

(RE)POSSESSING HISTORICAL PERCEPTION THROUGH POETIC VOICE: A
PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE POETRY OF
EAVAN BOLAND

A THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTERS OF ARTS DEGREE
IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF THE
TEXAS WOMAN'S UNIVERSITY

ENGLISH, SPEECH, AND FOREIGN LANGUAGES
COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

BY

TAWNY O. LEBOUF, B.F.A.

DENTON, TEXAS

DECEMBER 2011

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The writing of this thesis has been a scholarly journey of a lifetime. I had many moments of aid and assistance. I would like to first thank my committee. Thank you Dr. Russell Greer for constantly pushing me in my own direction. Your encouraging words will remain with me along my paths to finding the “smoking guns.” Another great thank you to Dr. Genevieve West for your patience, encouragement, and for your green pen, which is always in pursuit of clarity. Thank you always. I would also like to thank Dr. Hugh Burns who was complicit in the rooting of the beginning ideas of this thesis, and to Dr. Russell Greer for introducing me to Eavan Boland, a gift I will always cherish.

The writing of this thesis has been a sometimes tumultuous climb, and I would not have made it without encouraging words from my fellow students and friends, Fawn Wheat, Mary Wood, Dr. Katt Blackwell-Starnes, Rachael Geary, Angela Mack, Michan Chowritmootoo, Courtney Patrick and Nick Clowers. Thank you for all of the support and hugs, each moment lives within the words of this work. Lastly, but absolutely not in the least, I would like to thank my husband and my son. Patience and love do not define what you offered during this journey. Brian, thank you for the constant quiet encouragement. Micah, thank you for being such a loving and caring presence in my world.

ABSTRACT

TAWNY O. LEBOUF

(RE)POSSESSING HISTORICAL PERCEPTION THROUGH POETIC VOICE: A
PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE POETRY OF
EAVAN BOLAND

DECEMBER 2011

Repossession, reconstruction, re-visioning, renaming -- all are words used to describe the process through which female writers have been working to reclaim a history that has been previously silent. This work of reclamation has spanned over many decades. Many female writers have been a part of this revisionist tradition. The rewriting of female roles within myth gives new voice and depth, and offers repossession. The Irish poet Eavan Boland is one of these writers whose works create new skin over old scars.

By including within our literary present a de-construction of the traditional two-dimensional image of Woman in myth, and by giving voice to the previously absent realities, the re-visionist writer affects her reader in a profound manner. Because myths are culturally constructed, readers experience their de-construction as a loss. There is a disequilibrium created within this act. The fracturing of the old comfortable myths and then Boland's re-visioning work to not only change the perceptions of one reader, but on a larger scale, by directly confronting myth, Boland is working to change the consciousness of our culture.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Acknowledgments.....	iii
Abstract.....	iv
Chapter	
I. INTRODUCTION	1
II. SECTION I – THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS	8
The Phenomenological Impact of Literature	8
The Power of Language.....	15
Speaking vs. Listening.....	18
The Relationship between Reader and Writer.....	20
Literature’s Impact - Poetry - Content, Form, and Meaning	23
Literature’s Role in Becoming.....	26
Becoming	28
III. SECTION II – EXAMINATION OF LITERATURE	44
Peeling Back the Superficial.....	57
Pronoun Usage	60
Poetic Rhythm	64
Metaphorical Allusions	70
Creating a Passable New Skin.....	75
Metaphorical and Literary Allusions.....	78
Pronoun Usage	83
Poetic Rhythm	86
The Woman in the Doorway.....	93
Metaphorical and Literary Allusions.....	95
Pronoun Usage	104
Rhythm and Repetition	107
IV. CONCLUSION	112
WORKS CITED.....	116

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

we are defined
by what we forget,
by what we never will be –
star-gazers,
fire-eaters.
It's our alibi
for all time:
as far as history goes
we were never
on the scene of the crime.
~ from "It's a Woman's World"

Repossession, reconstruction, re-visioning, renaming -- all are words used to describe the process through which female writers have been working to reclaim a history that has been previously silent. This work of reclamation has spanned over many decades. Many female writers have been a part of this revisionist tradition. The rewriting of female roles within myth gives new voice and depth, and offers repossession. Poets such as Adrienne Rich, Margaret Atwood, Sylvia Plath, to name a few, have set their own pens to the task.

Another powerful voice meets this task with an emphasis toward a desire to create a “poet’s inheritance.” This voice belongs to Eavan Boland.

Boland pulls from a rich Irish heritage of male poets working in the currency of myth. She began her poet’s journey trying to mold herself into that heritage and began to feel an alienation created by the absence of a feminine-voiced inheritance. Within her essay “A Kind of Scar: The Woman Poet in a National Tradition,” she writes that what was missing, “what [she] regretted was the absence of an expressed poetic life which would have dignified and revealed” her own (80). In an effort to “locate [herself] within the Irish poetic tradition,” Boland describes the split that occurred for her in a very personal manner. In her search for her own poet’s identity within that male dominated tradition, she found “corruption”:

The more I thought about it, the more uneasy I became. The wrath and grief of Irish history seemed to me — as it did to many — one of our true possessions. Women were part of that wrath, had endured that grief. It seemed to me a species of human insult that at the end of all, in certain Irish poems, they should become elements of style rather than aspects of truth. (81)

These revelations contribute not just to an Irish inheritance, but also to a female poetic voice that is universal in its reach. This universal reach creates for the woman poet an ethical obligation to “de- and re- construct those constructs that shape literary tradition, bearing witness to the truths of experience suppressed, simplified, falsified by the ‘official’ record” (Hagen & Zelman 443).

The purpose of this work is to define the experience of the reader and the effect Boland's re-visioning of myth, directly his-story¹, has upon the reader. By including within our literary present a de-construction of the traditional two-dimensional image of Woman in myth, and by giving voice to the previously absent realities, the re-visionist writer affects her reader in a profound manner. Because myths are culturally constructed, readers experience their de-construction as a loss. There is a disequilibrium created within this act, as if the rug is being pulled from beneath the reader's feet. The disequilibrium creates a fracturing of the old comfortable myths. This act of fracturing and then Boland's re-visioning work to not only change the perceptions of one reader, but on a larger scale, by directly confronting myth, Boland is working to change the consciousness of our culture.

Eavan Boland is an Irish female poet who has created not only a large and rich body of poetic works, but she has also created works of prose describing her journey to develop her themes and subjects. Beyond her poetry and prose works, Boland has created a body of critical essays on other poets of note as well – some female and some male, some Irish and some not. In her prose, Boland uses the word *subversion* often when describing her poetic purpose and practice. She seeks not only to re-write or re-vise the myths, which previously left Woman as the two-dimensional figures of victory, justice, or the mother of nation, but to subvert the traditional into a re-imagined history that more closely reflects truth.

¹ According to the Boland scholars, Patricia Hagen and Thomas Zelman, "In its simplest terms, the resulting division is the distance between male and female — the split, in Boland's terms, between 'hearth and history,' *her hearth and his story*" (445).

Boland seeks this truth through many direct altercations with the history that we have experienced and, as cultures, have used to contribute to our continuous cycles of *becoming*.² In her collection *In Her Own Image* (1980), Boland faces this struggle with a direct interrogation of masculine representations of Woman within the opening poem, “Tirade for the Mimic Muse.” Within this opening poem, Boland forces the myth of the muse into the open and displays her crimes for all to see. She continues the battle of subversion by then exploring the relationship between female identity and victimization in poems such as “Anorexic,” “Masectomy,” and “Menses” (Randolph 52). In another of her collections, *The Journey* (1987), Boland continues the rebellion by leading her poet narrator on a journey to the banks of the river Styx; however unlike in Virgil’s *Aeneid*, which provides the Sibyl Cumaea as guide to Aeneas, the narrator of this epic is the poet Sappho. In *Outside History* (1990), Boland provides a blueprint, of sorts, for her method of subversion by giving us the following lines in “We Are Always Too Late”: “Memory/ is in two parts./ First, the re-visiting/ . . . Then/ the re-enactment” (lines 1-3, 12-13). Boland spends much time within her poetry re-visiting and re-enacting, re-visioning the history that was written, sung, remembered so that her reader will then reconsider those memories that were lost.

She also spends some time re-establishing her overall purpose and putting focus on the creation of a poetic inheritance which now includes the feminine voice — what she found missing as a young and developing poet. Within the collection *Against Love Poetry* (2001), Boland writes “but this is different./ This time, when she looks up, I will be there”

² *Becoming* refers to the idea that we are in a constant process of change; through learning we change our perceptions of the world around us. This idea is explored in greater detail in Section I.

("Is It Still the Same" 13-14). As this collection is one of the latest additions to her *oeuvre*, it seems apparent that in retrospect, Boland feels that she has succeeded in creating a path for the young poet; I will not disagree here. In addition to the language and meaning that she creates within the lines of her poetry, Boland's prose guides her reader through her collections as Sappho guides her poet in "The Journey," creating a link and an understanding to her purpose and a look into her poetic aesthetic, so that the literature that is experienced becomes a relevant piece of the collective and not just the quick glimpse of a passer-by. In one of those guiding essays, "A Kind of Scar: The Woman Poet in a National Tradition," Boland writes,

[O]ver a relatively short time — certainly no more than a generation or so — women have moved from being the subjects and objects of Irish poems to being the authors of them. It is a momentous transit. It is also a disruptive one. It raises questions of identity, issues of poetic motive and ethical direction which can seem almost impossibly complex. What is more, such a transit — like the slow course of a star or the shifts in a constellation — is almost invisible to the naked eye. Critics may well miss it or map it inaccurately. Yet such a transit inevitably changes our idea of measurement, of distance, of the past as well as the future. [. . .] And, since poetry is never local for long, that in turn widens out into further implications. (75)

In the scheme of feminist study, it is important to note Boland's foundations as an Irish poet, and her post-colonial ties in that capacity. However, in this work, I am broadening that scope. In this age of globalization, the study and understanding of the

culture in which a work is produced is important; however, when discussing, as I strive to do, the long-term effects of literature that work to return to the scenes of the crime and to offer release for the victims, the discussion of the historical impact and the release that these works offer is no longer regional, but global. As women writers around the world re-vise the images and myths that we, as readers, experience as part of our own *becoming*, our established ideas of gender begin to change.

Within her poet's memoir, *Object Lessons: The Life of the Woman and the Poet in our Time*, Boland quotes Matthew Arnold: "Poetry attaches its emotion to idea; the idea is the fact" (83). She also looks to Adrienne Rich often when describing her own poet's *becoming*. One of the lines that she borrows from Rich in order to aid in her description of her evolution both as a poet, that figure which painstakingly chooses every syllable and punctuation mark, and within her thematic and ethical decisions is "Until we can understand the assumptions in which we are drenched, we cannot know ourselves" (249). Along with Arnold and Rich, among others, Boland also points to the historian Sir Herbert Butterfield's expression that "History is not the study of origins; rather it is the analysis of all the meditations by which the past has turned into our present" (246), and to T.S. Eliot's famous line: "No poet, no artist of any kind has his complete meaning alone" (242). For the woman poet, these ideas of history and origins can create a ripple effect. Most of the literature that Boland looked to for instruction left her with more questions than answers, a void. Boland describes her process in her own *becoming* as a search for the right questions that needed asking. Her answers to these questions not only become her legacy for those who follow, but her

obligation as poet and woman “to tell as much as she knows of the ghosts within her, for they make up, in essence, her story as well” (249).

Moving forward from this obligation, in relation to her mission to provide that which was hollow and missing for her – a poet’s inheritance, “an expressed poetic life which would have dignified and revealed” her own, I find myself wondering and hoping to dignify how Boland provides this to her reader. My goal in this study is to use the lens of phenomenology in order to reveal the experience of the reader. This phenomenological lens will reveal how her use of poetic gestures, her manipulation of time, and her use of lateral or oblique language affect her reader. This revelation, in turn, provides a description of how we, as readers, choose to allow Boland’s battles with the silent past to become part of ourselves and in turn part of our own *becoming*. The effect changes the manner in which we, as readers, experience our world going forward – with newly expressed understandings and ideas about our own histories. Within this work, I will not only seek to define literature’s impact upon this change, but more specifically poetry’s.

At the moment that I finish a poem, I feel as though I understand something outside of myself. We use different modes of literary criticism and their language-constructed tools to break down the poem’s inner workings to understand that meaning. I would like to understand the gravity of the feeling. If, as feminists suggest, by repossession, the silences of the past are being filled through these poems that revise myth and reclaim history with a more comprehensive image of Woman – who we were, who we are, and where we go from here – then it is through the lens of the philosophy of experience and perception that the lingering and lasting effects of a poem can and should be studied.

CHAPTER II

SECTION I – THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

The Phenomenological Impact of Literature

Art and literature appear as the play in us of an art and speech whose origins contain everything in advance. ~Maurice Merleau-Ponty

It is not until we truly think, when our eyes are open to the silences, that we can then begin to expel, create, and define our own humanity. Only then do we escape becoming the *Other* through passive subjugation. Eavan Boland's poetry works to undo this conditioning through a re-visioning of the representation of woman within the historical evolution of myth. This evolution of myth takes place when the histories are retraced and those stories of the silences are told; then the poet adds new memory and new experience to the collective consciousness. Through the connection of reader and writer, the perceived experience of *Otherness* is released through the reconstruction of a falsely two-dimensional image of Woman, an image that has historically been oversimplified. Boland seeks to create a more three-dimensional image of woman within her poetry. These statements are steeped in phenomenological philosophical questions, which leads me to use the theory of phenomenology to explore the experience of reading Boland's poetry. First, it is important

to here trace the manner in which the phenomenologists create the foundational theories of the interaction that takes place between author and reader, and how the reader experiences this re-visioning of myth.

Based on the philosophical writings of Edmund Husserl, phenomenology is defined as the study of phenomena, that is, “the study of human experience and the way things present themselves to us in and through that experience” (O’Brien 2). In order to understand the study of human behaviors and the constructs of knowledge-building as it pertains to both the feminist sphere and to the experience of the reader, the writings of Simone de Beauvoir, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Georges Poulet will be used as theoretical foundations for this defining.

Within *Toward A Phenomenology of Sexual Difference: Husserl, Merleau-Ponty, Beauvoir*, Sara Heinämaa explains Husserl’s basic foundational claims for his philosophical inquiry and methodologies. She writes that Husserl did not see philosophical inquiry as a tool that should be used to establish universal truths or to deduce absolutes. Phenomenology instead “aims at a presuppositionless description of the essential features of experience.

. . . By this he means that philosophy does not study experiences as facts (actual or possible), but aims at finding the essential structures of all experience” (Heinämaa 11).

Phenomenology is not designed to have an end-game or a pinpoint goal; it is instead a way of learning to have the capability to distance ourselves from our perceptions, which occur, in some cases, before thought, and to look at the causalities that shape our perceptions. Unlike

a school of thought, such as psychoanalysis, which seeks to find the internal or the hidden in the human mind,

Husserl explains again and again that phenomenology . . . is about the ways in which we relate to the world and its beings. The phenomenologist takes a ‘step back’ from the world, he suspends his belief in the presence of the world and the objects that it includes, humans included. The aim, however, is not to examine oneself, but to become aware of one’s involvement in the presence of the world and in the constitution of the meaning of ‘reality.’ (Heinämaa 13)

Husserl was a German philosopher who lived in the years 1859 through 1938. His works on phenomenology were not published until 1950. However, Maurice Merleau-Ponty studied Husserl’s essays in manuscript form before their publication. Within his second work, *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945), Merleau-Ponty describes the stance of phenomenology as an act of reflection:

Reflection does not withdraw from the world towards the unity of consciousness as the world’s basis; it steps back to watch the forms of transcendence fly up like sparks from a fire; it slackens the intentional threads which attach us to the world and thus brings them to our notice; it alone is consciousness of the world because it reveals that world as strange and paradoxical. (xv)

Merleau-Ponty describes those threads that “attach us to the world” as our perceptions of our world and of the others around and among us. He defines perception as that which “proceeds ahead of the criteria of thought and tells me what these appearances mean” (*Prose* 41). Perception, therefore, is that understanding that is pre-thetic, our knee jerk reactions to

stimuli around us. These stimuli include our perceptions of objects, animals, and other people – their gestures, movements, speech, language, etc. Within *The Prose of the World*, one of his works left unfinished, Merleau-Ponty uses a metaphor to explain perception as he studies it. This metaphor uses a visual trick often taught to children. Place a coin in between your first finger and your thumb and hold it at an arm's length towards the moon. After closing one eye and looking directly at the coin through the open eye, the coin appears to cover the moon. Now, using our logic, we know that the moon is larger than the coin; however, our perception, our immediate response, is one of awe – this coin is the same size as the moon. When we look upon the scene with both eyes, we see only a physical situation at play – our arm, the coin, and the moon in the distance. In this configuration the visual trick is not at play. But, when you look directly at the coin and close one eye, you channel your perspective, and gain the perception of the illogical comparison of the 'tiny' and the 'big' being of the same dimension. Upon opening the other eye, the illusion, again, is broken (*Prose* 52). It is in this manner that we can study our perspective, and in turn our perceptions.

In 1948, Merleau-Ponty was commissioned by French national radio to offer seven lectures on French culture. These lectures have been gathered and translated into the volume *The World of Perception*. Within these speeches, Merleau-Ponty describes the role of art, politics, and literature in the creation of and in the development of culture. Within the "Introduction" to these lectures, Thomas Baldwin explains Merleau-Ponty's view of the role of our senses in our experiences, which create our perception: "as we get on with our life we

do not notice the role of the senses in organising experience and ‘constituting’ the physical world; it is precisely their business to make this role invisible to us” (12). Thus, our perspectives and perceptions are not visible to us as long as we do not linger upon them. It is in the lingering that we can then begin to re-organize our ways of thinking and perceiving. This is the work of art – both visual and written – and philosophy: “to rediscover and articulate ordinary experience, and this is what, for Merleau-Ponty, modern art and phenomenological philosophy make possible” (Baldwin 12).

It is our perceptions of our world that drive us to finding meaning in our lives. Myth plays a large part in those perceptions. According to the mythologist Joseph Campbell, “myth is the secret opening through which the inexhaustible energies of the cosmos pour into the human cultural manifestation” (3). We use our deep-seated connections to these culturally created “openings” to connect us to the phenomena of our world; one might suggest that myth is as much a part of the invisible threads, which Merleau-Ponty speaks of, as are our senses. For Merleau-Ponty the “natural attitude of common sense leads us to overlook the phenomenon of the perceived world” (Baldwin 12). Although Merleau-Ponty does not directly speak of common sense as a foundation, I would like to here link these ideas in order to further define those invisible threads, which hold us to and create meaning for our perceptions. When he writes of *ideas* as “part of our makeup” (*Prose* 142), Merleau-Ponty is pointing to this foundational, cultural creation, which he labels the *world-thesis*. We perceive our world using our *world-thesis* as foundational knowledge, “in the same way that my perception of the other is at first sight perception of the gestures and behavior belonging

to the human species”(Prose 142). This *world-thesis* is founded on our cultural creations – those perspectives and ideas which we learn through cultural history, myth, and religious teachings, or as Merleau-Ponty suggests a “certain way of patterning the world,”

in the case of each civilization, of finding the *Idea* in the Hegelian sense, that is, not a law of the physico-mathematical type, discoverable by objective thought, but that formula which sums up some unique manner of behavior towards others, towards Nature, time and death. (*Perception* xviii, *italics are mine*).

