TÜRKİYE CUMHURİYETİ
ANKARA ÜNİVERSİTESİ
SOSYAL BİLİMLER ENSTİTÜSÜ
BATI DİLLERİ VE EDEBİYATI
(İNGİLİZ DİLİ VE EDEBİYATI)

GENDER POLITICS IN THE POETRY OF EAVAN BOLAND AND PAUL DURCAN

Yüksek Lisans Tezi

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Tez Jürisi Üyeleri

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TÜRKİYE CUMHURİYETİ

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SOSYAL BİLİMLER ENSTİTÜSÜ MÜDÜRLÜĞÜNE

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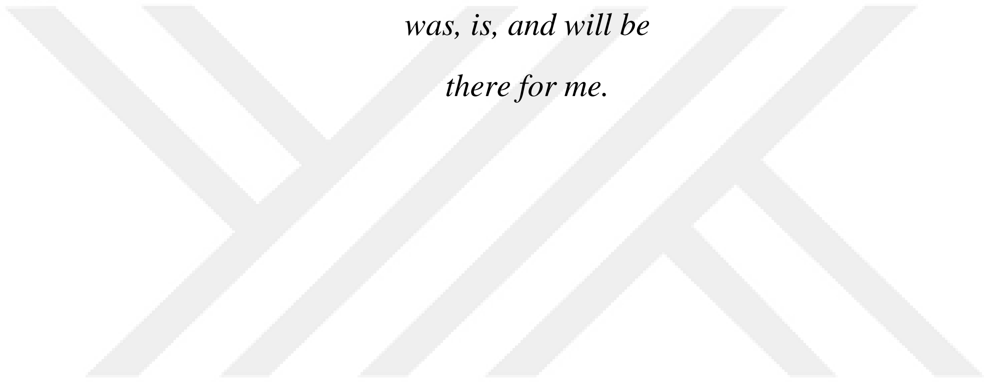
(…../..…/……..)

Okan ATEŞ

To my beloved wife Dilek, who

was, is, and will be

there for me.



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INTRODUCTION

This study aims to analyse the poetry of Eavan Boland and Paul Durcan in relation to their preoccupation with gender politics, and to argue that the representation of gender politics in Boland and Durcan's poetry has distinctively contributed to the consolidation of woman's active participation within the Irish poetic tradition. Boland's struggle for the notion of the "Irish woman poet" and Durcan's protest against the gender-based social norms are distinct characteristics that will be examined in their selected poems. Thus, this study will examine in what ways these two poets challenge the conventional repressed image of femininity and rearrange women's position in Irish social life and former poetry.

There are several reasons for choosing specifically Boland and Durcan to analyse the shifting gender politics in Irish poetry. In fact, Eavan Boland is not the only Irish woman poet who writes for the aim of restoring women's repressed poetic existence. Several others, such as Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin, Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill, and Medbh McGuckian, have made immense contributions to the liberation of Irish women in verse. However, there are certain qualities that make Boland's poetry more eligible for this study. Dhomhnaill produces poetry in the Gaelic language[1], which makes the original poems rather unsuitable for this study. Often associated with Northern Irish Poetry, Belfast-born McGuckian's verse covers different social and political contexts, and it hardly reflects the entirety of "Irish womanhood" regarding especially the post-independence period of the Republic (Fogarty, 1994: 92). On the other hand, Boland self-

[1] Helen Kidd states that Ní Dhomhnaill insists on Irish as a modern language. For the poet, Gaelic is not the language that is simply confined to classroom exercises, but a language with colloquialisms, word games, oral energy, which offers a different diversity (41).

consciously offers herself as a national, as opposed to regional or local, voice (Goodby, 2000: 234). Her characterizations regarding Irish womanhood can be considered as a true representation of the Republic with its history. Although Ní Chuilleanáin chooses English for her artistic purposes, her poetry mostly engages with Irish womanhood within the contexts of folklore, myths and legend. Contrary to the fictional qualities of Ní Chuilleanáin's poems, Boland prefers the actuality of Irish femininity by referring to the female anguish during the Great Famine, or by including domestic interiority of a suburban woman. Since this study will also focus on how certain stereotypes regarding Irish women have altered in both poetic and social contexts in the last quarter of the twentieth century, the contemporary references to Irish womanhood in Boland's specific poems might have a greater importance. Bearing all these reasons in mind, Eavan Boland's poetry becomes more convenient for this study despite the other poets' indispensable roles in contemporary Irish women's poetry.

Eavan Boland's engagement with gender politics could be paired with any of the women poets above. However, including a male poet rather than restricting the argument to the women poets might offer a new and different perspective for women's liberation in Irish poetry as well as Irish society, and it will assert how these two poets, regardless of their gender, subvert the stereotyped norms of Irish femininity within the Irish literary convention. Besides, such inclusion will also point out that the existing problems regarding gender issues in Irish poetry have found a resonance in the works by male poets. At this point, for the male eye of this research, several options are available such as Paul Muldoon and Seamus Heaney, or Paul Durcan. Muldoon's "Sky-Woman", for instance, contrasts with the masculine perspective of Irish poetry by offering subversive elements (Johnson & Cairns, 1991: 4). Paul Muldoon's translations of Ní Dhomhnaill's poems into English might be also considered as a literary step that encourages Irish women's poetry. Seamus Heaney also slides away from the predetermined and gendered characteristics of

the tradition as can be seen in his "Aisling" and "Act of Union". In "Aisling", for instance, he subverts the nationalist *aisling*[2] tradition that degrades femininity (Fogarty, 1994: 95), or in "Act of Union" he focuses on the 'outcome' of Ireland and England's sexual union; however, *aisling* tradition often disregards any physicality by separating the female from her sexual and reproductive qualities (Armengol, 2001: 15). Heaney's subverting attitude that trespasses the boundaries of masculinist and patriotic *aisling* tradition, in this way, questions the patriarchal norms in Irish poetry. Several other Irish poets could also be included with such specific examples about gender politics in the Irish literary convention. However, the reason why Durcan is preferred among these canonical figures is that his verse offers various aspects of Irish femininity along with his sarcastic and occasionally sentimental attitude towards gender politics in Irish poetry. Goodby claims that "[i]f any single [Irish] male poet could be said to have […] registered the importance of the women's movement, it would definitely be Paul Durcan" (242). His ceaseless references to the ongoing problematic issues such as divorce and abortion as the contemporary gender-related problems of the society, his presentation of self-reliant and independent women in his poems, and his reversal of predetermined gender roles can be instantly recognized in his verse.

To discuss Boland and Durcan's literary standings in accordance with gender politics in Irish poetry, it would be helpful to lay out the recent history of women's rights in Ireland. Although the international echoes of women's liberation movement in the late 1960s had its influence over Ireland in the early 1970s, there had been earlier activities regarding the rights of Irish women. For instance, the Irish Housewives Association (IHA), which was founded in 1942, protested for the domestic and public rights of

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[2] Aisling poetry is usually based on the personification of the Irish land as a defenceless, pure, and weak woman who are repeatedly raped or ravished by an English invader, always described in very "masculine" terms (Armengol, 2001: 8).

housewives as a response to the 1937 Constitution of Ireland that covertly limited women's position within domestic borders by defining her as the home- makers[3]. However, the Association was constantly disrupted and investigated by the Church in the following decades, blaming it for communist activities (De Haan, 2015: 42). In such circumstances, where feminine identity was repressed by religious and governmental institutions, the self-determining female voice in Irish poetry was hardly audible until the poetic revival of womanhood in the 1970s. However, the unorthodox representations of femininity in Irish drama and prose flourished much earlier compared to Irish poetry.

Just like these earlier attempts by the Irish Housewives Association to improve women's position within the society before it was severely questioned from the 1970s onwards, there had been similar defiance against heterosexual gender politics in the early century Irish prose and drama. Though it was not until the 1970s that the objectified woman was put into discussion by several poets, the image of self-sufficient feminine figure within the social life had been taken as subject by such authors as George Egerton or G.B. Shaw, who presented the notion of "New Woman"[4] in their works. Through the end of the century, both Egerton and Shaw inscribed the notion of the "Irish New Woman" into their works to reconstruct women's positions within Irish society and literature.

George Egerton, the pseudonym that Mary Bright used, targeted the cultural practices that are "designed to keep women in their place, and [she] carved out an

[3] See 1937 Constitution of Law Article 42.1. The Irish state recognises that by her life within the home, woman gives to the state a support without which the common good cannot be achieved. The state shall, therefore, endeavour to ensure that mothers shall not be obliged by economic necessity to engage in labour to the neglect of their duties in the home.

[4] The term "New Woman" is used to refer to women who challenge the limits that society conventionally imposes on them. The Irish-born feminist novelist and orator Sarah Grand used the term for the first time in her "The New Aspect of the Woman Question", published in 1894. As she remarks, while the vast social territory of male authority "has shrunk to his true proportions in [women's] estimation", Irish women "have been expanding to [their] own" (272). This shifting gender power, which dismantles the conventional manners imposed on Irish woman, is represented by the image of "New Woman".

autonomous space for herself, her literary protagonists, and thereby her readers" (O'Toole, 2013: 96). The stereotyped image of the woman as the "angel in the house"[5] and its related domestic attributions were questioned by Egerton. Her works aimed at creating an independent place for the woman author, the women characters in her texts, and most importantly for the woman reader. A central protagonist in her prose "A Woman" advises a female character to do the following: "stand on your own feet, heed no man's opinion, no woman's scorn, if you believe you are in the right" (Egerton, 1995: 64). In fact, in terms of deconstructing the traditionally accepted female identity that is often emblematic and objectified, Eavan Boland's poetic struggle coincides with the gender politics that Egerton dealt with in her prose in that both writers aim to explore a new and liberated territory for the Irish women.

As for the Irish drama, at the turn of the century, Shaw's *Mrs. Warren's Profession* was a breakthrough in terms of collapsing the preconceived social perspective towards the Irish woman. Staged in 1902, nine years after the completion of the text due to the censorship, the play portrays a non-conforming female protagonist. The characterization of Vivie Warren, the daughter of a former prostitute, goes beyond the constructed image of Victorian women by presenting a portrayal of self-sufficient businesswoman who performs male-specific actions on stage such as engaging in economics, enjoying whiskey and cigars, and wearing trousers (Shaw, 2006: 10). Shaw describes Vivie as "the highly educated, capable, independent young woman of the governing class as we know her today" (Shaw, 1965: 566). The shocking presentation of Vivie, who is endowed with

[5] Especially in the nineteenth century, the ideal womanhood is associated with domestic duties such as raising the children, and doing housework. However, the term "angel in the house" would later disturbed by the New Woman writers in Ireland at the turn of the century. Then, it would be once again challenged by Woolf's famous announcement in her renowned speech "Professions for Women", where she argues that "killing the Angel in the House was part of the occupation of a woman writer" (246). Boland and Durcan's representations of gender politics metaphorically kill the poetic version of Irish "angel in the house".

conventional masculine characteristics, can be traced in Durcan's satirical poems only decades after because the Irish woman in poetry, when compared to her counterparts in prose and drama, was located into a more symbolic, traditional, and passive position along with the patriotic and nationalist tone. It was not until the late 1970s that the Irish readers were able to observe poetic correspondences of Vivie in Durcan's verse. His female characters that parodically show masculine characteristics in his specific works clearly serve as instances of his poetic criticism upon gender politics. For instance, the alteration of conventional gender-based attributions such as the wife providing for the family instead of the husband in Durcan's "Cleaning Ashtrays" (Durcan: 1995, 48) could be regarded as the poetic reflection of what Shaw's Vivie represents for.

Both Egerton and Shaw can be regarded as the guiding figures of prose and drama for the introduction of self-sufficient Irish women in their texts. However, the lack of a poetic equivalence of Shaw and Egerton raises a problematic case to pinpoint a specific predecessor in Irish verse. In this regard, as for these two poets, it was not likely to find a proper predecessor poet that could guide them for the restoration of women's position in the conservative Irish poetry.

One may be confused as to where exactly Boland stands in this gender-based counter writing by the women poets. In fact, it may be inappropriate to consider Boland "the first Irish *woman* poet" who focuses on gender politics within the literary tradition, ignoring her peers as well as the long history of the women poets on the island. However, it would be more appropriate to claim her as the pioneer of the feminist poetic discourse that has been gradually established within the Irish literary tradition. Commenting on Boland's poetry, Thomas McCarthy states that Boland's *In Her Own Image* "without fear of contradiction, was the first serious attempt in Ireland to make a body of poems that arise from contemporary female consciousness" (184). Similar to McCarthy's views,

Eavan Boland also argues that until the 1960s, being a poet and being a woman was like "oil and water, which could not be mixed" (Boland, 1995a: xi). The primary motive that lies behind Boland's stylistic evolution, from being a mere echo of conventional formal structures towards the formal reflections of feminist resistance, throughout the decades can be observed in relation to this oil-water metaphor as her own poetry became the poetic representation of gender politics within the canon, both in terms of subject matter and style.

Despite the fact that Irish literary history includes several women poets that produced poetry on diverse topics, Boland was unable to find a predecessor that would guide her poetic career. The missing essence of their poetry, according to Boland, was that their poetry failed to portray women's ordinary life, their sufferings, and their equal position in the canon as well as social life. To exemplify, A. A. Kelly's anthology of verse by Irish women covers lots of women poets from the late 17th century to date. Elinor Mary Sweetman and Winifred M. Letts were just two of these poets who wrote love poetry by employing traditional poetic motives and styles (Kelly, 1997: 69, 97); and several others included in the anthology either internalized the mainstream tradition by touching on such subject matters as peasant-life stories, which can be seen in the poetry of Jane Barlow, – or by simply writing about the concept of Eve, the assimilated conventional image of women, as depicted in Emily Hickey's "A Rose" (Kelly, 1997: 52-54). As for Boland, she was unable to relate these earlier women poets to her purpose. In her essay, the poet confirms that "[she] did not recognize these women. These images could never be a starting point for [her poems]. There was no connection between them and [her] own poems" (Boland, 1987: 152). In fact, what concerns Boland most about the Irish poetic tradition is the absence of women in poetry, which eventually gave way to simplistic insights into the private and public experiences of women. Due to the negligent attitudes of the earlier women poets towards this complex issue, Boland feels no connection with

them. These earlier poets merely followed the same tradition that used "women as ornamental icons and figments of national expression" while Boland deconstructs these stereotypical images imposed on Irish women (Boland, 1987: 155).

Some other reasons for her literary loneliness as a woman poet can be analysed in relation to the language she uses, and the attitude she purposefully adopts. Boland was unable to read or write in Gaelic, resulting in her unintentional negligence of such poets as Mhac an tSaoi, who was already an established literary figure during the years Boland started writing, and who could have been a leading example for her (Sewell, 2003: 161). The critic Ní Frighil[6] also blames Boland for ignoring the past and present Irish women poets writing in Irish, such as Eibhlín Ní Chonaill, Máire Bhuí Ní Laoghaire (Villar-Argáiz, 2008: 95). Despite such accusations against Boland for the negligence of her native literature's history, another well-established woman poet of the Irish literary convention, Ní Dhomhnaill agrees with Boland in the sense that in the long history of Irish literature, she could not find the suitable poetic foremothers appreciated by the canon while there were several "confirmation[s] of Eavan Boland's claim that women have been nothing else but the 'fictive queen and national sibyls'" (24). In addition, Boland follows a self-conscious strategy by marginalizing herself within the canon and by emphasizing her loneliness and isolation. By doing so, she could act more subversively against the Irish poetic tradition and its emphasis on creating a truly national culture (Villar-Argáiz, 2008: 100). The poems such as "The Lost Land" (Boland, 2009: 260) or "Formal Feeling" (Boland, 2009: 274), which were published during the recent years of her career, exemplify Boland's aim that the political authority in her poems becomes stronger as her speakers are more weakened, marginalized, and made more vulnerable (Keen, 2000: 27).

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[6] Ríona Ní Frighil's statement above is borrowed from her unpublished paper "The Poetry of Eavan Boland", delivered in *IASIL* Conference in Debrecen, Hungary, on Thursday 10 July 2003. Since it is unavailable for the specific citation, Ní Frighil's argument is quoted from Villar-Argáiz's *The Poetry of Eavan Boland* (2008).

In other words, even after becoming an established and highly appreciated poet within the canon, Boland takes advantage of this loneliness as a strengthening element in her poetry since it allows her much space to subvert and challenge the authoritative traditional characteristics of Irish poetry.

Thomas Kinsella concludes his essay "The Irish Writer" by asserting that "every writer has to make the imaginative grasp at identity for himself; and if he can find no means in his inheritance to suit him, he will have to start from scratch" (66). Due to the lack of predecessor poets related to their literary attitude, Boland and Durcan have determined their styles by this "scratching" activity. As a result of this creative process, the readers are able to "explore other areas of experience and imaginative ideals" in the works of these poets (Dawe, 1983: 146). The creativity in their poetry and the brightness of their imaginative poetic world are the two important characteristics of their poetry that readily support Dawe's statement. Contrary to the exhausting effort that Boland takes in order to bring the dismissed Irish womanhood of past and present into the fore, Durcan presents self-reliant and traditionally unusual women characters who are playfully caricatured in his poems. For instance, "Wife Who Smashed Television Gets Jail" (Durcan, 2009: 29) or "The Haulier's Wife Meets Jesus On the Road Near Moone" (Durcan, 2009: 117) are just the two of his numerous poems that deal with the gender politics and power dynamics between the sexes.

Compared to Boland, it becomes even harder to trace Durcan's poetic style in any specific poets before him because his poetry appears a vast spectrum that covers various subject matters by referring to different poetic figures. Keeping his peculiar stylistic "scratching" in mind, one can see through Durcan's cunningly-weaved poems that there have been countless references to the numerous earlier poets throughout his career. His admiration for Kavanagh's poetry is obvious since he takes Kavanagh as his spiritual

mentor, who “is posited as a protective, enabling forefather” (Martiny, 2007: 99). His harsh criticism towards the Church overlaps with the Swiftian vein of Austin Clarke’s poetry, which has a satirical and ironic tone (Murphy, 1977: 58). The Plath-Durcan parallelism in his *Daddy, Daddy* (1990) collection and the inclusion of the self-determinant womanhood also indicate that Durcan “render[s] the feminine psyche so accurately” (Gahern, 1987:109). In addition, the absurd cases through dramatic monologues as in “Beckett at the Gate” (Durcan, 2009: 168) or the two-lined “Ireland 1972” (Durcan, 2009: 18) which alludes to Pound’s imagist poem “In a Station of the Metro” clearly suggest that his poetry shows similarities with the poets of the modernist convention such as T.S. Eliot, Beckett, and particularly with Ezra Pound who “was such a great innovator” for Durcan (Kelly & Durcan, 2003: 297). Numerous references have been directed at these poets in Durcan’s publications. Although he playfully incorporates their styles or poetic personas to some extent in his own poetic perspective, it is hard to categorize Durcan into any poetic convention.

Since the central argument of this study revolves around the altering gender politics in contemporary Irish poetry, it would be appropriate to focus on Durcan’s selected poems regarding the repositioning of womanhood in the Irish poetic tradition. Adopting a critical and mocking attitude in his certain poems about the representation of gender politics such as “Cleaning Ashtrays” (Durcan, 1995: 48) and “The Kilfenora Teaboy” (Durcan, 2009: 47), Durcan reverses the established norms of androcentric literary convention that locate Irish women into secondary and subservient position. The psychological subservience of the househusband to his bread-winner wife in “Cleaning Ashtrays”, and the physical subordination of the teaboy to his “powerful” and “handsome” wife in “The Kilfenora Teaboy” are clear instances of Durcan’s reversal of traditionally accepted gender roles. In both poems, husbands are portrayed as holding an either physically or mentally inferior position to their dominant wives. In order to put a

strong emphasis on the realities that Irish women face, the poet voices the unexpected in the convention: sexually independent wives, financially self-sufficient businesswomen, or several other women characters presented in "unconventional" manners. Occasionally, Durcan's verse echoes the Swiftian mockery and Plathian actuality, as in his mocking poem "Sister Agnes Writes to Her Belovèd Mother" (Durcan, 2009: 70), or his collection *Daddy, Daddy* (1990) that provides certain private experiences similar to those in Plath's collection, *Ariel* (1965). In fact, a detailed examination of Durcan's poetry reveals that the playfulness and mockery in his lines are coherently combined with the bitter philosophy lying on the background.

In Durcan's case, the "scratching" Kinsella emphasizes is accomplished through the poet's genuine approach, the roots of which are nurtured by the ongoing social issues especially in relation to women's rights in Ireland. During his tours and reading sessions throughout the country, he has "recorded a society and landscape changing beneath his feet" in his poems (Mc Donagh, 2016: 3). In this regard, Durcan emerges not only as an observer for the reflections of the recent developments in women's position, but as a chronicler poet that incorporates these issues into his lines. However, his subversion of the biased traditional social norms dictated upon both sexes is not limited to the heterosexual stereotypes. As Martiny remarks, he is one of the few heterosexual male authors in Ireland who deliberately dallies with homosexual imagery to explore and subvert societal taboos (98). Mc Donagh attributes Durcan's inclusion of such gender-based dynamics to his poetic adaptation of the complex social and cultural developments that have marked Ireland's changing urban and rural landscape (3). In his poems, contemporary issues regarding womanhood, the image of working women, the rights to abort and divorce, or the domestic life of married couples have presented a remarkably clear picture of the Irish woman, revealing her unspoken authority. For instance, the speaker in "The Bus Driver" (Durcan, 2009: 63) becomes shattered when one of his

colleagues asks about his late wife, or the newly divorced wife in "The Pièta's Over" recommends that her ex-husband should "… get down off [her] knees / And learn to walk on [his] own two feet." (Durcan, 2009: 140). Though playful and satirical at some places and highly serious at others, it is evident that Durcan's verse has contributed to the restoration of women's position in the society as well as in the literary canon. He not only stresses the significant role that women take in "men's world", but also swaps the traditionally accepted gender-roles by offering unconventional feminine characterizations such as dominant and authoritarian wife or successful businesswoman, which contradicts with the Republic's description of Irish women's duty as home-makers and domestic counterparts of an ideal Irish family by the Constitutional Law.

For the theoretical frame of this study, the selected poems by both poets are analysed in the shade of the theoretical premises offered by the French feminist critics, such as Luce Irigaray or Hélène Cixous, since the study is centred on the heterosexual gender politics in Irish poetry. Besides, the way Durcan subverts and switches the conventional gendered roles in Irish society can be examined through Bakhtin's theory of the carnivalesque and grotesque.

