eat in hopes that the painting will speak to him. After this almost religious experience of fasting, he is finally called into the world of the painting (419-422). The dominant theme of Yeats's later poetry, permanence and impermanence, art and death, can be traced back to the dual spiritual and physical nature of the boy's mystical experience in *The Speckled Bird*, which the unfinished novel never fully explores. Visual art often represents Yeats's desire to escape the bodily world for a more permanent form, as in "Sailing to Byzantium," but

his ekphrasis develops the experience of visual art, like poetry, as a singular event that resists transcendence even as it propels the viewer toward it.

Loizeaux argues that Yeats uses visual art to represent his own art, but the poems also show evidence of his interest in the singularity of visual art works in relation to his own, a metonymic relationship characterized by their contiguity, not always a symbolic one defined by subordination. For Yeats the work of visual art has its own "active set of relations" (Attridge 67) that opens itself to the same ethical exchange with the other that poetry does. Between the late 1890s and the publication of *The Tower* in 1928, the visual arts are curiously absent from Yeats's poetry; instead, his visual energies were being exercised in his theatre work in writing and producing plays with a high level of attention to visual presentation. His creative engagement with the Japanese Noh, a style of theatre with highly stylized visuals including masks and an emphasis on physical gestures, became an outlet for his ideas about the creative tensions between visual and aural art. Because the theatre is beyond the scope of this project, and because Loizeaux, in *Yeats and the Visual arts,* and Masaru Sekine and Christopher Murray, in *Yeats and the Noh,* have explored the theatrical side of Yeats's visual interests, my project will continue by drawing connection between Yeats's early poetic interest in the visual arts and his more sophisticated engagement with paintings and sculptures in his later poetry.

Loizeaux shows how Yeats's "On a Picture of a Black Centaur by Edmund Dulac" (*CP* 215) from *The Tower* (1928) uses a work of visual art as a highly symbolic reference to his own creative process. At first glance, the finished version of the title

signals an ekphrastic poem that bears little resemblance to any one of Dulac's actual pictures of centaurs, of which there are many. Both Loizeaux and Albright acknowledge this inconsistency in their readings of the poem: Albright suggests that although one of Dulac's highly stylized centaurs may have served as initial inspiration for the poem, the powerful, dominating character of the centaur is better reflected in Cecil Salkeld's picture painted after seeing an early draft of Yeats's poem (*Yeats: The Poems* 666). Read this way, the poem's title is a better nod to the inspiration of his friendship with Dulac than the inspiration of his pictures. Edmund Dulac was Yeats's friend and collaborator: he produced *At the Hawks Well*, designed some of the masks for his plays and the covers for many of his books, and Yeats's even dedicated *The Winding Stair and Other Poems* to him (*Yeats: The Poems* 666). I argue, however, while acknowledging my debt to both of these readings, that Dulac's image is not absent in the poem, but compels the dynamic between word and image that make it ekphrasis. Like so many of Yeats's poems about the visual arts, this one is born of a friendship and matures as an aesthetic meditation on the creative process. The poem acknowledges Yeats's respect for and debt to the singularity of Dulac's work, and evinces Yeats's mastery of the antagonism between word and image at the heart of ekphrasis.

Albright's notes to Yeats's poems are helpful in dissecting the somewhat obscure symbolic system of the poem to show that it is basically a meditation on Yeats's creative process. Albright pairs the poem with "A Coat" as another poem that announces a shift in the poet's style, this time giving up all that was mimetic and reactionary in his work for a more direct, uncompromising art of visceral force. The centaur represents the

"spontaneous, improvisatory, vitally physically kinetic kind of art" Yeats is eager to produce while parrots represent the mimetic art "the slavish art that copies reality instead of creating it," the influence of which has been too loud and demanding to ignore (*Yeats: The Poems* 666). The parrots may also recall the island paradise imagined in Yeats's early poem "The Indian to His Love" where the only disturbance to the lovers' retreat is a parrot that "sways upon a tree, / raging at his own image in the enameled sea," a reminder that the lovers cannot fully escape the discontent of the unquiet lands (*CP* 14). In the earlier poem, the parrots represent a creative human necessity—the individual's rage against himself—but in the later poem, the poet has had enough as a whole forest of parrots call at him with their imitative rage. Yeats celebrates the power of the centaur to crush his previous work, distract the parrots, and force him to re-imagine his "occult and labored method of poem-production" (*Yeats: The Poems* 666).

Even if the poem forgets Dulac's actual picture in its finished version, the speaker does not forget that he is addressing a picture, not just an imaginary centaur. The second-person address so typical of ekphrasis begins and ends the poem but recedes in the middle, so that the presence of the centaur's destructive potential initiates the poet's meditation on his art and returns at the end to challenge, perhaps even threaten, the poet's newfound artistic convictions. The poet addresses the centaur as a defeated rival in the first four lines, recalling the rivalry between word and image that often characterizes ekphrasis: "Your hooves have stamped at the black margin of the wood…/ My works are all stamped down in the sultry mud" (*CP* 215). The imagery shifts from the "black margin" of the woods to the "mad abstract dark" of the kitchen, a

laboratory retreat where the poet labors to find poetic sustenance. The move from outdoors to indoors parallels the move from poetic reception to poetic inspiration and production, but both spaces are initially dark and isolated. The poet uses his main ingredient, the "old mummy wheat" of an older poetic tradition he has labored to sprout after millennia in ancient tombs, as a reaction against the imitative realism of his contemporaries particularly in the theatre. He grinds the mummy wheat, "being driven half insane / Because of some green wing" (*CP* 215).

At the poem's precise middle, lines 8 and 9, the emphasis shifts to Yeats's new kind of art, compared not to the labor of bread but to the silent fermenting of wine that has garnered its power resting unaware while history passed it by. In the following lines, he contrasts his old laborious efforts with the grace of finding latent artistic power despite his striving in the wrong direction:

> In the mad abstract dark and ground it grain by grain
> And after baked it slowly in an oven; but now
> I bring full-flavored wine out of a barrel found
> Where seven Ephesian topers slept and never knew
> When Alexander's empire passed, they slept so sound. (215)

The poet shifts from inspiration to reception, to "bring full-flavored wine" of good poetry once again "out" to an audience. The emphasis on bringing the wine "out" for pleasure contrasts with the furtive grinding of the bread for the speaker's own sustenance.

The rivalry between the invigorated poet and centaur returns in the next stanza, and can be heard in the rivalry of word and image in the last four lines:

Stretch out your limbs and sleep a long Saturnian sleep;
I have loved you better than my soul for all my words,
And there is none so fit to keep watch and keep
Unwearied eyes upon those horrible green birds. (215)

The speaker playfully induces the centaur to "sleep a long Saturnian sleep," while his own voice takes on the centaur's more direct, kinetic power. This last image of a resting, waiting centaur most resembles Dulac's picture, called "The good Chiron taught his pupils to play upon the harp," which is often cited as the poem's inspiration. And it is in these lines that the poet seems most convincingly to be speaking to the centaur as a picture, not just a poetic image. The centaur is an object of love as a source of that physical, male energy Yeats desires for his poetry in the first part of the poem, but here the two have switched roles and the centaur is more vulnerable to the poet's power. Words overwhelm the image, denying its otherness, that which makes it unique and irreducible as an image. The line "I have loved you better than my soul for all my words" suggests with some humility that his words have not done justice to Dulac's picture, but the last two lines fix the centaur firmly on the picture plane, fearful of that Dulac's image has the silencing power of the centaur whose hooves may still "stamp at the black margin of the wood." Calvin Bedient identifies the ambiguity in these last lines: are the unwearied eyes those of the centaur or the poet? He calls the problem insoluble, but prefers to read them as the poet's unwearied eyes keeping watch while the centaur sleeps: the poet is "taking over the task he should have assumed and borne all along" (36). If we read the painting itself as a presence in the poem, however, the centaur's "sleep" could simply be the poet's fixing the centaur back in the dream-world

of Dulac's painting. The docile centaur has the "unwearied eyes" of a figure fixed on a picture plane, watching for the horrible green birds but this time staying away from Yeats's art.

Visual Alterity: Ekphrastic Ambivalence in Ottava Rima

Yeats's attention to visual form is paralleled by his dynamic conception of poetic form, the relationship between structure , sound, and sense. Despite his early assertion that "words alone are certain good" in "The Song of the Happy Shepherd" (1885) Yeats learns as he continues to write and increasingly to speak publicly that poetic language cannot be isolated from the ambiguities and deceptions of "grey truth" when it enters the realm of audience reception (*CP* 7). While poetic words could not be counted on to carry their intended meanings indefinitely or even at all, poetic form—the inextricable relationship between structure, sound, and sense—remained for Yeats the counterargument to every misreading, the sign of exchange inherent in the artistic process. Denis Donoghue argues that even when a poem makes statements in ordinary language, a poem "is not the sum of those statements; it maintains its autonomy by virtue of its form" ("Force of Form" 7). Donoghue calls works of literature "forms of composition rather than forms of designation" (7), suggesting the dynamic interaction of structure, sound, and sense in the artistic process, not the unity of the autotelic artifact. This dynamic notion of form is congruous with the lively tensions energizing the ekphrastic poem, an exchange between two such dynamic forms on the threshold

between them. And for Yeats's versions of ekphrasis, *ottava rima* is the form he finds most often suited to the theme of aesthetic mediation.

Helen Vendler's discussion of *ottava rima* in *Our Secret Discipline* (2004) illuminates Yeats's use of that form, but she stops short of making the connection between *ottava rima* and aesthetic mediation. Why, we might still ask, do some of Yeats's best meditations on the visual arts employ the form? "Sailing to Byzantium," "The Municipal Gallery Re-visited," and "The Statues" each contribute to the poet's development of *ottava rima* as viable modern form, fit for serious yet psychologically complex aesthetic reflection. Vendler sums up Yeats's contribution to the form:

> By allowing in his ottava rima poems a maximal psychological complexity, he has removed the genre from the chiefly descriptive or speculative function, and made it sympathetic to intellectual and emotional autobiography. (289)

Yeats was attracted to the form through Shelley, but found reasons to develop it for his own purposes. "A Bronze Head," in *rhyme royal*, a closely related Renaissance form (with seven instead of eight line-stanzas), functions similarly to *ottava rima* (*CP* 340). Throughout his ekphrastic poetry Yeats exhibits the ambivalence characteristic of the genre between the dynamic power of the word and the power and permanence of the visual form. The balance of the eight-line stanza and the ending couplet contain each *ottava rima* stanza as an individual room—"a station, a place, a location" (Vendler 289)—each capable of a different balance of visual and verbal power. Vendler cites Seamus Heaney on Yeatsian form to support the linguistic equation between "stanza" and "room" in *ottava rima:* "a strong-arched room…which serves as a redoubt for the

resurgent spirit…. The unshakably affirmative music of this ottava rima stanza is the formal correlavitve of the poet's indomitable spirit" (263). And Catherine Paul's reading of "Municipal Gallery" as a simulation of a museum visit is grounded in the correlation between the "literal space of the museum's one room" and the "physical and imaginative space of the poem's many stanzas" (59). My study of the form will explore how the shifting balance of artistic power and psychological confidence within each of these rooms becomes a metaphor for the exchange that Yeats wants to foster in the public's continued engagement with his own art and the works of others for the furtherance of cultural nationalism.

"Sailing to Byzantium"

If any of Yeats's *ottava rima* poems voice "the poet's indomitable spirit," "Sailing to Byzantium" from *The Tower,* expresses the theme with incomparable determination. Yeats weaves a stately form of artistic pride with contrasting imagery that mocks not just his own dying body but the world of flesh, testing the limits of the form to contain such contraries and make with them a work of beauty. The word "sailing" initiates the poem's sense of movement and fluidity, which is echoed in the speaker's resistance of the impulse to monumentalize his artistic achievements in old age. If the stanzas of the *ottava rima* are like rooms, then the four rooms of this poem are different states of mind the poet enters and exits looking for the right location from which his soul can sing on as his body dies. The poet turns first from the world of the flesh to his own ragged flesh,

then to artistic models of bodily permanence, and finally to an imaginative state that captures both the anguish of dying and the pride of the poet's art.

Key to my reading is the shift in the speaker's attention in stanza III away from his own decrepit form by inviting the "sages" to overwhelm his soul. His request models an ethical turn away from the self toward the image of another: away from an art that makes "monuments of its own magnificence" toward an art at once more fluid, inspired by the sages to perpetual song, and more stable, free of the constraints of bodily decay in the "artifice of eternity" (*CP*193). With this trajectory in mind, the first two stanzas demonstrate the decadence of focusing on the body at the expense of the soul. Sonic excess echoes the abundance of sensual imagery for an opening stanza that voices the decadence of a poetic form along with the bodily obsessions of youth. Aquatic imagery dominates the stanza, to emphasize the position of the poet sailing away from earthly seas: "the salmon-falls, the mackerel-crowded seas, / Fish, flesh, or fowl, commend all summer long / Whatever is begotten, born, and dies" (193). Yeats's neologisms—"salmon-falls" and "mackerel-crowded" evoke the gross effect of fish roiling in the water, their bodies a fleshly mimicry of the rising and falling of the waves. The alliteration and consonance of "fish, flesh, or fowl" reinforce the animal nature of the process of conception and birth, started over and over again, yet inevitably leading to death. This is a world without art, where animal desires rule, alienating an aging poet.

In stanza II, however, the poet discards the flesh but not the energy of the world he is departing. Despite his complaint that "all neglect / Monuments of unageing

intellect" in the youthful world, "monuments" seem to imply something too fixed for the energy of what Yeats desires in the last three stanzas. The second stanza, with its derisive rejection of singing schools "studying / monuments of its own magnificence," refines the poet's desire to include permanence without the self-reflective, self-perpetuating impulse of poetic monuments.

A visual icon in stanza III represents both permanence and otherness, and to this, the poet entrusts his soul. Once again Yeats yearns for unity between visual and verbal forms as the basis for his paradise, and this poem, perhaps more than any of his others, captures the jarring, unsatisfactory, yet strangely beautiful effect of such poetic longing.

> O sages standing in God's holy fire
> As in the gold mosaic of a wall,
> Come from the holy fire, perne in a gyre,
> And be the singing-masters of my soul.
> Consume my heart away; sick with desire
> And fastened to a dying animal
> It knows now that it is; and gather me
> Into the artifice of eternity. (193)

The first two lines of the stanza upset reader expectations by reversing the real and metaphorical location of the sages the poet is addressing. An ekphrastic poet might address the sages as the stylized figures in the gold mosaic of a Byzantine cathedral, for instance, and compare the gold to "God's holy fire," but, having arrived at the threshold of Byzantium, Yeats addresses the sages in their spiritual state, and compares their "holy fire" to the fragmentary unity of a gold mosaic. By comparing the spiritual reality to a visual one, Yeats evokes the spatial intimacy that one experiences in an encounter with a painting while maintaining the otherness and permanence of the visual that he longs to

unify with his poetic voice. By asking the sages to "perne in a gyre," he invites them to even greater intimacy across the boundaries of time and space. After the dynamic exchange between sages and poet throughout the stanza, and after discarding the "dying animal" of his body, Yeats imagines himself gathered into the gold mosaic, the "artifice of eternity," where the sages dwell in permanent, spiritualized form.

The power of visual intimacy in this stanza of "Sailing" is heightened in contrast with the resigned tone of a similar passage in the last stanza of "The Tower," the next and title poem of the volume, which re-casts the last two stanzas of "Sailing to Byzantium" without the grandeur of *ottava rima* and with an attitude of resignation toward death. At the end of "The Tower," we can hear the absence of the poet's address to a work of visual art. Instead of invoking the sages for his "singing-masters," the poet is alone, directing his own soul's final education: "Now shall I make my soul / Compelling it to study / In a learned school" (199). The spare trimeter lines of this stanza leave no room for apostrophes to sages or imagining works of art. The meter of these lines more closely echo the resignation and fragility of the human experience of death. The confident trimeter of the first three lines breaks down into a "delirium" of stressed and unstressed syllables as the poet considers the last stages of physical death:

> Till the wreck of body,
> Slow decay of blood,
> Testy delirium
> Or dull decrepitude, (199)

The next lines develop the humanity of the poet's predicament and preview the concern central to "The Municipal Gallery Re-Visited": mourning the loss of his friends, the loss

of their art, the loss of their beauty. The raw emotion can be heard in the line, "that made a catch in the breath," where the harsh sound of the word "catch" halts the breath of the reader ever-so-slightly longer than the lines previous or following.

> Or what worse evil come—
> The death of friends, or death
> Of every brilliant eye
> That made a catch in the breath—
> Seem but the clouds of the sky
> When the horizon fades;
> Or a bird's sleepy cry
> Among the deepening shades. (199-200)

The solitude at the end of "The Tower" highlights, by contrast, the ethical aspect of Yeats's poetic openness to the visual other in "Sailing to Byzantium."

While the more naturalistic bird's cry of "The Tower" signals the departure of the soul from nature, the zen-like detachment of the soul from earthly concerns as it crosses the threshold of death, the bird-form in the last stanza of "Sailing to Byzantium" sings across a different threshold: the threshold of the imagination where art has lost its humanity but not its voice.

> Once out of nature I shall never take
> My bodily form from any natural thing,
> But such a form as Grecian goldsmiths make
> Of hammered gold and gold enamelling
> To keep a drowsy emperor awake;
> Or set upon a golden bough to sing
> For lords and ladies of Byzantium
> Of what is past, passing, or to come. (194)

The last stanza of "Sailing," the only perfect *ottava rima* stanza, showcases art without the humanizing call of death, and demonstrates that such art may have entertainment or prophetic value, but not the ability to articulate human experience. The last stanza's

meta-artistic *ottava rima* form is too perfect, an imaginative reverie just enough abstracted from reality to parody it, as the form of gold Yeats imagines too readily becomes the parody of a bird in the reader's imagination. Although the poet has traveled far from the youthful world of the first stanza, the last image of a form singing on a branch recalls the "birds in the trees" of that youthful world more than any other image in the poem. Even as a work of art, the golden form is as encumbered as the peacock in "Ancestral Houses" (201) and "My Table" (203) from "Meditations in a Time of Civil War," for instance. The peacock, with its beautiful form but lack of lyrical voice represents a foil for the golden bird, with its beautiful voice absent in the beauty of a natural form. Desire for life still dominates the poet's imaginative reverie on death.

The bird of parody in "Sailing to Byzantium" may be read as a pre-figuring of the various birds that populate the rest of *The Tower*. The naturalistic, mythical, or legendary birds in the rest of the volume belie the simplicity of Yeats's belabored abstraction at the end of "Sailing to Byzantium." The "brute blood" of the bird in "Leda and the Swan" (214-215), for example, charges a traditional myth with political and sexual overtones, and locates Leda and the swan firmly in the world where all is "begotten, born, and dies" (193). The bird's absence in "The Stare's Nest at My Window" (204-205), opens the poem to potential reconciliatory significance that the high art golden figures of "Sailing to Byzantium" cannot achieve. In contrast to politically and socially charged birds of the rest of the volume, the last stanza of "Sailing to Byzantium" reads as a note of defiance against his art's association with these deeply

embroiled issues. Art shall engage but shall not be controlled by politics, he declares with his contradictory, elusive golden bird.

"The Municipal Gallery Re-visited"

"The Municipal Gallery Re-visited," Yeats's most purposeful ekphrastic poem also most directly embodies the hubris of the poet when confronted by the work of visual art. The poem is a "portrait" of the poet that might be—and indeed has been—added to the wall of the gallery, but a portrait in words that tries to capture the co-presence of his own "pride and humility," the qualities of Lady Gregory that Mancini's portrait fails to capture (*CP* 320). The pride of form and humility of experience can be heard in each stately, gracious *ottava rima* stanza as the poet stands, sinks down, then kneels, abject before great paintings of his esteemed friends. The form contends with the speaker's disorienting experience, as the quiet and stillness of the museum context contends with the contentious religious and political imagery represented in the paintings and masks the politically charged conflicts over the pictures' ownership. Yeats embeds conflict in the *ottava rima* so that art and life vie with each other. This poem re-imagines this form (as Vendler has argued Yeats re-imagines every form he engages) as a modern form capable of voicing the paradox of alterity and familiarity at the heart Yeats's ekphrasis.[7]

[7] My reading of *ottava rima* in "Municipal Gallery" owes something to Vendler's reading of the form in "The Statues." Her reading emphasizes the agitation of Yeats's *ottava rima* stanza (its uneven rhymes and frequent punctuation) contrasted with the traditional integrity of the form (271).

Yeats's choice of *ottava rima* for this re-visit to the gallery is all the more remarkable when we consider that Yeats is not just re-visiting the gallery but the whole controversy over the Hugh Lane bequest to the gallery memorialized in the earlier poems "Paudeen," "To a Wealthy Man…" and "September 1913," all from *Responsibilities.* Lane promised to leave a vast collection of French impressionist paintings to the Municipal Gallery in Dublin on the condition that it would build a new gallery for them over the River Liffey. Yeats and his friends worked hard to get the pictures for Dublin, throwing themselves into a dispute over the competing wills Lane left after his untimely death on the Lusitania in 1915. In "To a Wealthy Man who promised a Second Subscription to the Dublin Municipal Gallery if it were proved the People wanted Pictures" Yeats criticizes a potential benefactor of the gallery for depending on the middle class to support such a high cultural endeavor. He mocks the man, who waits for "what the blind and ignorant town / Imagines best to make it thrive" (*CP* 107). In "September 1913," Yeats criticized the failure of the middle-class Irish to live up to the example of cultural leaders like O'Leary, Fitzgerald, Emmet, and Tone, choosing instead a life of slavish obedience to the laws of commerce: to "fumble in the greasy till" (*CP* 108). By using *ottava rima* for his later Municipal Gallery poem, Yeats confirms that the gallery, his friends, and his own legacy are part of an aristocratic lineage idealized in the patronage culture of the Renaissance, not slaves to the whims of middle-class consumerism. Yeats celebrates this culture in "To a Wealthy Man…" with references to Renaissance patrons and artists like Duke Ercole, Guidobaldo, the Duke of Urbino, Cosimo d'Medici, and Michelozzo. By using a form that traditionally registers

this level of high art culture and meta-artistic reflection, "The Municipal Gallery Re-Visited" claims for Yeats's own and the Gallery's legacies a formative role in Irish culture. But as I will show, Yeats's confidence in the permanence of such patronage culture has also diminished to some degree by the time he writes "The Municipal Gallery." The poet's doubts about the permanence of his own aging body and his cultural influence paradoxically breathe new life into the *ottava rima* form, allowing it to embody artistic pride alongside the melancholy of life experience.

This tension between art pride and life experience is played out in the emotional drama that unfolds for the poet as he encounters the familiarity and otherness of the pictures. The way the image ambushes the emotions of the poet in the first stanza, as discussed at the opening of this project, could be construed as evidence of the stupefying, fixating power of the visual battling the steady temporality of the word. For all of that though, as Albright observes, the poem demonstrates better an "easy commerce" between poetry and painting, not the essential antagonism theorized in ekphrasis (800). The paintings represent "an Ireland / the poets have imagined," the lives of friends "as though some ballad singer had sung it all" (*CP* 320). Reading the poem through the lens of the Yeatsian mask reconciles these seemingly disparate responses. Yeats's personal emotional response to the visual and bodily other, captured in words like "ambush," "guarded," "suddenly," and "smitten," contrasts with his poetic mask, which finds in the paintings a kinship: they work for common purpose of representing Ireland in cultural memory. In other words, the images in the Municipal

Gallery are the poet's--from an "Ireland the poets have imagined"—and not the poet's, as singular painted images created by others.

Yeats's speech to the Irish Academy of Letters (printed with the first edition of the poem) emphasizes the singularity of the gallery's paintings as "a set of active relations" in a few ways the poem does not (Attridge 67). Yeats reveals the source of his emotional response to be as much his friendship with those who painted the images as the images of those they painted: "There were pictures painted by men, now dead, who were once my intimate friends. There were the portraits of my fellow-workers…" (qtd. in Chapman 161). In the poem Yeats names Mancini but otherwise emphasizes his kinship with other writers and the figures represented, not the painters. By leaving them out, the poem appeals more broadly to the whole system of artistic creation and display over which Yeats, in his old age, must finally relinquish a control he never fully had. Yeats declares in the same speech that Ireland appears in the paintings "in the glory of her passions," not—and here we should recall Yeats's criticism of Michael Field's ekphrastic poems so many years before—not "Ireland as she is displayed in guide book or history" (qtd. in Chapman 161). As imaginative works, not just static representations, they look back at the attentive viewer, calling out for a response that does justice to their otherness. Yeats's poetic response is a counterpoint of pride and humility in which the poet's openness to the singularity of a painting brings lines to a halt and the poet to his knees.

The imagery and form of the second *ottava rima* stanza capture this paradox of pride and humility. The first four lines combine the traditional *ottava rima* rhyme scheme (*abab*) with a muti-vocality that Chapman calls a gesture of "self-parody" (182):

> An Abbot or Archbishop with an upraised hand
> Blessing the Tricolour. 'This is not' I say
> 'The dead Ireland of my youth, but an Ireland
> The poets have imagined, terrible and gay.' (*CP* 320)

These lines may also dramatize the Yeatsian mask that distances the voice of the speaker from the poet's voice. The word "terrible," an allusion to the phrase "terrible beauty" in "Easter, 1916" (*CP* 180), recalls another instance of Yeats's self-consciousness about his poetic role in influencing public ideas about what it means to be a nation. With the line "a terrible beauty is born" the poet acknowledged the transformation of the Easter rebels in public imagination into something other than they were before their deaths. The Ireland he imagined in that poem was immediately and has since been a source of contention: Maude Gonne thought Yeats failed to properly honor the rebels' heroism, and recently, Margot Backus blames Yeats for the political mythologizing the poem has engendered over the years. These lines from "Municipal Gallery" do seem to gently parody the influence the artistic imagination has had on Ireland in public memory, but also a similar, if more transparent, self-consciousness about his role as he had in 1916.

The note of poetic self-consciousness in the first half leads nicely to the visual emphasis of the second, where the speaker encounters the visual other. The speaker's eyes move "suddenly" to a portrait that captures the beauty of a vaguely recognized

woman, not the contentious religious and political iconography of a religious figure and the Republican flag.

> Before a woman's portrait suddenly I stand;
> Beautiful and gentle in her Venetian way.
> I met her all but fifty years ago
> For twenty minutes in some studio.

The suddenness of the speaker's encounter with the portrait contrasts with the subtlety of its beauty and the vagueness of the memory. The woman's beauty itself is not striking or absolute but modified by gentleness, "in her Venetian way." The imprecision of "in some studio" accentuates the intangible nature of the sudden encounter: what strikes the poet is not a clear memory or a striking representation, but an emotion unique to an encounter with visual otherness that resists articulation.

The hazy image in stanza II heightens the contrast with the poet's emotional defeat in stanza III. Overwhelmed with the experience, the speaker acknowledges his defeat as the disinterested, dignified speaker of traditional *ottava rima* and closes his eyes to the visual imact of the images around him: "Heart smitten with emotion I sink down, / My heart recovering with covered eyes" (*CP* 319).[8] Here Yeats shifts to the past perfect tense and narrates the rest of the halting stanza with covered eyes, remembering the portraits he just viewed on the walls:

> Wherever I had looked I had looked upon
> My permanent or impermanent images;
> Augusta Gregory's son; her sister's son,
> Hugh Lane, 'onlie begetter' of all these;

[8] The word "overwhelmed" appears in an early draft of this stanza (Chapman 167), replaced with "smitten" more likely for syllabic stresses than for emotional connotation. "Overwhelmed with emotion I sink down" is replaced by "Heart smitten with emotion I sink down."

Hazel Lavery living and dying, that tale
As though some ballad singer had sung it all. (*CP* 320)

The preponderance of semi-colons and repeated or binary words and phrases in this stanza resist the movement the speaker wants to make from physical vision to memory, a narrative realm more fit for the verbal arts: "looked" and "looked upon," then "permanent or impermanent," "Gregory's son" and "sister's son," then "living and dying," and finally "singer" and "sung." Repeating the vague word all at the end of two lines—"all these" and "sung it all" only serves to reinforce the imprecision and uncertainty of the speaker's response to the physical images.

Contrasted with the awkward phrasing of stanza III, the word "ebullient" in the next stanza signals a poet who has found his voice again by playing off of John Synge's famous declaration of the portrait, "Greatest since Rembrandt" (320). Multi-vocality allows Yeats to overcome the visual impact so that at the poem's precise mid-point, he can reflect on the limitations of painting and the power of his own art: Mancini's portrait of Augusta Gregory is great, he concedes, "But where is the brush that could show anything / Of all that pride and that humility?" (320). Yeats's response is similar in "A Bronze Head" when he considers an iconic sculpture of Maude Gonne's aging head. He recalls Gonne's nature, like Gregory's, as contradictory: outwardly violent and inwardly gentle (Albright *Yeats* 832) and wonders at the limitations of a visual medium, or even a physical body, for showing forth the complexities of the human soul: "who can tell / Which of her forms has shown her substance right." In "A Bronze Head," Yeats's takes advantage of poetry's power to consider contrary psychological

possibilities for Gonne's form, and the sculpture becomes all but an afterthought (340). In "Municipal Gallery," the paintings and the gallery space remain present, palimpsests of Yeats's memories of Coole Park and his deep friendships with Gregory and Synge.

Museum and painting imagery is replaced in the penultimate two stanzas by earthy imagery of rootedness and homelessness; however, the connection to art is not lost but intensified by highlighting its formative role in society. The Mancini portrait leads Yeats to parallel the spaciousness in Gregory's soul with her hospitable home at Coole Park: "But in that woman, in that household where / Honour had lived so long, all lacking found" (320). The lines recall "Coole and Ballylee, 1931" in which Yeats mourns the imminent death of Lady Gregory and dwells on it as the end of an era (243-245). "We were the last romantics," he writes in "Coole." "But all is changed, that high horse riderless, / Though mounted in that saddle Homer rode" (245). Yeats articulates considerably more confidence in the furtherance of her cultural legacy in "Municipal Gallery." Instead of a horse without a rider, her legacy in Ireland is perpetuated through those formed at Coole Park under her direction and through her hospitality. Even the demolition of Coole in 1932, which must also have saddened Yeats, does not pose a threat to the deep roots established between culture and society there.

> Childless, I thought, 'My children may find here
> Deep-rooted things,' but never foresaw its end,
> And now that end has come I have not wept;
> No fox can foul the lair the badger swept. (320-321)

Yeats's confidence in the power of artistic space at Coole to survive beyond the demolition of the building allows that artistic spirit to find a new home in the Municipal

Gallery. The "Old marble heads, old pictures everywhere" the poet remembers at Coole are re-invented for the public in the gallery (244). Gregory's spirit is rooted, not in the paintings as monuments to a definable, locatable past, but now in the gallery space where viewers engage actively with the works of art and read the paintings for themselves each time they visit.

The last stanza articulates a confidence in the ability of the public to read and judge the portraits for themselves, though the stanza has been read as poetic narcissism. Yeats does invite the viewer to look at the portraits as though reading the lines of a written account--"Ireland's history in their lineaments trace." The middle stanzas recall his verbal "portraits" of his lost compatriots in "Easter 1916," but at the end of "Municipal," Yeats conjures the emotional effect of literal, silent portraits of his friends—portraits accessible to his immediate audience for their own judgment. The tension between portrait and speaker remains: as he asks his reader to view the portraits in addition to reading his books he releases control over his art to his Irish audience. His wish is to be "gathered" into the portraits, almost as he wishes to be gathered "into the artifice of eternity" in "Sailing to Byzantium," rather than relying on his poetic legacy alone.

Yeats's openness to public reception at the end is paralleled in the way he opens the *ottava rima* form throughout the poem. As Loizeaux reminds us, Yeats's poems about art are often metaphors for his own artistic practice, and the masks of his own and others' voices Yeats inserts throughout the poem foreground his artistic self-consciousness. Vendler argues that the *ottava rima* of "Among School Children" opens

Yeats's philosophy of art from the realm of visible artifacts into "the life of Everyman" where the work of modern consciousness is a process of artistic becoming. That openness can be heard at the end of "Municipal Gallery" with deliberate reference back to the realm of the visual other where the work of modern consciousness starts. By emphasizing the viewers' experience as an ongoing event at the end of "Municipal," Yeats resists the monumentality typically ascribed to his works about the visual arts.

Art in Action, Art as Performance: "My Table" and "Lapis Lazuli"

Both "My Table" and "Lapis Lazuli" reflect on works of art that Yeats received as a gift, a singular ethical gesture to which the poet responds with a poem as a gift of his own. The dynamics of gift-giving destabilize cultural readings or modern art gallery readings of the works of art. Yeats sets up Sato's ancient sword, the gift of a 500-year-old family heirloom from an admirer of Yeats's poetry, in the first few lines as a poetic inspiration, as though the sword's immutability and beauty could "moralise / My days out of their aimlessness" (*CP*202). The story of the sword follows with it, so that Yeats becomes, in the gifting, the last in a long line of Sato's ancestors whose "aching hearts" had to pass it on in old age. The changeless work of art, through gift exchange, speaks as much to mutability as permanence. The gift of lapis lazuli, a gift from a young apprentice poet Harry Clifton on the occasion of Yeats's seventieth birthday, is likewise dedicated to Clifton as a kind of gift exchange. The sculpture as a gift is an opportunity for the poet to respond to the call from the other by performing an ekphrasis that participates in the creative building process he has been developing as a response to

violence. "Those that build them again are gay," he writes making a transition to the deliberate ekphrasis of the final stanzas (*CP* 295). Those stanzas represent an ethical response to the call from the other that transcends the antagonism typical of ekphrasis.

As the third section of "Meditations in a Time of Civil War," a poem dominated by imagery of home and inheritance, "My Table" extends Yeats's concern about the future of Ireland in a time of violence to an object of violence from Japanese history that has become over time and distance an objet d' art. "My table" is not an obvious ekphrastic poem; indeed, the title draws attention to the make-shift table on which Sato's sword rests, not the sword itself: "Two heavy trestles, and a board / Where Sato's gift, a changeless sword, / By pen and paper lies" (*CP* 202). Daniel Ross has explored the domestic imagery of "Meditations," and argues, like Albright, that the sword is Yeats's symbol of the possibility of permanence. Ross holds, "Domesticated and turned into an object that is as easily associated with art as with warfare, the five-hundred-year-old sword serves as a symbol of the permanence, and hence the beauty, that becomes possible when violence gives way to artistic expression" (39). The symbol of permanence is complicated by the temporary, makeshift table on which it rests, but more significant contrast of both to the pen and paper, the materials of poetic labor, appears in the next line. Next to the table and the sword, the pen and paper represent both nascent creativity and uncertainty about building in a time of violence.

The decisiveness of the sword contrasts with the aimlessness of the poet, which is reflected in the poem's form, alternating tetrameter and trimeter couplets, the lines of which enjamb between the couplets rather than within them. Rhyme and half-rhyme

end each couplet, but together with the irregularity of the caesuras and enjambments, Yeats creates a formal tension between stasis and movement that echoes the sword's dual associations with artistic permanence and human change. In the following lines, the irregular pattern serves to emphasize all the better the enjambed couplet that rhymes "heart" and "art":

> Curved like new moon, moon-luminous,
> It lay five hundred years.
> Yet if no change appears
> No moon; only an aching heart
> Conceives a changeless work of art.

The sword only changes with the cycles of the moon, and even that change is only a reflection that actually reinforces the sword's stability despite the cycles of the sun and moon, or by extension of history and inheritance. In the memorable couplet rhyming heart and art, the poet empathizes with the sword's artist-forger, shifting his attention to the sword itself to its creator. For Yeats is the most recent inheritor of the sword, but also, and more important, inheritor of the burden of creating art in a time of violence.

The uncertainty of the poet's act evoked in the first three lines is confirmed in the last lines, where the ungainly weight put on the word "seemed" to rhyme with "screamed" creates a tension between perception and reality.

> That he, although a country's talk
> For silken clothes and stately walk,
> Had waking wits; it seemed
> Juno's peacock screamed.

By skipping a beat in the last line (5 beats instead of 6), Yeats reverses the stress pattern of the last line, paradoxically increasing the line's feeling of solidity despite the

uncertainty of "seemed" in the line before. The iambic stress pattern could easily have been maintained by adding the word "that" before "Juno's," but by leaving it out the meter is open for the sound of the peacock's scream: the heralding of a new age motivated by the sword's forging, or perhaps motivated by the sword's wielding, moving the sword from the realm of art to reality, which would also cause the peacock's frightful scream. By leaving the last iamb open for the sound of the peacock's scream, Yeats signals his hope that his art, like the sword, would be able to demolish the boundary between art and life as an active force in response to Irish violence.

The peacock itself represents in "Meditations" the uncertainty and burden of art in a time of violence. The bird is associated with contemplative art as it strays next to the urn on which Juno is painted in "Ancestral Houses": "O what if gardens where the peacock strays / With delicate feet upon old terraces, / Or else all Juno from an urn displays / Before the indifferent garden deities" (*CP* 201). The peacock is traditionally considered Juno's favorite bird, a creature of divine but voiceless beauty, in contrast to the nightingale, with its sweet lyrical voice. Even in all of its visual glory, the peacock is handicapped without a voice, a foil for Yeats's art which has voice but not visual beauty. In "Ancestral Houses," the peacock represents the poet's concern that such useless beauty is out of place in a time of civil war. Yeats's previous peacocks make the image even more complicated. In 1914 Yeats and Ezra Pound planned together a celebratory dinner in honor of their friend and fellow poet Wilfred Blunt, serving up for the main course a roasted peacock —which was Yeats's suggestion— "in full plumage" with beef in reserve for those with "plainer tastes" (Going 304). As William Going interprets the

scene, Yeats "saw Blunt and his peacock dinner stylized into an eternal moment in Byzantium: riches are unimportant to him who knows the fixed pride of beauty" (310). Going's summation depends on a straight reading of "The Peacock," and that may be right in the context of the dinner party. The finished poem, in contradistinction to the roasted peacock, is as much about the solitude of death as the pride of artistic achievement. So too might the finished version of "My Table" be as much about death as artistic intervention in politics. With the final sound of the lyrically voiceless peacock screaming, the poem does demolish the boundary between art and life, and the sword's forger, its long line of inheritors, and Yeats himself are one. The peacock's scream represents Yeats's refusal of the death that will always lie behind the legacy of his own artistic achievements, just as it does for Sato's sword.

"Lapis Lazuli"

Yeats's "Lapis Lazuli" confronts the conflict of war and art directly by presenting the arguments with theatre metaphors and answering them with his own performance of ekphrasis on an ancient Chinese sculpture in speckled blue stone, a more meditative medium than the ancient sword of "My Table," and a stark contrast to Shakespearean theatre he imagines in the poem's first part. The performative aspect of "Lapis Lazuli" allows us to read the poem as a defense of tragic joy. Of the seven types of tragic joy David Albright delineates, the tragic joy exhibited in this poem is probably closest to "exhilaration in the face of destruction," which Yeats alludes to in his development of gaiety in each stanza (*Yeats: The Poems* 770). In the first stanza, the reader might be

tempted to agree with the "hysterical women" who cannot understand the use of art when the reality of the violence of war is so imminent. The women, and maybe the readers, are the ones "sick of . . . poets that are always gay" (*CP* 294). Yeats performs even here to mock the women's fears: by using exuberant language, linguistic play, and references to old folk songs in describing the violence, he argues that the fear of war is like child's play, perhaps less real than the joy of the artist he elucidates in the poem.

