Boland's sense of an Irish identity was further diminished when in her adolescence the family moved to America, due to her father's rhrs

very conflictual relationship with the republic, starting then and continuing on in more and more violent forms until, eventually, I extricated it from myself as

In Irish cultural convention, woman's place has been colonised, subjected to restricted and marginalised interpretation and representation. Mary Holland remarked in the *Irish Times*, "The message has been unequivocal. The proper place for a woman apart from the convent is the home preferably rearing sons for Ireland."[15] This view has been confirmed in Monica McWilliams' overview of women's place in Northern Irish culture and politics: "It is undoubtedly the case that both Church and State have combined together in ensuring that the prime role of women is as mothers and housewives."[16]

The primary vehicle for such imposition has been education. The maternal terms used in an early twentieth-century, patriarchal plea for Irish history as necessary in the curriculum for establishment of national identity typifies this: "A genuine knowledge of our motherland... is the very breast-milk of education; it is the liquid food that soonest becomes assimilated into blood: it alone can impart the warmth of patriotic feeling, the enthusiasm for the motherland, without which the development of the national character on traditional lines is impossible."[17] These words, written by a clergyman in 1905, show clearly the manipulative manner in which the maternal and the national were intertwined, as were church and state, in education. The Women's Education Bureau's research revealed the gradual development of "secondary school curricula which prepared girls for competition in public examinations...the nuns responded to pressure from the Catholic middle-class by providing the required teaching."[18]

Ní Dhomhnaill recalled "an independent intellectual tradition of nuns"[19] at her boarding school, but Boland seems, in her poem "The Latin Lesson," to be speaking from personal experience of the conflict between women's desire for education and self assertion and the imposition of rules and regulations reflecting societal conventions:

> Today the Sixth Book of the Aeneid.
> An old nun calls down the corridor

Manners, girls. Where
are your manners?[20]

Through the strategy of the poem's form, the enjambement emphasises the distance from

The conventional suspicion of an educated woman and her spirited nature are clearly indicated; Ní Dhomhnaill implies through the colloquial narrative that though Elly returned from university, alerted to the possibilities of another role, she would neither be accepted nor would she be content with the domestic role, challenging the church over its societal stranglehold:

> She saw right well the cheek—
> imposing on the poor
> to pay the church beyond their means
> and leave their children hungry.

Boland emphasised the way in which such boldness is discouraged, even more in the circumstances of a would-be poet: "If you take a woman in a town which no doubt is strongly influenced by its Catholic past and its rural customs—where women were counselled patience and its silent virtues...she's already under a lesser set of permissions to explore her own gift and a greater sense of inferences that that gift is dangerous to her tradition of womanhood. These are huge pressures!"[22] Ní Dhomhnaill considers the

When I look at the little white girl-host
comelier than golden candlesticks at Mother Mary's feet
what can I tell her of the vast
void

through which she must wander alone, over my dead body?

Through a number of poems which create a joyously rebellious response, Ní Dhomhnaill humorously resists what Catherine Nash has described as "the context of the construction of femininity."[24] This was imposed "by cultural nationalists and later, Church and State, which denied women an autonomous sexuality in their idealisation of asexual motherhood."[25] In "Annunciations," the very title implies alternatives to the traditional representation of the annunciation in the biblical narrative as male imposition of responsibility on woman. Ní Dhomhnaill's perspective offers a teasingly feminist reaction to the subsequent traumas in the human world:

he went away
and perhaps forgot
what grew from his loins—

two thousand years
of smoke and fire[26]

The poet goes on to suggest feminine solidarity and collusion with the character of Mary, in the positing of a radically alternative scenario, known only to women:

...a man came to you
in the darkness alone,
his feet bare, his teeth white
and roguery swelling in his eyes.