Luce Irigaray suggests that the boundaries of social order and the determination of certain rules are set by men's needs and desires (Irigaray, 1985: 171). Such claim can also be observed in Irish society. As stated above, the Irish Constitutional Law determines women's roles in accordance with their domestic and maternal aspects, locating women in a secondary position in social life. Other than this, their symbolic roles within Irish poetry are also adjusted into the needs of masculine and male-authored poetic tradition as can be seen through the *aisling* tradition or certain patriarchal characterizations such as the Hag of Beare or Cathleen Ni Houlihan. In that sense, it becomes evident that Luce

Irigaray's argument concerning the patriarchal biased authority coincides with the situation that Irish women confront in poetry and social order.

In her *This Sex Which Is Not One*, Irigaray argues that three specific social roles are imposed on women by the patriarchy as *mother*, *virgin*, *prostitute*, suggesting that the characteristics of (so-called) female sexuality derive from them (186). She explains these three categories as "the valorization of reproduction and nursing" for the *mothers*; "faithfulness, lack of interest in sexual pleasure" for the *virgins*; "seductiveness, in order to arouse the consumers' desire while offering herself as its material support without getting pleasure herself" for the *prostitutes* (ibid). For the patriarchy, the concept of "womanhood" connotes these three roles that restrict and oppress female individualism. Coinciding with Irigaray's explanation, Boland's engagement with gender politics deconstructs the established perceptions of *mother*, *virgin*, and *prostitute*. In fact, the poet makes use of these categorized images as counter-arguments. Her specific poems about motherhood in *Night Feed* (1982) do not fit into the conventional image of motherhood. The strict emphasis on *parler femme*[7] in *In Her Own Image* (1980) stands as a reaction to the phallogocentric[8] understanding of femininity, which can be traced through "Making Up" (Boland, 2009: 87) or "Mastectomy" (Boland, 2009: 76). Regarding the *prostitute* image for Irish women, the poem "Mise Eire" (Boland, 2009: 128) brings the unspoken aspects of Irish women's history into discussion by presenting an Irish prostitute in British garrison. Besides, in the poem "Mise Eire", Boland's female characterization might serve as a model for the commodification of women who "cannot do anything but mimic a 'language' that they have not produced" (Irigaray, 1985: 189). In parallel with Irigaray,

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[7] Irigaray's term *parler femme* has been translated into English in a number of ways: as "writing (the) body" by Dallery, who uses this term as a common translation for *parler femme* and Hélène Cixous's *écriture feminine*; as "woman's speaking" by Reeder; and as "speaking (as) woman" by Porter (Kruse, 1991: 454).
[8] The term "phallogocentrism" is coined by Jacques Derrida, implying that the masculine is at the centre of determining the meanings. It is a combination of "phallocentrism" focusing on the masculine authority and "logocentrism" focusing on the language that assigns meaning to the world.

Boland's prostitute character in "Mise Eire" is described as a woman "who practices / the quick frictions, / the rictus of delight" during her professional work (lines 23-25).

Irigaray stresses that because of the patriarchal social norms, a woman does not have any right to her own pleasure, neither as mother nor as virgin nor as prostitute (Irigaray, 1985: 187). In this regard, Durcan's deconstructing attitude regarding female sexuality plays a highly significant role in altering gender politics of Irish poetry. For instance, in "The Haulier's Wife Meets Jesus on the Road Near Moone" (Durcan, 2009: 117), which could be regarded as "arguably the strongest feminist poem yet written in Ireland" (Crotty, 1995: 286), the wife complains about her sexual dissatisfaction since her husband treats her as "a sack of gravel / or a carnival dummy" during sexual intercourse (lines 35-36). Recalling Irigaray's established *mother* profile who is deprived of her sexual needs by the male social norms, Durcan's mother character[9] goes against the predetermined boundaries and taboos by discreetly inviting "Jesus to spend the night with [her]" while "it was like a fire burning in [her] when he talked to [her]" (lines 135, 142). Durcan's inclusion of female sexuality also subverts the nationalist perspective of Irish poetry. In "Fat Molly" (Durcan: 2009: 67), the poet alters the chaste "Cathleen Ni Houlihan of the Revival into a carnivalesque big mama who taught him the 'perfectly useless' 'art of passionate kissing" (Kearney, 1996: 108). Durcan's women, both in personal and national contexts, challenge the androcentric definitions of Irish womanhood by embracing the female body.

Cixous's "The Laugh of the Medusa" may also offer a useful frame to explore Boland and Durcan's gender-oriented poetic approach. Boland's reception as the woman poet writing of women recalls the feminist critic Hélène Cixous's assertive introductory paragraph in her article in which she argues that "women must write her self: must write

[9] As the wife explains, her husband is an alcoholic haulier, "father with [her] of four sons".

about women and bring women to writing… [She] must put herself into the text- as into the world and into history- by her own movement" (875). As the practical embodiment of Cixous's call, Boland puts herself into the text in "Night Feed" (Boland, 2009: 92) and into history in "That the Science of Cartography is Limited" (Boland, 2009: 204). As the literary representative of feminist movement in Irish poetry, she also launched Poetry Workshops for the prospective women poets during the 1980s[10]. Further, Cixous's statements about *écriture feminine* can be observed throughout *In Her Own Image*, a collection in which Boland inscribes what Cixous already defined as "the impregnable language that will wreck partitions, classes, and rhetorics, regulations and codes" (886). Prioritizing the female physicality, Boland attacks the social taboos and masculine understandings of female body as can be seen in "Making Up" (Boland, 2009: 87) or "Exhibitionist" (Boland, 2009: 84). For instance, the speaker of "Exhibitionist" performs a parodic striptease in her suburban bedroom, mocking the conventions of pornography in order to convert the "gimmickry / of sex" into her own "aesthetic" of autonomy (Goodby, 2000: 271). Bearing all these in mind, it is quite evident that Boland's poetic career can be regarded as the Irish version of Cixous's "woman writer".

Durcan's writing about gender issues occasionally alludes to the theory of "carnivalesque". In the introductory chapter of his *Rabelais and His World*, Mikhail Bakhtin theorizes that the carnival celebrates the temporary liberation from the established order, marking the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions (10). In a similar way, the societal norms that determine gender roles especially in marital life are questioned by the poet in a sarcastic way. Although the traditional manners require the husband to be the bread-winner and consider him as the

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[10] When the male poets spoke to Boland about the bad writings those workshops were encouraging, she ascribed it to the fact that a different magnetic field was integrating into the Irish poetry: new themes, new approaches, new voices that would refresh the Irish poetry (Allen-Randolph, 1993: 126).

figure of authority in the house, he is presented subordinate to the wife in "Cleaning Ashtrays" (Durcan, 1995: 48) or "The Pieta's Over" (Durcan, 2009: 140). Although the subject matters of these poem are drawn from Durcan's own marital life, his subversion of gender roles is not limited to the autobiographical elements of his poetry. The switched roles of the marital life as in "The Haulier's Wife Meets Jesus On the Road Near Moone" (Durcan, 2009: 117), "The Kilfenora Teaboy" (Durcan, 2009: 47) or "Wife Who Smashed Television Gets Jail" (Durcan, 2009: 29) can be taken as the examples since, for instance in "The Haulier's Wife", the wife is presented as a wanderer although it is the husband's profession as a haulier to travel around to make deliveries. She experiences the carnal festivities through "the temporary liberation from the established order" of her marriage. The upside-down situation where the traditional roles are fused into each other becomes a recurrent case in Durcan's poetry.

In addition, Bakhtin also describes the grotesque image of body as a physical quality that "transgresses its limits", which can be observed especially through "the genital organs, the breasts, […] the phallus" (26). In these images, the bodily parts may be shown as multiplied, minimized, or enlarged organs. Touching on the grotesque features of the body, Durcan refers to the private parts of the body in a symbolic way as can be seen in "The Man with Five Penises" (Durcan, 2009: 124) or "The Woman Who Keeps Her Breasts in the Back Garden" (Durcan, 2009: 101). In these poems, the poet wittily combines grotesque images with gender politics. For instance, the speaker in "The Man with Five Penises" at first complains about his own genital organ, worrying that he has only one although he accidentally witnesses that his father has five of them. His psychological reasoning may recall Irigaray's explanation that the sexual imperatives dictated by male rivalry measure the strongest as the one who has the best "hard-on", the longest, the biggest, the stiffest penis, or even the one who "pees the farthest" (Irigaray, 1985: 25). However, Durcan's speaker is finally convinced that "[u]nquestionably, one

penis is more than enough" (line 41). In this regard, the carnivalesque features of Durcan's poetry can be associated with the ways in which he subverts the predetermined and gendered way of thinking.

In his article "Epic and Novel", Bakhtin makes a comparison between these two genres and favours novel over epic, claiming that "novel continues to develop, yet uncompleted" (Bakhtin, 1981: 3). The critic argues that epic has a rigid and concrete form with its impenetrable boundaries, contrasting with the fact that "the boundaries [of literature] are constantly changing" (33). Claiming that "the language of poetic genres is authoritarian, dogmatic, and conservative" (287), Bakhtin points to the "monologic" characteristic of lyric poetry. However, in their article "Dialogism and the Addressee in Lyric Poetry", Marianne and Michael Shapiro argue that "poetry remains importantly 'dialogistic' despite Bakhtin's own prejudices" (392). Similarly, Boland and Durcan's subversive and experimental approach towards Irish verse provides a dialogic environment, breaking the uniformity of poetic properties. In addition to their experimentations on form to create dialogic expressions in their verse, Eavan Boland's sliding away from the Irish poetic convention as an 'Irish woman poet' and Paul Durcan's satirical voice towards the hypocritical Irish patriarchy break the authoritarian monology of androcentric Irish poetry.

Drawing upon the socio-political motives prevalent in Boland and Durcan's works, it can be stated that both poets are driven by a desire to problematize the conventional norms imposed on the Irish woman by the patriarchal ideology in many aspects. Hence, the sexual politics represented in their poems prompt a feminist critical exploration of the selected poems, and in the case of Durcan, the way he handles the grotesque image as well as the reversal of gender roles recalls the Bakhtinian carnivalesque. As an opposition to the prescriptive image of femininity, Eavan Boland

and Paul Durcan's poetry are engaged with the dynamics of gender politics since their poems deconstruct the traditionally established feminine images.

Although both Boland and Durcan have produced lyrics about the silent and unspoken women of the Irish society, the poetic resistance for women's liberation from the stereotyped patterns had not been completely recognizable until the 1970s. For the starting point, the poets who would reclaim and defend the Irish women in their poetry had to overcome the prescribed image of femininity that is blended into the national characteristics of the country, which can be observed, for instance, through the emblematic women figures of the independence fights, or through the domestic duties set by the clerical norms.

Before women's long-term poetic silence was disrupted by the emergence of feminist approach in Irish poetry, the subordinate female image that had already been constructed by Irish cultural norms was socially dominant throughout the country. The feminine nationalist symbols, as Dark Rosaleen or Cathleen Ni Houlihan, stand as the key figures of the decolonization process. They are often represented as the crone, unliberated woman that urges young Irishmen to fight for the sake of their country, and the liberation of these emblematic female figures corresponds to the liberation of the country as well. However, the image of woman "as mother/land is seen paradoxically as both nurturer and destroyer, demanding the ultimate blood sacrifice from her sons" (Bacik, 2007: 102). From Bacik's point, the idea of holiness of male martyrdom is, in fact, conveyed under the guise of the female command for bloodshed.

In addition to the nationalist symbolic femininity, Irish literary convention also makes use of 'Irish woman' as a medium of nationalist context by presenting her as the victim of the Great Famine of 1845s, a disastrous incident that enhanced the idea of independence. As Kelleher suggests, in most of the representations of the famine, "the

victim of the famine, who is the subject of a detailed description, is female" (6). It is clear that the notion of 'Irish woman' was already stereotyped in Irish nationalist texts, by presenting her not as individuals but mediums to arouse patriotic feelings. Until the foundation of the Irish Free State in 1922, the androcentric collective memory had already determined woman's cultural features along with her idealized passivity and glorified deprivation[11].

Apart from such national feminine symbols containing restrictive attributes that view women only in relation to motherhood and wifehood, another factor that defines and determines the borders of womanhood appears as the Catholic Church. Starting from the early years of the Republic, the doctrines of the Catholic Church of Ireland, which stands as another national emblem of the country, were highly influential in the restrictions of women's individualization. The social restrictions and bans related to women such as abortion, divorce, extramarital sex, and illegitimate child-bearing were constructed by the dogmatic discourses of the Catholic Church in Ireland because the Church occupies "a largely unquestioned position in the social, cultural and moral fabric of the Irish state" (Mc Donagh, 2016: 69). However, starting from the 1970s when gender politics in Irish poetry simultaneously emerged, the Republic witnessed several milestones regarding the rights and increased opportunities for women and marginalized groups such as the partial legislation of contraception in 1974, the election of Ireland's first woman president in 1990, the decriminalization of homosexuality in 1993, the legislation of divorce in 1995, and of a comprehensive workplace equality in 1998 (Wright, 2010: 7). These gradual improvements which clearly expand beyond Irish women's dictated social territory are

[11] For instance, in Yeats's *Cathleen Ni Houlihan*, the national symbolic character, Kathleen Ni Houlihan, transforms into a young maiden at the end of the play once the young Irelanders fight for her (Byars, 1975: 41).

accompanied by the activist stance of Boland and Durcan, whose preoccupation with gender politics inevitably consolidate women's poetic and social individuality.

According to George Russell, the poet better known as Æ, each Irish citizen has "some vague ideal of his country, born from his reading of history, or from contemporary politics, or from an imaginative intuition", an insight which implies that the ideal Ireland is different from the actual one for the citizen (6). Russel's definition clearly covers the Irish poets, such as Boland or Ni Dhomhnaill, writing of gender politics in the 1970s as they wrote to actualize their idealized cultural and poetic norms by combining the contemporary issues about gender politics and their ideals. As Boland would later state in her prose *Object Lessons*, she "was born into and became a poet in a culture where the word 'woman' and the word 'poet' were magnetically opposed" (35). The gradual recognition of female subjectivity within Irish poetry was the outcome of hard literary labour by such poets as Eavan Boland, Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill, Medbh McGuckian, Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin. Moreover, the correspondence of this recognition to social life has been supported and poeticized by male writers as well. As an exclusive instance, Paul Durcan's contribution to the representation of gender politics in Irish poetry is highly significant in that he readily normalizes and embraces the feminization of modern Irish poetry by not only prioritizing female attributes in a dominant manner, but also presenting gender-related social discussions such as abortion, divorce, and domestic life with a critical tone. Thus, he affirms woman's poetic centralization by mirroring her social standing in Ireland. In this regard, the restoration of woman's poetic position within the canon should not be restricted to the poetry collections of merely women writers.

For Boland's poetry, the starting point for the reconstruction of Irish femininity was the Famine and Irish myths. The nationalist literary works produced during the Revival such as *Cathleen Ni Houlihan* by W.B. Yeats, "The Old Woman of the Roads"

by Padraic Colum, and "Dark Rosaleen" by James Clarence Mangan had already placed the woman into an emblematic status by suggesting that "woman was the nation and the nation was woman" (Fulmer, 2007: 3). Regarding the intensity of using icons of objectified women as the national symbols, Padraic Pearse states that when he was a child, he actually believed that there actually was a woman called 'Erin'[12] (300). Contrary to such a convention that combine the emblematic femininity into national literature, Eavan Boland's women in her poems stand for the experiences of the unspoken women from the Irish myths and Irish past. She bravely establishes "a risky but strong association between such historical traumas inflicted on the Irish as the Great Hunger, and the marginal, silenced role of women in history" (Matthews, 1997: 40). In fact, as John Rickard remarks, the Irish woman is the *tabula inscripta* of the national trauma, full of defeat and suffering (100). Through their personal sufferings, the women characters in certain poems inscribe the misfortunes and sufferings of a nation into the notion of Irish womanhood. The representations of women in "Mise Eire" (Boland, 2009: 128) or "Quarantine" (Boland, 2009: 282), for instance, allude to Ireland's traumatic history through their bitter experiences that are neglected by the poetic convention. These experiences vary from prostitution and emigration in "Mise Eire" to the freezing death in "Quarantine". As an opposition to the emblematic feminine symbols, the poet redefines the Irish woman. As a detailed instance of this association, she contextually transmits the historical facts of the disaster into a poem written in the form of a letter: "*March 1 1847. By the First Post*" (Boland, 2009: 206-7). In the poem, the speaker appears as an English maiden travelling in Ireland during the Great Famine:

> *Shall I tell you what I saw on Friday,*
> *driving with Mama? A woman lying*
> *across the Kells Road with her baby—*

[12] Erin, or Éirinn in Irish language, is the ancient name of Ireland. The patriotic and nationalist writers often used to refer to Ireland as a woman named Erin: "Let Erin remember the days of old / Ere her faithless sons betray'd her" (Moore, 1828: 24).

in full view. We had to go
out of our way
to get home & we were late
& poor Mama was not herself all day. (lines 19-25)

As the evocation of the "Famine literature" of the 1870s where the maternal agony is prioritized to highlight the national experience of the Famine, Boland above introduces the suffering Irish mother with her baby through the eyes of another woman. However, the striking aspect of the poem is not merely Boland's portrayal of the severity of Irish women's condition, but how this image is moulded along with the national condition of the country. As Melissa Fegan argues, the Famine proved "the fallacy of the Union" because "if Ireland was truly part of the United Kingdom, her citizens would have been worth saving from starvation and financial ruin" (449). The negligence of the English maiden, whose main concern is material pursuits rather than helping the woman and the baby, refers to the politics of the time. Talking of the "odorous daffodils" and the "sewn copper silk", the English speaker amplifies the nationalist tone of the poem by voicing the opposite side of the colonial binary as the unconcerned colonizer. Thus, through such historical allusions, Boland presents "the true voice and vision of women [that] are routinely excluded" from Irish history (Boland, 1989: 19). Thus, by giving a specific cultural and literary representation of Irish women's issues, Boland voices women's national captivity and repression in poetry[13].

Apart from the marginalization of womanhood within the poetic canon, the religious and conventional norms have oppressive power over the image of individual and independent woman. For instance, in the Republic, the women who did not fit into

[13] The critic Heather Clark observes Boland's intonation of repressed feminine voice by revealing that in "In His Own Image", she writes of domestic violence; in "Anorexic", of a woman who starves herself; in "Mastectomy", of male surgeons' callousness; in "The Journey", of women who have lost their babies to disease; in "The Making of an Irish Goddess", of Famine women who ate their own children; in "Mise Eire", of prostitutes who serviced British soldiers; in "Tree of Life", of infants who died soon after birth (337).

the Church/State model of married motherhood were subjected to the sanctions, commonly known as "Magdalene Laundries"[14] the last of which was closed in 1996. It is rather ironic that these institutions were operated by the Sisters of the Church, which portrays a picture where women are oppressed by other women. In fact, Magdalene Laundries were just one aspect of how women were degraded and disregarded within the social order. Just as Boland goes against the traditional Irish femininity in poetry by presenting the neglected sufferings of those women from the Irish past, Durcan also touches on controversial social discussions related to Irish woman in a sarcastic way.

Different from Boland's poetic attitude, Durcan's engagement with gender politics conveys a more playful tone that represents the poet's critical views on the factual norms determined by the cultural context. For instance, in relation to the follies of the Magdalene Laundries, his poem entitled "Sister Agnes Writes to Her Belovèd Mother" (Durcan, 2009: 70) poetically strikes at the Convent with its own weapon, that is chastity. As the poetic counter-attack of the "fallen women" in Laundries, Durcan impersonates his vision of mockery through Sister Agnes, who normalizes the sexual intercourse between the Reverend Mother and the Retreat Director as well as the pregnancy out of wedlock. As it can be seen from her letter to her mother:

> The big news is that Rev. Mother is pregnant;
> The whole convent is simply delighted;
> We don't know who the lucky father is
> …
> Of course, it's all hush-hush,
> Nobody is supposed to know anything (lines 5-7, 14-15)

The colloquial language such as "hush-hush", the sincerity of the tone as it is a private letter sent to a family member, and concealing the scandalous fact from the public in a humorous way are united on a regular basis in Durcan's satirical manner. In fact, he

[14] Magdalene Laundries were the convents that embraced the women rejected by the society or their own families. These institutions were conducted by the Church. Among the common reasons for leading a life in the Laundries, there were inappropriate behaviours, bearing child out of wedlock, or alleged sexual sins.

mockingly normalizes the abnormal by presenting specific snapshots from the private aspects of women's everyday life as such. The domestic obstacles that women encounter –or the social pressures that women are subjected to– are either reversed or exaggerated in his poems, which indicates that his poetry collectively presents a sort of resistance to the gender-biased Irish social and poetic norms from multiple perspectives.

This dissertation examines the selected poems from Boland and Durcan's earlier publications, which offer a critique of the gender codes imposed by the Irish State and the Church. The primary reason for this is to demonstrate the changing gender dynamics in a clearer way since the 90s are politically marked as "Mary Robinson Years" after the first female president of Ireland. Together with the globalization, modernization of the society, and also the Celtic Tiger, the social gender politics in the country changed in favour of Irish women in those years especially when compared to the earlier decades. Since this study centres on how women's roles were reclaimed, discussed, and ultimately exercised in Boland and Durcan's poetry and how these poets had prepared a poetic grounding for such alterations, the poems from earlier collections are specifically selected.

The next two chapters of this study will demonstrate in what ways Boland and Durcan employ the problematic case of gender politics in their poetry. Examined in separate chapters, these poets will be discussed in accordance with their preoccupation with gender politics in their verse. In parallel with that, the chapters begin with brief biographical backgrounds of these poets and how their certain experiences nurture the way they are concerned with gender politics in Irish poetry. The chapters continue with how these poets demolish and deconstruct certain patriarchal notions such as the emblematic femininity in Irish poetry or the existing constitutional bans regarding abortion or divorce. Both Eavan Boland and Paul Durcan contribute to the reorientation

of gender dynamics within the Irish poetic canon by bringing such predetermined aspects into discussion.

CHAPTER I

Towards "a new language": Femininity, Motherhood and the Female Body in Eavan Boland's Poetry

"I have written this

so that,
in the next myth
my sister will be wiser."

--from "Daphne with her thighs in bark"

This chapter examines Eavan Boland's development as the "Irish woman poet" in relation to the representation of Irish gender politics. From an early age, Boland was exposed to social discrimination because of her Irish identity as well as her gender. The chapter starts with a brief introduction of her early life and relates it to her preoccupation with gender politics. With a detailed examination of her various poems, this chapter aims to demonstrate in what ways Eavan Boland has altered the androcentric gender politics in Irish poetry. Since the examined poems in this chapter are closely related to the recognition of Irish women's poetry, certain arguments related to her verse are reinforced with the ideas of several feminist critics such as Cixous and Irigaray.