My cultural perspective will differ from the cultural perspective of another who grows up on the other side of the world, another who will have grown up learning and creating different culturally-created perspectives on history, myth, and religions. My *world-thesis* will differ from this other’s *world-thesis*. My *world-thesis* is that which I, in a manner of speaking, take for granted and do not necessarily step back and re-evaluate until, as Merleau-Ponty points out, those strings that attach me to it are slackened. The world of perception remains an invisible idea to us “[a]s long as we view things through the spectacles of our practical and social needs . . . The job of phenomenology is to take these spectacles from us in order to let us look at things directly” (Matthews 149). Therefore, in order to have the ability to re-evaluate my culturally-created *world-thesis*, I must first challenge those strands which create my perceptions of the world around myself. Challenging these strands is the work of poetry and art. Boland suggests that not only is it the work of the poet it is the “responsibility” of the poet “to formalize the truth”(Lessons xiv-xv).

In some cultures and situations, this *world-thesis* may be described as a manner of *truth*. But, according to Daphna Erdinast-Vulcan in her article “That Which ‘Has No Name in Philosophy’: Merleau-Ponty and the Language of Literature,” Merleau-Ponty “dispenses with traditional philosophical binaries of ‘inside’ and ‘outside,’ dismissed metaphors like ‘screen’ or ‘mask’ which uphold the division of content and form, and refuses to entertain the concept of ideality, or a-priori meaning.” Instead of being an a-priori event or, as mentioned before, a foundational knowledge, the “foundation of truth is not outside of time; it is in the opening of each moment of knowledge to those who will resume it and change its sense”(Prose 144). Because *truth* is therefore an *idea* that can be affected by new knowledge, when the strands that attach me to my *world-thesis* are slackened, it is not a hard and fast *truth*, which is truly threatened by the new knowledge, but only my perspective, “[t]hus the highest point of truth is still only perspective” (Prose 132). And as Beauvoir suggests: “In order for the past to be mine, I must make it mine again each instant by taking it toward my future” (*Pyrrhus and Cineas* 93-4). Therefore, I must choose to recover and revive the *truths*, as I perceive them, in each moment. This is not a decision that is made for me by my cultural constructions or my religious beliefs; this decision of perception is rather a decision made in each moment:

We say that the true has always been true, but that is a confused way of saying that all preceding expressions revive and receive their place in the expression of the present, which makes it possible, if one wishes, to read the present in them after the fact but, more justly, to recover them in the present expression. (Prose 144)

Again, I return here to Merleau-Ponty's expression of the threads that attach me to my world. When those threads become slackened, I can then begin to understand my perceptions and learn to affect them. I can then realize that decisions on what perspectives I choose to change do lie within my own grasp. It is on this level that Merleau-Ponty, Poulet, and Beauvoir suggest that literature works to affect the reader's sense of his world – by creating disequilibrium within the reader's *world-thesis*, or his/her *ideas* associated with *truth*. The writer creates this disequilibrium within the reader through the language of literature. This idea has many facets involved in its development, and within the development of these ideas here, I will move from Merleau-Ponty to Poulet as I delve into the relationship that is created within the act of reading. First, we should begin with Merleau-Ponty's description of speech.

The Power of Language

Merleau-Ponty describes language as having two distinct constructs, “We may say there are two languages” (*Prose* 10). The first is “language after the fact, or language as an institution, which effaces itself in order to yield the meaning which it conveys” (*Prose* 10). This form of language is that which we must pull apart in order to understand its true meaning, such as legal and governmental language used in the writing of laws and codes. The second is language “which creates itself in its expressive acts, which sweeps me on from the signs toward meaning — sedimented language and speech” (*Prose* 10). This second form of language Merleau-Ponty refers to as *speech*:

Speech is peculiarly my own, *my* productivity, and yet speech is so only to make meaning out of my productivity and to communicate that meaning. The other who listens and understands joins with me in what is the most singular in me. (*Prose* 141)

Speech, in this manner, is my tool through which I not only express myself and my meanings, but a tool through which the other, the listener, meets me within my meaning, and then chooses to either accept or reject my message. In the language of literature this interaction between self and other is that of the author and reader.

According to Merleau-Ponty, “The perfection of language lies in its capacity to pass unnoticed” (*Prose* 10). In this he suggests that the perfection of language lies within its ability to become an invisible bridge between those thoughts and meanings which occur in the interaction between self and other. In phenomenological interpretations of speech, the signs and the signified meanings are less important. It is the invisible strings that lead us from the words or phrases of words to the meaning: “When someone — an author or a friend — succeeds in expressing himself, the signs are immediately forgotten; all that remains is the meaning” (*Prose* 10). It is within this invisibility, for Merleau-Ponty, that the *virtue of language* lies — “it is language which propels us toward the things it signifies. In the way it works, language hides itself from us” (*Prose* 10).

In this manner the language of literature works to provide me, the reader, with new experiences and thereby new *ideas* and new knowledge, which contribute to the re-defining of my *world-thesis*. When Boland, in her poem “Anorexic,” begins her reader’s experience with the lines “Flesh is heretic./ My body is a witch./ I am burning it” (lines 1-3), I as reader

begin to tap into my *world-thesis* as it pertains to the heretic witch burning at the stake, a very complex myth of history. She is signifying an entire history of heretics, women, and wrongly accused practitioners being burned or drowned for gossip -- a fitting two-dimensional image to fracture and re-vision. However, in the seventh stanza of this poem, Boland throws her reader into a completely different signification with one word -- "rib" (line 19). No longer a poem of either the disease anorexia or on burning heretic witches, she has now suddenly thrown her reader into direct confrontation with the myth of the creation of woman in the image of Eve and the original sin. The interaction that occurs between language and reader works through these significations, the subtle connotations of phrases and words via my previous experiences with the meanings and power of the words used. But it is in the perceiving of those meanings that holds "the power of throwing me in turn toward a signification that neither he nor I possessed before" (*Prose* 141), as is the case with Boland's introduction of the word "rib." We each have our own unique *world-thesis*. Our *world-thesis* is created, as already discussed, through experiences and our perceptions of those experiences. I carry my own unique *world-thesis* along with me at all times, and it plays a large part in how I perceive my world. I also carry it when I am a reader. And although, from afar, the process of reading may seem a passive activity, it is in fact, a very active endeavor. When considering the power that the language of literature has upon reader, it may be of significance to consider the power of the present. As Eliot suggests, "The historical sense involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence" (qtd. in *A Journey* 115).

The power of language, as Merleau-Ponty suggests, “lies neither in that future of knowledge toward which it moves nor in that mythical past from which it has emerged: it lies entirely in its present” (*Prose* 41). Merleau-Ponty explains that phenomenology “steps back to watch the forms of transcendence fly up like sparks from a fire” (*Perception* xv). In a similar manner, he suggests that this power of language, which emerges entirely in the present, succeeds only “insofar as it [orders] the would-be key words to make them say more than they have ever said, and transcends itself as a product of the past” (*Prose* 41). This transcendence is key to the overall effect that the work of literature has upon the reader’s experience of its speech. When the reader transcends the basic denotative significations of the phrases and words, then the language has given “the illusion of going beyond all speech to things themselves, [. . .] in effect [it goes] beyond all given language” (*Prose* 41). The interaction between author and reader becomes a forum for transformational experience, if the literature can rise to the occasion of allowing the reader to lose all sense of pastness and future.³

Speaking vs. Listening

In considering the relationship between reader and author, one must also attempt to clarify the parallel that this relationship has with speaker and listener. Phenomenologically speaking, the listener in this equation is not a passive partner in the conversation. The listener is not simply a sounding board off of which words merely bounce. The listener is instead participating in the making of meaning. When successfully communicating with

³ Georges Poulet suggests the role of reader within this interaction. (p 19 & 20)

another, the language that is used is an agreed upon medium of communication. If I seek conversation in the English language, I seek this medium. If I am choosing the medium of the written word, I chose a book or a poem instead. One is no less a conversation than the other. Nor is it any less an interaction. When I am involved in a conversation with another in-person, I not only pull meaning from the other's words, but also from the gestures they make – anger looks different than sadness in body language. There is still this element of communication within the medium of the written word. An author's choices of words, punctuation, rhythm, and imagery (amongst other choices) are very much like gestures within a conversation. Every word and stop – whether a full-stop or a pause – is a gesture.

Merleau-Ponty suggests that in relation to the speaker and listener dialogic relationship “it is the same thing *to speak to* and *to be spoken to*” (*Prose* 141). The active participation in meaning-making does not end when I am no longer speaking; instead “my speech is intersected laterally by the other's speech, and I hear myself in him, while he speaks in me” (*Prose* 141).

Speaking is not just my own initiative, listening is not submitting to the initiative of the other, because as speaking subjects we are continuing, we are resuming a common effort more ancient than we, upon which we are grafted to one another and which is the manifestation, the growth, of truth. (*Prose* 144)

This description of the dialogic relationship between speaker and listener leads me to the more specific paralleled relationship of reader and author.

The Relationship between Reader and Writer

The relationship between reader and author is a unique one. We might be tempted to, at first, consider a book as an object, like a chair or a vase. I can pick the book up and flip it over in my hands; I can view it from multiple sides. However, it is the literature within the pages of the book that makes this object transcend its formal being. Our perception of this object is no longer that of the chair once we, as reader, begin to immerse ourselves within the pages, images, and meaning within its lines. Georges Poulet describes the phenomenon of reader while immersed in a book as that “extraordinary fact in the case of the book is the falling away of the barriers between you and it” (“Phenomenology” 54). In the act of reading, we lose the walls that surround the object itself, so that the book no longer is a three-dimensional object, but a window. This loss of physical barriers no longer offers the reader simply lines on a page, but experiences. Poulet suggests in the process of immersing myself in the pages of the book “I say farewell to what is, in order to feign belief in what is not. I surround myself with fictitious beings; I become the prey of language. There is no escaping this take-over. Language surrounds me with its unreality” (“Phenomenology” 55).

Within this immersion, we experience new knowledge not as a spectator, but as an active participant. Merleau-Ponty describes the evolution of the reading experience as:

My relation to a book begins with the easy familiarity of the words of our language, of ideas that are part of our makeup, in the same way that my perception of the other is at first sight perception of the gestures and

behavior belonging to ‘the human species.’ But if the book really teaches me something, if the other person is really another, at a certain stage I must be surprised, disoriented. (*Prose* 141)

What world are we, as readers, immersing ourselves in if not into our own? From what direction is this, as Poulet suggests, ‘unreality’ originating? This is the wonder of the interaction between reader and author. As a reader, I am entering into the thoughts and the creations of another’s consciousness; or as Poulet posits, “When I read Baudelaire or Racine, it is really Baudelaire or Racine who thinks, feels, allows himself to be read within me” (“Phenomenology” 58). This is, in fact, the reader that Poulet suggests that we should always be, at first, in order to allow the literature, and therefore the author, to reveal herself to us. If I can allow myself to let loose those barriers that fall away, and enter into the dialogic relationship with this other consciousness that has left herself for me in written form, the disequilibrium can then occur. This disequilibrium, as suggested earlier, can work to link the reader’s established sense of their own *world-thesis* to new knowledge and therefore new ideas and truths. And it is in these transformational moments that meaning is made:

If we are to meet not just through what we have in common but in what is different between us – which presupposes a transformation of myself and of the other as well – then our differences can no longer be opaque qualities. They must become meaning. (*Prose* 141)

The idea of shared consciousness is thoroughly discussed by Poulet within his article “Phenomenology of Reading.” In it he suggests that the full effect of the author/reader

relationship and the full complexity of the idea that I experience through the author's own consciousness can be felt when I read without reserve:

I not only understand but even *feel* what I read. When I read as I ought, i.e. without mental reservation, without any desire to preserve my independence of judgment, and with the total commitment required of any reader, my comprehension becomes intuitive and any feeling proposed to me is immediately assumed by me. In other words, the kind of comprehension in question here is not a movement from the unknown to the known, from the strange to the familiar, from outside to inside. It might rather be called a phenomenon by which mental objects rise up from the depths of consciousness into the light of recognition. . . I am on loan to another, and this other thinks, feels, suffers, and acts within me [. . .] To understand a literary work, then is to let the individual who wrote it reveal himself to us in us. ("Phenomenology" 57-8)

This is not to suggest that the author's consciousness is fully responsible for the ideas and constructs that come to the forefront of the reader's mind while in the process of reading. The author instead taps into previous experiences and perspectives. But, the process allows new experiences and new perspective to also then be formed.

Literature's Impact – Poetry – Content, Form, and Meaning

As a reader, I am therefore not simply an unaffected audience to the words and turns of the literature. I become an experiencing part of the action that is taking place on the page in front of me. I experience the literature along with the characters, or more appropriately, I experience the characters within my own consciousness. Because, as reader, I am experiencing the literature, I am therefore experiencing not only the author's words used, but another's *world-thesis* at work. In this interaction, again, it is in my perceiving of those meanings that holds "the power of throwing me in turn toward a signification that neither he nor I possessed before" (*Prose* 141). Furthermore, I, as reader, am allowed to experience, as Poulet suggests, "thoughts foreign to [me]. I am the subject of thoughts other than my own. My consciousness behaves as though it were the consciousness of another" ("Phenomenology" 55). But, most specifically to the current question at hand – the question of the power of literature, specifically poetry, to affect change within one's *world-thesis* – I am not only *thinking* thoughts foreign to me, but I am *experiencing* them. As Poulet suggests:

The consciousness inherent in the work is active and potent; it occupies the foreground; it is clearly related to its *own* world, to objects which are *its* objects. [. . .] I often have the impression, while reading, of simply witnessing an action which at the same time concerns and yet does not concern me. This provokes a certain feeling of surprise within me. I am consciousness astonished by an existence which is not mine, but which I experience as though it were mine. ("Phenomenology" 59)

Within this experiencing of the *Other*, I am thinking thoughts which were not of my making, I am feeling emotions and adventure which was not of my own volition, but I am experiencing these thoughts and feelings as if they were my own. Therefore, I am attaching my perceptions to these experiences. In discerning these perceptions, I am packing along with me my *world-thesis*. And, as suggested earlier, with the disequilibrium, which can come from the experience of reading, the strands that attach me to my *world-thesis* are slackened. I can allow new knowledge or new experience to affect my *ideas* and *truths*, which then works to change my perspective of my world, my culture, and the others around me. Again, as Merleau-Ponty points out, “the highest point of truth is still only perspective.” He goes on to suggest,

a truth of transparency, recovery, and recollection, in which we participate, not insofar as we think the same thing but insofar as we are, each in his own way, moved and touched by it. [. . .] [The writer] takes them just where they are and, by working with objects, events, men, intervals, plans, and openings, he touches in them their most secret foundations, getting at their fundamental ties with the world and thus transforms their deepest partiality into a means of truth. [. . .] Writing speaks to men and rejoins truth through them. (*Prose* 131)

As a reader, I choose to linger upon the effect of a work of fiction within myself, and in turn I then choose to allow it to change my ideas of my world. So powerful is the experience of literature upon reader, that Simone de Beauvoir suggests it “allows one to undergo imaginary experiences that are as complete and disturbing as lived experiences. The reader ponders,

doubts, and takes sides; and this hesitant development of his thought renders him in a way that no teaching of doctrine could” (“Literature and Metaphysics” 270).

Both Merleau-Ponty and Poulet suggest the readers of poetry have an even higher level of experiencing. Poulet suggests that, for a poet, the rhetorical choices made are sought for their deep level of affectation upon the reader. These choices, offers Poulet, work to “instantaneously” ask the reader to relive a long period within their memory, whether through the senses or through the emotions – “. . . all at once the mind is able to feel an entire past reborn within itself. This past, together with the whole train of its emotions, surges up in the moment and endows it with a life that is not momentary” (*Studies* 27). When Boland writes in the opening stanza of “The Women,”

This is the hour I love: the in-between,
neither here-nor-there hour of evening.
The air is tea-colored in the garden.
The briar rose is spilled crepe-de-Chine. (lines 1-4)

she creates not only an image but a feeling within her reader. I, as her reader, have not personally sat within the same garden of “briar rose” and “tea-colored” air, but I have experienced my own environment within that quiet few moments that occur before the sun finally sets for the evening. The children have been quieted within the home, the dinner dishes are done, and just for a few moments, there is time to simply breathe, smile, and think. I am not only experiencing the words and images of Boland, but as her reader, I am pulling from my own perspectives and histories to fill in the gaps that she leaves for me.

Poulet quotes Madame de Stael in describing this as a moment of possession that is the power of poetics – “ ‘Poetry,’ says Madame de Stael, ‘is the momentary possession of all that the soul desires.’ Possession, within the moment, of all that our soul desires to regain of itself” (*Studies* 27). Merleau-Ponty discusses these rhetorical choices of the poet as “gestures” used to create an aesthetic experience – “the meaning of a poem [is] in the gesture it contains; to him a word is a gesture. To understand the gesture in a work of art we need to participate in the situation it describes by having an aesthetic experience” (Calhoun 6).

Literature’s Role in Becoming

I began this chapter with an ambiguous few sentences: “It is not until we truly think, when our eyes are open to the silences, that we can then begin to expel, create, and define our own humanity. Only then do we escape becoming the *Other* through passive subjugation.” I would like to return to these lines now and begin to tie the importance of a phenomenological examination of the poems of Eavan Boland to their affectation upon the readers that we are and the people that we are always in the process of *becoming*. Boland herself points to the importance of the development of the ethical choices that she makes within her own *poetic gestures*. In the light of our never-ending process of *becoming*, literature’s role in our process of the development of our gendered identity is paramount. Just as we create new meaning through our experiencing of literature, and by lingering upon those experiences and our responses to them, we slacken those threads and we change our knowledge and perceptions of not only our own gendered identities, but also those that

came before us. In his *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty delineates the manner in which gender and our experiences with gender have an effect on how we relate to the world around us:

Ultimately, maleness and femaleness are . . . two variations of our basic way of relating to the world. Every individual person creates an interpretation or a modification of one of these two principal variations. Most modifications develop and amplify the duality, but some work to undo or annul it. The development of a sexual identity, in any case, is not accounted for by the concepts of inheritance and properties, but by the concepts of imitation and mimicry, repetition and modification. (Heinämaa 68)

If, as Merleau-Ponty suggests, the development of gendered identity is made through experience – that of “mimicry, repetition, and modification” – *and* as Beauvoir suggests that “one is not born woman,” but instead is always in the process of becoming one, then the experience that Poulet distinguishes as unique between the consciousness of author and the consciousness of reader is significant, one might suggest essential, in that *becoming*.

If woman has been established as *Other* to man’s *Absolute*⁴ through socially evolved acts of experience, then how deeply does the act of reading another’s thought affect that culturally constructed dichotomy? The reader remains a *self* who is simultaneously “granted the experience of thinking thoughts foreign to him” (“Phenomenology” 56). When considering the reader’s experience as being a granting of access to another’s consciousness, then the experience granted, as defined by Beauvoir, becomes a part of the reader’s own

⁴ Beauvoir defines the construct of woman as *Other* to man’s *Absolute* within her essay *The Second Sex*.

history and consciousness when that reader makes the decision to make it their own. It is in this manner that the poetry of Boland affects the reader on the level of experience, and on this level that Boland creates change within the cultural collective and founds her “poet’s inheritance.”

Becoming

It has all been over since the day before yesterday, and yet
I experienced it just this instant. But if you say that you
experienced it just this instant, you will be told that you
are making a lot of fuss about nothing.