This daring blasphemy is a directly subversive challenge to the colonisation, by the Irish establishment, of women's sexuality and place in society. Ní Dhomhnaill rebutts just such

A colonised people's identity is often denied in the suppression of its history. Where Irish women's experience has been marginalised they restore its significance, resisting dual colonialism through imaginative recreation as in "Medb Speaks" and a range of poems in Boland's *Outside History*. Characteristically, Ní Dhomhnaill expresses this intention in terms of land and folklore, "Lots of women's poetry has so much to reclaim: there's so much psychic land, a whole continent, a whole Atlantis under the water to reclaim."[33] Boland, however, rebels against the traditional historical assumption that the mundane and the domestic are insignificant: "the experience of the silent and the futile and the absurd and the pointless—at least on the surface—routines and rigours of lives. I think we have to retain them as a theme..."[34]

Thus a treasured item such as "The Shadow Doll," a model of a bride's wedding dress, "survives its occasion" but still,

> Under glass, under wraps, it stays
> even now, after all, discreet about
> visits, fevers, quickenings and lusts...[35]

It is the particular achievement of contemporary Irish women poets to unfold these wraps as their matriarchal forebears could not, to recapture the story which 10.3(c)1.1oytl cordB(r)11u0u -0.009(e) w

the words
that make a rhythm of the crime...

I am the woman
in the gansy-coat
on board the 'Mary Belle,'
in the huddling cold,

holding her half-dead baby to her
as the wind shifts East
and North over the dirty
water of the wharf

mingling the immigrant
guttural with the vowels
of homesickness...[40]

The short-line

surreptitiously one-sided, “The proposals that happen under the surface to make a canon—that are subterranean and invisible—have been radically exclusive.”[45] Another poet, Derek Mahon, at university with Boland, has admitted, “I now realise she was struggling to assert herself in what she correctly perceived to be a male-dominated literary culture.”[46] In Boland’s poem “Athene’s Song,” written at this time and published in her first collection, she identifies with the silence of those whose history she later validated, in that her talent was unrecognised, her voice marginalised, “lost and mute.” The traditional form of the poem with its neat stanzas and regular rhyme is in considerable contrast to experiments in later volumes which reflect Boland’s greater confidence, yet even here there is the suggestion of something powerful and significant merely biding its time, resisting lack of acknowledgement, “hold[ing] its own:”

nation...intersects with a specific poetic inheritance...that inheritance, in turn, cuts across me as a woman and a poet."[50]

Ní Dhomhnaill recalls similar influences in different circumstances: "I wrote [poems] in English, because Irish had no real intellectual credibility in a modern sense.…"[51] She remembers the inspiration for the beginnings of her undermining and subverting this denial of credibility: "I had been writing Irish poems in English and in mid-poem I switched to Irish and it was much better. One of the poems won an *Irish Times* prize...my Irish teacher suggested I should go to the Cumann Merriman Winter School. Máire Mhac an tSaoi and Cáitlín Maude were there...a great actress, singer and poet, who was in her twenties and real, live, *now*."[52] The liveliness and contemporaneity Ní Dhomhnaill responded to is now a vivid quality in her own work, as Dennis O'Driscoll attests: "Ní Dhomhnaill has transformed the

domination."[60] However, Ní Dhomhnaill has a further layer of suppression and domination to resist, in a desire for reconnection with the verve and joyousness of the Irish language in its living, active form. She feels the revivalists tended to have a purist approach which stultified the energy of Irish; she remembers her grandfather and a friend, "spoke only Irish in their respective households and their wives had no Irish to begin with...this form of revivalist Irish was practised over the backs of silenced women and children.…It's a dead thing, it's cruel and it's misogynist."[61] The most positive response to this colonialist exclusion seems to be Ní Dhomhnaill's appropriation of the language, using it to express women's needs and concerns, to reject the "realm of the oblique and unspoken" and to assume a right to her literary place and poetic authority.