Eavan Boland was born to a family of a diplomat father and a painter mother in 1944. Due to her father's appointment for the Irish Embassy in Britain, the family had to move to London when Boland was just six years old. Since the post-independence effects after the proclamation of the Republic in the 1940s were quite observable in diplomatic

and military manners, these dynamics also influenced young Boland's developing perspective towards her Irish roots and womanhood. In fact, both Irishness and womanhood may be evaluated within similar contexts because both groups are exposed to a cultural marginalization and oppression. Implying an analogy between them, Rowbotham argues that "certain similarities exist between the colonization of the underdeveloped country and female oppression" (201). Marilyn French also agrees with Rowbotham by stating that "if we transpose the description of colonized and colonizer to women and men, they fit at almost every point" (130). For instance, the masculine, similar to the colonizer, establishes authority over women by pushing them into secondary position. Likewise, the terms that define the notion of 'woman' are already set by men, who are the decision-makers just as the colonizers. In this regard, Boland's exposure to political discrimination in London may have reinforced her attitude towards her own "marginalized" identity, first as Irish and then as a woman.

Boland is also interested in the marginalization of women in the Irish poetic canon. During an interview with Jody Allen-Randolph, Boland complains about a very stubborn and privileged perspective that "would see male poets as Irish poets and women poets as women poets", and she argues that such discrimination quarantines the Irish poetry from "the energies of women's poetry" (124). In order to establish an essential bond between Irish poetry and women's poetry, her lyrics include certain aspects of both perspectives. A clear fusion of the feminine and the national can be observed through "The Pomegranate" (Boland, 2009: 215), which is about "the story of a daughter lost in hell" (line 2). In the poem, Boland describes the first time she read the myth of Persephone[15] as follows:

[15] In Classical mythology, Persephone is abducted by Hades, and her mother, Ceres, chases them. After the deal, Hades allows Persephone to spend half of the year with her mother, Demeter. For the rest of the year, in Autumn and Winter, Persephone is in the underworld with Hades.

As a child in exile in
˘˘ ¯ ˘ ˘¯ ˘

a city of fogs and strange consonants,
˘ ¯ ˘ ¯ ˘ ¯ ¯ ˘ ˘

I read it first and at first I was
˘ ¯ ˘ ¯ ˘ ˘ ¯ ˘ ¯

an exiled child in the crackling dusk of
˘ ˘ ¯ ¯ ˘ ˘ ¯ ˘ ¯ ˘

the underworld, the stars blighted. Later
˘ ¯ ˘ ¯ ˘ ¯ ¯ ˘ ¯ ˘

I walked out in a summer twilight
˘ ¯ ¯ ˘˘ ¯ ˘ ¯ ¯

searching for my daughter at bed-time. (lines 8-14)
¯ ˘ ˘ ˘ ¯ ˘ ˘ ¯ ¯

The extract depicts how the young Boland first came across the myth of Persephone. As an exile child in London, “a city of fogs and strange consonants”[16], the poet first imagines herself as Persephone “in the crackling dusk of / the underworld”, and then as Ceres “searching for [her] daughter at bed-time”. The abduction of the female body by Hades and the victimization of Ceres as a mother clearly depict the way the male establishes authority in accordance with his desires even in ancient myths.

Independent from the content, the formal characteristics of the poem may account for her early years in exile. The poet catches a rhythmical recurrence through various metrical qualities. The quoted first line above opens with two consecutive anapests, and in order not to interrupt the rhythm of the following line, the preposition “in” is included into the first one. Thus, the second line goes with an iambic trimeter extended with a

[16] The power exercise through the opposing national identities is conducted through the pronunciational differences between the Irish dialect and the standard English in the poem. For instance, in “An Irish Childhood in England: 1951” (155), when the child Boland “produced ‘I amn’t’ in the classroom”, her English teacher in London “turned and said – ‘you’re not in Ireland now.” (lines 35-36). Similarly, in “Writing in a Time of Violence” (211) she narrates how “the dear vowels / *Irish Ireland Ours* are / absorbed into air” (lines 32-34). In “Emigrant Letters” (297), she recognizes “an Irish voice” in Detroit airport, whose owner must have been away for years” because of “vowels half-sounds and syllables”.

dactylic word “consonants” at the end. The third line also portrays a broken iambic tetrameter interrupted in the middle with the conjunction “and”. The following fourth line shows the characteristics of ionic pattern[17] along the words “an exiled child”, which is common in ancient Latin poetry. In fact, this specific metrical choice may be ascribed to the Latin courses that she took in London and Trinity College. However, similar to the previously broken iambic line, the poet does not complete the line with a full ionic pattern since the following “crackling dusk of” is sounded with repetitive trochees. For the final line, the maternal empathy towards Ceres is emphasized by beginning with a trochee unlike the rest of the lines that begin mostly with iambs or anapaests. By doing so, Boland draws attention to the exploitation of Persephone and the ultimate victimization of Ceres as the mother. The metrical analysis of the extract illustrates that Boland’s lines do not follow a strict meter or rhyme scheme. However, it is clear that she definitely follows a rhythmical pattern with a variety of scales in order for her verse to sustain certain aspects of poetic fluency.

As it can be seen in “The Pomegranate”, Boland interweaves her national perspective into womanhood by referring to the related classical myths. However, her engagement with mythical entities is not limited to classical sources since she draws much from the Irish myths and Irish past that could help her dismantle the conventional attitude towards Irish femininity. By doing so, she “desire[s] to untangle the complex relationship between woman, history, and the Irish nation” (Clark, 2010: 328). Despite much appraisal for her multidimensional approach to the case, few critics, such as Edna Longley, criticize the national aspects of her feminist poetry since “by not questioning the nation, Boland recycles the literary cliché from which she desires to escape” (Longley, 1994: 188).

[17] In ionic meter, the line opens with a pyrrhic (two unstressed syllables) followed by a spondee (two stressed syllables). The rhythm is sustained with the continuous cycling of pyrrhic- spondee formation. The earlier examples can be observed in Sappho or Anacreon (Halporn, 1994: 23). Considering Boland’s admiration for the Greek woman poet Sappho from the Classical times, “an exiled child” may also allude to her Latin education in London.

Longley argues that Boland's own creation of "national feminine" becomes a twin sister of the conventional Dark Rosaleen since the poet does not criticize the nationalist perspective that indirectly led the male poets to make woman a silent object in their poems (ibid). About this case, Boland writes: "On the one hand, I knew that as a poet, I could not easily do without the idea of a nation […] On the other, I could not as a woman accept the nation formulated for me by Irish poetry and its traditions" (Boland, 1989: 8). Drawing on her view, it can be inferred that Boland does not accept the masculine characteristics of Irish poetry and she rearranges them in a way that Irish poetry would be able to represent the rightful image of Irish woman.

In her essay "Outside History", Boland looks into the "emblematic relationship between the defeats of womanhood and the suffering of a nation", she realizes that she only needs to "prove the first in order to reveal the second. If so, then Irishness and womanhood, those tormenting fragments of my youth, could at last stand in for one another" (37). In this regard, her female characters from Irish history draw a picture of agony in order to indicate the defeats of womanhood. By doing so, she would be able to prove the suffering of a nation through these renovated emblematic female symbols without any attempt to romanticize them. Looking from that perspective, it becomes clearer that the qualities embodied in Boland's national feminine differ from the conventional *aisling* tradition[18] because the poet aims at "establish[ing] a discourse with the idea of a nation" (Boland, 1989: 20). Her national women do not resemble the emblematic "spoken women" in nationalist texts, but they are the "speaking women" who discuss and enlighten women's historical experiences. In this regard, her national tone in those poems does not follow the nationalist male-authored tradition as she offers "not

[18] Aisling tradition lacks female individuality unlike Boland's certain female characters from Irish past. Besides, the stocked image of an Irish woman, who is the symbolic representation of Ireland, is replaced by Boland's female characters ranging from, for instance, an emigrant mother to a garrison prostitute in "Mise Eire".

[the] national liberation, but [the] personal liberation from the national myth" (Clark, 2010: 333). Boland's female deities borrowed from Irish myths help the poet liberate the nationalist emblematic femininity from the patriarchal limitations. The detailed examination of her selected poems such as "Making of an Irish Goddess", "Mise Eire" and "Mother Ireland" reveal that Boland's use of womanhood is innovative and subversive because these poems continuously dismantle the patriarchal feminine figure as the representative of Ireland.

"The Making of an Irish Goddess" (Boland, 2009: 178) opens with Ceres's journey into the underworld with a brief description of the nature she left behind:

> Ceres went to hell
> with no sense of time.
>
> When she looked back
> ˘ ˘ ‒ ‒
>
> all that she could see was
> ‒ ‒ ˘ ˘ ‒ ‒
>
> […]
> a seasonless, unscarred earth. (lines 1-4, 10)

A clear example of Latin-originated ionic rhythm demonstrated earlier in "The Pomegranate" emerges once again through the lines "When she looked back / all that she could see was". The unstressed first two monosyllables of "When she" is followed by another two stressed monosyllables of "looked back". The cyclical continuation of this rhythm stretches into the following line with the same pattern. Drawing a parallelism with Ceres's experience, the speaker compares herself to Ceres and confesses: "But I need time / […] / to make the same descent"., Boland's Irish speaker, in these two lines, switches the rhythm into iambic scansion although the earlier pyrrhic-spondee combination alludes to the Latin influence discussed above. This alteration may represent the authenticity of Boland's Irish deity by marking a metric difference as well. Rather than grounding her own making of Irish goddess over ancient Greek myths and poetic

patterns, Boland's speaker adopts a nationalistic attitude in order to reconstruct the image of Irish woman as the national symbol.

While Ceres's departure for her daughter is marked with certain uniformities in nature such as "leaves of a single colour" or "wheat at one height", Boland's Irish goddess is closely associated with the bodily embodiment of the unspoken Irish past. In the poem, Boland draws much from Cixous's famous declaration that women should write through their body independently from the images patriarchal culture constructed for them. The action of "making" in the title "The Making of an Irish Goddess", in this regard, might imply the way Boland reconstructs the national myths in contrast with the artificial femininity of Irish patriarchy. As Susan Suleiman suggests, Cixous's call "went out to invent both a new poetics and a new politics, based on women's reclaiming […] control over their bodies and a voice with which to speak about" (43). The impact of Cixous on women's writing, as Suleiman points out, can be observed through the poetic qualities of Boland's verse and her engagement with gender politics. In the poem, the poet relates her own body to the national past from a tragic viewpoint. She expresses that her body, which is "neither young now nor fertile / and with the marks of childbirth / still on it":

> must be
>
> an accurate inscription
> of that agony:
>
> the failed harvests,
> the fields rotting to the horizon,
> the children devoured by their mothers (lines 21-26)

John Rickard's description of Irish woman as the *tabula inscripta* of the national trauma can be closely traced through the bodily representation of Boland's character in the poem as "an accurate inscription / of that agony" (100). These perishing agonies, collective traumas, and perpetual defeats in Irish past are inscribed into the Irish woman's body as "the failed harvests / the fields rotting to the horizon / the children devoured by their

mothers". All these descriptions point to one exact moment in Irish past: the Great Irish Famine[19] that lasted between 1845 and 1852. The quoted lines of the extract above gradually become longer as the consecutive allusions are emphasized in a stronger way. The implication of cannibalism through "the children devoured by their mother" during the Famine might recall the monstrous image of Cixous's Medusa[20]. However, as Raquelle Bostow defines in her "The Myth of Medusa", Medusa was "a Gorgon raped by Poseidon, punished by Athena, and conquered by Perseus" (2016). Despite her monstrous image that has been associated with the evil, the myth embodies the victimization of a Gorgon. Drawing a parallelism with the myth, Boland's mother figure is also a victim of the British politics during the Famine years: the British parliament was politically insensitive towards the disastrous effects of the Famine, and nationalist Irish writers often used an Irish mother with an infant as the key symbol of this disaster (Kelleher, 1997: 6). As the embodiment of sufferings and agonies of those times, the Irish goddess that Boland makes does not stand for the monstrous imagery or evil but on the contrary, she appears as the embodiment of the unspoken bitter experiences of Irish women. Just as Cixous's suggestion of "look[ing] at the Medusa straight on to see her" because "she's not deadly, [s]he's beautiful and she's laughing" (885), Boland also makes her Irish goddess visible enough to be recognized from a different perspective.

The rebellious refusal of patriarchal definitions through "laughing" can also be traced within the redefinition of the Irish national feminine symbol. Fogarty puts an emphasis on the fact that "the image of female muteness becomes a weapon" against "the oppressive conditions prevailing for women" (Fogarty, 1999: 259). It is for that reason

[19] The Great Famine was caused by a failure of the potato crop, which many people relied on for most of their nutrition. A disease called late blight destroyed the leaves and edible roots of the potato plants in successive years from 1845 to 1849 (Mokyr). It was during the Famine years that approximately a million died and another million emigrated, and the resonance of these numbers is highly powerful considering that the population was around 8.5 million people during that time (Ó'Gráda, 2001: 122).

[20] As Duffy remarks, Irish women during the Famine were "filthier and more frightful than the harpies […] struggling, screaming, *shrieking* for their prey, like some monstrous and unclean animals" (192).

Boland emphasizes Irish women's muteness in Irish poetry by establishing her feminine imagery over their catastrophic experiences during the Famine in, for instance, "Mise Eire" or "Making of an Irish Goddess". In this regard, the way Boland embraces "female muteness" as a weapon recalls the appreciation of Medusa's laugh as a revolting action against the predetermined definitions set by Irish national culture. Boland also draws a parallelism between the "rivate" female body and the "national" Irish lands within the context of reproductive qualities. The detailed description of her body as "neither young now nor fertile" corresponds to the infertile lands with "failed harvests". This association may also stand for Luce Irigaray's call that "[w]oman ought to be able to find herself, among other things, through the images of herself already deposited in history" (Irigaray, 1993: 10). Calling Irigaray's words, a portrait of the Irish lands during the Famine years is associated with the reproductive condition through the female body. By using specific details from the Great Famine, Boland not only speaks out for the obliterated women of the Irish past, but she goes against the conventional patriarchal approach in Irish poetry which has already organized the Irish femininity in favour of masculine interest.

This analogy between the Irish woman and the Famine recurs in "The Famine Road" (Boland, 2009: 42) where the larger sestets and septets are interrupted by the italicized spin-off tercets because the poem contains two plotlines entwined into each other. The main plot delivered in sestets narrates how the construction of Famine roads was decided by the British government and how these roads were built. In the interrupting italic tercets, on the other hand, the diagnosis of a woman with infertility is issued by referring to the infertile famine roads:

> *'anything may have caused it, spores,*
> *a childhood accident; one sees*
> *day after day these mysteries.'*
> […]
> *'Barren, never to know the load*
> *of his child in you, what is your body*
> *now if not a famine road?'* (lines 17-19, 36-38)

The futility and uselessness of the female body without its procreative aspect is ironically emphasized in the last stanza of the poem. The barrenness of woman's body is once again pictured through the iconographic Famine roads which began "from nowhere, going nowhere of course" (line 7). Referring to the dead-end roads that were built by the sick and starving Irish folk, the speaker implies a similar dead-end genealogy because of the infertility. The close association of female body with its reproduction merely serves to the traditional patriarchal viewpoint, which assumes that the infertile female body is as useless as the dead-end Famine roads. However, Boland implicatively criticizes such notion by arguing that the female body – just as Famine roads – cannot be evaluated in relation to her 'utility' and reproductive functions. In that way, Boland's infertile female character stands against the patriarchal categorization of female body.

In "The Famine Road", although the frequently used enjambments throughout the poem might imply a prosy texture, Boland raises the poetic qualities by working with rhyming end-words such as "sees-mysteries" or "load-road". Besides, although there does not exist a strict metrical coherence in the poem, the rhythmical flows that emerge at specific lines such as the iambic tetrameter of "an**oth**er **third** of **those** a**gain**" (line 9) also strengthen the poetic qualities of Boland's verse. These poetic qualities indicate that while Boland's poetry with a colloquial language was diverging from the monology and rigidity of Irish poetry that has its own poetic patterns and limitations, it also bears certain rhyming and metric characteristics that could mark Boland's distinct poetic taste as well.

In a similar way to "The Making of an Irish Goddess", Boland presents another national feminine symbol in "Mise Eire"[21] (Boland, 2009: 128). In order to redefine the space given to the Irish women, Boland occasionally presents unconventionally self-

[21] The title "Mise Eire" is Gaelic, meaning "I am (from) Ireland". However, Boland might also refer to the historical "misery" of Irish women through a pun, as Paretti remarks. The critic suggests that Boland speaks the language of national pain through the voices of ordinary women by echoing 'Misery' in the title (62).

determining female characters that are entwined with Irish national context as can be seen in “Mise Eire”[22]. The poem has three different speakers from Irish past –the Irish national feminine symbol, a garrison prostitute, and an emigrant mother– and they speak for their own experiences in a revolting way since their experiences are not visible to the androcentric Irish poetic canon. Boland’s “Mise Eire” might be regarded as a recomposition of Padraic Pearse’s poem of the same title, which was written in Gaelic and published in 1912 during the heyday of independence fight (Villar-Argáiz, 2008: 123). The major difference between the two poems is that Pearse traditionally presents the stereotypical personification of Mother Ireland, who often calls upon “her faithful sons to rise up against the infidel invader so that […] she might be redeemed from colonial violation and become pure once again” (Kearney, 1996: 120). As Villar-Argáiz claims, Pearse’s views on national identity is heavily influenced by “the Catholic religion and its view of womanhood, especially motherhood” (122). However, Boland refuses the symbolic and objectified use of femininity and she voices “a garrison prostitute, an emigrant mother, and […] the woman poet herself who chooses to inhabit these other voices in order to find her own” (Allen-Randolph, 2014: 83). In Boland’s “Mise Eire”, the shifting female speakers of the poem represent the unspoken women of Irish past.

Cixous argues that “in woman, personal history blends together with the history of all women, as well as national and world history. As a militant, she is an integral part of all liberations” (882). The critic suggests an integration of the female individuality into a historical basis suitable for women’s liberation, and she further implies that the female experience –whether from national past or present time- serves as the ultimate assurance for women’s liberation. Similarly, the historical unity of the female counterparts in “Mise

[22] Gerardine Meaney notes that “Pearse’s refrain of ‘I am Ireland’ became, in Boland’s poem, ‘I am the woman’” (Meaney, 1991: 17). This subversion of objectified femininity into female subjectivity proves how effectively Boland employs gender politics.

Eire" guarantees a similar liberation for Irish women. Similar to Cixous's argument, "Mise Eire" presents how the personal experiences of Irish women –firstly prostitute and then emigrant mother- are blended into national history. This fusion in the poem ultimately signals a resistance from the first line: "I won't go back to it". Meaney argues that those women in the poem are presented as resisting individuals to the official version of Irish history provided by the mythic totality of Mother Ireland (Meaney, 1993: 146). Boland's subversion of the traditional emblem can be regarded as a revolt against the Irish poetic convention which Randolph describes as "male, historic, and bardic" (Allen-Randolph, 2014: 78). Engaging with Irish myths and past in order to reconstruct the biased gender dynamics in Irish poetry, Boland explains this urge by stating that "women poets such as [herself] should establish a discourse with the idea of a nation", and should also establish a "relationship between the feminine experience and a national past" (Boland, 1987: 156). Exhibiting the women's personal experiences blended into the Irish past, Boland's feminist perspective is nurtured by the national past in "Mise Eire".

The poem opens with an assertive and declinatory statement of "I won't go back to it" (1), which is explained with several reasons referring to Ireland's deficient past such as "scalded memory", "the songs / that bandage up history" and "the words / that make a rhythm of crime" (8-12). The title "Mise Eire" in Gaelic includes an assertation of place, of roots, and of belonging, whereas the first line in English denies all these things by offering the linguistic counter-resistance (Robertson, 1994: 269). Regarding these allusions, it could be deduced from the authoritative first line that Boland's national feminine symbol rejects going back to the conventional attributions determined by Irish patriarch and patriotism. Contrary to the helpless figure of Pearse's poem[23], this new female figure set by Boland is empowered to make decisions (Villar-Argáiz, 2008: 124).

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[23] As Augustine Martin explains, "Pearse's poem images Ireland as the Hag, old, betrayed, lonely, despite its distinguished, chequered history" (80-81).

Besides, she introduces her unspoken and brutal roots by giving voice to the garrison prostitute and the emigrant mother[24]. The repetitive “I am the woman” line marks the change of speakers in the poem. The first “I am the woman” line is uttered by a garrison prostitute “in the precincts of the garrison –” (lines 18, 22):

> who practices
> the quick frictions,
> the rictus of delight
> and gets cambric for it,
> rice-coloured silks. (lines 23-27)

The acts of “quick frictions” and “rictus of delight” in exchange for “cambric” and “rice-coloured silks” refer to the colonial prostitute’s profession, “whose clientele is drawn from the soldiers of the British army of occupation” (Robertson, 1994: 270). Unlike the conventional feminine image that isolates woman from her sexuality and preserves her within Catholicism, Boland advocates a female figure liberated from the sexual taboos determined by Irish society. Here, the representation of Irish woman through sexual transaction might recall Irigaray’s explanations upon the commodification of female body since the critic claims that in a patriarchal social order, women are “products” and “commodities” used and exchanged by men, and for that reason they are not able to “claim the right to speak and participate in exchange in general”[25] (Irigaray, 1985: 84). She adds that because of their repression, “women have to remain ‘infrastructure’, unrecognized […] by our society and our culture” without occupying a notable social existence (ibid). Women’s exploitation and degradation by the patriarchal society represses them into the unrecognized and obliterated layers of the society. In the poem,

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[24] During an interview with Wilson, Boland emphasizes that if one consistently simplifies women by making them national icons in poetry and drama, he or she inevitably silences a great deal of the actual women in that past, who intimately depend on women writers, not to simplify them in this present (87). In that sense, Boland amplifies the unspoken and unheard women that existed in Irish past.

[25] The critic also analyses that “explicitly condemned by the social order, [the prostitute] is implicitly tolerated. […] In her case, the qualities of woman's body are ‘useful’. However, these qualities have ‘value’ only because they have already been appropriated by a man” (Irigaray, 1985: 186). This explains how hypocritically man takes advantage of female body in accordance with his desires although he condemns such actions. In referred lines, Boland might have criticized such attitude as well.

Boland removes the “infrastructural” position of Irish women and challenges the patriarchal order by bringing an Irish prostitute into her poetry. In this regard, the poet claims a poetic territory for any Irish woman ostracised by social order. These “excluded” women characters in Boland’s poems do not retreat into a poetic silence or a cultural shade, but on the contrary appear as the striking representation of Irish history. The poetic representations of these women are also reinforced with certain literary devices in the poem. While the recurrent alliterative sounds of “t”, “r” and “c” contribute to the accented reading of the stanza, the poet also enhances the poetic effect with the stressed first syllables of such words as “practices”, “frictions”, “rictus” or “cambric” throughout the quoted extract. These trochaic and dactylic words also refer to the previous lines of “my nation displaced / into old dactyls” (lines 2-3), creating a poetic coherence between the national emblem and the garrison prostitute.

