UNIVERSITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ

FINDING A VOICE WHERE THEY FOUND A VISION

Place, Time and Politics of Location in Contemporary Irish Feminist Writing

A Pro Gradu Thesis

by

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Political Science
1997

YHTEISKUNTATIETEELLINEN TIEDEKUNTA
YHTEISKUNTATIETEIDEN JA FILOSOFIAN LAITOS

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Tutkielman tarkoituksena on lukea Irlannin tasavallassa vaikuttavien neljän naisrunoilijan ja kahden feministiaktivistin tekstejä paikan ja ajan näkökulmasta. Materiaali koostuu kahdestatoista runosta ja viidestä artikkelista, joissa kirjoittajien suhde "omaan paikkaansa" korostuu merkittävällä tavalla. Nämä paikanmäärittelyt ovat sidoksissa menneeseen aikaan: teksteissä kirjoittautuu auki Irlannin poliittinen historia kuudesta eri naisnäkökulmasta. Poliittiseen historiaan luen mukaan kaikki ilmiöt, jotka politisoituvat naisten teksteissä: mm. nälänhädät, vuoden 1916 pääsiäiskapinan, naisen paikan määrittely perustuslaissa ja viimeaikaiset aborttitaistelut. Tutkielmassa siis vieraillaan menneisyyden ja tämän päivän Irlannissa, ja pohditaan naisten paikallistuneiden äänten merkitystä ulkomaalaisen lukijan näkökulmasta. Työ on ennen kaikkea politologinen lukuharjoitus, ei lingvistinen/stilistinen analyysi.

Tutkielma pyrkii vastaamaan seuraaviin kysymyksiin: 1) Millainen on irlantilaisen naiskirjoittajan suhde ympäristöönsä, omaan tilaansa, kaupunkiinsa ja maahansa? Millaisia merkityksiä paikoilla on kirjoittajille itselleen aktiivisina feministisubjekteina? 2) Millainen on näiden paikkojen aikaulottuvuus? Mitä kirjoittajat "muistavat" paikoista, joissa liikkuvat? 3) Onko ajan- ja paikanmäärittelyissä kapinaa maan nykytilaa vastaan? Pidetäänkö historiaa taakkana vai voimistavana tekijänä mahdollisessa kapinassa? Mikä on siis menneisyyden merkitys kuudelle irlantilaiselle naiselle nykypäivänä?

Tutkielma etenee kronologisesti menneisyydestä nykyhetkeen selkeyden vuoksi, vaikka itse teksteissä kronologia ei ole olennaista. Tekstien "muisti" ulottuu kauas, aina kelttiläiseen mytologiaan saakka. Osassa teksteistä ilmenee halu kirjoittaa historiaa uudelleen naisnäkökulmasta, osassa taas kielletään menneisyyden merkitys nykyminälle. Kiinnostavaa teksteissä on, kuinka "viralliset" tapahtumat ja henkilökohtainen historia vuorottelevat. Menneisyyden paikoilla, myös niillä joissa kirjoittaja itse ei ole iästään johtuen vieraillut, on siis merkitystä tämän päivän elämässä.

Yhteistä kaikille teksteille on läheinen suhde paikkaan. Läheisyys ilmenee osassa turhautumisena ja kyllästymisenä: ongelmallisimpia paikanmääreitä tuntuvat olevan koti ja talo. Toisaalta kirjoittajat tuntuvat ammentavan voimaa luonnosta ja kaupunkimaisemasta. Nämä henkilökohtaiset paikanmääreet sekoittuvat maanlaajuisiin poliittisiin kysymyksiin: tasavallan ja Pohjois-Irlannin rajan oikeutukseen, naisten asemaan Pohjois-Irlannin vankiloissa, katolisen kirkon vahvaan otteeseen maaseudun naisten elämässä. Näissä paikoissa sekoittuvat tuska, suru, kauneus ja voima.

Tekstit jakaantuvat kahteen ryhmään: toisissa teksti liikkuu paikasta toiseen ilman pysyviä lepopaikkoja, toisissa kirjoittaja rakentaa pysyvämmän suhteen yhteen maisemaan. Työssä verrataan tekstien pysyvän paikan kyseenalaistamista feministiteorioiden liikkuviin metaforiin, esimerkiksi Rosi Braidottin nomadisubjektin käsitteeseen. Suhde teorian ja ei-teoreettisten tekstien välillä ei ole saumaton, mutta kiinnostavia yhtymäkohtia löytyy.

Keskeisenä johtopäätöksenä on, ettei feminismissä ole kyse pelkästä "naiseudesta" ottamatta huomioon paikallisia konteksteja. Paikantumisen politiikka (Adrienne Rich) kumoaa kuvitelmat globaalista "naiseudesta" ja jättää tilaa kokemuksiltaan eriäville äänille. Irlannin esimerkki on tässä poikkeuksellisen valaiseva: naiset elävät saarella, jossa suhde historiaan ja kansalliseen mytologiaan on vahva, jossa on käynnissä pienimuotoinen sisällissota ja jonka suhde Britanniaan on hyvin monimutkainen. Naisia erottaa toisistaan mm. uskonto, luokka ja asuinpaikka. Feminismi on aina suhteessa kansalliseen kysymykseen, ja paikantumisen politiikka on tarpeellinen selviytymisstrategia.

Asiasanat: Irish Studies, feminist writing, politics of location, temporalisation, women's history

CONTENTS

The Singers

for M.R.

The women who were singers in the West
lived on an unforgiving coast.
I want to ask was there ever one
moment when all of it relented,
when rain and ocean and their own
sense of home were revealed to them
as one and the same?

After which
every day was still shaped by weather,
but every night their mouths filled with
Atlantic storms and clouded-over stars
and exhausted birds.

And only when the dange
was plain in the music could you know
their true measure of rejoicing in

finding a voice where they found a vision.

EAVAN BOLAND

1. INTRODUCTION

The title of the present study, *Finding a voice where they found a vision*, is the last line of an unforgettable Irish poem. It came to me in a dream a year before this version was completed. At the time, I was going to study the strategies of Irish women's organizations, and "the women who were singers in the West" (Boland 1994a:1) seemed to me an accurate portrayal of the few Irish feminist activists I knew. Since that morning, I was certain about the title and the overall theme of the study: it was going to be about Irish women who spoke from their own locations, and whose voices were inspired by their immediate surroundings. In particular, I was struck by the concept of voice: the voices of the women in Eavan Boland's *The Singers* must have been singing in my dream, so vivid the imagery of the poem appeared to me from the first reading on.

Even before the dream, I had a feeling about places. I have been to Ireland twice and both times I met people with a tremendous pride of place. The places or buildings I was taken to were not only of geographical or architectural interest, but the history of those places was explained to me more thoroughly than anywhere else I had been to, including my own country. It was lived history, discussed casually in pubs and cafés, without a hint of intellectual snobbery. Although there were arguments about the details of the "story", people seemed to share a kind of broad common narrative about their past on their small island. I was impressed by their stories, as I could not enter the story -telling competition with my Kalevala stories, or with stories of my ancestors in the Finnish civil war. The problem was not the language but the simple fact that I was not accustomed to discussing history at all. The history I had been taught at school was not living in any sense, and my disillusion with the dominant discourse about the past got even deeper after realizing how little it had to do with women and other majorities. Facing those facts was frustrating in the beginning but gradually it was compensated by curiosity about the missing people.