~ Michèle Le Doeuff

Boland warns of the dangers that can be present when a poet allows an intrusion of theory and cultural mores into her poetry, specifically the intrusion of feminism and separatism into the poets’ imagination, which alters the creation: “It encourages her to feminize her perceptions rather than humanize her femininity” (*Lessons* 245). However, she continues beyond this warning to suggest that the results of the creative act of writing, even if void of intrusion during the creative process, can often develop strong effects within the feminist arena. I am not suggesting that while in the creative process Boland is striving for these reader effects on a global scale. Yet the effects to the humanizing of femininity are culturally present and are significant. Defining the “poet’s inheritance” that Boland found absent in her younger years, and which she seeks to establish for those who follow, is a

necessary step in defining our past and then to our future *becoming*.

In reference to the idea of *becoming*, I turn here to another of the phenomenological philosophers, Simone de Beauvoir. Beauvoir wrote philosophically about Woman and on the effect that literature has upon its reader, as well as the lasting effects produced from the relationship constructed. As quoted earlier, within her essay *Pyrrhus and Cineas*, Beauvoir suggests,

In order for the past to be mine, I must make it mine again each instant by taking it toward my future. Even the objects that were not mine in the past because I didn't find them can be made into mine if I found something on them. (93-4)

This idea in conjunction with the thesis of her seminal feminist essay *The Second Sex* -- "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (281) -- provides a foundation on which to begin a phenomenological look into the purpose and then into the effect of Boland's repossession of myth upon the reader, and thereby the collective consciousness.

Many critics in studying Beauvoir's writings on woman have wrongly suggested that her works are expressly existential in nature -- hinting at, and at times pointedly expressing her works as simply mutations of those of her partner Jean-Paul Sartre. However, new studies of Beauvoir's works have established that *The Second Sex*, published in France in 1949 (its first translation in English appearing in 1953), has its foundations in the philosophical study of phenomenology (O'Brien and Lester (2001), Simons (2001), Kruks (1990), Lundgren-Gothlin (1991 & 1996), Le Doeuff (1980), Heinämaa (1999 & 2003)). Therefore,

I move forward with the reading, understanding, and use of Beauvoir's essay from the perspective of phenomenology.

When read through a phenomenological lens, Heinämaa offers Beauvoir's treatise in *The Second Sex* as:

we cannot answer the question about women's way of being by making deductions or inferences from our theories about human existence. Rather, we need to turn back to experience and study the whole of it from a new view point, that of the female body. This is necessary, not because we could not imagine conscious beings without sex, but because we ourselves are men and women. (Heinämaa xvii)

Heinämaa further explains Beauvoir's meaning in *The Second Sex*. She argues that the similarities of women are not found in "*what* they are, but by *how* they relate" (68). Also, in the defining of the importance that lies within the examination of the ways that we, as cultures, create and assimilate gendered identities, Heinämaa suggests "Sexual difference might be more deeply embedded in our experience of persons and human beings than, for example, skin color or other 'racial' differences" (86). She goes on to point out that the argument could be made against this statement; however, "One could at least argue for this by pointing out that there are societies that do not make the distinction between black and white, but there is no known culture that does not make the distinction between women and men" (86). Literature's role in our *world-theses*, in our *becoming*, and therefore the formation of our identities necessitates a return to the silent histories and lost truths, then forward through re-creation.

In 1972, in her widely read and anthologized essay, “When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision,” Adrienne Rich wrote about the power of and the need to re-write and re-name the myths and literary images of women because of the influence they possess over “all of us who are products of culture” (21). Rich further noted, “A radical critique of literature, feminist in its impulse,” would provide culturally relevant information on how “we live, how we have been living, how we have been led to imagine ourselves, how our language has trapped as well as liberated us; and how we can begin to see — and therefore live — afresh” (18). In her examination of Beauvoir’s essay, Heinämaa writes, “Whatever stage in human evolution or cultural development we study, women’s subjection already seems to be in effect. It is as if it always had already happened” (102). Boland sees this cultural development as being full of silences. In *Object Lessons*, she writes, “Every step towards an origin is also an advance towards a silence” (24). However, she goes on to explain that this origin, this “past in which our grandmothers lived and where their lives burned through detail and daily incidence to become icons for our future is also a place where women and poetry remain far apart” (24). That leaves quite a lot of material to return to in an effort to re-write and re-name. What histories need tending?

Within the essay *Pyrrhus and Cineas*, Beauvoir suggests, “At each instant, I have an entire past of humanity behind me. . .” (111). This does not help to answer the question of what histories need tending, but it does suggest the magnitude of the decision that women writers are faced with. Poulet, as well, suggests in the realm of “historical self-awareness” that “I find in myself the whole history of humanity and in the history of humanity my own

history” (*Studies* 31). Within her latest collection of essays *A Journey with two Maps: Becoming a Woman Poet*, Eavan Boland names silence as “a condition of the past;”

For all those acts of naming and re-naming, it was a complicated territory I was setting up house in. The rift between the past and history was real; but it was not simple. In those shadows, in that past, I was well aware that injustices and griefs had happened without any hope of the saving grace of elegy and expression – those things which an official history can count on.

Silence was a condition of that past. I accepted it as a circumstance. (12)

She goes on to explain that she accepts this condition “only on certain terms. That the silences were not final. They were not to be forever. That they could be recognized; but also remedied” (*Journey* 12). Also, within her autobiographical *Object Lessons: The Life of the*

Woman and the Poet in our Time, Boland writes that in her own process of *becoming* she finds it

difficult, if not impossible, to explain to men who are poets – writing as they are with centuries of expression behind them – how emblematic are the unexpressed lives of other women to the woman poet, how intimately they are her own. And how, in many ways, that silence is as much part of her tradition as the troubadours are of theirs. (248)

I think it here important to bring notice to the fact that as a meticulous technician of meaning and word placement, Boland repeatedly makes the decision to offer gender as an integral difference of experience in the realm of poet: “men who are poets,” “to the woman poet,” *The Life of the Woman and the Poet in our Time*, and *Becoming a Woman Poet*.

In the mining of history for the purposes of putting voice to the previously silent truths, Boland offers a look into her hopeful process of change as dependant upon “the questions we ask. Always providing we are willing to ask them” (*A Journey* 15). This willingness to ask drives our process of *becoming*. In his *Studies in Human Time*, Poulet considers this process of change and quotes Henri Bergson. Bergson suggests,

becoming no longer signifies *being changed* but *changing*; the act, that is to say, by which in transforming himself man incessantly reinvents his own being: ‘to exist is to change, to change is to mature, to mature is to create oneself endlessly.’ If the being endlessly draws its existence out of the past, it is not as one draws the consequences from a principle or as one copies the image of a pattern. It is a free adaptation of past resources to present life, in view of the future. (qtd in *Studies* 35)

And in the scope of choosing that change, Beauvoir offers that inaction is in itself an action, both “weigh upon the earth. Every rejection is a choice, every silence has a voice” (*Pyrrhus and Cineas* 126). Boland expresses this choice as not just a simple choice, but as what to her felt to be an “obligation” (*Lessons* 249). For Boland, the choices of what histories to revisit and what silences to give voice, for there are many, lay not in the choices as if through a list. Rather her path to which histories lies in the choice of the questions asked. Boland states, “at a certain point, I set out to find those questions” (*A Journey* 15).

Do the right questions lead us to, as Rich suggests, that place in which women can begin to live “afresh”? If a phenomenological view into the actual experience of reader can be accomplished, then that study can give us a better depiction as to how we begin to live

“afresh” and a more complete picture into literature’s role in that goal. As to literature’s large role in the making of experience, and thereby the making of the mind of our cultural identity, the French feminist Geneviève Fraisse suggests that literature has not only been the ground upon which these culturally important questions have been asked and explored, but “one of the essential tasks of literature today is to question the theoretical approach to these representations” (111). Fraisse writes that the relationship of the sexes and in the creation of the differences between them “occupies a central place in poetry and in the novel” (111). And, in a historical context, “Up until modern times, literary writing was the only writing to approach the issue frankly. Here, the ‘representation’ leaves open the question of the modes of thought which all representation creates” (111). The historical impact is important here, as Fraisse goes on to explain, because “History is a moment, a sequence of time in which semantic associations are made and unmade; an opportunity, or not, for certain thoughts, certain theses about the sexes to be formed” (124).

The significance of an in-depth study of the experience of the reader is of deep importance to the equalization of the sexes. Feminist philosopher, Françoise Collin suggests these gender relationships are “indeed social relationships, constructed and modulated into both new and repeated configurations by different societies through their respective practices and symbolic orders” (16). Literature, and the experience of reading literature, is of great importance in the development of sexual identity, as Collin suggests, “Human inventiveness is infinite in weaving the fabric of domination, but so is our inventiveness in

resistance, in unpicking the stitches” (16). It is within the “unpicking of the stitches” that Boland seeks to subvert the two-dimensional images of the mythical woman that haunt the cultural perspectives of gendered constructions.

Boland’s concept and use of subversion is of utmost importance in studying her aesthetic choices and her poetic voice. Within her autobiographical work, Boland quotes not only Rich’s critical writing on woman as poet and the ethical decisions therein, but she looks to Alicia Ostriker’s work as well. In 1982, Ostriker suggested as “women poets we look at, or into, but not up at, sacred things; we unlearn submission”(87). Ostriker considered the work of the woman writer in the past to be a theft of sorts, claiming, “Women writers have always tried to steal language” (69). She provides Emily Dickinson’s call “Tell all the Truth but tell it slant” as a call to writers who “in every century have been inhibited both by economic dependence and by the knowledge that true *writer* signifies assertion while true *woman* signifies submission”(69). She believes this has been true more so for the woman poet than for the woman novelist because of the tradition that the poet treads into as a young writer. The inner sanctum of poetry is pocked with the untouchable, the profane. Ostriker outlines this to be an especially tough decision for the woman poet, because,

At first thought, mythology seems an inhospitable terrain for a woman writer. There we find the conquering gods and heroes, the deities of pure thought and spirituality so superior to Mother Nature; there we find the sexually wicked Venus, Circe, Pandora, Helen, Medea, Eve, and the virtuously passive Iphigenia, Alcestis, Mary, Cinderella. It is thanks to the myth we believe that woman must be either “angel” or “monster” (71).

Myth, as part of our own *world-thesis*, plays a large part in the defining of our perceptions, and as suggested within Chapter 1, *perception, therefore, is that understanding that is pre-thetic, our knee jerk reactions to stimuli around us*. And if this perception that has been left to us through myth is of such a two-dimensional image of woman – either “angel” or “monster,” then Boland’s desire to join this movement for re-visioning seems quite clear. Ostriker writes, specifically about poetics:

Whenever a poet employs a figure or story previously accepted and defined by a culture, the poet is using myth, and the potential is always present that the use will be revisionist: that is, the figure or tale will be appropriated for altered ends, the old vessel filled with new wine, initially satisfying the thirst of the individual poet but ultimately making cultural change possible.

Historic and quasi-historic figures like Napoleon and Sappho are in this sense mythic, as are folktales, legends, and Scripture. Like gods and goddesses of classical mythology, all such material has a double power. It exists or appears to exist objectively, in the public sphere, and consequently confers on the writer the sort of authority unavailable to someone who writes “merely” of the private self. Myth belongs to “high” culture and is handed “down” through the ages by religious, literary, and educational authority. At the same time, myth is quintessentially intimate material, the stuff of dream life, forbidden desire, inexplicable motivation — everything in the psyche that to rational consciousness is unreal, crazed, or abominable. (72)

Therefore, in returning to myth, Boland is not only affecting her reader's perceptions of the public sphere, but through the re-visioning of myth and the reconstruction of the two-dimensional "angel" or "monster," she also touches something inherently personal in her readers. And, thus she exacts a change in their *world-thesis* through disequilibrium.

In working in the realm of myth, there still remain many aesthetic and ethical decisions for the poet. Boland offers that she not only relies upon the aesthetic value of her subject, but upon the effect that her poems may have upon the changing of culture. Boland, in her essay "A Kind of Scar," also suggests the overall importance of our creative practices and decisions to the collective development of sexual identity — "we ourselves are constructed by our constructs" (20). Boland not only sees these consequences as an after effect of her poetry, but she also sees the decisions made in the creation of her poetic voice as founded in ethical obligation. Boland criticizes Patricia L. Hagen and Thomas W. Zelman, in explicating Boland's attempt to repossess history, suggest, "Boland displays a painterly consciousness, a keen, painful awareness of the shaping power of language, and a fundamental sense of poetic ethics" (443). Hagen and Zelman further emphasize the ethical obligation of specifically the woman poet:

Given the relation between image and selfhood, the poet — especially the woman poet — has an ethical obligation to de- and re- construct those constructs that shape literary tradition, bearing witness to the truths of experience suppressed, simplified, falsified by the 'official' record. (443)

Boland sought to enter into that tradition, and as an Irish poet, especially as one who grew up outside of Ireland, "[r]ather than accept the nation as it appeared in Irish poetry, with its

queens and muses,” she writes that she felt it was time to “*re-work* those images by exploring the emblematic relation between *my own feminine experience* and a national past” (“Scar” 89, *italics are mine*). Boland further suggests she “was not alone,” and again quotes Ostriker: “‘Where women write strongly as women’ says Alicia Ostriker, [. . .], ‘it is clear their intention is to *subvert* the life and literature they inherit’ ” (“Scar” 89, *italics are mine*).

In Boland’s process of joining this tradition of re-visioning, re-naming, and re-constructing those silent truths, she writes, “I knew my angle of entry must be *oblique*” (“Scar” 90, *italics are mine*). Her use of the word *oblique* is telling, especially in a phenomenological manner. If myth is part of our pre-thetic perception, or as Merleau-Ponty here uses ‘habitual expression,’ then his concept of making new meaning from old is important in the process of subverting:

[W]e should be sensitive to the thread of silence from which the tissue of speech is woven. In expressions already habitual, there is a direct meaning which corresponds point by point to the established phrases, forms, and words. Precisely because these expressions are habitual, the gaps and element of silence are obliterated. However, the meaning of expressions in the process of becoming habitual can in principle, as it were, *a lateral or oblique meaning* which results from the commerce between the words themselves (or from the available significations). It is a new way of shaking up the apparatus of language or of narrative to make it yield goodness knows what. (*Prose* 46, *italics are mine*)

When considering Dickinson's call to "Tell all the Truth but tell it slant," it seems important to note that within her essay, again "A Kind of Scar," Boland states that in her goal of subverting myth and the images already historically wrought she knew her "angle of entry" to be "*oblique*" (90, *italics are mine*).

In entering into the fray, even if obliquely, Boland seems to have created an aesthetic process recreating both myth and the silences of the historical *Other*. In the article "Eavan Boland and the Politics of Authority in Irish Poetry," Catriona Clutterbuck describes the formation of Boland's process as a two-part process, or as a "diptych model." Clutterbuck suggests that this model of aesthetic process "can be summarized then, as follows: experience (not necessarily personal) leads to vision (necessarily personal) which leads to poetic form, that in turn leads to radically inter-personal re-vision of experience, creating community out of a prior necessary conflict of interest" (90). Boland further defines this two-part model of aesthetic development (qtd in Clutterbuck 90). In reference to phase one, Boland suggests the search for meaning, " 'the wonderful relation of routine to ritual, ritual to rite and rite to metaphor.' " Referencing phase two of this process, Boland suggests the path from ritual and rite to reality – " 'through the rite of poetry we are led to the ritual and from the ritual to the reality' " (90). Clutterbuck concludes, "This re-engagement with reality [. . .] is the true promise of art" (90). And, Boland provides a blueprint for this two part process within "We Are Always Too Late": "Memory/ is in two parts./ First, the re-visiting/ . . . Then/ the re-enactment" (lines 1-3, 12-13).

To be sure, Boland does not choose the direct confrontation of myth as the subject for all of her poetry. But, it is to those poems in which she does that I delve into. For Boland spends much of her time in her autobiographical prose distinguishing that difference in the existing poetic inheritance of the male poet and that which is lacking for the woman poet. By doing so, Boland suggests, inherently, the power of poetry not only in the changing of our cultural consciousness in the realm of the feminine in poetry, but also on the larger scale as it pertains to her reader. Boland explicates the power of the poem as dwelling in a “subtle system of reference.” The poem, she offers, “codifies, suggests, infers.” And as Merleau-Ponty points to the power of poetry and its gestures, Boland also offers that poetry “gestures outward while staring obdurately inward. Looked at closely, it can tell you about a society. Looked at from a distance, it can reveal a history of evasion” (*A Journey* 115). She returns to her process of ethical and aesthetic decisions, what she also points to as her own poetic *becoming*: “Only later, armed with my own questions, did I feel comfortable enough to challenge some inherited ideas” (*A Journey* 115).

As in the vein of Dickinson’s call to those women poets who follow, Boland asks that “women should break down barriers in poetry in the same way that poetry will break the silence of women” (*Lessons* 254). She ends her autobiographical work with this call. However, instead of ending this chapter on this chord, I would like to here return to her warning, which asks those women poets who follow to beware of writing with feminism as a precipice from which to jump, not to be encouraged “to feminize her perceptions rather than humanize her femininity” (*Lessons* 245). A fault critics have found to be alive in Boland’s works, in my opinion incorrectly so. For example, Jennifer Fitzgerald’s critique of

Boland's "A Kind of Scar," in which she states, "[Boland's] identification throughout of women with suffering, and therefore with passivity, does nothing to nurture their power" (qtd in "Irish Critical Responses" 278). In the introduction of *A Journey*, Boland offers this connection between past and present which again seems to carry the spectring words of T.S. Eliot along for the journey, "The historical sense involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence" (115). The evolution that has occurred for woman in her societies and cultures creates for the woman poet new responsibilities if she is to make ethical choices. As Boland traces this evolution of responsibilities, it seems that this warning, both as the power of perception "not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence," and her own want to move forward in the humanizing of her femininity, resonates as an almost tangible visitor that must remain with the woman poet, almost as Poe had his raven.

Within *Object Lessons*, Boland maps this evolution and the pitfalls that lay in the journey forward for the woman poet:

In previous centuries, when a poet's life was an emblem for the grace and power of a society, a woman's life was often the subject of his expression: in pastoral, sonnet, elegy. As the mute object of his eloquence her life could be at once addressed and silenced. By an ironic reversal, now that a woman's life is that emblem of grace and power, the democratization of our communities, of which her emergence is one aspect, makes a poet's life look suspect, can make it appear, to a wider society, elite and irrelevant all at once. (xiv)

This creates a double-edged sword for the woman poet. On the one hand, she can represent the “grace” as the poet; however, this emerging role comes with societal suspicion. Boland further asserts that with the tension of these two lives, one of emblem and one of emergence, “the pressure is there to betray the other: to disown or simplify, to resolve an inherent tension by making false design from the ethical capabilities of one life or the visionary possibilities of the other”(xiv-xv). She goes on to suggest that this evolution of our societies and her emergence in them is a shift in the climate of literature in the same way the modernists shifted their time. She submits that she makes “this less as a claim than as a historical reading” (xv). These tensions can create a very real want for the woman poet to get caught up in that feminizing of her perceptions:

It does not mean she will write better poetry than men, or more important or more lasting. It does mean that in the projects she chooses, must choose perhaps, are internalized some of the central stresses and truths of poetry at this moment. And that in the questions she needs to ask herself — about voice and self, about revising the stance of poet, not to mention the relation of the poem to the act of power — are some of the questions which are at the heart of the contemporary form. This does not give her any special liberty to subcontract a poem to an ideology. It does not set her free to demand that a bad poem be considered as a good ethic. Her responsibilities remain the same as they have been for every poet: to formalize the truth. (xv)

These truths, however, should no longer be relegated to the section of *women's* literature.