Although the exact time of the poem is unknown to the reader, it can be deduced from the context that these figures of national feminine, garrison prostitute, and emigrant mother are the striking reflections of women’s thoughts and actions during times of trauma such as the Great Famine and the Irish Civil War (Dillon, 1999: 310). Coinciding with the collective memory formed out of such national experiences, Boland’s sense of nationhood is “not something to be praised by nationalist ballads or songs, but a cruel reality of dispossession and oppression” (Villar-Argáiz, 2008: 126). In this regard, the poet voices another woman neglected by the nationalist idealization of victorious Irish history. A change of speaker from the garrison prostitute to the emigrant mother is marked with another declaration of “I am the woman” as follows:

> I am the woman
> in the gansy-coat
> on board the *Mary Belle*
> in the huddling cold
>
> holding her half-dead baby to her

[…]
mingling the immigrant
guttural with the vowels (lines 28-32, 36-37)

The mother is possibly having a transatlantic journey for America as it can be inferred from the italicized name of the ship, *Mary Belle* (Robertson, 1994: 271). The name "Mary" also implies a Christian background of Virgin Mary, who is often associated with the Victorian notion of "angel in the house" (Kühl, 2016: 171). The Latin-origin "*Belle*", which means 'beautiful' in English, might also stand as an implication of how exactly the masculine perspective perceives and evaluates the women, expecting them to be chaste beauties as in 'Mary Belle'. However, just as the garrison prostitute goes against the tabooed female sexuality, the emigrant mother also transgresses the domestic borders of Irish femininity with this journey. In this regard, it becomes obvious that all three women in "Mise Eire" make their own decisions: the national emblem denies her "brutal roots" by declaring that she "won't go back to it", the garrison prostitute "practices / the quick frictions" to maintain her life, and the emigrant mother is "on board the *Mary Belle*", hoping for a better life for "her half-dead baby".

As Falci remarks, the irregular stanzas in the poem "signal the resistance of the speaker to the patriarchal and colonial ideologies that have defined the nation and the state… her refusal to 'go back to it" (233). Sliding away from the conventional stanzaic structures that embody certain characteristics such as rhyme scheme or metrical coherence, the poet symbolizes female resistance through the variability of stanzas. In addition to this formal representation, Boland often relates Irishness to the dialectic peculiarities by contrasting it with British pronunciation, as explained in the analysis of "The Pomegranate" above. The assonance of "o" sound throughout the words "woman", "coat", "on board", "cold" and "holding" refers to the articulation of Irish dialect with its "distinct open and close mid back vowels" (Hickey, 2004: 75-76). Robertson describes the mother's immigrant guttural in the following line as "her native Irish Gaelic" because

"a guttural language […] is composed of harsh, rasping sounds produced in the throat" (272). Considering the dactylic wordings of the garrison prostitute and previously mentioned "old dactyls", a similar correlation between the assonant "o" and "immigrant guttural" can also be established linguistically here. It is obvious that while the poet brings light to the obliterated lives of Irish women, she also strives to create a poetic language for these women from Irish history. The original qualities of her women's language can be certified with the Gaelic title followed by English content, dactylic words for emphasis, alliterative and assonant sounds to catch the vocal rhythm. In this regard, the poet constitutes a new discourse:

> a new language
> is a kind of scar
> and heals after a while (lines 40-42)

In the poem, this new language of Irish women becomes a medium for declaring how the national femininity subverts and reconstructs the nationalist patriarchal figures such as Cathleen Ni Houlihan or Dark Rosaleen. The "new language" of these women symbolizes the gradual healing of "the wounds of patriarchy" marked into Irish womanhood (Fogarty, 1994: 99). This wound, marking "a kind of scar" as stated in the poem, might also imply the repression of Irish women by the archetypical national feminine images, which "heals after a while" through this new language. In contrast to those archetypical images, Villar-Argáiz points out that "Mise Eire" is a new and more accurate national female icon, bearing witness to actual flesh-and-blood Irish women (127).

As Helen Kidd remarks, Boland dares "to speak to and across patriarchal national canonicity", and she further "pose[s] crucial questions about marginalisation, silencing, control and stereotyping, reinstating women as active speaking subjects" (45). In order to amplify the unheard female voices in her poems, she subverts and reconstructs national feminine image in "Mise Eire". Rejecting the *aisling* tradition that reduces Irish

femininity into an emblematic, objectified and passive position, her poems dismantle certain gender roles attributed to the Irish woman. Another instance of such shift can be seen in “Mother Ireland” (Boland, 2009: 261), where Boland’s national feminine gradually becomes the voice of her own self. The poem starts with drawing a conventional picture of Mother Ireland speaker:

At first
I was land
I lay on my back to be fields
and when I turned
on my side
I was a hill
under freezing stars
I did not see.
I was seen (lines 1-9)

As the lines demonstrate, the mythical figure of Mother Ireland –as the personification of the island– narrates how the geographical formation of the country occurred in parallel with her bodily properties. From her confession that “I did not see. / I was seen”, one might infer the objectified and immobile women as archetypical national icons. In the first lines of the poem, Boland suggests a pseudo-conventional feminine imagery. The speaker’s passivity is implied by the fact that she “did not see” but “was seen”. However, the speaker deity narrates her self-realization in the following lines as:

From one of them
I learned my name.
I rose up. I remembered it.
Now I could tell my story.
It was different
from the story told about me. (lines 14-19)

Although much of patriotic writings refer to the same incident that a female deity rises out of misery and defeat as a triumphant national figure, Boland’s deity signals the invalidity of these conventional narrations. Boland’s female deity signals that Irish literature has established a poetic discourse by misinterpreting the mythical creation of Ireland, which results in neutralising the female power and abusing the national history

in favour of patriotic feelings. However, once Boland's speaker deity had access to knowledge, she "rose up", "remembered", and "could tell" the story about herself. Though narrating the same myth, the differences between "her story" and "the story told about [her]" suggest how the androcentric perspective has reshaped national values in favour of "his" desires. However, Boland's Mother Ireland does not speak through the masculine vein, but disturbs and reworks certain Irish myths. The self-realization of female deity, in this regard, requires a re-evaluation of not only national values but also gender dynamics.

In addition to the reconstruction of a female deity that gradually becomes aware of what has been attributed to her by the patriarchy, Boland also makes certain experimentations over the layout of "Mother Ireland". The stylistic reflection of the differences between "her story" and "the story told about [her]" can be observed through the gradually indented lines. This experimentation in line lay-outs could be interpreted as a symbolic rejection of the poetic qualities of masculine Irish tradition. The subversion of commonly accepted stanzaic patterns with indented line structure is strengthened with inexplicit end-rhymes of "them" and "name", or "story" and "me" in the poem. Instead of using instantly recognizable rhyming words, such as "gate" and "late" or "canon" and "season", Boland presents her end-rhymes in such a way that they reveal themselves once the lines are spoken. This specific use of rhyming might also symbolize a difference from traditional poetic qualities of Irish poetry. In addition, the recurrent use of first-person pronoun throughout the poem also implies an insistence of female subjectivity. Bearing all these in mind, "Mother Ireland" confirms that Boland's engagement with gender politics is not limited to the content, but she fortifies the feminist implications of her character with formal qualities of her poetry.

Babcock's observation that "what is socially peripheral is often symbolically central"[26] perfectly fits into the symbolic representation of Mother Ireland (32). In the poem, the speaker deity is also attributed with a crucial nationalist value for Ireland. However, such centrality does not cover her repressed gender characteristics since the woman occupies a secondary position in the stories told about her. Just as the women of "Mise Eire" and "Making of an Irish Goddess", the Irish deity in "Mother Ireland" also rejects such secondary position by appearing as the subject of the poem and she creates her own narrative discourse that can easily be dissociated from conventional gender politics of Irish poetry. These poems might be illuminative in terms of how Boland reconstructs the predetermined gender politics without isolating her poetry from national qualities. However, her preoccupation with the problem cannot be limited to the symbolic representation of Mother Ireland figures in those poems.

Especially during the first quarter of the twentieth century, Irish myths were occasionally used in order to revive a collective nationalist consciousness in Ireland. Including predominantly male figures such as Cuchulainn or Lir, these myths also signify the patriarchal expression of nationalist thoughts in Irish texts (Romanets, 2003: 58). In this regard, Boland gives enough space for Irish myths in her poetry the same way as she does for the objectified female national figure of Ireland. In her poems such as "Song" (Boland, 2009: 44), "Story" (Boland, 2009: 236), and "Listen. This is the Noise of Myth" (Boland, 2009: 152), Boland sharpens "her strategies of image destabilization by juxtaposing romanticized feminine figures against her own fictions" (Allen-Randolph, 2014: 84). The emblematic and mythical femininity in her poems is reconstructed in a

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[26] It can be easily deduced from the national feminine symbols such as Dark Rosaleen or Mother Ireland that women have been pushed towards the margins while their symbolic significance plays a vital role in Irish poetry. These mythical characters are subservient to the Irish patriarchy while they are crucial to Irish patriotism.

suitable way in her poems, where women speak for their liberation within the nationalist context.

Boland's adaptation of national and mythical female symbols into her feminist perspective might be explained through Irigaray's analysis on Freud. Expressing her societal criticism towards repressed female sexuality, Irigaray focuses on Freud's suggestion that the beginnings of the sexual life of a girl child are so obscure and faded with time that one would have to dig and discover the traces of history and of a more archaic civilization that might give some clue to woman's sexuality (Irigaray, 1985: 25). The repression of female sexuality starting from her adolescence is likely to prohibit her from claiming her sexuality in a patriarchal society. For that reason, one might bypass this masculine domination by tracing the female sexuality down to its historical roots, which may offer enough to restore it. For the ultimate liberation of female sexuality, Boland also makes use of ancient Irish stories as will be examined below. In Ireland, the isolation of female sexuality from her femininity can be taken as the destined outcome of the Church's influence on Irish society. Since the population is predominantly Catholic, the notions of chastity and fidelity are closely attributed to Irish women (Howes, 2002: 926). This tendency resulted in reshaping and moulding Irish myths into a chaste perspective as well. However, the ways Boland handles these myths contribute to the rearrangement of women's position within Irish poetry. Her frequent use of "Diarmuid and Gráinne"[27] myth helps the poet restore Irish woman's existence within the canon not only as the subject of the poem but also as the author of it. Boland's first employment of this myth is marked in "Song", where the two lovers run away from the vengeful king:

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[27] Upon the death of his wife Maigneis, the great and fierce warrior Fionn announces that he would wed the fastest woman in Ireland. Although Gráinne wins the competition, she later realizes that her new husband is considerably older than she is. During the wedding festivities, she falls in love with Fionn's handsome warrior, Diarmuid. Gráinne finds a way to trick him into eloping with her. Chased by the vengeful Fionn, the lovers never spend a second night in one place. Despite Gráinne's attempts to lure him into bed, Diarmuid resists much. However, he cannot resist any longer and yields to Gráinne's demand (Monaghan, 2004: 226-227).

Where in blind files
Bats outsleep the frost
Water slips through the stones
Too fast, too fast
For ice; afraid he'd slip
By me I asked him first. (lines 1-6)

The stanza has twenty-seven words, most of which are monosyllables, as well as a comma, a semicolon, and a full stop. According to Tóibín, the poet's intentional wording suggests fear, flight and urgency together with repeating sounds throughout the stanza (Tóibín, 2017: 46). In addition, the rarity of punctuation in the stanza also contributes to the fast pacing of the lines, without allowing any pause. The formation of such rhythmical urgency is accompanied by the lovers escaping from the vengeful Fionn. The polysyllable words of "outsleep", "water", and "afraid" almost serve as the foreshadowing signals in the poem: the "afraid" Diarmuid is convinced to "outsleep" with Grainne as a result of her taunting him with "water":

My skirt in my hand,
Lifting the hem high
I forded the river there.
Drops splashed my thigh.
Ahead of me at last
He turned at my cry:

'Look how the water comes
Boldly to my side
See the waves attempt
What you have never tried.'
He late that night
Followed the leaping tide. (lines 13-24)

Until the last stanza, the ending lines suggest a sexually assertive female character since Gráinne "asked him first" (6), "risked the first kiss" (12), and got his attention with her evocative "cry" (18). The overt expression of female sexual desire is delivered with a reference to the water splashing her thighs. Following Gráinne's allusion that "the waves attempt / what [he] never tried", Diarmuid follows "the leaping tide" and responds to her invitation.

There are several versions of Diarmuid and Gráinne myth with minor differences. As MacKillop reveals, the distinctions among the several versions of these ancient stories are posited on the ambitions the different writers held for it, the diverse purposes they would have it serve (147). In other words, writers' specific preferences about how exactly –and for what purpose – they use this myth inevitably result in providing several versions of the myth with minor alterations. For instance, in her depiction of Queen Maeve in *The Tain*, Lady Gregory was uneasy about the frank depiction of sexuality and more interested in the heroic elements (Tóibín, 2017: 48). Similarly, Padraic Pearse and W.B. Yeats used certain myths mainly in order to arouse patriotic feelings especially during the first quarter of the twentieth century, affirming that these myths serve as mediums for the writers' underlying messages (Moran, 1989: 630). Bearing all these in mind, the ways Boland uses these stories also indicate her literary perspective. Throughout the poem, she foregrounds Gráinne's sexuality by revealing the character's "forthright and sexually demanding" aspect (Monaghan, 2004: 281). Similar to Cixous's emphasis on writing for the female body, in Boland's poem, it is "woman speaking desire that matters, rather than her legendary status" (Kidd, 2003: 37). Boland's interpretation of Gráinne as a sexually dominant woman may recall Cixous's demanding call: "Your body is yours, take it" (876). In a similar way, Boland's mythical character stands against the repressive patriarchy and claims her sexuality. By doing so, the poet offers a space for women's writings in Ireland because masculine authorities "don't like the true texts of women – female-sexed texts" (Cixous, 1976: 877). The liberation of female sexuality and the introduction of sexual expressiveness appear as the key elements that Boland brings into the shifting gender politics. More importantly, the poet establishes a new discourse for Irish women poets by using the same story as well, which is evident in "Story" (Boland, 2009: 236), and "Listen. This is the Noise of Myth" (Boland, 2009: 152). The poet prioritizes the repressed sexual aspects of Irish woman through this myth. In that sense,

the poet goes against the settled opinion that female sexuality is a taboo and should be quarantined from Irish poetry[28].

Boland's "Story" is another poem that she incorporates Gráinne's myth, which centres on the lovers' escape from the vengeful king. It consists of seventeen couplets and starts *in medias res* as if imposing an aura of epic into the poem. The deliberate lexicon that Boland exercises throughout the poem adds up to the rurality of setting as the lovers' escape covers much of Ireland's landscape. Mentioning "sycamore", "elder", "thickets" and "blossoms", the poet creates a rural setting that easily fits into context:

> Two lovers in an Irish wood at dusk
> are hiding from an old and vengeful king.
>
> The wood is full of sycamore and elder.
> And set in that nowhere which is anywhere.
>
> And let the woman be slender. As I was twenty.
> And red-haired. As I was until recently. (lines 1-6)

While Boland uses Gráinne's myth to foreground female sexuality in "Song", she puts an emphasis on female authorship in "Story". Starting from the third couplet, the poet enters into the poem through her physical resemblances with Gráinne's slenderness and red hair. However, the following lines reveal that the narration shifts into the mythical story once again. With this sudden trespassing and intervention, Boland announces her authority over the text as the author of it. The instant in-and-out situation could be related to how she subverts but still dominates the poetic framework as the woman poet[29]. Through the end of the poem, the rural setting of the story gradually shifts into her own study room during the time she composes "Story":

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[28] In her poem "Letters to the Dead" in *Domestic Violence*, Eavan Boland defines Ireland as "a country that hated the woman's body" (line 30).

[29] In the poem "Once" (Boland, 2009: 285), Boland uses a similar poetic approach by starting the poem with Gráinne's story as: "The lovers in an Irish story never had good fortune. / They fled the king's anger. They lay on the forest floor. / They kissed at the edge of death.". However, the following stanza shows an abrupt change: "Did you know our suburb was a forest? / Our roof was a home for thrushes. / Our front door was a wild shadow of spruce.".

And a garden with jasmine and poplars. And
a table at which I am writing. I am writing

a woman out of legend. I am thinking
how new it is – this story. How hard it will be to tell.

The declaration of "writing / a woman out of legend" could be interpreted as a mythical discovery for the Irish women's poetry. The excavation of female subjectivity out of Irish legends has no common points with the male-authored poetic convention that has culturally abused and manipulated Irish woman in texts. For that reason, Boland defines her story as "new" and foresees that it will be "hard" to "tell" her story in such a poetic environment.

The exclusion of women from Irish history inescapably obstructs the development of feminist consciousness in Ireland, which led to a disconnection between feminist and Irish identities (Mullin, 1991: 40). In order to break this traditional pattern, Eavan Boland approaches this ancient story from a feminist perspective. In the poem "Story", the possession of the female body and ruling over it is emphasized through Fionn's insistence on capturing the lovers. In order to eliminate Fionn's tireless ambition to get the beautiful Gráinne, Boland's mythical lovers consider starting "a rumour in the wood […] / that she has lost her youth", "[t]hat her mouth / is cold", and "[t]hat this woman is growing older" (lines 12-14). Their sole aim is that with the help of these rumours, Gráinne would become an "undesirable" woman in Fionn's eyes. Thus, the vengeful king would end his chase. This creative solution also recalls a famous argument of second-wave feminism concerning the objectification of women by the "male gaze"[30]. Fionn might be viewed as the embodiment of traditional patriarchy because of his insistent desire to "have" Gráinne.

[30] In her essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema", Laura Mulvey coined the term "male gaze" in relation to cinematography. She defines the gazer as "active/male" and the gazed as "passive/female", and she further explains that "[t]he determining male gaze projects its phantasy on to the female figure which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed" (346). Correlatively, the way Fionn values Gráinne could be described in relation to the "male gaze" that considers female as object of desire.

It is clear that Fionn's evaluation of Gráinne is simply based upon her physical features which appeal to his desires. In the poem, the narrator Boland is well aware that "the way legend stresses it" revolves around her being "young and beautiful". However, Boland opens up a rift in that legend by spreading a rumour that she "has lost her youth" and "is growing older". In this way, her "new" story and her feminist interpretation of Irish legends could signal a resistance to the idealized femininity. The examined poems above show that Boland's attempt to reconstruct the feminine image as the Irish national symbol is accompanied by a specific use of Irish myths in favour of establishing a feminist discourse within Irish poetry.

As it has been examined in detail above, Boland contextually subverts the representation of national femininity in Irish androcentric verse. However, her engagement with gender issues is not limited to the contextual layer of her poetry. Although there has been glimpses of feminist perspective in her lyrics, a sudden change[31] in her stylistic qualities can be thoroughly observed in *In Her Own Image*, (1980). Inspired by certain contemporary poets such as Sylvia Plath and Adrienne Rich as well as the ongoing feminist discussions in Ireland in the 1970s, Boland defines it as a book of "anti-lyrics" which counterattacks Ireland's "complicated silences about a woman's body" (Allen-Randolph, 1999: 298). The evolution of Boland's formal qualities into a spoken argumentation of female subjectivity in Irish poetry could be better understood with a close examination of the formal characteristics of her poetry in her early and late career because the early years of her career illustrate the portrait of a confused young poet whose poetry "was a hybrid: half British Movement poem and half Irish lyric. Both had their roots in a Victorian romanticism" (Boland, 1995a: 104). In her early poems, the

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[31] This sudden change can be ascribed to Boland's admiration for Plath's poetry. Besides, Boland comments on her poetic career before and after *In Her Own Image*, a collection which she considers as a turning point. She admits that she has left her "first literary world with a very powerful model of being an Irish poet" (Allen-Randolph, 1999: 297). The following years of her career would picture a more feminist perspective as the Irish woman poet.

plain everyday life is combined with conventional Irish lyric format in a straight language. Besides, Derek Mahon, a familiar literary figure from her years in Trinity College, describes the weakness in Boland's early poetry by stating that her "historiography is still male-oriented" as it can be observed in her first publication *New Territory* (1967)[32], where the young poet writes of the "story of a man / who begged for deathless life …" based on a Greek hearsay in her "The Gryphons" (Boland, 2009: 7). In search of her genuine voice as a poet, Boland's stylistic characteristics have their roots in such poets as W.B. Yeats and Sylvia Plath, both of whom have influenced Boland's employment of gender politics in her verse.

The leading poet Austin Clarke's definition of Yeats as "an enormous oak-tree which, of course, kept [modern Irish poets] in the shade" fits into Boland's situation as well since her genuine style once flourished and developed out of a Yeatsian convention (Clarke, 1995: xi). Boland not only borrows from Irish myths like Yeats's Revivalist attitude, she also mimics his formal lyricism. For the young poet, meditating Yeats's poetry created "a sense of belonging to language, of being excited about its possibilities" (Fyfe, 2007: 1). The variations and possibilities offered by the language evidently draw her poetry into a lyrical constitution. Written in an emotional tone along with musical and rhythmic features, Boland's "Athene's Song" (Boland, 2009: 23) stands as a clear model for her early style:

> Beside the water, lost and mute,
> Lies my pipe and like my mind
> Remains unknown, remains unknown
> And in some hollow taking part
> With my heart against my hand
> Hold its peace and hold its own. (lines 19-24)

[32] Boland recalls her early years, when she was a young poet, echoing other poets' voices before she found her own voice: "I asked too few questions of the world around me and myself as a poet. I was Irish: I was a woman. Yet night after night, bent over the table, I wrote in forms explored and sealed by English men hundreds of years before" (Boland, 1987: 151).