During my years at university, Ireland came to my curriculum in the first year and feminism in the fourth year. The Thesis is a combination of my two

passions, written for two audiences at the departments of Political Science and English. The combination seems almost too personal and cross-disciplinary — it would indeed be easier to write about a more distant topic and for one audience. A critical reader may even find this piece of writing too well-designed for the author's own interests. The author, on the other hand, after a long process, feels that the topic has given her a new design and taken her to some place else than was planned. The texts in the present data, which came to me one by one over a longer period of time, took hold of me and taught me something about history. The actual process was a highly contingent event after all.

From the strategies of women's organisations I started moving towards namings of "place" in the poems and articles by Irish feminist writers. The dream initiated the movement: it made me read again the texts which I had initially enjoyed as breaks from the more "serious" material. It seemed sufficient to concentrate on the places only, until my supervisor kindly showed me that the places I was writing about were necessarily places in time and memory. The temporal dimension was already there, embedded in those namings of "place", and it seemed artificial to ignore it after this realization. Therefore, the theoretical framework of this paper is quite metatheoretical: it is built around place (or location) and time. In the next chapter, I will outline the questions asked from the data, and give a short report from the theoretical point of view.

In brief, the present study is about places-in-time in twenty texts written by six Irish feminist writers. Common to them all is a willingness to reveal their relationship to the past and to the places in which they are living at the time of writing. There are many contexts in the present data, but the common setting is a conservative Catholic state, where some of the most aggressive political discussions during the last twenty-five years have been carried out on two themes: women's bodily self-determination and the status of the family. People are actively involved in these debates because the rights of the individual are explicitly defined in the Constitution, and every change in it will be made only after a constitutional referendum. Therefore, the role of the Constitution in Ireland is more central than in many other European countries, including my own, and in the present study, some attention will be paid to its history and the

values it embodies. Although the present data does not challenge the Constitution directly, it does so successfully in a more indirect manner by rebelling against one-dimensional images of women and giving the women figures in the texts, either historical or contemporary, a sound voice. If there is a mute Woman in the Constitution and other historical documents which have affected Irish women's lives, the purpose of the writers of the present data is to break her image down and give the audience a variety of images which do not remain as mere emblems.

Furthermore, all the women have been raised as Catholics and they are currently living in the Republic of Ireland. They were born in the 1940's and 1950's: the age difference between the eldest and the youngest writer is fifteen years. In broad terms, they can thus be called a generation. That is what all the texts have in common. The main objective of the present study, however, is to show in what aspects the texts differ from one another. The present data is sufficiently multivocal for that purpose, but, unfortunately, for an average Finnish reader the discussion may sometimes seem too heavy. With such a statistical nobody in mind, I have tried to give him or her a contextual reading of the places in the texts. Therefore, the analysis consists of a body of "extra" information about the political history of Ireland.

The data consists of twelve poems and eight non-fictional prose texts. As the present study is not a stylistic analysis, prose and poetry are not exclusive categories here. As we shall see, the prose texts contain many poetic elements, whereas the poems do not constitute a homogeneous entity — it would be even less so from a stylistic viewpoint. There are other more interesting divisions to be considered, for example, between the autobiographical and the less personal texts, and between the interests of "the womb" and "the border". Although the writers' geographical location is on the southern side of the border, none of the writers totally ignore the issues of the North in their texts. As an observer of their texts, I cannot ignore the South/North dimension in the present study either. However, because of my scattered knowledge of the problems of the North, the emphasis in the present study will be on the places which cover the current area of the Republic.

The temporal scope of the texts' origins is sixteen years. Four texts were written in the 1980's, fourteen in the first half of the 1990's, and the latest two were saved from the Internet in 1996. Much has happened in Ireland since the writing of the first text in 1980, and still, it seems that the problems which Nell McCafferty first takes up in the early texts of the present data are almost exactly the same problems from which we have heard in the 1990's: reproduction and "choice", the status of the family in the Republic, the position of female Northern political prisoners, for example. My purpose in the present study is not to represent Ireland, an island which has highly vocal and active feminist citizens, as a wax museum of crimes against its "womanhood". However, despite Irish feminists' activism, there is a conservative affiliation between the leading political party, Fianna Fàil and the Catholic Church in the Republic, and their bonding does not usually result in the promotion of women's rights, not at least from a secular feminist point of view. Ireland is not the only European country where women's rights have been marginalised, but the peculiar combination of nationalism and Catholicism results in a situation which may seem unacceptable for a secularized, unpatriotic Protestant-raised woman in Northern Europe.

Apart from my personal motivation, there are many external reasons why the present study should be carried out. The most obvious reason is that Irish women's writing is a relatively unfamiliar phenomenon in Finland. To my present knowledge, this is the first thesis of its kind in my country. Furthermore, only a few writers' titles are available in Finnish libraries. Contemporary novelists such as Edna O'Brien, Maeve Binchy and Emma Donoghue may be familiar to some readers, but I assume that in the fields of poetry or non-fictional prose not many readers are able to name a single woman writer. Therefore, the external goal of the present study is to promote and increase an understanding of Irish women's writing, more specifically poetry and non-fictional prose, in Finland. More specifically, due to the subversiveness of the present data, I will call it feminist writing.

Another reason why the present study seems worthwhile is that women's writing tends to become marginalised inside Ireland, too. For example, in 1992,

The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing, a "comprehensive" compilation of all significant Irish literary texts from the early Celtic scripts to contemporary writing was published in three volumes. In particular, the enterprise was supposed to increase a mutual understanding of the diversity of cultures, North and South, inside a small island. (Hogan 1996, Smyth 1995b.) However, the editors forgot one point: there were no texts by women in the anthology. Later on, they apologized their "mistake" and ignorance, and promised to make a fourth volume consisting of texts by women only. Ailbhe Smyth (1995b:199), one of the writers of the present data, is insulted by the message: "if women figure in 'Irish culture' it is an addendum, an erratum slip, an afterthought". This "slip" or "mistake" is, indeed, an indication of the current status of women writers on the island. Despite their international recognition, the writers of the present data find it hard to become fully integrated into the domestic literary "canon", including the Field Day canon, which is supposed to be one of the most liberal literary communities on the island. Fortunately, a position on the margins does not have to be disempowering, as the present data suggests. It can lead to more subversive discourses than the "mainstream" ones, and it can produce fresh ideas, for example, about the national question.

Finally, about the organisation of the present study. As I said before, the next chapter will be devoted to methodology and theories. Chapter 3 will be a short biographical introduction to the writers of the present data. The analysis of the data is divided into two chapters: chapter 4 is a historical reading, consisting of eight central themes inside the present data, and in chapter 5, the texts' strategies for the future will be revealed, based on the insight given in the previous chapter. In other words, chapter 4 will concentrate on the meanings of the past in the present of the texts, and in chapter 5, the prospects for the future in that same present will be discussed. Chapter 6 concludes the "results" of the present study, and I will try to take some distance from the data there to evaluate the "results" from a theoretical point of view. The thesis ends in a small epilogue, the meaning of which will be revealed to the reader in the course of the analysis.

A few reading instructions may still be useful before the story begins. First of all, *italics* are a sign of deviation from the main text. In shorter doses, they signify an echo of another voice. In longer doses (as whole paragraphs separated from the main text), they are my own experimental regards for those who believe in politics of location.