Instead these advantages “she gains for language, the clarities she brings to the form, [t]hey

must be seen as pertaining to all poetry” (*Lessons* xv). When the woman poet is given the right to inhabit the entire world of language without the label of *women’s* literature, then her contributions to poetry can be seen as formalizing truth. And in Boland’s view, “That means they must also be allowed access to that inner sanctum of a tradition: its past” (*Lessons* xv).

Boland’s warning speaks directly to her modes of structuring her poems into the diptych model described by Clutterbuck. Through sometimes lateral or oblique language, Boland enters into the complex conversations of the oversimplified myths by first asking her reader to inhabit the often familiar skin of emblematic figures, and then by creating disequilibrium by injecting them with new vision and new meaning. In doing so, she confronts both past and present.

CHAPTER III

SECTION II – EXAMINATION OF LITERATURE

Now we move from the foundational and theoretical justifications for examining the experience of the reader of poetry, and the ripple effect created culturally and then globally by Boland's re-visioning of myth, to the analysis itself. In order to offer an explanation of poetry's effect on our culturally created ideas and truths, we must, as Merleau-Ponty suggests, reflect and linger upon the *poetic gestures* of the poems. We must "withdraw from the world towards the unity of consciousness as the world's basis." We must step back "to watch the forms of transcendence fly up like sparks from a fire." We must slacken the "intentional threads which attach us to the world and thus [bring] them to our notice" (*Phenomenology of Perception* xv). The *them* that Merleau-Ponty speaks of here are our perceptions of the world around us, how we manufacture meaning from the phenomena around us. In the case of poetry, the *them* that we must seek can be found in the *poetic gestures* the poet uses in order to convey meaning. These *poetic gestures* communicate much more than symbols and structures to the reader. The reader experiences the poetry through these gestures. The poet uses many tools (gestures) in order to reach a reader on the level that Madame de Stael⁵ suggests, the level of "momentary possession." Understanding the

⁵ See Page 25 of "The Phenomenological Impact of Literature"

momentary possession can lead us to understanding the truth that Boland suggests is the responsibility of the poet to formalize.

When we allow ourselves to first experience the poem on an aesthetic level, we experience the poem and the rhetorical gestures made on this deep level of possession. Poulet suggests we experience these gestures “instantaneously.” By choosing to deconstruct the culturally constructed myth of woman, Boland asks her reader to experience the myth on a pre-thetic level. This pre-thetic level Boland taps into within her reader is tightly bound in perceptions. As Campbell suggests, myths are culturally created “openings” connecting us to the phenomena of our world; therefore the entrenched myth plays as much a part of the invisible threads as do our senses. When Boland asks her reader to experience the word “rib,” she not only asks her reader to experience a benign part of anatomy, she is digging out a well-worn and often used artifact of the human conditioning and therefore our *becoming*.

A phenomenological analysis of Boland’s poems must begin with a stepping back from these entrenched perceptions, and then to an exploration of the poetic gestures she chooses. It will remain important throughout this analysis to keep in mind the effect that Poulet suggests poetry has upon its reader and what therefore Boland asks her reader to bring with them. The poetry not only asks of its reader to experience but to relive a long period within their memory, whether through the senses or through the emotions – “. . . all at once the mind is able to feel an entire past reborn within itself. This past, together with the whole train of its emotions, surges up in the moment and endows it with a life that is not momentary” (*Studies* 27). By defining Boland’s effect on the perceptions of one reader, we

learn, on a larger scale, her poetry's effect on the consciousness of our culture. What *poetic gestures* does Eavan Boland choose that move her reader into experiencing her deconstruction of the traditional two-dimensional image of woman in myth as both a literary and actual loss? And what *poetic gestures* does she then create to help the reader beyond the disequilibrium that she causes in their established *world-thesis*? Answering these questions in this analysis allows us to also uncover the poet's effect on the reader's *becoming*.

In my search for a place to begin in this undertaking of a phenomenological view into the actual experience of reader, I stumbled through many available structures. There are many windows through which Boland offers entry into her *oeuvre* of poetry. I march forward with the realization that any structure that I choose is purely arbitrary; for most of Boland's poems do not fit squarely into any one frame I can give them. However, for the sake of explicating and doing so clearly, I must, nonetheless, choose a structure for exploration.

Because Boland's poems and collections often double back to retread familiar ground with new and different gestures, I will not superimpose a structure based on a timeline. She exhibits this retreading directly through her multiple direct addresses of the muse – "Tirade for the Mimic Muse," published in her 1980 collection *In Her Own Image*; "Tirade for the Epic Muse," published in the 1982 collection *Night Feed*; "The Muse Mother," also published in *Night Feed*; "Tirade for the Lyric Muse," published in her 1987 collection *The Journey*; as well as others of her poems that invoke the myth of the muse in various manners such as "Envoi." Structuring an analysis in this manner could also be considered structuring by theme. An analysis by theme does not seem integral to this particular study. I, as an American reader and critic, choose also not to offer my

interpretations of the poems in which she most intimately delves into the sea of the Irish past, such as “My Country in Darkness,” “An Irish Childhood in England: 1951,” and “City of Shadows.” However, in my view, there are instances in which these poems transcend the *Irishness* of their design into a more global reading, creating a need to discuss their reach beyond its borders; such is the case for “That the Science of Cartography is Limited” and “Anna Liffey.” Although these poems are directly addressing Irish histories, events, geographies and peoples, the implications of Boland’s gestures surpass even the great Irish heritages they conjure.

What I have chosen to do instead is a structuring of these phenomenological readings of Boland’s poems based upon the tone she chooses. Boland uses tone in a manner that could be compared to the Möbius strip. In one sense, we consider the tone of an author as the “literary speaker’s attitude towards his listener” (Abrams 258). This consideration is not complex enough for the phenomenological definition of speaker and listener. All participants within the discourse must be considered – the author, the narrator (or personae), the reader, the listener, and the subject (sometimes the hero). Our first step in deciding Boland’s tone in a poem should be to define the listener or reader. This is a complex decision in the explicating of a Boland poem. She often manipulates and inverts the role of the listener/reader; the reader is often moved from the comfortable seat of the voyeur to the position of participant. In her poem “Outside History,” Boland very clearly creates this inversion of the role of the reader. She begins “There are outsiders, always. These stars – / these iron inklings of an Irish January” (lines 1 & 2). Boland allows the reader to begin the poem in a familiar position – that of voyeur. The stage is being set –

“stars” and “iron inklings of an Irish January,” the characters developed – “outsiders” and “history.” Then she inverts this experience – “whose light happened / thousands of years before / our pain did ” (lines 3-5). The reader is now a participant being asked to reflect upon his/her own “pain” while being possessed by this poem.

Our second step in defining Boland’s tone should be to explore the other corner of the rhetorical triangle, the hero or the subject of the poem. The subject often shifts from one concern to another in a Boland poem. An example of this shifting of subject inhabits the experience of “Writing in a Time of Violence.” The subject of this poem in the beginning is the poet’s own self-reflection on her experience as young poet,

In my last year in College
I set out
to write an essay on
the Art of Rhetoric. I had yet to find

the country already lost to me
in song and figure as I scribbled down
names for sweet euphony
and safe digression. (lines 1-8)

In line 20, the subject shifts to an older Boland speaking to her younger self, and by extension, shifts to an older poet speaking to the poet in the beginning stages of her own *becoming*,

I can see her. I could say to her –

we will live, we have lived
where language is concealed. Is perilous.
We will be – we have been – citizens
of its hiding place. But it is too late

to shut the book of satin phrases,
to refuse to enter (lines 20-26)

As in the case of the Möbius strip, in which a definitive beginning and ending are not discernable, there is another underlying theme at work within “Writing in a Time of Violence.” In this poem, Boland uses the metaphor of the snake as a comparison to the power of the word, “And when I came to the word *insinuate* / I saw that language could writhe and creep / and the lore of snakes / . . . came nearer” (lines 9-11 & 14). She ends the poem with this theme of the snakes, which as a child she “had learned . . . not to fear -- / because the Saint had sent them out of Ireland” (lines 12 & 13). The last lines of the poem make it clear that the story of expelled snakes offers a mistaken sense of safety,

we are stepping into where we never

imagine words such as *hate*
and *territory* and the like – unbanished still
as they always would be – wait
and are waiting under
beautiful speech. To strike. (lines 36 – 41)

Unlike the snakes, the words of domination – *bate* and *territory* – were not banished. They wait beneath the words of beauty, waiting “To strike.” The subjects of Boland’s poems are often multivalent and often occupy multiple layers. Whether she provides her reader with a subject in the image of a hero or heroine, or through metaphorical language, Boland shifts the reader’s gaze through her poems not just from the first line to the last, but also among three-dimensional layers of meaning and metaphor.

Boland uses tone to set the stage for her poems and thus to move her reader emotionally into the proper frame of mind. Sometimes the tone she uses is accusing and violent, other times it is slow and meandering. But, in each of her poems, the tone she chooses directly affects her reader’s experience with her subject, and affects the reader’s possession by the idea the poem formalizes. In these phenomenological analyses, I have divided the poems into three general groups, based upon the similarity of tone.

In group one, Boland uses her tone to subvert the traditional myths of woman. These poems fracture the culturally created perceptions of the reader by subverting the previously established and previously consumed images. The poetic voice Boland establishes in these poems works to create disequilibrium for her reader. Here, Boland directly confronts culturally created myths such as Eve, witchcraft, lovesick and impulsive young maidens, the Muse, the painters’ model, the prostitute, and, among others, the immigrant mother “holding her half-dead baby to her” (line 32 “Mise Eire”). She creates a tone in these poems that asks her reader to see these two-dimensional creations as real women, and therefore as re-definable. This grouping includes poems like “Anorexic,” “Witching,” “Listen. This is the Noise of Myth,” and “It’s A Woman’s World.” In these

poems, Boland challenges the invisible strands that attach us to our perspectives, especially as those perspectives are tied to myth. This challenge leaves the reader feeling forced to linger upon his/her own assumptions. Her tone in these poems work to undo what Merleau-Ponty considers the “habitual expressions” of the reader. Here, I will show, Boland builds tone through her aesthetic gestures of rhythm, representation of time (past to present to past), pronoun usage and metaphorical allusions to create the effect of transcendence that, when lingered upon, flies up like sparks ready for new meaning.

Boland does not leave her reader lost in the sense of disequilibrium for long. Another loose grouping of her poems, group two, works to create the re-visioning of those subverted mythical images into intimately recognizable forms of the feminine reality. What Boland breaks, she rebuilds. In “Making Up,” Boland begins her cry to women to take these myths and to re-create them in their own vision:

Take nothing, nothing
at its face value:
...
Myths
are made by men.
The truth of this

wave-raiding
sea-heaving
made-up
tale

of a face
from the source
of the morning
is my own: (lines 33 – 52)

She uses the man-made myth of the Venus, that “wave-raiding/ sea-heaving/ made-up/ tale,” and turns it to her own use. The face that rises “from the source/ of the morning/ is my own.” There is a new sense of ownership created here, and therefore a new sense of reality and definition. In the analysis of the poems of this grouping, I will show that Boland uses her tone to create a very different mood and effect for her reader than she creates in the first group. Because of this very different tone, the reader experiences the poems in a contrastive manner. Using the same poetic gestures listed above, rhythm, representation of time (past to present to past), pronoun usage and metaphorical allusions, these poems show the reader the way to that feminine reality and create new perspective in the manner that Poulet suggests, “surges up in the moment and endows it with a life that is not momentary” (*Studies* 27). Whereas the first grouping of poems subvert, this group of poems suggests a new reality and a new way of seeing or, in phenomenological terms, perceiving. I will show that the poems in this grouping most strongly work to re-vision and to give voice to, as Adrienne Rich suggests, “how we can begin to see — and therefore live — afresh” (18). Boland, in explicating the poem “Fruhling 1946” by Elisabeth Langgasser, writes, “when a myth is stripped of meaning, it simply grows another skin” (*A Journey* 97). As poet, Boland is then obligated to that poet’s tradition of “formalizing the truth” and, therefore, to endeavor to create that new skin.

My third grouping of Boland's poems focuses on the creation of a poetic inheritance which now includes the feminine voice, what she found missing as a young and developing poet. Within the collection *Against Love Poetry* (2001), Boland writes "but this is different./ This time, when she looks up, I will be there" ("Is It Still the Same" 13-14). Her chosen tone in these poems is often that of the older sister shining a light on her own experiences with and in language. The subject or theme of this grouping is often language itself, as in the case of "Writing in a Time of Violence." These poems speak to Boland's hope to create an inheritance for those women poets who follow and often begin with Boland shining that light upon her own experiences with poetry, silent histories, and self-reflection. Speaking more directly to the future poet, Boland strongly invokes that almost tangible visitor which I described as carrying her warning against discarding "the complexities of true feeling for the relative simplicity of anger" (*Lessons* 245). In her attempt to offer this pathway to the young woman poet, Boland shines a light on the slippery stones that may line it; therefore offering sage advice in the form of *poetic gestures*. In her poem "Echo," published in 2001, Boland shines her light on the loneliness of the act of creating poetry:

After the sound of an animal howling.

After the thunder. After the horn.

After the song of a mountain woman

There is still silence and empty air.

Then you are there.

You listen. The thunder calls.

You listen. The waves are speaking.

You answer. But no one will ever

Answer you. And you know it.

And the same is true for you

— poet!

In this grouping of poems, Boland not only speaks to the young woman poet, but, at times, she also offers a pathway to the humanizing of femininity to her other readers as well. This last grouping includes poems such as “Formal Feeling,” “Story,” or “An Old Steel Engraving,” in which Boland exclaims, “we have found/ the country of our malediction where/ nothing can move until we find the word,/ nothing can stir until we say this is/ what happened and is happening. . .” (lines 16-20). These poems call not only to the future poet struggling with directions and meaning, but also to her non-poet reader in the sense that her words rise from the page like a call to arms pointing to the importance of putting the words to the silences, not only to name them but also to remedy them. In these poems, Boland creates a new version of muse, which rises from the ashes of the old.

In all of these groupings of poems, Boland lulls her reader from past to present to future, often seamlessly. Her reader often experiences time in a multifaceted manner. Time is a static element in one poem, while in another it is a quick building element leading to an obliteration of the culturally accepted creations. Either way, Boland establishes the tone of the poem through her voice and her *poetic gestures* in order to manipulate her reader into the frame of mind she most wants them. These gestures place her reader emotionally for the journey through gestures, subversions, inferences and into new meanings. Her use of

rhythm, enjambment, and repetition are integral to this reader's journey – “Where the poet enters an intense musical partnership with a community of readers. . . an audience can be transformed into countless beings of one mind” (*A Journey* 174). This musical partnership guides the reader down a path of realization and evolution, and contributes to the reader's *becoming*.

Two elements that Boland relies heavily upon are her use of pronouns and deeply rooted connotations (metaphorical allusions). She discusses both poetic strategies in her essays collected in *A Journey with two Maps: Becoming a Woman Poet*. In relation to the power of the pronoun in the reader's experiencing of the poet's gesturing, Boland writes

Not *I* any longer, but *we*. [. . .] It was a flexible instrument, this new pronoun. It was also inclusive of older histories, older communities. It could be the *we* of the balladeer, recording an event for which I was no longer the audience. Or the *we* of the Middle Ages poet, glued to other words by faith and authority. It might become the *we* of Renaissance. Then, a few poems on, it might spin around and appear as the *we* of the Irish nation in the poems of Speranza in 1848; or, in another swift turn, manifest itself as a 1930s political poem. (*A Journey* 21)

Boland's use of pronouns works to guide her reader's gaze through time and space without hesitation. Her reader moves through memory and into the present seamlessly. Within his explication of Eliot's *The Waste Land*, Poulet reminds his reader of the experience of memory in the present: “yet, says Eliot, it is necessary to accustom oneself to ‘depend upon tradition and the accumulated wisdom of time.’ This dependence, or this ‘historical sense,’ implies a

‘perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence’ (*Studies* 356). Boland also uses her narrative voice to access “the pastness of the past” and then turn that pastness into present. For example, within her poem “We Are Always Too Late,” Boland uses the narrative voice to turn a reader’s attention from past to present, all at once making the significant connection valid and impactful. An example of this forced turning of perspective can be witnessed in the following excerpt taken from the first lines of the poem –

“Memory/ is in two parts./ First, the re-visiting:/ the way even now I can see/ those lovers at the café table. She is weeping.” (1-5). Here the narrative choice of pronoun leads the gaze of the reader from the narrative “I” to the scene of lovers in a café - first to third person. The reader’s focus moves in these lines from one view to another. Boland continues this narrative shifting throughout the poem. Within the last stanza, the narrator directs the reader from being a passive voyeur to being a participant: “I raise one hand, I am pointing to/ those trees, I am showing her our need for these/ beautiful upstagings of/ what we suffer by/ what survives. And she never even sees me.” (18-22). No longer only an “I” or only a “her,” the reader is now affected by the narrator’s words within the inclusive second-person pronouns “our” and “we.” This is a shared meaning, a shared experience, in turn becoming a shared memory between poet and reader.

With respect to her use of culturally established connotations and metaphorical allusions, Boland uses sometimes almost invisible significations to turn her reader’s gaze in the right direction. On this subject, Boland writes, “I began to see that poems are not just an individual florescence. They are also a vast root system growing down into ideas and understandings. Almost unbidden, they tap into the history and evolution of art and

language” (*A Journey* 17). As suggested in Chapter 2, with the use of the word “rib” quickly and without punctuation or any other signal as to its importance, Boland profoundly changes the gaze of her reader in the poem “Anorexic.”

She writes in *A Journey* that a “poem is a subtle system of reference. It codifies, suggests, infers,” and as quoted earlier, a poem “gestures outward while staring obdurately inward. Looked at closely, it can tell you about a society. Looked at from a distance, it can reveal a history of evasion” (*A Journey* 115). Although, as readers, we may not be able to vocalize this signification upon immediately finishing the poem, the meanings touch us on a pre-thetic level, on the level of our most established ideas and understandings within our own *world-theses*.

Peeling Back the Superficial

every day the language gets less
for the task and we are less with the language.
~ from “The Journey”

In 1980, with the publishing of her third major volume of poems *In Her Own Image*, Boland departed from her earlier style of poetry writing. A definitive line can be drawn between the style of her two earlier volumes, *New Territory* (1967) and *The War Horse* (1975), and this third volume of poems, which Jody Allen-Randolph describes as “polemical” (“Ecriture Feminine” 48). Allen-Randolph ties this “departure, eruption, and even mutation” in Boland’s poetry to the “upswing of the French feminist movement linking sexuality to textuality in the late seventies” (48). This volume of poems, as Allen-Randolph

suggests, indicates a shift in Boland's poetry representing the beginning of her subversion and direct confrontations with the two-dimensional myths of Woman. In *Object Lessons*, Boland describes these two-dimensional images, "the dark queens and national sibyls," as "motifs," which the "majority of Irish male poets depended upon" (134). She goes on to describe these "often passive" and "simplified women," which to her seemed a "corruption." Her anger is not in their use, "The trouble was these images did good service as ornaments," but in their effect upon our cultures: "the transaction they urged upon the reader, to accept them as mere decoration, seemed to compound the corruption." These "distorted images" of women had their "roots in a suffered truth" (135). This first grouping of analyses represents Boland's challenge to her reader to no longer see these previously "distorted images" as "empty decoration," but to begin to perceive these emblems as real and three-dimensional women. In these poems, Boland often metaphorically reveals the mask or disguise of the mythical and then seeks to peel the superficiality back in the presence of her reader. Through the revealing of the faulted and imperfect beneath the guise, these mythical creations become re-definable.