The rhyme scheme of the sestet above reveals a simple and duplicating "a-b-c-a-b-c" structure. Besides, repetitions in the third and sixth lines, in other words "c-lines", of the sestet create a musical conformity with the rhyme scheme. The harmonic syllable of "my" within and between "b-lines" contributes to the lyrical characteristic of the sestet. Apart from the poem above, Boland's women characters during those years were all derived from the national poetry that objectified Irish womanhood. In her "Winning of Etain"[33], Boland narrates an ancient Irish myth in a way that her poetry is an extension of androcentric perspective. In the poem, Etain appears, in Derek Mahon's words, as a "passive figure bearing little resemblance to more active legendary women-like Aoife, Medbh and Emer" (Mahon, 1993: 24). Her neutral position and the static existence throughout the poem proves that the young Boland's character obeys the constructed social norms that determine her as a domestic tool that is won or lost by men. In their *The Madwoman in the Attic*, Gilbert and Gubar claim that the masculine authority with which the male precursors construct their literary personae contradicts with the woman writer regarding her own gender definitions (48). Since the manners of Irish poetic convention as well as the poetic territory determined for an Irish woman did not correspond to Boland's subversive definition of the Irish woman, the feminist transatlantic influences of certain women poets such as Sylvia Plath and Adrienne Rich[34] immediately caught the young poet's attention. In this way, her writing has evolved over the past several decades, changing its shell "from a lyric reminiscent of Yeats's, through a didactic critique inspired

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[33] The poem centres on a power exercise between the vengeful Druid Fergus and King Aengus, both of who battle for "winning" Etain. She is merely a woman "[f]or whom two kings made Ireland a red grave" (line 4). The power exercise between two enemies is conducted through the "ownership" of Etain throughout the poem. Her transformation into a dragonfly by the vengeful druid Fergus, and her being rescued by Aengus, who fights "to own his own" (line 7), confirm the passive, victimized, and objectified representation of femininity.

[34] It was a major disadvantage for Boland that "the larger part of [the Irish literary] past lies in another language" (Montague, 1974: 21-22). Besides, Haberstroh argues that "[th]e absence of women writers as suitable models in Ireland, Boland finds useful models in Europe and America, such as Sylvia Plath, Anna Akhmatova, and Adrienne Rich" (66).

by Sylvia Plath" (Burns, 2001: 218). However, the reason behind this shift rests on another Yeatsian influence on her, which "is his ability to change as well as claim a place" (Allen-Randolph, 2014: 28).

Boland diligently investigates and analyses Plath's works, whose death made a deep impression on the young poet. While examining Plath, Boland thought over the short lines and the anti-lyric stances. The radical change of transforming her poetry from Victorian lyricism into an "anti-lyrical" structure can be regarded as the outcome of that meditation. As Heather Clark remarks, Boland's stylistic experimentation over Irish poetry centres on a feminist way of resistance, which can be observed through "the short lines, the enjambment, the repetition, the exclamation points, the imagery of fevers, witches, burning, rebirth, male surgeons mutilating the female body, striptease artists" that are all derivative (339). Practising this new style in her *In Her Own Image* (1980) and *Night Feed* (1982), the poet accomplishes her wish "to crack open that sugar crust of Irish lyricism and find a language -even if it was an awkward one at first- for the life I was living" (Allen-Randolph & Boland, 2010: 236). As a clear example of this accomplishment, "The Woman Turns Herself into Fish" (Boland, 2009: 118) includes the new stylistic features in its initial lines as below:

Unpod

The bag,
The seed.

Slap
The flanks back.
Flatten

Paps. (lines 1-7)

As the quoted lines indicate, the pared-down stanzas and cracked iambs, such as "Unpod / the bag / the seed" in succession, clearly depict the radical change in Boland's style. The explicit wordings in *In Her Own Image* –such as "bitch" or "paps" – are the echoes of

Plath's agressive wordings such as "devil", "freakish" or "bastard" in her famous "Daddy"[35]. The philosophy behind this aggressive tone rests on the theoretical statements of the French feminist scholars, namely Cixous, that urge women writers to write through their bodies. Several of the poems included in the collection refer to the unspoken aspects of the female body as in "Menses" (Boland, 2009: 80), "Mastectomy" (Boland, 2009: 76), or "Anorexic" (Boland, 2009: 75). In "Menses", the speaker unconventionally introduces herself in relation to the female cyclical pattern: "I am the moon's looking glass. / My days are moon-dials" (lines 12-13)[36]. While moaning "for him between the sheets", the female speaker begins "to know / that [she is] bright and original / and that [her] light's [her] own" (lines 60-64). Just as "Menses", the entire collection offers a reclamation of female subjectivity with a poetic tone that is aggressive, unashamed, and demanding.

As Gilbert and Gubar argue, it becomes a source of pain and anger for the woman writer that once she looks at the mirror, what she recognizes "is usually a male construct, the 'pure gold baby' of male brains, a glittering and wholly artificial child" (17-18). With her desire to change the reflection in the mirror, Boland's *In Her Own Image* marks "a turning point for Irish women and […] Irish poetry" because "she rescued women's sexuality from the realm of the tacit and exposed it" (Smyth, 1995: 253). Boland does not borrow a feminist perspective that she completely isolates from her Irish identity. On the contrary, as Jacqueline Belanger and Heather Clark have argued, her female figures in "Anorexic" and "In Her Own Image" (Boland, 2009: 73) could be read as allegorical

[35] As John Redmond remarks in his review "In the Heaven of Lost Futures" in *The Guardian*, both *In Her Own Image* and *Night Feed* are "so closely modelled on Plath's *Ariel* that they are practically imitations" (2006). In a similar way, in her review "Behind the Linen Room", Fiona Sampson comments on how Plath "casts a shadow over virtually every poem" in these poetry books (2006). Nevertheless, it was through the Plathian influence that in the following years, Boland was able to find her own poetic voice as the amalgamation of her national and feminist perspectives.

[36] In "The Regulation of Menstrual Cycle and its Relationship to the Moon", Sung Ping Law confirms a synchronous relationship between the moon's phases and menstruation.

figures for Mother Ireland and Cathleen Ni Houlihan[37]. The female speaker of "Anorexic" subverts "both female form and its biological origins in a maternal body", illustrating how the powerful "women iconizing" myths can turn into destructive fantasies (Allen-Randolph, 2014: 63-64). Besides, her hunger strike might represent Boland's feminist allusion to the Famine since the speaker of the poem torches "her curves and paps and viles" and distinguishes her selfhood from the expected physical qualities of Mother Ireland:

> I vomited
> her hungers.
> Now the bitch is burning.
>
> I am starved and curveless.
> I am skin and bone.
> She has learned her lesson. (lines 13-18)

A similar case of "teaching a lesson to conventional femininity" occurs in the opening poem of "Tirade for the Mimic Muse" (Boland, 2009: 71), where Boland insults the obedient Muse starting from the first line: "I've caught you out. You slut. You fat trout." (line 1). The speaker calls the Muse as "ruthless bitch" because of neglecting "[t]he scream of beaten women / [t]he crime of babies battered / [t]he hubbub and the shriek of daily grief" (lines 33-35). As it becomes obvious through the lines, the aggression and resistance of the volume depicts Boland's "female counter-selves that refuse to function as comforting and affirmative mirror images" (Fogarty, 1999: 270). Besides, Boland's poetic battle against the patriarchal authority –a repressing force for female body and women's history– can be traced in "Mastectomy" and "Making Up" (Boland, 2009: 87). The rearrangement of the female image in accordance with male desire is issued in "Mastectomy", where the bladed male surgeons

> […] have taken off
> what they slaked them first

[37] The correlation between Boland's female characters in *In Her Own Image* and national image of Mother Ireland is examined in Belanger's "The Laws of Metaphor': Reading Eavan Boland's 'Anorexic' in an Irish Context" and Clark's "Eavan Boland's Muse Mothers".

> what they have hated since:
>
> blue-veined
> white-domed
> home
>
> of wonder
> and the wetness
> of their dream. (lines 34-42)

From the female victim's eyes, the lines narrate an inherent hostility towards the female body and re-appropriation of it. The tabloid definition of pre-operated female breast as "blue-veined white-domed home of wonder" reveals that it causes "wetness" for [men's] dream". Here, the "wetness" could be read in two different ways. On one hand, the poet might have implied the terrifying existence of female breast in men's eyes, getting into their nightmares and causing a "wet" bed. On the other hand, she might have referred to the male desire for female body, getting into their lustful dreams and causing a "wet" bed. In either way, the female breast appears to dominate the male unconscious. To get rid of such "uncontrollable" troubles, the surgeons operate on the speaker.

Contrary to the male desire that arranges female appearance, "Making Up" deals with female artistic creativity as well as male oppression that has created constructed images and myths hostile to Irish women (Allen-Randolph, 2001: 58). The feminist critics Gilbert and Gubar explain this male hostility and patriarchal domination in literature as follows:

> Both patriarchy and its texts subordinate and imprison women, before women can even attempt that pen which is so rigorously kept from them they must escape just those male texts which […] deny them the autonomy to formulate alternatives to the authority that has imprisoned them and kept them from attempting the pen. (13)

Viewed in the context of their insights, it becomes clearer that Boland's "Making Up" makes the female body "both the vehicle and the source of the discovery of female knowledge repressed by masculinist discourse" (Allen-Randolph, 2001: 58). As the

speaker reveals, "it's a trick" for women that "[m]yths / are made by men", leading to the women's subordination to those myths as in "Mother Ireland"[38]. Gilbert and Gubar's call for a female "autonomy to formulate alternatives to the authority" is exemplified in the poem. Besides, from the feminist perspective, the creative mentality of the speaker that is reflected through "making up" process is similar to Cixous's famous argument that women must write through their body: "Write your self. Your body must be heard" (880). In the poem, the message is not explicitly spoken but it is implied that the speaker's recognition of men's made-up myths is contrasted with a female face that has been artistically made up. In that sense, it is evident that Boland makes use of the female face as a medium for female artistic creativity in the poem "Making Up"[39].

As argued above, *In Her Own Image* (1980) can be regarded as an outstanding publication of its time with striking female aggression. In his review "Herself" in *Irish Times*, Thomas McCarthy asserts that the volume could be considered "the first serious attempt in Ireland to make a body of poems that arise out of the contemporary female consciousness" (1980). In terms of determining a new poetic territory for Irish woman both as the subject and author of it, the volume stands as literary talisman of feminist movement in Irish poetry. However, just as Boland's earlier poems do not truly represent the stylistic characteristics of her poetry, the feminist subversions in formal characteristics of *In Her Own Image* cannot be attributed to Boland's distinctive style. Although her style is explicitly twisted into a feminist vein through the volume, the collection also includes certain formal characteristics that Boland would hardly employ in the following years. For instance, Allen-Randolph's biographical *Eavan Boland* reveals that the poet chose to write persona poems for the entire collection, a choice she would barely make

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[38] As stressed before, a similar female self-realization can be identified in "Mother Ireland", where the speaker deity realizes that her own story is totally different from the story told about her.

[39] In fact, Allen-Randolph describes the theme of the poem as "the necessity for the woman poet to re-image women and reshape tradition [through] words which dignify, reveal, and revalue female experience in all of its complexity" (Allen-Randolph, 1991: 59).

again (66). Besides, she would return to longer line-lengths with an authentic tone in the following publications.

For instance, the poem "Escape" (Boland, 2009: 266), written in the form of a sequence poem, is divided into five subsections that are independent from one another regarding the stanzaic patterns, meter, and rhyme. However, the traces marked by Boland's style are discernible in certain lines. For instance, the lack of subject pronouns, which are often replaced by "and" as if suggesting a continuation of the previous lines, is a recurrent issue that Boland employs in her poems[40]. In the poem, once the speaker Boland encounters a swan which was making her nest "on the verge beside Lesson Street bridge" (line 3), she remembered:

> my first attempt at an Irish legend.
>
> And stopped the car
> and walked over to her.
> And into my twentieth winter: (lines 6-9)[41]

The full stop at the end of the first quoted line above marks the end of the stanza by revealing her poetic re-enactment of the Irish myths as a young poet. Boland begins the second stanza by omitting the subject pronoun: "And stopped the car". Obviously, this omission suggests a unity between the stanzas by referring to a syntactical continuation. The avoidance of enjambment, thus the avoidance of delaying the intended message of the line, demonstrates the direct, ordinary, and colloquial norms of the language that

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[40] Starting a new stanza with the omission of subject pronoun can be seen in several of her poems in the collection such as; "And will not look at me." in "The Loss" (Boland, 2009: 264), "And touches mine for the last time. / And falls to earth." in "The Blossom" (Boland, 2009: 263), "And should have felt them, should have entered them…" in "Hide This Place From Angels" (Boland, 2009: 302), or "And asks a little of us…" in "Horace Odes: II: XI" (Boland, 2009: 300).

[41] Her "first attempt at an Irish legend" in her twenties might refer to such poems as "The Dream of Lir's Son" (Boland, 2009: 12) and "Malediction" (Boland, 2009: 13) from her *New Territory* (1967). While these poems of Irish myths show the traces of a masculinist attitude by putting the male on the fore, "Escape" prioritizes the maternity and femininity by presenting the meeting of "A mother bird too near the road" (line 30) and Boland as "A middle-aged woman going / as near to her as she dared." (lines 31-32).

Boland often adopts while providing sincere snapshots of her experiences as an Irish woman poet.

In fact, "Escape" is a clear instance of how her "imperfect language fragmented and shattered by a feeling of uncertainty" is projected through the broken speech in her poems over the time (Villar-Argáiz, 2008: 257). While the fragmented female bodily parts in *In Her Own Image* dominate the collection, the following years of her career indicate that such attitude is replaced by the fragmented state of mind, presented in both language and form. While poems like "Daughter" (Boland, 2009: 263) and "Burdens of a History" (Boland, 2009: 298) are divided into sections as in "Escape", several others show resemblance in terms of the fragmented language as can be seen from the lines, for instance, "Head of a woman. Half-life of a nation. / Corsely-cut blackthorn walking stick." from "Imago" (Boland, 2009: 249) or "I saw a statue yesterday. A veiled woman. / Head and shoulders only. Up on a pedestal." in "The Art of Grief" (Boland, 2009: 239). Robertson explains this subversion by arguing that in Boland's perspective, an Irish female poet "can reclaim the English language and traditional poetic forms and make them her own through a subversion of them" (Robertson, 1994: 268). In other words, Boland claims a poetic territory of her own by adjusting the traditional poetic forms in accordance with her feminist perspective. In parallel to this, Boland also explains to Allen-Randolph that a male poet often begins publishing quite young but a woman poet is a new poet rather than a young poet, bringing freshness and originality into Irish poetic environment (Allen-Randolph, 1993: 126)[42]. A critical explanation of Boland's statement can be conducted with reference to Gilbert and Gubar's female "anxiety of authorship" in contrast to Bloom's masculine "anxiety of influence". While male writers might

[42] During the same interview, Boland claims that thanks to this originality and inventive attitude of women poets, "when the history of poetry in our time is written […] women poets will be seen to have re-written not just the poem, not just the image […] They will have altered the cartography of the poem. The map will look different." (130). In this regard, it signifies a vital importance that female authorship must be supported and expanded as much as it can.

struggle for a distinctive creativity under the influence of their male precursors, female writers experience an “anxiety of authorship” by discovering new territories and developing their own styles.

The poem “Escape” plays a significant role in terms of showing how Boland discovers a new territory in Irish poetry by constructing a domestic setting. In “Escape” Irish women’s unspoken, ordinary domestic interiority is fused into the myth of Lir’s children by an Irish woman poet:

> I sat in the kitchen and frost
> blended with kettle steam while
> I crossed out and crossed out
> the warm skin and huggable limbs
> of Lir’s children –
> rhyming them into doomed swans
> cursed into flight on
> a coast that was only half a mile
> from my flat in Morehampton Road. (lines 13-21).

The choice of words such as “kitchen”, “frost blended” or “kettle steam” stands for Boland’s domestic sphere as an Irish housewife. However, the action of “rhyming” covers her poetic side, and this way, Boland creates an amalgamation of being an Irish housewife and being an Irish poet. The dynamic status of poet / woman fusion in the poem is also implied in the previous lines when Boland refers to her own private domestic territory and her public artistic profession at the same time: “The table cloth still on the table. / The page at the last line I crafted.” (lines 10-12). Over the years, it has become a notable characteristic of Boland’s style that she frequently integrates her private domestic life as a woman into her poetry through the occasional “I” speaker. During an interview with Wilson, the poet affirms that “the voice is me. It isn’t just the voice of an ‘I’. […] I am a woman and write in terms of what defines me” (Wilson & Boland, 1990: 80-81). It is through the first person subject pronoun that Boland brings domesticity and womanhood

into the centre of Irish poetry. In addition, Boland explains these domestic references regarding the Irish women's spatial territory as follows:

> [M]y lexicon was the kettle and the steam, and the machine in the corner and the kitchen, and the baby's bottle. These were parts of my world. Not to write about them would have been artificial. Those objects were visible to me. […] They crept out of their skin and turned into something else. I felt about them, after a day spent in the house or with little children, exactly the way the nature poet feels after taking the same walk for several days and seeing the same tree or the same bird. (Allen-Randolph & Boland, 1993: 124)

The immense occupation with the domestic interiority especially during her years in Dundrum, the suburb of Dublin, is highly influential in finding her own poetic voice, which can be observed in "The Women" (Boland, 2009: 141).

In "The Women", Boland provides another example of an amalgamation of being a woman and being a poet. Once she is inspired to write poetry at a specific hour of the day, her domestic identity is blended with artistic determination. She defines that specific time, "the in-between, / neither here-nor-there hour of evening" (lines 1-2), as "[t]he hour of change, of metamorphosis, / of shapeshifting instabilities" (lines 10-11). Surrounded by a poetic tradition where being a woman and being a poet in Ireland are "magnetically opposite to each other" (Boland, 1995a: 35), the poet denies such masculinist classifications and isolations in Irish poetry as follows: "The dial of a washing machine, the expression in a child's face. … I wanted them to enter my poems. I wanted the poems they entered to be Irish poems" (Boland, 1995b: 492). In that sense, bringing "womanhood" to the centre of Irish poetry has become her primary duty in terms of regulating gender politics in Irish poetry. Bearing all these in mind, the speaker of "Women", who appears to be Boland herself, offers an antithesis of the androcentric determinations as follows:

> This is the time I do my work best,
> going up the stairs in two minds,
> in two worlds, carrying cloth or glass,

leaving something behind, bringing
something with me I should have left behind. (lines 5-7)

Unlike the descriptive full-stopped lines in the previous stanza such as "The air is tea-coloured in the garden. / The briar rose is spilled crêpe-de-Chine." (lines 3-4), an elaborated longer sentence branched into several clauses in the extract marks the dominance of poet's aesthetic side. Boland does not separate the notions of being a woman and being a poet into two different spheres. On the contrary, she goes up the stairs "in two minds" mingling into each other. In this way, she challenges the conventional attitude which defines being a woman and being a poet with "oil and water" metaphor because these two identities cannot be mixed into each other just as oil and water (Boland, 1995a*:* xi).

A mixture of these "two minds" –as artistic and domestic– is supported through certain rhythmic qualities, offering a slice of female artistic creativity that is "quarantined from mainstream literature" (Hagen and Zelman, 1991: 444). In terms of wording, a cyclical pattern can be determined along with internal half rhyme of "stairs […] minds" and "worlds […] glass", which is also followed by a double use of "something" and "behind". These rhythmical patterns and echoing repetitions offer a circular structure, which might also refer to Boland's mental circularity between her domestic and artistic perspective.

As the chapter explains with a detailed examination of her selected poems from different periods of her career, Eavan Boland has challenged and changed the boundaries Irish patriarchal culture has previously determined for Irish women in poetry. The androcentric use of Irish myths and national feminine symbols in poetry has been deconstructed by her subversive tone. Besides, as a result of her distinct poetic stance, women's position has shifted from being "objects" of poem towards becoming "subjects" and eventually "authors" of it (Boland, 1995a: 126). In that sense, Boland's contributions

to the shifting gender politics within the canon have provided a landmark for Irish women's poetry.

Just as Eavan Boland, Paul Durcan has also contributed much to the alteration of the male-constructed gender politics in Irish poetry as well as Irish society. In this regard, the next chapter offers a detailed examination of how Paul Durcan's verse deconstructs the biased gender politics in Irish poetry in a sarcastic and unconventional manner.

CHAPTER II

Against "a male-dominated society": A Carnivalesque Parody of Irish Masculinity in Paul Durcan's Poetry

> *Why do you keep your breasts in the back garden?*
> Well – it's a male-dominated society, isn't it?
>
> --from Durcan's "The Woman Who Keeps Her Breasts in the Back Garden"

This chapter explores how Paul Durcan subverts the patriarchal norms of Irish society through his poetry and how he has contributed to the shifting gender politics in Irish poetry. Considered as a "wordsmith whose craft entertains […] through a range of forms from the dramatic monologue to the sonnet and aphorism; simple lyrics and ballads", Durcan is preoccupied with gender politics in many different aspects –just as he produces poetry in many different forms (Elliott, 1995: 305-306). Thus, the chapter focuses primarily on his subversion of the gender roles determined by the Republic and the Church. Writing often about extreme, shocking and unlikely situations that are almost surreal, Durcan is preoccupied with certain subject matters related to gender issues –such as marriage, divorce, abortion– that appear quite often in his verse. In fact, Paul Durcan's verse has been entwined into his experiences and personal life so closely that Seamus Heaney prefers to call him *Poet* Durcan instead of Paul Durcan[43]. Looking from Heaney's

[43] The name "Poet" is never claimed. It is bestowed by Heaney, who addressed Durcan as "Poet" Durcan (Macmonagle, 2015).

perspective, one can easily infer from Durcan's poems that his attempts to redefine gender dynamics draw much from his autobiographical experiences. Durcan's observations on his parents and his own marriage provide substantial discussion points for gender politics in Irish society. In addition to the institution of marriage, the poet's mocking attitude towards the Catholic Church also poses a threat to Irish patriarchal authority because of the Church's immense influence over the social order. Examining his selected poems, this chapter aims to present a close correlation between Durcan's preoccupation with gender politics and his distinctive style as a performative and chronicler poet.

Paul Durcan was born to a family of a District judge and a housewife, John Durcan and Shelia MacBride in 1944. In fact, his mother was a practising solicitor but had to retire upon her marriage because of the Marriage Bar in Ireland (Mc Donagh, 2016: 8). Until it was removed in 1973, the constitutional ban restricted the employment of married women. In his poem "First Place in Ireland" (Durcan, 2007: 107), he describes his mother's domestic sacrifice as "[f]orty years of age / [i]n matrimony's cage" and refers to his mother as a person who "[w]as compelled to resign / [h]er solicitor's job / [t]o marry a barrister". Durcan is also uneasy about how her upcoming brilliant career was replaced by domestic concerns:

> Instead of researching the land laws
> In relation to tenure and ownership
> And altering society by applying
> Her mind to these questions,
> She applied her mind to the question
> Of whether or not she could afford
> To buy a washing machine
> And later a pressure cooker,
> A fridge, a dishwasher

His mother, Shelia, had to refuse the chance of "altering the society" with "her mind". Instead, her mind would be busy with evaluating the chance of buying a washing machine or a dishwasher. The imprisonment of her intellectual mind into the cage of matrimony inescapably limited her vision to domestic concerns. Paul Durcan's poem, with a sombre

tone, covertly condemns the patriarchal social order that reduced Irish women into secondary position.