Second, and this is the most important piece of advice: do not forget the element of voice while reading this. In Ireland, one of the favourite past-times of poetry readers is to attend readings, which are often half-party. Irish women's poetry is an oral, living tradition, "visible, audible, exuberant", states the literary critic Lia Mills (1995:82). Six women, out of which four are experienced performers as well as poets, are speaking through the present discussion. In particular, the poems, making the majority of the data, need to be read aloud if one wants to hear the voices. The voices cannot be only read, they must be heard, and there are no poetry tapes included in Appendix 1, only the poems in the written form. I suggest that the poems be read, silently or aloud, as whole texts before going too far into the analysis part (chapters 4 and 5). It is the only way to avoid the violence done to the poems by chopping them up into analysable pieces.

In Appendix 2, there is a dateline of the events mentioned in the text for those who find themselves lost in the course of the story. A simple chronology, it may still be useful to get one's facts straight.

In Appendix 3, there is a map of Ireland for the spatially oriented reader, or for a reader who wants to improve his/ her knowledge of Irish geography. All the cities, towns and villages mentioned in this work should be found on that map; however, it is not as crucial to consult it as it is to read the poems.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

In this chapter, I will be looking for a theoretical framework for the analysis of the data. First, I will shortly go through the research process and explain how the texts have been read. Second, I will present the spatio- temporal concepts used in the analysis of the texts: the politics of location (Adrienne Rich) and the concept pair space of experience and horizon of expectation (Reinhart Koselleck). Third, the earlier works done on the theme of Irish women and place will be introduced to the reader. Finally, there will be more conceptual clarifications to help you get started with the analysis of the data. The actual theoretical discussion will be left to the last chapter, as it does not seem meaningful to weigh the theories and concepts used before exploring the data.

2.1 The research process

In this chapter, some aspects of the research process will be discussed. It has a lot to do with methodology, although the present study lacks a single method, at least if a method is understood as a pre-fixed approach applicable to certain "type" of data. There was no package solution for analysing the unique texts in front of me: it only seemed reasonable to read them and write about them. If the present study should be stamped somehow, it may be called hermeneutic (in the simple sense of the hermeneutic circle towards "understanding" the data) and interdisciplinary (consisting of at least approaches from women's studies, politology, history and the study of literature). In other words, it is an exercise of interpretation and argumentation, an attempt to make different voices speak to each other. It has been carried out in a long hermeneutic process, and the main aim of my reading is understanding Irish feminist writing. Therefore, it seems more fruitful to describe the process itself instead of looking out for a single method which does not exist.

The topic took the longest time to prepare. I went to Ireland in the autumn of 1995 to look for it, and came back with books and inspiration. Back in

Finland, I had to come in terms of what was possible for me to do with the Finnish resources — active participation in the Irish feminist "scene" would have been an ideal way to do research but it was not economically realizable at this stage. Fortunately, a wide range of literature on Irish history and culture was found in the Finnish libraries, and more material was available in the Internet. I also obtained a lot of material directly from my Irish contacts.[1] The deeper I got into the pile of books and articles, the more I became interested in "the national question" and it seemed that Irish feminism could not be discussed without taking the general political history of the island into account. Or, at least, from the distance and as a Finnish student of Politics, the connections of feminism and Irish political history turned out to be the most interesting puzzle for me to solve.

Ailbhe Smyth (1995:41) speaks of her country as a dangerous "bogland" and warns everyone treading on it from sinking too deep into it. I have had this feeling too many times: being too deep "down" in Irish issues to see what is relevant. In order to survive, I had to make *pitkospuut,* a kind of wooden path built on top of a bog to make the journey shorter. I could not decide myself what the relevant historical questions would be for Irish feminists in the 1990's; I had to let them tell me what they found important. The choice of writers was, however, solely mine, and I chose what impressed me most from the limited amount of material I had obtained. Four poets' and two essayists' writings rang the bell: these six voices were talking about their place and its rootedness to the past. Out of their writings, I had to make a choice: which texts would reflect the relationship between feminism and "the national question" best?

I chose twenty texts, twelve poems and eight articles. What if I had chosen different ones? The portrayal would have been different if I had favoured other writings by the same authors: what legitimates my choice here? There is no simple answer to that question, and the responsibility of choice was heavy on my shoulders until I realized: this is a textual universe which I alone have

[1] In a Finnish Master's thesis, formal acknowledgments are considered inappropriate. However, I would like to thank Ailbhe Smyth and WERRC, Attic Press, Irish Countrywomen's Association, The National Women's Council of Ireland and Poetry Ireland for answering my questions and sending me a part of the core material of the present study. Without their help, the study would not have been possible.

established, and the texts have to be discussed as separate entities from the writers' whole production, let alone Irish feminism. Therefore, my strategy in the analysis is to give each text individual attention, and to compare the elements found in each text to other texts, not the style of writer A to the style of writer B.

Some of the texts were with me from day one, some of them were found only a few months before writing the final version of the thesis. The data was not collected systematically in the first phase of the process but some texts were actually included in the data after reading the theories and the background material. First, the indecisiveness about the final contents of the data worried me: it seemed dangerous to add in a new text or to omit another, but at the final stages of the process I saw it in a different light. In fact, it seems now more dangerous in a study such as this one to have a fixed data before studying the background of the phenomena because the chosen texts may then appear impossible to discuss in a single paper. I had to limit the scope of discussion little by little, and some omissions made were simply because some texts seemed too different thematically to be discussed in the same paper with the others. The planned theme, first outlined as women, place and history, modified the data, but it also happened that the data modified the details of the theme. The circular movement of reading and writing appeared to be the only realizable strategy: a linear movement from one stage to another seemed artificial in my case.

Modifications followed one another. Finally, there was a question, the kind of research question which should be asked before collecting the data, according to some manuals (see e.g. Sajavaara 1994:9): what kind of a relationship do these authors build between their place of enunciation and their Irish past in the chosen texts? Or further, what aspects of the place they live in do they emphasize, and even more important, what do they leave unsaid? The latter question is sometimes impossible to answer because of the endless possibilities of what could have been said, but comparisons will be made between the texts to give a partial answer. The outcome is an intertextual enterprise: the texts gave me a list of things I should take into account.

What she said was what she didn't say, or did she? When one was silent, the other one shouted it out. When one just implied, the other one gave a straight-forward account of how things are and were on her island. There are so many Irelands and so many other places. So many pasts, so many versions of history. Most of them agreed on one thing; their places need change, but some of them sang beautiful songs, full of love to their country. How am I to compile this all?

The texts were in front of me, first one by one, and I had to start reading them more analytically. In the poems, there were many details I did not understand first. In the articles, there were multiple layers of meaning, and some of them would obviously be beyond my understanding as a foreigner. However, this first stage of analysis was the most enjoyable one. There were so many small things to be discovered. In fact, these details were the names and concepts I would have understood automatically if I had been Irish. The microscopic reading was full of surprises: the details which I had been wondering about for months just appeared in books I had initially judged irrelevant. In the analysis part of the present study, I will faithfully report some of those details for my Finnish readership. However, a full account of the people and events behind the texts would be painstaking for the purposes of the present study. The general strategy will be that the "off-paths" from the actual theme will be referred to in notes.