> That if nothing drastic is done
> Aeroplane and Zeppelin will come out,
> Pitch like King Billy bomb-balls in
> Until the town lie beaten flat. (294)

Yeats calls attention to his own performance and aligns it in the next stanza with the Shakspearean theatre as a metaphor for the performance everyone in Ireland (or in Europe) participates in as they move through the actions of a seemingly meaningless tragedy of war. The second stanza takes war more seriously, but transfers the performative metaphor from his own voice to those involved in and affected by war, perhaps even the women he mocks:

> All perform their tragic play,
> There struts Hamlet, there is Lear,
> That's Ophelia, that Cordelia;
> Yet they, should the last scene be there,
> The great curtain about to drop,
> If worthy their prominent part in the play,
> Do not break up their lines to weep. (294)

By repeating the word "drop" multiple times in this stanza—above and twice more later—Yeats draws a linguistic parallel between the rising and falling curtain of a theatre production and the dropping of bombs alluded to in the first stanza. The theatre

metaphor suggests that Yeats understands each individual to play an important role in the whole production of Ireland's response to war; and while he remains skeptical of people like the "hysterical women" to realize tragic joy, his metaphor implies that such a detached attitude would relieve them of their hysteria. Theatre strikes a balance between determinism and freedom—playing a prescribed role and working or choosing to play it well and maintain one's character. The word "gay" in this stanza is used to prove that like actors who play Hamlet or Lear knowing the ultimate poetic joy of the ending and do not "break up their lines to weep," the artist in the tragedy of war must continue to play his detached role as an artist in order to realize tragic joy. For the artist, to despair would be to stop producing art and to stop searching for joy even in the worst of the violence and destruction.

In the third stanza Yeats sets up the fleeting nature of tragic joy. He must demonstrate that even though destruction will always return, those moments of beauty, creativity, and gaiety are worth the labor and suffering of the journey. Callimachus' "long damp chimney shaped like the stem of a slender palm, stood but a day," but it will be built again in different ways by other artists "and those that build them again are gay" (*CP* 295). This leads to a performance of ekphrasis that Yeats has not yet tried in his previous poems: in the next two stanzas, he describes his experience looking at a specific piece of artwork. I call this a performance because in the process of describing a piece of artwork, Yeats would have been aware that he would be in a sense doing some violence to the autonomous presence of the artwork by putting it into words. Yeats's deliberate performance of a verbal interpretation of his sculpture creates distance

between himself and the complex experience of art he is trying to capture, which may be compared to Eagleton's assertion that the performative voice of "Easter 1916" creates distance between the speaker's tone and the more equivocal irresolutions of the voice's content (276). Yeats very deliberately describes in detail his process of noticing various details of the piece and its effect on his imagination, consciously separating his analytical self from his aesthetic experience.

> Two Chinamen, behind them a third,
> Are carved in Lapis Lazuli,
> Over them flies a long-legged bird
> A symbol of longevity;
> The third, doubtless a serving-man,
> Carries a musical instrument. (295)

Even though it appears to be a straight-forward description, the image of the bird as a "symbol of longevity" recalls the poet's own desire for a permanent form—an "artifice of eternity"—in "Sailing to Byzantium." The sculpture, like the bird-form in that earlier poem, represents an artifice of eternity and a "musical instrument" at once, but also as in "Sailing to Byzantium," both are unattainable by the poet. In the earlier poem, they are only attainable in death, in "Lapis Lazuli," they are attainable only through the distanced performance of ekphrasis.

"Lapis Lazuli" presents a contradiction between the calm, even ritualistic gaze at the sculpture and the "tragic scene" of war whose presence in the previous stanzas is not forgotten even as the Chinamen look with gay eyes on the tragedy below. But the seeming contradiction is part of Yeats's argument in the poem. Tragic joy, to exist, must be sought in the imaginations of the artists of each age: art is necessary to preserve the

joy in the times of destruction and perhaps even to lighten the hearts of the hysterical women who, in their performances of fear, may unwittingly be kept from despair by the "palette and fiddle-bow" that seem so irrelevant. While Yeats may perceive the Chinamen achieving a permanent state of tragic joy in their permanent place in art in "Lapis Lazuli," the experience of tragic joy in looking at the sculpture is fleeting for the viewer, thus necessitating his care for the "human scene" of ignorance and violence. Yeats shows in this poem how even a piece of sculpture can be a performance of sorts as it develops in the imagination of the viewer, who, on the next performative level of the poem, is Yeats performing his own act of interpretation of the sculpture within his own verbal medium. By self-consciously describing his visual aesthetic experience through words, Yeats limits the reality of that experience, sacrificing it for the production of his own verbal art and the possibility of the continuation of all artistic production. The poem "Lapis Lazuli" embodies the experience of tragic joy for the poet: Yeats experiences the joy of creation even as he experiences the demise of the full power of his experience of the sculpture.

"Under Ben Bulben"

In "Under Ben Bulben," the gravestone becomes a medium through which the poet can speak as a completely disembodied soul already gathered into the artifice of eternity. Although Yeats seems to have found his greatest image of art in the dancer, by the end of his life Yeats returns to the "artifice of eternity" as his final artistic resting place in "Under Ben Bulben." How can a poet so enamored with the power of the

body's living form be so confident in asserting the power of artifice in his final words? Albright writes that for Yeats "Modernist art is an art of robots, pounding down everything in their path; an art so objective, so entangled in things, that it thing-digests the whole human race" (105). Yeats corroborates this rejection of the Modern in "Under Ben Bulben" when he sets the task for future artists as a kind of spiritual labor: "Poet and sculptor do the work / Nor let the modish painter shirk / What his great forefathers did, / Bring the soul of man to God" (*CP* 326).

Yeats leaves his reader with a final comedy on the tragic by creating an ordered artifice out of the tragedy of death and the end of his art. He writes,

> Under bare Ben Bulben's head
> In Drumcliff churchyard Yeats is laid,
> ……
> No marble, no conventional phrase,
> On limestone quarried near the spot
> By his command these words are cut:
> Cast a cold eye
> On life, on death,
> Horseman, pass by! (327-28)

Yeats's final monument embodies the singularity of art by directly engaging his audience and asking them to respond. The grave stone captures a similar irony that ends "Sailing" and "Municipal Gallery," in which by deliberately calling attention away from himself in the moment of writing, he attempts to control the reader's future engagement with his work. In his last artifice, Yeats celebrates the unifying power of art as a continuing process.

Conclusion

If Yeats casts his poetic legacy as part of an ancient oral tradition, he leaves his dramatic legacy in ancient Irish mythological tradition by ending his last play by calling upon the image of Oliver Sheppard's statue of Cuchulain in the Dublin Post Office. Sheppard may also have recalled for Yeats his own early training at the DMSA where he first met the sculptor (*Au* 53). Parallel to Yeats's prescriptive directions for his eternal artifice is his nearly as prescriptive last stanza of "The Death of Cuchulain" in which he directs his audience's attention to the statue of Cuchulain. Yeats asks, "What stood in the Post Office / With Pearse and Connolly?" implying that Cuchulain's revolutionary Irish spirit was with them, the Irish spirit that Yeats approves of and hopes his audience will emulate. He ends the Cuchulain cycle by shifting the reader's attention from the Cuchulain on the stage to the Cuchulian "by Oliver Sheppard done," thus hoping to continue the power of art in the less transitory medium of sculpture, which he must leave his audience to interpret for themselves. The self-conscious parallels Yeats drew between himself and Cuchulain throughout his career make Sheppard's statue a monument to both the poet's and Cuchulain's legacy. And, as Yeats was probably fully aware, Cuchulain's statue and his legacy would always be seen through the lens of Yeats's own interpretation in his cycle of plays. In some ways then, the writhing and twisting form of Cuchulain in the Post Office represents a parallel monument to Yeats's own rather plain limestone grave. The self-consciously speaking eternal artifice of his grave is complemented, even empowered by this silent, yet powerful visual art of the body.

By employing Derek Attridge's critical work on singularity, my formal readings of ekphrasis and singularity in Yeats's poems represents an event of reading within a particular context and cultural milieu. Yeats's resistance to monumentality invites such readings. While Yeats wrote very little ekphrasis by its strictest definition, his poetry demonstrates some of the same hopes and anxieties about the visual that characterize traditional ekphrastic literature and, I would argue, Yeats's ekphrasis expands the boundaries of traditional definitions of the genre for modernist literature and helps explode those definitions as the twentieth century progresses into the twenty-first. His resistance of monumentalism has allowed a later poet like Eavan Boland to look back to his meditations on art and find a creative space to grow.

CHAPTER THREE

Ekphrasis from Yeats to Boland: Continuity and Departure

> [The IRA] used terror knowing that terror's greatest ally is the Process of Time itself, how the Process of Time is a process of Attrition and Oblivion so that we ordinary folk have no choice but to accept the end result of terror, primarily because we cannot remember the day-by-day, hour-by-hour minutiae of terror.
>
> —Paul Durcan, "Letter to Gerry Adams." *Diary*. 131.

> The point about pictures, as about books, or going to the zoo, is that in the company of pictures and books and wild creatures time stands still.
>
> —Paul Durcan, *Diary*. 86.

In *New Territory* (1967), Eavan Boland's first published volume of poetry, the fledgling poet introduces herself as a subtle and formal poet by precociously taking on, among other themes, the Yeatsian conflict of art and death—a fitting tribute given her stated admiration for this Yeatsian theme above all others in her 1974 essay, "The Weasel's Tooth." In that essay she praises poems like "The Tower" and "The Circus Animals' Desertion" where she sees Yeats, "stripped of the heroism he craved, forced to true coherence by the incoherence of bodily disintegration" (Randolph 88). Yeats's own notion of heroic coherence was associated with finding a permanent form for his spiritual life after death, which he often figured in terms of sculptural materials. But as I showed in chapter two, Yeats's ultimate refusal of this type of heroism—his last permanent form a humble gravestone—affords him greater openness to forms of mourning for his legacy, not forms of self-preservation.

Yeats's ekphrases introduce a relational fluidity to the traditionally antagonistic relationship between painting and poetry that is crucial for Boland's own development

of the form. Over time, Boland's poetry realizes by meditating on Yeats and works of visual art that the fixity of a painting or sculpture is located not in the nature of the static object, but in the effect of the imaginative engagement of the work of art on the process of time itself. Typically associated in ekphrasis with the temporal nature of the written word, the "process of time" is for Paul Durcan, as he states in the first epigraph to this chapter, a passage from his published diary, a tool wielded by the perpetrators of violence against public memory. The second epigraph, another passage from the diary of Paul Durcan, articulates how the process of time is mitigated by works of art. For Durcan, an Irish poet who often writes in the ekphrastic mode, it is the "company of pictures," not the pictures themselves, that makes time stand still. Durcan's formulation locates an essentially relational quality in the encounter between a poet and a work of art that, like the encounter between a reader and a text, has the power to redress time's obfuscation of public memory.

In her memoir *Object Lessons,* as well as in other essays and interviews, Boland consistently and often unapologetically cites Yeats's influence on her development as a poet from the times she retreated to quiet rooms with his poetry to escape the troubles of boarding school as a child to her more recent poetic meditations on the aging body. Boland has distinguished herself from other more recent Irish poets by embracing rather than distancing herself from Yeats's example. The poetic relationships of Patrick Kavanagh and Thomas Kinsella with Yeats are, by contrast, more contentious, as Steven Matthews has shown. Kavanagh, for instance, although no idealizer of nature, reacted against Yeats's involvement in "petty nationalism" and early in his career, advocated a

more parochial, gritty vision of local country-based poetry that became important for Seamus Heaney's early poetry (qtd. in Matthews 54). Matthews, however, shows that despite his Kavanagh's assertions, his poetry shows a more Romantic version of poetic detachment and unity that aligns him back with Yeats (55). Likewise, Matthews argues, Kinsella's "vigorously unYeatsian, international-modernist poetic" opens him to the processes of "recycling and loss" that actually echo the vulnerabilities Yeats opened himself to by constantly re-creating his poetic persona and style (70). Boland's claim of Yeatsian influence should not therefore be taken at face value any more than other poets' claims to have distanced themselves from the great poet's influence. But a closer look at Boland's poems shows a deeper and more wide-ranging debt to Yeats's poetry than she has acknowledged publicly. This chapter sets the groundwork for the rest of this dissertation by establishing Yeats's mature poetry as a key formative influence on the form and substance of Boland's work from her earliest published poetry and criticism. While this chapter attempts to cover the breadth of that influence, the emphasis will be on how the fluidity of the Yeatsian tension between permanence and receptivity affords Boland the imaginative space in which to re-imagine this tension for her own generation through ekphrasis. From her accomplished formal engagements with that tension in *New Territory*, which opens, tellingly, with an epigraph from Yeats, Boland moves on to find her own voice in parallels between the fluidity of imaginative poetic space, the volatile potential of domestic space, and the charged intimacy of the social space where the poet encounters a work of visual art.

Boland appeals to the contrast between the seeming permanence of art and the impermanence of the body in "The Poets," the first poem in *New Territory*. The opening stanza recalls Yeats's "Adam's Curse" as the poet's labor to find "Pattern and form" in words is conflated with the sculptor's or stone-mason's labor to find a "figure" in stone: "with their own hands quarried from hard words / a figure in which secret things confide" (*NCP* 7). The products of their labor are contrasted with their dying bodies, "made / For the shovel and worm"and their "perishable minds" (7). Boland's second stanza recalls another great poem of mutability, comparing the poets' spirits in death to the astrological constellation of a lion that "hunts without respite among fixed stars," just as the lovers on Keats's urn remain fixed in a position where their mouths will never consummate the kiss they reach for. Boland thus sets up in the first two stanzas the inability of poetic permanence to answer the ultimate mutability of human life as the distance between earth and the heavens, but the third and final stanza finds the poets victorious, their perpetual "hunt" in the heavens revealed on earth when the sun sets each night in defeat. The "tenant moon" comes to represent the reflection of the sun, the reminder of mutability, when the heavens, or poetic truth, seem to be revealed. By calling the sun the "absentee landlord of the dark," Boland heightens the ethical gravity of this aesthetic problem for the Irish poet; she compares the retreat of the power and influence of mutability with the occasional retreat of British presence from Ireland: even in their absence, mutability defines the human condition just as the British control Ireland from afar.

New Territory continues to develop the melancholy of mutability by contrasting the permanence of sculpture and stone with images of the aging body and death in "The Gryphons." This poem alternates stanzas about Tithonus, the mortal lover of immortal Eos, granted immortal life but not immortal youth by the Gods, with stanzas on the gryphons. Boland figures the gryphons' fate as the opposite of Tithonus: instead of facing body-less immmortality, the gryphons, encased in stone, are "awarded / Fairer terms," of immortality in permanent bodily form (*NCP* 8). The paradox of the poem, that neither immortality nor permanent bodily form can fulfill the human desire to escape death, affirms the emotional necessity of death. Tithonus himself, who remains distanced by not being named, articulates the lesson for Boland.

> The story goes
> That when he saw his body die
> And he lived on, he dried his tears, arose
> And stared into the sky:
> "No one but I," he shouted, "on this earth
> Knows that the very dearest thing is death." (8)

The truth of this moral lesson is mitigated, however, by the speaker's introduction of the myth as "Greek hearsay," and her conclusion of the myth with "the story goes," which further distances the human drama of the poem from the moral of the Tithonus narrative. The titular gryphons, despite their cold "nightmare granite features," better convey the melancholy of the human desire for immortality. The pathos of the poem occurs in the exchange between the speaker and the sculpture: Tithonus "was released,"

> But how do these perennial stones
> Endure the prospect of a living feast?
> No one can hear their groans
> Nor offer them respite – we can at most
> Find in the granite eyes a fierce request. (8)

Tithonus learned his lesson, but what about these forms that lack the agency to control their fate or even to cry out against it? The poem's emotional center lies where the speaker re-imagines the gryphon sculptures as living creatures trapped in permanent bodily form and empathizes with their fate. Like a medieval icon, the gryphon returns the speaker's gaze, but the meaning of its plea is ambiguous: it could as well be for respite from their immortality as from the ferocity of their hunger. In the gryphons' grim impenetrability, the speaker knows at once the menace of and the desire for death.

Margaret Mills Harper has argued that by the time Boland publishes *In a Time of Violence* (1994), it had become "clear that the intimacy of death and language form the backbone of Boland's work, both as a structural principle and an aesthetic position" (182). Harper locates in Boland's concern with death and aging what may be the most profound debt her poetry owes to W.B. Yeats:

> She has made herself in her writing by finding a way to age and move toward death there, remaking the lyric subject into an approximation of a time-bound, disappearing body and thus revising the idea of art in the process. In crossing the borders of poetic possibility to make the written word a realm not of agelessness and beauty but of change and decay, Boland transforms the poetic landscape as dramatically as Yeats did when he made his soul in *The Tower* and the poetry of his late period that followed that volume. (182)

A constant theme in Boland's numerous early prose essays and reviews on Yeats is the power of Yeats's approach to death and bodily decay in his later poetry. I have already

cited Boland's well-known essay, "The Weasel's Tooth," in which, despite her strong objections to Yeats's cultural nationalism, she praises the later Yeats for his ability to "look alone into the void of death" (Randolph 88). A decade earlier she praises "Sailing to Byzantium" for delving into the thick of the "civil war" between art and life. "There are no deeper insights into art," she writes, "than those which see it against this backdrop of struggle. Yeats does this and what is more he does it with a complete personal concern and urgency; he is an ageing man, agonizingly aware of his mortal nature, but he is also an artist who must turn his face towards everything immortal" ("Precepts of Art" 10). In 1970 she re-iterates a similar point after drawing an analogy between the Irish famine roads and Yeats's "famine of identity": "Finally Yeats's identity was shaped, not by national forces, nor creative ones, but by pain and melancholy confrontation with decay, and the facing down of death" ("Review of *Yeats"* 82).

In the later Yeats, Boland found inspiration in a poet who fought against his increasingly public persona as a state senator, a poet who found his voice in the humility of old age, not its glories, in beauty made subtle by irony and self-consciousness. Boland develops the theme in her later work as well, but as she faces the prospect of aging, Yeats's poems on aging increasingly represent points of departure rather than points of reference. Where Yeats separates his aging body from his vigorous mind and soul in a series of profound images from *The Tower*—"a tattered coat upon a stick" (*CP* 193); "Decrepit age that has been tied to me / As to a dog's tail" (194); and "a sort of battered kettle at the heel" (194)—Boland refuses to bifurcate herself and searches

instead for a poem she can "grown old in,": "I want a poem I can die in," she declares in "A Woman Painted on a Leaf" (*NCP* 242). Chapter 5 of this dissertation will discuss at some length Boland's departure from Yeats with poetry that explores the intimacy of physical aging and death; but such a departure would not have been possible if not for *The Tower's* profound impact on her early work.

Art, Violence, and the Domestic Sphere

The menace of violence and problem of artistic response is perhaps the most salient and constant influence of Yeats on Boland's poetry from *New Territory*, where the problem tends to be abstracted from reality in myth and legend, to her most recent volume *Domestic Violence*, where the domestic sphere is so entwined with political violence that its art becomes political art. Looking to Yeats to navigate the turbulent waters of art and politics is more intuitive than finding in his poetry affirmation of the private, domestic sphere as a source of the poetic power to engage the world of politics. And yet for Boland, Yeats's "Meditations in a Time of Civil War" represents a way of exploring the critical significance of women's experiences in the domestic sphere for a fuller reflection on art and violence in Ireland.

Boland spends several pages of her memoir developing how "Meditations" modeled for her a fecund example of how the private individual voice in a private sphere distant from the politically charged atmosphere of the town or the city could offer a relevant alternative to engaging the political fray. She recalls, "I wanted to see the powerful public history of my own country joined by the private lives and solitary

perspectives, including my own, which the Irish poetic tradition had not yet admitted to authorship," she writes (187). What she found in Yeats was "the eloquent and destabilizing effect of the private voice" in a poem that engages the violence of civil war (187). She reads the fifth section of the poem, "The Road at My Door" (*CP* 204) for how it portrays civil war as a public reality encountered in the intimacy of a private world. In the first two stanzas Yeats the speaker meets officers at the door to Thoor Ballylee—they crack jokes to pass the time and he "complain[s] of the foul weather"—but in the third and final stanza, the "paramount adventure," as Boland puts it, is located in the divided mind of the speaker (*OL* 189):

> I count those feathered balls of soot
> The moor-hen guides upon the stream,
> To silence the envy of my thought;
> And turn towards my chamber, caught
> In the cold snows of a dream. (*CP* 204)

Surrounded by evidence of violence—the "feathered balls of soot"—but instead of speaking to the political issue, he makes the radical decision to "turn towards my chamber," towards the inner private retreat of the Romantic poet. In his Nobel Prize Lecture, Yeats recalls this as a time of great uncertainty at his home of Thoor Ballylee, isolated as they were without news of outcomes and yet observing the effects of the violence from the relative safety of their home: "Ford cars passed the house from time to time with coffins standing upon end between the seats, and sometimes at night we heard an explosion" ("The Irish Dramatic Movement").

By responding to political uncertainty with contemplative retreat, Yeats was in a position of receptivity that allowed him, in the next section of "Meditations," "A Stare's

Nest at My Window," to re-imagine his tower, and his own mind, not as a fortress resisting violence, but as source of the honey bees' creative labor of building in the crevices of a broken fortress. In the published version of his Nobel lecture, Yeats recalls this receptivity as a visceral experience of smelling the scent of the honey bees as he wrote the first few verses of the poem: "Presently a strange thing happened," he writes, "I began to smell honey in places where honey could not be, at the end of a stone passage or at some windy turn of the road and it came always with certain thoughts." The poet's heightened sense of smell reinforces the connection between the poet's physical position and the openness of his mind and senses. Richard Rankin Russell has argued for the formative influence of Yeats's position of receptivity on Seamus Heaney's ability to enter "meditative, liminal states" and "dwell in ambiguity," which have enabled him to create "a new space of poetic and political possibility" ("Poems without Frontiers"). For Boland, Yeats's contemplative response to civil war represented the power of private experience to upset the assumptions of the political poem and offered her a way to imagine the space of "poetic and political possibility" in the spaces of domestic life. In "Meditations," Boland writes, "he has proposed a private world in a political poem—a world so volatile that it had collapsed and refreshed all the other apparently stable meanings in the poem" (189). And Boland's historically revisionary, narrative driven version of Yeats's receptivity can be heard in her final statement on his achievement in his civil war poem: She thus finds "Meditations" to be exemplary of "the real ability of an inner world to suffer the outer world so powerfully that history itself faltered before that gaze" (189).

The de-mystifying tone of Boland's "Yeats and Civil War" from *New Territory,* however, forestalls the sense of kinship and sympathy with Yeats's poetic detachment from the civil war with which the poem ends (*NCP* 19). Boland versifies Yeats's statement in his Nobel lecture about smelling honey where it "could not be," contrasting its mystical suggestiveness in the next stanza with prosaic diction to narrate Yeats's mid-life move to Thoor Ballylee as settling down to the comforts of old age. The speaker addresses Yeats in the second person as though to bring him back down to earth from the heights of poetic reverie:

> In middle age you exchanged the sandals
> Of a pilgrim for a Norman keep
> In Galway. Civil War started, vandals
> Sacked your country, made off with your sleep; (19)

The outwardly focused pilgrim seeking truth turns inward in his defensive "Norman keep," which suggests keeping safe from danger from the outside and hoarding valuables on the inside. The self-centered defenses are then summarily defeated by the war, evidence of which Yeats could see in the country. As Boland has it, the poet's great symbol of the tower is made impotent by the reality of violence.

The implication that Yeats somehow shirked his responsibilities by retreating to the country continues in the next stanza until the last line, when the poet's escape is transferred to his mind, able to wander again like a pilgrim as a stowaway on a ship. As the ship "hoisted sail out of fire and rape" in line 10, Boland maintains the ambiguities of Yeats's intentions: has he fled responsibility or has he fled as a last resort? In line 11, however, the controversies surrounding the physical space are enveloped in a metaphor

of mental space: "And on that ship your mind was stowaway" (*NCP* 19). The next stanza corroborates the imaginative openness of the mental space by contrasting the image of the sun rising on the actual landscape as a "wasted place" with the life-giving imagery of the wind blowing the smell of honey across the thresholds of the poet's imaginative space: "the wind at every door and turn / Blew the smell of honey in your face / Where there was none." Finally, the last two lines, with the only off-rhymes in the poem, refashion the ambiguity of the first few stanzas in the poet's favor: "Whatever we may learn / You are its sum, struggling to survive – A fantasy of honey your reprieve." Boland re-imagines the idea of "fantasy" from Yeats's "A Stare's Nest," in which the line "We had fed the heart on fantasies" has a negative connotation, equating fantasies with delusions (*CP* 205). In "A Stare's Nest" Yeats invites the honey bees to build something more substantial with their steady, creative work. In "Yeats in Civil War," Boland implies that whether Yeats's "fantasy of honey" was a delusion or not, it was a creative force that represented then, and still represents for Boland and her contemporaries, a reprieve from the brutal survival instincts that reign in a time of violence. This early poem of Boland's draws a parallel between physical and imaginative space that she reads in Yeats and continues to develop as she finds her own voice in the private experiences of individual women in the often domestic spaces of their imaginative lives.

Poetic Imagination and the Intimacy of Enclosure

A dominant image of Yeats in the imaginations of his readers may be the poet of "I See Phantoms of Hatred…" (*CP* 205), from the last section of "Meditations," standing

atop Thoor Ballylee where "monstrous familiar images swim to the mind's eye," but this position of bardic power comes after a whole series of sections in which the poet places himself inside Thoor Ballylee where he considers art's response to violence and war. In "My House," Yeats delineates the tower's inner structure, setting it up as an appropriate space for his poetic wanderings by comparing his position to Milton's: "A winding stair, a chamber arched with stone, / a grey stone fireplace and an open hearth / a candle and a written page / *Il Penseroso's* Platonist toiled on / some like chamber" (*CP* 201). The combination of stability and movement in the room's structure fosters the combination of receptivity and permanence characteristic of the writer's art. Words like "winding," "arched," "open hearth," as well as the fire implied by the fireplace and the candle all suggest forms open to flux and movement while the preponderance of stone materials—"arched with stone," "a grey stone fireplace"—suggest the permanence of the final written page. Likewise, the opening lines of "My Table," discussed in chapter two, echo the parallel between the poet's writing process with the changing and changeless objects in the poet's domestic surroundings (*CP* 202). The table, "two heavy trestles, and a board" signifies the laborious aspect of the writing process, while "Sato's gift, a changeless sword," signifies the permanence of the imaginative creation as an art object. The sword on the table "by pen and paper lies," which, like "a candle and a written page" in "My House," reminds the reader that these sections of meditations are about the difficulty of the art process and the poet's imaginative receptivity fostered in a domestic environment, at a remove from the violence of civil war, much as Boland's poetry would struggle with this same conflict in her domestic space.

Gaston Bachelard articulates the psychological attraction and imaginative inspiration of intimate spaces like rooms in a house, closets, and even drawers in a bureau. The house, for Bachelard, is more than a metaphor for the human psyche; the houses and rooms of memories and imaginations are sites for the understanding of our fullest selves: "On whatever theoretical horizon we examine it," he argues, "the house image would appear to have become the topography of our intimate being…there is ground for taking the house as a *tool for analysis* of the human soul" (xxxvi). And more poetically, he expounds, "Our soul is an abode. And by remembering 'houses' and 'rooms,' we learn to 'abide' within ourselves. Now everything becomes clear, the house images move in both directions: they are in us as much as we are in them…" (xxxvii). In the following passage, Bachelard's striking image of time and space as the apparatus of our living breath reverses the conventional understanding of the human body existing in time and space. Here, time and space exist together in an image of the human body. In terms of human mind and memory, space is the dominant organizing feature, with time enclosed within its little cells.

> At times we think we know ourselves in time, when all we know is a sequence of fixations in the spaces of the beings stability – a being who does not want to melt away, and who, even in the past, when he sets out in search of things past, wants time to 'suspend' its flight. In its countless alveoli space contains compressed time. That is what space is for. (8)

Alveoli, the little cavities in our lungs in which breath originates, are in this image the source of time as a subjective perception: time as a historically controlling force is diminished when the space occupied by the individual orders experience. In Yeats's "Meditations," the space the poet occupies orders his own experiences of civil war, the

dominant marker of his historical time, and allows him to re-imagine its significance at an artistic and ethical remove from political violence. Bachelard calls such spaces "well-determined centers of revery," which become for the poet, the axis of receptivity and poetic creation. Bachelard explains that these "centers of revery" are "means of communication between men who dream as surely as well-defined concepts are means of communication between men who think" (40).

The imaginative nature of physical space that Bachelard helps clarify in Yeats also represents a deep source of inspiration for Boland's poetry. Boland's poetry cultivates the intimacy and narrative possibility of imaginative space in three major "centers of revery," each of which find some parallel in Yeats: domestic space, personal and personalized objects, and paintings and other works of art. In her essay "Domestic Violence," Boland articulates how the enclosed spaces of art and domestic interiors are connected in shaping the intimacy and significance of our personal experiences. She remembers gazing upon painting after painting of interior space as a young woman at the National Gallery Dublin and discovering an intimacy of exchange there that she had not yet found in poetry: "I understood this chronicling of interiors did two things. It documented space. But it also spoke for it: for its ferocious importance in the lives of those who lived there. It rolled back the boundaries of spatial meaning and revealed the intimacy of the attachment between the body and its immediate horizon" (35). Since the remaining chapters in this dissertation will address the way works of art represent "centers of revery" for Boland, here I will show how both poets work to make domestic space one of receptivity and poetic creation. Keen awareness of their spatial

environments allows Yeats and Boland to thrive as poets on enclosure and limitations on their public voices. The openness and creativity Boland associates with her sense of space, in part developed from Yeats, sets the groundwork for her sophisticated aesthetic and ethical engagement with the visual arts.

In the last chapter, I argued that Yeats's engagement with paintings and sculptures created an intimate space of creative exchange which challenged the monumentalizing impulse that he often sought in the visual arts. A discussion of the imaginative power of other intimate physical spaces Yeats and his poetic speakers inhabit will suggest an even fuller picture of the poet's spatial imagination and its influence on Boland. A pastel sketch Yeats made of Lady Gregory's house at Coole Park around the turn of the last century suggests the spatial orientation of Yeats's imagination even early in his career—especially by contrast to the psychological concerns his father's paintings exhibit. Loizeaux writes, "These works, empty of human figures, evoke the mood of place rather than reveal the psychology of a sitter as J.B. Yeats's portraits do" (*Yeats* 11). But perhaps there is more to see in these pictures than a departure from his father's art. The poet's *Coole Library,* a pastel dated c. 1903, is carefully composed to split the viewer's focus between a wall of books, framed pictures, and seating area on the right half of the sketch and a large open doorway dominating the right. The sketch suggests a psychological parallel between a threshold of the house and the imaginative threshold represented by the books and pictures. A book lying on the table in front of the sofa waiting to be opened, or just having been closed, suggests Yeats's consciousness of the parallel between real and imaginative space at Coole Park.

James Pethica has argued that Yeats's use of metonymy of place for person (the inspiration of Coole Park for Lady Gregory's creative influence) in his later Coole Park poems signifies one way that Yeats dealt with the complex economy of their partnership. Pethica shows, convincingly, that Yeats's poems of *Reponsibilities* (1914) evidence his attempts to subsume his material and creative obligations to their spiritual essence in an older model of patronage and art production (189). Throughout their relationship, however, and no matter how the relationship is framed by Yeats or Lady Gregory, value has emerged that defies the values of the market or the art establishment—friendship and common work has grown from the exchange that binds them together and that energizes Yeats's poems about Coole Park. Yeats's enthusiasm for the space of Coole Park became a metaphor for his gratitude for Lady Gregory's hospitality, and his poems on Coole became a kind of reciprocal gift for what she and her home had meant to him over the years. "Coole Park, 1929" opens and closes with homage to Gregory and her home. He opens in meditation "Upon an aged woman and her house" and closes reflecting on the imaginative legacy of Gregory and her house's demise, "when all those rooms and passages are gone" (*CP* 242). "Coole and Ballylee, 1931" recalls the image Yeats drew in pastel in 1903: "a sound / from somebody that toils from chair to chair; / Beloved books that famous hands have bound, / Old marble heads, old pictures everywhere" (*CP* 244). The preponderance of the images in these poems of trees, birds, and the lake on the grounds at Coole evoke a kind of Romantic inspiration from without, while these images of enclosure evoke the imaginative inspiration he found in personal and artistic companionship with his hero and friend.

The domestic sphere became more important for Yeats personally and poetically in the period between 1917 and 1922 when he finally gave up the dream of marrying Maud Gonne (or her daughter Iseult) and settled down with Georgie in his Galway tower, Thoor Ballylee. Yeats's interest in the visionary, violent world did not ebb, but as the domestic became his retreat, it also became a source for the metaphor of slow, deliberate building for the artist's quiet labor in a time of violence and political turmoil. In his essay on the domestic in "Meditations," Daniel Ross concludes, "It is clear that this mature Yeats, now a husband and father, prefers the gentle domestic work of building to the destructive ways of the revolutionary hero" (41). Ross suggests that "Meditations" represents this turning point in Yeats's life "away from his more apocalyptic visionary images to ones that emphasize domestic tranquility and the permanent, reconstructive power of art" (36). Yeats moves in this period toward a greater self-awareness of his role in the course of Irish history and memory, so his self-evaluative reflections on his role as an artist in a time of violence are challenged by the immediacy of civil war. Domestic space, aligned with his desire for the permanence of art and distance from the immediacy of war, contends with the irresolution in Irish politics that he has and will continue to be part of as senator of the Irish Free State. As Ross argues, "Having struggled to make Thoor Ballylee a livable place for his family, Yeats understands that few things can quell violence like a turn to domestic emphases: building and restoring houses, starting families, and feeding children leave one little time for paramilitary operations" (40). Aside from the substance of domestic life though, the quiet of the space removed from politics and the architectural qualities of

the tower make it not just a family-centered escape but a space where his poetic imagination can continue its work.

Unlike Yeats, who chose his home as a retreat from politics, Boland, as a woman for whom the domestic sphere was almost a given in her early adulthood, was at first plagued as a poet by its distance from political centers. But Boland found in Yeats a way of employing the spatial remove as an asset to her ability to respond to the political fray, as viewed from the outside. "The War Horse," the title poem of her 1975 volume, initiates this theme with nods to Yeats throughout (*NCP* 39-40). The rider-less horse storming its way through the suburban landscape recalls the "high horse riderless" at the end of "Coole and Ballylee, 1931" that mourns the absence of a guiding intellect in the artistic pursuits of the Irish Ascendancy with the passing of Lady Gregory (*CP* 245). "We were the last romantics," Yeats soliloquizes, "But all is changed, that high horse riderless, / Though mounted in that saddle Homer rode" (245). Boland's war horse surely also recalls Yeats's centaur as the "Iron of his shoes as he stamps death / Like a mint on the innocent coinage of earth" (*NCP* 39). These Yeatsian associations of the horse with art contrast with the violence of the horse as a specter of war developed in the poem's second half, but both are distant from the speaker's consciousness as she watches the incongruous scene of a horse storming through the suburbs, loose from the "tinker's camp" (40). The coincidence of these two worlds does not seem at first to have done any great harm—"only a leaf of our laurel hedge is torn—" but quickly, in the next stanza, turns more sinister as her flippant attitude toward the torn leaf becomes, with reference to a "volunteer" (the common name for an IRA soldier), a metaphor for the

attitude toward violence cultivated in the suburbs: "a volunteer / you might say, only a crocus its bulbous head / Blown from growth, one of the screamless dead."

"The War Horse" initiates Boland's concern for the de-sensitizing effect of suburban separation from centers of violence and politics—the ability to draw the blinds on a war horse blazing through the country as long as it does not harm one's person or property: "Neighbors use the subterfuge / of curtains; he stumbles down our short street / Thankfully passing us." The speaker does not stop before implicating her own position in perpetuating violence through ignorance: "I pause, wait, / Then to breathe relief lean on the sill / And for a second only my blood is still / with atavism." Like Yeats, meditation on an object—a smashed rose—allows her poetic imagination to emerge from mental turbulence and the violence of the Irish civil war so many decades before appears alive before her mind's eye, if only for a moment, which affords the poet an empathy with the past made available to her because of her meditative distance from the real violence.

> …That rose he smashed frays
> Ribboned across our hedge, recalling the days
> Of burned countryside, illicit braid:
> A cause ruined before, a world betrayed. (40)

For Boland the ethical implications of her physical position in suburbia are thrust front and center, distinguishing her poetry from Yeats's. Yeats's confidence in the ultimate power of art both to transcend and to effect change on the political world is mitigated in Boland by her more profound and grounded sense of individual evil. And her sense of the individual evil dwelling in a family home as much as in heart of an enemy enriches

her domestic poems with an ethical sense that opens her to the potential as well as the implications of evil of the imagination enclosed in space.

Bachelard's poetics of space does not preclude the presence of evil within an intimate setting. Intimacy is, indeed, a kind of intensity, and the domestic interior a source of drama. He argues that in literature the drama of the house is heightened by the neutralizing effect of the outside in a winter setting:

> The house derives reserves and refinements of intimacy from winter…. As a result of this universal whiteness, we feel a form of cosmic negation in action. The dreamer of houses knows and senses this, and because of the diminished entity of the outside world, experiences all the qualities of intimacy with increased intensity. (40-41)

As "dreamers of houses" both Yeats and Boland heighten the drama of inner life by contrasting an intimate domestic setting with the cold and snow of winter. The drama of inner life in Yeats's "Meditations" is heightened by imagery of snow blowing around outside. As the poet turns from the political fray toward his chamber in "The Road at My Door," he imagines himself "caught / in the cold snows of a dream" (204), and two sections later in "I see Phantoms…," the labor of his emergence at the tower-top is emphasized by "a mist that is like blown snow…sweeping over all" (205). Similarly, in Boland's *Domestic Violence* the whole volume is framed by imagery set out in the first line of the first poem: "It was winter, lunar, wet" (*DV* 13). The harsh weather outside forces the reader, with the speaker, inside where the drama of the volume occurs with heightened intensity.