The legal and moral authority of Irish patriarchy over women can be seen through the bans of contraception (removed in 2018), divorce (removed in 1995), or Marriage Bar (removed in 1973). Apart from that, the Constitutional Law of 47.2 and the Magdalene Laundries discussed above serve as the further examples of how the State restricted female individuality. The stereotypical existence of Irish women as the child-bearers and housewives is the ultimate result of such masculine oppression.

Just as his mother, Paul Durcan was also exposed to a similar kind of gender stereotyping. At a very early age, he was "aware that certain kinds of people disapproved of [him] –particularly certain kinds of male" because according to them, "boys [like Durcan] had to be soldiers –chaste soldiers– and had to fit into a mould; and if they didn't, there was something not quite right. [His] father would say: 'Paul is a sissy. Come on, be a man'" (Tallant, 2007). The poet's ostracized situation because of his 'difference' suggests that the masculine ideals not only determine and label the characteristics of the female gender, but also define the dogmatic rules of being a "man". In that sense, Durcan's ironic tone is also directed at the ideal Irish masculine figure, whose primary representative appears to be his own father. Being judged negatively by his father and other upholders of the Irish masculine ideal, the poet attacks them in his verse "by repeatedly exposing their hypocrisy, their inability to be true to the very standard that they enforce" (Auge, 2013: 174).

Creating a burlesque poetic setting where the biased traditional, religious, and social norms are playfully mocked, Durcan aims at creating a humorous but safe-zone for more democratic gender discussions and more independent Irish women. At that point, his private life plays a key role for his critical approach as can be seen from "First Place

in Ireland", where his mother is presented as the true victim of Irish patriarchal society. Similarly, the poet makes use of his father's patriarchal and conventional image to ridicule the authority established over Irish women.

Paul's father, John Durcan, has always been a key symbol of masculine ideals in Durcan's poems, appearing in different forms and positions ranging "from a fascist tyrant to a benevolent patriarch" (O'Brien, 1996: 101). Peter Middleton observes that "[f]athers in poetry represent a cultural authority derived from discourses of religion, law, nation and morality" (Middleton, 2000: 171). From that point, the father figure represented in Durcan's poems can be associated with a true reflection of the State, strictly attached to its traditional manners and values in order to create a collective consciousness on the way of independence[44]. However, Durcan does not hesitate to shake the patriarchal authority that separately attributes certain qualities to "men" or "women", dividing them into two spheres. For instance, in "Crucifixion", John Durcan's authorizing masculinity "evaporates as he began to 'liquidize into a woman', and his humiliation is completed as his physical body is 'sluiced' away" (Mc Donagh, 2016: 15-16).

The portrayal of his father as the embodiment of both male and female qualities evokes the androgynous aspect of gender[45], which offers a harmonious unity against the strict gender codes. Similarly, in "First Love", Durcan draws attention to how the masculine mind is equally occupied by the feminine as well: "Inside every small boy there is a small girl. / Inside every young father there is a young mother" (Durcan & Lambert,

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[44] As Edna Longley explains in *The Living Stream*, Durcan's father emerges as an exaggerated epitome of the patriarchal roles assumed by state and Church: censor, fascist, landlord, sports-fanatic, (hypocritical) Irish-language fanatic, "saint and murderer" (65).

[45] In her *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf argues that two powers preside in the mind: the man, and the woman. She explains that in the man's brain the man predominates over the woman while in the woman's brain the woman predominates over the man. Referring to the term "androgynous mind", coined by Coleridge, she argues that the harmonic unity between these two brains without dominating one another can be regarded as the ideal mind (106).

1988: 3); or in "Vasectomy Bureau at Lisdoonvarna", he defines the clinic as a place "[w]here men are women, and women are men" (Durcan, 1995: 63).

Regarding the androgynous aspect of the mind, in "The Man Whose Name was Tom-and-Ann" (Durcan, 2009: 89), the speaker at a party gets confused once he witnesses the androgynous aspect of marriage:

> I paid attention when I was introduced to a man
> Whose name was Tom-and-Ann:
> […]
> Nobody had noticed that his wife was not with him:
> She was at another party being introduced to my wife
> Who, when she came home, started humming,
> "Tonight I met a woman whose name was Ann-and Tom" lines 7-8, 14-17)

Rather than the unusual introductions at the party such as "This is Tom; and Jerry; and Mickey; and Mouse", the speaker focuses his attention on a man named "Tom-and-Ann". The names of cartoon characters do not interest the speaker as much as the androgynous proportion of the male mind, Tom-and-Ann. However, Durcan's androgynous mind is not limited to the male but it concerns both sexes. The following lines reveal that at another party, the speaker's wife meets a woman called Ann-and-Tom, presumably Tom's wife. Reminiscent of Woolf's suggestion that "the normal and comfortable state of being is that when the two [female and male mind] live in harmony together, spiritually co-operating" (106), Durcan aims at presenting the androgynous mental state dominated by neither sexes, which inherently implies a case of equality and harmony in Irish society.

In "The Man Whose Name Was Tom-And-Ann", the cartoon figures whom the speaker meets at the party may imply an escape from reality and entrance into the realm of surreal universe. The adjustment of surreal units –with all their impossibilities– into the lyrics is quite frequent in Durcan's verse[46]. In certain poems such as "The Man with

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[46] One of the surrealists' aims was to show that prevailing social norms are mostly artificial and fragile, and thereby eminently changeable and reformable. By dissolving the allegedly unchangeable social order, one opens the door for alternative social arrangements (Wicks, 2003: 14). An examination of Durcan's poems

Five Penises" (Durcan, 2009: 124) or "The Woman Who Keeps Her Breasts in the Back Garden" (Durcan, 2009: 101), Durcan subverts the reality in order to dismantle the constructed patriarchal norms in Irish society. As the titles suggest, exaggerated bodily parts may be evocative for Bakhtin's description of the grotesque carnival body. According to Bakhtin, "exaggeration, hyperbolism, [and] excessiveness are generally considered fundamental attributes of the grotesque style", which focuses on "the genital organs, the breasts, the phallus" by exceeding their limits (26, 303). In a similar way, Durcan exceeds the natural limits of breasts and phallus in those poems. His use of grotesque image in "The Man with Five Penises" strikes the reader at its first line: "My father was a man with five penises". The speaker boy enters the bathroom and accidentally witnesses that his father is having a bath:

> I could have sworn I saw, as I say,
> At least four or five penises floating about,
> Possibly six or seven. (lines 14-16)

There is a specific reason for Durcan's grotesque portrayal of his father with multiple phallic organs instead of other bodily parts such as arms or legs because the phallic symbol is associated with masculinity and male power (Khan, 2008: 41). Besides, Irigaray argues that the phallic qualities play crucial role in distributing the patriarchal power in society: while little boys compete among themselves by peeing the farthest, young men's competition centres on having the best "hard-on" to be called the strongest (Irigaray, 1985: 25). In a similar way, since John Durcan is often portrayed as the true representative of the patriarchal Republic in Durcan's poems[47], the father figure here is

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from such perspective would register that his surreal approach also represents the artificial and fragile gender roles established by the patriarchal society.

[47] As Mc Donagh asserts, John Durcan could have been a reflection of the Irish state over Durcan's life, "representing one of the state's foundational pillars, responsible for the interpretation and implementation of the state's laws" (20).

portrayed as having multiple phallic organs in order to picture an allegedly strong masculine figure. However, Durcan demeans the significance of having multiple organs:

> For a long time after that, I used to feel sorry for him,
> Concerned as well as sorry:
> He must have a right old job on his hands every morning
> Stuffing that lot into his pants.
> And imagine what he must feel
> When he has to use public toilets,
> Holding himself together for fear
> All that lot might spill out – (lines 17-24)

Rather than being amazed or stunned by the "supreme" influence of having multiple organs, the poet feels sorry for his father because he has to deal with lots of problems regarding all those organs. Realizing that having an extraordinary phallic organ in terms of quality and quantity does not matter at all, Durcan refutes the masculine interpretations of male organ by acknowledging that "[u]nquestionably, one penis is more than enough" (41). Throughout the poem, Durcan uses the grotesque male reproductive organs in order to prove that the constructed iconographic significance of phallus is artificial and lame. According to Bakhtin, the essential principle of "grotesque" is degradation, that is, the lowering of all that is high, spiritual, ideal, abstract (19). In a similar way, Durcan degrades the symbolic significance of phallic organ in a male-dominated society. In another poem, "The Woman Who Keeps Her Breasts in the Back Garden", the poet makes use of female breasts with their grotesque characteristics. Written in the form of a dialogue between a woman and a presumably male questioner, the poem elucidates how the woman could evade the male gaze:

> *Why do you keep your breasts in the back garden?*
> Well – it's a male-dominated society, isn't it?
> *Yes, I know it is, but could you explain…?*
> Certainly I'll explain, certainly:
> Seeing as how it's a male-dominated society
> And there is all this ballyhoo about breasts,
> I decided to keep my pair of breasts in the back garden
> And once or twice a day I take them out for a walk (lines 1-8)

In the poem, Durcan presents Miss Delia Fair[48] "as the hard-headed opponent of a male-dominated society" (Gahern, 1987: 112). She is able to recognize how exactly the androcentric society appreciates her presence as a female individual, and she finds an alternative solution for that. Once again, Durcan practises the exaggerated and grotesque properties of bodily parts in order to expose and criticize how women are regarded from a male perspective. Once Miss Delia Fair endeavours to take the conversation into the intellectual level rather than physical, the italicized male questioner suddenly ends the conversation since it does not interest him any more:

> I have other things on my mind besides my breasts:
> Australia – for example – Australia.
> To tell you the truth, I think a great deal of Australia.
> *Thank you very much for talking to us, Miss Delia Fair.* (lines 15-18)

In addition to the change in subject matter, an implication of male uneasiness due to the female excogitation might urge him to end the conversation. Realizing that Miss Delia Fair could be a threat to his authority with her mind[49], the questioner interrupts her and ends the conversation. In another dialogue-based poem, "Interview for a Job" (Durcan, 2009: 101), Durcan animates a job interview between a female candidate –named "Scarcity"– and a male employer, revealing how disturbing the male gaze[50] could become. The poem is nothing like the conventional properties of Irish poetry, but rather experimental in form:

> - I had a nervous breakdown when I was seventeen.
> - You had not?
> - I had.
> - But how could a beautiful girl like you
>   Have had such a thing as nervous breakdown?
> - I don't know, sir.
> - But you have luscious hair!

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48 The absurdities of Durcan's naming add up to the comic and surreal tone of his poetry, as can be seen from "Miss Delia Fair" or "Scarcity".

49 Durcan is preoccupied with the repressed female intellectuality as well. For instance, in "First Place in Ireland", Durcan argues that his mother could have altered the society with her mind. In "Bishop of Cork Murdered His Wife", the hypocritical society takes Bishop's side and condemns the wife for her suspicious belief in women's rights.

50 The term represents his sexually objectifying attitude, presenting the women as a primarily passive object for heterosexual-male erotic gratification (Eaton, 2008: 878).

- They said I had some kind of depression.
- With long black curls like yours? Depression? (lines 1-9)

From the beginning, the primary intention of the male employer is to take advantage of Scarcity. The following lines of the conversation unveil his molesting attitude: "Your lips: they're kissable / […] / And your hips: I would say they handle well" (lines 17-19). However, Scarcity stands against his aberrant approach at the cost of oral defamation and threat: "Get out of my office before I bellow for my Little Willie / To kick you in the buck teeth and whack you on the bottom" (36-37). As Goarzin suggests, in Durcan's poems, "the feminine body is present in unlikely places or expresses itself in unforeseen ways, defying the conventions of gender and of accepted behaviour"; and the women in Durcan's poems are "agents of the rebellion against the stereotypes or tropes of femininity" (172-3). Through Miss Delia Fair and Scarcity, Durcan illustrates archetypal female characters who are incompatible with androcentric Irish society.

In "The Woman Who Keeps Her Breasts in the Back Garden" where the fragmented female bodily part appears as the symbol of female resistance, Durcan introduces the dialogue through italicized and regular lines. However, he works with hyphens to emphasize the conversational tone in "Interview for a Job". These two different approaches for the similar type of duologues signal the unpredictable dynamics of his formal spectrum, demonstrating his experimental poetic attitude. In order to clarify how exactly Durcan adjusts gender politics into this peculiar stylistic attitude, his poetic tone within the canon should be examined.

On the very first page of his article on Durcan's stylistic distinctiveness, the Irish poet Derek Mahon quotes a full-length poem entitled "Poet Arrested for Distributing Daffodils in Castle Bar" (163). The poem contains certain characteristics that could be instantly observed in Durcan's poems. For instance, the headline-like entitling may evoke Durcan's similar poems such as "Margaret Thatcher Joins IRA" or "Irish Hierarchy Bans

Coloured Photography". As the title reveals, the poem narrates an absurd and comic situation with a peculiar use of repetitions to enhance the musicality and oral delivery for the poem: While the speaker is "sitting in Bewley's Oriental Café in Castle Bar / On Easter Monday, oh such an Easter Monday", all of a sudden his friend walks into a bunch of daffodils and disturbs them in the name of other people: "One for the dentist's wife, one for the dentist / One for the priest's wife, one for the priest". Following their arrest, District Justice Joseph Galtieri O'Higgings, whose authoritative name jarringly prepares the reader for an absurd situation, "sentence[s] the poet to six months' hard labour / Talking sense into the Provisional IRA"[51]. Following the poem "Poet Arrested for Distributing Daffodils in Castle Bar" that he quotes, Mahon begins his article with a confession that Durcan did not write the poem but Mahon himself did[52]. The sole purpose of doing so is "to demonstrate […] that there is such a thing as a recognisable 'Durcan poem" (Mahon, 1996: 164). Since the stylistic characteristics of Durcan's poetry do not show any significant resemblance to any other poets', his distinctive style can easily be identified. Within this originality, the poet diligently creates a harmonic unity between the content and form, complementing each other.

Durcan's protesting attitude towards the androcentric authority in society has its counterparts in the formal characteristics of his poetry. Just as he bends the conventional manners imposed on Irish women, he also denies the traditional methods of Irish poetry by "attempt[ing] to construct an Irish poetry that is free from the Anglo-Irish tradition, headed by Yeats, which tends to overwhelm young developing artists to strangle their

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[51] The absurd court calls and endings glitter in Durcan's mocking style. For instance, in "Priest Accused of Not Wearing Condom", the judge "sentence[d] the accused to two years' hard labour" and recommended that he "should be given condom therapy". In "Bishop of Cork Murdered His Wife", the bishop recovers from this unfortunate incident "on an island loaned to him by a government minister" while the victim wife's body is thrown into the River Lee.

[52] In a similar way, Edna Longley notes Durcan's prosaic attitude even in his titles by practicing an imitation. As the critic expresses, 'Meeting Paul Durcan on the Top Deck of a Bus in Cork City' may sound like a preparation for Durcanesque parody, but that is actually how she first encountered him (Longley, 1996: 102).

unique poetic voices" (McKenna, 1997: 70). The prosaic language and the rarity of certain formal devices –such as rhyme and meter– led certain literary authorities to question the merit of Durcan's poetry. It is argued that for the established and conventional tastes, "Durcan's verse is too loose, extravagant and adventurous" (Woodcock, 1996: 133). However, his unique poetic taste is a key factor in terms of challenging and redefining the traditionally accepted norms.

Paul Durcan satirically explains how the advocates of traditional Irish poetry condemned his poetic sense and discarded it as unsuitable[53], as he states: "In my First Arts exam, I was given such poor marks in poetry that I had to switch to Archaeology and Medieval History. The poetry don informed me with a benign smile that I did not have a proper understanding of poetry" (qtd. in Curtis, 1996: 179). Durcan's art was most criticized "by those who read with the eye rather than the ear [because] the eye notes only the absence of regular stanzas and assumes chaos" (Clifton, 1989: 20-21). During an interview with Kelly, the poet refuses all the accusations directed by conventional perspective, stating:

> I have been asked many times over the years, especially by people who genuinely do not like what I write: Why is it that you present prose as poetry? In my defence, I say that […] I am preoccupied with metric structure, as I'm sure anyone who writes poetry is. Everything I've ever published in verse has had to obey rules of metre; if somebody doesn't hear that, then I wonder did I get it right. (Kelly & Durcan, 2003: 297)

Gahern agrees with Durcan by acknowledging that his poetry is essentially dramatic and "comprised of monologues and dialogues, brief or connected scenarios complete only when they are spoken, or '*performed*'" (108). Besides, Douglas Sealy emphasizes the fact that Durcan's work "never seems quite at home on the printed page" (76). The properties of his verse become recognizable once the lyrics are voiced since the oral delivery of his

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[53] An attempt to reorganize Durcan's poetic taste in favour of what the characteristics of Irish poetry requires can be associated with how gender roles are forcibly imposed on male and female individuals. For that reason, it becomes reasonable to suggest that Durcan's stylistic ease subverts the established poetic taste as well.

poetry ensures the way Durcan's characters in the poems are intended to act or speak[54]. The performative qualities of Durcan's verse can be traced in his poems that are based on gender politics as well. To exemplify, during the performance of "The Kilfenora Teaboy" on stage, Durcan animates and mimics "the brow-beaten toady of an overbearing wife", and the self-deprecatory refrain is muttered with bowed head (Gahern, 1987: 111). In another poem, "Send a Message to Mary but Don't Bother If You Have an Important Television Programme to Watch" (Durcan, 1980: 106)[55], the performative aspect of his lyrics is strengthened with alliterative sounds: "Thinking of thinkers who think that they are the only thinkers who think" (line 2). In addition, the assonance of "o" sound also catches the audial rhythm while he raises a feeling of empathy with the opposite sex:

> Do you in the front row know what it is like to give birth?
> Or anonymous you at the back? Or murderous you on the street? (lines 6-7)

As the lines above demonstrate, the poet uses the deictic function of the language for his present audience, and rhetorically asks them whether they could relate to the circumstances of childbearing. In fact, the sense of empathy often appears as the dominant constituent of Durcan's verse. During an interview with Knowles, the poet explains his motive for such attitude, stating: "I always try to become the other […] The writer has to become the other. It's a truism to say that only by becoming the other, do you become yourself" (Knowles & Durcan, 2005: 22). This process of finding one's self through "becoming other" can also be observed in his preoccupation with gender politics. Accordingly, Durcan's dramatic monologues are based on the female eyes of the marital

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[54] As Gerald Dawe acknowledges, "[m]any of Paul Durcan's poems read like dramatic monologues. There is a theatricality about them, a love of playfulness […] It's Robert Browning with a surreal edge" (Dawe, 1984: 25).

[55] The ironic aspect of Durcan's comic entitling and the ridiculed function of television and media will be discussed at length in the following pages. Besides, he does not problematize the length of his titles as can be seen in "Shaking Hands with Seán Ralph in the Middle of the Street at the Intersection of Sandymount Green and Claremont Road" (Durcan, 2015: 152), or "Little Old Ladies Also Can Write Poems Such as This Poem Written in Widow's Blood in a Rented Top-Storey Room in Downtown Cork" (Durcan, 2009: 83).

life as in “The Haulier’s Wife Meets Jesus on the Road Near Moone” (Durcan, 2009: 117) and “The Man Who Thought He Was Miss Havisham”. These poems also demonstrate how Durcan bends the established social norms regarding gender dynamics. Similar to Bakhtin’s theory of carnivalesque, Durcan playfully switches the accepted gender roles in favour of Irish women.

In “The Haulier’s Wife Meets Jesus on the Road Near Moone”, the speaker yearns for any sign of spiritual or sensual affection from her husband. In a society where femininity is closely associated with chastity and stripped off from its sexual properties, Durcan’s portrayal of such a sexually confident character –who is not ashamed of talking about her physical qualities– signifies a challenge for gender definitions:

> I am thirty-three years old,
> In the prime of my womanhood:
> The mountain stream of my sex
> In spate and dark foaming;
> The white hills of my breast
> Brimful and breathing (lines 7-12)

Contrary to the social taboos regarding female physicality, the wife is “proud of [her] body” and “unashamed of [her] pride”. Besides, her audacious personality contrasts with the constructed image of subservient Irish wife[56]. Further, her characterization dwells certain properties which speak back to the rigid association of femininity with a demure, subservient, and altruistic stance. For instance, her sensual desires as a woman do not fit into the conventional image of Irish femininity that is isolated from its sexual qualities:

> One night in Cruise’s Hotel in Limerick
> I whispered to him: Please *take* me.
> (We had been married five years

[56] For many decades, Irish women have been portrayed as the other, the subservient, and the secondary However, the haulier’s wife stands against any sort of stereotypical Irish womanhood. For instance, in poetry, they were raised to an emblematic, passive, and objectified position (see Kathleen Ni Houlihan). According to the Constitutional Law, their sole responsibility is based on housework and raising children (see 47.2). Until the removal of Marriage Bar in 1973, married women were not allowed to work. Besides, regarding the social order, the Catholic Church has administered a repressing authority over the Irish women.

And we had two children.)
Christ, do you know what he said?
Where? Where do you want me to take you? (lines 41-46)

Contrary to the wife's declared sexual desires, the husband "makes love to [her] about twice a year" (line 33). Durcan's portrayal of the husband as an 'impotent' and 'slow grasper' person depicts how the poet undermines the masculine authority. In Durcan's hands, the husband's professional, sexual, and intellectual incapability contrasts with the wife's proficiency. For instance, the poet's specific choice of "haulier" for the husband's profession recalls his sarcastic reversal of roles: although hauliers take long distance journeys away from their home as a requirement of their profession, the haulier in the poem is illustrated as a negligent husband who prefers to stay at home while it is the haulier's wife that takes a long journey for a play "[i]n Abbey Theatre in Dublin / Called *The Gigli Concert*" (72-73). Drawing a picture of an independent traveller woman with sexual alertness, the construction of the husband in the poem is a clear instance of the carnivalesque overtones in the poem. Switching the established gender roles in marital life, the poet degrades masculinity inasmuch as he reinforces the female properties.

The representation of the marital life in Durcan's poems is carnivalesque, where the distinctions among ranks and status are blurred (123). Bakhtin explains the carnival setting as a place where the entire world is upside down, illustrating the king as clown and the clown as king (370). In a similar way, Paul Durcan also blurs the distinctions between gender roles constructed and imposed by society. On this note, the autobiographical poems concerning his own failed marriage provide substantial material for his deconstruction of attributed gender roles for both sexes.