The politics of choice extended to the choice of background material. First, I did not want to read anything that was not written by feminists, or at least by women. I thought it inappropriate to refer too much to books written by male historians because of my disillusion with history-in-general (see Introduction). My biased view of Irish history-in-general was enhanced by some books in which women were only mentioned in the footnotes or as some major politicians' wives (see e.g. Moody and Martin 1994 for a malestream version of Irish history). However, the feminist sources could not answer all my questions because of the mere scarcity of them. I ended up reading many general history books despite the fact that women were not equally represented in them. Those books gave me only partial answers: special editorial policies had to be made in

every reading, and the information about women's activities at the time which the book concerned had to be mentally "glued" in the story. Fortunately, I was equipped with enough scepticism not to believe what the history textbooks suggested: that in the past, Irish women only counted as angels of the hearth. The feminist historian Margaret Ward (1991:205–223) confirms the impression that I have got of the current state of history writing in Ireland: women's contributions have not been accounted in general history textbooks, and, on the other hand, women's history is written within a female ghetto, gets rarely published by major publishers, and the works written so far have been about highly specified phenomena. Obviously, very few of those publications ever reach Finland.

At the second stage of reading, the texts had to be brought "together". The questions asked at this stage were methodological *per se,* as they lineated the structure and the extent of cross-reference and comparison in the present study. The "method" at this stage limited the scope of discussion. I asked, for example: What kind of affinities and differences could be found between those various namings of place? Would it be possible to group some of the texts under the same heading, or would it be wiser to discuss each text separately? Are there similarities in the writers' concepts of time: do some writers relate to their past in a similar way, or do they all have different versions of history? At this stage, after having survived the reading of the secondary material, the data itself resembled a bogland. Of course, each writer had a different approach to time and place, but what was even more interesting — and puzzling — was that there were ambiguities between the texts of the same writer, and even inside an individual text. In the present study, it would seem fatal to "purify" the data from ambiguities and discuss only the clearer points. Instead, I will try to give room to the ambiguities and discuss them as far as possible.

My method of reading the texts is probably easier to grasp by explicating what I am not doing. This work is not a linguistic analysis, neither is it a piece of literary criticism. With my supervisor Kari Palonen's formulations about "reading the political" (1988:23–24; 1993:14–15) in mind, I call it a politological reading exercise; and the aim of my politological activity is to bring out possible

unexpected meanings within the texts. In this exercise, both the texts and their interpretations will be conceived as acts, and the writers and readers as political actors. Every text is a wilful, planned expression from the writer's part, including the texts in the present data and the present study. An interpreter of texts, according to Palonen (1988:66), has to know the context thoroughly but at the same time it is possible to re-contextualise the texts and dig out new political meanings in them. If the text is a map, it is important to pay attention to the principles according to which the map was originally drawn. This leads the interpreter away from "simple literacy" towards reading "differently". (Palonen 1993:15.) At the end of chapter 2 and in chapter 6, there will be more discussion of the definition of "the political" and, in particular, about the political content of the present data.

Occasional attention will be paid to the writers' language and style: these aspects cannot be totally omitted because they often are an integral part of the content of the message. However, I will not chop up the sentences into fragments and study each word separately, nor will I take a detached role of a literary critic whose primary aim is to find out what is wrong with the text. On the contrary, I will remain "inside" the textual world and try to follow the writer's footsteps as far as possible. I am using my imagination and playing the game of *as if*: as if I were a private detective, or the writer's ghost. In a sense, this strategy leads to re-writing the original texts. But are not interpretations always just rewritings of the original version?

A final comment about the emotional side of reading the texts seems necessary. I am fortunate to have chosen the kind of data which still passionates me. However tiring the other aspects of research may have seemed, the original texts have been the "heart" of the process. I refuse to read the texts without this emotional input: it would kill the life of the data. I am still moved by "the women who were singers in the West" and "the woman /in a gansy-coat /on the board of 'Mary Belle' " (Boland 1994a:1, 1994b:376).

2.2 Politics of location and historical specificity

The present study operates on two main axes of human experience: place and time. In the next two chapters, a theoretical framework will be given to the forthcoming analysis. In this chapter, I will explain the meanings of the concepts "politics of location" and "naming of place" in the present study. My intention is to keep the discussion as simple as possible here, and to continue the theoretical discussion in chapter 6.

Adrienne Rich (1986:210–216) uses the concept "politics of location" as a guideline for feminist politics. A politics of location basically means that no- one just "happens" to be a member of a certain community but that this membership entails a certain world-view, which cannot be thrown away overnight. It also means that there are no pure ideas but that all ideas are located in the context of everyday life. Rich started thinking about her location as a member of the women's movement in the United States, and wanted to challenge its obvious white, middle class, educated bias. She started from her own experience, and realized that her location in the world is political in content.

Rich's realization leads to considering the body as everyone's closest location, and even that body has always more than one identity. Furthermore, for Rich, the body is always *my* body, the white Jewish lesbian middle-aged body in her case in the United States in the 1980's. *My body* is a strikingly particular location, and to be able to speak from that location, contends Rich, one cannot begin a sentence by saying "Women have always been oppressed". One must always ask who "women" are and who "we" are. By asking this question, a feminist writer, fortunately or unfortunately, cannot create a myth of global sisterhood based on common experiences as "women".

According to Rich (ibid:215–6), a feminist exercise of politics of location begins with the body and the material world, but not merely as an understanding of one's body parts and bodily pleasures; a politics of location also means acknowledging the places the body has taken its owner, and the places it has not let her go. In other words, it is impossible to speak from no particular point of view, and a point of view is always a place on the map. For most people, the

most influential place is the place of birth. Rich (ibid:212) believes that women cannot ignore the influence of the country in which they were born, even if nation-states are losing their grip on their citizens. To say, in the words of Virginia Woolf "as a woman I have no country, my country is the whole world"[2] (quoted in Rich 1986:211, originally in Woolf 1938) is an illusion, and a potentially dangerous one because it disguises the particularities of one's speaking position under a "global" discourse.

Rich's formulation is also helpful considering temporalization because she emphasizes that the place on the map is also a historical place (ibid:212). Our experiences are rooted in the traditions of that place, and this historical location has to be explored before one can speak about "women" or "the world" or "the women of the world". Coming in terms with one's location, contends Rich (ibid:219), means naming the place from which one is coming from. The more specific the naming, the less credible do all "global" generalisations about the exploitation of women become. In a surprisingly simple manner, Rich succeeds in combining the aspects of time and place in her notes toward the politics of location. Therefore, I consider her ideas as the theoretical core of the present study.

Contemporary geographers, such as Neil Smith and Cindi Katz (1993:77), give recognition to Rich's formulation, as it destabilizes the fixity of both social and geographical location without, however, taking a stance of "formless relativism". Smith and Katz contend that Rich does not take space for granted; for her, it is not an already existing absolute space onto which political locations are projected. By exercising politics of location, it is possible to start using more reflexive spatial metaphors, to examine the silences in them and to increase our understanding of space and location.

The present study is not, however, a theoretical study on the dimensions of space. Smith and Katz (1993:67–8) warn social scientists of an

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[2] Woolf's thesis originally appears in *Three Guineas*, a novel published on the eve of WWII. Most criticism against Woolf is directed at this particular novel, in which she dreams about the possibility of global sisterhood against militarization. This stance does not appear in all her texts, not at least in *The Room of One's Own*, in which her ideas of women's personal self-fulfillment seem more modern and individualistic than the idea of women as citizens of the world.

unproblematized usage of spatial metaphors, and advise them to at least give the reader translation rules about how their metaphors should be approached. As a reseacher of other people's spatial metaphors, the best I can do is to keep my own concepts simple. It is impossible to form translation rules for other people's texts, as all writers of the present data certainly conceive space differently. Consequently, from a geographist's point of view, the present study does not fulfill the criteria for a critical work on space. It is more about places, spots on the map of Ireland where the writers are located.