Interior spaces are not unequivocally attractive spaces for Boland; in fact, some of her most compelling earlier poems about interior space—"Suburban Woman" and "Ode

to Suburbia" for instance—reveal their latent violence. But despite the negative associations of the suburban home in these poems, it never loses its potential as a "tool for analysis of the human soul," as Bachelard has put it. In "Suburban Woman," the home is both a refuge and a prison, a site of struggle renewed every day between the woman's autonomy and her entrapment: "The room invites. / She reaches to fluoresce the dawn. / The kitchen lights like a brothel" (*NCP* 64). These lines first endow the woman with the power to light her world, only to subvert that power by revealing how limited her world actually is. The poem turns to a battle metaphor in the last section, so that the pulling down the kitchen blinds in the evening is a sign of surrender: "a white flag--/ the day's assault over, now she will shrug / a hundred small surrenders off as images / still born" (*NCP* 65). But just as pulling down the kitchen blind in this poem is a sign of surrender, in "Domestic Interior" the speaker suggests this gesture as a means of escape from oppressive male authority by turning inward to domestic space. The speaker draws directly on the metaphor of the house for the inner life of the mind: "Put the kettle on, shut the blind. / Home is a sleeping child, / an open mind." This poem is a good example, then, of the intimacy Boland assumes between the speaker of her poems and the painted subject: while the painter and the museum collude to keep the woman in her limited place, the speaker speaks to her as a friend inviting her for a spot of tea and her freedom.

The intimate social space set up between the speaker and the painted subject in her ekphrastic poems dramatizes a space of intimate dialogue with a mute subject. Boland's interest in paintings as spaces of intimacy and dialogue sets her apart from

Yeats and more contemporary poets like Paul Durcan, whose ekphrastic poems are often self-consciousness of the public gallery setting of their painted subjects. Paul Durcan, in *Crazy about Women*, a book of poems commissioned by the National Gallery of Ireland to accompany an exhibition by the same title, as Elizabeth Loizeaux articulates so well, "metaphorically drags images of all kinds out of the museum and down the steps into the stream of contemporary Irish life…" (*Twentieth Century* 51). In "Bathers Surprised," a poem paired with a painting by that title by William Mulready, Durcan voices the nude woman at the center of the painting as though she were living and had been living, imprisoned on the museum wall for a century or more. "Having been a bather in the foreground for many years," she says, "I would welcome leeway to tell my side of the story" (ll. 1-2). Durcan may take ekphrasis out of the museum to make paintings talk to passers by, but Boland goes two steps further: first, she tends to speak to, not for, the painted subject, and in later poems, she brings art to the ekphrastic mode that was never meant for the museum context, broadening and enriching what can sometimes still seem like an out-dated, aristocratic mode.

By pairing the two epigraphs at the opening of this chapter, I hope to suggest that Paul Durcan's answer to the degenerative effects of time on memory is in part, like Boland's, the contemplative remove of the work of art. What Durcan's second passage makes so wonderfully clear is that when art makes time stands still a relational space is created where the poet's imagination is free to engage the work of art. Both Durcan and Boland embrace and explore how books, pictures, and other forms that engage our imaginations can compress time and expand our ability to empathize with the suffering

of others. In the first epigraph, Durcan suggests in his "Letter to Gerry Adams" that the leveling effect of time on the public imagination's response to the horrifying immediacy of terrorist acts works against wide-spread public rejection of violent terrorist tactics, which requires some understanding of the minutiae of terror's effects: "the three-hundred thousand contexts, the three-hundred sub-contexts of the three hundred thousand hours of the last thirty years" (*Paul Durcan's Diary* 131). Similarly, Boland's poetry argues implicitly that while the process of time is necessary for healing to work, the leveling effects of time on memory can also be the greatest enemy of the healing process; the desire to forget and the need for consolation can lead to superficial healing while the wound continues to fester, nurturing bitterness and resentment at the expense of deeper healing. She articulates this stance in her essay "The Weasel's Tooth," renouncing easy consolation for the death of a child in the Dublin bombings in favor of exploring "carefully, sympathetically, finally, with love the evil which could cause that death" (89).

Boland also redresses the degenerative effects of time on memory by recovering a spatial form of narrative, exemplified in *Object Lessons,* that turns and returns to memory as she recalls her personal growth as a poet. Boland's narrative takes to hear Bachelard's pronouncement that in the rooms of our memory, time does stand still: "Here space is everything, for time ceases to quicken memory. Memory—what a strange thing it is!—does not record concrete duration" (9). Boland organizes her narrative spatially to show the connections between her own experiences and those of women across time, and to refuse the hegemony of time on determining the potency of

these connections. By organizing her memoir around the rooms in which she lived and learned as a child, Boland resists the temptation to tell her story not as a recording of subjectively chosen and historically approved "important events" but by the psychic weight her memories and imagined memories of the past have for her development as a poet. She speaks of the "turnings and returnings" of the narrative (xiii), and even figures significant times in her life in terms of the rooms she inhabited—reading Yeats at 16 was located in a specific room at boarding school, and the stifling atmosphere of her London exile is emblematized by her description of the rooms in which she lived. I would argue that the act of reading Yeats at a young age and the environment in which she first encountered Yeats were as influential on her own developing imagery and understanding of herself as an Irish poet as the content of Yeats's poetry itself. The rooms in which she read Yeats are depicted as a private escape where she can experience with Yeats the intimacy of Irish community unavailable to her living in London.

The spatial orientation of her narrative is one of the ways in which Boland creates new, appropriate forms through which the voiceless experiences of women and art can be known without being subsumed by the hegemony of historical narrative. Just as the dynamic between enclosure and imaginative freedom animates the substance of her poetry, the dynamic between limitations and freedom also influences how Boland allows her poetic forms to open and adjust in response to her experiments with the spatial arrangement of experience. As a suburban housewife in London, Boland became convinced that she had truth to express from that experience fit for poetry, but found

she had to re-imagine conventional poetic forms to do so (*OL* xi)[1]. Boland resists including her representations of women's experiences within a poetic tradition that tends to place experience in a temporal framework, but neither does she deny that her own art emerges from that poetic tradition.[2]

The opening section of *Object Lessons*, "Lava Cameo," appeals to the spatial imagination by moving in and out of Boland's reconstructions of stories of women her family's past and her reflections on the difficulty of finding a "name" for her life and the lives of her fore-mothers in poetry. Her writing in this chapter often makes connections associatively, transitioning easily between literal and figurative meanings of naming. One section, for instance, ends with the poet's disappointment in failing to find an ancestor's gravestone in a cemetery, connecting the absence of her memorial to her absent name in history. When she asks in the next paragraph, "Was there really no name for my life in poetry?" naming has become a metaphor for the absence of a place in the poetic tradition for the silences of individual experiences (23). In her poem of the same name, "Lava Cameo," Boland opens with an object that represents the mysterious intimacy of a relationship far in the past and ends by suggesting the destructive forces

[1] Boland identifies the problem of form for her experience when she writes, "As a young woman and an uncertain poet, I wanted there to be no contradiction between the way I made an assonance to fit a line and the way I lifted up a child at night. But there were many; they were deep-seated, they influenced arguments of power and presumption which were obvious to me and yet unexamined in any critique I knew" (xi).

[2] Boland argues that by the time she writes *Object Lessons*, the tables have turned: the woman's experience has become more accepted, and the old poetic tradition, although undeniably important, has its hegemony. She writes, "A woman's life—its sexuality, its ritual, its history—has become a brilliantly lit motif, influencing the agenda of culture and commerce alike. At the same time the old construct of the poet's life, for which I have such exasperated tenderness, has lost some of the faith and trust of a society. Increasingly, it is perceived as arcane and worse: as a code of outdated power systems whose true purpose was to exalt not the poet's capacity to suffer but his suitability for election to a category which made him or her exempt from the shared experience of others" (xi).

underlying the object's materials and the destructive forces of writing this object and the relationship it represents into history (*NCP* 227-28). As Matthews has argued, Boland's constant labor over the limitations and fluidity of form takes its cues from Yeats, who re-invented any form he touched. "Boland's constant attention to the demands of form and its exclusions, both for good and bad," he writes, "make her a powerful dramatizer of Yeatsian achievement as dilemma, both the source of something and its denyer" (86).

Boland does not employ any kind of direct formula for allowing the spatial imagination to influence her poetry, but her attentiveness to the unique power of the visual other allows her more freedom with the forms of poetry throughout her oeuvre. Boland's poetry finds tentative ways in her experimentation with form to give voice to the silences of the past while never losing sight of the tragic past-ness of what is already gone—death and suffering are often more effectively mourned than mollified. From some of her earliest poems, her breaks with poetic convention represent attempts to incorporate multiple voices and open up the time of the poem across generations, narratives, and different cultural mythologies, as I will show in this next chapter. In the second full chapter on Boland, I will show how Boland experiments with breaking down her own poetic voice so that the thoughtfully placed ruptures in syntax, awkward juxtapositions, and piled-up prepositions witness the impossibility of fully representing experience in words.

Boland's ekphrasis, as I will show in the following chapters, follows an ethical trajectory from antagonism to empathy to the more profound empathy of *communitas*, and this ethical development through engagement with art allows her to achieve a kind

of poetic justice for silenced women while distinguishing them from the women of myth like Mother Ireland. For Boland, the popular image of "Mother Ireland" co-opted for political purpose fulfills the threats of what Mitchell calls "ekphrastic fear," that the dangerous visual other may, like Medusa, "silence the poet's voice and fixate his observing eye" (*Picture Theory* 172). For Boland as a woman poet, the danger of the visual other that Mitchell proposes has already been created and perpetuated by the poets and politicians of the past and remains embedded in the minds and hearts of the Irish. Boland uses her ekphrasis to elaborate more complex artistic representations of women and how they might help break down stagnant notions of Irish identity. Boland does not seek to reflect women's otherness as a unified experience; rather, she sees that the association of the other with a simplified binary of beauty or danger belies the reality and complexity of both women's experience and the experience of visual art. "In Coming Days," which closes *Domestic Violence,* her most recent volume, and which I will discuss in detail at the end of chapter six, represents Boland's final farewell and resounding rejection of the contentious Mother Ireland figure, the Shan Van Vocht, that has been a plague on women's progress in Ireland. The intimacy established in Boland's spatial imagination as it dwells in domestic and artistic spaces allows her to distinguish the true from the false in her own and other women's experiences and allows her poetry to capture what is true.

Yeats is a precursor for Boland's poetry, but not an overwhelming force. Boland has measured Yeats's accomplishments against his limitations for a contemporary

audience and emerged with her own voice, her own form of ekphrasis, and an ethic based on the dignity of individuality and the necessity of community.

CHAPTER FOUR

Ekphrasis and Empathy in Eavan Boland's Poetry from *New Territory* to *Outside History*

Eavan Boland's 1987 volume, *The Journey*, dedicated to her mother, opens with a poem that draws, paradoxically, on the frustration she felt as a young child when her mother locked her door to do her painting ("Interview" *Caffeine Destiny).* "I Remember" confronts the double exile she experienced as an Irish child in London and as an "interloper" in her mother's painting studio in their London home (*NCP* 127). In *Object Lessons* the rooms she occupied as a child in London, as a young adult at University and as a young woman in the suburbs are sites of memory and sources for her imagination; her recollection of her mother's painting studio in "I Remember," is endowed with the significance of a war memory. The language of destruction and abandonment pervades her memory of tentative occupation in this significant room:

> I remember the way the big windows washed
> out the room and the winter darks tinted
> it and how, in the brute quiet and aftermath,
> an eyebrow waited helplessly to be composed
>
> from the palette with its scarabs of oil
> colours gleaming through a dusk leaking from
> the iron railings and the ruined evenings of
> bombed out, post-war London. (127)

The "brute quiet and aftermath," the harsh "scarabs of oil colours," and the "ruined evenings" suggest the speaker's dislocation even before the direct reference to "post-war London." As she looks around the room, the unfinished portrait sitting on her mother's

easel--"scattered fractions // of the face which had come up the stairs / that morning"—pictures the painting's subject as a war victim (127).

Up to this point, the poem captures the distance between her and her mother, poet and painter, but the last stanza signals what will be in the rest of the volume the poet's embrace of the disorder and alienation she encounters in the painter's studio as an energizing source and evocative subject for her poetry. In the last stanza, the speaker emerges back into the room in the warmth and innocence of her "high, fawn socks" to see the room "had been shocked into a glacier / of cotton sheets thrown over the almond / and vanilla silk of the French Empire chairs" (127). In contrast to coldness of the covered furniture, the "almond" and "vanilla" of the uncovered chairs seems inviting, even in a room that caused her such distress the day before. The cold covered chairs perhaps suggest the illusory *tabula rasa* of history and art she rejects as a source for poetry, choosing instead to probe the wounds of her exile and the woundedness of her own war-torn nation. Her memory of this childhood room has less of the nostalgia of the Thomas Hood poem she cites in *Object Lessons*—"I remember, I remember / The house where I was born" (38)—but also recalls the biting irony of Philip Larkin's "I Remember, I Remember," his dismal albeit honestly articulated record of disillusionment with place: "Nothing, like something, happens anywhere" (82). Boland's voice finds itself apart from either tone: nostalgia evades the truth of the past, and irony suggests that we reach toward an unavailable truth. Boland's tone in this and other poems mourns the wounds of the past, but also finds in those wounds—of feelings of abandonment, war, the jarring discoveries of her own memory—spaces of liminal

potential, just as the unfinished portrait and brushes "porcupining in a jar" (127) at first emblems of a child's fear, become sources of animate possibility.

This chapter begins with Boland's exile from the painting studio and will trace how she begins to frame her poetic relationship with paintings in her work up to and including *The Journey.* I argue that Boland's earlier poems about the visual arts contribute significantly and distinctly to her broader attempt to develop empathy with and, in later volumes, to create appropriate forms of mourning for the silent (and silenced) past. This tension between poetry and painting may be one of the most fruitful in her oeuvre; part of my purpose will be to argue that the way she represents that tension grows in beauty, honesty, and sophistication over the years from its first appearance in *New Territory* to her most recent volume, *Domestic Violence*, to which I will devote chapter six. My organizational approach to this development will be generally chronological with a few important exceptions and departures. Like many poets, Boland's development of themes, images, technique, and voice is rarely teleological; the themes and images that coalesce in her later ekphrasis are often latent in earlier poems, so I will relegate my discussion of those earlier poems to where they are most thematically significant. The metaphor of poetry and quilting, for instance, in "Patchwork or the Poet's Craft," a poem from her 1980 volume *Night Feed,* speaks better to the blurring distinctions between art and craft in *Domestic Violence* than the more painterly examples of ekphrasis in the earlier volumes, so I will discuss "Patchwork" in chapter six.

The poems most characteristic of her development of her earlier ekphrasis lead her from antagonism to empathy not just with the women in the paintings but with the mostly male artists painting them. By paying attention to painting as both an inspiration and an *other* to her poetic voice, Boland's ekphrastic poems model an ethical relationship between the subject grieving and the silence of the lost: as the mourning subject immerses herself in the empathy of grief, so the speaker of her poems immerses herself in empathy with silenced women. These poems become part of the effort she articulates in her essay "The Weasel's Tooth" of finding a response to cultural and political violence that refuses the pat answers of immediate response and takes into account the incongruities of time and distance on our understanding of violent events.

The conflicted way Boland figures her poetic relationship with her mother's painting is reflected in the tensions inherent in the relationship between painting and poetry in her ekphrastic poems: painting alternately represents a force of male authority that created and canonized it or a more maternal source of the complexity in which she finds hope for escaping the binaries of Western definitions of identity and nation. Given Boland's interest in mother-daughter relationships throughout her work, painting may take on a kind of maternal significance for her. But as "I Remember" captures so viscerally, her relationship with the maternal, as well as with painting, is so rich because of, not despite, its conflicted nature: the conflict with her own memory and the conflict between forms of art. Boland is an "outsider" to her own childhood by the time she is writing this and other poems such as "An Irish Childhood in England: 1951," a later poem in the same volume, and "In Which the Ancient History I Learn is Not My Own"

(*In a Time of Violence)*—about her childhood experiences of being an outsider in London and an outsider in her mother's studio. The reversal in the last stanza of "I Remember," in which distressing memories of her mother's studio are suppressed by "a glacier / of cotton sheets thrown over the almond / and vanilla silk of the French Empire chairs" (127) evokes the speaker's attempt to over-rule a particular way of remembering the past as well as it justifies the destruction and dissent as subjects in her poetry. As Patricia Hagen and Thomas Zelman articulate, "emigrant longing and personal nostalgia have joint roots that lead us to mummify the past, preserving it from the changes time brings about" (65). The speaker can be read, then, as self-consciously refusing this mummification of memory, setting up her voice as a source of dissent against stagnant ways of understanding the past.

Like her understanding of the past, Boland's own statements about her relationship to her mother's art appear, at least on the surface, to be conflicted. In her 2007 essay "Domestic Violence," Boland contrasts the "dissent" and disorder at the heart of her poetic with what she perceived as the orderliness of a still life painting. She remembers how important it was for her as a writer to see her own art in contrast to her mother's painting:

> As a painter's daughter I had memories of my mother arranging flowers, fruit; getting them ready for a still life. I wanted the opposite: to feel that those atoms and planes could be thrown into a fever of spatial dissent; that they moved, rearranged themselves, threw off their given shapes. I thought of that as the starting point for my poems. (34)

The "spatial dissent" she wants for her poetry is how she remembers seeing her mother's painting as a child in "I Remember," but in this later memory, painting (albeit

a still-life, not a portrait) represents definition, a reflection of the world as seen through the eyes of order. "Fruit on a Straight-Sided Tray" (*Night Feed*) colludes with this criticism of painting. The still-life, which represents "the science of relationships / in which the abstraction is made actual," only disguises "for a while" the messy paradox of mutability, which Boland calls "the equation / that kills: you are my child and between us are // spaces. Distances. Growing to infinities" (*NCP* 97-98). The addition of time into the "equation" of art's positive and negative space gives the lie to the work of art. Other ekphrastic poems in *Night Feed* support this criticism of painting: the painting represents a false innocence that belies death and the darker truths of life, especially the interior lives of women. In this volume, ekphrasis most often pits the speaker, champion of dissent and voice for the voiceless, against the fixity and false order of painted representation.

In a 1993 interview with Jody Allen Randolph, however, Boland figures this relationship between her own art and her mother's differently: the painterly imagination is neither a negative evocation of exile nor an emblem of false order but the source of a fecund fragmentary aesthetic. She argues that her mother and her husband Kevin were "the two great influences on my way of looking at things," her mother's contribution being "this wonderful fragrance of the unrational, the inexplicable, the eloquent fragment" ("An Interview" 102). By the time she makes this last statement, time seems to have transformed the childhood fear suggested by the "scattered fractions" of the unfinished portrait in "I Remember" into a memory of artistic inspiration. Her commitment to aesthetic dissent aligns her with a theory of art in

which, as Simon Malpas puts it, aesthetic reflection is made possible not by art's mimetic relationship with the actual, but "because of the way its presentation estranges, disrupts, and fragments the actual" (84). Boland's ekphrasis might be said to shift with the publication of *The Journey* to understand that the complexities of life and death are suggested even by their absence in painting, that the "eloquent fragment" is the provenance of painting as much as poetry.

Boland's fragmentary aesthetic is inherently ethical. She states explicitly and in no uncertain terms the connection she understands between her subject matter, her sense of subjectivity, and the ethics of her poetic practice: "Who the poet is, what he or she nominates as a proper theme for poetry, what selves poets discover and confirm through this subject matter—all of this involves an ethical choice. The more volatile the material—and a wounded history, public or private, is always volatile—the more intensely ethical the choice" (*Object Lessons* 127). After *Night Feed,* Boland starts to understand painting, even paintings done within a patriarchal framework, to contain this "volatile material"; painting and other forms of visual art could now represent another layer of her own fragmentary aesthetic rather than working against it. As part of the same fragmentary aesthetic, painting and poetry maintain their singularity as artistic media, but work together toward an ethic of mourning the wounded past rather than revealing how artists have been implicated in opening those wounds.

Intimacy and Empathy in Boland's Early Ekphrasis

Eighteenth-century French painter Jean-Baptiste Chardin, known for his still-life and paintings of ordinary moments in the everyday lives of middle-class people, figures prominently in two of Boland's early ekphrastic poems and in her discussions of the revelatory power of representing the ordinary in art. She names Chardin specifically in "On the Painting *Back from Market* by Chardin" (*New Territory*, 1967) and "Self-Portrait on a Summer Evening," (*The Journey*, 1987) and appeals to Chardin to make her final argument in *Object Lessons* about beauty and truth. As Boland recognizes, Chardin's daily life rather than the truth of traditionally sanctioned ideas and forms of beauty such as the sublime, the mythic, or the female as an object of beauty for the male gaze. Unlike his predecessors in representing daily life like Vermeer and the Dutch still-life painters, Chardin's images of the everyday do not depend for their significance on being raised to the level of symbol: his paintings reveal beauty by representing the self-absorption of the things themselves. She explains, "Romanticism in the nineteenth century, it seemed to me, had prescribed that beauty be commended as truth. Chardin had done something different. He had taken truth and revealed its beauty" (*Object Lessons* 253). Boland may be referring to the ending lines of Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn" in which beauty and truth are equated, which she reads elsewhere as a "standard piece of pre-Victorian rhetoric" voiced by the poet himself ("The Voice of Eavan Boland" 120). Continuing in the same interview, Boland contrasts the arrogance of Keats's "inflation of these abstract principles" to the "hubris" of art challenged by Dickinson in her response, "I died for Beauty—but was scarce." Dickinson's use of the image of the intimate space

of the tomb—given more positive connotation when called a "Room" two lines later—to counter abstractions like Beauty and Truth is reflected in Boland's use of intimate, domestic objects and the intimate spaces of small paintings of domestic subjects to challenge abstract representations of women's lives. The intimate dialogue suggested between the speakers in Dickinson's poem is paradoxical of course, because tombs are typically associated with isolation, but in death the inhabitants seem to be able to hold the comfortable dialogue between these "adjoining rooms" that would have been impossible in life. Boland's intimacy with the subjects of paintings participates in a paradox similar to Dickinson's tomb conversations: the fixity of the women in paint—the fixity that she laments as a kind of death—makes her own reflections possible. Her early ekphrastic poems draw on the intimacy of the close, almost conversational relationship between the viewer and the painted subject, in hopes that the interaction will provide some insight into the lives of the women behind the two-dimensional space.

In Boland's first published ekphrastic poem, "From the Painting *Back from Market"* the speaker is in a fairly traditional relationship with the painting as an object of her gaze. In this fairly formal poem, with its rough variation on the *ottava rima* form that Yeats uses in so many of his great later poems on art and life, the poet speaks for the silent work of art, giving voice to the hidden experiences of its female subject, and using it as a jumping off point for her broader meditation on visual and verbal representation. In the first stanza, Boland emphasizes the fixity of the painting as an incomplete representation of a life of movement and flux: "Chardin's peasant woman / is to be

found at all times in her short delay / Of dreams" (*NCP* 17). A few lines later, she underscores the male painter's agency in fixing the whole woman, body and soul, in a static work of art: "He has fixed / Her limbs in colour, and her heart in line." Fixity finds voice in the internal form of the poem as well: the easy iambs the reader might expect from what look like pentameter lines are halted before it even starts by trochaic feet at the beginning of the first two lines: "Dressed in the colours of a country day— / Grey-blue, blue-grey, the white of seagulls' bodies—." Each stanza's two half-lines, a technique she will develop into a style in later poems, echo the incompletion of the painting's representation.

The first stanza also suggests the potential of the liminal space the subject inhabits, revealing how her fixed eyes betray her active thoughts "mixed between love and market," but instead of capitalizing on the way the painting's own form supports the potential of this liminal space by placing the woman against a doorway in the background, the speaker continues to contrast the fixity of the painting to the flux of real life. Boland's descriptions of the details of the woman's life the painting represents lead up to a critique of what representation neglects:

> [. . .] I think of what great art removes:
> Hazard and death, the future and the past,
> This woman's secret history and her loves – (*NCP* 17)

Boland's attributes the agency to art, presumably visual art, for "removing" the complexity of life and death and a sense of time in representing reality. The speaker takes it upon herself to fill in the details of the woman's life, highlighting the hidden flux of communal life as a parallel for the hidden flux of the woman's inner life. In the last

stanza she describes the market, "where men and women / Congregate and go / Among the produce, learning to live from morning / to next day," so that "congregate and go" has a line to itself, an emblem of the movement back and forth from communal to individual identity that helps to give the woman a more complex subjectivity.

The image Boland uses to end this poem, of men and women at market as birds in the snow, reverses the speaker's previous criticism and defends painting's impulse to fixate as the impulse to save what time disintegrates. The men and women are "linked / By a common impulse to survive, although / In surging light they are single and distinct, / Like birds in the accumulating snow." The snow becomes an image of the leveling effects of death; its blank whiteness is both an erasure, covering up the hidden lives of the past, and a blank canvas with the potential to reveal those lives again.

The fixity of the female subject of which Boland accuses Chardin is the subject of Boland's criticism of Jan Van Eyck, Renoir, and Degas in poems from *Night Feed.* "Domestic Interior" and "Degas' Laundresses" in particular help to initiate Boland's formal experimentation with a more intimate, fluid relationship between the speaker and the painted subject. I pair these poems together because of the speaker's antagonistic relationship with the painters of the paintings she addresses and because the speaker in each shifts the object or tone of her address significantly mid-poem, exemplifying Boland's early attempts to make empathy part of her aesthetic. I will eventually contrast the antagonistic ekphrasis here with Boland's later efforts, specifically in "Self-Portrait on a Summer Evening," to make her empathy and her

aesthetic more complete by accepting her identification not only with the painting's subject but also with the painter as a fellow artist.

Boland transforms the "Domestic Interior" referred to the in poem's title from the prison-like setting for the female subject in Van Eyck's painting to the more liberating domestic spaces of a suburban home and an "open mind" (*NCP* 91). As the first poem in *Night Feed,* it introduces the volume's exploration of the freedom from objectivity available to women in domestic spaces. Boland identifies in this poem with the female subject of the painting, but fails to account for her identification with the painter as a fellow-artist representing women. She criticizes the painter's act with a tone of biting irony and the language of a death-sentence: "by whose edict she will stay / burnished, fertile, / on her wedding day, / interred in her joy" (*NCP* 91). The speaker tries to free the woman from this fate by speaking directly to her. The intimacy of this act is supported by the subtlety of the transition at the end of the same stanza with "Love, turn." The sonic similarity of "interred" and "turn" make the transition no more than a whispering in the woman's ear. The remaining stanzas advocate a turning inward to a place of liberating self-absorption: "a way of life / that is its own witness." The speaker encourages the woman to "put the kettle on, shut the blind," which recalls the suburban women in "The War Horse" with a very different tone. In the earlier poem, shutting the blinds was an act of avoiding an ethical relation to the suffering of the outside world; in "Domestic Interior," turning inward becomes an act of liberation from the objectifying eyes of the outside world.

"Degas's Laundresses" sets up a similarly antagonistic relationship between the speaker and the painter, and similarly transitions mid-poem from objective description to a more intimate relationship between the speaker and the female subjects of the painting (*NCP* 108). This time, however, Boland addresses the many laundresses Degas represented in dozens of paintings on this subject. Boland's criticisms of Degas echo those of art historian Richard Kendall's, who argues that Degas's orthodox sense of class divisions influences his representation of the Parisian laundresses as nameless, objectified women of their class rather than individuals (5). Boland seems to admire the beauty of Degas's paintings on one level: she calls them "Aphrodites" in line 1 and the internal form of her first three stanzas might be read as an attempt to mimic the sounds and patterns of the women's work. The repeated fricatives—"sleeved," "stitches," "silking," "fitted sheets," "seam," "folds," "wash," "freshes," "whiff," "fields, "stiffened"—evoke the sounds of linens being shaken and handled (108). The speaker describes women absorbed in their work, "seam [ing] dreams in the folds of wash" and unaware of the objectifying gaze of the painter. She calls attention to her own potentially objectifying voice as a speaker watching the women when she suddenly speaker to them directly, warning them and repeating three times, "Whatever you do don't turn." The speaker, like the reader, knows that the warning is futile: Degas has already captured their self-absorption. At the same time, the speaker reveals her own artistic act of representing the women to be controlling. She implores them not to turn, but the next stanza contradicts this plea: "See," she tells them, "he takes his ease,

staking his easel so." The speaker's warnings become a lament for the silence of individual experience lost in the process of representation.

"Domestic Interior" and "Degas's Laundresses" exemplify Boland's early experiments with the relationship between her speaker and her subjects in order to challenge the typical objectification of women in artistic representation. But she has only hinted at her own complicity as a poet in the potentially objectifying nature of artistic representation. Poetry about the visual arts may give voice to a previously silent medium, but it also threatens the unique and "other" power of the visual work, as the power of the voiceless woman as "other" is threatened by representation. The relationship between the speaking subject and the traditionally silent other puts the poet in the position of oppressor that Boland wants to transform. By playing out the problem of representation in ekphrasis, Boland's role as a representing subject is two-sided. In the struggle between domestic space and temporal history, Boland sets herself up inside the domestic sphere resisting the abstractions and figurations of history, but in the struggle between the word and image, she takes the role of power which both gives voice to and threatens to silence the image's otherness.

Michael Thurston shows that Boland takes on the problem of representing subjectivity as a gradual process throughout her sequence of poetic sequences. Indeed, he seems to suggest that the ethics of Boland's response to her situation are incumbent upon the accumulation of her work rather than individual lyrics. In the sequences the reader can feel the accretion of various figurations of the "tentative, cautious, self-doubting, and highly aware subjectivity" that Thurston celebrates as the ethical strength

of Boland's poetry (229). Boland's ekphrastic poems might be said to work as a series, which reflect a more sophisticated and layered relationship between subjectivity and poetic form throughout her work.

Her "Woman Posing: after the painting *Mrs Badham* by Ingres," from *Night Feed*, further complicates this simple dichotomy between fixity and flux, reflecting on an unfinished art work to show how it may be as dynamic a presentation of a woman's life as a poem (*NCP* 110). "Woman Posing" draws a parallel between the irony behind the artifice of a model's pose and the dynamism behind the apparent fixity of the painting itself. The poem attempts to interpret the woman behind the representation, but does not deny that the woman's complex subjectivity is inherent in the painting itself. In the first two lines, Boland establishes the harsh fixity of representation by calling the woman by the actions stereotypically associated with her gender: "She is a housekeeping. A spring cleaning. / A swept, tidied, emptied, kept woman." When the woman is not kept by the house, she is kept in Ingres' painting. But as she delves into the details of the painting, identifying the contrast between the "reckless fashion" of her costume and the "solid column" of the real woman's neck, the representation hardly seems closed to the imagination.

Indeed, the contrast between reckless and solid here is supported visually by the contrast between the finished head and neck and the unfinished (or at least sketchy) state of the rest of Ingres' drawing. Boland interprets the irony of the real woman in the finished part of the drawing: "She smirks uneasily at what she's shirking— / sitting on this chair in silly clothes, / posing in a truancy of frills" (*NCP* 110). By the end of this

stanza, it appears that the "silly clothes" and "frills" are what make her a static "kept woman" while the real woman's mind is racing in dynamic response to being in such a pose. Even the sitter's "broad knees," the only other part of the real woman the viewer can see hinted at behind the clothes, have "no repose" in Boland's interpretation, and the woman's agency as she "shoulders" the shawl around her arms is mitigated by the objectifying action of upholstering—like a sofa—that the shawl returns to her. The speaker's interpretation of the woman's ironic distance from her pose highlights the latent energy pent up in the artist's representation of her pose.

In *The Journey,* Boland's speaker empathizes more deeply with the women in paintings by acknowledging her complicity with the painter in silencing them. By voicing parts of a woman's experience, the speaker implicitly silences the rest. The aesthetic and ethical question at the root of Boland's interest in formal experimentation is this: where is the self in the poem? "I felt the interior of the poem could only be changed by changing where the poet stood in the poem," she explains in an interview with Pilar Villar ("The Text of It" 56). In *The Journey* she finally realizes this goal, not just by changing the direction of the speaker's voice as in "Domestic Interior" and "Degas's Laundresses," but by inserting herself directly into a position of empathy with the painting's subject. Boland says that "Mise Eire" is one of the first (maybe the first successful) experiments with putting herself in the margins in order to allow the voices of the silent past be heard (*NCP* 128-29). In "Self-Portrait on a Summer Evening" the speaker inserts herself into both the poem and the painting, putting herself as the poet at the margins and allowing the painted subject to speak through her (*NCP* 129-130). The

speaker opens with an omniscient poetic voice, describing and interpreting, in typical ekphrastic fashion, how Chardin's representation of a woman fails to fully capture her: "he has been slighting her / in botched blues, tints / half-tones, rinsed neutrals" (129). The speaker's voice is almost like a gallery guide, speaking her interpretation of the painter's actions directly to the viewer:

> Before your eyes
> the ordinary life
> is being glazed over:
> pigments of the bibelot
> the cabochon, the water-opal
> pearl to the intimate
> simple colours of
> her ankle-length summer skirt. (129)

By choosing words of precious value and foreign origin like "bibelot" and "cabochon" and "water-opal pearl," the speaker criticizes Chardin's attempts to lift the woman's experience out of the ordinary, to lift it on a pedestal of beauty where it loses the unique quality of the ordinary.

Like the poems on Van Eyck and Degas, the speaker changes her position mid-poem, but this time, she subtly inserts herself inside it between a repeated line:

> Optical greys
> Before your eyes
> Before your eyes
> In my ankle-length
> Summer skirt (130)

The repeated lines make the poem into a kind of mirror: on one side (the first half of the poem) the speaker and the viewers look at the woman being painted. On the other side, the speaker as the woman in the painting looks back on the reader/viewer, forcing the

reader to assess her own ethical position in relation to the poem and the painting. The speaker's "I am Chardin's woman" echoes the repeated "I am the woman" in the previous poem, "Mise Eire," emphasizing her attempt to destabilize the perceived unity of the woman's experience. By destabilizing her own gaze on a seemingly static woman in a painting, Boland asserts her determination to see beyond typical representations and interpretations. In this view, rather than a productive antagonism, the poem represents a more fluid relationship between literature and visual art as they refuse closure to one another. Boland dares the reader/viewer to pin the woman down, to easily assign her motivations, but, we might ask, where can the poet go from here? How can she take her poetic insight into the fluid nature of the gaze and subjectivity within and between works of art? Can this flexible relationship between speaker and subject be applied in other aesthetic contexts?

The answer to these questions, and what I will argue to be the source of a transformation in her poetic-ethical perspective, can be illustrated through discussion of one of the primary weaknesses in her earlier ekphrasis. Despite her growing interest in the potential of ekphrasis to be an intimate, conversational space where she can encounter the silenced on its own ground, Boland's lack of attention to the formal and thematic function of interior spaces in the paintings themselves reveals an aesthetic and ethical weakness in many of her earlier ekphrastic poems. Poems like "Canaletto in the National Gallery of Ireland" (*NCP* 157) and "Growing Up: from Renoir's drawing 'Girlhood'" (144), both from *The Journey*, presuppose a viewer gazing upon a museum painting in uncomplicated wistfulness, even "envy" for the fixity of the painted figures

who will never have to know the pain of lost innocence. Neither of these poems pretend to create any dialogic space between the viewer and the painted subject—the poet uses the painting as a vehicle for criticizing the present. In "Growing Up," Boland criticizes the painter for his complicity in society's repression of women's dreams, instead choosing to depict "this […] haul and full / of fantasy: / full-skirted girls" (144). In "Canaletto," Boland compares the descent of Venice into a tourist state to the establishment of her own country at the hands of the British: "raised / and saved / and scalded into / something measurable" (157). The lack of dialogue between poet and painting gives both poems a didactic tone lacking in other ekphrases.

"From the painting *Back from Market"* is more dialogic than these two poems, but Boland still describes the painting's subject as being constrained in the formal elements of the painting by the artist: "He has fixed / Her limbs in colour, and her heart in line" (*NCP* 17). Boland focuses so much on the fixity of the painting's main subject, however, that she gives short shrift to the liminal potentiality of the painting's formal elements, most tellingly the doorway separating the darker, meditative foreground where the woman stands from the suggestion of daily life from the open day-lit doorway on the left side of the painting. The speaker seems to criticize the painter for the woman's fixity, her inability to move or speak with her own voice, but she does not account for the fact that the power of the painted medium is simply not characterized by "voice." Surely the representation of the woman in the liminal space between the doorway and the viewer's space imbues her seemingly ordinary inner and outer experiences with some imaginative complexity. Boland does suggest this potential when she says, "her

eyes mixed between love and market," but retreats back to fixity in the next lines. I am not suggesting that the poem Boland wrote should be anything other than it is; indeed, the image of birds in the snow at the end beautifully captures the complexity of the binary to which her poem has limited itself. I am trying to show, however, that the context she left out is exactly what she discovers in her later ekphrastic poems. Later, she conceives of the exchange between the viewer and the painting not as a subject looking at either an object or another potential subject, but a subject in space encountering the representation of another subject in a different space. In her 2007 essay, "Domestic Violence," in a passage cited in chapter three, Boland recalls visiting the National Gallery Dublin and being particularly drawn to a painting for the suggestiveness of the liminal space, not the subject, it represents: a painting showing an open door at the end of a corridor. And in "The Art of Grief," from *In a Time of Violence* the spatial context of the speaker's encounter with a statue of a veiled woman, a potential mirror of herself, is emphasized as she stands there, her "car keys getting warmer in one hand" (*NCP* 239). The liminal space between viewer and work of art quickens with interpretable potential in such poems.

A poet's creative and critical engagement with the formal spatial context surrounding a painted subject, such as the painting's doors and windows, invigorates the ethical possibilities of the poet's potentially objectifying gaze, and so too does the poet's encounter with art work outside the museum context to which traditional ekphrasis and its theories are so often limited. Boland's ekphrases on the portrait of a woman painted on a leaf, or on Audobon's book of paintings, *The Birds of America,*

expand the context of art beyond the walls of the museum, and open her ekphrasis to the full potential of the fluid, potentially subversive liminal situation on the threshold between the real world and the represented one. Victor and Edith Turner explain that liminality, in an anthropological understanding, is "not only *transition* but also *potentiality,* not only 'going to be' but also 'what may be'" (Turner and Turner *Image and Pilgrimage* 3), and Victor Turner specifically draws out the potential of the threshold in tribal ritual to an modern aesthetic context. Poetry, drama, painting, and other art forms, have an effect on society akin to the tribal transitional phase: in both a somewhat subversive relationship with society resists normative distinctions, challenges assumptions, and opens society to the creativity of new forms. Turner agrees with Brian Sutton-Smith, another anthropologist in seeing

> liminal and liminoid situations as the settings in which new models, symbols, paradigms, etc., arise—as the seedbeds of cultural creativity in fact. These new symbols and constructions then feed back into the 'central' economic politico-legal domains and arenas, supplying them with goals, aspirations, incentives, structural models, and *raisons d'etre.* (Turner *Ritual and Theatre* 28)

The liminal is characterized by the "blurring and merging of distinctions" (26), which Boland begins to capture with poems like "Self-Portrait" and "Domestic Interior," but the potential Turner explains here seems to suggest an even deeper way in which the transformation of language in art can speak beyond itself to the world we live in. The subjective gaze may change her stance toward a fixed and stable subject, but the liminal gaze, on the threshold between one stable world and another, has the potential to destabilize *both* her stance and the fixity of the subject.