As the critic Tóibín reveals, Durcan's wife Nessa was the bread-winner and Paul Durcan looked after their two daughters (Tóibín, 1996: 15). Apparently, Durcan's role within the matrimony could not fit into the traditional husband or father profile who

provides for his family. As Mc Donagh remarks, Durcan's "She Mends an Ancient Wireless" describes Nessa as "a strong woman, comfortable in the domestic sphere while also keeping down a job" because she "fixes whatever goes wrong in the house, from plumbing to electricity", which Paul Durcan admires much (35). The poet gladly embraces this 'unusual' situation in his poetry by "critiquing the failures of culturally accepted models of Irish masculinity" (Mc Donagh, 2016: 50). Referring to his own marriage, Durcan questions certain stereotypical gender roles culturally imposed on both sexes, and he does not hesitate to undermine the masculine authority. For instance, in "Cleaning Ashtrays" (Durcan, 1995: 48), the poet confesses that he is distressed by Nessa's "multiplied numbers of cigarettes" which she stressfully smoked at nights:

> After she went out to work, and the children to school,
> I stood in the kitchen cleaning ashtrays;
> The spectacle of a kitchen sink with encrusted ashtrays
> Piled up with tap water dripping into the scum
> Made me fear her with a fierce, irrational fear. (lines 12-16)

Kiberd defines patriarchy as "the tyranny wrought by weak men, the protective shell which guards and nurtures their weakness" (391). Durcan's cracking of that protective shell to expose the male vulnerability and desperation stands against the high-powered masculinity as well as the accepted social restrictions –such as Marriage Bar in Ireland, or the wives' role determined by the constitutional law. Durcan's degradation of artificial masculine prepotency is also reflected through grief, regret and psychological breakdowns of his 'husband characters', who appear in "Hymn to a Broken Marriage" (Durcan, 2009: 132), or in "The Pièta's Over" (Durcan, 2009: 140). As the poem "Hymn to a Broken Marriage" indicates, the speaker explains what he would do if he could put back the clock to the day they wedded:

> I would wed you again and, if that marriage also broke,
> I would wed you yet again and, if it a third time broke,
> Wed you again, and again, and again, and again, and again:
> If you would have me which, of course, you would not. (lines 4-7)

Runchman explains that the characteristics of Durcan's poetry are "his trademark long lines, gyrating repetitions and deadpan (but dead serious) humour" (79). Accordingly, the poet's regret for their broken marriage is emphasized with repeated 'wedding' anticipations in his trademark long lines. However, the twisting last line abruptly reveals that his regret contrasts with Nessa's unswerving decision in a humorous way: "If you would have me which, of course, you would not". In another poem based on their divorce, "The Pièta's Over"[57], Durcan once again suggests the male subservience and dependency that is opposed to female independence and self-assertiveness:

> The Pièta's over –and, now, my dear, droll husband,
> As middle age tolls its bell along the via dolorosa of life,
> It is time for you to get down on my knees
> And learn to walk on your own two feet. (lines 1-4)

Durcan shows that, far from being a passive victim, his wife is more emotionally mature than the men, confident in her own sexuality, and aware of their vulnerability and insecurity with women (Sloan, 2011: 43). Viewed in this respect, although the conventional social norms in Ireland represent the female in a way that she is subordinate to the husband, Durcan playfully switches the constructed notions and blurs the boundaries of gender roles. Having been fostered by his wife throughout his marriage, the husband's inability to 'stand on his own two feet' points to the male subordination along with the crisis-management skills of the female. Commenting on Durcan's 'wife speakers' as well as several other female characters from his poems, Gahern also suggests that "few male writers have rendered the feminine psyche so accurately", which proves his rightful legacy to meditate on gender politics (Gahern, 1987:109). Through these women characters, Durcan questions the conventional norms that repress and silence Irish women. As Francis Stuart remarks, "a poet must be a countercurrent to the flow around

[57] The word "Pièta" could be considered a Biblical interpretation of the 'death' of their marriage. Several sculptures and paintings depict 'Pièta' scenery with Jesus Christ in the arms of his mother Mary, right after he was taken down from the Cross.

him. That’s what poetry is: the other way of feeling and looking at the world” (Stuart, 1995: 19). Durcan’s evaluation of the ongoing incidents and conditions from a critical perspective, for this reason, is often delivered through dramatic monologues by those women, opening a window for “the other way of feeling”.

Similar to “The Pièta’s Over”, the poem “The Man Who Thought He Was Miss Havisham” (Durcan, 1995: 16) is also written in the form of a dramatic monologue of a wife exasperated by her husband’s manners. The poem demonstrates that the role reversal in marital life not only empowers Irish women, but mockingly subverts the traditional Irish masculinity. In the poem, the ordinary dressing code is replaced with the couple’s celebratory crossdressing activity, where the wife “slouch[es] about in his battledress” and the husband “click[s] about in her frocks”:

> He can get uppity if she leaves him
> Without a clean pair of Y-fronts;
> She gets prickly if she finds
> There is not a clean bra in the house.
> […]
> But when I discovered that my husband
> Thought of himself as Miss Havisham
> Well, old son, I could not wear it all! (lines 10-13, 20-22)

The husband celebrates this delusional clothing festival in such a mental state that, in time, he loses his sense of reality and thinks of himself as Miss Havisham, a notably eccentric character from Charles Dickens’ *Great Expectations* who is portrayed as being dressed in her wedding dress. In fact, this exaggerated dressing festivity might recall Bakhtin’s definition of the carnival as “people’s second life, organized on the basis of laughter” (8). As Bakhtin explains, in a carnival system where the roles are reversed, the king is the clown, being mocked by all the people (197). The element of laughter is only granted by creating a suitable environment –a second life– that is alternative to the reality. However, once the husband takes one step beyond this alternative “second life” which

was previously planned for entertainment only, the imbalance between the masculine and feminine qualities in his mind leads to a sort of mental instability, resulting in his idling around "[i]n his wedding dress / Forever readjusting his trousseau" (lines 26-27). Here, Durcan's burlesque husband character exemplifies his tendency to challenge the Irish masculinity through his peculiar characterization. In fact, his characterization is exaggeratedly filled with feminine attributes, a situation which can also be observed in "Wife Who Smashed Television Gets Jail" (Durcan, 2009: 29).

In the poem "Wife Who Smashed Television Gets Jail", the image of 'subordinate' and 'weak' Irish women who are restricted into the domestic interiority is playfully replaced by an image of a bread-winner, dominant and authoritative wife who prefers to take her husband out for a drink rather than staying at home (lines 19-21). Predominantly ornamented with mock-feminine attributions, the husband profile is evocative of 'Miss Havisham husband' above. From the very first line, the battered husband's statements speak for Durcan's signature burlesque tone:

> "She came home, my Lord, and smashed in the television;
> Me and the kids were peaceably watching *Kojak*[58]
> When she marched into the living room and declared
> That if I didn't turn off the television immediately
> She'd put her boot through the screen (lines 1-5)

In addition to the switched gender roles, the opening line shows that Durcan also exchanges the spatial attributions for the female and male. Irish social code 'inherently' requires the husband to be the bread-winner by working 'outside', and the wife to deal with domestic work by keeping herself 'inside'. However, the husband's initial lines reveal that "she came home" while the husband "and the kids were peaceably watching *Kojak*", which implies the reversal of attributions for Irish man and Irish woman. A

[58] *Kojak* is a TV series, broadcasted in the United States between 1973-1978.

similar spatial reversal can be seen in "Cleaning Ashtrays": "After she went out to work, and the children to school / I stood in the kitchen cleaning ashtrays" (lines 12-13). Obviously, these two poems deconstruct the attributed husband and wife roles, which are represented with the two opposite spatial poles: the interior and exterior spaces. Durcan reverses the gender-based spatial attributions by presenting the husband at home and the wife coming from outside.

The effeminate husband's[59] addressing as "my Lord" in the first line show that the speaker appears in court. The extract above reveals that it is the husband who files a complaint about domestic violence. Despite her ineffective efforts to lead a proper marital life, the wife is unable to break the delusional and destructive influence of television on their domestic communication. She highlights that she "didn't get married to a television", but the husband is busy thinking of the show:

> I had to bring the kids round to my mother's place;
> We got there just before the finish of *Kojak*;
> (My mother has a fondness for *Kojak*, my lord); (lines 11-13)

As the poem narrates, the husband still cares about *Kojak* although the wife strongly requests him to stop watching it, and have a conversation with her. Having listened to the effeminate husband's statement, the judge settles the case by affirming that the wife who prefers conversation to television is "a threat to the family which was the basic unit of society / As indeed the television itself could be said to be a basic unit of the family" (lines 23-24). While announcing his final decision, the judge does not hesitate to intimidate those who might plan similar acts of revolt: "Jail was the only place for them.

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[59] As Mc Donagh explains, a complex and often consciously unsettling use of the first person narrative voice is a key marker of Durcan's poetry (125). In Durcan's poetry, the diversity of his speakers range from homosexuals ("I Was a Twelve-Year-Old-Homosexual") to nasty clergy ("Bishop Robert Clayton and His Wife Katherine"), from Jesus Christ ("The Virgin and The Child") to suffering wives ("The Man Who Thought He Was Miss Havisham").

Leave to appeal was refused" (line 26). The fallaciousness of power-holding patriarchy's conclusive decisions are mocked with a pseudo-frightening element of imprisonment[60].

An ironic illustration of the husband as 'the victim' demonstrates Durcan's subversion of the domestic abuse in order to point to the repression that Irish women face. Similarly, with a self-explanatory title, "Minister Opens New Home for Battered Husbands" (Durcan, 1978: 45) is another example of his subversion of domestic power and authority. Likewise, "The Kilfenora Teaboy" (Durcan, 2009: 47) confesses that his "handsome" wife occasionally beats him "[b]ut on the whole she's a gentle soul" (line 14). Besides, the portrayal of Kilfenora husband does not correspond to the masculine Irish patriotism since he confirms that "though the land going to pieces / [he] will not take up the gun" (line 3-4). However, his avoidance of military weapons is opposed to the female preoccupation with military clothing in "Wife Who Smashed Television Gets Jail" where the wife puts "her boot through the screen", and in "The Man Who Thought He was Miss Havisham" where another wife "slouch[es] around in his battledress". Apparently, Durcan's subversion of patriarchal and patriotic Irish mindset not only portrays Irish women with a powerful and self-assertive image, but sarcastically mocks the masculine pseudo-authority by constantly degrading its values.

The poem "Wife Who Smashed Television Gets Jail", together with several other poems examined above, appears to be the true representation of the formal characteristics of Durcan's verse. As Dawe remarks, Paul Durcan is "a poet whose work is critical, representing a liberating force in Irish poetry", and this force is "richly endorsed by the style and content of the poems" (Dawe, 1980: 15). The liberation of Irish women

[60] A similar fallaciousness occurs in his poem "*Philadelphia, Here I Come*". In his teenage years, Durcan was delivered to a mental clinic by his own parents. He spent several years in and out at hospitals though he knew that he was mentally healthy. In the poem, Durcan's mother informs the father about the poet's mental illness: "The doctor says he has schizophrenia, / And, therefore, he *has* schizophrenia". The emphasis on the italicized word remarks the ultimate authority of the doctor against Durcan's sanity. The doctor, similar to the judge above, is unable to make a sound evaluation but in the end, his judgment is binding.

represented in Durcan's poems coincides with his experimental and innovative formal approach as well. As the poet suggests, poetry "is born of speech and silence. So it is a form of music" (Curtis, 1996: 171). Written predominantly in free verse with a relatively colloquial language, his poetry is often conveyed through the dramatic monologues as can be seen in "Cleaning Ashtrays" or "Hymn to a Broken Marriage". In that regard, the speeches and silences, especially during the performance on stage, bring the rhythmical consistency through these monologues or dialogues[61] because "the disposition of lines on the page, and the punctuation, can never give an exact notation of the author's metric" (Knowles & Durcan, 2005: 21). In spite of the distinct performative characteristics of his certain poems, Durcan's artistic path, at times, crosses with those of other poets, such as Patrick Kavanagh or Sylvia Plath.

In fact, Paul Durcan confesses that his poetry is influenced by Kavanagh, who could be regarded as Durcan's poetic forefather[62]. During an interview with Mary Dalton, Durcan summarizes Kavanagh's impact on him in three ways:

> [O]ne, that life was fundamentally good; two, that there was nothing that was not fit subject matter for a poem; and three, that poetry was most nearly poetry when it was most nearly prose. (Dalton & Durcan, 1991: 24)

Alluding to the goodness of life, the poem "Sister Agnes Writes to Her Belovèd Mother" discussed above clearly exemplifies how his characters can be blindly optimistic at times even if the situation is suitable for a crisis. For the appropriateness of any subject matter for poetry, "On Buying a New Pair of Chains for Her Husband" (Durcan, 2009: 89) might be an excellent example: "No, young man, I do not want a Guaranteed Irish Chains / I want Chains period, Chains for my husband" (lines 1-2). The prosaic and colloquial

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[61] For the duologues, see "The Woman Who Keeps Her Breasts in the Back Garden" and "Interview for a Job" above.

[62] It was Kavanagh, in fact, who took Durcan under his poetic wings when he was at the very early years of his career. Quoting Durcan's lines from "First Confession", "Bless me, Father, for I have sinned / I have not read Jean Gênet", Patrick Kavanagh pronounced solemnly "I've found my successor. I pass my mantle to Durcan" (Lynch, 1996: 147).

expressions of the lines here are also compensated with his “technical and tonal mastery” over the context, which enables the poet “to avoid stylistic pitfalls” (Mooney, 1987: 23). The junction point of all the three elements that Durcan inherited from Patrick Kavanagh is embodied in his *Daddy, Daddy* (1990) collection, where Durcan echoes one of the key poets of feminist discourse, Sylvia Plath.

Durcan’s *Daddy, Daddy* is a body of poems, resolving Durcan’s problematic relationship with his father in a confessional manner. The entire collection is dedicated to his father John Durcan, who passed away two years before its publication. In her article “Your Daddy, My Daddy” which examines Durcan’s intertextual references to Plath in specific poems, Peggy O’Brien is amazed with Durcan’s choice of title and claims that “knowing the charges of heinous appropriation, vile presumption that would await him, a man would never dare” to refer to Sylvia Plath’s “single most resonant phrase in the canon of women’s poetry”: “Daddy, Daddy” (75). Revealing his troubled relationship with the authoritative and prescriptive father figure that evokes the patriarchal dominancy, the poet pours his heart out into the lyrics. O’Brien draws the parallelism between the two poets by asserting that Durcan is “identifying with Plath both as a fellow suffering human being and as a poetic strategist” (100). The male poet confesses the emotional and psychological experiences that are evocative of Plath’s certain poems. Contributing to the women’s growing voice in the canon and Irish society, Durcan clearly slides away the traditional norms of the Irish male authorship by creating empathy with Plath. O’Brien also affirms this situation as follows:

> *Daddy, Daddy* underscores a moment in Irish history when a male writer identifies with a woman, one significantly who is not Irish and not bound up with issues of nationhood, the traditional turf of the Irish male writer. (O’Brien, 1996: 100)

Contrary to Eavan Boland whose poetry is reshaped in its form in accordance with Plath’s style, Durcan’s tribute to Sylvia Plath revolves around similar emotional and

psychological experiences towards the patriarchal figures in their poetry[63]. As Barry Sloan examines, Durcan's phrase, "a swastika in the sky" recalls Plath's "[n]ot God but a swastika / So black no sky could squeak through" from her "Daddy" (Plath, 1981: 222); and just as his female predecessor, Durcan "ascribes sinister details to his father's face": John Durcan is portrayed with an "icicle-compacted face" in a similar way of Otto Plath's face, as described in "Daddy", with a "neat moustache" (line 43), an "Aryan eye, bright blue" (line 44), and "[a] cleft in your chin instead of your foot" (line 53) (Sloan, 2011: 40). To affirm that Durcan's Plathian allusions are not coincidental, his certain lines echoing Plath's Ariel can be taken as examples. For instance, Durcan's "My grapes, for example. Grapes are too excitable" from "Our Father" (Durcan, 2009: 273) unmistakably echoes Plath's "The tulips are too excitable, it is winter here" from "Tulips" (Plath, 1981: 160); or in "Bare Feet", he records an entire poem over the image of black shoe –an item borrowed from Plath's initial lines "You do not do, you do not do / Any more black shoe" in "Daddy" (Plath, 1981: 222).

As Peggy O'Brien examines the parallelisms between Durcan's *Daddy, Daddy* and Plath's certain poems, she realizes that "Durcan regularly makes forays into issues of social sensitivity in Ireland, especially those related to sex, like contraception and divorce. These politics are not a minor part" of his poetry (100). Since these matters related to gender –such as sex, contraception and divorce- are closely associated with the Church's influence over the Irish society, Durcan's deconstruction and subversion of religious doctrines –with the aim of restoring women's deserved position in society– play a significant role in rearranging the gender dynamics in the society.

Since the Irish society is predominantly Catholic, the Church occupies "a largely unquestioned position in the social, cultural and moral fabric of the Irish state" (Mc

[63] As Maurice Elliott explains, "a superficial account of *Daddy, Daddy* will certainly unleash a patriarchy […] who is threatening, peremptory, moralistic, beastly, murderous, fascistic" (321).

Donagh, 2016: 69). Unfortunately, Irish women have also had their share from its authoritative sanctions which are entwined into Irish law. To exemplify, women in Ireland have just got the "right to abort" with a referendum in 2018. Besides, couples were not allowed to divorce by law until the mid-1990s, which had pushed women into domesticity and subservience. Considering the Church's authoritarian influence over gender issues, Durcan's defamation of religious institutions and clergy inevitably opened a rift for women's voice. The poet's preoccupation with scandalous incidents regarding the Church is reminiscent of a Bakhtinian sense by focusing on "the reproductive power of […] the body" and "carnivalistic parodies of" the things considered "sacred" (Bakhtin, 1984: 123). Bakhtin draws a parallelism between the degradation of "coming down to earth" and "the reproductive and generating power of the body", which refers to sexuality (22). In a similar way, in his poems that humorously parody the Christian doctrines, Durcan challenges the Church's patriarchal authority by offering an unusual image of Catholic clergy who are abnormally surrendered to their sexual appetites. The poet's defamation of the "sacred" through "the reproductive power of the body", in that sense, enables him to break the Church's religious authority over Irish women.

Durcan's clerical criticism, functioning as a critique of the biased gender dynamics in his society, is made manifest in his poems such as "Archbishop of Kerry to Have Abortion" (Durcan, 1995: 26) and "Bishop of Cork Murders His Wife" (Durcan, 1978: 53). For the poetic framework that Durcan constructs for his anti-Church poems, the titles play a significant role as if they were to deliver the news[64]. Although these headline titles stand for a life-like aspect of the incidents, the content clearly draws a line between the reality and fiction by including, for instance, an Archbishop inspired by

[64] They function as an announcement of moral corruption since they resemble newspaper headlines such as "Bishop of Cork Murders His Wife" (*Sam's Cross* 53), "Catholic Father Prays for His Daughter's Abortion" (Durcan, 1995*:* 30), "Cardinal Dies of Heart Attack in Dublin Brothel" (Durcan, 2009: 154), "Archbishop of Kerry to Have Abortion" (Durcan, 1995: 26), "The Archbishop Dreams of the Harlot of Rathkeale" (Durcan, 2009: 40), or "Priest Accused of Not Wearing Condom".

"Saint Samuel Beckett" or the institutional "Vatican Abortion Clinic". Besides, the sarcastic language that Durcan adopts in these poems not only supports his critical perspective but shakes the Church's authority over society as well. For instance, in "Archbishop of Kerry to Have Abortion", the "[f]ifty-five-year-old Boethius Sheehy" has been impregnated by "a devoutly pious" person. However, she

> Is to undergo an abortion next week
> At the Vatican Abortion Clinic in Rome
> Located in the apartments – whose blinds are always drawn –
> Of the Congregation of the Propagation of the Defence of the Faith (lines 8-11)

Durcan's "reliance upon fantastic and grotesque imagery for shock effect, his colloquial style and prolixity" represent the outspoken voice of unheard women in Ireland because women were still unable to decide on their own body regarding whether to carry or abort (Auge, 2013: 168-169). As the lines above indicate, Durcan subverts the accepted moral values with a fully-equipped clinic for any possible abortions for the female clergy, knowing that abortion is prohibited in Christianity. Further, the prolixity and verbiage of his verse also contribute to the mocking effect, which is illustrated through the embowered apartments "[o]f the Congregation of the Propagation of the Defence of the Faith". The following lines also reveal that the speaker is a journalist who dallies with words:

> [Archbishop] Is reported to be scared stiff at the forthcoming referendum[65] –
> I'm sorry, I'll read that again –
> Is reported to be scared stiff of the forthcoming abortion.
>
> […]
>
> *This is P.J. Newman in the Macgillacuddy Reeks*
> *Handing you back stociously – I mean stoically – to the studio in Dublin.*
> (lines 15-17, 21-22)

[65] *The Berlin Wall Café* was first published in 1985, following The Eight Amendment of the Constitution of Ireland in 1983. Acknowledging "the right to life of the unborn", the Amendment passed with 66.9% of the vote. It is clear that Durcan proposes a poetic reaction to the enactment of abortion ban in here, and also in "Catholic Father Pray for His Daughter's Abortion" from the same collection.

The interruption of a news report in the line “I’m sorry, I’ll read that again” and the implication of drunkenness through the slipped adverb “stociously” –which is a made-up adverb for drunkenness– lower the tone of seriousness in the poem. Besides, the mocking journalistic epilogue above is something Durcan uses in order to increase the sarcastic tone in other Church-criticizing poems. For instance, “Irish Hierarchy Bans Colour Photography” (Durcan, 2009: 71) ends with the line “*This is Claudia Conway, RTE News (Colour), Maynooth*”. In a similar way, “Archbishop of Dublin to Film *Romeo and Juliet*” (Durcan, 1995: 24) ends with the line “*This is Marlon Brando in Dublin handing you back to the studio in Tahiti*”[66]. Although he creates a framework suitable for news reporting, Durcan’s primary aim is not to declare and inform the reader but to mock and criticize. In his “Newsdesk” from *The Laughter of Mothers*, the poet explains how little he trusts newspapers: “The bad news is that I buy a newspaper every day. / The good news is that I don’t read it” (58). The harsh criticism towards the Church with ironic reportages, tabloid newspaper headlines, and exaggerated situations are accompanied by the unreliability of media.