In the analysis part, an extract of the data will often be called a "naming of place". It is not an elaborate theoretical concept but a basic term for the kind of exercise Rich recommends feminists to take. The data consists of fragments in which women give names to their own place in the present or to a place in the past. I understand an individual writer's, or text's, politics of location consisting of various namings of place. Confusion between these two concepts (one "macro" and the other "micro") should not be harmful for understanding the analysis. A favourite location gets many names.

In the present data, it is possible to find multiple places and locations, some more historically specified, and some more concentrated in the present. With Rich's critique of global sisterhood in mind, I will ask the present data what kind of strategies the writers' individual politics of location become and if these strategies explode universalizations of "Irish womanhood". Caren Kaplan (1994:138) elaborates Rich's formulations and argues that the usefulness of politics of location depends on its user. If one writes about space, place or position without historical specificity, the whole term may become its own reification, an abstraction or a universalization. On the other hand, according to Kaplan, it is possible to consider politics of location as a critical practice and take historical specificity into account. At its best, a politics of location can deconstruct standard historical periodizations and demystify unclear spatial metaphors and lead us to a better understanding of differences and similarities among women. In the case of the present study, it is my aim to use politics of location as a critical tool. In addition to studying Irish women writers' locations, it is also a means of locating myself as a researcher in a relationship with the

source material, and a means of analysing the several politics of location within the texts.

Rosi Braidotti (1994:237) advises her readers not to forget their own locations, despite their theoretical aspirations. As a researcher of other people's locations, I find her remark about partiality crucial for the purposes of the present study:

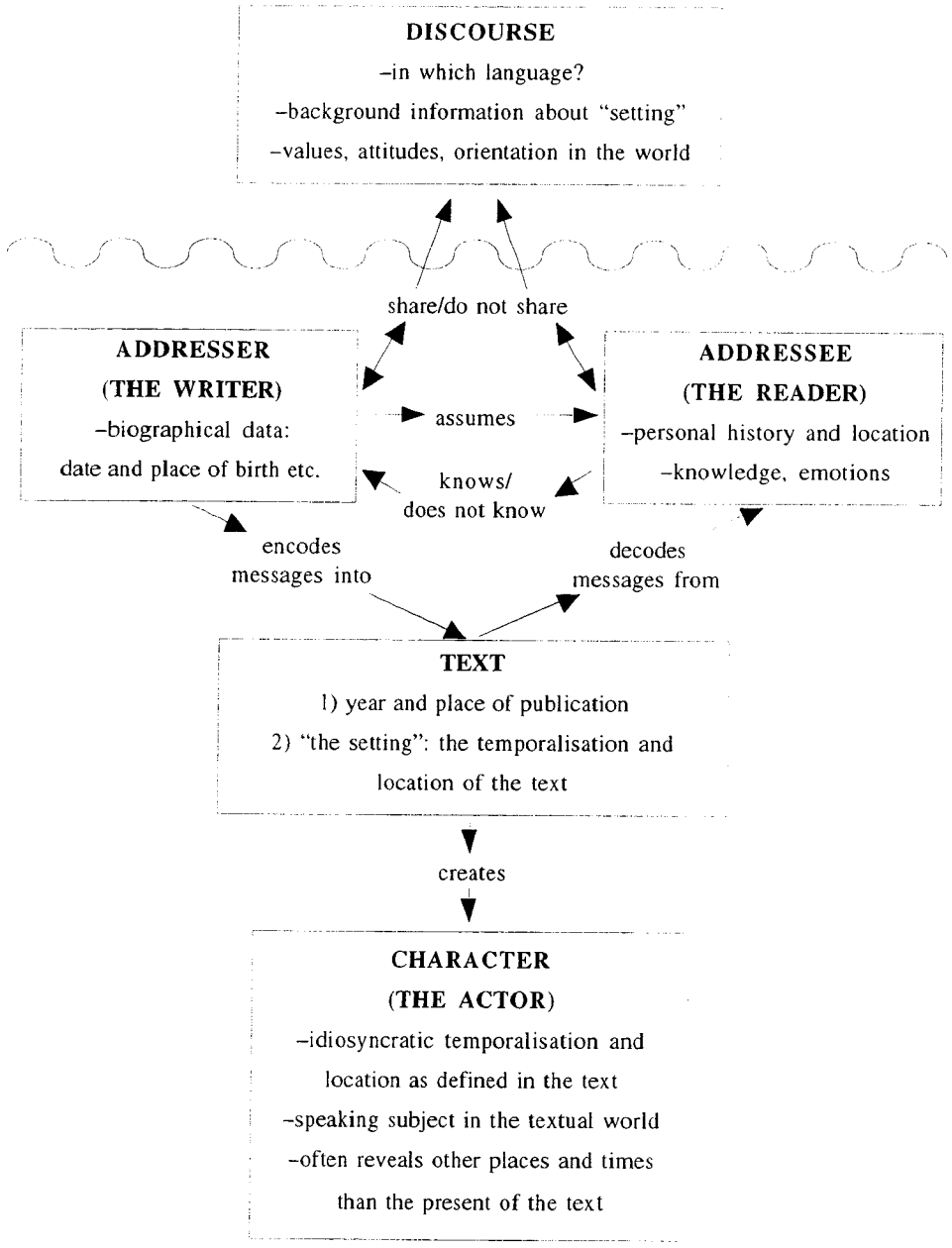
> The politics of location means that the thinking, the theoretical process, is not abstract, universalized, objective, and detached, but rather it is situated in the contingency of one's own experience, and as such it is a necessarily *partial* exercise. In other words, one's intellectual vision is not a disembodied mental activity; rather, it is closely connected to one's place of enunciations, that is where one is actually speaking from.

Braidotti's words are a reminder: thinking is always located in the contingency of experience. It would be absurd to hide one's own partiality when discussing other women's partialities. Therefore, I locate myself within my data: although I am not studying my own place, I cannot stay outside the discursive universum I have created. However, there is a fine line between honesty and self-indulgence in every piece of writing in which the writer writes him or herself "in" the text. This is a risk I am willing to take.

2.3 Temporalisation and the idea of space-time

Imagine having a text extract written by a Catholic, middle-aged Southern Irish woman in front of us. She writes about a woman who refuses to go back to "it", a small family farm in the countryside, and prefers her current life in a city, working as a prostitute in a British garrison. How to approach the text in terms of place and time? There are at least three locations within the text: that of the assumed writer, that of the actor in the present of the text (the "I" of the text) and that of the place the actor describes. An important distinction here is the distinction between the writer and the actor, which is often blurred in poetry in particular. Whereas fictional prose is easy to read as pure fiction, in poetry it is often less clear whether the actor of the poem is the writer him/herself or an imaginary actor. The relationship of their interaction is often better understood

graphically:



(Graph freely modified from Leech&Short 1980:210.)