Boland uses her tone in these poems to create a fractured aesthetic experience for her reader. She uses the tools of pronoun usage, rhythm, metaphor, and the representation of time (past to present to past) in order to emotionally possess the reader's gaze. These are powerful tools for Boland that work to create an aesthetic experience in which, like Poulet suggests⁶, the reader becomes the "prey of language." This fracturing of the reader's

⁶ See page 20 of "The Phenomenological Impact of Literature"

established perceptions of the mythical induces a feeling of disequilibrium and loss, and creates a de-construction of the traditional two-dimensional image of Woman.

In “Tirade for the Mimic Muse,” the first poem in the collection *In Her Own Image* (1980), Boland establishes the mood and tone of the aesthetic quickly. The first word to be read, in the title itself, indicates the emotional setting of this poem, “Tirade.” Boland not only immediately plays her hand with the emotion, but also does not hide the mythical in metaphor; she offers her target explicitly, “the Mimic Muse.” The muse has long been an emblem of poetry and art famously representing an ideal throughout history. This ideal has been applauded and represented in some of the most famous of our cultural images, Botticelli’s image of the Venus in *The Birth of Venus*, Leonardo da Vinci’s *Mona Lisa*, or John Keat’s “Muse of my native land! loftiest Muse!” who is “first born on the mountains! by the hues/ Of heaven on the spiritual air begot” (*Endymion IV* lines 1-3). The muse has not been the subject of anger, but has traditionally been a welcomed and sought after guest of the poet. This poem is a tirade, a rant, an accusation against the muse. Boland is dwelling in those deep waters of the myths of the canon, which many of her predecessors considered sacred and therefore untouchable. Not for Boland.

Within this poem, the gaze of the reader is shifted and manipulated into multiple angles. Boland points her reader’s gaze to varying views. Layered beneath the varied views is a manipulation of the reader’s participation in the poem itself. Boland alters her reader’s role in the poem through her use of pronouns and through the shifting of the time within her poem. Because the reader is possessed by the poem, these variations and shifts work like a path of participation and perspective.

Pronoun Usage

The poem begins with a quick aggressive tone of confrontation – “I’ve caught you out” (line 1). The first-person pronoun establishes a narrator’s persona and the beginning of an outlined perception of the “Mimic Muse.” The muse here is someone to catch or trap. “You slut. You fat trout” are the short, fast sentences that finish out the first line. This is in direct confrontation to Homer’s “Sing, O goddess” in *The Iliad* and “Tell me, O Muse” in *The Odyssey* or Virgil’s “O Muse, tell the causes.” This narrator, this *I*, is not calling out to the muse for inspiration; she is instead calling her out for her transgressions:

I’ve caught you out. You slut. You fat trout.
So here you are fumed in candle-stink.
Its yellow balm exhumes you for the glass.
How you arch and pout in it!
How you poach your face in it!
Anyone would think you were a whore –
An ageing out-of-work kind-hearted tart.
I know you for the ruthless bitch you are:
Our criminal, our tricoteuse, our Muse –
Our Muse of Mimic Art. (lines 1-10)

This muse has been kept immortal by the “candle-stink” of the male writers who have called upon her. The “yellow balm” keeps her beautiful for their view, their “glass.” The lines “How you arch and pout in it! / How you poach your face in it!” ask the reader to conjure the image of an immortal “slut” who is arching her back and pouting her lips for the glass. The narrator releases her grip of anger for a moment in the lines “Anyone would think you were a whore –/ An ageing out-of-work kind-hearted tart.” Is this muse someone we

should pity? She is “kind-hearted,” “ageing,” and thrown out for her age. No. This *I* knows her “for the ruthless bitch” that she is. This narrator has more information than we, the readers, possess. As a voyeur, the reader is transfixed and has now been given an image, a viewpoint. The pronoun *you* offers a focal point to the reader. The point of focus, for now, is identical for the reader, the narrator, and for the accusations. All are focused on the aging muse. But, Boland offers her reader no comfort in this viewpoint; she shifts the reader’s role in this tirade. By doing so, she works to further entrench the reader in the experience, and begins the possession. The reader, the listener, the voyeur has been affected by this “criminal.”

Not only is this muse a “ruthless bitch,” but she is “Our criminal, our tricoteuse, our Muse,” no longer only a *you* or an *I* but now the reader is asked to adjust her position within this experience, to take on some ownership of this “fat trout” through the use of *our*. The reader is no longer being allowed the comfortable seat of voyeur; the narrator forces the reader into active participation. This muse’s transgressions not only affect *me* in this world of written language, but she has affected *us* all. Boland further complicates the focal point for the reader by beginning to address the muse not in the moment, but now through time.

The reader no longer looks simply at the staged assault upon the muse; the reader now looks out onto the long history of crimes of this “tricoteuse.” This immortal of women protected herself from the “horrors” of ageing, “From the slow betrayal of our bedroom mirrors.” Again, the reader is included in the list of the victims, *our*. Jody Allen-Randolph suggests in this change of gaze, from the intimate to the collective, “[Boland] turns away from the distorting lens of metaphor to use the violence directly” (50). She goes on to

suggest that Boland's technique here essentially traps the Mimic Muse during the first two stanzas, and now this muse "is forced to observe the exigencies of experience whence she fled" (50). I add here that Boland's turning at this integral point in the poem also shifts the reader's experience of moving from passive voyeur (*you* and *I*), to active victimized participant (*our*).

Within the two middle stanzas of the poem, stanzas 3 and 4, Boland only uses the pronoun *you*, with the exception of the one line, "From the slow betrayals of our bedroom mirrors" (line 29). The purpose of the temporary shedding of the first-person *I* works to fix the view of the reader out onto these listings of the crimes of the muse. Let's be clear, this narrator is not suggesting that the muse has committed these crimes, but that by ignoring her power over them, she too carries responsibility. Boland moves her reader's view out onto well-traveled themes – "With what drums and dances, what deceits / Rituals and flatteries of war, / Chants and pipes and witless empty rites" (lines 21-23). In the second half of the third stanza, Boland returns the reader to the muse – "You did protect yourself from horrors / . . . How you fled" (lines 26 & 30). She follows this same patterning of the pronoun usage in the fourth stanza. The first half is absent of any pronouns. The reader is allowed to dwell and to consider the crimes – "The scream of beaten women / The crime of babies battered / The hubbub and the shriek of daily grief" (lines 33-35). But, again Boland brings the muse back into view with the use of the directly confrontational *you* – "A world you could have sheltered in your skirts" (line 37).

The narrator (*I*) again returns to the scene in the fifth stanza and moves on from the historical proofs to showing the strength of the song of the muse. This narrator was not

immune to the wiles of this Muse – “And I who mazed my way to womanhood/ Through all your halls of mirrors . . .” (lines 41-42). This poet narrator, like those who came before her, “waited” for the Muses’ “trashy whim!” (line 43). She was holding out hope for inspiration from this muse: “Hoping your lamp and flash, / Your glass, might show / This world I needed nothing else to know / But love and again love and again love” (lines 44-47). But, she, and subsequently the reader, has become aware of the “criminal” that hides behind the “glass.” The *I* and *you* are again in direct confrontation with one another. The reader is again voyeur – “Your luck ran out. Look. My words leap” (line 51). However, in the last of this tirade, the reader is again unseated from the comfort of the voyeur. Boland brings the reader’s participation full circle in the last two lines of the poem – “You are the Muse of all our mirrors. / Look in them and weep” (lines 59 -60).

Actively participating in a scene or happening is always a more powerful experience in our lives than when we simply sit on the sidelines and watch. In this poem, the reader oscillates between the two roles and in doing so, experiences the tirade and the crimes of the muse as a personal affront. Through the lens of phenomenology, the reader already experiences the action of the literature that is taking place on the page. The characters, action, and settings come to life within the reader’s own consciousness. Furthermore, the reader experiences, as Poulet suggests, “thoughts foreign to [them].” The reader’s “consciousness behaves as though it were the consciousness of another” (“Phenomenology” 55).⁷ This other’s consciousness in most simple terms is the author. However, Boland complicates that simplicity within this poem. The persona that dwells within the poetic

⁷ See page 22 of “The Phenomenological Impact of Literature”

narrator should not simply be attributed to the poet herself, but as her creation – a *poetic gesture* in itself. Her further complication of the positioning of the reader’s gaze through pronouns produces an experience full with pushing, pulling, and directing. For the reader, in a phenomenological sense, this experience essentially creates disequilibrium, which as Merleau-Ponty suggests creates the opening for transformational experience and, therefore, the opportunity for new meaning making.

Poetic Rhythm

The aesthetic experience of this poem is driven by Boland’s decisions to create the emotion and rhythm of the rant. The first line of the poem sets a rapid rhythm through the use of quick and forceful sentences – “I’ve caught you out. You slut. You fat trout.”

The images and accusations do not trickle forth in a lyrical sense; instead they are dumped out in rapid succession. This rhythm affects the emotion and experience of the reader. In the aesthetic experiencing of this poem, the reader does not have time to reflect or easily move from one image to the other. The narrator moves the reader through time and space rapidly and jarringly.

In the middle of this first stanza, Boland uses two emphasized sentences – “How you arch and pout in it! / How you poach your face in it!” (lines 4 & 5). These two lines are not only emphasized through the use of the exclamation points, but they are also identical in structure, word count, and in the first word used, emphasizing the ranting demeanor of this poem. As cultures we experience and react to rants and tirades in a different manner than we do a conversation. We pay special attention to the rant. Not only does a rant seem

important, but it is often also entertaining. By establishing this poem's rhythm as a rant, Boland secures her reader's attention and ensures her words' possession over the reader.

The poem then turns to the disguises of the muse, her attempt to mask her crimes behind "Eye-shadow, swivel brushes, blushers,/ Hot pinks, rouge pots, sticks,/ Ice for pores, a mud mask --/ All the latest tricks." (lines 11-14). The words plunder over make-up and masking techniques. These "tricks" given in quick succession in this manner continue the feeling of the rant, but then the rhyme and rhythm change. The reader's experience changes with the variation in tempo here. The pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables change from that of a quick listing unmarked by a pattern of poetic rhythm except for the rapid procession of the "tricks" of masking to that of the recognizable iambic rhythm. Boland interrupts the plundering and moves into a slower more comforting rhythm; this new rhythm marks a change in the experiencing of the poem itself. Her tone also changes here and therefore so does the reader's pace:

Not one of them disguise
That there's a dead millennium in your eyes.
You try to lamp the sockets of your loss:
The lives that famished for your look of love.
Your time is up. There's not a stroke, a flick
Can make your crime cosmetic. (lines 15 – 20)

Before these lines, Boland offered no definite pattern of end rhyming. The first stanza is marked by repetition and rhyming meant for emphasis, "How you arch and pout in it! / How you poach your face in it" (lines 4 & 5), but no discernable pattern. Now she

slows the rhythm down and creates a lulling effect through the rhyme scheme of A A, B B, C C. Along with the rhyme scheme, Boland uses an iambic meter:

Nőt oíe | ðf thém | dísgúise

Thátt thére's | á déad | millén | niŭm ín | yður eyés. (lines 15-16)

Boland's use of rhythm here is significant to the poetic experience. The reader takes note, and is manipulated to do so. The crime at hand is masking "a dead millennium." This is no small transgression. The unstressed, stressed rhythm continues through the first two lines through to the end of the stanza. However, Boland does create a momentary stop through caesura within the fifth line of the iambic rhythm with a powerful sentence that falls and ends in the middle of the line – "Your time is up." Although the rest of the stanza does continue with the same metrical rhythm, this short sentence again changes the musicality, and therefore, the reader's attention is manipulated with the full-stop of the period. The reader's special attention to this meaning is demanded – "Your time is up."

Each of these first two stanzas ends in a natural pause, which Boland signals with the use of the period. But, the next stanza is different, and the reader takes note of this, another change in musicality. This change in musicality also marks another change in the reader's gaze. The reader's experience turns from the Muse and the narrator's tirade to a long laundry list of historical wrongdoings. She returns to the quick plundering speed that was used in the listing of cosmetics in the second stanza:

With what drums and dances, what deceits
Rituals and flatteries of war,
Chants and pipes and witless empty rites
And war-like men
And wet-eyed patient women
You did protect yourself from horrors,
From the lizarding of eyelids
From the whiskering of nipples,
From the slow betrayals of our bedroom mirrors –
How you fled (Stanza 3)

The kitchen screw and the rack of labour,
The wash thumbed and the dish cracked,
The scream of beaten women,
The crime of babies battered,
The hubbub and the shriek of daily grief
That seeks asylum behind suburb walls –
A world you could have sheltered in your skirts –
And well I know and how I see it now,
The way you latched your belt and itched your hem
And shook it off like dirt. (lines 21-40) (Stanza 4)

Boland uses repetition again to manipulate the rhythm of the reader's experiencing of this poem. In the third stanza, there are two lines that begin with "And" and three lines that begin with "From," leaving only three lines that differ. She does the same in the fourth stanza with the repetition of the words "The" and "And." The ease with which the reader can gloss over the repeated words marks the significance of the repetition of these line-

beginning words. Boland makes it unnecessary to dwell on the first word, but instead allows her reader to dwell on the differences in the lines: “screams of beaten women,” “crime of babies battered,” “hubbub and the shriek of daily grief.”

The fifth stanza carries a slower more involving rhythm, much like the second half of the second stanza that was marked with iambic meter. However, this entire stanza is slowed in musicality and speed. This stanza is about the self-reflection of the narrator, a complication to this rant. The stanza also marks the moment in the poem in which the reader is asked to return to the more private and intimate space. The images of the historical falls away, gone but not forgotten, and the list of characters experienced again shrinks back to the poet narrator, the muse, and the reader. The slowing of the pace of the words in the fifth stanza, no longer plundering over “tricks” of disguise or through the halls of historical silences, marks a more solemn moment. There is no *our* in this stanza, only *I*, the narrator, and two appearances of *Your*, the muse. The only repeated elements within this stanza are the two line-beginning occurrences of “Your” in lines 45 and 50, the middle and the last lines of the stanza. There is also a pair of rhyming lines in the middle of the stanza – “Your glass might show/ This world I needed nothing else to know” (lines 45- 46). Beyond these two occurrences of rhyme and repetition, this stanza is unmarked by *poetic gestures* designed to quicken the experience.

This quiet moment ends for all – the reader, narrator and muse with the beginning of the last stanza. This transition, by design, is jarring for the reader. Again the poem’s tone moves from momentary intimacy back into its ranting rhythm:

Your luck ran out. Look. My words leap
Among your pinks, your stench pots and sticks.
They scatter shadow, swivel brushes, blushers.
Make your face naked.
Strip your mind naked.
Drench your skin in a woman's tears.
I will wake you from your sluttish sleep.
I will show you true reflections, terrors.
You are the Muse of all our mirrors.
Look in them and weep. (lines 48-60)

Boland returns to the musicality of the second stanza within the sixth stanza. The variation in rhythm demands a certain attention not only from the Muse but also from the reader. Within the first line of this last stanza, Boland, again, uses the power of the caesura to manipulate the emotions of the reader – “Your luck ran out. Look.” It is as if Boland’s narrator is screaming – Look! Look at my power over you. The authority in this poem has changed. In the beginning of the poem, the power seemed to be held by the immortal beauty that had the ability to “protect [herself] from the horrors.” Not any more. This poet holds that power now. The Muse will “Look.” She then uses repetition which creates a rhythm akin to a canon – “Make your face naked./ Strip your mind naked.” These quick two sentences are powerful and hit the intended target. The surface-level mask is not the goal of this narrator. The more deeply rooted “mind” must also be stripped “naked.” The narrator’s words will “Drench” the Muse’s skin in “a woman’s tears.” With these words, this narrator *will* “wake” the muse from her “sluttish sleep,” and *will* “show” the muse the harsh realities she has been ignoring for a millennium. With the rhythm of a canon, the

change in musicality, and the strengthening of already strong words, “Look,” “*will* wake,” and “*will* show,” Boland wrenches the reader out of comfort again.

The *poetic gestures* of rhythm and repetition manipulate not only the reader’s attention, but also emotions. The emotional twists and turns, slowing and quickening, intimacy to public and then back to intimacy, force the reader to again actively participate in the poem itself. These changes and patterns of poetic rhythm create more disequilibrium for the reader. Like the pronoun usage, the changes and shifts manipulate the reader into emotional states that force active participation. Because the reader participates rather than viewing, the poem, as Beauvoir suggests, allows the reader “to undergo imaginary experiences that are as complete and disturbing as lived experiences” (“Literature and Metaphysics” 270). Because these experiences are as complete and as disturbing as those experienced in reality, the reader learns through them, and very foundational truths and ideas are touched, possibly fractured.

Metaphorical Allusions

As expressed in the introduction to these analyses, the second step in analyzing the phenomenological effects of Boland’s *poetic gestures* upon her reader must be to begin to seek out the twists and turns of the subject. Within “Tirade for the Mimic Muse,” the subject might be seen as the muse herself; however, because of the frequent shifts Boland creates throughout the poem, the subject shifts as well. The *poetic gestures* analyzed above, pronoun usage and rhythm, also lend their services to the shifting of the subject. However, it seems most appropriate to define the shifting in the subject of the poem through Boland’s use of metaphorical language and imagery.

Although Boland does not hide the direct object of her tirade in metaphor, she does use metaphor to orient her reader to the purpose of her tirade, and therefore to her tirade's subject. Boland is using very strong metaphorical and symbolic language from the very first line of the poem, "I've caught you out. You slut. You fat trout." The pre-thetic thinking that emanates from these phrases and words situates the reader within a certain frame of mind. The verb used in the first short sentence, "caught," ties itself to the direct objects of the following two sentences – "slut" and "fat trout." Neither of these two sentences has an explicit verb within them; however, the reader reasons the verb out very quickly as a form of *to be*. A case may also be made to suggest that because the second two sentences are missing an explicit verb, the connection between "caught" and the two objects "slut" and "trout" may be even stronger on a pre-thetic level. This is one manner in which the possession of the poem works for the poet and her purpose. Either way, the close relationships between the verb "caught" and the nominatives "slut" and "fat trout" manipulate the reader's frame of mind. In our cultural understanding, both a slut and a trout are things to be caught – for different reasons. Both "slut" and "fat trout" are also belittling, derogatory and demeaning words to be compared to or to be labeled. Boland then further connects the metaphors used. In lines four and five, the poet narrator uses two phrases to further describe the muse – "How you arch and pout in it! / How you poach your face in it" (lines 4 & 5). The first line directly continues and connects the reader to the word and idea "slut," arching her back and pouting for the looking glass or for her admirers. The second line directly connects to the image of the "fat trout," poaching her face in her glass. These connections add to the

overall experiencing of the imagery of the poem. But, they also serve as a driving force for the imagined experiencing of the reader.