In "Fruit on a Straight-Sided Tray" (*Night Feed)* Boland's gaze destabilizes the fixity of a still-life painting as the truth of death emerges from the distances created by the painting's positive and negative space. By connecting *nature morte* (as the French call the still-life genre) to the increasing distance between the speaker and her daughter as they grow older, the poem galvanizes the potential for a transformative intimacy on the threshold between life and art, life and death. Thurston analyzes "Fruit on a Straight-Sided Tray" in terms of how Boland uses the visual arts to draw attention to the distances involved in representing life in any form. When an artist arranges fruit for a still-life painting, Boland's poem opens, "the true subject is the space between them: / in which repose the pleasure of these ovals / is seen to be an assembly of possibilities" (*NCP* 97). In addition to demonstrating the poet's facility in describing the abstract formal relationships between positive and negative space, geometric and organic forms, Boland's ekphrases "draw our attention to constructedness itself, to how meaning depends not only upon perspective or standpoint but also on active involvement, interpretation, and making" (232). Thurston's point goes to the heart of the triadic structure of any representation, both verbal and visual: a representation exists as a relationship between an artist, her materials, and the work's reception by the viewer or reader.

Lapsarian imagery adds a dimension of mourning for lost innocence that involves each part of the triad of representation in "Fruit on a Sraight-Sided Tray" (*NCP* 97-98). Until the end of the second stanza, the speaker reflects contentedly on the "repose" and "pleasure" of understanding a painting to represent more than its

ostensible subject, but then she very subtly introduces the negative side of this truth: the "possibility" is also "a deliberate collection of cross purposes" (97). Imagery in the third stanza starts to suggest the human dimension of the seeming repose: the "gross blues and purples" evoke the colors of bruised skin and "yellow and the shadow of bloom," the first flush of adolescence. The "homely arrangement" of fruit on a tray disguises it as a representation of death and loss of innocence, just as the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge in the biblical story of the fall was also the tree of death. Looking upon the still-life seems at first to be an innocent act, but with a longer gaze forces the speaker to see the promise of death, the "equation that kills" in the painting's negative space.

Boland seems to revel in the surprising, somewhat awkward leap she makes from objective art criticism to her relationship with her daughter; the connection is so powerful that it seems to have been latent all along as though her objective reflection were a ruse for avoiding a humbling conclusion. Looking involves personal reflection, not just aesthetic reflection on the painting's "science of relationships," and any attempt to isolate the aesthetic from the ethical, the poem suggests, is self-deluding. Science would suggest a static, recognizable formula for combining positive and negative space, but the negative space between she and her daughter is growing and cannot be reversed: "[. . .] you are my child and between us are / / spaces. Distances. Growing to infinities" (98). Until the end, the poem's form of even three line stanzas echoes what the speaker sees in the painting: the negative and positive space beautifully unified into a whole. The negative space before the last stanza, however, transforms the significance of the stanza break to echo the unresolved relationship between mother and child. The

sorrowful implications of the last stanza break are supported by the poem's lonely last line. The abstract truth about the fruit in the poem's third line—that "the true subject is the space between them"—is embodied in the space between the stanzas and the space collapsing between art and death.

J. Hillis Miller's argument in "What do Stories about Pictures Want?" suggests that writers who acknowledge the triadic structure of visual forms allow them to be "performatively felicitous" within literary works rather than waiting passively to be described: "these works do something to those who behold them, or they enter decisively into the lives of their makers, most often . . . to bring death into the realm of the living" (s67). Miller's formulation elucidates how the exchange between the writer and the painting afforded by the ekphrastic mode also opens the writer to a more intimate experience of the threshold between life and death. It is not until later volumes that Boland's poetry fully realizes the eloquence of the painting's relationship with death, but "Fruit on a Straight-Sided Tray" demonstrates her awareness of the paradox that the image of permanence in "still-life" hides only superficially the truth of its French name, *nature morte,* or dead nature.

Art and Elegy: Boland's Ekphrastic Voice in Outside History

The first sequence of Boland's 1990 volume *Outside History,* called *Object Lessons,* initiates a new ekphrastic voice for her, taking ekphrasis completely out of the museum, connecting ekphrasis with elegy, and harkening back to the original influence Yeats had on her exploration of art and death. In *Object Lessons,* Boland blurs the line between art

and domestic object, which are generally distinguished by the evidence of the artist's hand in making it. Her poems in this volume transform domestic objects into art objects through the speaker's intervention and interpretation. I will contrast these object poems with objects in the later volume *Domestic Violence,* in which objects are raised to the level of art by a more complex exchange between craft of the object, the artist who crafted it, and the community in which it became meaningful, rather than just the speaker's imagination. But these object poems in *Object Lessons* have a special place in Boland's poetic development as realizations of the poetry in ordinary life, of which she had found examples in painting (particularly Chardin), but not in poetry. Boland's receptivity to the objects in this series of poems also hearkens back to Yeats's contemplative retreat in "Meditations in a Time of Civil War" where the quietude of ordinary life became a "center of revery" for artistic creation. For Boland, objects become "centers of revery" for imagining and re-imagining the narratives of women whose voices are silent in historical memory.

In "The Black Lace Fan My Mother Gave Me," the first poem in the "Object Lessons" sequence of *Outside History (*1990), Boland evokes the elusive nature of her mother's life by imagining her narrative through a black lace fan, a gift that blurs the line between art and object. The fan is a thing of beauty, but it also, paradoxically, allows the speaker to evoke the hidden quality of her mother's experience without completely revealing and thereby objectifying it. The speaker evokes the impossibility of knowing and representing her mother's narrative in the first few stanzas with unclear pronoun references and terse, simple sentences.

It was the first gift he ever gave her,
Buying it for five francs in the Galeries
In pre-war Paris. It was stifling.
A starless drought made the nights stormy. (*NCP* 165)

The pronoun "it" refers to the fan in the first two lines, but in the third line "it" refers to the weather; the expectant, stormy weather echoes this narrative's confusion. The pronoun "they" works similarly in the next stanza, referring first to the couple and then, in the last line, to the shopkeepers who wrapped the fan.

They stayed in the city for the summer.
They met in cafes. She was always early.
He was late. That evening he was later.
They wrapped the fan. He looked at his watch.

The speaker builds an atmosphere of expectancy as the distance grows between the man and woman: she sits in the heat of the evening, waiting for him and the coming storm as he has the fan wrapped in another part of town. In the fourth stanza, Boland bravely takes on a description of the fan's beauty that could easily have been an objectifying metaphor for her mother, but becomes instead a metaphor that clarifies, probes, and opens up the mystery of her mother's character. The words "wild" and "clear patience" suggest her mother's character in the first part of the description: "These are wild roses, appliquéd on silk by hand, / darkly picked, stitched boldly, quickly. / The rest is tortoiseshell and has the reticent, / clear patience of its element…" (*NCP* 165). The second part of her reflection on the fan, which probes the fan's tortoiseshell handle suggests the speaker's awareness of the violation her narrative intervention represents to her mother's experience. "It is," she writes,

A worn out, underwater bullion and it keeps,
Even now, an inference of its violation.
The lace is overcast as if the weather
It opened for and offset had entered it.

The fan becomes, therefore, an emblem of her own poetry as much as a metaphor for the beauty and mystery of her mother's story.

Boland uses an image of an empty, intimate space in the next stanza to initiate the fully-dramatized story-telling of the last stanza. "The past is an empty café terrace," she writes. The image recalls Bachelard's idea that architectural spaces are imaginative spaces, where the mind can hold and create memories, and to which someone like Boland can return for some hint of the real experience on which to build her imaginative re-creation of the past. And so the speaker embraces her imaginative role in the story: "And no way to know what happened then-- / none at all—unless, of course, you improvise:" (*NCP* 165). In the last stanza, the only one with a full rhyme and without awkwardly end- and middle-stopped lines, the speaker deliberately dramatizes her narrative as a poetic fancy, thereby refusing the closure of narrative.

The blackbird on this first sultry morning,
In summer, finding buds, worms, fruit,
Feels the heat. Suddenly she puts out her wing—
The whole, full, flirtatious span of it. (165)

The last image of her mother as a bird, suddenly and flirtatiously "put[ting] out her wing," could also be interpreted as the poet's own act of flirting with the reader through playing with syntax and line, keeping the reader's attention by alluding to narrative, but refusing to finally satisfy with closure.

The title poem of the "Object Lessons" series, like "Black Lace Fan" blurs the line between art and object as an ekphrastic poem on a decorated mug rather than a high art painting or sculpture, captures the tension between narrative revelation and narrative reticence in its unusual form. "Object Lessons" also foreshadows the connection between ekphrasis and death more fully developed in the poem that follows it, "On a Gift of *The Birds of America* by John James Audubon." "Object Lessons" opens with a contrast between the seemingly benign rituals of domestic life and the "cruel theatre" of a hunting scene represented on the side of a kitchen mug.

It was yours.
Your coffee mug. Black,
With a hunting scene on the side
(cruel theatre as the kettle poured).
Together, we unpacked it
In the new house. (*NCP* 167)

The middle lines open the stanza, revealing the scene represented, but then the last two lines retreat back into the safety of the house, ignoring danger foreshadowed on the mug. A similar dynamic animates stanzas toward the end, in which the mug breaks on the floor, the idealized pastoral hunting scene irrevocably damaged:

Those mornings
We drank coffee
And shared cake in a kitchen full of
Chaos, before we knew the details of
This pastoral were merely
Veiled warnings

Of the shiver
Of presentiment with which
We found the broken pieces of
The sparrow hawk and the kisses of
The huntsman, the pitcher

And the thrush's never

To-be-finished
Aria, an untouched meal…(*NCP* 167-168)

The Keatsian echo at the end should remind the reader, as well as the couple, that the bird's "never to-be-finished aria" is characteristic of representation itself, not a result of the mug breaking. The presentiment of destruction exists within any representation and even more clearly in a hunting scene, idealized but still about death. The poem's formal tension between revelation and reticence reinforces the "object lesson" of the mug's destruction: the couple's idealization of home, like the idealization of the scene on the mug kept them from paying attention to the truth the image was telling all along.

"On the Gift of *The Birds of America* by John James Audubon" is another ekphrastic poem that draws on the parallel intimacies of a love relationship and of art to evoke the inevitability and personal tragedy of death. The comfortable relationship between the lovers exchanging gifts and between the poet and an open book settles the reader in a realm of trust and goodwill that was not available in poems like "Self-Portrait" in which the speaker is alone with the painting's subject. I made the point previously that "Self-Portrait," "Domestic Interior," and others are more intimate ekphrases than those written in this century by male poets, but "On the Gift" connects the vulnerabilities of the painted subject and the speaker on another level yet (*NCP* 168-169). Looking at the detailed paintings of individualized birds, the speaker is reminded of the fragility that accompanies the beauty of the living. A book that is meant to celebrate the living species of America and promote conservation has paradoxically

come to better represent a commemoration of the dead. The book is literally an elegy for the birds he depicted that, since 1826 when he first sought publication for *Birds of America,* have become extinct. The book is also an elegy in a broader sense: Audubon's paintings of the fragility and fleeting nature of life capture the intrinsically elegiac quality of painted representation, allowing the viewer to simultaneously celebrate with the artist the diversity of America's wildlife while also lamenting the silence of the living moment suggested by all painted representations. Words like "flustered," "poised" and "fragile" (168) in the first half of the poem emphasize the delicacy of nature as the speaker describes the birds, but they also suggest the delicate quality of the love relationship implied by the "we" of the poem. In the last stanza, as the couple remembers a moment by the lake when "Two swans flew over us," the couple remains "rooted to the spot" suggesting that they have exchanged places with the birds in the book (169). The exchange is supported by a correspondence of details: Audubon's paintings often include details of place and vegetation that place his birds firmly in their natural environments—as Boland recognizes by referring to botanical details like "the branch / of a pignut" and "the pine siskin and the wren"—so by calling up "that evening, late in May, the Clare hills […] / ghostly with hawthorn (168), the couple's own memory becomes rooted in place and time, and the elegy mourns their own passing.

To say this poem becomes an elegy for the fleeting nature of the couple's earthly love should not necessarily suggest a morbid tone of death's inevitable descent; on the contrary, Boland uses the word "celebration" to describe this elegy: "then surely this // is the nature and effect of elegy: the celebration of an element / which absence has

revealed: it is / our earthliness // we love as we look at them" (168). This poem, like the earlier "Fruit on a Straight-Sided Tray," leads from an objective description of a painting to a personal relationship suggested by the terms of description and on to a reminder of death, but the speaker in "On the Gift" is more comfortable with the reminder. Indeed, she seems to welcome it as a sign of her humanity, her "earthliness." In the earlier poem, negative space in the painting suggests the growing distance between the speaker and her daughter, a relationship represented as threatened by that distance; in the later poem, the speaker associates the vulnerability of nature with the vulnerability of her own love, but beauty triumphs in this poem, perhaps because the relationship implied in the poem does too: the relationship between she and her companion is affirmed by the pair of swans, a symbol of monogamy, flying overhead.

The elegiac tone and the symbolism of the swans flying overhead in the last few stanzas recall Yeats's musings on love and death in "The Wild Swans at Coole." In fact, the speaker's memory of the swans flying overhead could almost be read as her return to the Clare hills just as Yeats frames his poem on a nineteenth return to the wild swans at Lady Gregory's Coole Park. Her memory of the "musical insistence of their wings as they came in past / the treetops" (169) recalls Yeats's memory of "the bell-beat of their wings above my head" (*CP* 131). Perhaps most significant though, thematically, is the open question with which Yeats ends his poem, and the answer that Boland's poem implies. The swans at Coole come to represent Yeats's earthly passion: as is traditionally argued, he is the sixtieth swan of the uneven "nine-fifty-swans" on the lake. He seems troubled by contrast between their robust liveliness and "clamorous wings" in

his memory and the way he identifies more now with their "drift on the still water." He asks, "By what lake's edge or pool / Delight men's eyes when I awake some day / To find they have flown away?" (*CP* 132). To have been left behind by his flock of swans can only mean the end of his own passion in death, but he expects the passion they represent to continue in other places, in other forms. Instead of reminding the speaker of Boland's poem and her companion of death, however, the "musical insistence" of the swans' wings seems to reinforce "rootedness" in the "earthliness" of the here and now. But death is not far from the poem's surface. The inter-textual reminder of Yeats's more melancholy vision of swans maintains the tension between the vitality and mutability of rootedness. The musical insistence of Boland's rhythmic, quickly moving and enjambed, but uneven lines reminds them, as they reflect back on the memory, that their "earthliness" is always in a vital tension with the promise of death, just as James Audubon celebrated and captured the profound diversity of bird species in America while being aware, as a conservationist, that given the complex individual needs of each species, some would not survive. The last line's "rooted to the spot" is at once an image of elegiac consolation in life's continued growth and a reminder that the stability of rootedness, like the still moment of life captured in a representational image, also alludes to death.

Boland's ekphrasis of mourning in this poem is a far cry from the antagonism between painter, poet, and subject her earlier ekphrases embodied, despite their development of empathy. An ekphrasis of gift-exchange and elegy opens the social relationships within the poem to a new level of empathy unimpeded by what has

sometimes seemed like an over-reliance on the terms of gender politics and alterity in Boland's earlier poems. Chapter five will show how Boland continues to develop an ekphrasis of mourning by exploring the special relationship between art and death in painting and other artistic genres. Chapter six will argue how Boland expands the ethical reach of her ekphrasis of mourning in *In a Time of Violence* and *Domestic Violence* by experimenting with representing social relationships within her poems and by representing art being wrought by women rather than continuing to criticize the way women are depicted as subjects. Women's crafts play an important role in Boland's development of an ekphrasis that does remain satisfied with self-reflexive aesthetic antagonism, but creates real forms through which different ethical ways of imagining communitas in Ireland and around the world.

Tracing Boland's engagement with visual art in her own medium demonstrates how her poetry continually finds new ways to solve the problems inherent in employing the poetic self to understand the relationship between the self and the other. She refuses to allow her representations to fix the relationship between poetry and visual art, but rather uses the space between the two to open up new ways of thinking about inter-artistic and, both explicitly and by extension, inter-subjective relationships. Meaning is neither bound in fixity nor confined to the relativity of flux; rather, as Boland seems to accept and lament in "Fruit on a Straight-Sided Tray," the meanings, like the distances, are "growing to infinities." But always tempering the despair of temporal distance is the visible presence of the other that, like either an artistic or a prophetic vision, distills the

abstract into the particular, making us—if only for a moment—more acutely perceptive than we usually are.

CHAPTER FIVE

Looking Ahead: Poetics of Mourning and Ethics of Communitas in Boland's Poetry

> During the terrible years of Yezhovshchina I spent seventeen months in the prison queues in Leningrad. One day someone recognized me. Then a woman with lips blue with cold who was standing behind me, and of course had never heard of my name, came out of the numbness which affected us all and whispered in my ear—(we all spoke in whispers there): 'Can you describe this?' I said, 'I can!' Then something resembling a smile slipped over what had once been her face.
>
> —Anna Akhmatova, "Requiem"

In this and the next chapters, I will move toward an argument that suggests how the ethical thrust of Boland's ekphrasis seemingly shifts away from the ethos embodied in the statement she made in her 1974 essay, "The Weasel's Tooth" that Ireland is a land "whose final and only dignity is individuality," to explore how an ethic of communitas in Ireland can be a source of hope (12). I will argue, however, that the move toward communitas is continuous with her earlier stated commitments, not a break with them: with the dignity of individuality comes the responsibility of being in community. Simon Malpas adumbrates a general argument about the relationship between art and mutual responsibility: art, in his view, "is what touches upon the differences between us that form the basis of community, and reminds us of the necessity of being in common" (93). Despite her early assertion about the dignity of individuality, Boland's art never gives up on this "necessity of being in common," and moves toward an articulation of it that we can see most clearly in her later poetry. In this inter-chapter that makes a transition to a full chapter on two of those later volumes, *In a Time of Violence* and *Domestic Violence,* I explore the meaning of communitas as an ethical stance for the poet, and then explain

how mourning becomes the basis for establishing a poetics of communitas for Boland's Ireland.

For a poet who has faced charges that she has claimed too representative a stance for herself as a voice of silenced and oppressed women, distinguishing her poetic stance from the traditional bardic voice of the national community has been important to Boland. My argument in this chapter extends those of recent critics who focus on Boland's fragmentary sense of individual identity as a response to these charges; as Pilar Villar has put it, her mature work "provides the prospect of a fluid identity, one constantly changing and unstable" ("The Text of It" 53). Boland's fragmentary version of Irish womanhood, poetics, artistic practice, and Irish culture has never sought to break down an otherwise coherent tradition; rather, it has always reflected and articulated the truth of an already broken culture for the sake of finding a more honest basis for understanding the truth of common life in Ireland. This discussion of Boland's sophisticated engagement with a fragmented individual identity leaves room for a discussion of the more positive aspects of fragmented identity that developed long before cubism gave us images for it in modernism. Individuals are drawn to each other in relationship and small-scale community like a poet is attracted to a painting: not only for self-reflection but also for the radical otherness that emerges as the revealed fragmentary nature of our own identities convicts us of our need for others. Boland's poetry does not try to imagine common experience on a national, political level, and neither does she try to suggest a return to a romanticized, Irish, locally organized

agrarian society; rather, she finds the ethical basis for common life in domestic space, where the individual first forms relationships with others.

The domestic space for Boland is not only a microcosm of the larger public space, but also space that has its own definitions and dramas, a threshold space between the private world of the individual and the public space of the larger community. Developments in the science of physics in the last century have demonstrated—to simplify immensely—that the very-large (the macrocosm) and the very-small (the microcosm) are defined by a different but related set of physical laws; by a rough analogy, the political world encompasses yet is guided by a different set of relations than the world of the small, the domestic sphere, which Boland takes as her subject. Boland's answer in a recent interview to a question about her latest volume, *Domestic Violence,* captures the alternate, hidden reality that defines the domestic not just by its "kitchens, objects, familiars of daily life," but by "the small" and the "seismic relations and spaces between them." Boland's task, as she says, is to "reclaim the energies of those…charged-up, awkward, powerful interiors" ("Interview" *Carcanet Press*), in order to discover, as she wonders in the titular poem of her latest volume, "what it is / is wrong in the lives of those who hate each other" (*DV* 27-28). Instead of exploring the simplified dichotomies between public and private, national and individual experience, Boland defines a new space for her words, where the mystery and hiddenness of experience gain more equal footing with that which can be known, understood, or captured through language. Here the individual finds her first and most essential social relations, and Boland's speakers enact a return to these essential relations in the space of

the poem—in the social relation between the word and the image in the space between the poet and visual art in ekphrasis.

My understanding of the sense of "being in common" in Boland's poetry depends on having memories in common, but what it means to have "common" memories is controversial. Maurice Halbwachs's theory of "collective memory"-- "a set of beliefs collectively shared, constructed, and passed on by a group" (qtd. in Friberg x)—has been criticized for appealing too closely to a hegemonic sense of collective identity. More acceptable today is Paul Connerton's "social memory," which takes into account the complex of relations between personal, cognitive, and social-habit memories (qtd. in Böss 25). The sense of common memory that I read in Boland's poetry, like Connerton's "social memory," is inductive: instead of assuming the presence of a unified culture to begin with, she recovers and enacts in her poetry individual, private instances of common memory that together suggest, without proving unequivocally, the presence of an Irish life-in-common, albeit a tentative and broken one, between the lines of recorded history.

Communitas and the Work of Mourning

On what then can a communal sense be based if not on a common language, a shared religion, a united national identity, a common mythology, even a common experience of suffering? Boland finds a appropriate answer for this question in Russian poet Anna Akhmatova, whose "Epilogue to the Requiem" Boland describes in a compelling passage of *Object Lessons.* She explains how Akhmatova suffered along with

so many other Russians under the Stalinist regime, as she waited "days, months, years" outside of a Leningrad prison for her son to be released. Boland finds in Akhmatova's poem a theme of mourning that she draws on in her later work, noting "the connection it makes between her womanhood and her sense of a nation as a community of grief. The country she wishes to belong to, to be commemorated by is the one revealed to her by her suffering" (149).[1] If the ethical approach of Boland's later work springs from communitas rather than empathy, the substance and tone of her later work, especially her ekphrasis, finds itself most characteristically in mourning. In communitas, the poet, the reader, the artist, the artistic subject all share a common loss—a common memory of suffering and the potential for the loss to continue, especially the loss of memory and the power of language which becomes almost a pre-occupation for the poet in her most recent volume. The twin impulses of preservation and liberation—for the dead, for their memory, for the medium of language—find dramatic embodiment in her poem's of mourning. Boland's ekphrastic poetry defies descriptive attempts to define this "community of grief" for Ireland; however, it ultimately creates forms of common mourning for a wounded past to begin the healing in the still-wounded present.

Michael Böss argues that in common memories, "what is shared is not memory itself, but forms of memory" (24); likewise, although her readers may not share memories in Boland's poetry specifically—indeed many of the "memories" she writes about are imagined to some degree—the forms she creates for remembering take on

[1] Boland re-iterates this point in a review of Elaine Feinstein's 2005 biography of Akhmatova for *The Irish Times*, writing that "Akhmatova is by no means the only poet to make public poetry from private suffering. But her sense of that act and its responsibility is peculiarly acute, and also deeply communal" ("Eloquent Lines").

universal significance. Poetry's power lies not in the direct expression of personal experience but in giving it a form through which it can be experienced in a new way by a reader. Boland argues that forms of visual or aural art more directly express an immediacy of human experience. "Photography, painting, music certainly excel as methods of expression," she explains, whereas poetry is "arcane and rule-bound":

> It doesn't leap to the moment the way a photograph can. Where poetry excels is as a method of experience, not expression. It has a unique capacity to render an experience in a fresh, unsettling way. I don't write a poem to express an experience, but to experience it again. …What's so thrilling about that is that the reader can finish it out of their own experience. That's the real power of poetry. (Villar "The Text of It" 64)

"The Art of Grief," from Boland's 1994 volume *In a Time of Violence,* captures an exchange between the two types of artistic media—poetry and sculpture—and emphasizes the difference in their abilities to "render" and "express" experience, but ultimately both are similarly distant from the speaker's memory of her mother's real grief. Boland reflects upon the statue of a woman's head covered in the veils of mourning and distinguishes the sound of real tears, "the dissonance of grief," from the form the sculptor had given to it that reveals the grief in a new way: "Just a mineral grace / in which she had found a rhythm to weep by" (*NCP* 240).[2] By aestheticizing it, the artist has removed the unknowable dissonance of the original grief, but has also made it possible for Boland as the poem's speaker to reify the dissonance of her mother's grief long ago.

[2] The memory as recorded in the poem is notional, but the sculpture itself is not. She explains in an interview that she remembers seeing the statue of a veiled woman at Iveagh House, the Department of Foreign Affairs on Stephen's Greene when her father worked there, when she was a child of four or five. She reflects, "I know when I thought about it later I wondered how did the sculptor put the veil on the face. Where they carved together? How did that work? And that became part of the poem's subject" (Villar 65).

In her poems of mourning, Boland gives form to the hidden suffering of the past, giving those who read them "a rhythm to weep by" while not presuming to explain the suffering or heal the pain in a more concrete way. The encounter with her mother's grief she has through this sculpture transpires, I would argue, within the ethical range of communitas: her mother's grief and her own historical place maintain their otherness, absorbed not in each other but in the "single, synchronized fluid event" of the past encounter in a living room of her childhood and the current encounter in the museum (Turner *Ritual and Theatre* 48). The speaker is not able to fully empathize with her mother: empathy would require a fuller understanding of the roots of her grief. Her acceptance of the hiddenness of that knowledge is the ethical center of the poem, as the speaker articulates in two fluid, abstract, prosaic lines: "What she knew was gone and what I / wanted to know she had never known" (*NCP* 241). The contrast between these lines and the lyrical imagery of art and violence in the rest of the last stanza finally allows the poet to create forms that echo, without ever fully capturing, the experience of suffering. The sculptor's act of carving marble is not an act of violence against the fullness of reality; it echoes the marble's own transformation from rough material to workable medium: "the sculptor made the medium remember / its own ordeal in the earth the aeons / crushing and instructing it until it wept itself / into inches, atoms of change" (241). Perhaps these lines might also suggest Boland's vision for what mourning might finally accomplish: Time has been "crushing and instructing" the people of Ireland, and weeping, as a natural, human outpouring of response to that

suffering might lead to the "inches, atoms of change" in her society that her mourning in language represents for art.

Anna Akhmatova envisions a similar hope for her own art in a foreword to her long poem "Requiem" used as the epigraph to this chapter (Akhmatova 90). She describes a brief encounter with another woman waiting interminably for a loved one to be released from prison, who finds some solace or maybe satisfaction in knowing that a fellow sufferer could describe their experience. The two women, unknown to each other, stand in solidarity, finding common hope in the potential of art to capture the reality of suffering.

Suffering and the Problem of Metaphor

The relationship between suffering, language, and social change is more fraught for Boland than the above examples might seem to suggest. Aestheticizing the suffering of others immediately raises an ethical red flag in this argument. "The War Horse," the title poem from her 1975 volume, illustrates Boland's early awareness of a significant difference between her own experience and that of a poet like Akhmatova: while Akhmatova's own suffering alongside other Russians informs her understanding of suffering communally and certifies its authenticity, Boland's early poem captures the experience of an isolated suburban dweller able and willing to close the curtains to a symbol of war and destruction proclaiming itself as a rogue horse saunters down the quiet street. Boland implicates herself as one who has, however unwittingly, closed her eyes to suffering; when she writes, "for a second only my blood is still / With atavism,"

(*NCP* 40) she suspends us in time with her as she realizes her weak, even guilty position as a poet in relation to past suffering. This position of weakness and culpability, of knowing the suffering of war through electronic media like television and radio, but closing her curtains to its reality is a theme Boland returns to time and again in her poetry. In "Domestic Violence," for instance, Boland confesses her inability to empathize fully with the "killings, killings, killings" that "shiver / into our ancient twelve by fifteen television" (*DV* 14) and implies the blindness cultivated to the suffering of her neighbors for the sake of her own domestic happiness.

In an earlier poem from *The War Horse,* however, kitchen blinds are drawn not in fear but in surrender, as though the speaker is the victim of a split identity—the poet and the suburban housewife—that forces her to fight for her art. The couplets of three out of five sections in "Suburban Woman," instead of rhyming regularly as in the heroic tradition, alternate rhymes, half-rhymes, and consonance from stanza to stanza, their sonic tension echoing the conflicted identity of the speaker. The speaker herself is the victim in this poem, suffering her incompatible desires, which Boland figures as an unhealing wound:

> And on this territory , blindfold, we meet
> at last, veterans of a defeat
>
> no truce will heal, no formula prevent
> breaking out fresh again; again the print
>
> of twigs stalking her pillow will begin
> a new day and all her victims then—
>
> hopes unreprieved, hours taken hostage—
> will newly wake … (*NCP* 65)

Could it be argued that the metaphorical wounds the speaker employs to evoke the suffering of a poet elide the real experience of death, physical trauma, and illness that the image suggests? Can probing the aesthetic significance of this image in poetry have implications for ethical approaches to real individual and communal suffering? Is it even right to separate the aesthetic image—as poignantly as it might represent the pain of its associations—from its visceral reality? Boland asks at the end of "The Art of Grief," did her mother "flinch as the chisel found / that region her tears inferred, / where grief and its emblems are inseparable?" (241). If she cannot fully empathize then where does the authority come from if not by appropriating the traditional (and patriarchal) bardic authority to speak for the oppressed community? These questions might arise in response to a statement she makes in her essay "Domestic Violence," in which she has what some might call the audacity to "want" a form of domestic violence as an aesthetic image:

> I wanted the cut flowers on the table to show the wound of their break with the natural. […] I wanted, imaginatively and figuratively—and only, of course, in the realm of the poem—domestic violence. […] I had deep respect for the customary use of the term to denote a tragic relationship, but I needed the words for a different context, to convey an aesthetic association. ("Domestic Violence" 34)

I will discuss this term "domestic violence" in more detail in chapter six, but for now I cite this passage to demonstrate how jarring this juxtaposition of image and reality can be. Boland feels the need to defend her use of the phrase, but she does so by explaining the self-reflexivity of these questions: she uses the phrase to denote the "wound" that exists between representation and reality, just as her own term for this wound in art,

"domestic violence," embodies it by naming a book of poetry and calling up the tragic reality of many private lives.

In her 1976 book, *Illness as Metaphor* Susan Sontag made an important contribution to the perception of illness, especially cancer, in American culture by arguing that "illness is not metaphor, and that the most truthful way of regarding illness—and the healthiest way of being ill—is one most purified of, most resistant to, metaphoric thinking" (3). This may seem on the surface to be a harsh criticism of metaphor, but her criticism of the way illness is used as a metaphor turns on how the metaphor is so often formulated in public discourse, not a criticism of metaphor itself. She argues,

> To describe a phenomenon as a cancer is an incitement to violence. The use of cancer in political discourse encourages fatalism and justifies 'severe' measures—as well as strongly reinforcing the widespread notion that the disease is necessarily fatal. The concept of disease is never innocent. (84)

By over-using an over-determined metaphor of cancer in society, public discourse has, albeit unwittingly, influenced the way we think of those who are ill and the illnesses that afflict them. The same might be said about the way television news coverage blunts our perception of real suffering around the world by making us believe its discursive medium is both transparent and comprehensive. Boland gives Sontag's short book a glowing review,[3] and one can see why by comparing Sontag's difficulty with the stereotypical way illness is represented in public discourse to Boland's own arguments against the way women were often "double-exposed, like a flawed photograph, over the

[3] Compare this with her rather scathing review she wrote a year earlier of Sontag's *On Photography*.

image and identity of the nation" in public discourse and traditional poetic imagery ("Writing the Political Poem").[4] While an exploration of political or public suffering might descend to another delineation of various forms of victimization, the most poignant wounds in Boland's poetry exist in the private sphere of past and present, individual and communal experience, and offer forms of grief and possibilities, not promises, of healing. Such metaphors as Boland employs them are, to a certain degree, justified by their appeal to private individual and communal experiences of loss rather than using them as a simple replacement for other simplified and damaging public images of a victimized people.

I would argue that Boland's achievement lies not in offering the private world of the domestic sphere as an alternative to public representations of women's lives, but in her ability to give form to the limits of her own empathy with the hidden experiences and suffering of other women. Only when Boland fully recognizes the limitations of empathy, embracing her culpability in her poetic voice rather than fighting against it or excusing it, does her ethical stance toward suffering become truly transformative. When the "wounds" she explores concern the break between representation and reality, her poems, beginning in the 1990s, start to emphasize the absence that characterizes loss over the more forceful presence of suffering, and their tone tends more toward mourning than protest. By highlighting the wounds of language, the poetic voice is

[4] Boland calls Sontag's essay a "fine and poignant essay on the magnetic force of sickness" in her review ("This Canker"). She agrees that in public discourse, metaphors tend to reflect more on the pre-occupations of those who use them than on a real relation between reality and language. In such discourse, Boland says, "all the nightmares of an age cling to the dark screen of illness; all its fears of punishment, its guilts, its childish sense of random justice."

able to participate in the mourning for the potential loss of her craft rather than attempting to describe the suffering and loss that others experience—an experience she can never fully know. In the pre-1990s poem "Mise Eire," however, Boland's speaker seems to reject aestheticizing her nation along with an older poetic tradition, with its appeal to "the songs / that bandage up the history, / the words / that make a rhythm of the crime" (*NCP* 128). But she fails to recognize the potential of language to act this way unwittingly, that by calling up an experience through language one inevitably also misrepresents it.

Steven Matthews concurs on this point, arguing that for Boland, as for Yeats, "the craft is always a compromising of experience and a displacement of it within self-mythologizations" (87), but also holds that Boland's foregrounding of metaphors of craft demonstrates a more "honest consciousness of the aestheticization of experience involved in any poetry-making than that of many other writers'" (88). By choosing not to represent the presence of suffering in her later poetry, Boland is able to forge a tentative and fragile bridge between poetic forms of mourning and the real work of mourning experienced by individuals and communities faced with loss.

An important difference emerges in this discussion between actual and symbolic violence—between the reality of violence experienced by the readers and viewers of art and often the artists themselves, and the representation of violence in art. For Mitchell this distinction must be taken seriously by artists and audiences: The failure to recognize it can be a source of artistic misinterpretation and, perhaps more significantly, ethical misappropriation of artwork in real life. This distinction is important for recognizing

both the limitations and the special gift of art in the face of real suffering. And here is where ekphrasis speaks so well to this ethical dilemma between art and life: each of Boland's ekphrases enacts the drama of this tension between representation and reality, forcing this tension to the center stage, so to speak, of the poem's dialectics. But a poem, as a form of representation itself by virtue of its reliance on the medium of language[5], does not itself heal the actual wounds of body, mind, or spirit; rather, it mediates the healing process by keeping questions open, resisting the violence of closure. Healing, in this view, is not an end to be achieved but a process in which the wounded partake and changes, only imperceptibly at first, over time. Indeed, many who mourn the death of a close loved one will say that the wound of loss never entirely heals; rather, it simply becomes less painful to remember as time passes and the grieving process is allowed run its course.

Elegy and Responsibility

Two of Boland's later volumes, *In a Time of Violence* (1994) and *Domestic Violence* (2007), are rife with elegies and poems about death. I have cited already Margaret Mills Harper's work on the centrality of the relationship between language and death in Boland's poetry; indeed, she argues, they "form the backbone of Boland's work, both as a structural principle and an aesthetic position" (182).[6] Harper's argument could be

[5] By using the term "medium of language," I assume that language is not intrinsic to meaning , but, rather, one among various media that embody, interpret, or avoid meaning in different ways, such as visual or musical media. I base this assumption on Peirce's semiotic analysis of the codes that underlie nonlinguistic symbol systems (Peirce).

[6]Harper's essay is helpful for establishing that Boland realized this connection in volumes leading up to *In a Time of Violence* but Harper stops short of extending the scope of her own argument to this

further supported through reading both *In a Time of Violence* and *Domestic Violence,* and indeed, my argument does not stray far from Harper's line of thinking, but I will argue that Boland looks beyond language for aesthetic forms by which mourning is made possible in a modern world that refuses the consolations of an earlier era. For Boland, a poet committed to recovering elegy as a genre in the modern world must address issues of representation and public responsibility, which makes the modern elegy terribly relevant to understanding modern ekphrasis. I will explore how the ethical exchange characteristic of elegy is intrinsic to the way Boland uses words and images, but also a thematic and ethical force for her later poetry as she comes to terms with individual mourning as the ethical limit of her ability to empathize with women of the past, and common mourning as the ethical limit of her poetic ability to heal the wounds of the present.

Transcending the complicated questions about elegy's role in modern poetry, Boland has expressed an unwavering commitment to the genre: "If poetry does not address public grief in some way," she says, "it runs the risk of abandoning one of its great roles and one of its great genres, which is elegy" ("Can Poetry Console?"). In *Domestic Violence*, Boland searches the world for forms of mourning from the "letters to the dead" in Old Kingdom Egypt to the still life painting of Irish-American William Harnett. She searches these tangible forms not just as expressions of grief, but as forms

---

volume, the latest available to her for a 1997 essay. Harper proposes that *In a Time of Violence* "must be the topic of another essay," which I have not found any evidence of having been published in the interim. She only remarks, concluding her essay, that it "fulfills the promises I sensed in Boland's earlier work, taking her into 'that region … where grief and its emblems are inseparable' and reassuring me of the rich possibilities that such a journey holds" (193).

for imagining what common mourning means in the modern world. Boland explains that "a community has little difficulty in agreeing on expressions of grief. The difficulties I feel come in trying to agree on imagining it" ("Can Poetry Console?"). Boland tries to imagine how poetry of mourning can still have public, communal reference by using imagery that invites exchange between her poetic voice, her reading audience, and the art and artists her poems represent. Rather than representing monuments whose determined public reference makes them as divisive for some as they are unifying for others, Boland experiments with representing art whose communal reference works on a smaller scale, allowing imagined communities and individual relationships to agree on forms of common mourning.

As Jahan Ramazani argues, Irish poets from Yeats to Heaney have used the elegy as a form of commemoration in an Ireland whose traditions of common grief are diminishing in importance. He reminds us that funeral rites and mourning customs have shown more resistance to modern influence in Ireland than other Westernized nations, but insists that poets from Yeats and John Synge to Patrick Kavanagh and Seamus Heaney have had reason to lament the spreading loss of traditions like the "carnival energies of the Irish wake" (23). Boland's poetry of mourning more often cites the tradition of keening, a integral part of the Irish wake, "an atonal array of primitive sounds" voiced by mourners in a theatrical, ritualistic expression of grief ("Can Poetry Console?"). But like many modern elegists, Boland stretches the boundaries of the elegy, resisting the traditional elegiac narrative that ends in a consolation for the bereaved. Ramazani argues that many modern elegies (he uses Seamus Heaney's for example) rely

on the poem's form to carry the poem's consolation. Formal elements like line breaks, rhythms, and meter carry the ethical weight of the elegy, leaving spaces of consolatory or transcendent possibility that might seem closed off in summary. Ramazani argues that Heaney balances imagery of re-birth with tough-minded skepticism. The sequence "Clearances," for instance, an elegy for the poet's mother, is not anti-consolatory like many modern elegies, but finds consolation in more ancient sources--"vegetal rebirth, piscatory fertility, avian flight" (*Poetry of Mourning* 353)—and mitigates its consoling power with a suspicion that knowing death still trumps these sources of comfort. Ramazani identifies Heaney, John Montague, Michael Longley, and Derek Mahon as "questioning, analyzing, and even attacking the elegy's major subgenres and conventions" but also as reclaiming them for our time (337). Boland has earned a place in this catalogue as a poet whose lyric questions the basic assumptions about the poet's relation to the dead, but finds new ways to both create and excavate forms of profound mourning.