It is evident that the absurdities in these poems stand as a reaction to the Church’s masculine domination by bringing controversial and shocking elements into the centre. Bakhtin explains that the carnival laughter is able to unleash the restricting orders “from all religious and ecclesiastic dogmatism, from all mysticism and piety” by parodying the Church’s cult (Bakhtin, 1984: 7). In fact, Durcan’s constant tampering with religious values has a close correlation with gender politics. As Molly Mullin explains, most Irish feminists are battling “against the construction of an essentially Catholic and patriarchal Ireland”, and they are now “left with the task of trying to redefine Catholicism and Ireland

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[66] These endings also include certain mockery elements. In “Irish Hierarchy Bans Colour Photography”, the news is, in fact, delivered from a coloured channel. In the latter cinematographic poem, the journalist introduces himself as Marlon Brando, who was one of the best known actors of his time. The exaggerated tone is enhanced once he hands it back to the studio in Tahiti, an island in the middle of Pacific Ocean.

by producing alternative visions" (46). In parallel with these Irish feminists, Paul Durcan's contributions to this redefinition process by creating alternative realities cannot be underestimated. As Ferguson's sociological analysis reveals, the celibate priest was the role model for Irish masculinity until the last decades of the twentieth century (120). However, Durcan's unusual descriptions of priests and bishops who gladly embrace the bodily pleasures play a central role in demolishing the religious masculine dogma.

Through a carnivalesque deconstruction of the religious dominance, Durcan creates an alternative poetic universe where the ecclesiastics have surrendered to their carnal desires by celebrating the earthly festivities of ephemeral world[67]. The poet's amusing preoccupation can be identified in several poems. For instance, in "Cardinal Dies of Heart Attack in Dublin Brothel" (Durcan, 2009: 154), the speaker learns that their "beloved cardinal has died / In the arms of his favourite prostitute" (lines 3-4). In "The Archbishop Dreams of the Harlot of Rathkeale" (Durcan, 2009: 40), the Archbishop describes his "non-committal" dream of a prostitute with pleasure: "I see her walking down the road at evening / Wearing a red scarf and black high-heel shoes; / She is wearing nothing else" (lines 6-8). In "Bishop Robert Clayton and His Wife Katherine"[68] (Durcan, 2009: 287), the Bishop incites matrimony by referring to his wife's "décolletage" and sharing the details of their sexual intercourse during his preach:

> I having placed three pillows beneath her back
> She will draw back her knees up past her cheeks
> Until her knees recline upon her shoulders
> So that I can douse her haunches with my tongue,
> Install myself inside her (lines 37-41)

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67 As Bakhtin explains, clowns and fools are "characteristic of the medieval culture of humour. They were the constant, accredited representatives of the carnival spirit in everyday life out of carnival season" (8). Apparently, Durcan's priests and bishops represent a similar carnival spirit with their exaggerated actions, celebrating the earthly pleasures.

68 Robert Clayton (1695-1758) was an Irish Protestant Bishop, who was notorious for his unorthodox beliefs. Having led a considerably wealthy life, Clayton might have been Durcan's target due to his secular actions as well as religiously discriminating identity.

Bishop Clayton, holding "the Gospel in [his] left hand and her thigh in [his] right hand", concludes his extremely obscene sermonic speech in a classical way for a clergyman: "In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost / Amen". The Bishop's in-between state might prove that Durcan's satires "chart the loosening clerical grip on public mores" (Wheatley, 2003: 253). This might also indirectly mean that Irish women will eventually have a more liberated social status once the religious domination has been weakened. For a clear example of such transition, it would be helpful to look into Durcan's recent poetry collection, *The Days of Surprise* (2015). For instance, in "Lullaby of an Unmarried Mother" (82) from this collection, Durcan mentions how magnificently the social and cultural changes in Ireland have taken place. The poet gives voice to the self-assertive and secure single mother who begins her speech by rejecting the traditional femininity:

> No, no, I'd not like to be a married mother!
> And to think that not so long ago in Ireland
> If I were an unmarried mother
> They'd have locked me up
> Or taken away my child from me! (lines 1-5)[69]

The role of the Church as a social moral arbiter has largely been usurped in recent times, having led to the rise of new powerbrokers such as unmarried mothers or economically independent women (Mc Donagh, 2016: 84). For this reason, Durcan's constant attempts to break the Church's hegemony play a crucial role in offering an image of Irish women independent from social restrictions and gender roles.

In addition to the clerical sensuality, Durcan also denounces the hypocrisies of Irish society that justifies the sinful actions of churchmen against the victimized Irish

[69] A television documentary entitled "Sex in a Cold Climate" narrates the life of young Irish girls sent to laundry asylums because of alleged sexual sins or inappropriate behaviour. These asylums were run by convents and they were named "Magdalene Asylums" after the woman who reformed her supposedly dissolute life when Jesus forgave her. These institutions aimed at reforming the modern day Magdalenes through hard work, prayer, and the discipline associated with Roman Catholic convents (Kollar, 2004: 310).

female in “Bishop of Cork Murders His Wife”. Revealing the domestic violence committed by a man of the Church, the poem reports that the bishop murdered his wife by hitting her head with a television set since she “tried to prevent her husband / From watching ‘Match of the Day”[70]. The faithful Church-comers protect their Bishop by “condemning the woman on the grounds of her suspicious belief in women’s rights” (Mc Donagh, 2016: 71). As Fogarty explains, the public vision of women is restricted to the dichotomy “between images of femininity as pure, virginal, transcendent and disembodied and as dangerously erotic, fallen, pernicious and threatening” (94). In this regard, the religious folk in the poem chooses the Bishop’s side since any women with suspicious belief in women’s rights will pose a threat to the patriarchal society. Through the end of the poem, the punishment of the crime is narrated in a sarcastic way:

> The Bishop will recover from this unfortunate incident
> On an island loaned to him by a government minister;
> Meanwhile the remains of his wife
> Have been chucked into the River Lee;
> There will be no funerals.

Durcan’s comic resolution coincides with Bakhtin’s “carnival laughter” in the sense that it is “gay, triumphant, and at the same time mocking, deriding” (Bakhtin, 1984: 11-12). According to Bakhtin, the complex nature of carnival laughter is not only nurtured by the absurd, humorous and celebratory elements, but it provides a critical perspective through sarcasm and mockery as well. In parallel with that, the Bishop’s “triumphant” case result is coated with a “mocking” element of “an island loaned to him” for a proper rehabilitation. The result must definitely satisfy the public conscience because the Bishop, purely innocent in the public eye, is acquitted of murdering a woman who had suspicious

[70] As John Goodby explains, in Thomas Kinsella’s “Nightwalker”, “television is a form of late capital anaesthesia, watched by the half-dead ‘grubs’ who make up the population of Dublin as necropolis”, and in a similar way, Durcan is also “aware of the negative influence of television as passive cultural consumption” (181). Although the poet’s critical tone tends to put emphasis on religious corruptions by using television as a medium of negative influencer, the problematic existence of television in Irish domestic life and conjugality is emphasized in “Wife Who Smashed Television Gets Jail” (Durcan, 2009: 29).

beliefs in women's rights. In that sense, Durcan's sense of humour in the poem could be evaluated in relation to Bakhtinian "carnival laughter" that is unleashed from all moral codes.

As the chapter argues, Durcan's engagement with gender politics comprises a subtle parodic structure with grotesque images and carnivalesque elements, which serve as a means to critique the State and the Church and to reverse gender codes, and thus deconstruct the authority of Irish masculinity. All these elements that he subversively weaves into his poetry, as discussed above, are reinforced with his stylistic characteristics. The rearranged gender politics represented in his poems demonstrate that the repressed and subordinate Irish women are replaced with self-assertive and dominant women who subvert the conventional and biased gender definitions of Irish society.

CONCLUSION

> "The women of Ireland, Mná na hÉireann, who instead of rocking the cradle, rocked the System, and who came out massively to make their mark on the ballot paper, and on a new Ireland"
>
> -from Mary Robinson's victory speech[71], 7 Nov. 1990.

Irish nationalism has been moulded with patriarchal and religious regulations since the early days of independence fight. The specific use of Irish myths to revive patriotic feelings was based on the image of national symbolic femininity, which often appears as a medium to deliver the necessary nationalist message. Within the intensive nationalist dynamics of the 19th and early 20th century, female poets who were few in number were either followers of the male-dominated poetic convention, or they merely produced poetry that was isolated from everyday life. The gap between female authorship and the texts about female subjectivity has reached such a level that as Deborah Tall remarks, following the foundation of the Republic, "to be both woman and poet in Ireland has been, until recent times, an all but impossible synthesis" (39). In parallel with that, Eavan Boland also confirms the situation, saying: "The poets I knew were not women: the women I knew were not poets" (Boland, 2011: 264-265). The secondary and symbolic existence of female identity in Irish poetry is also accompanied with the social oppression that Irish women had to endure.

The Republic of Ireland was a country where married women were not allowed to work, divorce was unavailable, and contraception was illegal. The primary duty of Irish

[71] As the first female president of the Republic, Mary Robinson was a close friend of Eavan Boland from Trinity College in the 1960s. She also cited Durcan's "Backside to the Wind" during her campaign, and Durcan celebrated the 'Mary Robinson years' (1990-1997), a period of time that clearly marked the altered gender roles, in his *Greetings to Our Friends in Brazil* (1999).

woman was specifically determined by the Irish Constitutional Law, emphasizing the child-caring and domestic duties. The fact that Irish women were repressed by the religious and constitutional restrictions could be observed in the papal visit to Ireland in 1979, during which Pope John Paul II openly verified the social repression of Irish female identity in his speech, stating: "May Irish mothers, young women and girls not listen to those who tell them that working at a secular job, succeeding in a secular profession, is more important than the vocation of giving life and caring for this life as a mother" (Haberstroh, 1996: 14-15). In a country where politics were closely entwined with religious doctrines, women's roles were dictated in accordance with religious regulations.

In such an androcentric climate, both Eavan Boland and Paul Durcan have contributed to the destabilization of the fixed and biased gender norms in poetic convention as well as Irish social life. Eavan Boland has successfully dismantled the passive, symbolic and objectified Irish femininity, and replaced it with self-aware Irish mythical characters by referring to the women's obliterated lives in the context of Ireland's national history[72]. Her specific poems such as "Mise Eire", "Mother Ireland", or "Making of an Irish Goddess" explicitly promote the aim of subverting the patriarchal nationalist tradition. In those poems, the spoken women are replaced with the speaking women, a situation which assigns the essential female subjectivity in a poetic tone. Over the centuries, the symbolic feminization of Ireland as 'Dark Rosaleen', 'Roísin Dubh', or 'Shan Van Vocht' was so prevalent that the mother figure in *Night Feed* (1982), "holding a bottle for her infant in the dawn, serves to unsettle these encodings with an image of a contemporary woman" (Randolph, 2014: 76).

[72] Hagen and Zelman define Boland's poetry as the combination of national and feminist discourse. As the critics explain, "by affirming herself as an Irish poet, and thus rejecting the common notion that women's poetry should be quarantined from the mainstream literature, Boland [claims] her birth right, her say in that tradition, her right to 'establish a discourse with the idea of a nation" (444).

Following the restoration of female subjectivity in Irish poetry, Eavan Boland provided enough poetic space for the female authorship in the light of feminist discourse. The poems "Escape", "The Women" or "Is It Still the Same" precisely display how Boland presents the notions of 'womanhood' and 'poet' in harmony. Boland's influence on the Irish poetic convention was so noticeable that in her *Sisters*, June Levine confirms that Eavan Boland, who was the "founding member" of the Irish Women's Liberation Movement, "looked nothing like other Irish poets of the sixties" (140). Eventually Boland's intense preoccupation with gender politics and her constant struggle to rearrange the biased gender norms has registered her as "probably Ireland's most influential feminist" over contemporary Irish women poets such as Sinéad Morrissey (Batten, 2003: 169).

As the analysis of Boland's distinctive formal style in the first chapter suggests, her subversion of the conventional poetic form and her introduction of the notion 'Irish woman poet' to the canon could be recorded as the principal signs of her feminist standing against the androcentric Irish poetry. Offering a poetic language that is reminiscent of W.B. Yeats and Sylvia Plath, Boland voices a poetic discourse that is both Irish and feminist. Within the light of her subversive approach, the younger poets such as Jean O'Brien, Paula Meehan or Roz Cowman "are dealing with all kinds of themes and experiments, and this just has to refresh the whole basis of Irish poetry" (Tall, 1988: 39). In this regard, Eavan Boland's preoccupation with gender politics –together with a series of workshops for women poets– has clearly changed the cartography of Irish poetry.

Just as Eavan Boland's immense influence over the shifting gender politics in Irish poetry, Paul Durcan has made a significant critical contribution to the rearrangement of biased social norms that repress Irish womanhood. As Goodby asserts, "[i]f any single male poet could be said to have […] registered the importance of the women's movement it was Paul Durcan" (242).

Durcan's poetic vocation advocates a rebalanced gender politics in Irish society, removing the invisible psychological domination over Irish women. Durcan's engagement with gender dynamics within Irish society consists of several different layers ranging from exchanged gender roles to the hypocritical actions of the clergy, from the autobiographical observations on his familial life to the grotesque units of body. The contextual diversity of his verse and the colourful poetic variations offered in his lyrics serve a greater purpose, that is to subvert the fallacies of masculinity and to establish the rebalanced social roles in opposition to the previously determined gender stereotypes.

Durcan's use of poetic surreal realm where the reversal of fixed gender roles sarcastically undermines the masculine authority have been examined through "Wife Who Smashed Television Gets Jail", "The Man Who Thought He Was Miss Havisham", "The Kilfenora Teaboy" as well as the autobiographical "Cleaning Ashtrays" and "The Pièta's Over". As the poems demonstrate, Durcan redefines the established gender roles by empowering the Irish woman while exposing the fragility and vulnerability of the patriarchal domination. By showing the extremity of the social restraint that Irish women have undergone, Durcan's poetry aims to evoke a feeling of empathy with Irish women, with the hope that it would eventually lead to fair and impartial gender roles. In addition to subvert the biased conventional rules, Durcan's emphasis on the ideal of androgynous mind is also portrayed in "The Man Whose Name Was Tom-and-Ann" and "First Love", both of which offer an image of ideal mental state where female brain and male brain co-exist in harmony.

Resonating with Bakhtin's theory of the carnivalesque to portray gender roles in a satirical tone, Durcan's poetry embodies Bakhtin's 'grotesque image' particularly in the poems "The Woman Who Keeps Her Breasts in the Back Garden" and "The Man with Five Penises". The exaggerated bodily parts that exceed their limits in these poems are

the indications of how Durcan subverts the iconographical qualities of patriarchal perspective through the grotesque imagery. Overcoming the male gaze by occasionally taking off and keeping her breasts in the back garden, the vigilant Miss Delia Fair is conscious of the society in which she has to survive. Further, the speaker's revelation that "one penis is more than enough" in "The Man with Five Penises" dismantles the iconographic importance of the phallus as a symbol of potency, authority, and domination.

Paul Durcan's probably most aggressive condemnation is directed at the fallacies of the Church, which can be closely associated with gender dynamics in Ireland because of the close correlation between the Church's orders and social life. The clergy's fondness of hedonistic desires independent from any moral code contrasts with the notions of chastity and fidelity imposed by the Church. The poems "Cardinal Dies of Hearth Attack in Dublin Brothel", "Archbishop of Kerry to Have Abortion", "Bishop Robert Clayton and His Wife Katherine", or "Catholic Father Prays for His Daughter's Abortion" are clear instances of how Paul Durcan dallies with the Church's authority in a humorous and burlesque way. According to Paul Durcan, breaking the Church's authoritative domination corresponds to the ultimate liberation of Irish women who have been repressed by the religious doctrines. Therefore, he directs his mocking criticism and satirical poetic voice at the religious institutions for the sake of ensuring strong and independent Irish women in poetic convention as well as the society.

As discussed in Chapter II, in addition to the frequent implementations of gender issues, Durcan's poetry manifests itself in terms of experimental and subversive qualities. His constant experimentations with the poetic form and subversive attitude by incorporating the surreal into his poetry are the clear indicators of his individual style. As Derek Mahon's observations in "Orpheus Ascending" indicate, the originality of

Durcan's poetic vocation within the Irish poetic canon has found itself a proper place as "Durcanesque poem" despite the lack of certain literary qualities such as metre and stanzaic structure, for his poetry is the true epitome of oratory poetry with its prosaic but musical structure. Acknowledged as the chronicle poet of the modern Ireland, Durcan's verse has marked the social milestones of the country by leaving its glistening trace[73] on controversial issues such as divorce, contraception, or domestic roles.

The positive results of the altered gender politics in Ireland cannot be restricted solely to Boland and Durcan. A great variety of people from different layers of the society –from diplomats to housewives– have had their share in that. It has gradually become a social realization, which is followed by an inevitable victory. Together with the poetic contributions of Eavan Boland and Paul Durcan, the cartography of gender politics in Ireland has changed so extensively in the following forty years that during the second papal visit to Ireland in 2018, Pope Francis witnessed the altered gender dynamics in the country. At the official ceremony for Pope's arrival, the speech of Prime Minister Leo Varadkar, who previously declared that he was gay during the 2015 same-sex referendum, illustrates how the social gender norms have changed:

> In place of Christian charity, forgiveness and compassion, far too often there was judgment, severity and cruelty, in particular, towards women and children and those on the margin […] The Ireland of the 21st century is a very different place today than it was in the past. [Irish people understand] that marriages do not always work, that women should make their own decisions, and that families come in many forms including those headed by a grandparent, lone parent or same-sex partners or parents who are divorced. (Varadkar, 2018)

Varadkar's speech that marks the inevitable changes and modernizations in Irish society can be traced in Durcan's *The Days of Surprise*, published in 2015. As argued above, Durcan's "Lullaby of an Unmarried Mother" portrays a similar tableau through the voice of his single-mother character: "[…] not so long ago in Ireland / If I were an unmarried

[73] Referring to the guidance and influence of poetry over the social order, and resembling himself to a snail, Durcan once signed one of his publications as: "A snail leaves his career behind, glistening".

mother / They'd have locked me up" (lines 2-4). Besides, Durcan's foreshadowing and poetic insights regarding the Church's corruption in the previous decades also came true in the 1990s[74]. In parallel with that, Boland's poetic struggle to provide an independent territory for Irish womanhood within the country's national fabric became salient in the 1990s. Boland's inexhaustible effort to claim Irish female subjectivity was appreciated by the first female president of the Republic, Mary Robinson, who also drew public attention to the repressed condition of Irish women, quoting Boland in her inaugural speech: "As a woman, I want women who have felt themselves outside history to be written back into history, in the words of Eavan Boland: 'finding a voice where they found a vision'" (13).

[74] For instance, the Bishop of Galway, Eamon Casey, had to resign from his religious profession in 1992 in consequence of his 'indecent' action, fathering a child from an American woman in the 1970s. Died in 2017, 'the man of religion' has been accused of abusing three young girls recently, including his niece, Patricia Donovan, at the age of five (Sheridan, 2019). Another scandal was that of Father Michael Cleary, who had an affair with his housekeeper and fathered two children from that affair (Keogh, 2007: 133-134). It is clear that Durcan's sarcastic accusations and foreshadowing in the previous decades had raised awareness for these issues.

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ÖZET

Bu tezde İrlanda'ya özgü birçok toplumsal ve kültürel bağlamlarla temas halinde olan (İrlanda mitleri, Büyük Kıtlık, Boşanma Referandumu, kürtaj, basmakalıp İrlanda kadını vb.), İrlandalı şairlerden Eavan Boland ve Paul Durcan'ın yaratıcı stilleriyle eserlerinde İrlanda'daki cinsiyet politikasını nasıl betimledikleri tartışılmaktadır. Bu bağlamda tezin giriş bölümünde İrlanda'da, erkek-egemen milliyetçiliğin ve Katolik inancının İrlanda kadınını sembolik, ikincil ve bastırılmış bir pozisyona itmesi ve bu geleneksel cinsiyet politikasının İrlanda şiirindeki kadın imgesini nasıl etkilediği ele alınmıştır. Buradan yola çıkarak, birinci bölümde Boland'ın seçili şiirlerinde İrlandalı kadının şiirdeki yerinin nasıl düzenlendiği ve Boland'ın kadınların bastırılmış sesleri için İrlanda şiirinde nasıl bir alan yarattığı feminist eleştiri çerçevesinde detaylıca incelenmiştir. Cixous ve Irigaray gibi Fransız feministlerin söylemlerinden yola çıkarak, Boland'ın erkek-egemen İrlanda şiirine "kadın şair" kavramını nasıl kabul ettirdiği ve şiirlerdeki "İrlanda kadını" imgesini nasıl değiştirdiği tartışılmıştır. Tezin ikinci bölümünde ise cinsiyet politikasına dair şiirsel tartışmaları Kilise ve evlilik gibi müesseselere yansıtmaktan keyif alan Durcan'ın hicivsel şiirleri Bakhtin'in karnaval ve grotesk imgesi bağlamında tartışılmış ve bu şiirlerde Durcan'ın cinsiyet rollerini tersine çevirmesi, özellikle de evlilik bağlamında, incelenmiştir. Buna ek olarak, Durcan'ın anne-babasından ve kendi başarısız evliliğinden bahsettiği otobiyografik şiirlerinde nasıl ataerkil cinsiyet rollerine karşı çıktığı sunulmaktadır. Eavan Boland ve Paul Durcan'ın seçilen şiirlerinin feminist eleştiri ve Bakhtin'in karnavalı ekseninde incelenmesi, bu şairlerin heteronormatif cinsiyet politikasına ve 1970lerden itibaren erkek-merkezli İrlanda şiirine karşı sundukları bağlamsal ve biçimsel eleştiriyi ortaya koymaktadır.

ABSTRACT

This study examines how Eavan Boland and Paul Durcan, through their inventive styles, represent gender politics regarding Irish social and literary tradition in their works by touching on numerous topics ranging from the Irish myths to Divorce Referendum. Within this context, the Introduction argues that the androcentric patriotism and Catholicism had already located Irish women into a symbolic, secondary, and repressed position, and Irish women in poetry were already determined by conventionally accepted gender politics. The first chapter examines in a detailed way how Boland, in her selected poems, rearranges Irish women's position in poetry, and how she creates enough space for the silenced Irish women within the canon. Drawing on the views of French feminists such as Cixous and Irigaray, the first chapter discusses the ways in which Boland makes the androcentric poetic convention accept the notion of "woman poet", and how she subverts the stereotyped "Irish womanhood" in poetry. In the second chapter, the distinctive burlesque poems of Durcan, who enjoys projecting gender discussions into such institutions as marriage and Church, are examined in accordance with Bakhtin's theory of carnivalesque and grotesque, and Durcan's reversal of gender roles is discussed in relation to marriage. Besides, the chapter explores to what extent Durcan goes against the predetermined gender roles in his autobiographical poems where he alludes to his own parents and his failed marriage. The detailed examination of Boland and Durcan's poetry within the light of feminist criticism and Bakhtin's carnivalesque reveals the poets' contextual and stylistic criticism towards the heteronormative gender politics as well as the androcentric Irish poetry since the 1970.