At the end of the first stanza, another image is used. This muse who has affected the reader is described not only as a “ruthless bitch,” but a “criminal,” “a tricoteuse.” The inferences introduced with the word “tricoteuse” are even more incriminating than the first two, “ruthless bitch” and “criminal.” This allusion conjures the memories of the French women who attended the public executions and knitted while the doomed were being prepared, set to the guillotine, and dragged away. This muse is no regular criminal; she is an uninterested voyeur attending atrocities. This image and metaphorical gesture readies the reader for the case, which is about to be put before her. The word “tricoteuse” is not just any word, but describes a historical female figure that was very aware of the atrocities going on about her, but chose to ignore the suffering and wrongs. This muse is about to be dragged across the historical wrongdoings she may have had the power to avert, “A world that you could have sheltered in your skirts” (line 37). But, like the tricoteuse, the muse did nothing; instead she “shook it off like dirt” (line 40).

In stanza 2, the poem turns to these crimes of the muse and her attempt to hide them, to mask her crimes behind “Eye-shadow, swivel brushes, blushers,/ Hot pinks, rouge pots, sticks,/ Ice for pores, a mud mask --/ All the latest tricks.” (lines 11-14). By seating the muse in front of her possessions of disguise, the poet narrator is suggesting the false image of the muse. This muse has not been as perfect as she seems; she has instead become a master of disguise and masquerade. Boland fractures the reader’s perception of the Muse by introducing these cosmetics as “tricks.” By fracturing the traditional image associated

with the beautiful, sublime and other-worldly goddess, the threads that attach the reader to his or her culturally-created perceptions of the Muse are slackened. This slackening of the perceptive threads, in turn, allows the reader to begin to consider the Muse in a new light, as a real three-dimensional woman who must use masks to appear as the reflection of perfection and as the source of artistic inspiration. Boland humanizes the Muse through the imagery of the cosmetics.

Aesthetic experience is driven through imagery. And, as Poulet suggests, when we immerse ourselves in the poem, the barriers that exist between the words and the reader fall away. These metaphorical and figurative allusions of trout, tricotueses, and masks serve as a compass that readies the reader for the imagery to come. In this manner, these images orient the reader to the poem's subject shifts and imagery. Because the reader, through these images, is oriented to the poem's subject, then the reader is also more ready to not only understand the *poetic gestures* that Boland offers, but also to experience them.

By directly catching this Muse and laying her out for what she is, Boland challenges the perception of the muse and of that two-dimensional image of the beautiful, inspirational mythical being. Boland does not applaud this muse for her immortal beauty, but forces her eyes onto the "millennium" of "beaten women" and "babies battered," whom she had ignored for a millennia.

In similar fashion, Boland addresses the muse directly in other poems throughout her body of work. The work of this poem cannot be mistranslated; this is the direct interrogation of a masculine representation of woman, an "object of inspiration constructed by a masculinist discourse and within a masculine conception of aesthetic decorum" (Allen-

Randolph 50). One may question Boland's aesthetic choices here. Many critics have. Contemporary poetry is filled with artists who are pushing on the barriers that were previously considered untouchable. The muse has been a source of inspiration throughout literary history; just in the last few pages I have listed only a few who have called on her – Homer, Virgil, Keats, da Vinci, and Botticelli. Boland began in this same aesthetic training, but she suggests in *A Journey* that at some point in her *becoming* her ideas of aesthetics changed –

When I was young I thought of aesthetics as an abstract code. I learned later it was a human one. I learned it belongs everywhere, and to no one person. Which means it can be a common possession. Standing in a room in the winter half-light before the wonder of a new child is aesthetics. Hesitating at the meaning of the subject matter as fit for poetry is aesthetics. Searching back to the prompts and resistances involved in becoming a poet – the reading, the writing – is also aesthetics. I came to believe there is no meaning to an art form with its grand designs unless it allows the humane to shape the invented, the way gravity is said to bend starlight. (75)

An image once considered sublime and untouchable is here made ready to be shaped by the “humane.”

Boland strips this goddess of the mimic arts of her sublime perch, and in doing so fractures her reader's previous perceptions of a truly entrenched myth. The reader's perception shifts from the acceptance of the culturally benign Muse to the idea that the

abuses of history, “The scream of beaten women, / The crime of babies battered, / The hubbub and the shriek of daily grief,” were abuses that the Muse with all her power over art “could have sheltered in [her] skirts” (lines 33-37). The gaze of the reader shifts often in this tirade, which creates an emotional exposure to Boland’s poetic accusations. The narrator’s rant becomes the reader’s rant. The reader is first possessed by the discourse between narrator and subject and is then left to linger upon his or her own created perspectives of the Muse. This fracturing and subverting of an entrenched mythical emblem creates a real and faulted muse, and therein an emblem that becomes re-definable.

Creating a Passable New Skin

And see the difference.
This time – and this you did not ordain –
I am changing the story.
~ from “Formal Feeling”

Within this second grouping of poems, Boland works to create a new skin over the scar left behind by the fractured mythical images she leaves in her wake. In the poem “Mise Eire,” Boland writes, “a new language/ is a kind of scar/ and heals after a while/ into a passable imitation/ of what went before” (lines 40 – 44). Within the first group of poems, Boland works to subvert and fracture the old man-made and man-used myths of the two-dimensional. In this, the second, grouping, she creates intimately recognizable forms of the

feminine reality; she creates a scar, a passable imitation. The scholars Hagen and Zelman suggest that Boland follows her “attempt to unseat the rhyming queens” with a mission to “reinscribe the human truths they have suppressed” (445). “History,” they suggest, “rests . . . on the assumption that the ordinary and the important are mutually exclusive categories, an assumption that justifies omitting women’s experience from the records even today; women’s aspirations, sufferings, and unglamorous heroics are rendered invisible by their ordinariness” (Hagen and Zelman 445). With poems like “The Journey” and “The Pomegranate,” Boland invokes the old spectres of those poets who have come before her and have missed the brilliance emanating from the ordinary.

Boland suggests, “when a myth is stripped of meaning, it simply grows another skin” (*A Journey* 97). As poet, Boland feels an obligation to that poet’s tradition of “formalizing the truth;” and therefore, she endeavors to create that new skin, that new feminine reality. As suggested in the introduction to these analyses, Boland uses her tone to create a very different mood and effect for her reader than she creates in the first group. Because of this different tone, the reader experiences the poems in a contrastive manner. Whereas the first grouping of poems subvert through a tone, which is sometimes filled with ranting and screaming from the rooftop, this group of poems suggest a new reality and a new way of seeing or, in phenomenological terms, perceiving. There is a new sense of ownership created within these poems, and therefore a new sense of reality and definition rise from the

words and rhythms. Utilizing the *poetic gestures* of rhythm, representation of time and space, pronoun usage and metaphorical and literary allusions, these poems show the reader the way to that feminine reality, and create new perspective in the manner that Poulet suggests “surges up in the moment and endows it with a life that is not momentary” (*Studies* 27).

I turn now to “The Journey.” Boland chooses to write this poem in the tradition of the epics of Homer, Virgil and so many more. Not only is this list of authors predominantly male, but it is also marked as the foundation of so many established myths. In the epic *Divine Comedy*, Dante establishes his genealogy in literature by using Virgil as his guide into the depths of the underworld. Boland subverts the sacred again in this poem. She chooses Sappho as her poet’s guide, a choice Nell Sullivan suggests, “underscores women’s exclusion from the patriarchal canon” (339). This choice possibly has even more meaning considering Plato’s famously labeling Sappho not as poetess but as the tenth muse. Boland also chooses to rail against the sublime conventions of the form itself. In an interview with Marilyn Reizbaum given in 1989, on this subject Boland states,

The important part of “The Journey” for me was not just that it included the antibiotic, but that it was in one of the elite conventions of poetry which had turned its back on experiences of that sort. And I think the great tension for women poets is between a tradition which has shouldered off the experiences they value and therefore devalued them. (473)

Within “The Journey,” Boland is both subverting the old foundations and forcing a new skin to grow over the scars left behind. Much like her narrator is demanding attention from the Mimic Muse – “Look. My words leap . . .” – Boland is demanding re-vision.

Metaphorical and Literary Allusions

“The Journey” begins with an epigraph. Lines from *Book VI* of *The Aeneid* create a frame of mind for the reader. The lines are those of Virgil’s poet narrator describing the scene that Aeneas and his guide the Cumaean Sibyl experience as they step from Charon’s ferry. The scene is that of the “wailing infant souls . . . stolen from their mothers’ breasts . . . before their time.” Boland seeks a very specific tone and theme with these lines and with this scene, a scene of wailing infants who were not allowed life. The scene that she sets here follows her purpose of putting voice to the ordinary events that were overstepped by her predecessors. Here, Virgil gives these lives, which ended tragically, only four lines for the telling (lines 526- 529).

Boland then begins the poem with a monologue of a narrator; we will later come to know her as both mother and poet. It is again that time between dusk and night, “the in-between/ neither here-nor-there hour of the evening” (“The Women” lines 1 & 2). This narrator is angered and filled with anxiety: “ ‘there has never’/ I said ‘been a poem to an antibiotic’ ” (lines 1 & 2). The last two lines of the first stanza continue the subject of this monologue: “never a word to compare with the odes on/ the flower of the raw sloe for fever” (lines 3 & 4). This mother is angry with her forbearers of language. What could be more sublime than a mother worried about her sick child, but never has a word on the curing properties of antibiotics been written to compare to the odes. Never has a word been

written that would compare to the epics to describe the fever reducing powers of the blackthorn berry.

She continues her indictment of her predecessors, but she also offers that this is not an oversight that has been remedied. The indictment moves from the past tense “there has never been” to the present tense “is wasting:”

Depend on it, somewhere a poet is wasting

his sweet uncluttered metres on the obvious

‘emblem instead of the real thing.

Instead of sulphur we shall have hyssop dipped

in the wild blood of the unblemished lamb,

so every day the language gets less

‘for the task and we are less with the language.’ (lines 7-13)

This narrator confronts not only those poets who have come before, but also those who continue to follow the example given. They “waste” their “metres” on establishing “obvious emblems” instead of paying close attention to the realities of life. It is of importance to also note here that this section of the poem marks the only appearance of a masculine pronoun (*his*) within the entire 96 lines. Boland invokes the well worn literary theme of the age-old battle between good and evil, heaven and hell: “Instead of sulphur . . . the wild blood of the

unblemished lamb,” another strong indictment of the “obvious emblems.” For this poet-narrator, these themes are not reality. These poets are wasting their talent for writing “uncluttered metres.”

After the poet-narrator finishes speaking, she looks around her and describes the book that lays beside her: “open at the page Aphrodite/ comforts Sappho in her love’s duress” (lines 16 & 17). This literary allusion serves a complicated purpose for the reader. First, these two lines introduce and frame the reader’s mind to a different kind of poetic ancestor of language, Sappho. It also serves to set forth the idea and feeling of comfort from “love’s duress.” Both are important framing devices, which work as foreshadowing elements. The reader is given the subject of that foreshadowing in line 26 of the poem: “when she came and stood beside me.” The reader is not definitively given this mystery *she* until line 40; however, because Boland has already framed the image of Sappho in the mind of her reader, the importance of Sappho to this poet-narrator and her importance to this poet’s journey is not lost in the interim.

Sappho, not the Sibyl of Cumea, comes to this poet not in a dream but during a near sleep, in which she is “as ready to believe” (line 26). Together the poet and her guide journey “down down down.” The reader is not given the destination, again not definitively. However, as readers, we have been programmed so fully by the epics of Homer, Virgil, and Dante that even if we have not read them directly, we know of them and their content. And the theme of the guide arriving during a dream-like state and the journey downwards is familiar. As part of the established western canon, these epics are a part of our collective *world-thesis*. Boland is tapping into those culturally created perceptions and ideas, and in

doing so asks her reader to reconsider them. Sappho's appearance while the poet is in a dream state is the appearance of her guide down into the depths of the underworld. Sappho, as the poet's guide, begins to explain the tragedies that begin to materialize out of the "shadows:"

'Cholera, typhus, croup, diphtheria'
she said, 'in those days they racketed
in every backstreet and alley of old Europe.
Behold the children of the plague.' (lines 49-53)

Sappho gives this daughter-poet the quiet opportunity to allow these images to wash over her. Describing the "horror," the narrator offers her reader the images of "limpet shape[s] —/ suckling darkneses" and the weighed-down arms of mothers who appear as "terrible pietàs." This image and allusion brings to the forefront the image of the grieving Mary holding the limp body of Jesus after the crucifixion. Boland has tapped into allusions to the great epics, the goddess Aphrodite, the lost poet Sappho, and to Christianity's most recognizable form as represented by the bodies of mother and son. All of the reader's *world-thesis* as associated with these large and multivalent themes and images rushes to the imagination and fuses it with meaning.

Sappho then offers her warning to this poet, a warning echoing the subject of the poet's own anxiety in the beginning of the poem: "be careful./ Do not define these women

by their work” (lines 57 & 58). But, instead, Sappho directs this poet to see these women through the brilliance of the ordinary. These women are of all walks of life and experiences: “washerwomen,” “court ladies,” “laundresses.” They are not to be divided by class and fortune. They are women, mothers, grieving:

‘But these are women who went out like you
when dusk became a dark sweet with leaves,
recovering the day, stooping, picking up
teddy bears and rag dolls and tricycles and buckets –

‘love’s archaeology – and they too like you
stood boot deep in flowers once in summer
or saw winter come in with a single magpie
in a caul of haws, a solo harlequin.’ (lines 65-72)

For this guide, these are mothers; they were no different than this poet. They worried as she does. The everyday, the previously deemed mundane here is made sublime – “stooping, picking up/ teddy bears and rag dolls and tricycles and buckets.” Boland further creates this feeling by labeling these acts of mothering as “love’s archaeology.” The narrator and the women and children along the river begin to feel like one.

Boland pulls the barrier back into view for the reader so as to maintain the needed gulf between this dreamer, her guide and the scene of the underworld: “Between us was the melancholy river,/ the dream water, the narcotic crossing” (lines 74-75). Before Sappho leaves her charge, she offers this poet the agency she needs to remedy the “obvious emblems” and lost utterances:

‘there are not many of us; you are dear

‘and stand beside me as my own daughter.

I have brought you here so you will know forever

the silences in which are our beginnings,

in which we have an origin like water,’ (lines 84-88)

Creating a genealogy and creating an inheritance through these lines, Boland subverts not only the patriarchally created epics of war and heroes but also the authority through which the nameless were left out. Boland also offers her reader another pre-thetic connection to the origins of the “obvious emblems.” By offering “the silences in which are our beginnings,/ in which we have an origin like water,” Boland is pushing the barriers of re-visioning as far back as not only Sappho and the underworld of the Greek and Roman epics, but also to the origin of the goddess Aphrodite, whose was said to have been born of water.

Pronoun Usage

As in “Tirade for the Mimic Muse,” Boland uses pronouns to move the gaze and perception of the reader throughout this poem. However, she does not use pronouns in

quite the same manner. The pronouns in this poem have a significant ebb and flow to them.

The reader is only included in the action of this poem at one point:

Instead of sulphur we shall have hyssop dipped
In the wild blood of the unblemished lamb,
so every day the language gets less

‘for the task and we are less with the language.’ (lines 10 – 13)

The reader is asked to consider this state of language as her own – *we are*. The effect of this poet-narrator’s anger at the absence of “a word to compare to the odes” is not only her anxiety, but this anxiety should extend to Boland’s reader as well.

The importance of the pronoun usage begins to surface in line 15 of the poem: “and the dark fell and the book beside me/ lay open at the page Aphrodite/ comforts Sappho in her love’s duress” (lines 15 – 17). The reader may not recognize their significance at the moment that these two pronouns, *me* and *her*, are offered, but Boland establishes through pronouns her characters for the reader. These are the two characters that will be referred to throughout the remainder of the poem, with the addition of the women and children to come.

The pronouns flow in and out of this poem at a dream-like pace. They are most prevalent during the appearance of Sappho as guide and during her departure. A significant increase in the pronouns at both of these most important points in the poem is noticeable and is impactful to the experience of the reader. At both moments not only does the pronoun usage increase, but the tempo also notably increases.

After the initial appearance of *her* (line 17), Sappho enters the dream as a three-dimensional entity while the poet-narrator moves into a dream-state; there is suddenly a *she* that enters this picture – “when she came and stood beside me” (line 28). Boland quickens the tempo of this poem and guides the reader along the journey that is to begin:

and I would have known her anywhere
and I would have gone with her anywhere
and she came wordlessly
and without a word I went with her (lines 29-32) (Stanza 8)

The repetitive use of *I* and *her* creates a focus for attention for the reader. This repetitive use of pronouns is replicated in stanzas 20, 21 and 22, marking the end of the journey and Sappho’s departure:

I whispered, ‘let me be
Let me at least be their witness,’ but she said
‘what you have seen is beyond speech,
beyond song, only not beyond love; (Stanza 20)

‘remember it, you will remember it’
and I heard her say but she was fading fast
as we emerged under the stars of heaven,
‘there are not many of us; you are dear (Stanza 21)

‘and stand beside me as my own daughter.
I have brought you here so you will know forever
The silences in which are our beginnings,
In which we have an origin like water,’ (lines 77 – 88) (Stanza 22)

The importance of the exchanges that occur within these two sections of the poem are marked with a lyrical sense of rhythm, but the rapid fire pronoun usage ensures that the reader's attention moves from the poet-narrator to Sappho during their discourse. The appearance of the collective pronouns *us* and *our* are also very important. Sappho's is the only voice that utters these collective pronouns within this poem. Not only a guide here, Sappho also serves as the female poetic ancestor for this narrator. With the use of these collective pronouns much like through the use of allusions, Sappho provides this poet-narrator the agency she needs to remedy the silent truths. By using the all-inclusive *us* and *our*, Sappho is inviting the poet into her own world. If the poet-narrator like Boland felt a lack of a poetic inheritance, one has now been established for her.

Poetic Rhythm

This poem is arranged in 24 quatrains. The use of enjambment is prevalent throughout, and Boland's rhythms manipulate the reader into just the right musicality at the right moments. In the first stanza, she establishes the speaker in an unmelodious manner. There is a sense of dissonance that occurs in the beginning of the second line when the verbal phrase *has never been* is broken by "I said:"

And then the dark fell and 'there has never'

I said 'been a poem to an antibiotic: (lines 1 & 2)

This marks the only moment in the poem in which a verb is severed in this manner. The

dissonance it creates is striking and works to set the tone of this poem. The rest of the stanza is also designed to force the reader to linger upon its words:

never a word to compare with the odes on
the flower of the raw sloe for fever

‘or the devious Africa-seeking tern
or the protein treasures of the sea-bed. (lines 1-8)

The phrases “raw sloe for fever,” “devious Africa-seeking tern,” and “protein treasures of the sea-bed” do not make for quick and easy reading. And although when reading in our mind, we don’t necessarily use our tongues and mouths to form the words, we still imagine ourselves doing so. Therefore, the complexity of the designs of these phrases forces the reader to linger upon them. Boland gives her reader a well-deserved full stop at the end of this listing of ignored themes. The next line begins with emphasis and strength: “Depend on it” (line 7). The list that follows is interesting in its rhythmical and rhyming make-up: “we shall have hyssop dipped/ in the wild blood of the unblemished lamb.” (lines 10 & 11). This list of the subject matters of the “obvious emblems” is marked with repetition of consonant sounds, which makes it easier to read through as well as more pleasant to the ears. The difference can be explored directly in the differences of “raw sloe” and “hyssop dipped” or “unblemished lamb” and “devious Africa-seeking tern.” The poet-narrator here is still in a fit of anger, are these rhyming phrases meant to mark sarcasm? The reader does move through this section with a feeling of that sarcastic air. This may very well be the product of the alliteration present.