In "The Weasel's Tooth," Boland might seem to distance herself from the elegiac genre completely when she says that her response to the death of a child in the Dublin bombings "must not be to grieve for the child" (89). Indeed, she all but dismisses "Child of our Time" (*NCP* 41), the poem she wrote in direct response to the child's death as an overly sentimental expression of immediate grief. Boland explains that she sees her contribution as exploring the evil that lead to that death through the banalities of her own craft. The possibility of creating forms of grief through attention to craft becomes a kind of objective correlative for the direct expression of personal or a shared public grief.

Boland's insight into her own responsibility as an artist and a human being in this early essay prepare her to develop an elegiac ethic that accepts the problematic role of the poet to console a grieving public. She cites Sandra Gilbert's formulation of this question: "Can societies trust any longer to the private imagination of the poet what they once trusted to the public theater of elected actors such as the keeners?" ("Can Poetry Console?") And her answer seems to be, yes, but only if the poet accepts that her private imagination must take responsibility for public guilt.

Poems to die in: Death and Solidarity in In a Time of Violence

Boland opens *In a Time of Violence* with a poem in which new love confronts the reality of death on the Famine Roads, but the volume ends with a poem yearning for a form in which to experience her own death, much as Yeats yearns for a form of eternal life in "Sailing to Byzantium." Throughout the volume she has done the hard work of empathy that moves her from a distanced observation of death's silences to a deeper understanding of them, and finally to disillusionment with empathy as a limited, even deceptive way of moving closer to death. In two poems from *In a Time of Violence,* Boland's speaker stands in solidarity with women represented in art of the past by commencing a search for a poem in which they and she as the speaker/poet could escape the youthful imperative for women in literary tradition, a search that finds success in the elegiac poems written for her mother's death in *Domestic Violence.* She seeks to answer the women in "Time and Violence" whom she imagines asking for "words we can grow old and die in": a poem that does justice to the lives and deaths of women (*NCP* 239).

Solidarity, not empathy, is Boland's primary motivation for writing women out of the poem, however. In "Woman Painted on a Leaf," the plea is voiced by the first person singular of the speaker, the painted woman, for a poem in which death is not impossible: "I want a poem / I can grow old in. I want a poem I can die in" (*NCP* 242). In her essay "Domestic Violence," Boland describes finding the first hint of a poem in which women faced the reality of death in the work of fin de siècle writer Charlotte Mew. In Mew's poems, domestic spaces, previously sites of female entrapment and decorum, were transformed into places where the energies of women's lives could be felt. Boland detects that "something had happened in these spaces. Love had died there. Fear was felt there. Death was coming" (35).

In "Time and Violence," the speaker imagines a temporary transformation of a typical Irish suburb into a kind of purgatory: a place of encounter and exchange with imaginary women of art, ghosts of the past wounded by language and longing for death. The speaker enters this liminal space as she contemplates the harsh juxtaposition of the new life represented by the change of seasons and spring flowers around her with the reality of her aging body: "whatever else might flower before the fruit, / and be renewed, I would not. Not again" (237). In the twilight, that temporary liminal space between day and night, a car splashing by on the street deepens rather than breaking her revery, and the wounded images of women preserved in literary and artistic tradition—the shepherdess of pastoral poetry and painting, Cassiopeia of Greek mythology, the mermaid of Nordic story-telling—all appear as a fleeting glimpse and a whisper in her ear. Instead of seeing them as they are represented in art, however, she is able to see

them in this place where she is struck with the weakness of her own aging, as they might be as mortals with human bodies trapped in position over the centuries and unable to die. As the women whisper in her ear, the speaker's own aging becomes a strength, the power she has to change the plight of these women: to stand in solidarity with their suffering and let them die. The women emphasize the connection between sound and death in their pleas for a poem to die in: "*Write us out of the poem. Make us human / in cadences of change and mortal pain / and words we can grow old and die in"* (239).

"Time and Violence" recalls Boland's poem "The Women" from *The Journey* in which the speaker/poet describes the transformational potential of that same "in-between, neither here-nor-there hour of evening" (*NCP* 141). She calls it "the hour of change, of metamorphosis, / of shape-shifting instabilities" in which women of the past arise before her eyes "like visions," but the women she sees in the earlier poem are not the wounded women of literature and art; rather they are the wounded women of reality who have taken reluctant refuge in art, those women who "fell and grieved and healed into myth, / into me in the evening at my desk" (141). The tension for the speaker of "The Women" lies between her sense of responsibility for finding justice for the women she sees and her inability to empathize, to see beyond her own "terrain" between poetic practice and domestic responsibilities. The key development from the earlier to the later poem is not the speaker's ability to empathize with the women in her vision, but her ability to allow the women's voice to change her own: the women's plea affirms the poetic value of the speaker's own process of aging, and in exchange, the speaker makes it her mission to find a poem to die in.

In her more directly ekphrastic poem "Woman Painted on a Leaf" Boland answers this call by giving voice to her own need for a poem to die in. The poem embodies the tension between fixity and living flux present particularly in the very early poem "On the Painting *Back from Market*," but here we have a found object, a curio in a shop whose artistic merit is ascribed by the speaker, not a great work of art whose value is represented by its place in a museum. In the first part of the poem, the speaker is determined to reject the fixity of the visual representation of a woman on a leaf, distancing herself from the image by describing it objectively and then, more forcefully, "This is not my face. Neither did I draw it" (241). The distance becomes more difficult as the speaker recognizes the object in a long tradition of art that forces upon representations of women and nature the same fate: fixed associations with beauty and death that deny their more complex reality. She imagines the curio's provenance:

> A leaf falls in a garden.
> The moon cools its aftermath of sap.
> The pith of summer dries out in starlight.
>
> A woman is inscribed there. (241)

As the poem progresses, the distinction between the voice of the speaker and the voice of the painted women becomes ambiguous. The following lines could be a performance of the painted woman's voice, but the poem and the previous poems in the volume have prepared us to read it as the speaker's voice as well: "I want a poem / I can grow old in," she says, "I want a poem I can die in." She does not desire the permanent form in which to exist in eternity as Yeats does in "Sailing to Byzantium." This she calls "not death" but "the terrible suspension of life." Although Yeats does recognize and even celebrate the

cycles of life and death before imagining eternity, the focus of the poem and its enduring image is the "artifice of eternity." Unlike Yeats, Boland does want to take her form from an "earthly thing"; she wants her body to return to the earth rather than escape from it: she imagines her face as a "dried out" leaf falling to the ground rather than an image on that leaf. Boland contrasts her desire for death with the fixity of autumn: the "hard look" of the stars and the "bronzing of the distance" imagine autumn as a sculpture in the final stages of completion (242).

Boland cannot completely reject the power of the visual, however, and in fact she recognizes that its emblematic power can actually transform her own art for a more honest response to the problem of permanence. The influence of the visual allows Boland to see the very permanence she wants to avoid in her own poem. Even as she states that the "Fine lines drawn on a veined surface," do not represent her own image, the lines written as metaphorical veins, carrying the life-blood of in the poem, do represent her as a poet (*NCP* 241). The lines of the poem are even end-stopped and rhythmically arranged on the page, mimicking the patterns of veins on a leaf. The poem attains a permanence in its representation of the qualities of the leaf that she hopes will become only "crisp tinder underfoot," speaking without permanent physical form (242). The sound quality of the poem's numerous full stops restrain the speaker from her hoped-for release, but the attitude of openness is maintained by the poet's recognition that poetry alone does not offer the form in which the cycles of life and death can continue or even be adequately represented.

The speaker's freedom from the objective omniscience of poetic tradition, her potential for transformation, ambiguity, and death are preoccupations of Boland's later work, and they are often related to the formal economy of Boland's poems. A poem like "Instructions" (*Domestic Violence)* reverses the emphasis, making formal change necessary to reflect a change in the poet or speaker. Her speaker in this poem is a benevolent dictator of a writing instructor, determined to undermine the patriarchal intentions of poetic tradition by illustrating the formal requirements for corking the poetic fountain of youth once and for all. She explains in the first two lines, "To write about age you need to take something and / break it" (*DV* 77), embodying in her uneven lines the brokenness she insists upon in her instructions. The idolatry of youth cannot simply be dismissed or passed over, she argues; rather, it must be systematically dismantled like an iconoclast smashing images of God. The poem's fourteen lines suggest the sonnet form, but the stunted lines prevent it from making the sophisticated argument of a capable sonnet, and the humanist strain of the traditional sonnet is exchanged for the self-abnegation more typical of the medieval mystics. The imagery of death in last two lines, however, suggest that the end of youth means the freedom to die, to exist beyond the reaches of representation, symbolism, or stereotype.

> Now take syntax. Break that too. What is left is for you
> and you only:
> A dead tree. The future. What does not bear fruit. Or
> thinking of. (77)

The fricatives in the last two lines and "the future" tucked between images of barrenness contrast the plosives ("cut," "snapped," etc.) and imagery of destruction repeated throughout the poem, lending to the last two lines an ascetic freedom.

Tangible Losses in Domestic Violence

Given Boland's enduring admiration for Yeats's poetry, and especially his later poems, it is difficult not to hear Yeats's aging bodily complaints in Boland's own poetry of the aging body and death. The bare skeletal and vein imagery in "Woman Painted" and "Instructions" recalls Yeats's self-caricature as a "tattered coat upon a stick" in "Sailing to Byzantium" (*CP* 194) or his powerful evocation of the soul's poverty, the "foul rag and bone shop of the heart" in "The Circus Animals' Desertion" (346). The desire for a "poem to die in" is not an exclusively gendered desire, although Boland's poetry has demonstrated the intractable association between women and images of fixed, eternal beauty in art. Yeats's haunting image of Eva Gore-Booth shows, however, that even in her old age, the woman can still embody national politics, if only to emphasize its impoverished, self-destructive nature: Eva is still, "When withered old and skeleton-gaunt, / An image of such politics" ("In Memory of Eva-Gore Booth and Con Markievicz" 233). In protest, Boland's imagery of the dying body is more deliberate, a source of hope, not regret, as reflected in her use of spare, skeletal poetic lines that aid the passage of a woman from presence to absence in the poem.

Her plea for a poem in which to die in *In a Time of Violence* finds an answer in *Domestic Violence* where Boland chooses to truly write her mother out of her own elegies,

making them meditations on her own grief, the writing of elegies, or even language, but only hinting at her mother as a remembered presence. "Achill Woman" (*Outside History* 1990) is perhaps a precursor to this new mode as a poem that chooses to focus on what has been lost rather than fill in the silences for which the speaker's youth and ignorance are culpable. "An Elegy for my Mother in Which She Scarcely Appears" and "And Soul" (*DV* 2007) are Boland's first to reflect the loss of a specific person in her life. She has written about the losses felt as her children grew up in "Fruit on a Straight-Sided Tray" (*Night Feed* 1980), "The Pomegranate," and "Love" (both from *In a Time of Violence* 1994) but in these elegies she confronts a separation potentially more complete than those of her motherhood. As she suggests in "Amber," however, perhaps the limits that reason puts on living and the dead are not absolute, just as the piece of amber she was given by her mother has the power to "chafe at the edges of edges of the seen," preserving "seeds, leaves and even small feathers" so that they "seem alive as they ever were" many millions of years later (*DV* 32).

Boland's continues to develop the connection between the female body, death, and poetic absence in *Domestic Violence,* further transforming the Yeatsian trope of old age. In "An Elegy for My Mother in which She Scarcely Appears" the speaker's meditation on the deaths of household animals recalls Yeats's famous metaphor of his poetic themes as "circus animals" that seem to have abandoned him in his old age ("The Circus Animals' Desertion"). One of the central contrasts between the two poems is instructive for a reading of Boland's poem. Yeats's circus animals evoke regret that the time spent on the spectacle of his art may have left his heart bereft: "Players and painted

stage took all my love / And not those things that they were emblems of." In Boland's poem, however, animals exist in a domestic sphere together with others mute companions and witnesses of her mother's daily life without which Boland's own heart would be bereft. In Boland's elegy, the fates of the animals, the other "old, dumb" household implements of domestic space, her mother, and language itself are intertwined in an uncertain lyric voice that navigates the threshold between private memory and public elegy. In the poem's first three stanzas, Boland's voice emerges from the realm of memory, recalling her first encounter with the paradox of elegy and culpability:

> I knew we had to grieve for the animals
> A long time ago: weep for them, pity them.
> I knew it was our strange human duty
> to write their elegies after we arranged their demise.
> I was young then and able for the paradox.
> I am older now and ready with the question: (*DV* 33)

From here, however, Boland's voice enacts the uncertainty of translating a private thought-process with its own internal logic for an audience, as though her voice were crossing a threshold between her private memories of her mother and the traditionally public form of the elegy. She asks,

> What happened to them all? I mean to those
> old dumb implements which have
> no eyes to plead with us like theirs,
> no claim to make on us like theirs? I mean—

The logic is clearly a personal one with the insistence of the repeated "I mean," and the associative transition from the animals to "there was a singing kettle" in the next stanza. The speaker's tentative voice mitigates the seeming callousness of associating her

mother with the "old dumb implements" the poem catalogues. She transitions from remembering a "wooden clotheshorse" to remembering her mother, and then through the liminal "winter, lunar, wet" of the volume's first poem simultaneously back in time and into the present tense. The clotheshorse carries tea cloths instead of "landlords or Irish monks," but still, she argues,

> …I would have thought, worth adding to
> the catalogue of what we need, what we always need
>
> as is my mother, on this Dublin evening of
> fog crystals and frost as she reaches out to test
> one corner of a cloth for dryness as the prewar
> Irish twilight closes in and down on the room
> and the curtains are drawn and here am I,
> not even born and already a conservationist (34)

The shift in Boland's voice here from memory to the imagined past before she was born, and also into the present tense of creating this memory through language recalls a similar move in "Silenced," in which the speaker joins Philomel in the room where she is weaving and time collapses so that the ancient myth and an old radio voice their violations simultaneously. By collapsing time like this, Boland refuses the traditional narrative structure of recorded memory, choosing instead the spatial proximity of imaginative memory. Language in the last few lines is not one of the lost household animals of memory, but "the last and most fabulous of beasts" of imaginative reality. This elegy ultimately affirms the power of language to resist the desire to preserve the dead as relics for the enjoyment of the present, in favor of the power to conserve language as a living, participatory, imaginative act. The speaker is "already a conservationist,"

> With nothing to assist me but the last
> and most fabulous of beasts—language, language—
> which knows, as I do, that it's too late
> to record the loss of these things but does so anyway,
> and anxiously, in case it shares their fate. (*DV* 34*)*

Boland's underlying concern for the fate of language echoes the intertwining fates of heart and language in Yeats's poem. Yeats's confidence, even arrogance as a poet—"those masterful images"—is mitigated by his sense of proportion: commitment to the creations of his mind has done nothing to change the impoverished, haggle-ridden "rag and bone shop of the heart" where his poems, and language itself, begin. Boland too, seems to fear that language, "the last and most fabulous of beasts," is after all one of the "old dumb implements" of domestic life that, like the singing kettle and the brass firedogs, might be forgotten (*Domestic Violence* 34).

I end this section with an example of a form of grieving from the visual/structural arts that invites the viewer/reader to be part of a continual drama of mourning rather than drawing power from monumental power structures. Mitchell discusses the Vietnam Veteran's Memorial in Washington D.C., one of the most celebrated works of public art of the twentieth century, as an unconventional but effective form of mourning for the 57,000 names inscribed on the V-shaped marble walls. What makes it successful, however, is not its resistance to the traditional heroic war monument: it is, he says, "anti-heroic, anti-monumental, a V-shaped gash or scar, a trace of violence suffered, not […] violence wielded in the service of a glorious cause" (380), but "at a more subtle level" it also "reinscribes" the "symbolic valences of the traditional war memorial" (381). As a form of representation, one must also

acknowledge that the monument leaves no place for mourning the suffering of the Vietnamese, for instance, and while the shape of the monument may signify the "Vagina of Mother Earth opened to receive her sons," the suffering of women is significantly left out of the monument (381). The power of the monument lies not in its incomplete challenge to traditional monumentalizing but in its ability, as a public monument, to keep open the possibility of mourning and healing for those who visit the memorial. As Mitchell articulates,

> If the VVM is a successful work of public art, it is not because it manages to "heal" the wounds of the past or to re-open them with forms of critical violence: it succeeds only in keeping the space between these possibilities open, in the way an indelible scar provokes an indefinite series of narratives and counternarratives. (381)

Boland, like Maya Lin, the designer of the VVM, offers forms for entering into the process of mourning for suffering rather than forms that offer a way to escape the suffering by lauding either the hero or the victim. Boland's poems, like Yeats's, maintain an open dialogue and tension between the desire for escape and the necessity of entering into one's own suffering and the suffering of others.

Community and Communitas

Boland's ethical engagement with death in her poetry is intimately connected to her vision of the thriving of human life in relationship with others. Before developing the notion of "communitas" as an ethical alternative for empathy in her ekphrasis, Boland's own stated antagonism toward the idea of "community" must be considered. In *Object Lessons,* Boland is less than enthusiastic about the relationship between poet

and community in Ireland. As she says, she started her poetry career in a time and place where "poetry appeared to be granted authentic communal importance" (*OL* 24), but she learned eventually that its importance depended on a particular vision of community that colluded with traditional patriarchal social structure in which the bardic role was played by men, and women's voices were on the margins and in the domestic sphere where public voice was all-but impossible.

Beyond feeling excluded, however, Boland criticizes the "poetic community" for co-opting for itself a voice of "power and resonance" that found its source in the power structures of the political sphere (*OL* 24). A theme throughout Boland's prose is her staunch refusal to simply co-opt this bardic voice in her work. She rejects the public, representative role that writing a political poem in Ireland presumes, and explains that she came to realize that writing a more responsible political poem would involve "like other parts of the poet's life…more of solitary scruple than communal eloquence" (*OL* 178). Her articulation of this realization here is consistent with her explanation in "The Weasel's Tooth" that a poetry responsible to the suffering of her nation would renounce the immediate response of the public newspaper poem to examine the workings of "individual evil" in the banalities of craft (90). But Boland's problem with "community" in that early essay and elsewhere is its entrenched association with the idea of a unified nation: Yeats's "fantasy of cultural coherence" is for Boland a grim and daunting inheritance (86). A poet's public voice is often assumed to be approving of this legacy if not directly resisting it, and Boland articulates her desire to be a subversive voice consistently throughout her career. For Yeats's romanticized notion of Ireland as "a

community bound together by imaginative possessions," Boland wants to substitute the word "imaginary" to uncover the falsity of Yeats's well-intentioned dream (87). Criticism since then has indeed shown the unified notion of "Irishness" to be a chimera, but that sentimentalized notion of community is distinct from the localized, face-to-face community that develops out of the spaces between and among individuals.

In his important and far-reaching book *Imagined Communities,* Benedict Anderson articulates an important counterargument to Boland's denunciation of Yeats's imaginary Irish community. He argues that all communities, from the local town or city to the nation, are imagined, but the element of imagination itself does not necessarily imply lack of authenticity: "Communities are to be distinguished," he explains, "not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined" (6). Anderson suggests that the element of imagination may contribute to the formation of even the smallest of communities although his book is about large-scale communities: He explains, "all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even those) are imagined" (6). A small-scale community not built exclusively on the bonds of necessity or inherent commonality uses the imagination to formulate identity through ritual or defining themselves not just by who they are but who they desire to be. The imagined small-scale community, far from representing a falsity, can potentially free the individual from the limitations of her own ingrained ways of perceiving reality. I will argue that Boland does not so much speak as a representative of a particular community in her poems as she speaks as a member on equal footing, imagining and experiencing within in the poem a kind of social relationship—a spontaneous communitas—that

models the individual, ethical relationships on which community is built in the real world.

Despite her disavowal of this idea of an Irish poetic "community" in her prose, her poetry demonstrates a commitment to "communitas," a more visionary, potentially transformative model for ethical-poetic interventions in keeping with her presentation of poetry as a liminal medium, not one that either affirms or negates normative social structures. Victor Turner prefers the Latin term "communitas" to "community" in his own work on ritual in tribal societies because it distinguishes a relatively unstructured model for human relationships defined by a "communion of equal individuals" from the more general sense of community as an "area of common living" (*Ritual Process* 96). Elsewhere, Turner similarly defines communitas as "an unmediated relationship between historical, idiosyncratic, concrete individuals" (*Ritual and Theatre* 45) that emerges at different times (especially during the liminal phase) to evaluate, even challenge the normative structure without necessarily opposing it or rejecting it. I find this distinction between the Latin and the more general term especially helpful in a poetic context because "communitas" suggests an imagined relational space set apart from normative reality, while "community" suggests a space within normative society. The liminal qualities of "communitas" better parallel the social relationships dramatized within a poem, especially an ekphrastic poem, often characterized by imaginative exchange between life and death, past and present, real and imaginary even as the ethical conditions of common life persist.

Characterizing Communitas

Two aspects of communitas are worth highlighting in the context of Boland's poetry: first, unlike empathy, which tends to be at least initiated by an element of pity or of social inequality, communitas preserves and even heightens a sense of individuality while also strengthening a bond of equality with others. Communitas is not, in this sense, a rejection of empathy—indeed, communitas may even be predicated on the ability to empathize—but a non-objectifying extension of it recognizing empathy's limitations for appreciating the dignity of one's own and one another's individuality along with our mutual need for community. As Turner explains, "the more spontaneously 'equal' people become, the more distinctively 'themselves' they become; the more the *same* they become socially, the less they find themselves to be individually" (*Ritual and Theatre* 47). Anderson defines a nation as an "imagined community" based on this ideal of equality, but perhaps because of the larger scale, the distance between the ideal and reality is greater: "regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship" (*Imagined Communities* 7). Examples of the difference between ideal and reality on the state and national level abound, but even on the small-scale of the communities studied by the Turners, equality is more the exception than the rule: space is made for it in the ritual communitas of the liminal stage, but the difficulty of the empathy required for regular equality is recognized in the return to the hierarchies of normative society.

Boland's shifting understanding of the power and limits of empathy can be illustrated by a contrast between two poems. In an early poem like "Self-Portrait" (*The Journey*) Boland's identification with the woman in the painting is initiated by her sense of the painter's injustice to the woman, "slighting her / in botched blues" (5-6). The ambiguity between speaker and subject on which he poem turns is, as I have already argued, a move of empathy on the speaker's part. In the recent "Silenced" (*Domestic Violence*), however, the speaker and her subject remain distinct. The speaker maintains her distance as a separate individual recalling the narrative of injustice and violation, but then enters to watch and record as Philomel becomes the creative voice of her own violation: "She was weaving alone, in fact, and so intently/ she never saw me enter" (ll. 13-14). The possibility of Philomel's individuality remains untouched by the speaker, who actually augments it by acknowledging her as an artist. After she enters, however, the lines of place and time blur as the speaker seems to be back in Ireland, but the room she is in with Philomel remains the same.

> An Irish sky was unfolding its wintry colors
> Slowly over my shoulder. An old radio
> Was there in the room as well, telling its own
> Unregarded story of violation. (15-18)

In empathy Boland allowed the lines of identity to be obscured in "Self-Portrait," but here the poet pulls distinct identities together by obscuring the boundaries of time, place, and imagination. The ambiguity of identity in the earlier poem becomes the ambiguity of place and time in "Silenced"; the empathy the speaker enacts in the earlier poem becomes the *communitas* the speaker encounters with Philomel. I will return to

this poem later to examine how poetic form and the play of various media in the poem contribute to a reading of the relationship between representation and suffering in terms of an ethic of communitas, but for now would like simply to show that in that ethic, the relationship between the speaker and her subject is best characterized by exchange rather than empathy: Boland gains from the encounter as much or more than Philomel gains in justice as a subject of the artist's gaze. Philomel is herself an artist, telling her own story in her weaving, and the poem's speaker simply calls us to step with them both into a new realm of perception.

A second aspect of communitas worth highlighting here is its difference from, not direct antagonism with, a stable social structure. The Turners' explanation of the relationship between structure and communitas is worth quoting at some length:

> Communitas, in the present context of its use, then, may be said to exist more in contrast than in active opposition to social structure, as an alternative and more "liberated" way of being socially human, a way both of being detached from social structure—and hence potentially of periodically *evaluating* its performance—and also of a "distance" or "marginal" person's being more attached to *other* disengaged personas—and hence, sometimes of evaluating a social structure's historical performance in common with them. Here we may have a loving union of the structurally damned pronouncing judgment on normative structure and providing alternative models for structure. (*From Ritual to Theatre* 50-51)

Communitas is not just a new version of social structure as we know it, but neither is it anarchy. Desire for communitas is often a response to the excesses or deficiencies of social structure, but not a permanent alternative: "Wisdom," Turner argues, "is always to find the appropriate relationship between structure and communitas under the given circumstances of time and place, to accept each modality when it is paramount without

rejecting the other, and not to cling to one when its present impetus is spent" (*The Ritual Process* 139). Communitas describes a social relationship that occurs apart from the public realm of social definitions, with paradoxical power to urge the public realm to model its own ethical practice on the experience of individuals the transformative encounters, however brief, of communitas. In such an encounter, Turner explains,

> We feel that it is important to relate directly to another person as he presents himself in the here-and-now, to understand him in a sympathetic way, free from the culturally defined encumbrances of his role, status, reputation, class, caste, sex or other structural niche. Individuals who interact with one another in the mode of spontaneous communitas become totally absorbed into a single synchronized, fluid event. (*From Ritual to Theatre* 48)

I will argue that the ethical model for Boland's ekphrasis in *In a Time of Violence* and *Domestic Violence* moves her from the empathy of previous volumes to spontaneous communitas, which captures more deeply both the individuality and the equality of the poet, the artist, and the represented subject in the social relationship intrinsic to Boland's ekphrasis.

Turner draws an important distinction between two types of communitas, spontaneous and normative, the boundaries of which have been at the heart of recent criticism of Turner's ideas amongst anthropologists, and are important for differentiating my own appropriate of communitas as an ethic from the more contentious normative practices of communitas in the ritual of pilgrimage. Spontaneous communitas, he explains, "can never be adequately expressed in a structural form, but it may arise unpredictably at any time between human beings who are institutionally reckoned or defined as members of any or all kinds of social groupings, or none (*Ritual*

and Process 137). What they seek who pursue this type of communitas "is a transformative experience that goes to the root of each person's being and finds in that root something profoundly communal and shared" (138). Under the influence of time, spontaneous communitas cannot be maintained, and the need for organization and social control arises to produce a compromise, which Turner calls "normative communitas" (132). [7]

Critics of Turner's application of normative communitas to interpretation of pilgrimage have shown his ideas to have little grounding in reality. Eade and Sallnow compile the evidence of half a dozen anthropologists who have shown that the normative communitas of Christian pilgrimage around the world is better characterized by a tension between structure and anti-structure (5). Also, whereas Turner assumed commonality of purpose and understanding of their journey unified pilgrims, recent research has proved that the perceptions and motivations of these journeys are better characterized by diversity (10). Bilu, another critic of Turner, argues that "factionalism and conflict may be no less salient concomitants" of the pilgrims than commonality and equality (302). He goes on to argue, suggesting a fundamental problem with Turner's categories, that the introduction of normative communitas "dilutes the concept of which it is a part, whereby making it less vulnerable to incongruent data" (304). The arguments of these and other more recent studies are convincing with regard to the application of

[7] The influence of size, in addition to time, may also influence the need for structure and the dilution of communitas. Turner dwells on the example of St. Francis of Assisi, whose order could be described as starting out in the manner of communitas, bound by poverty and equality in Christ. "Francis was a supreme spiritual master of small groups: but he was unable to provide the impersonal organization required to maintain a world-wide order" (*Ritual and Process* 142).

normative communitas to pilgrimage and indeed, the literature of pilgrimage.[8] Anyone who has read Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* will remember the pilgrimage is characterized by a tension between the ostensible equality the pilgrims gain as walk together and the competition around which their tale-telling contest is framed. Criticisms of the phenomenon of spontaneous communitas are harder to find. It is perhaps better suited for studying the ethics of exceptional cases in human culture, which may find a more incisive analysis in literary than in anthropological study. While many critics use the term communitas to refer to both normative and spontaneous communitas (and thereby find reason to point out inconsistencies), I use the term to refer only to spontaneous communitas, and even then more as an ethic of face-to-face interaction and relationship in the particular imagined space of the poem than as an occurrence that can be easily replicated in the real world. I will show that Boland is no less skeptical of applying communitas as an ideal for larger groups or society as a whole.

An ethic of this kind of communitas assumes that each dramatic personae in the poem exists on a threshold between art and life, representation and reality, where they encounter each other free from the burdens of ideology. Through empathy, Boland develops in her earlier poetry the recognition of common woundedness between herself and her subjects, but her exploration of ethical relationships also leads her to realize the limitations and impossibilities of empathy. Stephen Cheeke articulates how ekphrasis can both move us toward empathy and remind us of its limitations: "Poems and

[8] Darlene Juschka, too, argues against the implicit anti-structure of Turner's communitas as applied to pilgrimage. She uses the writings of Margery Kempe, whose experiences of oppression during pilgrimage directly reflect her experience as a woman in normative reality (189).

paintings," he writes, "might seek to remind us of the suffering of others, but in doing so they also remind us that suffering is usually a solitary experience and that it is impossible to share another person's pain" (102). Depicting suffering as a spectacle for a viewer's gaze therefore becomes limited and even detrimental to our relation with those who suffer in the real world, allowing the viewer a feeling of empathy without requiring anything more. The limitations of empathy justify Boland's move toward focusing on representing responses to loss and absence rather than the presence of suffering. As any pre-school teacher will attest, learning empathy for others is an important first step in human ethical development, but it reveals itself as empty when viewed as an end in itself. Empathy leads Boland, along with her art, other art forms, and the figures represented there all into a poetry that performs their encounter and explores the new areas of ethical imagination made possible through spontaneous communitas.

In various interviews, Boland articulates the poetic- ethical move she makes between understanding the experiences of the voiceless and understanding how she related to them as a person and a poet, a dilemma she seems to be working on incipiently while writing *Outside History.* The way she articulates the dilemma may at first sound like empathy, but a closer look reveals the ethical relationship to have developed into something much more fluid and reciprocal:

> But here I was in a different ethical area. 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. (qtd. in Randolph 111)

"Feeling [her] way into the powerlessness" of the voiceless, sounds less like the stability of empathy with a voiceless individual than it sounds like the destabilizing movement of the poet into a new realm of the imagination, like moving from one room to another and changing her whole proximity to the voiceless. "Silenced" embodies this spatial aspect of communitas as well: the poet's entry into the poem is figured as a change of location, not of identity; spatial proximity enables her to see the story in weaving that Philomel was unable to tell in words. Significantly, the speaker stops where most ekphrasis starts, with narrating the picture in words. Philomel is "pulling out the crimson thread" as the poem stops abruptly, and the reader is drawn back to the beginning of the poem for the narrator's stark, lyrically uneasy account of the story, thus limiting the possibility that her looking is strictly voyeuristic. By changing her stance in relation to Philomel, the speaker risks being open to that accusation of voyeurism to maintain her ethical remove from another's artistic process.

In the two volumes I will address in the next chapter, *In a Time of Violence* and *Domestic Violence,* Boland reveals the reality of exploring a new realm of the ethical imagination to be at once dangerous, deeply rewarding, and absolutely essential. Ekphrases in these volumes re-define the relationship between poet and work of art, word and image, as one open to the ethical risks and rewards of artistic re-imagination and apart from the difference and exclusions of re-presentation. The next chapter will bring together the themes of mourning, communitas, and ekphrasis introduced in this chapter and suggest how the form, and thus the overall aesthetic, of Boland's poetry has

been influenced by the more fluid relationship between her speakers and visual arts and visual artists.

CHAPTER SIX

Exiting the Museum of Words: Ekphrasis, Communitas, and the Ethics of Exchange in Eavan Boland's *In a Time of Violence* and *Domestic Violence*

In "Letters to the Dead," a central poem in *Domestic Violence*, Boland imagines the transformational power of the artistic threshold far from her native Ireland in the Old Kingdom of ancient Egypt, where everyday objects like bowls were rendered sacred sacrifice in funerary ritual by a community of mourners.

I

In the Old Kingdom scholars found pottery
Written round and around with signs and marks.

II

Written in silt ware. On the rims of bowls.
Laid at the entrance to tombs.
Red with the iron of one world.
Set at the threshold of another.
They called them letters to the dead. (43)

Boland's poem demonstrates awareness of the archaeological record: Bowls and other pieces of pottery were written over with messages for the deceased, and those who placed them at the edge of their beloveds' tombs considered them expressions of grief and mediums of potential justice for both the living and the dead. The "letters" were presented with some expectation of a reply, of aid from the deceased in the tribunal of the afterlife. Mourning with these objects was believed to have had a power to cross the threshold between the living and the dead, signifying a more fluid exchange between

the two worlds than is available in most modern Western forms of mourning.[1] The "letters" also represent a complementary relationship between form and text by placing the specific requests of the written text on an everyday piece of pottery, a visual sign of a reciprocal human relationship with the dead who once received from these bowls and are now being asked to give back.

In *Domestic Violence,* sites of exchange, those liminal environments where the tension between word and image, physical and spiritual, life and death, past and present, are most deeply felt, become as important to Boland's ekphrasis as the objects themselves. The "letters," like Yeats's "artifice of eternity" in "Sailing to Byzantium," are works of art on the threshold of the afterlife. But the comparison with Yeats probably speaks more by contrast than similarity: where Yeats sought to escape death in spiritual abstraction, Boland explores the spiritual potential of art in everyday, narrative contexts. Exchange between the living and the dead trumps Yeats's desire for permanence in Boland's poem, which hinges on the iconicity of the particular object in conversation with the contexts of the pottery's finding and original use. In her stark lines the spiritual exchange represented by the "letters" in Old Kingdom ritual is echoed in the exchange between past and present, object and context, when the bowls are found by archaeologists. By breaking the first two lines between "pottery" and "written," the

[1] Indeed, scholars of ancient Egypt agree that the relationship was believed by the mourners to have been reciprocal, as the content of the letters themselves indicate (Doxey 231). The letters most often seek justice for suffering on earth, and "frequently the deceased individual is asked to take another deceased person before the court of the afterworld to obtain satisfaction for a living relative" (Thompson 802).

reader dwells for a moment on the verb "found," on the threshold between the pottery's buried, hidden past and its excavation into the present. The poem's second section (above) corroborates the exchange signified in the space between "the iron of one world" and the "threshold of another," and in the fourth section the speaker imagines herself at a seasonal threshold—"Here at the threshold of an Irish spring"—to seek justice for her own Irish dead (43).

The fragmentary form of the poem, eight short stanzas numbered separately with many end-stopped lines, echoes the poem's dynamic between object and context, so that the poem's last line unifies the individual fragments and resonates through the rest of the volume: "these are my letters to the dead" (44). Boland seems to hope that her own words will be both forms of mourning and means of justice for the living and the dead of her own nation. The speaker asks for the counsel, the power of the dead, at the threshold of the domestic and the spiritual as wives and daughters did from their deceased relatives in ancient times. The ancient pottery in "Letters to the Dead," though mere fragments of their original ritual purpose, speaks to contemporary Ireland through Boland's exploration of the spatial exchange between original and contemporary context.

The art and objects whose presence she calls up throughout *Domestic Violence* are like the traces of a lost culture, the remains of a civilization found in an archeological dig, where meaning is always a negotiation between object, narrative, and context. Boland's objects are distinct from her contemporary Seamus Heaney's, whose objects are endowed with mystery that gains an almost sacramental quality: "…the dust and

stillness and rust all suggested that these objects were living a kind of afterlife and that a previous time was vestigially alive in them. They were not just inert rubbish but dormant energies, meanings that could not be quite deciphered" ("The Sense" 34). For Boland mystery is enveloped in narrative; "dormant energies" are fodder for exchange; and meaning takes shape in the dynamic between tradition and the present context. The bowls and the writing on them in Boland's poem are the traces of a people-group's belief in a real exchange between the living and the dead: "They did not mourn or grieve these signs or marks. / They were intimate, imploring, local, desperate" (ll. 8-9). Like an archaeologist uncovering an artifact, Boland is as concerned with the context in which the art found meaning as much as she is in the object itself. Apart from how the object is situated within the excavation site, what an archaeologist can know about the culture of the people who made a particular arrowhead, for instance, is limited. Likewise, Boland is interested, in these volumes, in the question of how the environmental and narrative contexts in which a work of art is found informs our understanding of its original making and use, which then informs the way a work of art can be understood by a new audience.

Historian Toby Barnard has argued that archaeological approaches to material culture in Ireland have extended scholarly interest to objects that might previously been ignored because of their lack of financial or traditional historical value. He explains: "Belatedly, scholars are attending to what was once dismissed as unworthy of their notice. They have learnt from non-historians that objects have worth and meanings other than those arising from financial cost or practical uses" (14). Claudia Kinmonth,

for example, in *Irish Country Furniture,* has, according to Barnard, broken new ground in the study of Irish material culture by attending to the contexts of making and exchanging local furniture and critically engaging oral accounts where written documentation is all but non-existent (Barnard 23). By exploring a work of art as a cultural artifact, a mere trace of a whole complex of motivations, contexts, uses, and perceptions, Boland's poetry blurs the lines between art and object, high and low art, public and private value. Her archeological approach to representing art in *In a Time of Violence* and *Domestic Violence* allows her ekphrasis to exit the "museum of words" and opens her aesthetic to the relational exchange at the heart of artistic creation and experience.[2] The layers of significance Boland ascribes to the "letters to the dead" make them iconographic of the potential of this approach. The inscribed pottery—and its threshold position at the excavation site and formerly at the entrance to a tomb—suggests the mutual exchange between image and text that shapes the ekphrastic poems throughout these volumes, the relational exchange between an art object and its dynamic contexts outside of the museum, and the relational ethic developed around art created, experienced, and used in those contexts.