The graph above illustrates the readers' situation. If we know enough about the background of the text and speak the same language with the writer, we might share the same discourse with him/her. This is, of course, not certain because our values and beliefs may detach us from the writer so violently that we speak about the same theme in a seemingly different language altogether. This is mostly the case in the present study: despite their common language and

nationality, women obviously do not share the same discourse with the few male politicians and writers cited in the analysis, and possibly not always with each other either. If we do not share the same discourse, it will be difficult for us to decode the text and we need to go "beyond" the text to understand it, ie. to use a dictionary or to read more about the phenomenon. A Finnish reader, for example, may need a dictionary and some consultation about the "history" of an Irish poem.

The writer always assumes an addressee to whom he or she writes but after the publication of the text it may spread to any public whatsoever, whereas the reader often knows at least the writer's basic biographical data. In other words, the writer never knows the contexts in which his or her texts will be read whereas the reader can often trace the context in which the text was written. According to a common definition, a skilled writer is able to encode one's messages so that as wide a public as possible is able to decode them in their own contexts. By decoding the text, the readers can judge the credibility of the text and to identify or unidentify with its actor. After its publication, the text starts living a life of its own: its setting and its characters may even be recycled into another text, as has happened in the present study.

If we know who the writer is, we can somehow trace the contexts in which the text was written. If the text were given to us anonymously, we would be left with the places inside the text only. Whatever the situation, unless an exact year is given, the reader's autonomous reaction when visiting a place in a text must be to ask "When?". When was the text written, and to which period of time does the writer base the actor of the text? Other questions may follow, but it seems that the question about time is an immediate question following a description of place, or space.

Every text has a distinctive temporalisation. The example above will be presented in more detail in the analysis part, among other temporalisations. In this chapter, I will try to convince the reader that place and time are interwoven dimensions: one cannot be discussed without the other. First, I will represent two metahistorical categories formulated by the German conceptual historian Reinhart Koselleck and evaluate their usefulness in the scope of the present

study. Second, I will try to compare the categories with the ideas about space and time repesented by a feminist geographer, Doreen Massey, and to establish a dialogue between Koselleck and representatives of a different theoretical school. Finally, a some kind of compromise for the theoretical background of the present study should appear.

From the outset, the categories discussed here seem antithetical to Adrienne Rich's politics of location, in which all disembodied "objective" science is brought under critical scrutiny by asking the writer where he or she stands. A categorical mind cannot understand why his or her categories are declared context-specific; and a cultural theorist with a relativist bent has no patience for "eternal" scientific metacategories. However, the categories presented here do not seem to oppress anyone: Koselleck does not deal with philosophical binary pairs such as immanence/transcendence, body/mind, or spiritual/material, -male/+male, which are constructed to deny the meaning of the less valuable part, the Other.

In his impressive essay on metahistory, Reinhart Koselleck (1989:268–270) establishes two categories "space of experience" and "horizon of expectation" to deal with human historical consciousness. He separates these categories from concepts, which are always "embodied in the sources", and therefore subject to quick changes. Instead, he considers them as categories of highest generality in the human cognition of historical time. If compared to dichotomous concept pairs in the historical discourse, such as war and peace, freedom and necessity etc., the categories of experience and expectation do not counterpose each other: they are always "together". People construct expectations for the future with prior experience in mind, and an expectation directs our rendering of certain memories from the past as important. These constructed pasts and futures never coincide but they are necessarily interrelated. Koselleck's discussion of the past and future is, in fact, concentrated on the present: he is interested in what kind of temporalisations people build in the here-and-now, which can, of course, be situated in any point in history. He calls this historical consciousness between experience and expectation "an anthropological condition".

To split hairs, Koselleck's "anthropology" is rather limited: he does not discuss any other cultures' temporalisations apart from Western civilization. Of course, by "anthropology" he means philosophical anthropology (his philosophy is rooted in the Western tradition), not pragmatic anthropology studied on the field. For the purposes of the present study, this critique of West-centredness is not, however, relevant. In the case of Japanese women's writing, for instance, it would be crucial. Furthermore, it is my belief that all human cultures have a basic sense of past, present and future, and that by modifying Koselleck's formulation it may even be used as a tool in anthropological research outside Europe, too.

Koselleck (1989:272–3) uses the category space of experience to contain the events incorporated and remembered from the past to the present. In a sense, experience goes deeper than memory: it consists of our "rational" reworking of the past as well as of "irrational" elements which may defy verbalization, in other words the unconscious. In addition, experience may include the experience of earlier generations and our institutionalized knowledge of the past, whereas memory is limited to what we can remember ourselves. Our experiences are situated in space in no particular organization: there is no continuity, only multiple layers of experiences mixed together. In my understanding of Koselleck's formulation, this seemingly chaotic space consists of a mixture of places, which become in our conscious reworking places-in-time, as we give our experience a temporal dimension — a specification of period, year, date — ourselves to organize our account of that space and to make our experience more understandable for others. In other words, in the space of experience itself, there is no linearity or chronology, only past places which sometimes overlap, sometimes totally miss each other. In that sense, the present data is exemplary to illustrate Koselleck's point.

The other dimension of the cognition of history is, according to Koselleck (ibid:272–275) the horizon of expectation. It is the future in present, something that cannot be in strict terms experienced, only anticipated. Therefore, Koselleck calls it a horizon, as the dimension which cannot yet be seen. It is the realm of hopes and fears, dreams and anxieties. Still, what is expected of the future can

never be totally disconnected of our past experience, and in this sense, the space of experience and the horizon of expectation are intertwined but distinct modes of existence in the present moment. However, what is expected rarely comes into reality, as it is directed towards what is still invisible. Even the most rational expectation is interrupted by an element of suprise, and this event creates a new experience. Surprises penetrate the horizon of expectation, and this tension between expectation and new experience creates what we call historical time, believes Koselleck.

From the viewpoint of politology, Koselleck seems to have an insight to the unpredictability of life, which makes some issues and moments "political". For instance, it can mean a change in one's views of history after meeting an influential person by surprise. The meeting creates a new experience, which is incorporated in the space of experience with earlier experiences. They will overlap and mutually influence each other, and one is evaluating the meaning of an earlier experience retrospectively. There are two political moments in this chain of events: the meeting and the realization that one's views have changed. The political potential of this realization is that it may cause further action, for example, the writing of a poem.

How should the two categories be applied into empirical research, then? Koselleck is convinced that the two categories are not "empty", that the relationship between experience and expectation can be demonstrated in both "objective" and "subjective" historical data. He discusses the various changes in European history from a static, cyclical past-oriented concept of time towards a more dynamic belief in "progress". The transition period from the end of the 18th century onwards, which Koselleck calls *Sattelzeit*, means that in central Europe, people faced more changes in their everyday lives than the earlier generations. It was no longer possible to rely on parents' or ancestors' experiences: a new generation created its own temporalisation, which was marked by an increasing acceleration of life-style. Koselleck's *Sattelzeit* is primarily a time of dramatic changes in the meanings of concepts and language, and social history serves as a background for these changes. In the scope of the present study, it is not possible to discuss the impact of the concepts that

Koselleck explores, for example, the concepts used in the French Revolution or Immanuel Kant's ideas of "progress", to the course of Irish history. However, his notions about time seem useful for the present study because of their generality and applicability.