Boland continues the alliteration, but with a different structure. This different structure immediately brings a new sense of importance and a need to pay attention:

‘so every day the language gets less

‘for the task and we are less with the language.’ (lines 12 & 13)

The alliteration is more blatant in these two lines. The inversion of the words also brings attention to the lines: “language gets less” and “less with the language.”

The repetition of words and signal phrases becomes a strong and prevalent element in this poem in stanza 7 within the first line “not sleep, but nearly sleep.” But, the repetition of words is most emphatic in the next stanza, which marks the arrival of Sappho to the poet-narrator’s almost dream state:

and I would have known her anywhere
and I would have gone with her anywhere
and she came wordlessly
and without a word I went with her (lines 29-32) (Stanza 8)

Between the changed, quickening rhythm and the inclusion of this mysterious new unnamed figure, Boland creates an atmosphere in which the absorption of details is easy and quick. There are no full-stops here. In fact, there have not been since line 17 in the fifth stanza, and the next period does not appear until line 44, in stanza 11. The reader is embarking, as voyeur, on a journey along with this poet narrator, but this journey is to be dreamy and rhythmical like the waves of a river.

Floating down, light “failing,” in a dream-like state with Sappho, “the scholiast’s nightingale,” by her side, the narrator embarks on her journey down. The reader is lulled

into experiencing the same dream-like state. The absence of any stops in this section accompanied by the repetitive directions of “down down down” creates this atmosphere for the reader:

down down down without so much as
ever touching down but always, always
with a sense of mulch beneath us,
the way of stairs winding down to a river
and down we went, again down
until we came to a sudden rest
beside a river in what seemed to be
an oppressive suburb of the dawn. (lines 33 – 44)

The dream is broken in line 44 with the first full-stop given in 27 lines. The drama of this stop could be compared to the experience of coming face to face with a wall. All at once, all stops, “beside a river” in “bad light.”

Upon arrival, unlike Virgil’s Aeneas, Boland’s narrator does not speak of the auditory impressions. She waits for her eyesight to transition to the light, “At first I saw shadows, only shadows.” (lines 45-46). The tempo of this experience has now slowed, as if to give the reader permission to allow the arriving images an opportunity to wash over them. Boland gives four lines of the stanza, and at the end of three of the lines is a full-stop. The images begin, here, to stream in.

Another element of rhythm plays a drastically different part than Boland asks of it in “Tirade for the Mimic Muse.” In stanza 17, Sappho is describing the similarities between the

poet-narrator and these mothers who like all mother's should be seen through their "love's archaeology:"

recovering the day, stooping, picking up
teddy bears and rag dolls and tricycles and buckets – (lines 67 & 68)

This list is reminiscent of the plundering lists of Boland's rant against the Muse: "Eye-shadow, swivel brushes, blushers,/ Hot pinks, rouge pots, sticks" (lines 11 & 12). But the rhythm of this listing is different. It is not the place for plundering, but a place for more careful consideration. Boland offers this feeling to her reader through the use of and the repetition of the conjunction "and."

Repetition, like the pronoun usage, marks important moments within this poem.

In lines 77 through 81, Sappho is translating the scene for our poet-narrator:

I whispered, 'let me be
let me at least be their witness,' but she said
'what you have seen is beyond speech,
beyond song, only not beyond love;

'remember it, you will remember it' (lines 77-81)

Much like Sappho's arrival, "and I would have known her anywhere/ and I would have gone with her anywhere," the repetition emphasizes and accentuates her departure and the pair's ascendance "under the stars of heaven."

These *poetic gestures* drive the emotion of the poem and accentuate the moments when the reader is to mark and remember. The setting given offers a somber and intimate experience, the pronouns used, for the most part, keep the reader with Sappho and the

narrator, and the repetition emphasizes the arrival and departure of the sage, now, mother-poet. The retelling and re-visioning of this mythical journey down into the underworld is impactful for the reader of its tale. As mentioned earlier, the poet Alicia Ostriker suggests, “myth is quintessentially intimate material, the stuff of dream life, forbidden desire, inexplicable motivation — everything in the psyche that to rational consciousness is unreal, crazed, or abominable” (72). Therefore, in returning to myth, Boland touches something inherently personal in her readers. Because she offers a revision to the familiar, she exacts a change in their *world-thesis* through disequilibrium. With this poem, she does much more than that. She also offers that new feminine reality to both reader and poet alike, she offers that new skin.

The silences Boland remedies with this re-visioning of the epic journeys of Aeneas, Odysseus, and Dante provide voice to the tragic, who were previously deemed ordinary. She offers voice to the experiences that were deemed unfit for verse by her forbearers of language. She rails against their devaluing of these intimate and transcendent experiences of love: “so every day the language gets less/ for the task and we are less with the language” (lines 12 & 13). We have become weakened for what has been said and for what has been left unsaid. As has already been established, in-action is in itself an action, both “weigh upon the earth. Every rejection is a choice, every silence has a voice” (*Pyrrhus and Cineas* 126). These lost utterances and stories are beyond voice, either in song or speech, but they are not beyond emotion. The want to “witness” is integral to Boland’s poetry. Clutterbuck suggests that it is these “lost utterances that are the blank spaces which alone guarantee the present voice of the poet” (“Eavan Boland and Authority” 78).

Sappho hands down the mantel from mother-poet to daughter-poet, creating a foundation for that poet's inheritance that Boland found missing. Having changed the story but not the setting, Boland suggests that this experience leaves the poet, and I suggest reader, with a greater sense of clarity – “nothing was changed; nothing was more clear” (line 93). The poet-narrator is left awake among her “poetry books stacked higgledy piggedly;” all is as she left it. Both poet and reader learn that language is not up to the task of everything; there are some crimes that cannot be corrected. But, the love felt and the tears wept can lead to change and new knowledge.

Within this poem, Boland subverts a laundry list of themes that were previously made silent through in-action. The historically privileged made decisions on what was to be deemed literary and poetic and what was not. The list here includes a newly recognized sense of inherited authority – Sappho's replacing Virgil, the experiences of everyday life being of value and beauty (“love's archaeology”) and a reckoning with the canonically recognized themes of poetics, epics and odes included. In the same interview with Marilyn Reizbaum, Boland states that she is “very conscious of attempting to include [devalued experiences] by subverting the pre-existing structures so that they have to include them” (473). Here in “The Journey,” she is not asking, she is forcing the issue. And by guiding her reader through this journey along with her poet-narrator, she adds a previously un-dreamed experience to the cultural repertoire, one that does not marginalize the suffering of mothers and their children for the more heroic vision of slain soldiers.

The Woman in the Doorway

out of myth into history I move to be
part of the ordeal
~ from "Outside History"

In the previously described diptych model of Eavan Boland's process of "re-visiting" then "re-enacting," the two groups of poems were defined as beginning with experience, "not necessarily personal," leading to vision, "necessarily personal" (Clutterbuck 90). In this third grouping of the thematic material in Boland's poetry and the relevance of those themes to the phenomenological experience of her reader, the experiences that rise to the forefront explore language and labeling. In poems such as "A Formal Feeling," "Story," and "Anna Liffey," Boland examines the possibilities of language in the shaping of our perceptions. Often, these poems speak directly to the young poet: "I can say to her. I could say to her —/ we will live, we have lived/ where language is concealed. Is perilous" ("Writing in a Time of Violence" lines 20 – 22). In the case of "Writing in a Time of Violence," that young poet comes in the guise of her younger self, the younger self who felt a disconnection with the poets that came before her, the younger self who sought a poet's inheritance and found a void. Like Sappho as guide to the poet-narrator of "The Journey," in these poems, Boland offers lessons meant to pass from one mother-poet to many daughter-poets.

These poems no longer seem to be doing the labor of either subverting the masculine-created emblem of woman or the re-visioning of those myths into new skin. This group of poems, instead, embody Boland's gaze in the direction of the poet's

inheritance. Within these lines, the central theme symbolized points to “the necessity for the woman poet to re-image women and reshape tradition by feeling her way into words which dignify, reveal, and revalue female experience in all of its complexity” (Allen-Randolph “Ecriture Feminine” 59). Part of Eavan Boland’s mode of reshaping the tradition is shaped by the obligation that she feels to create this inheritance. The inheritance she provides reflects her reservations for the static nature of art, a theory that Hagen and Zelman label as her “long-term suspicion of the preservative tendencies of art” (*History of the Ordinary* 140). Art, for Boland, can become a rendering of the static, the momentary. Often this momentary depiction aids in the further development of those two-dimensional images to which we, as cultures, seem to cling so strongly.

These poems, although often highly layered in themes, offer a tone of sage advice giving. The advice given depicts Boland’s own struggle with the powers of language and often explore possibilities in which, like in “The Journey,” the value of the ordinary is and can be poetic. In this grouping of poems, Boland not only speaks to the young woman poet, but, at times, she also offers a pathway to the humanizing of femininity to her other readers as well. Boland’s words rise from the page like a call to arms pointing to the importance of putting the words to the silences, not only to name them but also to remedy them. In these poems, Boland creates a new version of muse, which rises from the ashes and scars of the old.

Unlike the quick and plundering pace of “Tirade for the Mimic Muse” or the otherworldly pilgrimage of “The Journey,” Boland’s “Anna Liffey” offers the reader places to linger and crevices of language in which to wander within the ordinary and within life

itself. This poem begins with a story, meanders in the rhythm of the river, and ends in the realizations of the toll of time and ageing. Boland's use of rhythm, enjambment, and unconventional rhythms create a meandering and slow paced poem, much like the river it personifies. Her pronoun usage in this poem creates a unique journey for the reader. The metaphorical and literary allusions conjure a long history of naming and language.

Metaphorical and Literary Allusions

With the name Anna Liffey, Debrah Raschke explains, Boland evokes the great Irish authors who have created female characters that personify the river Liffey (140). James Joyce's character Anna Livia Plurabelle in *Finnegan's Wake* "not only" has the "river's name, but she both looks and acts like the river Liffey. She is the Everywoman, Everygoddess, Everyriver" (140).⁸ In the opening lines of *Finnegan's Wake*: "riverrun, past Eve and Adam's, from swerve of shore to bend of bay" (3), James signals to the power of the river and its source. As an emblem of "everywoman," in which an unrealistic depiction is inevitable, Anna Liffey becomes a natural thematic choice for Boland's re-visioning.

Boland opens the poem with the beginning of a created legend, the beginning to her own myth. The opening to this poem is reminiscent of many grand tales and their first lines.

⁸ Raschke quotes both Margot Norris and Adaline Glasheen in this assertion.

Because of this, Boland immediately seats her reader's experience in the memory of fairytales and old country stories:

Life, the story goes,
Was the daughter of Cannan,
And came to the plain of Kildare.
She loved the flat-lands and the ditches
And the unreachable horizon.
She asked that it be named for her.
The river took its name from the land.
The land took its name from a woman. (Lines 1-8)

Boland gives her reader a make believe woman of a made up legend given in an eight line stanza. There are multiple allusive threads that Boland pulls throughout this poem, a woman in a doorway, the river as a source, and the narration of life. Although these threads begin as seemingly separate strings of metaphor, in the end they merge into one grand meaning.

Directly after the first stanza, Boland introduces the second thread: "A woman in the doorway of a house./ A river in the city of her birth" (lines 9 & 10). This woman, so far, is non-descript. She could be Anna Liffey. Boland is still allowing her reader to imagine the story of "the daughter of Cannan," but Boland begins here to fracture the image for the reader, even if ever so subtly. The "daughter of Cannan . . . came to the plain of Kildare" (lines 2 & 3), she was not *born* on the plain of Kildare. This "woman in the doorway" was born of this city through which the river runs. Over the next two stanzas this thread turns further away from the "daughter of Cannan." Boland first hints at the change in characters

with the line “There, in the hills above my house” (line 11). The poet is now a part of this tale, even if, at first, she is simply another voyeur.

Generally, as I did in my analyses of both “Tirade of the Mimic Muse” and “The Journey,” I choose to try to keep a separation between the poet and her poet-narrator, as the narrator is ultimately a creation. However, in this poem, Boland definitively seats her use of the pronouns *I* and *my* in a character that is defined by a life that is Boland’s story. Therefore, I will move forward with this analysis using the poet and Boland interchangeably.

Boland moves herself from a part of the scenery to being the subject of the poem itself. She comes close to this through the thread of the woman in the doorway:

If I could see myself
I would see
A woman in a doorway
Wearing the colours that go with red hair.
Although my hair is no longer red. (lines 20 – 24)

Throughout this poem “a woman in the doorway” moves through time and life and meanders like the river herself. Here in lines 20 through 24, the reader is not only introduced to the woman as the poet, but also to her age. She is no longer young, but Boland would have her reader still imagining the woman as young, with “red hair.” There is no mention of “a woman in the doorway” again until line 59 of this 188-line poem. However, this third mention of the woman is impactful to the reader. This appearance of

the woman is followed by the poet's admittance that, in this poem, she makes herself a "figure in a poem." She is the "woman in the doorway:"

There is now
A woman in a doorway.

It has taken me
All my strength to do this.

Becoming a figure in a poem.

Usurping a name and a theme. (lines 59 – 64)

The next time "a woman in a doorway" is mentioned, the phrase directly follows the line "And I make this mark:" (line 90). Although Boland gets close to the suggestion of herself not only as "usurping a name and a theme" by "becoming a figure in a poem" but as "a woman in a doorway," she never definitively places herself in that doorway. This is one point in the poem in which the themes of the woman and the language that we use to narrate our lives begin to merge:

And I make this mark:
A woman in the doorway of her house.
A river in the city of her birth. (lines 90 – 92)

The thread of "a woman in the doorway" finds its final merging point in line 115:

An ageing woman
Finds no shelter in language. (lines 115 & 116)

This metaphor finds its way to the river through language. The woman is no longer to be imagined as young, but is now ageing. The image of the young, red haired Anna Liffey who loved the river so leaves the reader's imagined experience. The quietness with which she leaves is remarkably reflective. Boland gives no new frame to her reader; there is only the continuation of the language.

The river as a source metaphor begins directly after the first mention of "a woman in the doorway," in line 11:

There, in the hills above my house,
The river Liffey rises, is a source.
It rises in rush and ling heather and
Black peat and bracken and strengthens
To claim the city it narrated. (lines 11 – 15)

The river is a source; it shapes the land through which it runs. Much like a wise storyteller, the waters shape the story it tells with language and names. This metaphor continues in small spurts throughout the poem: "Re-telling of a city,/ Its clarity as it flows," "Its patience at twilight" (lines 28, 29, & 33). The poet asks the river, "Maker of/ Places, remembrances,/ Narrate such fragments for me" (36 – 38). At this point in the poem, the river seems to represent that storyteller. It is narrating, giving clarity, and is a maker of places and remembrances. However, this river, in the beginning of the poem, "took its name from the land./ The land took its name from a woman" (lines 7 & 8). In line 65, the reader experiences a marked change in the meaning of this metaphor: "A river is not a woman."

The river, no longer a woman or a storyteller, begins to embody a life. Much like the merging of the metaphors of “a woman in the doorway” and language merge in line 115, the river merges with the metaphor of a life lived and the process that happens as we age. In the following long stanza, the long merging of meaning takes shape:

A river is not a woman.
 Although the names it finds,
 The history it makes
And suffers –
 The Viking blades beside it,
 The muskets of the Redcoats,
 The flames of the Four Courts
Blazing into it
 Are a sign.
 Any more than
A woman is a river,
 Although the course it takes,
 Through swans courting and distraught willows,
Its patience
 Which is also its powerlessness,
 From Callary to Islandbridge,
 And from source to mouth,
Is another one. (lines 65 – 82)

No longer is the river a woman or the woman a river. However, the river is still a source, carries a history along its banks and continues to be personified: “it finds,” “it makes,” and

has “patience” and “powerlessness.” The remainder of the same long, flowing stanza further clarifies this merging of river to life:

And in my late forties
Past believing
Love will heal
What language fails to know
And needs to say –
What the body means –
I take this sign
And I make this mark:
A woman in a doorway of her house
A river in the city of her birth
The truth of a suffered life.
The mouth of it. (lines 83 – 94)

The merging of these themes affects Boland’s reader on many levels. The poem meanders both in rhythm and structure, which I will outline further below. But, the meandering and merging of these themes reminds this reader of a river and its tributaries merging towards the mouth and source of the river. The merging of these metaphors is quiet business in this poem, and the reader experiences that quietness. Boland’s tone is reflective; and through her *poetic gestures* she allows her reader to experience that reflection.

Through out the poem, Boland uses the metaphor of the narration and labeling of life. This, in fact, is the culminating metaphor to which the other metaphors flow. Within the poem, the poet finds home in the “beautiful vowels” of her daughter’s names (line 55). She usurps “a name and a theme,” by making herself a “figure in a poem” (lines 63 & 64).

The poet later asks, in line 158, “Where is home now?” (line 163). But, the most powerful moments within the lines of this poem representing this metaphor for life can be found in two long stanzas. The first stanza falls in the middle to end of the poem, acting as another merging place for the metaphorical images used. The poet asks:

Tell me,
Anna Liffey,
Spirit of water,
Spirit of place,
How is it on this
Rainy autumn night
As the Irish sea takes
The names you made, the names
You bestowed, and gives you back
Only wordlessness? (lines 125 – 133)

Boland returns to the invocation of the river as woman for the purpose of seeking her advice. Unlike in the poem “Echo,” in which she advises the young poet to expect no answer, Boland returns to the old emblem of woman as river seeking council. Throughout “Anna Liffey,” Boland rails against the idea of the story of the river as a woman, but here she returns to it with a sense of resignation. However, in the last stanza of the poem, and

again with the continuation to the end of the metaphor of the river as narrator, Boland responds to herself:

In the end
It will not matter
That I was a woman. I am sure of it.
...
Consider rivers.
They are always en route to
Their own nothingness. From the first moment
They are going home. And so
When language cannot do it for us,
Cannot make us know love will not diminish us,
There are these phrases
Of the ocean
To console us.
Particular and unafraid of their completion.
In the end
Everything that burdened and distinguished me
Will be lost in this:
I was a voice. (lines 171 – 198)

The metaphors drive this poem through its meaning and the river guides the reader down this long poem's path of evolution and through to its end. The metaphors of "Anna Liffey" strongly represent a culmination of Boland's concerns with the two-dimensionality of the momentary art, which traps within its lines an image of a reflection of humanity. Within

these merging metaphors, Boland begins with the two-dimensional “*Life*, as the story goes” and ends with the complex and humanized ageing poet who after a life lived is still seeking consolation from the suffered truths of life.

Pronoun Usage

Although the poetic device of metaphor most strongly guides this poem, Boland, again, also uses pronouns to guide her reader through to her meaning. In the first stanza of the poem, there are no first person pronouns. The poem, at this point in the telling, is about the story of Anna Liffey. Boland gives only *she* and *her* in this stanza. The first person pronouns begin to surface in the third stanza. It is there that Boland brings herself as poet into the image for the reader: “There, in the hills above my house” (line 11). From this point on, most of this poem oscillates between *I*, *my*, and *me* and *it*, representing the river.