In "Wisdom," from *Domestic Violence*, the speaker observes another item being excavated from an indeterminate time and place, which is revealed as a dreamscape in the end: "Then / I saw what it was," she says, "—a plate, a round utensil, / a common flatness on which was served every day / the sustenance and restitution / of who we

[2] This argument is, in part, a response to Heffernan's *Museum of Words: The Poetics of Ekphrasis from Homer to Ashbery*, which understands the museum to be the focal context of writing about art. Heffernan's ideas are discussed further in following sections of this argument.

were once (23). The intrinsic usefulness of both the "letters" and the excavated plate—their "sustenance and restitution"—is endowed with a spiritual or even a human aspect in that liminal, indeterminate stage of mourning Boland so carefully crafts for her poems, endowing the objects with a transformative power as they come alive as participants in the poem. "Inscriptions" from *In a Time of Violence* likewise endows the name written on a child's cot in "blue, painted lettering" with the capacity to narrate, and thereby preserve something of the life that it signifies, if only in memory or imagination. In the empty, homely-crafted cot with its "tersely planed and varnished. / Cast-steel hinges," the speaker finds a story, a sign of love, not just an absence (*NCP* 210). The paradox that a seemingly vulnerable domestic object like a cradle preserves the child's name more effectively than a headstone, from which names are eventually erased by the corrosive effects of salt wind, rain, and time, again gives the space, not the object, the ultimate power to preserve the memory. Boland excavates the spaces opened over the years by the losses experienced by so many in Ireland, showing how art, with careful attention to the requirements of craft, can uncover healing and justice in the spaces created by what seem like the mere absences of the dead.

I choose to pair these two volumes because in *Domestic Violence,* I understand Boland to be returning to themes and images she developed in *In a Time of Violence* more than those in the intermittent volumes, *The Lost Land* (1998) and *Against Love Poetry* (2001). Boland's commitment to her craft established so movingly in her 1974 essay "The Weasel's Tooth" comes to maturity in these volumes, as her poetic craft establishes itself in the tensions between line and syntax, silence and speech while she also opens

her poetry to exchange with a more process-oriented version of the visual arts. The layers of significance Boland ascribes to the "letters to the dead" also make them iconographic of the looser approach to ekphrasis she develops in these volumes. The inscribed pottery—and its threshold position at the excavation site and formerly at the entrance to a tomb—suggests four characteristics of Boland's later ekphrasis that I will follow throughout this argument: the mutual exchange that characterizes the relationship between word and image outside of the museum, art as defined by purposes other than the contemplative vision typical of a gallery setting, the transition to representing women as participants in the artistic process rather than as objects of the artist's gaze, and an ethic of communitas at the heart of artistic creation.

Boland's recent essay on the communal art of Irish poet Paula Meehan is flush with appreciation for Meehan's negotiation of a continual source of conflict in Boland's own poetry: the relationship between the *I* and the contentious *we* of the Irish political poem. In "The Weasel's Tooth" Boland argues that as part of the poetic legacy of W.B. Yeats, she and other Irish writers are implicated in the perpetuation of the "damaging fantasy…of cultural coherence" that has been part of his social bequest (12).[3] Boland has fought the implicit collusion of the *we* in poetry and public discourse with the myth of cultural nationalism. Distinguishing her poetic stance from the traditional bardic voice

[3] She criticizes Yeats, however, only in the context of acknowledging him as the writer "I have admired and loved most in my life." In *Object Lessons* and elsewhere her early and consistent admiration for and debt to Yeats's poetry is well-established. With that context, she continues in "The Weasel's Tooth," "Once and for all I feel we should rid ourselves of Yeats's delusion: let us be rid at last of any longing for cultural unity in a country whose most precious contribution may be precisely its insight into the anguish of disunity."

of the national community has also been important for a poet who has faced charges that she has claimed too representative a stance for herself as a voice of silenced and oppressed women. My argument extends those of recent critics who focus on Boland's fragmentary sense of individual identity as a response to these charges; as Pilar Villar has put it, her mature work "provides the prospect of a fluid identity, one constantly changing and unstable" ("The Text of It" 53). In *In a Time of Violence* and *Domestic Violence,* Boland explores her own communal art, informed by realism about the potential violence of community, but ultimately understanding that the destabilized self in a communal context reveals the need for relationship and a fundamental ethic of responsibility. At the threshold of art and context, individual and community, so often characterized as antagonistic space, Boland explores the transformative healing potential of recognizing that with the dignity of individuality comes the necessity of being in common.

Art and Context in the Age of "Technological Reproducibility"

It would probably be impossible at this point to discuss Boland's "excavations" without reference to Seamus Heaney's by-now infamous bog poems, which rely on photographs for the substance of their excavations without examining the ethical or aesthetic implications of his exchange with the photographic medium. Susan Sontag is unequivocal in her recent criticism of the way photographs are treated in the modern media: "Photographs objectify: they turn an event or a person into something that can be possessed. And photographs are a species of alchemy, for all that they are prized as a

transparent account of reality" (*Regarding the Pain* 81). Sontag criticizes the assumed transparency of the photograph—not the photograph itself—and our failure to consider its ethical charge. The same might be said of any artistic medium, though the danger of transparency is not so great where the artist's touch is more evident.

Walter Benjamin's articulation of how reproducibility has changed our understanding of art in the modern world speaks to the difference between Heaney's and Boland's approaches to excavation and representation. Benjamin has articulated the possibility of "mechanical reproduction" –or "technological reproducibility"—as a defining difference between the art of an earlier era and art after the advent of photography. Graham MacPhee argues that Harry Zohn's persistent use of the phrase "mechanical reproduction" in his translation of Benjamin's essay has contributed to a widespread misappropriation of Benjamin's essay in literary scholarship. The word "mechanical," he argues, suggests a greater negative connotation of the idea than the essay allows for overall. Benjamin's essay is not a critique of reproducibility but a more progressive analysis of how it has changed art and culture; "Reproducibility," MacPhee argues, suggests "the reinvention of the coordinates of space and time in each moment of repetition," which allows art a more dynamic relationship with its context than may previously have been assumed (70-71). Benjamin, in this view, resists nostalgia for the past, arguing that tradition must be understood in light of its present context.

While ours might now be more accurately called the age of "electronic reproduction," Benjamin's basic distinction remains relevant: the possibility of reproduction has changed not only the appearance and general availability of art but has

also challenged how we understand the notion of "authenticity" and the relationship between art and meaning. When Benjamin writes that "The unique value of the 'authentic' work of art has its basis in ritual, the location of its original use" (224), he is not, however, lamenting the loss of authenticity in modern life, but adumbrating his challenge to the validity of authenticity as a category by articulating its dependence on rituals and traditions that are no longer recoverable in their original form. Whatever the shortcomings of art's reproducibility, Benjamin insists upon interpreting art in the present context, viewing art in the age of reproducibility as "freed" from its "parasitical dependence on ritual" (224). Freed from the restrictions of static perspectivism, the work of art in our age is more self-conscious of the dynamic relationship between art and context by virtue of its reproducibility.

Unlike Heaney's, Boland's excavations put the problem of the commoditization of art in the age of reproducibility front and center, countering this tendency by calling attention to potentially transformative contexts of artistic media. Boland's poetry extends Benjamin's argument, showing how seeing art through the framework of reproducibility allows the reader/viewer to understand even ancient ritual art in terms of this dynamic between object, context, and tradition. *Domestic Violence* represents a veritable history of artistic production and reproduction from hand-made crafts of ancient times to the commoditized objects of the contemporary world like a coffee table *Book of Kells* featured in "Midnight on the Sixth Day."

Boland's "Midnight" exemplifies the virtues of artistic reproduction: reading the *Book of Kells* at the kitchen table would otherwise be impossible, of course, and the poem

suggests that being "read" in this domestic context leaves the book open to creative interchange of new reading. For the reflective reader, the relational exchange between text, reader, and context, then, echoes and informs the material exchange between text and image and the spiritual exchange between the reader and God intended by the original book designers. In the biblical Genesis narrative, "midnight on the sixth day," is the threshold between God's completion of the masterpiece of creation and his rest on the seventh day where he declares satisfaction with his creation and releases absolute control to give creation freedom and agency of its own. Applied to art, midnight on the sixth day represents the threshold between artistic creation and releasing a completed work to the mercy of an audience. Boland experiences the receiving end of this transition of power when she opens a reproduction of the *Book of Kells* at her kitchen table, interpreting for herself the illuminated pages that a monastery artist released from his power over a millennia ago. While the original or "authentic" *Book of Kells* reposes under glass at Trinity College, Boland re-contextualizes a reproduction in the domestic rituals and poetic allusions that characterizes her own experiences as a wife, mother, and poet. These new contexts, paradoxically, make her more keenly aware of the surprising details on the margins of the illumination and make her a more creative reader of the images that were always there.

The first four lines of the poem enact her respect for the text by doing a close reading, arranging the lines so that the second set of lines enacts a commentary on the first, an arrangement she continues throughout the poem:

On the Chi-Rho page of the Book of Kells
X, P, and I are intertwined. They are the initials of Christ.

The letters are picked out in drops of lead. They are Coptic,
Pictic, Greek in origin. (*DV* 55)

The second four lines present her domestic context, and we are forced to wonder what the cat at the back door has to do with old Irish manuscripts.

I am reading from a book of Irish manuscripts. It is late
And I have laid it on the table.

Out at the back door our cat is waiting.
When she comes in her eyes are dark sugar.

What's stuck in her coat is all the ways that summer
Can stripe itself.

Surely he must have known, the old master,
That he was making shock waves for the sacred? (55)

The poem also alludes, perhaps even more obviously than the biblical reference for anyone familiar with Irish poetry, to the eighth-century Irish poem about a monk and his companion cat of which Boland published a translation called "From the Irish of Pangur Ban," in *The War Horse* (*NCP* 53). Boland's "Midnight" is almost a re-telling of the medieval poem, which is told from the perspective of a monk who compares his own work searching for insight in texts to his companion cat Pangur's work trying to catch a mouse. In Boland's translation, the monk tries to emphasize the solitary quality of their respective tasks, but his continual comparison of the common tireless, single-minded spirit of their pursuits and Boland's deliberate rhyming of the monk's comparisons, suggests that their companionship is deeper than the speaker lets on. In "Midnight" too, the cat at first seems a banal, domestic presence in contrast to a scholar

deep in study of the *Book of Kells*, but as the speaker looks into the cat's eyes and sees in their "dark sugar" the deep and mysterious pleasure of domestic space, her reading is more attentive to the mysteries of the marginal details.

The last two lines recall the marginal pictures in illuminated medieval manuscripts that seem to subvert or challenge the sacred seriousness of the text: "(In the corner of his page below the initials / an otter is eating a fish, a mouse is nibbling at the Eucharist)" (55). But they also cleverly suggest that the monk in "Pangur Ban" would represent on the margins of the sacred the mouse his feline companion failed to catch unwittingly participating in the Eucharist in communion with the divine and other readers and viewers of the page. The mouse tempers the seriousness of reverence for a "sacred" image, reminding the viewer that just as the margins of the text are the threshold for the divine, where grace is revealed through the most ordinary of creatures, so are the margins of society, the sphere of ordinary domestic life, a threshold for the transcendent.[4] By reading in a marginal context, Boland captures a moment of unexpected communion between her domestic life, an ancient religious text and artistic artifact, and an ancient Irish poem.

[4] One more level of allusion further heightens the ethical charge of the poem: "the old master" refers to the monk who illustrated the Book of Kells, but also to "The Old Masters" of Auden's "Musée des Beaux Arts," another ekphrastic poem in which reverence for the sacred is seemingly opposed to, but actually revealed through mundane ordinary life. Auden's poem opens, "About suffering they were never wrong, / The Old Masters: how well they understood / Its human position." Images of the birth and suffering of Jesus in Breughel's paintings suggest for Auden that the savior in Christian tradition became incarnate to suffer with and live alongside ordinary people, and the failure of humanity to acknowledge him did not change the fundamental grace of his message.

Boland's poetry creatively engages the complex exchange between art, context, and tradition made possible in Benjamin's age of reproducibility. By exploring how ritual value can be found in the most secular contemporary contexts, Boland resists the wistful nostalgia for a by-gone age of ritual meaning associated with magic, superstition, and the cult of authenticity. She re-imagines the "aura" of the work of art not as a slave to a fixed tradition but as a process of creative meaning-giving that understands tradition to be dynamic and ever-changing as it is put in conversation with the present.

Exiting the Museum: Exchange in Ancient Ekphrasis

Understood in the context of Benjamin's essay, Boland's inventive negotiations between past and present, art and context allow her poems about the visual arts to find freedom from the antagonistic post-Romantic power relationship between writing and the visual arts. As I have already discussed, James Heffernan understands ekphrasis to represent a "gradually intensifying struggle" between word and image, but his theory works best within limits that he defines himself: the hegemony of the modern art museum in the creation and display of visual art (7). This formulation assumes the verbal text to be otherwise autonomous and stable, which the rhetorical self-consciousness of Boland's poetry has increasingly challenged. Her attention to how text and context intertwine over time and experience allows complex relationships between them to emerge that defy the limits of antagonism, like a friendship overcomes a grudge. Wolfgang Ernst supports this reading in his discussion of context: "The notion of

context," he writes, "sets itself apart from the text while affirming its being as part of the text" (134).

By taking ekphrasis out of the museum, Boland is, in a way, returning to the Western origins of ekphrasis in Homer's representation of the shield of Achilles in the *Illiad*. Her "letters to the dead" call to mind Keats's ekphrasis on a Grecian urn, but Keats's contemplative, apostrophic approach to ekphrasis exemplifies the struggle for dominance and unbreachable distance between the word and image while in Boland's poem, word and image are inextricably linked and equally indecipherable apart from dialogue between object and context. In Homer's more ancient ekphrasis, which coincides with the origins of Western writing, context is likewise linked with signification as the narrator continually returns back to the forging of the shield by Hephaestus even as he narrates the scenes it depicts. Homer never presents the scenes from the peaceful life rejected by the warrior who will use the shield—scenes of marriage, cattle-driving, dancing, singing—as the objects of anyone's gaze; rather, the purpose of the shield for use in battle seems to radically contradict the scenes of peace-time it depicts. The object draws power in the narrative not from the nature of the images alone, but from the indeterminate relationship between the narration of the shield's making, the narration of the scenes themselves, and the narration of its use and damage in battle.

Heffernan shows persuasively that this ekphrasis demonstrates Homer's original attempt to argue for the power of his verbal medium to rival the overwhelming dominance of the visual arts in his culture (*Museum* 22). However, Homer's ekphrasis is

relevant to my argument as a precursor to Boland's communal, contextualized understanding of the visual arts; for Boland, as for Homer, meaning is as much in the process as the product. Despite the post-Romantic bias for contemplation and individual genius in the creation of visual art, art that emerges from the rituals of everyday life and the necessity of survival is still rich with transformative potential. But while Homer's ekphrasis, as Heffernan argues, affirms male authority in meaning-giving for the visual and verbal arts by privileging battle and male dispute, Boland turns her gaze toward the productions typical of women's art and the crafts tradition, revealing the artistic processes unique to domestic space to have a special ability to preserve and inform memory and to "speak" to the various environments in which they are later found or exchanged.

Boland's poems challenge us to see that the museum itself is a context for exchange, not a transparent vehicle for viewing the transcendence of art. While a gallery wall is to some extent a "clear space for complexity to happen," as Boland has written ("Art of Grief" 10), museum art, too, is burdened with meanings ascribed to it by critics, art curators, reproductions, and invented titles throughout its history. Boland is not alone in challenging the ascendancy and assumptions of the museum context in the Western art world. Theorists like Ernst have articulated the importance of recognizing the limits of museums in framing marginal or specifically situated objects of human life. He concedes that museums provide a framework in which people can "order their own thoughts and to develop their own ideas," but then argues, "amorphous fields of evidence, on the other hand, require a different mapping, a different writing, a different

cartography beyond the frame" (111). As Loizeaux argues so well, a poet like Paul Durcan responds to the overly serious attitude of many modern art institutions toward themselves and their holdings by writing about art with a strain of witty levity. While Durcan responds to the seriousness of art with a prophetic voice from the margins looking back and evaluating the inner sanctum, Boland, with no dearth of wit, responds by exiting the museum altogether to explore art situated in domestic, relational contexts.

"On this Earth" is a beautiful example of meaning shifting from the museum to a context of communitas as the speaker literally enters and exits the Musée Marmottan in Paris to show her daughter, "…Julie Manet // wearing her mother's brushstrokes, clothed in the ochres of decorum, the hot bonnets / and silks of that century" (*DV* 38). Julie Manet, the daughter of Berthe Morisot with Eugene Manet, brother of the famous Edouard Manet, posed for many an impressionist painting, but Boland wants to call attention to one that parallels her own artistic mother-daughter relationship. According to Delphine Montalant, after her daughter's birth, Julie became the primary subject matter for Berthe Morisot's paintings, and the artist shifted her focus, in part for practical reasons of time constraints, from oil painting to the more rapid and immediate technique of watercolors (Montalant 16). When she returned to oils, the long brush strokes and lightness of touch that characterize her watercolors left their mark on her technique, so that her daughter's life became an indelible presence in her art. It is this vital link between life and art that Boland evokes in her poem. She describes what she wants her daughter to see, and she narrates their entrance and exit from the museum, but the actual encounter with the painting is absent from the text. That silent encounter

seems to motivate the transition in the middle of the poem between the speaker's stated expectations of the painting in the museum to the manifestation of the painting's qualities of light and style in her own daughter. But by leaving their museum encounter with the painting out of the poem, she argues that its material significance is revealed most fully in the context of relationship.

> Hard to believe as we cross the road—the grass
> dry, cropped and exhausted—that there was ever
> a flood on this earth.
>
> We leave the museum and go to a nearby café.
> In the harsh noon light your cheeks are flushed.
> The line is not perfect.

The sudden coincidence of Julie Manet's restricting decorum and heavy dress with the dead grass and her own daughter's glowing countenance could be the speaker's realization of her and her daughter's mortality. The lines could also be the speaker seeing in her daughter the ambiguity of an impressionist painting: the immediacy of a fleeting moment captured in a medium that will always be a reminder of mutability. This ambiguity shifts Boland into another lyric mode: the last stanza is a kind of apostrophe to her daughter, a declaration that their relationship transcends life's mutability.

> My first daughter you were my dove, my summer,
> my skies lifting, my waters retreating,
> my covenant with the earth.

The shift in tone to this stanza from previous ones connects the immediacy of the mother-daughter relationship with a covenantal relationship like the one Yahweh establishes with the Hebrew people after the great flood in the biblical book of Genesis.

The smooth lyrical repetitions of this apostrophe contrast fittingly with the "cropped" lines of the third stanza and the end-stopped lines of the fourth, creating the sense that seeing her daughter in a new light as the reflection of the beauty of a painting has motivated this exclamation of immutable love. The poem is also one of at least two poems (with "Midnight on the Sixth Day") that suggest Boland's reading of Genesis. In contrast to other books of the bible, Genesis emphasizes the imaginative side of God in the creation story and the relationship between God and a community of people, the Israelites, more than individual people as emphasized in the New Testament books. Boland's reading of Genesis affirms Boland's interest in something other than material exchange that happens in our relationships with art and with other people.

By challenging the ascendancy of the museum, Boland also challenges the implicit but ill-defined separation of fine art from craft art. Within its own communal context, craft art signifies as deeply and complexly as museum art for the sophisticate. "Patchwork or the Poet's Craft," a poem from *Night Feed*, explores this idea at a much earlier stage in Boland's career as the question of quilting's artistic merit parallels the poet's conviction that is as much a craft of "piecing" as quilting. The speaker distances herself from the haughty rhetoric of the first stanza, bringing her poetic voice down to the ordinary language of the domestic world she lives in, but she questions the value, at first, of the mechanical, repetitious, patterned art of quilting, so different from the poetry of Romantic genius, high rhetoric, and allusion from which it is still difficult to separate qualitative judgments.

My sumptuous
trash bag of colours—
Laura Ashley cottons—
waits to be cut
and stitched and patched

But there's a mechanical feel
about the handle
of my second-hand sewing machine,
with its flowers
and *Singer* painted orange on it.
And its iron wheel. (*NC* 105)

How can these emblems of middle-class comfort and consumption—Laura Ashley, the orange *Singer*—relate to art? A few lines later she asks, "But is it craft or art?" The answer is in the stars, as they say. The night-sky represents the tension between surface and depth, order and disorder at the heart of quilting. She compares piecing colors and squares to knitting together the stars in the sky: "Only when its laid / right across the floor, / sphere on square / and seam on seam, /… /a night-sky spread—/will it start to hit me" (106).

Elaine Showalter affirms quilting as an art that captures tensions between individual and community, convention and innovation at the heart of women's traditional experience. Indeed, she claims the quilt as a central image in the feminist art lexicon. Although quilting and writing about quilting are not exclusive to women, as Michael Longely, for one demonstrates in his some of his more recent poetry on the subject, its traditional association with female community is nonetheless relevant here. "Piecing," Showalter writes, "is thus an art of making do and eking out, an art of ingenuity, and conservation. It reflects the fragmentation of women's time, the

scrappiness and uncertainty of women's creative and solitary moments" (199), all of which Boland has described in her prose as being part of her domestic life. The quilt's formal arrangement encourages innovation in colors and contrasts within well-known patterns (200), which Boland uses to describe both quilting and writing in her poem: "cutting and aligning, / finding greens in pinks / and burgundies in whites / until I finish it" (*NCP* 105). The connection between quilting and writing also has deep roots, according to Showalter, going back to the genres of women's writing that emerged in the 1820s—the sketch or short piece for an annual or periodical—that reflected and fit within the fragmented nature of a woman's schedule. Boland revises this for the modern world, showing how it is the nature of the poetic art to be a piecing together of words, images, colors, phrases, and stories that make a work more than the sum of its parts. Finally, Boland's speaker concludes that quilting is an art on its own terms that can speak to the way we understand the fragmented, communal aspects of artistic craft in what are considered the "high" arts.

Even if quilting has been proven to have artistic merit on its own terms, its tie to the sacred arts should not be ignored. The quilting tradition in the United States has long been used in mourning, drawing the sacred and the everyday, the dead and the living, into closer proximity through communal creation, reference, and use. Art historian Lisa DeBoer tells of a church community in the United States for which a traditional mourning quilt has taken on a profound sacred significance within their liturgical tradition. A church member commissioned the quilt to be crafted upon the death of a loved one, in keeping with a long tradition in the U.S. and countries across the

world of making mourning quilts to represent the comfort of the departed in the afterlife and a form of comfort and remembrance for the living. After the time of mourning, the church incorporated the quilt into its Easter liturgy, hanging it behind the altar and changing the colors behind it as the church year progressed. The hanging became a meaningful sign for the community of the reality of the death of Jesus Christ and the miracle of his resurrection through a visceral reminder of their own experience with a loved one's death and the promise of new life after death that Jesus promises in Christian scripture for those who follow him. The mourners have willingly placed themselves on a threshold between everyday reality and the realm of the dead, entering into a symbolic realm where their words, actions, and gestures toward death are charged with real significance.[5]

Boland again relates her poetic art with the crafts of her mother and grandmothers in "Inheritance," where she finds a common sense of purpose across generations and sense of community across the threshold of death. At first, the speaker's sense of belatedness consumes her: the alchemy with which her foremothers turned their poverty into the traces of their survival through the work of their hands is lost to the speaker. "I learned so little from them," she says,

> …The lace bobbin with its braided mesh,
> its oat-straw pillow and the wheat-colored shawl…
> all crafts I never had
> and can never hand on. (*DV* 39)

[5] Thanks to an e-mail conversation with Dr. DeBoer for this story and permission to tell it.

But then in the poem's second half she finds in the silence of helping her daughter through a fever that she has learned something deeper from them that relates her own craft with theirs—the mystery of the relationship between mother and children, care and healing, and fear.

> When dawn came I held my hand over the absence of fever,
> over skin which had stopped burning, as if I knew the secrets
> of health and air, as if I understood them
>
> and listened to the silence
> and thought, I must have learned that somewhere. (40)

The speaker does not claim a rational basis for having healed her daughter, but by figuring her love for her daughter this way, she conjures up the real spiritual presence of her foremothers. Staying up all night with her sick daughter, the speaker exists in a world apart where the instincts of fear and love allow her to connect with the struggles of her foremothers in a way that defies the rational limits of life and death. At dawn, the threshold between night and day, sickness and health, communitas and separation, the speaker emerges back into the real world with only the vague recollection of having been through something extraordinary.

In "Amber" from *Domestic Violence,* an ancient piece of amber is raised to the level of art as Boland gives meaning to the process of its creation, to the exchange by which she received it, and to its ability to transcend the present. The amber represents "a chafing at the edges of the seen" (*DV* 32), a material object that stirs the imagination and refers to a reality beyond itself. In "Back from Market," Boland's speaker chafes against painting for what it fails to capture of a woman's life; in these later, more loosely defined

ekphrases, she shows how it is in the nature of all art, from poetry and painting to what have been considered low art—more tactile, patterned forms of human creativity like potting, weaving, quilting, and engraving—to "chafe against the edges" of the boundaries between life and death, the seen and the spoken, the sacred and the ordinary. By blurring these lines, Boland's ekphrases capture the poignancy of the loss that accompanies the greatest and least triumphs in art and life.

Benjamin has shown, as I discussed earlier, that a simple dichotomy between mechanical and hand-produced art is impossible without sentimentalizing the rituals of the past. *Domestic Violence* embodies Boland's vision of the transformative potential of electronic media, art of what Walter Benjamin calls the "age of technological reproducibility," as another alternative to museum art. Boland does not appeal to the tension between the two types of production in order to demonstrate her preference for one or the other; on the contrary, by representing an ambivalent, but not negatively critical view of electronic media, she resists the nostalgia that representing weaving and crafts in her poetry might otherwise suggest.

Christina Hunt Mahony argues that the development of Radio Éireann played an important part in forming a national consciousness for the new Irish Free State in the 1920s and 30s. For Ireland, radio played the role that Anderson ascribes to newspapers in the development of nationalism in the previous centuries elsewhere in the world. Radio was thus an imaginative medium in more ways than one: sharing a common ritual of evening listening and a shared vocabulary of radio programs helped to form a national consciousness, but radio listening was also an "imaginative act" for the

individual listener who pictured and interpreted news from around the country and the world in his or her mind's eye (Mahony 11). Radio often serves a positive function when it appears in Irish literature, Mahony argues, in part because of the intimacy of the memories contemporary writers have of a "shared radio memory" that will probably be absent from the work of younger writers (19).[6] She writes that "The radio also linked generations who brought different reactions and requirements of the experience. Long after radio's introduction, radio listening also continued to be something of a ritualized practice" that fell into the rhythms of work and family life (12).

With the introduction of television, however, radio gradually lost its place at the center of family life and as a source of shared cultural knowledge. Radio became the background noise, the "thing you do while doing something else" (qtd. in Mahony 12) that is in America today. In "Domestic Violence," Boland invokes the numbing effects of televised "killings, killings, killings" that have little to do with the causes and effects of the domestic human tragedies behind them all. Their familiar Dublin landscape was transformed when it was "made to shiver / into our ancient twelve by fifteen television / which gave them back as gray and grayer tears" (*DV* 20-22). An endless stream of televised images—both the repetition of stories and the way one image quickly replaces another to create the illusion of capturing movement—dulls the viewer's sense of proportion so that even the recognizable places are only emblems of themselves: "gray

[6] Mahony cites Seamus Heaney as a writer for whom radio memories are fond and intimate, in part because "early radio listening required concentration, as poor reception was a fact of life" (12).

and grayer tears." And above all of this, the tragedy in human relationship at the heart of it is still a mystery: "nothing we said / not then, not later, fathomed what it is / is wrong in the lives of those who hate each other" (25-28). This part of the poem captures the disconnect between the televised images of violence and any real understanding of what causes people to perpetrate such violence. The presence of the television leaves the couples in the poem at a distance from each other, so neighbors are no closer than anyone else in Ireland. "Domestic Violence" shows that televised representations of suffering can allow those watching it to imagine that profound suffering exists only at an impersonal distance. Boland's poem shows, with both power and grace, that violence and suffering are conditions within the self, the domestic, and the neighborhood as much as they are visible, external conditions of the nation.

Boland represents people in open, even creative engagement with radio broadcast, even while the news they transmit of the troubles is full of violence and promotes a culture of fear. Radio mitigates the objectifying effects of television broadcasts by appealing to the listener's subjective imagination for the creation of images, and Boland's poetic representations of radio's effect on the individual imagination are correspondingly less indicting than her representations of television. Boland's representations of radio transmission reflect her resistance to the imbalanced preference given to vision in Western art, especially in the museum context. By emphasizing place and process in her writing about art, these poems reminds us that art can be a multi-sensory experience, and art that challenges the hegemony of vision in

Western art better resists the hazards of objectifying representations. Kenneth Frampton explains the freedom of the tactile, as opposed to the purely visual arts:

> The tactile resilience of the place-form and the capacity of the body to read the environment in terms other than those of sight alone suggest a potential strategy for resisting the domination of universal technology….The liberative importance of the tactile resides in the fact that it can only be decoded in terms of the *experience* itself: it cannot be reduced to mere information, to representation or to the simple evocation of a simulacrum substituting for absent presences. (28)

The more art is experienced with the combined senses of hearing, taste, smell, and touch, in other words, the less open it is to the kind of visual objectification that has made images of Cathleen Ni Houlihan in Ireland, for instance, acceptable representations of a whole nation. Resistance to pure vision is a common thread, so to speak, between Boland's representation of tactile domestic arts like weaving, sewing, and other crafts and radio transmission.

Outside of the museum, visual art and the poems that represent it challenge a central trope of traditional ekphrasis: that the temporal, narrative abilities of the word energize the static fixity of the image. In "Silenced" (*DV* 21), the syntactical stillness of the speaker's re-telling of the ancient Philomel myth is animated by her encounter with Philomel at the apex of visual creation. The poem's opening reads like prose until the violence of rape breaks the rhythm:

> In the ancient, gruesome story, Philomel
> was little more than an ordinary girl.
>
> She went away with her sister, Procne. Then
> her sister's husband, Tereus, given to violence,
> raped her once

The lines return to their prose-like regularity until short sentences evoke the latent energy of Philomel's incipient artistry. The speaker enters to watch and record as Philomel becomes the creative mediator of her own violation.

> …She began a tapestry.
> She gathered skeins, colors.
> She started weaving.
>
> She was weaving alone, in fact, and so intently
> she never saw me enter.

The speaker's distance maintains Philomel's individuality, which is augmented by her artistic agency. The speaker's entry, however, destabilizes the poem's sense of place and time: the speaker and Philomel are now in Ireland, and Philomel's violation parallels the political violence streaming over the radio waves.

> An Irish sky was unfolding its wintry colors
> Slowly over my shoulder. An old radio
> Was there in the room as well, telling its own
> Unregarded story of violation. (15-18)

The ambiguity of individual identity Boland captures in earlier ekphrastic poems like "Self-Portrait on a Summer Evening" or "Domestic Intrerior" now becomes the ambiguity of place and time in "Silenced." Instead of seeking justice for the violated female subjects of the male gaze through her poetry as she did in the earlier poems, in "Silenced" Philomel is herself an artist telling her own story, and the poem's speaker steps into her space as into a new realm of perception. "Silenced" is self-conscious about the word's ability to achieve justice for the image: the speaker performs the interruption caused by inserting her own voice into Philomel's artistic process as a spatial interruption, crossing a threshold into new artistic space.

The old radio is a kind of verbal companion, working alongside Philomel and exemplifying resistance to the objectifying forces of visual representation. This resistance is further supported by Boland's decision not to describe the weaving in its finished form, so that the last stanza highlights Philomel's artistic agency as she decides to foreground the story of her wounding in the high contrast of red on green:

> Now she is rinsing the distances
> with greenish silk. Now, for the terrible foreground,
> she is pulling out crimson thread.

The combination of tactile and visual qualities in Philomel's weaving—the smoothness of "greenish silks" and the raised texture of the "crimson thread"—further differentiate her art from the verbal media that surround her. But by situating them in the same Irish space, Boland makes the stories told by the radio, the weaving, and the speaker of the poem speak to each other. And in contrast to the desensitizing, repetitious images on a television screen—the "killings, killings, killings" of the volume's title poem—the coincidence of the "ancient, gruesome" story with the beauty of silk and thread makes the reality of violence strange and startling once again.

In the short poem "Histories" Boland lets the limitations of the radio speak for themselves by juxtaposing them with an image of her mother that shows her relationship to suffering to be more complex. The first stanza evokes radio transmission as a linear, impersonal, repetitive medium effective for dispersing facts about national suffering. The second stanza relates a seemingly unconnected image of the speaker's mother. The poem is brief enough to reproduce in its entirety.

That was the year the news was always bad
(statistics on the radio)
the sad
truth no less so for being constantly repeated.

That was the year my mother was outside
in the shed
in her apron with the strings tied
twice behind her back and the door left wide. (*DV* 22)

Like "Silenced," this poem differentiates a woman's agency in relationship to suffering from the impersonal reports of it on the radio. The repetition of her mother's apron strings strengthens the image of protection she represents, but also presents a sly contrast to the repetition on the radio, which has only a numbing effect on the bad news it transmits. With the "door left wide" her mother stands in defiance against the impersonal nature of the news of danger and suffering. Her image demonstrates an awareness of the limitations of radio transmission and defies its statistics to be truer than her domestic world. The poem complicates the relationship between the ever-present, invulnerable electronic media and the vulnerable humanity of the domestic sphere by showing a woman guided by her own measure of the truth rather than fear. Reading this back through the poem's title, the complexity and deep humanity of her stance represent a counter-history to the single-minded accumulation of facts represented by a more scientific approach to history.

Liminality in Visual Representation

Boland's art poems postulate a world apart from the order ordained by the museum—a reality in which the seen and unseen, living and dead, art and life still make

exchange. *In a Time of Violence* focuses on the human voice surviving and speaking from that threshold; in *Domestic Violence*, Boland examines the material nature of that threshold in various visual and audio media. The voice of lament from women of the past opens *In a Time of Violence* in "The Singers," a poem that sets a powerful elegiac tone for the whole volume. The *sean nôs* tradition represents, for Boland, the voice women have always had to lament their losses, a voice pitched on "unforgiving coast," the dangerous threshold between the chaos of the sea and the relative safety of the land (*NC* 203); this precarious position on the threshold of land and sea is a source rather than an impediment to their vocal creativity.

In *Domestic Violence*, Boland focuses more on the liminality of the visual realm, where the world and the representations around her are rife with threshold danger and possibility, using the color blue to lend additional spatial relevance to the threshold of seen and unseen, as she evokes so powerfully in the image of the blueness of the sea entering her room and merging with the "blue-green sisal" of her rug in "To Memory." The significance of "blueness" is imbricated throughout *Domestic Violence*, building on the spectrum of meanings it evokes for her in "The Blue Piano" (*Mein Blaues Klavier)* by German Jewish poet Else Lasker-Schüler, which she translated from the German for the collection, *After Every War*. Boland writes that in that poem,

> the piano trembles between the actual and possible, between the lost and recoverable. Put together with the unstable edges of the world it describes, as well as the color blue, it manages to be both surreal and true: a familiar household object and an image of loss. The private world is entrusted to a domestic horizon. This is the piano that was played in a room, in a home. Now it carries extraordinary freight. ("Domestic Violence: An Argument" 36)

In the volume *Domestic Violence*, "blue" often evokes the ambiguous, unstable relationship between land and sea just as the blue piano was both a "familiar household object and an image of loss." In "How it Was Once in Our Country," the third in the "Domestic Violence" sequence, the ocean-blue of the speaker's plate finds its amalgamated match in the human-fish hybrid of myth, the mermaid. Halfway through the poem, the speaker makes "blueness" not just a quality of objects, myths, or the ocean *per se,* but a parallel reality where those ambiguities reign:

> Consider the kind of body that enters blueness,
> Made out of dead-end myth and mischievous
> whispers of an old, borderless
> existence where the body's meaning is both more and less.
>
> Sea trawler, land siren: succubus to all the dreams
> Land has of ocean, of its old home.
> She must have witnessed deaths. Of course she did.
> Some say she stayed down there to escape the screams. (*DV* 18)

The tranquil blueness of a fondly remembered domestic object, a character in a fairy-tale, and a fondly remembered harbor in the first two stanzas hides the more violent alter-ego of blueness: an ocean whose sinister human-demon quality ruthlessly swallows those who hope there. The liminal ambiguity makes blue a color that signals a blurring of the line between the real and the possible, the finality and the freedom of death. In "To Memory," Boland confounds the real and surreal associations of blueness as she describes the ocean crossing the threshold between out-of-doors and indoors. The blue of the ocean combined with the "blue-green sisal," the fabric of the rug, complicate the readers' ability to separate reality from imagination.

> …the ocean—moonless, stripped of current—
> entered the room quietly one evening and
> lay down in the weave of the rug, and could be seen
> shifting and sighing in blue-green sisal … (*DV* 47)

Boland's use of blue here also invites the question of loss and recovery from Lasker-Schuler's poem: to what extent is this event made real again through the speaker's memory, and to what extent does sharing the memory with another woman, the goddess of memory, make it real?

It is difficult not to think of Mebh McGuckian when writing about the color blue and Irish poetry. J. Edward Mallot presents a nimble discussion of McGuckian's use of the color, which suggests some helpful contrasts for understanding Boland's use of the color. He argues that together with winter, her favorite season (a seasonal landmark in Boland's volume as well), blue tends to suggest creativity and productivity for McGuckian, but it is, of course, rarely a simple matter of symbolic signification (243). He argues that blue captures the "inbetweenness" of language so characteristic of her work: "While McGuckian's concept of 'blue' constantly changes, the reader's perception of 'blue' transforms as well, with the word itself a 'way station' both the poet and the reader pass by, never necessarily connecting themselves" (246). While Boland's "blueness" seems more stable than McGuckian's by virtue of being associated with a more consistent set of imagery, the liminal inbetweenness of images like the sky and the sea does make it a color that confronts the line between the real and the possible, death and freedom.

The color blue likewise signals an ambiguous state between inside and outside, representation and reality, loss and recovery, in Boland's "In Season," in which the speaker encounters a blue and white kitchen mug with new eyes. The couple, frozen in time and blueness on the mug's surface, live in surreal world: they are "out walking in / a cobalt dusk under the odd azure of / apple blossom / going toward each other with hands outstretched" (*DV* 52). Their yearning outstretched arms recall the lovers on Keats's urn, whose eternal youth is recompense enough for eternal fixity. Keats's speaker exclaims,

> Bold lover, never, never canst thou kiss,
> Thou winning near the goal—yet, do not grieve;
> She cannot fade, though thou hast not thy bliss,
> For ever wilt thou love, and she be fair!

The figures on Boland's mug are quite pointedly "not young," however, and her quandary is somewhat different from Keats's: "I wondered *how will they find each other?*" (*DV* 52) she asks, treating them as fellow humans who happen to live trapped in another reality, albeit a reality no less true than the speaker's own. As the poem develops, the speaker's voice attributes agency to the couple, not to the artist, for their isolation: they are not so much fixed in the static time of visual representation as they are fixed in the habits, repetitions, and resignations of the victims of time. If they never noticed a world outside of their own, the world inhabited by the reader and the speaker, "it can only be," the speaker suggests, "they have their own reasons, since / they have their own weather (a sudden fog, / tinted rain) which they have settled into." Although by humanizing the Keatsian situation the poem may also seem more deterministic, the possibility of

escaping the world on the mug more dire, the "blueness" with which the poem starts leaves the possibility open that the world the speaker describes is limited to neither the rules of representation nor the rules of scientific reality. If the figures on the mug "have their own reasons" to submit, then they might also have their own reasons to change.