At the end of the 18th century, approximately eighty percent of the European population lived within the cycle of nature. The peasant life was dependent on the good-will of nature and God. Expectations were built on the experiences of earlier generations, and people's most vivid hopes and fears were oriented towards the Hereafter, not towards the future in this world. (Koselleck 1989:276–7.) In Ireland, as we shall see in the analysis part, a temporal orientation of this kind still persisted in the 19th century, to the extent of a mass extinction of the farming population. The meanings attached to land contained people's hopes and fears, their horizon of expectation. This horizon is being reconstructed by the women writers of the present data. The historical time of the texts is twofold: in a text written by a contemporary writer about a woman in the 19th century she expresses 1) her own experience of Irish past and her expectations for the future on the island, 2) the constructed experience of the subject of the text and her expectations. The present data is, in Koselleck's terms, "subjective" historical data, past events re-constructed by contemporary authors, reactively, emotionally and with less information about the "facts" behind the narrative. The texts subvert History, as it is told in the academia, as an "objective", compact, chronological, rational account. And because of this, they are excellent cases of the functioning of historical time.

There are many ways to "place" the Irish transition period, in the words of the historian Tom Garvin (1987:164) "from a rural society depending mainly on subsistence agriculture/.../into a fully fledged, if modest, member of the Western group of developed and liberal-democratic nation-states." However, I do not have good access to the concepts used in Ireland in the 19th century, and this is why I cannot call the Irish period of acceleration *Sattelzeit* in Koselleck's terms. The purposes of the present study do not allow a strict conceptual analysis in the style of Koselleck. That is why I will only adopt here his "anthropological" toolbox and use it rather freely for my own purposes.

The overall impression one gets from Irish texts, earlier and contemporary, is that in the minds of individuals, the memory of the rural cyclical lifestyle and folklore is still fresh. In the present study, I will hold on to the common view that the Irish transition period towards modernity began approximately 100 years later than in central Europe. Garvin himself subscribes to this view, and he emphasizes the slowness of modernisation. The acceleration of life-style, for rural Irish people in the 19th century, did not obviously happen as dramatically as for urban French citizens after the Revolution.

This is the extent to which I "buy" Koselleck's theorizations of time and space. It is a male-stream, Western point of view, and a more experienced feminist critic would probably find more objections to its applicability to the present data. For myself, in this moment and context, it has been the clearest presentation of the complex issue of temporalisation so far. I find it useful because Koselleck brings his discussion to the level of individuals (who all "happen" to be high-prestige males): he pays attention to their mental processes, aspirations, emotions and even to the subconscious level. History written from his viewpoint should not become too distant or "objective" by any means. The other aspect that I "buy" is his dealing of time in spatial metaphors. He does not force time and space into binary pairs but tries to keep them dynamically linked to each other. I will now turn to this idea of time/space in a feminist framework.

Doreen Massey (1993:148) is a feminist geographer who also "buys" the idea of thinking about space and time together, not as binary pairs. She reveals the recent trends in cultural studies, in which researchers tend to concentrate on either space or time, and this leads to an unnecessary polarization:

> With Time are aligned History, Progress, Civilization, Science, Politics and Reason, portentous things with gravitas and capital letters. With space, on the other hand, are aligned the other poles of these concepts: stasis, ("simple") reproduction, nostalgia, emotion, aesthetics, the body. (Massey 1993:148.)

It is not a coincidence, argues Massey, that time and space have become, by some secret pact, a binary pair that is surprisingly close to the pair +male/-male in Western civilisation. If space is represented as either stasis or, conversely, as complete chaos, the portrayal resembles Simone de Beauvoir's famous thesis of

women traditionally belonging to the realm of immanence in Western philosophy, and that they should free themselves from the realm of necessity and reach towards transcendence. Fortunately, the next generation of feminists revealed that the problem is in the dichotomies themselves and that they can be superceded. (Massey 1993:151; de Beauvoir originally in 1972:97.)

As a cure for the separation of time (transcendence) and space (immanence), Massey (ibid:159) advocates a new thinking in terms of time/space. She believes that "the spatial is integral to the production of history, and thus to the possibility of politics, just as the temporal is to geography." If the political moment is considered spatially, as a kind of dislocation from the intended direction, it means that at least metaphorically, space has an openness to politics.

As an outsider to the debate with which Massey is involved, I find her arguments about the interconnectedness of space and time surprisingly close to Koselleck's formulation of the space of experience and the horizon of expectation. Both theorists argue that time is expressed spatially, and that our cognition of space/time is never such a neat chronological line as we may first find it. In fact, it is a very common-sense viewpoint, and those who have not been studying classical philosophy for too long may find it easier to grasp than those who have been blindfolded by its dichotomies. In the present study, in which temporalisation is expressed by visiting metaphorical places, it would have been easy to avoid the dichotomy space/time even without theoretical consultations, because the data itself is a proof of their interconnectedness.

If a single concept should be given for the analysis in chapter 4, I would call it a study on Irish women writers' historical consciousness. The idea that this consciousness is essentially spatial has been clarified to me by both Koselleck and Massey. It always involves a sense of "self" in a very personal setting in a certain society. The political theorist J.G.A. Pocock (1989:236) highlights this point by calling historical consciousness social and subjective in its origins. In other words, it develops of our awareness of ourselves in a social context — there is no cosmic time but an endless variation in the modes of conceiving the past. Pocock emphasizes the importance of personal experience in

its construction, and in this respect his view seems to converge with Koselleck's formulation. However, he does not base experiences in space but in time. I am again surprised by the relationship of the two dimensions, as it seems that in certain contexts they can be used almost alternatively. For example, I would not find the following quote from Pocock (1989:233) strange if its every *time* were compensated by *space:*

> Societies exist in time, and conserve images of themselves as continuously so existing. It follows that the consciousness of time acquired by the individual as a social animal is in large measure consciousness of his society's continuity and of the image of its continuity which that society possesses; and the understanding of time, and of human life as experienced in time, disseminated in a society, is an important part of that society's understanding of itself — of its structure and what legitimates it, of the modes of action which are possible to it and in it.

The fact that societies exist in space, or in time, may sound like a truism for most readers, but the example is only to demonstrate their togetherness. For instance, in the Irish context, the people's understanding of what legitimates their society is both spatial and temporal: the border dividing the North and South is both a spatial and a temporal construct. The meanings of the border are different for all Irish citizens, but the fact that it exists in space in the present is common for everyone. Whether or not it will spatially exist in the future depends on everyone's own horizon of expectation.

As we will see in chapter 4, in the contemporary Irish context, there are many contesting opinions about Irish society's continuity, and what will be possible to it and in it. I will not, however, look for clues of Irish society's "understanding of itself" but for six women's diverging consciousnesses of place and time. In the present data, a common feminist "understanding" of Irish society is the belief that the place is going through a some kind of legitimation crisis and therefore needs change so that it will be a place which also recognises women's experiences as a part of the agenda. There is no consensus on the questions by what means or how soon the change will happen, or what exactly it will bring about. Still, in the horizon of expectation of the present writers, the possibility of politics is often articulated, as opposed to the "continuity" of the present system and, rather, as a hope for new modes of action.

2.4 Consultations on earlier studies on Irish women and place

I have been inspired by three earlier works done on the theme of Irish women and place. All very different in approach, it seems reasonable to consult them all separately. Unfortunately, there were no accounts of Irish women and time available, and the temporal dimension is not explicitly problematized in the articles presented here either.