However, one important element of the *poetic gestures* that Boland chooses which becomes integral to the meaning and meandering of this poem is the lack of first person pronouns at any point in the poem when Boland mentions “a woman in a doorway.” If we were to trace the pronouns line for line and only the pronouns for meaning, the “woman in the doorway” would remain a stranger. Although, as described above, the first appearance on the woman uses the pronoun *her* once in its two lines:

A woman in the doorway of a house.

A river in the city of her birth. (lines 9 & 10).

Here the reader is not even yet told that this house belongs to the woman. The second appearance of the woman changes quite a bit, but Boland still leaves this appearance ambiguous:

If I could see myself
I would see
A woman in a doorway
Wearing the colours that go with red hair.
Although my hair is no longer red. (lines 20 – 24)

Boland leaves the description of the appearance of the woman as a possibility, but not a reality. The reader is given the verbs “could” and “would,” but not *is*. At this point in the poem, the story of “the daughter of Cannan” still lives in the imagination of the reader. Boland does not dispel it here.

The third appearance of “a woman in a doorway” occurs at a particularly important juncture in the poem, especially in the considering of Boland’s use of pronouns. There are two occasions in this poem in which Boland moves the reader from audience to active participant. As in the other two poems, “Tirade for the Mimic Muse” and “The Journey,” Boland uses the second person pronouns as agents of manipulation for the gaze of the reader. In this poem, the first occasion is in the stanza:

Make of a nation what you will
Make of a past
What you can – (lines 56 – 58)

This stanza marks the first direct address of the audience. The perceptions of the reader change. This poem is no longer living on the page in front of the reader. Boland invites the

reader into the image and into the scene. The reader is now actively participating. And again, when the reader begins to actively experience the poem, the reader participates rather than viewing. As Beauvoir suggests, actively participating in the poem allows the reader “to undergo imaginary experiences that are as complete and disturbing as lived experiences” (“Literature and Metaphysics” 270). However, directly after her invitation to her reader to move into the position of active participant, she pulls the “woman in a doorway” back into the mind of the reader:

There is now
A woman in a doorway. (lines 59 & 60)

This time the woman is no longer standing in *her* doorway, but simply “a doorway.” The implications of this affect upon the reader may be small in nature and in the significance to the overall picture of this extensive poem. However, the pulling back to the same image repeatedly must be considered as a relevant element in this poem. The last mention of the woman occurs in lines 91 and 92, directly following “And I make this mark:”

A woman in the doorway of her house.
A river in the city of her birth.

In this appearance, the woman stands in *her* doorway, in the city of *her* birth. She now possesses her own space in the poem. This third person story-like possession directly follows Boland’s use of *I*, as a representation of her own voice. Boland takes possession of the poet’s pen. At this point in the poem, Boland has already taken on this role by “Becoming a figure in a poem” (line 63). But, she never directly takes on the role of the “woman in a doorway.” Does Boland offer this to her reader as a space within the poem

itself? This seems a possibility. I would also like to suggest that Boland uses the metaphor of the “woman in the doorway” as a continuously fixed image throughout the poem. This poem meanders like the river it describes, “the woman in the doorway” works to repeatedly return the reader to the woman, whose image is one of the central metaphors in the poem.

Boland ends the poem with the first person *I*, but before doing so, she again includes the reader in her meaning through the use of the pronoun *us*:

When language cannot do it for us,
Cannot make us know love will not diminish us,
There are these phrases
Of the ocean
To console us. (lines 179 – 184)

The only appearance of the collective *us* in the poem not only occurs at the end of the poem, but takes on the theme of the major metaphorical guise in the poem itself, the river as language and life. And, with the final line of the poem, Boland, as poet and as woman, continues to possess the overriding voice in the poem: “I was a voice” (line 188).

Rhythm and Repetition

The rhythm of this poem flows like the river the poem personifies, sometimes slowly building and at other points quick and choppy. The stanzas vary in size, line count, and rhythm. There are many occasions of enjambment throughout the poem, creating a sense of quick flowing water. Not a source for legend, this river is a source that seeks “To claim the city it narrated” (line 15). Boland brings her reader from her “doorway” through the hills filled with “ling heather” and “Black peat” to “Swans” through “Steep falls” and “Small

towns” to “The smudged air and bridges of Dublin.” (lines 9 – 17). As if over the rolling hills and into the valleys, Boland changes the sizes of the stanzas eight lines, two quick lines, seven lines, and back to two –

Dusk is coming.

Rain is moving east from the hills. (lines 18-19)

Boland is painting her landscape, the landscape of her doorway. Raschke suggests that “in describing the hills outside Dublin, [Boland] does present a sacrality of place, but it is a sacrality imbued with the particulars – with the bend of Islandbridge, swans, neon, thirteen bridges to the sea” (140). But, she is not only giving us a bird’s eye view of the rolling hills and the river that cuts through them. She structures this poem in such a manner that leaves the reader in a constant feeling of flux, much like the waters of a river would. The reader experiences twist and turns throughout the poem. After the two line stanza listed above the varying sizes of the stanzas continue to fluctuate: 5 lines, then 11 lines, 3 lines, 5 lines, then 3, then 3 more. There is no constant in this poem, except for the recurrence of “a woman in a doorway.”

Boland then begins down a familiar journey, with one integral difference. If this poem had remained a poem to a legend of a river named for a woman, this is the moment that the poet might ask the muse, the mythic, for help in telling the story. Boland does not ask the legend, the emblematic myth; she instead asks the land, the river – “I praise/ The gifts of the river. . . Maker of/ Places, remembrances,/ Narrate such fragments for me:” (lines 25-26, 36-38). She asks of the river to help her to use language in the same manner it does – “Its shiftless and glittering/ Re-telling of a city,/ Its clarity as it flows” (lines 26-29).

This emotion and meandering are seated in the present. The reader experiences these words as an image created in the mind – rolling hills, the river, “a woman in a doorway.” Boland moves into the temporal feeling of the presence of the past here:

Fractions of a life
It has taken me a lifetime
To claim.

I came here in a cold winter.
I had no children. No country.
I did not know the name for my own life. (lines 44-49)

No longer a poem about the hills or the legend, this is the story of language and being able to “name.” Her children’s names were once the “beautiful vowels sounding out home.” (line 55). To name is to know, this is the inference that Boland is giving to her reader. It has taken her a lifetime to “claim” those words.

The musicality of the poem changes drastically here and remains varied for some time. Boland shifts into quicker stanzas: 3 lines, 2 lines, 2 lines, then 1 line, and then another 1 line stanza. But, then again the meandering poem changes rhythm. After five quick and powerful stanzas, the reader faces a long stanza of 30 lines; this stanza’s structure varies on the page itself. The lines of this, the 19th, stanza do not line up on the same margin as its predecessors. Boland emphasizes the experience of the river by structuring the lines in a meandering manner. There are five more stanzas given, each with fluctuating line counts, and then Boland offers what seems almost to be a poem in a poem. There are seven stanzas, each five lines long. None of these seven stanzas are marked with enjambment, and each of

the seven ends with punctuation, either a period or a question mark. The steady pace of these seven stanzas is the only given in this poem. Directly following the seven steady and musically mono-toned stanzas, the last stanza is offered. It is a 20-line stanza marked extensively with enjambment:

That I was a woman. I am sure of it.
The body is a source. Nothing more.
There is a time for it. There is a certainty
About the way it seeks its own dissolution. (lines 171 – 174)

The stanza continues on with this erratic rhythm. The punctuation in this stanza works like stones in the river; they slow the water down enough to cause ripples in its surface. There are periods separating what naturally seem to be sentences: “The body is a source. Nothing more” (line 172). Then there are sentences that seem to end on one line in an unnatural and dissonant manner, and continue to the next: “Their own nothingness. From the first moment/ They are going home. And so” (lines 177 – 178). The erratic nature of both the punctuation and the rhythm of this last stanza works to ensure that the reader lingers upon its lines and therefore its meanings.

The reader’s experiencing of the language drastically changes throughout this poem. What begins as a familiar beginning to a promising story ends as a call out to the meaning of a life lived. Throughout this poem, Boland offers her struggle with language for all to see and to learn from: “Past believing/ Love will heal/ What language fails to know/ And needs to say” (lines 84 – 87). Boland is also asking hard questions and exploring the river for answers. Where she once found home, within the “beautiful vowels” of her children’s

names, she finds no more “shelter in language.” She questions, “Is it only love that makes a place?” and “Where is home now?” (lines 153 & 163). Throughout our lives the questions change and as we move through different times of our *becoming*, we see those questions differently. Boland uses the metaphors of the river and storytelling to show her reader the meandering nature of life, ageing, and journey.

Raschke suggests, “myth and legend deceptively keep human touch at a distance” (140). Boland turns this on its heels. She begins as if telling the tale of the legend, “The land took its name from the woman” and leads her reader into an entirely different direction. She meanders this poem and its rhythms through to the deepest thoughts of human emotion – what will be left in the end? Boland’s answer is, “I was a voice.” Patricia Boyle Haberstroh suggests that with the collection *The Journey and Other Poems* “Boland has become, in a way that the personae in her first volume could never have imagined, a poet-explorer in new territory” (79). Here with “Anna Liffey,” Boland goes a step further and is exploring what may be an even more frightening terrain – the familiar.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

In beginning this work, my desire was to define the experience of the reader and the effect Boland's re-visioning of myth has upon reader. I was interested in discerning the realities of the effects that the de-construction of the traditional two-dimensional image of Woman in myth has upon the way that we, as readers, see ourselves before reading poetry and then after. What I have gained from this inquiry has grown infinitely larger than those goals.

The idea of a reader experiencing a de-construction of a culturally created myth as a loss was at first an abstract idea. However, through the exploration of the philosophy of phenomenology and then through actual application of those theories to the poems of Eavan Boland, I have been able to explore deeper into the art of Boland's poetry. This deeper exploration allows us as readers to see behind the curtain and to understand why a poem, when it speaks to us, changes us.

Boland describes her process of *becoming* as a process of finding the right questions and then seeking the answers. Her poetry offers her reader the same process. After reading at the ranting pace of "Tirade for the Mimic Muse," a reader may not immediately question her previously constructed ideas concerning the Muse. But, because of the *poetic gestures* Boland uses in order to create an active role for the reader, eventually those previously

created perceptions will fracture. As Merleau-Ponty suggests, in the fissures of those fractures, new meaning is created. Just as we create new meaning through our experiencing of literature, and by lingering upon those experiences and our responses to them, we slacken those threads that hold us to our perceptions and to our *world-thesis*.

Within interviews, Eavan Boland has been asked about negative reviews of her work. There is one answer in particular, which she gave to Jody Allen-Randolph in 1999, that seems to encompass all of the themes I have explored here:

I became a poet here at a time when the word woman and the poet were almost magnetic opposites. For them to be aligned, a lot of other things had to be challenged and put aside. During the eighties and nineties, when I would read this or that hostile piece about my work, it would occur to me that the writer of it thought that I had created division. But I hadn't. I just revealed it. ("A Backward Look" 304)

The revelation of division and the attempt to begin to heal the scar that was there is the power of Boland's poetry. The power for the reader in the experiencing of her writing is first in the challenging of those culturally created megaliths of literature. If a reader can allow the barriers of hesitation to fall away and truly experience the work of literature as they ought, then new meanings and knowledge may be revealed within the experience. When that work is revisionist in its theme, this seems to be an uphill battle from the start for the poet. However, as Poulet suggests, "[t]o understand a literary work, then is to let the individual who wrote it reveal himself to us in us" ("Phenomenology" 58).

By de-constructing the falsely two-dimensional figments of imagination that have represented Woman in so many of our most valued works of literature, Boland is creating disequilibrium in her reader. This disequilibrium, as Merleau-Ponty and Beauvoir point out, is integral to the reader's experiencing of the "slackening" of the existing threads, which tie the reader to his or her *world-thesis*. Beauvoir writes, "as the story unfolds, he [the reader] sees truths appear that were previously unknown to him, questions whose solutions he does not possess" ("Literature and Metaphysics" 272). In questioning, de-constructing, and then adding new life and meanings to myths, Boland is giving her reader space in which to slacken those invisible threads.

In poems such as "The Journey," Boland is creating new skin for the previously un-witnessed realities that history did not deem proper to be the subjects of poetry. She is illuminating the brilliance of the everyday small moments, "love's archeology." The "obligation" that she feels to "formalize truth" not only leads her, as poet, on a journey, but her reader as well. The aesthetic moves and poetic gestures she chooses work to lead her reader in the directions that create a focus on the matter at hand. In "Anna Liffey," these *poetic gestures* begin with a make-believe legend, down very real waters to the matter of the question with her repetitive "In the end," "In the end." Her replication in poetics of the rant in "Tirade for the Mimic Muse" leaves her reader with a powerful emotional disequilibrium that must be righted. She uses this disequilibrium to open the eyes of her reader. When her reader's eyes and perceptions are opened, new light and meaning may rise to the top.

Boland leaves a pointed message for those poets who follow within her poems that turn the tables on the poet herself, as is the case in poems such as “Anna Liffey” and “Echo.” Boland suggests that in her subversive acts of re-visioning, she “wasn’t doing it to be willful. I was doing it because the idea of the poet it offered was not mine. I couldn’t use this inherited authority and pretend it was mine. I had to make it for myself” (“A Backward Look” 297). However, Boland does not make it simply for herself; she also works to offer this authority and inheritance to those who will follow in her footsteps.

WORKS CITED

- Abrams, M.H. *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. 9th ed. Boston: Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 2009. Print.
- Allen-Randolph, Jody. "A Backward Look: An Interview with Eavan Boland." *Colby Quarterly* (1999): 292-304. Print.
- . "Ecriture Feminine and the Authorship of Self in Eavan Boland's *In Her Own Image*." *Colby Quarterly* 27:1 (1991): 48-59. *digitalcommons.colby.edu*. Web. 1 April 2011.
- Beauvoir, Simone de. "Literature and Metaphysics." *Simone de Beauvoir: Philosophical Writings*. Ed. Simons, Margaret A. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2004. 269-78. Print.
- . *Pyrrhus and Cineas*. *Simone de Beauvoir: Philosophical Writings*. Ed. Margaret A. Simons. Illinois: U of Illinois, 2004. 77-150. Print.
- . *The Second Sex*. Trans. H.M. Parshley. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc, 1953. Print.
- Boland, Eavan. *A Journey with two Maps: Becoming a Woman Poet*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2011. Print.
- . "A Kind of Scar: The Woman Poet in a National Tradition." *A Dozen Lips*. Eavan Boland et al. Dublin: Attic Press, 1994. 72-92. Print.
- . *New Collected Poems*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2005. Print.

- . *Object Lessons: The Life of the Woman and the Poet in our Time*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1995. Print.
- Campbell, Joseph. *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*. New York: Princeton UP, 1949. Print.
- Calhoun, Richard J. "Existentialism, Phenomenology, and Literary Theory." *South Atlantic Bulletin* 28.4 (1963): 4-8. JSTOR. Web. 26 Feb 2011.
- Clutterbuck, Catriona. "Eavan Boland and the Politics of Authority in Irish Poetry." *The Yearbook of English Studies* 35 (2005): 72-90. JSTOR Web. 8 June 2011.
- . "Irish Critical Responses to Self-Representation in Eavan Boland 1987-1995." *Colby Quarterly* 34:4 (1999): 275-91. *digitalcommons.colby.edu*. Web. 15 April 2011.
- Collin, Françoise. "Difference/Indifference Between the Sexes." *Contemporary French Feminism*. Ed. Oliver, Kelly and Lisa Walsh. New York, NY: Oxford UP, 2004. 13-30. Print.
- Erdinast-Vulcan, Daphna. "That Which 'Has No Name in Philosophy': Merleau-Ponty and the Language of Literature." *Human Studies* 30.4 (2007): 395-409. JSTOR. Web. 25 Feb. 2011.
- Fraisse, Geneviève. "The Difference between the Sexes, a historical Difference." *Contemporary French Feminism*. Ed. Oliver, Kelly and Lisa Walsh. New York, NY: Oxford UP, 2004. 109-127. Print.
- Haberstroh, Patricia Boyle. *Women Creating Women: Contemporary Irish Women Poets*. New York: Syracuse UP, 1996. Print.
- Hagen, Patricia L. & Thomas W. Zelman. *Eavan Boland and the History of the Ordinary*. Dublin: Maunsel & Company, 2004. Print.

- . "‘We were Never on the Scene of the Crime’: Eavan Boland’s Repossession of History." *Twentieth Century Literature* 37.4 (1991): 442-53. JSTOR. Web. 16 Feb. 2011.
- Heinämaa, Sara. *Toward A Phenomenology of Sexual Difference: Husserl, Merleau-Ponty, Beauvoir*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2003. Print.
- Homer. *The Iliad: The Story of Achilles*. Trans. W.H.D. Rouse. New York: Thomas Nelson and Sons, Ltd., 1938. Print.
- . *The Odyssey*. Trans. E.V. Rieu. New York: Penguin Books Ltd, 1983. Print.
- James, Joyce. *Finnegans Wake*. New York: Penguin Books Ltd, 1983. Print.
- Keats, John. *Endymion. John Keats: The Major Works*. Ed. Elizabeth Cook. New York: Oxford UP, 2008. 60-163. Print.
- Le Doeuff, Michèle. *Hipparchia’s Choice: An Essay Concerning Women, Philosophy, Etc*. Trans. Trista Selous. New York: Columbia UP, 2007. Print.
- Matthews, Eric. *Merleau-Ponty: A Guide for the Perplexed*. New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2006. Print.
- Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. *Phenomenology of Perception*. Trans. Colin Smith. New York, NY: Routledge, 1962. Print.
- . *The Prose of the World*. Trans. John O’Neill. Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 1973. Print.
- . *The World of Perception*. Trans. Oliver Davis. New York: Routledge, 2004. Print.
- O’Brien, Wendy. "Introduction." *The Existential Phenomenology of Simone de Beauvoir*. Ed. Wendy O’Brien and Lester Embree. The Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2001. Print.

- Ostriker, Alicia. "The Thieves of Language: Women Poets and Revisionist Mythmaking." *Signs* 8.1 (1982): 68-90. *JSTOR*. Web. 13 Feb. 2011.
- Poulet, Georges. *The Interior Distance*. Trans. Elliott Coleman. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1959. Print.
- . "Phenomenology of Reading." *New Literary History* 1.1 (1969): 53-68. *JSTOR*. Web. 17 Feb. 2011.
- Raschke, Debrah. "Eavan Boland's *Outside History* and *In A Time of Violence*: Rescuing Women, the Concrete, and Other Things Physical from the Dung Heap." *Colby Quarterly* 32:2 (1996): 135-42. *digitalcommons.colby.edu*. Web. 1 Aug. 2011.
- Reizbaum, Marilyn. "Interview with Eavan Boland." *Contemporary Literature* 30.4 (1989): 471-79. Web. 14 Aug 2011.
- Rich, Adrienne. "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision." *College English* 34.1 (1972): 18-30. *JSTOR*. Web. 9 Nov. 2010.
- Smith, R.T. "Altered Light: *Outside History*." *Irish University Review* 23:1 (1993): 86-99. Print.
- Sullivan, Nell. "Righting Irish Poetry: Eavan Boland's Revisionary Struggle." *Colby Quarterly* 33:4 (1997): 335-48. *digitalcommons.colby.edu*. Web. 15 April 2011.
- Vergil. *The Aeneid*. Trans. Christopher Pearse Cranch. New York: Barnes and Nobles Classics, 2007. Print.