By bringing a Keatsian dilemma to what is most likely a mass-produced mug in a typical domestic setting, Boland again signals her openness to the possibility of an everyday encounter to transform our way of seeing and understanding our relationship to others. She sets herself up in the beginning almost as divine creator: her gaze attributes meaning to the image, identifying the tragedy of the couple's inability to reach each other. By acknowledging later that "they have their own reasons," she destabilizes the subjective gaze, making of the mug a separate world and allowing the couple their own agency (53). This new ethical stance radically limits the poet's ability to judge, but frees her to imagine this kind of relational agency as the basis for organic community-building and the origin of public meaning.

Boland problematizes the idea of inserting herself into the poem by making the distinction between the poetic voice and the voice of the poem ambiguous in "To Memory." In order to capture the unstable *relation* between herself and the silenced, she dramatizes the "I," calling attention to the act of writing the poem, allowing the ambiguity of her status between the poet's voice and that of a separate speaker to open a whole new range of poetic and ethical possibility. In "To Memory" Boland foregrounds the stability and permanence of the poet's act of writing in the first six lines only to subtly shift her emphasis to more fluid, oral story-telling as the poem progresses. She

sets up the poem as a reference to the traditional poetic practice of invoking the Muses and an affirmation of her partnership in power with the mother of the Muses, Mnemosyne, goddess of memory:

> This is for you, goddess that you are.
> This is a record for us both, this is a chronicle.
> There should be more of them, they should be lyrical
>
> and factual, and true, they should be written down
> and spoken out on rainy afternoons, instead of which
> they fall away; so I have written this, so it will not. (*DV* 47)

Ironically, the poet's lyrical control seems deliberately and increasingly strained as the lines progress: the awkward "instead of which" ending line five contrasts with the intimacy of oral story-telling suggested in the first half of the line. The pronouns "they," "this," and "it" in line 6 compound the line's ambiguity. Even as the speaker starts to tell her story of commencing motherhood, the poet's logical, reasoned train of thought appears weak juxtaposed with the imagery she uses to describe the mysterious netherworld in which she and her new child dwell:

> My child was born at the end of winter. How to prove it?
> Not the child, of course, who slept in the pre-spring darkness,
> but the fact that the ocean—moonless, stripped of current—
> entered the room quietly one evening and
> lay down in the weave of the rug and could be seen
> shifting and sighing in blue-green sisal …

The radical logic of motherhood, of the one becoming two, of the self-protective, relatively self-absorbed poet turning her attention toward the needs of another, allows her to dwell on the threshold between the real and imagined to experience reality, temporarily, in a way unique to that time after the birth of her child. Boland confounds

the real and surreal associations of blueness as she describes the ocean crossing the threshold between out-of-doors and indoors. The blue of the ocean combined with the "blue-green sisal," the fabric of the rug, complicate the readers' ability to separate reality from imagination.

The speaker comes back to reality eventually, but even after remembering this time, she emerges changed and her relationship with the goddess she addressed at the beginning of the poem has changed as well. Instead of the hierarchical relationship of poet to muse, now they relate to each other as mothers who have shared a common experience of communitas with their newborn children and now with each other. Instead of breaking her silence about this experience by recording the memory for posterity, she is now sharing it with another woman; instead of writing the story, she is telling it and memory is listening.

> Which is why you are listening as the rain comes down, …
> …and I am telling you this: you are after all
> not simply a goddess of memory, you have
> nine daughters yourself and can understand. (48)

By changing the speaker's address from writing to telling, Boland foregrounds a relationship of exchange, not permanence, as the as ultimate purpose of her art. The reader enters the poem as a distanced observer of artistic creation; by the end of the poem, we are invited to overhear the intimacy of a shared secret between two women. Boland's use of blue invites the question of loss and recovery from Lasker-Schuler's poem: to what extent is this event made real again through the speaker's memory, and to what extent does sharing the memory with another woman, the goddess of memory,

make it real? The experience the speaker recalls is fleeting, but in communitas, the memory maintains its transformative power for Boland as a poet and as a woman.

Ekphrasis as "Domestic Violence"

Boland's tentative broaching of a communal art in her poetry is alive to the often violent reality of art's context outside of the safe haven of the museum. With *Domestic Violence*, Boland initiates a relation to violence that deliberately calls into question the traditional lines of demarcation between a safe interior, domestic space and a threatening outside world. Violence, a broken relation between the self and the other, has replaced "individual dignity," which Boland called up as the character of Irishness in "The Weasel's Tooth" (12). Domestic violence is within her own country, within her own town, within her own house and domestic relationships, and, most radical of all, within herself as a poet. The phrase "domestic violence" captures the inherent conflict on so many different levels in Ireland, and it can also be used to define the essential inter-art struggle inherent in ekphrasis. The struggle between the word and the image, the word doing violence to the image even as it gives it voice, is "domestic" in the sense that forms of art contend with each other in the enclosed space of the poem, not with external combatants like politics or religion. "Domestic violence" as a definition of ekphrasis recalls the older notion of the sister arts, emphasizing sibling rivalry rather than sororal affection. The immediacy of the term "Domestic violence" also suggests the need for change, a necessary intervention, at best the re-imagining of a relationship. And this is exactly what Boland's ekphrasis does for art: it re-imagines the relationship

between word and image, acknowledging the current state of conflict so embedded in Western understandings of art, but refusing to accept it as inevitable.

A new relation to violence required a new understanding of the relationship between personal and social responsibility for violence. In her essay, "Domestic Violence: An Argument in Ten Parts" (2007), Boland describes her process of coming to a terrible, unavoidable realization that helps explain her ethical stance and the exigence for lyrical experiment in her volume of poems by the same title. The essay also establishes the volume's overall historical backdrop in the heightened violence of the 1970s and 80s when the poet was raising her children in the Dublin suburbs:

> Then I turn on the radio. Guns and armaments fill the kitchen. Hoods, handcuffs, armalites--the paraphernalia of urban struggle slides easily in and out of the newsreader's voice. A blackbird flickers down into the grass. I can see neighbors' rooftops. The voice continues. An odd thought forms in my mind, painful and inexact. I look around the kitchen, lost in contradictions. Then I realize what it is. My coffee is the instant variety, closed in a glass jar made in Huddersfield. My marmalade comes from London. My kettle from Holland. My knife from Germany. My radio from Japan. Only the violence, it seems--only that -- is truly Irish. (34)

In the essay that follows this passage, Boland connects this realization with her awakening understanding of the domestic poem: that violence is no more absent from the domestic than is the global market. Commoditized and made palatable to the general consumer but nonetheless present, violence is transmitted through the radio just as instant coffee, marmalade and tea kettles are the traces of Ireland growing participation in global trade. But she also recognizes the impossibility of authenticity in an increasingly globalized Ireland, where even her private domestic space is permeated by the ebb and flow of exchange. Boland recognizes the source of her own culpability in

the violence—her participation in the consumer culture that perpetuates ignorance in the guise of a comfortable life—as a social culpability situated on the Irish ground she stands on amongst the traces of globalization.

The resistance of modern suburban life to social culpability is a bit of a paradox: knowledge about national suffering abounds in public media—especially national, non-localized media—but it can make us feel a deceptive sense of sympathy and proximity as Susan Sontag elucidates in *Regarding the Pain of Others:*

> The imaginary proximity to the suffering inflicted on others that is granted by images suggests a link between the far-away sufferers—seen close-up on the television screen—and the privileged viewer that is simply untrue, that is yet one more mystification of our real relations to power. So far as we feel sympathy, we feel we are not accomplice to what caused the suffering. Our sympathy proclaims our innocence as well as our impotence. (102)

For Sontag, co-opting the sounds of suffering in the media appeals to a sentimentalized version of sympathy that substitutes feeling for action. While Boland's poetry is certainly informed by this type of theoretical criticism, it moves beyond theory to inquire about how this dynamic works in peoples' lives on the local level where the negative effects do not seem quite so inevitable. Over dependence on television broadcast avoids the real proximity to suffering within local families and communities, but, like the radio in the passage of Boland's quoted above, attending to the reality of broadcast media can also motivate changing convictions.

The title poem of *Domestic Violence* challenges the ethic supported by an increasingly individualistic and globalized culture by raising the specter of domestic, localized violence as a force with which individuals must contend, by using her own

culpability to argue for the necessity of a relational, community-oriented ethic in response. The reader of "Domestic Violence" enters a topsy-turvy world where the virtues of common life and the violent realities of its commoditized foundations reflect and inform each other. "*Pleased to meet you meat to please you*" (line 3) says the sign on the butcher's window: the hospitable and the violent form an inextricable economy in the domestic spaces of this volume just as they do in the butcher's shop. Similarly, the other face of the speaker's family's hard won suburban contentment is the domestic violence of another couple, who, within hearing distance, "quarreled into the night, / Their voices high, sharp" (14). This series of juxtapositions forces us to ask if the fighting couple is in a house down the street, or if they represent a darker side of the speaker's own domestic space? The next lines resound for both couples, blurring the distinction between their experiences: "nothing is ever entirely / right in the lives of those who love each other."

Boland's poem does not ignore national violence, but shows how the safe physical distance from which it is seen on televised broadcast fosters a sense of the safe ethical distance from violence that belies its actual proximity, albeit in different forms. Televised broadcast, she argues, makes the familiar strange without creating the context for understanding and social action. The speaker recalls the familiar beauty of the Irish landscape with a strong sense of place, and how the television made it strange:

> the salt horizons and the Dublin Hills,
> the rivers, table mountains, Viking marshes
> we thought we knew
> Had been made to shiver
> into our ancient twelve by fifteen television

which gave them back as gray and grayer tears
and killings, killings, killings, (*DV* 13-14)

The landscape's transformation in the television parallels the disjunction between a familiarity and hidden hatreds in a suburban neighborhood, but the televised images leave the viewer stunned and bereft of interpretive resources.

Nothing we said
not then, not later,
fathomed what it is
is wrong in the lives of those who hate each other. (*DV* 14)

The repetition and enjambment of that most static of words, "is," enacts the failure of language—for the couple and for the poet's art—when confronted with abstracted hate.

The aphoristic chiasmus of the fourth part of "Domestic Violence" further evokes the resistance within rhetorical culture to articulating community responsibility: "We failed our moment or our moment failed us. / The times were grand in size and we were small. / Why do I write that / when I don't believe it?" Either way these neat phrases are turned, they fall flat and artificial under the poet's pen, but by performing these desperate clichés, she demonstrates the central problems of the volume: dissociating the domestic from its traditional defense as a place of safety and escape from public violence and dissociating the domestic poem from the bland, easy lyricism that has come to define it. Boland's poem shows, with both power and grace, that violence and suffering are conditions within the self, the domestic, and the neighborhood as much as they are visible, external conditions of the nation.

The importance of place in this formulation recalls Norman Vance's argument that the poem of place is a rich constant in Irish literary tradition, in a country

"notoriously lacking in consensus" on any other subject (4). The constancy of topography and proximity to Great Britain energize a dialectic that has been richly explored in Irish poetry, and Boland's poetry, no less than others, explores how place contributes to individual and communal identity in Ireland. But the relations of space between people in Ireland are, in addition to being challenged by their compression on the television screen, not without their harboring of bitterness and guilt.

In "Irish Interior," Boland directly questions the imaginative constancy of topography or geography in Irish life and culture by recalling the "domestic violence" of the Land League's zealous patriotism in the late nineteenth century. The poem draws a parallel between the effects of political domestic violence on the Irish peasants depicted in the drawing and the effects of ekphrastic domestic violence on the peasants caught in a battle between the fixity of being drawn and the fixity of the poet's gaze. Although it is in some ways a typical example of museum ekphrasis, "Irish Interior" takes the traditional aim of ekphrasis—to give voice to the voiceless image—and challenges it and all of its gendered implications by revealing the ambiguity of the speaker's and the reader's stance in relation to the representation of victims. In the first four stanzas, the economic and social entrapment of the Irish peasants is echoed in their silent fixity in ink on the page, and cramped, syntactically repetitive sentences.

> 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.
> The name of the drawing is *An Irish Interior.* (*DV* 25)

The ambiguity of "here" in line 4 opens the drawing to multiple layers of interpretation for the reader or viewer, and multiple layers of entrapment for the figures represented: "here" could mean in the house they occupy in the drawing, or in Ireland more generally, or in the drawing itself. The man and woman weave and spin, but weaving and spinning also characterize how the poet crafts and imbricates ambiguity of space and perspective in the first half of the poem with repetitive syntax that mimics the patterned surface of a weaving or the repetitive, refining act of spinning. The next two tercets of descriptive ekphrasis continue to weave end-stopped lines, simple sentences and mid-line caesuras to reinforce the couple's static vulnerability to the gazer's eye and the violence of the Land League often against fellow Irish.[7]

> The year is 1890. Before the inks are dry
> Parnell will fall and orchards burn where the two
> Captains—Moonlight, Boycott—have had their way.
>
> She has a spinning wheel. He has a loom.
> She has a shawl. He stands beside a landscape—
> maybe a river, maybe hills, maybe even a farm (*DV* 25)

By using the phrase "have had their way," Boland condemns the Land League for a kind of rape of the land that makes both the man and the woman in the drawing victims of domestic violence. This rare representation of a man as a fellow artist, minding the loom as his wife spins the yarn, and a fellow victim supports the view that in artistically

[7] "Captain Moonlight" was a code name for the Land League's zealously patriotic policy of destroying the property of those who took over farms left by tenants who had been evicted by their landlords. Captain Boycott, whose story represents the origin of "boycott" in contemporary usage, took over a farm in County Mayo and was thus subjected to vandalism, refused services, and generally ostracized by the community (Wilson 453).

liminal, societally marginalized spaces like this couple's, gender difference pales in importance to the sense of solidarity that grows from necessity.

Boland's ekphrasis has engaged this issue of visual fixity and gender since "From the Painting *Back from Market* by Chardin" (*New Territory*), in which she criticized "what great art removes: / Hazard and death, the future and the past / this woman's secret history and her loves" (*NCP* 17). The second five tercets of interpretive ekphrasis in "Irish Interior" revise this criticism, showing how a work of "low" art or craft, if understood as a contextualized work, can be the very embodiment, an icon, of hazard and death. The poem's second half opens the poetic line to enjambment, more complex sentence structure, and a lyrical freedom that belies the couple's entrapment, just as a weaving, understood as a contextualized process, is not the static work it might appear to the contemplative gaze. The speaker voices a sophisticated view of the drawing's thresholds and "skewed perspective":

> Nothing belongs to them but this
> melody and tyranny and hopelessness of thread
> rendered by linework and the skewed perspective
> the eye attains between his hand and the way
> her hand rests on the wheel… (*DV* 25)

As the speaker continues, though, she implicates the tendency of the individual gaze to perceive from a single perspective exclusive of aesthetic and social context. The gaze, not the work of art itself, conflates the rich ambiguity between reality and representation into a single perspective: "Which we are in has yet to be made clear as," she writes,

> we stare through the lines until their lives
> have almost disappeared and all we see, all
> we want to see, are the places in the picture light forgives, (*DV* 26)

With the communal *we,* she brings her own and the reader's gaze into the poem, but challenges our subject position and the authority of the gaze. W.J. T. Mitchell points out that experience of the world through our own perception is "itself a product of experience and acculturation" and no more a transparent window on reality than a photograph, a painting, or a poem (*Iconology* 38). By breaking down this hierarchy of perception, a painting or a poem offers insight into the truth of reality that our mind's interpretation of the world around us misses. Boland's poem asks the reader to consider her perspective as a threshold position, attentive to the form, but open to the possibilities the work suggests in different contexts.

Language and Violence

"Irish Interior" demonstrates how perception can establish the fixity or fluidity of a work of art as much as the medium in which it is made. Boland herself articulated a similar point in her 2002 essay "Virtual Syntax, Actual Dreams," in which she explains that the poet fights the desire for "fixity" or permanence as much as the visual artist. She explains that her own art has been characterized by a dialectic between using "a syntax that could halt time" and mitigate the effects of aging and experience and a sense of the "hubris" that accompanies this attempt (171). This tension manifests itself in her poetry in a conscious struggle between a "language of power" and a "dialect of limitations," which she learned by writing in domestic space as she raised her family (164). She articulates this as a persistent tension, and her poetry shows it to be a productive tension: "the tension between a language of power and a lexicon of true

limits is a daily, chastising struggle" (164). The attitude of humility with which she addresses this tension influences her poetic voice. I will show how she allows the silences to break her line, stagger her syntax, and alter her lyric control instead of choosing to use her capable command of the more traditional lyric to voice the silences of private and lost experiences.

A poet's powerlessness can only emerge authentically in a weakness of language itself, a theme she explores throughout her work, and has been explored by other critics. Pillar Villar-Argáiz ends an essay on Boland with a provocative statement about Boland's complex approach to the silences of the past: "It is not only that these lives have been lost," she writes, "but that Boland wishes to leave them that way. For the poet, every process of recovery itself involves an inevitable misrepresentation and rather than becoming a loquacious representative of the Irish past, she becomes a powerless speaker" ("The Subaltern" 54). By revealing her weakness through language, Boland acknowledges her lack of authority to speak for others, but her tentative, questioning lyric gives form to a conversation with the silent and the lost as she participates in the making of the past.

The distance between language and experience emerges from Boland's earliest attempts to incorporate her experiences as a woman into poetic language, and then, most forcefully and self-consciously, in her meditations on the fate of language in *In a Time of Violence.* That volume is, according to Boland, "about the changes that happen between an experience and its expression…to question the violence done to language" ("Eavan Boland" 124). From the epigraph of the first sequence of *In a Time of Violence*,

Boland alerts the reader to her engagement with a hierarchical, platonic understanding of representation; and from the first poem, she convinces us of her departure from it. Instead of criticizing the "irrational nature which has no discernment for greater or less" on which Plato bases his criticism of "the imitative poet," Boland seems to embrace the leveling effects of "irrational" thinking as the essence of poetry (*NC* 204). In another essay, discussing Jorie Graham's "Reading Plato," Boland criticizes Plato's "old and flawed theories of mimesis," rejecting not the artist's impulse to imitate or represent reality but the assumption that imitation is at a greater distance from truth than reality ("Serinette Principle" 21). Boland rejects the hierarchy from ideal to the real, acknowledging the violence of the real as a criticism of ideal forms. On the other hand, she acknowledges the loss that any attempt to represent our reality represents. She cites a line from Robert Hass's poem "Meditation at Lagunitas" that captures the loss that happens between a sign and what it signifies: "a word is elegy to what it signifies" (Boland "Serinette Principle" 25). In these two volumes, Boland's lyrics try to capture the power latent in this loss, a paradoxical power in weakness shared by the word and the image alike and contrasted to the hubris of logical power claimed by reason and science.

In a Time of Violence captures this contrast between logical and lyrical power in the knowingly awkward opening of "That the science of cartography is limited." In an essay on that poem she explains how the broken sound of the poem contributes to the poem's meaning:

> The deliberate awkwardness of the proposition--*that the science of cartography is limited*--is built into the title and the title is the first line. Why do that? Because I wanted to start this poem, charged as it was for me, with a deliberate mouthful of reason and argument. I wanted to send it towards the reader the way an educator might send an account of empire to a class: announcing acceptable ideas with an illusory logic. (Boland "A Question")

The language of reason and confidence of science receives harsh treatment elsewhere as well. The very next poem from *In a Time of Violence*, "Death of Reason," travels back half a century from the famine to source the "death of reason" during what would typically be called the "age of reason" (*NC* 205). Boland juxtaposes an England of the 1780s or 90s where "the art of portrait-painting reached its height" with the violence the loyalist Peep-O-Day Boys were committing against the Catholic Irish. With no disrespect to the visual arts, the poem makes portrait painting complicit in consolidating British power by using the idealized beauty of the sitter to represent the glory of empire. The female model is "anonymous beauty-bait for the painter," the agency in the exchange given to the easel, which "waits for her" and the age, which is "ready to resemble her." The poem's ragged, uneven lines warn the reader that the fire in Ireland will spread: the speaker almost completes a description of the portrait painting when she interrupts with short lines reminding "I smell fire" and "the flames have crossed the sea." The uneven lines almost make the speaker complicit in the fire's destruction of the painting, but is the speaker an iconoclast? If painting represents the idolatry of empire and the objectification of women, then she seems to say, so be it. The canvas is a threshold image here, at the end of a catalogue of thresholds over which the flames have already crossed: "The flames have crossed the sea. / They are at the lintel. At the door. / At the canvas, /

at her mouth" (205-206). Violence, she implies, moves representation across a boundary where objective judgments of beauty and form fail to be relevant. In the context of this violence, beauty and reason are a failed artifice: "the dictates of reason and the blended sensibility / of tact and proportion—yes / the eighteenth century ends here / as her hem scorches… ." Instead of dwelling on the death of the artifice in this volume, however, Boland lets the loss represented by the death of the anonymous female model guide her ethic.

Domestic Violence continues to experiment with linguistic irony, but not just to mimic the weakness of reason but to demonstrate Boland's own failure to escape from the grip of reason on her mind. In "Amber," reason is the limitation against which her poetic imagination tries to set the images and words of another way of knowing. "Reason says this:" she proclaims in sentences of numbing factuality, "The dead cannot see the living. / The living will never see the dead again" (*DV* 31). From there, she changes the terms of engagement, introducing a piece of amber as an organ of memory to question the very significance of the logical limits placed on what it means to "see." But the transformations Boland enacts in these and other poems often have difficulty resisting the linguistic constraints of reason. She takes a rather protective stance toward the language of everyday speech in her interviews and in many of her poems about the failures of her grade-school education, but her deep acknowledgement of its limitations are apparent when she represents the sometimes stilted rhythms of every-day speech. The poet would speak—has to speak—but also knows the dangers inherent in representational speech. The enjambed lines of varying length resist the solidity of

prose, question the prose line even as it mimics it in sound. These lines overall seem to declare with confidence but also humility, the value of the poet's task in the face of the dangers of speaking for the silent. Her greater command of the line in *Domestic Violence* reflects her more sophisticated understanding of what it means to respect the silences, the pauses, the formal needs of the poem as opposed to prose.

The last poem in the "Domestic Violence" sequence, "In Our Own Country," brings the sequence sonically and thematically full-circle with carefully controlled inversions and repetitions, again reaching after a sense of identity that is inherently ambiguous: the word "exile"—that signifier of the outsider—is stronger than the word "we" repeated often but ill-defined.

> We walk home. What we know is this
> (and this is all we know): we are now
> And we will always be from now on—
> for all I know we have always been—
> exiles in our own country. (28)

Boland explains in an interview that the last line here refers to the "estrangements of modern life" that many feel as they get older, but also to her personal sense of exile from her childhood abroad (Villar "The Text of It" 59). Boland has written about exile and aging many times before, but the strength of this passage lies in the ambiguity of the "we," which waffles between her own family ("They are making a new Ireland at the end of our road") and the nameless of the Irish past ("remember the emigrant boat?" These chiastic lines also recall the ambiguous speaker of Keats's famous lines from his ekphrastic poem "Ode on a Grecian Urn," "beauty is truth, truth beauty; that is all ye know on earth and all ye need to know," which helps support a reading of Boland's

poem that puts representation in the foreground of interpretation. Exile as a condition within and ambiguous communal identity bookends a sequence of poems that challenges the notion that Irishness can represented at all through language or images. The image of daffodils at the poem's mid-point comes closest to a defining image, recalling the fragility of the crushed flowers in "The War Horse," but the daffodils in a "single-crooked row" are actually more suggestive of a perverse individuality that defies a common definition.

Public Media and Domestic Drama

Boland's "Still Life" is in one sense more typical of ekphrasis than the previous examples because it alludes to a traditional painting by a commercially successful painter, William Harnett, and an etching that appeared in the *London Illustrated News*. But if Harnett's *tromp l'oeil* paintings and the newspaper context in which the etching appears are understood as thresholds between domestic space and public reception, then the poem articulates a fluid yet inextricable connection between art and the suffering of everyday life. "Still Life" is organized spatially, not by traditional narrative logic, weaving together static simple sentences and juxtaposing seemingly disparate narrative strands. Only a common location, Clonakilty in County Cork, near the south-east coast of Ireland, ties these strands together, and first, even this connection seems arbitrary:

> William Harnett was a famous realist.
>
> He went from Clonakilty to Philadelphia
> in the aftermath of Famine. In

the same year the *London illustrated News*
printed an etching of a woman.

On one arm was a baby—rigid, still.
In her other hand was a small dish.

They called it *Woman Begging at Clonakilty. (DV* 19)

Boland ironizes the "still moment" of visual representation by forcing the reader to put the etching of the woman and child at the end of the historical famine narrative. The poem's short-stanza form echoes the simultaneity of disparate events found on any given page of a newspaper, but its associative, poetic linkages between the events give meaning to what in a newspaper is often simple juxtaposition for the sake of limited space. In these first lines, the speaker voices the objective reporter, but the poem's last line throws into visceral, human perspective the speaker's initial description of it, and its title given by the newspaper. The last line parenthesizes the human situation, as though its truth occurs somewhere outside of history or objective interpretation: "(The child, of course, was dead.)" (19).

The threshold experience of Harnett's paintings finds additional personal significance in Harnett's own border-crossing past as an Irish American, which process Boland calls attention to in her poem's opening lines. The newspaper context of the etching of the woman and child likewise crosses the borders of Ireland, which the etching depicts, and London, where the etching appears for public consumption. But the cultural exchange happening on this threshold is inherently commoditized, as Benedict Anderson reminds us. Anderson argues that newspapers, though they helped create the

modern idea of the nation from their incipience in the eighteenth century, were commodities from the first, published for mass, disposable consumption. Newspapers, Anderson articulates, "provided the technical means for 'representing' the kind of imagined community that is the nation" (25), but also prescribed what kind of nation it would be: a "secular, historically clocked, imagined community" where the mass ritual of morning newspaper consumption contributes to a national shared knowledge akin to a modern, secular "morning prayers," as Hegel puts it (Anderson 35). The quantity, regularity, and alleged objectivity of newspaper production disguise its deeper subjectivity, however, as Boland's poem demonstrates so poignantly. The title given to the Irish etching by the *London Illustrated News* contrasts the way the British objectify the Irish famine as a source of public pity, and the sense of the human tragedy that Boland brings to the image by revealing the child's death in a way that catches the reader off-guard, as a parenthetical, off-hand remark that rings with a truth absent in the textual interpretation of the etching's title.

Harnett's *tromp l'oeil* depiction of ordinary, even ugly everyday objects was transgressive in its own right, hardly academically acceptable during his lifetime, and while the novelty of his mirror-like representations helped sell his paintings, his aesthetic, especially in the period of *The Old Violin* challenged prevailing nineteenth notions of idealized beauty as an antidote for the ugliness of an increasingly industrialized world.[8] The speaker's voice only comes through personally once in the

[8] One contemporary reviewer's rather generous evaluation captures the general tenor of Harnett's initial reception in the art world: "'It is not a work of high art and yet it is exceedingly interesting" ("Auspiciously Opened").

first sixteen lines, but it helps connect the narrative strands through the liminal nature of art: "I believe the surfaces of things / can barely hold in what is under them" (*DV* 19). The rigid surface of the poem's narrative, for one, barely holds in its humanist purpose, revealed finally in the last parenthetical line. The lines recall Boland's "*March 1 1847. By the First Post*" from *In a Time of Violence*, in which a seemingly routine letter between sisters about daffodils and silk dresses reveals the dark truth of the famine that exists just at the edge of the letter writer's consciousness. She writes to her sister, "*Shall I tell you what I saw on Friday, / driving with Mama? A woman lying / across the Kells Road with her baby—/ in full view"* (*NCP* 206). For all that is "full view" for this privileged London visitor, the broader suffering of the famine's victims is multiplied exponentially. Likewise for all of Harnett's characteristic shallow use of space and focus on the visible world of household objects, the heavily-foregrounded plane on which the objects rest is often a door that invites the viewer to consider the proximity of the invisible narrative world that lies beyond our sight.

The Old Violin, like Chardin's *Back from Market* with its doorway between the inner and outer worlds of the subject, is a good example of exactly this threshold phenomenon: Boland capitalizes on the brilliance of Harnett's formal structure, using the representation of a door for the cover of her book (Norton edition), thereby forcing the reader to encounter the tension between fixity and fragility even as she opens the cover the book, the literal threshold between life and art. She recognizes the humanity of Harnett's love for his music and his art, and suggests the same for her own, by

comparing the "still life" to an artist drawing the figure of an intimate love: "He painted his Cremona violin as if only he knew / the skin tones of spruce wood" (15-16).

The details of Harnett's painting deepen the painting's profound human concern at the heart of its tension between art and life. The music half-hidden behind the violin has been identified as "Vi ravviso, o luoghi ameni" from Bellini's *La Sonnambula* in 4/4 time and B flat major, a piece represented in *Ease* but now set an octave lower. The second piece is "Helas, Quelle Douleur" in 2/4, G major and set an octave lower than in Harnett's *My Gems* (Simpson 297). The nostalgia of the poem's words is visible in the heavily (perhaps freshly) rosined lower strings of the painted violin: "Oh remembrance of scenes long vanish'd, / Soft enchantment long lost and banish'd, / Where my childhood serenely glided, / Where the joyous moments flew; / Oh how peaceful have ye abided, / While those days naught can renew" (qtd. in Simpson 297). This sentimental song of longing for the past suggests that in the painting's implicit narrative, playing the violin is a vehicle for escaping life's troubles, but Harnett's painting toys with the viewer's own desire to understand art as a vehicle of escape into a more idealized world by putting the violin out of reach and calling attention to the fragility of the whole tableaux. [9]

[9] Robinson actually argues the opposite: "Harnett's still lifes tend toward a static and immobile perfection. The objects are suspended firmly and absolutely by visible strings and sturdy nails; their weight and solidity fix them immutably in place" (Robinson 163). She argues that the liveliness of the paintings comes from the introduction of flimsier objects to contrast the fixity of their place on the door. In *The Old Violin*, however, fragility is more of a unifying theme than a point of departure: a worn, unevenly varnished violin alongside a torn piece of sheet music, a scrap of newsprint, and a folded, damaged letter, all placed together on a door, that on close inspection, also bears signs of wear with a missing bolt, splintered wood, and peeling paint. The fixity of the door is also questionable: nail holes in the door suggest objects having been repeatedly hung up and taken down, and if this door swung open, objects hung

By the end of the poem, the title of "Still Life" has come to life, trembling with paradox. The literal designation for Harnett's object paintings fiendishly recalls the French name for the still life tradition, *nature morte,* or dead nature. Not only is the woman in the etching "stilled" by virtue of being etched, her child's death transforms the "still moment" of the visual medium into a reflection on the reality of death. And in perhaps the greatest irony of all for a writer, the etching's title, *Woman Begging at Clonakilty,* deadens the drama of a woman and child, while the revelation of the child's death in the last line—made more surprising because we cannot actually see the etching ourselves—suddenly brings the whole drama to life, quickening the exchange between the etched surface and human tragedy it captures. The woman is reduced to the indignity of begging while she mourns the tragic loss of her child, and we as readers confronted with our quite limited ability to empathize with a situation we probably assumed was captured by the title. Boland's ekphrasis here challenges us to recognize the surfaces of things for what they are, to appreciate our part in the human drama that lies beneath and to understand the reality of our own limited perception.

The Nation and the Limits of Community: "I almost loved you"

By using place, the Irish town of Clonakilty, to bring seemingly disparate works of art together to signify human tragedy, "Still Life" comes the closest of Boland's poems

on a single nail would be precariously placed indeed. The fixity of the painted representation seems to be designed deliberately to defy the narrative of "hazard and death, the future and the past" that perilously placed objects participate in. Robinson's interpretation suggests this narrative participation when she says that "the presence of these enigmatic clippings is a recurring reminder of the ambiguous presence of the artist and of information withheld" (163).

to suggesting artistic context and communal responsibility are intertwined on a practical level. Martin McCloone's articulation of the idea that individual relationships in local contexts might be the building blocks for re-imagining cultural identity in Ireland accords with Boland's recent poetry. His engagement with Kenneth Frampton's concept of Critical Regionalism represents a potential real-world, minimally reductive application of an ethic of communitas in larger communities, and bridges the gap between spontaneous communitas and normative, structured community. Despite the lengths Irish broadcasting has gone to represent divergent viewpoints, McCloone explains, it has still become slave to hegemonic notions of Irish identity that fail to reflect the diverse reality of opinion and experience that exists on the local level. McLoone appropriates Critical Regionalism to argue that social identities and political relationships need to be "*re-imagined,*" as he says with a nod to Bendict Anderson's concept of the nation as an imagined community. The key, he continues, "is the empowerment of communities away from the centre" (22). McLoone's arguments for the transformative potential of more deeply contextualized local broadcasting might also be applied to other art forms: indeed his response to Critical Regionalism is framed in terms of "local creative energies":

> It can be seen here, that the implication is again to release local creative energies and further-more that this be done in a critically reflective manner. In broad-cast terms, this means not only empowering local communities to represent themselves, to have a voice and a visibility of themselves, but that this should happen through an exploration of the diverse factors which constitute those communities identities. (24)

McLoone, with Frampton, advocates giving voice to the local communities on the margins of national life not so that they can speak to the dominant culture, but to contribute to their ability to thrive and develop their own local identities in an inescapably global context.

I conclude this argument with a reading of the final poem in *Domestic Violence*, which challenge's the idea that this kind of community can be built in Ireland if it appeals to damaging conflations of women and nation that persist in public rhetoric. "In Coming Days" models, through an inter-textual rather than ekphrastic relationship, the limits of applying an ethic of communitas on the national level, and represents Boland's most deliberate argument against her own involvement with the objectification and mythologizing of a female figure for national causes. She imagines a future encounter between herself and the ghost of the Shan Van Vocht, a traditional "Mother Ireland" figure who, according to Padraic Colum in his notes on the famous poem, traces her lineage back to the 1798 uprising (345). The meeting echoes encounters with women of literature and myth on the borders of reality and imagination in such poems as "Time and Violence" and "The Women", but here the attempt establishes not kinship but distance, revealing the Shan Van Vocht for what she really is: an inhuman fantasy of a nationalistic ideal.

Borders energize this poem's form, voice, imagery and allusions. Boland has closed the divide between the dead and the living by the end of the volume: she stands on the threshold between them, descending like Aeneas in Book Six to inquire from the dead. The speaker's vision of meeting "on the borders of Kildare" (*DV* 78) with the

mythologized Shan Van Vocht has a quality of spiritual revelation, but this place of liminal possibility, on the margins of history where "The rag-taggle of our history / will march by us" (DV 78), also represents a human relational encounter, where one unique, embodied individual encounters another as an equal. She imagines them as "two women by the roadside," ignored by the march of history, but the contradictory sense of time set up in the opening lines foreshadows the failure of creative potential in this encounter:

> Soon
> I will be as old as the Shan Van Vocht—
>
> (although no one knows how old she is).
>
> Soon
> I will ask to meet her on the borders of Kildare.

The creative exchange that characterizes liminal space elsewhere in this volume is conspicuously absent between the two women in this poem. As the speaker continues to visualize this encounter, the possibility of kinship with the Shan Van Vocht recedes: "She will look past me," Boland writes, "at the torn banners, / makeshift pikes, bruised feet. Her lips will move" (*DV* 78), but the sounds that emerge are not her own, thus precluding creative exchange. The speaker's lines persistently focus on their affinity as aging women, but the Shan Van Vocht continues to voice the self-obliterating myth of Irish unity, and the distance between the two women grows.

The mimicking, musical cry of the Shan Van Vocht competes rather than converses with the conversational tone of the speaker's uneven, prosaic lines so that the mythical woman's melodic voice (in original italics) seems increasingly to overpower

the speaker's, just as a rhetorical demagogue often overpowers, by sheer volume and popular appeal, even-handed argument:

> There is still time, I will tell her. We can still
> grow older together.
>
> *And will Ireland then be free?*
> *And will Ireland then be free?*
>
> We loved the same things, I will say—
> or at least some of them. Once, in fact, long ago,
>
> *Yes! Ireland shall be free,*
> *From the center to the sea.*
>
> I almost loved you. (*DV* 79)

In the last line, however, relational value trumps nationalist rhetoric, signaling the speaker's rejection of humanizing nationalist mythology. "I almost loved you" acknowledges Boland's complicity, however unwitting, in perpetuating nationalist fantasies by looking for their humanity in poems like "Time and Violence" or even "Mise Eire." All she finds in this poem is a voice, but not the voice she imagines as her legacy in "Anna Liffey" or "Woman Painted on a Leaf"; rather, she hears the voice of a marionette, mimicking the cries of the imaginary community of the Irish past. In this confessional last line, Boland rejects the Shan Van Vocht from the social ties she has developed throughout the volume, especially in the unique relationships with her own mother and daughter, and between other mothers and daughters across history and myth. Boland puts Mother Ireland in her place as a rhetorical temptation, but far removed from the real love made possible in a relationship based on creative exchange.

In this poem, Boland proves that the ethic of communitas she develops throughout *Domestic Violence* is distinct from the objectification that embodies the ideal of a unified nation in the figure of a woman and the ethic of empathy that often locates its hope in identifying with the other. The competing voices help define this relational ethic as a possibility only when exchange is creative and continually re-imagined between distinct individuals.

And yet the idea of community beyond the local remains a subject of debate. Walter R. Fisher deals with this question in some depth from a narrative philosophical standpoint, but acknowledges that his answers are limited. He argues that at their best and most free, communities that we choose or in which we freely acknowledge our inclusion have the capacity to affirm our deepest individuality even as we identify as part of a group. These community narratives "reveal us to ourselves ontologically, they account for our Being—what we are and what we can be," he writes (323). This dynamic conception of community, which echoes—although perhaps not consciously—Turner's original formulation of the unique individuality at the heart of communitas, has the potential, to support and inform larger structures. As Fisher reminds us, local communities exist even when unacknowledged and under-used as systems of interdependency. Attention to and development of the unique dynamic between individual and community on the local level has the potential to transform larger structures without promoting anarchy: As Fisher writes, "embedded in some local narratives are narratives with potential universal application" (323). And as Turner insists, communitas is always distinct from but in relationship to structural norms with

the potential to evaluate and challenges the excesses and deficiencies of structure for individuals. He understood that "wisdom is always to find the appropriate relationship between structure and communitas under the given circumstances of time and place, to accept each modality when it is paramount without rejecting the other, and not to cling to one when its present impetus is spent" (*The Ritual Process* 139).