Meaney has remarked that, "The use of Irish by a woman poet to write in ways which challenge the basic assumptions and myths of patriarchy is an attempt to wrest authority, not only from patriarchy and misogynist myth but from that formulation of national identity to which the Irish language and the silence of women were fundamental."[62] With her own customary energy and vigour, Ní Dhomhnaill says, "One of the things that causes me to get up in the morning is the desire to take Irish back from that grey-faced Irish-revivalist male preserve. I'll be damned if I'll let them monopolise the language!"[63] Her particular achievement is to have recovered the language from "the reductionist values that archaise and marginalise it."[64] In making her poetry more widely accessible Ní Dhomhnaill has engaged in a variety of positive and interactive collaborations with other poets, notably Michael Hartnett, Paul Muldoon and Medbh McGuckian, to have it translated. In a conversation with Medbh McGuckian, she maintained the overriding sense of energy and dynamism of her work in the terms in which she described effective translation, suggesting it "doesn't really matter if the words mean different things. The most important thing is to get the voltage that is behind the words."[65] In continuing to discuss "Toircheas 1," a pregnancy

poem, Ní Dhomhnaill touches on another significant aspect of gender and colonialism in poetic practice, that of the choice of theme and content in her work, "That is the exact voltage of these cloud galleons, who are the pregnant us, the somnolent pregnant women swimming with the current of the wind."[66] Medbh McGuckian commented on her translation of the poem as "The Ark of the Covenant," "Nuala and I and Eavan and poets of this

The self-knowledge and developing ability to assimilate separate yet organically associated channels of power is clearly at the root of the extraordinary commitment and generosity of Ní Dhomhnaill's writing: "The veritable experience of that female energy, which is not particularly goal-directed, is to do with the joy of being."[72] This "joy of being" is clearly evident in the poem "Feeding a Child," in which the richness of the intimate moment is offered to the reader

conscious of the need to have a line that would be dissonant enough not to regularise and make symmetrical experiences which lay right below the surface of poetic convention and which were going to be difficult to formalise in any sense; unspoken areas and emotional areas."[75] In this poem, rather than Virgil, the woman poet adopts, as her guide to the underworld, Sappho, who is conjured up through her complaint,

> ..."there has never"
> I said, "been a poem to an antibiotic..."[76]

Boland dramatises the need for real women, rather than idealised icons, in postcolonial Irish women's writing—for the vocalisation of the unspoken and the unspeakable:

> Depend on it, somewhere a poet is wasting
> his sweet uncluttered metres on the obvious
>
> emblem instead of the real thing....

She evokes the feminine line of poetics to take on permission, through Sappho, for establishing "that the poet is not *inventing* the value of something ordinary or unexceptional but *revealing* the value."[77]

> and down we went, again down
> until we came to rest
> beside a river in what seemed to be
> an oppressivwes1s1 o-2.3582 043 Tc -0.0006 Tw [(

baby's bottle...Those objects were visible to me. They assumed importances. They crept out of their skin and turned into something else."[78]

In "The View from Cabinteely" and "Deep Freeze," Ní Dhomhnaill also invokes domestic scenes, relating them to a wider range of reference from folklore to underpin these "importances," with her hints of "shades" and the "otherworld" and adding a vein of comic subversion:

> The suburban drone...
>
> A car backfires in the next avenue.
> The bicycle-brigade in headlong, straggling retreat.
> Smoke rising from chimneys. Those shades
> behind lace shades, cooking up a storm.
>
> …
>
> A modern Horn of Plenty...

Both Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill and Eavan Boland can take credit for contributing to changing the dominant patriarchal, colonialist ideology; to the wider cultural encouragement of the Irish woman's voice through their poetic practice; and to the continuing vocal

[29] A. Smyth, ed., *Wildish Things* (Dublin: Attic Press, 1989).
[30] Nuala Ní Dhomnaill, *Selected Poems*, 67.
[31] E. Boland, "Gods Make their Own Importance."
[32] E. Boland, "Outside History," *American Poetry Review*, March / April 1990, 35.
[33] R. Wilson and G. Somerville-Arjat, eds., *Sleeping With Monsters*, 152.
[34]