One more example serves to show the potential of aesthetically inspired communitas to help *re-imagine* larger social structures. Janet Sarbanes work on *rebetika*, a form of Greek folk music whose performance embodies the blurred relationship between audience and art characteristic of communitas, offers the possibility of understanding "nation" as something other than artificial notions of collective unity and political borders. Sarbanes articulates the potential that experiences of communitas might motivate social re-imaginings, with reference to Greek composer Manos Hadzidakis who used *rebetika* in his more formal compositions and praised it as a nationally unifying art:

> Our love of *rebetika,* Hadzidakis was essentially saying, makes it possible for us to love one another despite our ideological differences. Or, to put it another way, only when we suspend our belief in 'us' will the act of social imagination once again be possible…For to 'be Greek' then is not to be one thing but many things—including, perhaps, Turkish. It is to be the unorganizable, the uncategorizable, and the as-yet-unimagined. (31)

That paradox—that stagnant notions of "we" or "us" are the greatest impediment to real social imagination—captures the resistance Boland has expressed to the idea of a communal voice in Ireland. Who is the "we" she can speak for? This chapter has shown that non-objectifying, even transformational "we" is possible in Boland's poetry in the

subtle, tentative, and fragile personal and artistic relationships at the emotional and ethical heart of *In a Time of Violence* and *Domestic Violence*. "Irishness" is not and has never been a unified notion, but rather an imagined, changeable idea; Boland's poetry engages the "as-yet-unimagined" ethical and aesthetic contexts in which more open, hybrid notions of "Irishness" can continue to be imagined.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Yeats and the Future of Ekphrasis in Irish Poetry

Boland's ekphrasis gestures toward an ethic of communitas within which the dignity of individuality can be affirmed and through which the gift of relational exchange can be realized. Because her poems are open to the visual, her poems remain receptive to dialogue, and maintain an openness to healing and reconciliation that may or may not happen in any given instance. Idealism about community and reconciliation can be quickly dampened by reality, especially when the news in Ireland seems to return repeatedly to cycles of violence and reconciliation. But through it all Boland maintains a critical openness, one that recognizes the chimera of identity in the Shan Van Vocht. Boland's ekphrasis is crucial for re-imagining Irish identity in relational terms that do not assume rivalry and conflict.

Yeats is an important precursor for Boland, for whose poetry his own work modeled the artistic remove as a meditative space where the poet can more clearly think about and respond to the problem of violence. I have already shown how Boland has developed this liminal subject position into a constructive one open to female artists in her contemporary milieu. This liminal position between a poet and other artists and works of art is and promises to continue to be constructive for other contemporary poets, particularly in Ireland where the controversial relationship between art and

violence was such a dominant presence in the twentieth century and continues to be in the twenty-first.

Yeats's influence on Boland's poetic voice and her ethical imagination are significant in their own right, but also because his example continues to influence the direction of Irish poetry and the vitality of ekphrasis. Derek Mahon's poem "Lapis Lazuli" from his most recent volume *Harbour Lights* (2006) exemplifies how Yeats's meditations on the visual arts maintain a grip on the Irish poetic imagination and continue to afford contemporary poets the open exchange with the visual he struggled to sustain against the temptations of monumentality. Mahon, like Boland, is self-conscious of Yeats's influence, and without being dismissive of it, often develops his work against the grain of the spiritualizing, mythologizing tendencies of Yeats's art. Mahon's poetry, as evidenced in "Lapis Lazuli" is more grounded in the earthiness, even the banalities, of his own experiences and the reality of violence and suffering. Unlike Yeats's lapis sculpture, the lapis lazuli Mahon reflects on is still rough hewn, a potential, not a real work of art. Mahon references Yeats's lapis sculpture as a potentiality in the rough stone: "The willow-pattern wisdom is still unknown, / the twinkling sages and the branchy house" (*Harbour Lights* 24). While Yeats found potential in imaginative exchange with his lapis sculpture, Mahon emphasizes the potentiality, imaginative possibility, of the raw material of art. In this sense, Mahon, like Boland, conceptualizes a process-oriented art that does not require a work to be finished (or even started) for imaginative exchange of ekphrasis to occur.

Despite these differences, Mahon self-consciously echoes Yeats by dedicating his "Lapis Lazuli" to Harry Clifton, but instead of the poet Harry Clifton who gifted Yeats with the lapis sculpture on his seventieth birthday, Mahon's dedication suggests Harry Clifton the contemporary poet born in 1952 whose first volume of fiction, *Berkeley's Telephone*, is referenced at the end of the second stanza. The dual resonance of the name Harry Clifton reminds the reader that Yeats's poem was written in response to, and perhaps in reciprocation for a gift, and reinforces the continuity with Yeats's poem that the title initiates.

The first stanza of Mahon's poem emphasizes the other-worldliness of the lump of lapis lazuli as the speaker re-imagines the speckled surface of the raw precious stone as an emblem of the universe caught in the immediacy of the poet's writing process:

> A whole night-sky that serves as a paperweight,
> this azure block blown in from the universe
> sits on my desk here, a still shimmering piece
> of planet rock speckled with gold and white (24)

The word "still" in line three suggests a double-meaning, as it often does in ekphrasis: the piece of lapis is fixed in space, but it also continues to shimmer with the lights of the sky from which the speaker imagines it coming. These somewhat contradictory implications of "still"—meaning material fixity and imaginative flux—resonate throughout the poem. The next part of the stanza imagines the raw lapis as a potential sculpture, as cited in the paragraph above, and then returns to the immediacy and potentiality of the "the raw material from which art is born" (24). This "raw material" of

sculpture, then, embodies the imaginative raw materials of writing that the poet contemplates as he sits at his desk writing this poem.

The second stanza of Mahon's poem strengthens the liminal position of artistic meditation that Yeats's ekphrasis modeled and Boland employs so frequently in her own poetry as a position of imaginative and ethical potential. Mahon's imagery shifts from outer-space metaphors to scientific origins with the poet still at his desk, poetically excavating the origins of art. By using scientific words for lapis lazuli—"this complex chunk of sulphurous silicates"—the speaker demystifies its beauty before suggesting the cultural and religious significance lapis lazuli has accrued as a symbol of permanence and authenticity: "a royal blue loved since the earth began / because, like the swirling sea, it never dates—" (24). Mahon's description then re-mystifies the valuable stone by employing metaphors of the "swirling sea," a "slowly moving cloud" and "watery haze" to evoke an imaginative fluidity that belies the permanence typically associated with stone and sculpture.

Mahon develops evolutionary origins further in stanza three, but the imagery is dominated by the intensity of fire rather than the flux of water. The stanza opens with a setting that recalls the imaginative reverie impelled by the fluttering of soot in a fireplace grate in Coleridge's "Frost at Midnight": "Slow fires still glowing in our cindery grates / even while the white, meridional sun vibrates / on sandy shelves where life first crept ashore" (24). Mahon's speaker is searching for something essential—a mysterious otherness hidden at the origins of the lapis stone in the "secret depths," and compares the necessity of such a search to "the loved women of our private myths." The

stanza's last two lines place this poetic search for origins on a level with the force that compels the ekphrastic urge to understand art: "we want the key to that impervious heart: / with ultramarine what need have we of art?" (24). The rhyme between "heart" and "art" recalls the rhyme in Yeats's "My Table" from "Meditations," another poem on the origination of art. "Only an aching heart," Yeats writes, "conceives a changeless work of art" (*CP* 202). By recalling that earlier poem, Mahon highlights the contrast with his own poem: while Yeats's poem reflected on the making of a specific work of art many generations and centuries before, Mahon meditates on the origins of the raw materials of art—the making of the stone underground in a mysterious process told more often (and perhaps more comfortably) in the words of science and evolution than of poetry. The piece of lapis forming in the ground is the "impervious heart," which defines and defeats our human attempts at creating beauty. "What need have we of art," then, he asks, if we can contemplate the depths of beauty and creation in a piece of raw lapis lazuli?

Stanza four answers this question by dislocating reader and writer back out to sea with a sudden conflation of the fire and water imagery that has dominated the previous two stanzas: "Heat lightning photographs the astonished sea. / Am I in Bermuda or cold Sakhalin?" (25). The sense of dislocation in these lines, with the implicit contrast between Ireland, a Caribbean island, and an island off the coast of far-east Russia, is reinforced by the "bewildering weather" and the dangerous possibilities opened by globalization:

> Either this new century with its bewildering weather
> Will work wonders for the sea-angling industry
> Or bring wolves dancing down the mooring ropes
> Of vast tankers and patronizing warships
> To spill the bins and skate on the ice flows. (25)

The stanza's last three lines present contrasting attitudes toward such imminent and unknowable possibilities. One perspective is cynical and ironic, the other, cast as limited illusions and nostalgia, is a perspective of hope: "Do we die laughing or are among those / for whom a spectre, some discredited ghost / still haunts the misty windows of old hopes?" (25). The assonance between "ghost" and "hopes" might seem to discredit the hopes, but "hopes" also gets the last word, and the question is still an open one, which the speaker answers with a variation on "old hopes" in the last stanza.

Art, the speaker argues, as a creative and participatory activity, is still a source of hope. Imagery of individual artistic meditation in the last stanza—a woman's reading reverie highlighted by her unconscious physical actions as she "scratches her scalp and shoves specs in her hair" (25)—is contrasted with the machinations of war in the stanza's first two lines: "While planes that consume deserts of gasoline / darken the sun in another rapacious war / a young woman reads alone in a lighted train" (25). The image of a solitary woman traveling on a train reading a book, "skipping the obvious for the rich and rare" (25) in emphasizes the physical movement and flux of people across national boundaries as their imaginations engage with works of art.

Mahon's "Lapis Lazuli" develops the conflict between art and violence, but instead of foregrounding imagery of violence like Yeats does, his poem moves toward violence from his own artistic meditation and then away from it again toward the young

woman's imaginative reverie. The poem could be read as continuing where Yeats left off with poetic gaiety, compensating by returning to the reality of violence and suffering, and then returning to Yeats's gaiety again at the end, this time with a woman reading on a train and a different set of sages than the ones on Yeats's lapis sculpture:

> Hope lies with her as it always does really
> And the twinkling sages in the Deux Magots
> First glimpsed by a student forty years ago
> On a continent like a plain of lapis lazuli;
> And the Eurostar glides into the Gare du Nord. (25)

The "sages" in Les Deux Magots, a famous Parisian café where writers and intellectuals used to meet, are actually two sculptures of Chinese merchants ("magots") that look down on people in the restaurant, an image that suggests a combination of commercial, artistic, and philosophical interests that demystifies the "ancient glittering eyes" of Yeats's "Chinamen" (*CP* 295). Hope lies, for Mahon, not in the sculptures themselves, but in the young woman, who represents the continued imaginative engagement with art in a world characterized by dislocation and global transition, as suggested by the Eurostar as it "glides into the Gare du Nord" in the last line. Mahon's "Lapis Lazuli" ends by affirming the ultimate theme of Yeats's poem by the same name: the potential of creative, imaginative engagement with art as an ethical response to the confusion and disillusionment of the continual possibility of violence. Mahon's contrarian, at times dismissive attitude toward Yeats's lapis lazuli sculpture is revealed to be skepticism of the fetishizing potential of a poem about such a visually powerful object, not a dismissal of art itself as a creative, life-giving, and finally hopeful force in our globalizing society as much as it was in Yeats's time.

Mahon's poem moves from his own artistic meditation, which ends with the disillusioned question, "what need have we of art?" to find a source of hope in the artistic meditations of another. His poem, as much as Yeats's and like many of Boland's ekphrases, suggests the necessity of imagining others in a common commitment to the power of art to re-create and re-imagine the worlds we live in. All three poets suggest the continued power of ekphrasis as a mode of poetic imagination capable of responding aesthetically and ethically to real problems faced by individuals and communities in Ireland and beyond.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Akhmatova, Anna. *Selected Poems.* Trans. Richard McKane. New York: Oxford UP, 1969.

Albright, Daniel. *Quantum Poetics: Yeats, Pound, Eliot, and the Science of Modernism.* New York: Cambridge UP, 1997.

Allen Randolph, Jody. *Eavan Boland: A Critical Companion.* New York: Norton, 2008.

- - -. "Private Worlds, Public Realities: Eavan Boland's Poetry 1967-1990." *Irish University Review* 23:1 (1993): 5-22.

Amir, Ayala. "*Sunt lacrimae rerum:* Ekphrasis and Empathy in Three Encounters between Text and a Picture." *Word & Image* 25.3 (2009): 232-242.

Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism.* Rev. ed. New York: Verso, 1991.

Attridge, Derek. *The Singularity of Literature.* New York: Routledge, 2004.

Auden, W. H. *Collected Poems*. Ed. Edward Mendelson. NY: Vintage, 1991.

Auge, Andrew J. "Fracture and Wound: Eavan Boland's Poetry of Nationality." *New Hibernia Review* 8.2 (2004): 121-141.

"Auspiciously Opened." *St. Paul and Minneapolis Pioneer Press.* October 12, 1887: 2.

Bachelard, Gaston. *The Poetics of Space: The Classic Look at How We Experience Intimate Places.* Trans. Maria Jolas. Boston: Beacon Press, 1994.

Backus, Margot Gayle. "'More Useful Washed and Dead': James Connolly, W.B. Yeats, and the Sexual Politics of 'Easter, 1916.'" *Interventions* 10.1 (2008): 67-85.

Barnard, Toby. *A Guide to Sources for the History of Material Culture in Ireland, 1500-2000.* Portland, OR: Four Courts Press, 2005.

Bedient, Calvin. *The Yeats Brothers and Modernism's Love of Motion.* Notre Dame, Indiana: UP of Notre Dame, 2009.

Belsey, Catherine. "Mobilizing Byzantium." *Critical Approaches to Anglo-Irish Literature.* Ed. Michael Allen and Angela Wilcox. Irish Literary Studies 29. Totowa, NJ: Barnes and Noble, 1989.

Benjamin, Walter. *Illuminations.* Ed. Hannah Arendt. Trans. Harry Zohn. New York: Schocken Books, 1968.

Bilu, Yoram. "The Inner Limits of Communitas: A Covert Dimension of Pilgrimage Experience." *Ethos* 16.3 (1988): 302-325.

Boland, Eavan. "The Art of Grief." *House.* Ed. Aileen MacKeogh. Dublin: Project Press, 1991. 10-17.

- - -. "A Question." *The Literary Review: An International Journal of Contemporary Writing* 44.1 (2000). n. pag. Web. 1 Sept. 2009.

- - -. "Can Poetry Console a Grieving Public?" *The Poetry Foundation.* 12 Sept. 2006. Web. 1 November 2009.

- - -. *Domestic Violence.* NY: Norton, 2007.

- - -. "Domestic Violence: An Argument in Ten Parts." *American Poetry Review* 36.2 (2007): 33-37.

- - -. "Eavan Boland: An Interview." By Margaret Mills Harper. *Five Points* 1.2 (1997): 87-105. Rpt. in *Eavan Boland: A Critical Companion* Ed. Jody Allen Randolph. New York: Norton, 2008. 123-124.

- - -. "Eavan Boland Live Discussion." *The Writing University.* University of Iowa website. 14 Oct. 2009. n. pag. Web. 1 April 2010.

- - -. "Eloquent Lines of Resistance: Anna Akhmatova." *Irish Times* 20 August 2005. Web. 12 July 2009.

- - -. *In a Time of Violence.* NY: Norton, 1995.

- - -. "Interview." *Caffeine Destiny: An Online Magazine*. 2001. Web. May 2009. <http://www.caffeinedestiny.com/boland.html>

- - -. "Interview with Eavan Boland." *Carcanet Press.* 20 July 2007. Web. 12 July 2009.

- - -. "An Interview with Eavan Boland." By Jody Allen Randolph. *Irish University Review* 23.1 (1993): 117-130.

- - -. *New Collected Poems*. Manchester: Carcanet, 2005.

- - -. *Object Lessons*: *The Life of the Woman and the Poet in Our Time.* New York: Norton, 1995.

- - -. *Outside History.* New York: Norton, 2001.

- - -. "Paper Ghosts." Review of *On Photography*, by Susan Sontag. *Hibernia* 17 Aug. 1978. 13.

- - -. "Precepts of Art in Yeats's Poetry." *Dublin Magazine* (1965): 8-13.

- - -. Review of *Yeats* by Harold Bloom. *The Critic* (1970): 80-82.

- - -. "The Serinette Principle: The Lyric in Contemporary Poetry." *PN Review* 19.4 (1993): 20-26.

- - -. "The Stoicisms of Love." Interview by Alice Quinn. *New Yorker Online.* 29 Oct. 2001. Web. 1 Nov. 2009.

- - -. "The Voice of Eavan Boland." Interview with Jan Garden Castro. *Tampa Review* 10 (1995): 33-38. Rpt. in *Eavan Boland: A Critical Companion.* Ed. Jody Allen Randolph. New York: Norton, 2008. 116-121.

- - -. "The Weasel's Tooth." *Irish Times* 7 June 1974. Rpt. in *Eavan Boland: A Critical Companion.* Ed. Jody Allen Randolph. New York: Norton, 2008. 87-90.

- - -. "This Canker." Review of *Illness as Metaphor,* by Susan Sontag. *Hibernia* 22 March 1979. 14.

- - -. "Unfinished Business: The Communal Art of Paula Meehan." *An Sionnach* 5.1 (2009): 17-24.

- - -. "Virtual Syntax, Actual Dreams." Annual Meridel Le Sueur Essay. *Water-stone Review* (2002): 159-172.

- - -. "Writing the Political Poem in Ireland." *Southern Review* 31.3 (1995): 485-498.

Böss, Michael. "Relating to the Past: Memory, Identity, and History." In Friberg, Nordin, and Pederson. 20-34.

Brown, Karen E. "Norah McGuinness, W.B. Yeats and the Illustrated Book." *Women's Contributions to Visual Culture, 1918-1939.* Ed. Karen E. Brown. Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2008.

Chaganti, Seeta. "Vestigial Signs: Inscription, Performance, and *The Dream of the Rood." PMLA* 125.1 (2010): 48-72.

Chapman, Wayne. "'The Municipal Gallery Re-visited' and It's Writing." *Yeats Annual* 10 (1993): 159-187.

Cheeke, Stephen. *Writing for Art: The Aesthetics of Ekphrasis.* New York: Manchester UP, 2008.

Colum, Padraic, ed. *Anthology of Irish Verse.* New York: Boni and Liveright, 1922.

Corcoran, Neil. *After Yeats and Joyce: Reading Modern Irish Literature.* Oxford UP, 1997.

- - -, ed. *The Chosen Ground : Essays on the Contemporary Poetry of Northern Ireland*. Chester Springs, PA: Dufour Editions, 1992.

- - -. *Poets of Modern Ireland: Text, Context, Intertext.* Cardiff: U of Wales P, 1999.

Critchley, Simon and Robert Bernasconi. *The Cambridge Companion to Levinas.* Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002.

Crowther, Paul. *Phenomenology of the Visual Arts (Even the Frame).* Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 2009.

Deane, Seamus. *Celtic Revivals: Essays in Modern Irish Literature 1880-1980.* Winston-Salem: Wake Forest UP, 1985.

Donoghue, Denis. "Teaching Literature: The Force of Form." *New Literary History* 30.1 (1999): 5-24.

- - -. *William Butler Yeats.* New York: Viking, 1971.

Doxey, Denise M. *Egyptian Non-Royal Epithets in the Middle Kingdom.* Boston: Brill, 1998.

Durcan, Paul. *Crazy about Women*. Dublin: The National Gallery of Ireland, 1991.

- - -. *Paul Durcan's Diary*. Dublin: New Island, 2003.

Eagleton, Terry. *Crazy John and the Bishop*. Notre Dame: U of Notre Dame P, 1998.

Ellmann, Richard. "Esoteric Yeatsism: The Flowering of a Dream." *Yeats: The Man and the Masks.* London: Faber and Faber, 1961.

Engelberg, Edward. *The Vast Design: Patterns in W.B. Yeats's Aesthetic.* Buffalo: U of Toronto P, 1974.

Fisher, Walter R. "Narration, Reason, and Community." *Memory, Identity, Community: the Idea of Narrative in the Human Sciences.* Ed. Lewis P. Hinchman and Sandra K. Hinchman. Albany: SUNY Press, 1997. 307-327.

Finneran, Richard J. Notes. *The Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats.* By W.B. Yeats. 2nd ed. New York: Scribner, 1996.

Flannery, James W. *Yeats and the Idea of a Theatre: the Early Abbey Theatre in Theory and Practice.* New Haven: Yale UP, 1976.

Fogarty, Anne. "'The Influence of Absences': Eavan Boland and the Silenced History of Irish Women's Poetry." Special issue of *Colby Quarterly* 35.4 (1999): 256-74.

Foster, Roy F. *Modern Ireland: 1600-1972.* London: Penguin Press, 1988.

- - -. *W.B. Yeats: A Life, Vol. 1: The Apprentice Mage*. New York: Oxford UP, 1997.

- - -. *W.B. Yeats: A Life, Vol. II: The Arch –Poet*. New York: Oxford UP, 2003.

Frampton, Kenneth. "Towards a Critical Regionalism: Six Points for an Architecture of Resistance." In *Postmodern Culture,* ed. Hal Foster. London: Pluto Press, 1985. 16-30.

Frayne, John P. and Madeleine Marchaterre. Introduction. "Review of *Sight and Song*." *Collected Works of W.B. Yeats, Vol. IX: Early Articles and Reviews.* Ed. John P. Frayne and Madeleine Marchaterre. New York: Scribner, 2004. 167.

Friberg, Hedda, Irene Gilsenan Nordin, and Lene Yding Pederson, eds. *Recovering Memory: Irish Representations of Past and Present.* Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2007.

Fry, Paul H. "The Lamplit Answer?: Gjertrud Schnackenberg's Antiekphrases." In *In the Frame: Women's Ekphrastic Poetry from Marianne Moore to Susan Wheeler.* Ed. Jane Hedley, Nick Halpern, and Willard Spiegelman. Newark: U of Delaware P, 2009. 55-71.

Fryer, David Ross. *The Intervention of the Other: Ethical Subjectivity in Levinas and Lacan.* New York: Other Press, 2004.

Garratt, Robert F. *Modern Irish Poetry: Tradition and Continuity from Yeats to Heaney.* Berkeley: U of California P, 1986.

Glowacka, Dorota, and Stephen Boos. *Between Ethics and Aesthetics: Crossing the Boundaries.* Albany: SUNY P, 2002.

Going, William T. "A Peacock Dinner: The Homage of Pound and Yeats to Wilfred Scawen Blunt." *Journal of Modern Literature* 1.3 (1971): 303-310.

Gonzalez, Alexander G, ed. *Contemporary Irish Women Poets: Some Male Perspectives.* Westport, CT: Greenwood P, 1999.

Gordon, D.J. *W.B. Yeats: Images of a Poet.* Manchester: Manchester UP, 1961.

Hagen, Patricia L., and Thomas W. Zelman. *Eavan Boland and the History of the Ordinary.* Bethesda, MD: Maunsel, 2004.

Harper, Margaret Mills. "First Principles and Last Things: Death and the Poetry of Eavan Boland and Audre Lorde." *Representing Ireland: Gender, Class, Nationality.* Ed. Susan Shaw Sailer. Gainesville, FL: UP of Florida, 1997. 181-193.

Haughton, Hugh. "The Purloined Title: Contemporary Irish Poems on Paintings." *Seeing and Saying: Self-Referentiality in British and American Literature.* Ed. D. Gohrbandt and B. von Lutz. Frankfurt: Lang, 1998. 89-116.

Heaney, Seamus. "Place and Displacement: Recent Poetry from Northern Ireland." *Finders Keepers: Selected Prose, 1971-2001.* New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2002. 122-145.

- - -. "The Redress of Poetry." *The Redress of Poetry.* New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 1995. 1-16.

- - -. "The Sense of the Past." *History Ireland* 4 (1993): 33-37.

Heffernan, James A.W. *Cultivating Picturacy: Visual Art and Verbal Interventions*. Waco: Baylor UP, 2006.

- - -. *Museum of Words: The Poetics of Ekphrasis from Homer to Ashbery.* Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1993.

Henn, T.R. *The Lonely Tower: Studies in the Poetry of W.B. Yeats.* London: Methuen, 1950.

Hollander, John, ed. *The Gazer's Spirit: Poems Speaking to Silent Works of Art*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1995.

- - -. "Words on Pictures: Ekphrasis." *Art and Antiques* (March 1984): 80-91.

Homem, Rui Carvalho. "Looking for Clues: McGuckian, Poems, and Portraits." Homem and Lambert. 187-200.

Homem, Rui Carvalho, and Maria de Fatima Lambert, eds. *Writing and Seeing: Essays on Word and Image*. New York: Rodopi, 2006.

Jeffares, Norman A. *A New Commentary on the Poems of W.B. Yeats.* Stanford: Stanford UP, 1984.

Johnston, Dillon. *Irish Poetry After Joyce.* 2nd ed. Syracuse: Syracuse UP, 1997.

Juschka, Darlene. "Whose Turn Is It to Cook? Communitas and Pilgrimage Questioned." *Mosaic: A Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature* 36. 4 (2003): 189-204.

Keats, John. *The Poems of John Keats.* Ed. Jack Stillinger. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1978.

Kendell, Richard. *Degas: Images of Women*. London: Tate Gallery Publications, 1989.

Kinmonth, Claudia. *Irish Country Furniture, 1700-1950.* New Haven: Yale UP, 1993.

Klein, Holger, Sabine Coelsch-Foisner, and Wolfgang Görtschacher, eds. *Poetry Now: Contemporary British and Irish Poetry in the Making.* Ed. Tubingen: Stauffenburg-Verlag, 1999.

Krieger, Murray. *Ekphrasis*: *The Illusion of the Natural Sign.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1992.

Larkin, Philip. *Collected Poems.* Ed. Anthony Thwaite. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1989.

Levinas, Emmanuel. *Alterity and Transcendence.* Trans. Michael B. Smith. New York: Columbia UP, 1999.

Levine, George Lewis. "Reclaiming the Aesthetic." Introduction. *Aesthetics and Ideology.* Ed. George Lewis Levine. New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1994. 1-28.

Levinson, Marjorie. "What is New Formalism?" *PMLA* 122.2 (2007): 558-569.

Lessing, G. E. *Laocoon: An Essay on the Limits of Painting and Poetry* [1766]. Trans. with introduction and notes by Edward Allen McCormick. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1984.

Llena, Carmen Zamorano. "'Words we can grow old and die in': Female Reconstructions of the Irish Literary Idiom in Eavan Boland's Later Poetry." *Women Aging Through Literature and Experience.* Ed. Brian J. Worsfold. Lleida, Spain: Universitat de Lleida, 2005. 127-138.

Loizeaux, Elizabeth Bergmann. *Twentieth Century Poets and the Visual Arts.* Boston: Cambridge UP, 2008.

- - -. "Ekphrasis and Textual Consciousness." *Word and Image: A Journal of Verbal/Visual Enquiry* 15.1 (1999): 76-96.

- - -. *Yeats and the Visual Arts*. New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1986.

Long, Declan. "Subjective Affinities: Notes on Recent Art from Ireland." *Alabama Chrome.* Ed. John Hitchinson and Sheena Malone. Dublin: The Douglas Hyde Gallery, 2006.

Longenbach, James. *The Resistance to Poetry.* Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2004.

- - -. *The Art of the Poetic Line*. Saint Paul, MN: Graywolf Press, 2008.

Longley, Edna. *The Living Stream: Literature and Revisionism in Ireland*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe Books, 1994.

Mahon, Derek. *Harbour Lights.* Dublin: Gallery Press, 2005.

McCarthy, Bernadette. "William Butler Yeats: The Poet in the School of Art." *Notes and Queries* 253.4 (2008): 518-521.

McDonald, Peter. *Serious Poetry: Form and Authority from Yeats to Hill.* Oxford: Oxford UP, 2002.

McLoone, Martin. "Inventions and Re-Imaginings: Some Thoughts on Identity and Broadcasting in Ireland." *Culture, Identity & Broadcasting in Ireland: Local Issues, Global Perspectives.* Ed. Martin McLoone. Belfast: Institute of Irish Studies, 1991. 2-30.

MacLeod, Catriona, Veronique Plesch, and Charlotte Schoell-Glass, eds. *Elective Affinities: Testing Word and Image Relationships.* New York: Rodopi, 2009.

MacPhee, Graham. "From Reproduction to Reproducibility: Creativity and Technics in Benjamin and Arendt." *Angelaki: Journal of Theoretical Humanities* 11.1 (2006): 65-74.

Maia, Gil. "When what you see is what you read." Homem and Lambert. 90-101.

Mallot, J. Edward. "Mebh McGuckian's Poetic Tectonics." *Éire-Ireland* 40.3 & 4 (2005): 241-255.

Malpas, Simon. "Touching Art: Aesthetics, Fragmentation, and Community." In *The New Aestheticism*. Ed. John J. Joughin and Simon Malpas. New York: Manchester UP, 2003. 83-98.

Malton, James. *A Picturesque and Descriptive View of the City of Dublin*. [1799] Intro. by The Knight of Glin. Dublin: Dolmen Press, 1978.

- - -. *Georgian Dublin: Twenty-Five Aquatint Views in Colour.* Intro. and notes by Maurice Craig. Dublin: Dolmen Press, 1984.

- - -. *The young painter's maulstick; being a practical treatise on perspective; containing rules and principles for delineation on planes, ... Founded on the clear mechanical process of Vignola and Sirigatti; united with the theoretic principles of the celebrated Dr. Brook Taylor.* London: Carpenter and Co., 1800.

Marcus, Philip L. *Yeats and Artistic Power*. Syracuse: Syracuse UP, 2001.

Matthews, Steven. *Yeats as Precursor: Readings in Irish, British, and American Poetry*. New York: St. Martin's, 2000.

Melchiori, Giorgio. *The Whole Mystery of Art: Pattern into Poetry in the Work of W.B. Yeats.* Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1960.

Miller, J. Hillis. "What Do Stories about Pictures Want?" *Critical Inquiry* 34 suppl. (Winter 2008): s59-s97.

Mitchell, W.J.T. "The Commitment to Form; or, Still Crazy after All These Years." *PMLA* 118 (2003): 321-25.

- - -. *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation.* Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1994.

- - -. *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology.* Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1986.

- - -. "Representation." *Critical Terms for Literary Study.* Ed. Frank Lentricchia and Thomas McLaughlin. 2nd Ed. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1995. *Credo Reference.* Web. 19 March 2009.

Montalant, Delphine. "Berthe Morisot: Through the Eyes of a Mother." In *Berthe Morisot, 1841-1895 : Catalogue Raisonné de l'Ouvre Peint.* Ed. Alain Clairet, Delphine Montalant, Yves Rouart. Montolivet, France: CERA-nrs, 1997. 16-17.

Müller, Sandra. *Through the Mythographer's Eye: Myth and Legend in the Work of Seamus Heaney and Eavan Boland.* Tübingen: Franke, 2007.

Murphy, Maureen. "Back to the Municipal Gallery: W.B. Yeats and Modern Ireland." *Conflicting Identities: Essays on Modern Irish Literature.* Ed. Robbie B.H. Goh. Singapore: UniPress, 1997. 121-143.

Murphy, William. *Prodigal Father: The Life of John Butler Yeats (1839-1922).* Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1978.

Novak, Barbara. "William Harnett: Every Object Rightly Seen." *American Painting of the Nineteenth Century: Realism, Idealism, and the American Experience.* New York: Oxford UP, 2007. 185-196.

O'Donnell, William H. "The Art of Yeats's 'Lapis Lazuli.'" *The Massachusetts Review* 23.2 (1982): 353-367.

Oppenheim, Lois. *The Painted Word: Samuel Beckett's Dialogue with Art.* Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 2000.

O'Toole, Fintan. *The Lie of the Land: Irish Identities.* London: Verso, 1997.

Paul, Catherine E. "Visits and Revisits: W.B. Yeats at the Municipal Gallery, Dublin." *Yeats: An Annual of Critical and Textual Studies* 16 (1998): 58-83.

Peirce, Charles Sanders. *On Signs*. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1991.

Pethica, James. "Patronage and Creative Exchange: Yeats, Lady Gregory and the Economy of Indebtedness." In *Yeats and Women.* Ed. Deirdre Toomey. London: Macmillan, 1997. 168-204.

Pickering, Edward D. "The Artist's Tragic Flight: Yeats's Portrayal of Major Robert Gregory." *Journal of Modern Literature* 32.2 (Winter 2009): 80-99.

Pursglove, Glyn. "'The Story Talks Louder than the Paint': From Canvas to Page in Some Contemporary Poems." Klein, Coelsch-Foisner, and Gortschacher 113-122.

Ramazani, Jahan. *Poetry of Mourning: The Modern Elegy from Hardy to Heaney*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1994.

- - -. *Yeats and the Poetry of Death: Elegy, Self-Elegy, and the Sublime.* New Haven: Yale UP, 1990.

Rehder, Robert. "Metaphor is the Name of the Game." Klein, Coelsch-Foisner, and Gortschacher 123-137.

Robinson, Roxana. "Common Objects of Everyday Life." *William Harnett.* Ed. Doreen Bolger, Marc Simpson, and John Wilmerding. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1992. 161-167.

Rolston, Bill. "Visions or nightmares? Murals and imagining the future in Northern Ireland." *Representing the Troubles: Texts and Images, 1970-2000.* Ed. Brian Cliff and Éibhear Walshe. Dublin: Four Courts, 2004. 117-128.

Ross, Daniel W. "Building a House of His Own: Yeats, Domesticity, and 'Meditations in Time of Civil War.'" *ANQ* 22.1 (2009): 35-42.

Russell, Richard Rankin. "The Intersection of Object and History in Eavan Boland's 'Lava Cameo.'" *The Explicator* 60.2 (2002): 114-117.

- - -. "Poems without Frontiers: Poetic Reception and Political Possibility in the Work of Seamus Heaney." In *Seamus Heaney: Poet, Critic, Translator*. Ed. Jason David Hall and Bland Crowder. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007. 26-41.

- - -. "W.B. Yeats and Eavan Boland: Postcolonial Poets?" In *W.B. Yeats and Poscolonialism.* Ed. Deborah Fleming. West Cornwall, CT: Locust Hill, 2001. 101-132.

Sacks, Peter. *The English Elegy: Studeis in the Genre from Spenser to Yeats.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1985.

Sagaser, Elizabeth Harris. "Flirting with Eternity: Teaching Form and Meter in a Renaissance Poetry Course." *Renaissance Literature and Its Formal Engagements.* Ed. Mark David Rasmussen. New York: Palgrave, 2002. 185-206.

Sarbanes, Janet. "Musicking and Communitas: The Aesthetic Mode of Sociality in Rebetika Subculture." *Popular Music and Society* 29.1 (2006): 17-35.

Scarry, Elaine. *On Beauty and Being Just.* Princeton: Princeton UP, 1999.

Schuchard, Ronald. *The Last Minstrel: Yeats and the Revival of the Bardic Arts.* Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008.

Sekine, Masaru, and Christopher Murray. *Yeats and the Noh: A Comparative Study.* Savage, MD: Barnes and Noble, 1990.

Sheriff, John K. *The Fate of Meaning: Charles Peirce, Structuralism, and Literature.* Princeton: Princeton UP, 1989.

Showalter, Elaine. "Common Threads." *Everyday Use.* Ed. Alice Walker and Barbara Christian. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 1994. 195-224.

Simpson, Marc. "William Harnett and Music." *William M. Harnett*. Ed. Doreen Bolger, Marc Simpson, and John Wilmerding. New York: H.N. Abrams, 1992. 295-303.

Soderholm, James. *Beauty and the Critic: Aesthetics in the Age of Cultural Studies.* Tuscaloosa: U of Alabama P, 1997.

Sontag, Susan. "The Aesthetics of Silence." *Styles of Radical Will.* New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1969. 3-34.

- - -. "Against Interpretation." *Against Interpretation and Other Essays.* New York: Dell, 1966.

- - -. *Illness as Metaphor*. New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 1978.

- - -. *Regarding the Pain of Others.* New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2003.

Spargo, R. Clifton. *The Ethics of Mourning: Grief and Responsibility in Elegiac Literature.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2004.

Thompson, Stephen E. "Textual Sources, Old Kingdom." *Encyclopedia of the Archaeology of Ancient Egypt.* Ed. Kathryn A. Bard and Steven Blake Schubert. New York: Routledge, 1991.

Thurston, Michael. "'A Deliberate Collection of Cross Purposes': Eavan Boland's Poetic Sequences." Special issue of *Colby Quarterly* 35.4 (1999): 229-51.

Turner, Victor. *Dramas, Fields and Metaphors; Symbolic Action in Human Society.* Cornell paperbacks. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1974.

- - -. *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play.* New York: Performing Arts Journal Pub, 1982.

- - -. *The Ritual Process; Structure and Anti-Structure.* London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969.

Turner, Victor, and Edith L.B. Turner. *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture.* New York: Columbia UP, 1978.

Vendler, Helen. *Our Secret Discipline: Yeats and Lyric Form.* Cambridge, MA: Belknap of Harvard UP, 2007.

Vance, Norman. *Irish Literature: A Social History: Tradition, Identity and Difference.* 2nd ed. Portland, OR: Four Courts, 1999.

Villar, Pilar. "'The Text of It': A Conversation with Eavan Boland." *New Hibernia Review* 10.2 (2006): 52-67.

Villar-Argáiz, Pilar. *The Poetry of Eavan Boland*: *A Post-Colonial Reading.* Bethseda, MD: Academia Press, 2007.

- - -. "The Subaltern in Eavan Boland's Poetry." *New Voices in Irish Literary Criticism: Ireland in Theory.* Ed. Cathy McGlynn and Paula Murphy. New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 2007. 37-54.

Wagner, Peter, ed. *Icons-Texts-Iconotexts.* Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1996.

Wills, Clair. *Improprieties: Politics and Sexuality in Northern Irish Poetry.* Oxford: Oxford UP, 1993.

Wolfson, Susan J. "Reading for Form." *Modern Language Quarterly* 61.1 (2000): 1-16.

Yeats, W.B. *Autobiographies.* New York: MacMillan, 1955.

- - -. *The Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats.* Ed. Richard J. Finneran. Rev. 2nd ed. New York: Scribner, 1996.

- - -. "Discoveries." *Essays and Introductions.* New York: MacMillan, 1961. 261-297.

- - -. "Ireland and the Arts." *Essays and Introductions.* New York: MacMillan, 1961. 203-210.

- - -. *Literatim Transcription of the Manuscripts of William Butler Yeats's* The Speckled Bird. Ed. William H. O'Donnell. Delmar, NY: Scholars' Facsimiles and Reprints, 1976.

- - -. "The Irish Dramatic Movement." Nobel Lecture. *Nobelprize.org*. 15 Dec. 1923. Web. 1 March 2010.

- - -. "Rev. of *Sight and Song* by Michael Field."*The Collected Works of W.B. Yeats, Vol. IX: Early Articles and Reviews.* Ed. John P. Frayne and Madeleine Marchaterre. New York: Scribner, 2004. 167-170.

- - -. *Uncollected Prose by W.B. Yeats.* Vol. 2. Ed. John P. Frayne and Colton Johnson. New York: Columbia UP, 1976.

- - -. *Yeats: The Poems*. Ed. and with notes by Daniel Albright. London: Everyman, 1996.

- - -. *Yeats's Poetry, Drama, and Prose.* Ed. James Pethica. New York: Norton, 2000.

Wilson, A.N. *The Victorians.* London: Hutchinson, 2002.

Wyman, Sarah. "How Paul Klee and Frank O'Hara Used Painted Image and Printed Word to Signify Worlds in Motion." *Word and Image* 26.1 (2010): 40-51.

Ziolkowski, Theodore. "William Butler Yeats: The Tower of Visions." *The View from the Tower: Origins of an Antimodernist Image.* Princeton: Princeton UP, 1998.