Aine O'Brien (1992) makes an excursion to the Kilmainham Gaol in West Dublin and makes a photo-essay of her experiences in the women's wing of the prison. This was the place where rebellious nationalist women were taken after the Easter Rising of 1916 and in the following years before independence. The building is kept as a museum but the women's wing is closed from the general public. Why is the women's wing closed and why is there so little information available about the women who participated in the uprisings? Most of the women were not written into history, they only left their traces in the cells. O'Brien sees a prisoner's outfit in the museum, and some scribblings on the walls of the cells. Still, she is painfully aware of the presence of bodies, resistant bodies which have been locked up as a threat for the nation.

In a similar way as the writers in the present data, O'Brien constructs a relationship with her imaginary past in her essay. When she walks in the aisles of the prison, she is making herself a meaningful past present, to the extent that it is possible to imagine the lives of the women who left next to nothing behind them. The women prisoners scribbled their initials on the walls of their cells, but from them one cannot read who they were. This must be the key problem of women's history: how to tell the stories of women who left behind them only undeciphered traces? In the prison cell, it is easy to imagine the bodily side of the experience, but the thoughts of the women are hard to track down. O'Brien's views about prison life are somehow consistent with one text among my data: the question of bodies and mausoleums will be discussed again in the analysis.

Bronwen Walter (1995) studies the lives of Irish-born women in Britain from the point of view of place and location. Her approach is more sociological than that of the present study, and the temporal dimension of the article is

confined to that of the women's childhood: she is not discussing any specific events in Irish history. However, she makes useful remarks about place:

> Place is relevant in multiple ways. It is the context within which Irishness has meaning, for example in — and within — Ireland and Britain. Place also represents Irishness, in symbolic landscapes and maps. Material lives are set within local areas, towns and regions offering particular economic and social possibilities. Places fix the local territories of women and men — at home, in the pub, on the street. Place can be seen as a position, both of individuals and groups whose identities are fractured and crisscrossed around a number of axes, but also the positionality of different ethnicities and racisms with respect to one another. (Walter 1995:35)

According to Walter, place can be considered as concrete geographical locations as well as more abstract positions of different groups in society. In the present data, both concrete and abstract places will be discussed side by side. In fact, in poetry the namings of place cannot be separated into such categories because of the multiple ways of interpreting, for example, a metaphorical image. Walter (1995:40) also problematizes the concept of national identity by asking if the only available national identity for Irish women, or for Irish-born women in Britain, is that which ignores women's experiences. In the present study, a similar kind of question — what do women write about their past from the present viewpoint? — but without the concept "identity". The next topic of discussion will reveal the reasons why it was omitted. However, the present study shares with Walter's study a willingness to reveal what has generally been unacknowledged in Irish studies: women's sense of belonging/non-belonging to a complex national heritage.

Furthermore, Walter (1995:40) comments on women's voices in Irish arts. She believes that subversive Irish artists could notably raise the emigrant women's self-esteem as positive sources of identification. She contends that despite the success of Irish female singers their songs are often written from a male point of view with limiting images of women. She finds writers' and artists' approach often more radical, though "finding a place from which to name themselves" can be difficult. I share this insight with Walter: after having listened to Irish female singers and enjoyed their voices, I still could not consider their lyrics as subversive feminist texts. In the present data, a lot of energy is spent on finding a place of enunciation. A common solution is that the author

refuses to stay on one spot, she refuses a simple identity altogether. Through the poems in particular, I have come to think about the possibility of having multiple points of situating oneself instead of one, "positive" national identity.

The third study consulted here has probably affected me more than the two previous ones. I am indebted to Catherine Nash (1993) and her deconstruction of the images of "womanhood" in Irish landscape painting and, to a lesser extent, writing. She maps the places to which the conventional portrayals of Irish landscape takes us, and finds them consistent with the early 20th century ideals of the country as a woman. With the help of this mapping, she discusses the consequences of the use of the simplified images of "womanhood" and contrasts this tendency to contemporary women artists' remapping and renaming of place. She emphasizes the fact that in Ireland, feminist namings of place are necessarily postcolonial: the colonial experience cannot be omitted from Irish people's expressions of national identity, including women. Women who have been represented as symbols of the Nation cannot simply turn their backs on those images but they have to re-name the place they inhabit first. It is before all a constructed place which allows multiple perspectives, not only the identification of "womanhood"[3] with the nation. Nash is particularly critical in her use of "identity" and believes that it can be problematized by not fixing it to innate biological and psychological structures but by drawing a shifting map with alternative spatial metaphors to essentialist usage of place.

[3] The concept "womanhood" is frequently used in Irish academic and non-academic writing both by men and women. (see eg. Sawyer 1993, for an uncritical usage) In my understanding of the concept, it refers to a stable state of things, and any influence from the outside world can be named as a threat to Irish womanhood. One cannot but ask who the women contributing to that womanhood are, and what kind of attributes are included to that construct. The concept is not used unequivocally; still, all usages implicate that it differs somehow from other womanhoods and it has to be protected. The concept can be tested by asking: Are "out" lesbians, single mothers, feminist activists or career women a threat to or a positive part of Irish womanhood?

2.5 Identity/subjectivity/self

Most readers of the present study would agree that it is about six women's "identities" on an island nation. In the everyday understanding of the concept, it seems acceptable to use it when speaking about this study. At least in Finland, "identity" is a buzzword which is freely used in everyday conversation. However, I have made a deliberate choice here to avoid the concept altogether, because of certain theoretical problems its usage would create. I am convinced that one has to be an experienced anthropologist or sociologist to be able to use the concept well. In the scope of the present study, which is done physically far away from the writers of the data, it will not be possible for me to obtain the similar kind of insight that Walter (1995) and Nash (1993) have in their studies on Irish women's identities. The concept makes me nervous and wary: I feel that I should get the permission of the writers to declare as an outsider what their "identities" are. Without personal consultation, getting involved with the "identity politics" of the present data would make my voice sound like a patronizing voice of a schoolmistress.

In fact, the problem with "identity" lies in its definitions. None of the definitions found so far have not been clear enough to fit into the present study. For example, Rosi Braidotti, whose toolbox, the nomadic subject, will be used alongside with Rich's politics of location throughout my discussion, mentions "identity" always in relation to another concept, "subjectivity":

> I am sexed female, my subjectivity is sexed female, As that *what* my "self" or my "I" is, that is a whole new question, dealing with identity. The affirmation of my subjectivity need not give a propositional content of my sense of identity: I do not have to define the signifier *woman* in order to assert it as the speaking subject of my discourse. (Braidotti 1994:186; italics original)

For Braidotti, subjectivity is the audible dimension in a person, the speaking "I", which is regulated by language. On the other hand, Braidotti's concept of identity is a "sense", a dimension where desire and the unconscious are at play. If a feminist subject in Braidotti's style wants to speak about herself as a woman, she can do so without defining what *woman* stands for in her identity. In my understanding, Braidotti's subjectivity is the kind of "identity" that we use

in our everyday speech: something that can be rather clearly expressed in language, with the labels we use in our politics of location: woman, Irish, Finnish, Catholic, Protestant, lesbian, heterosexual. On the other hand, to "identity" Braidotti assigns the individual content of those labels, which may not be clear at all and possibly cannot be defined for others. This division may be just another conceptual turn-over: what used to stand for identity is now given a separate term, subjectivity. The line between the two dimensions still remains a mystery to me: Braidotti does not state that identity escapes language altogether but speaks in broad terms about a vague "propositional content". However, this conceptual division proves one point which I totally agree with Braidotti: that "identity" seems to be such a personal concept that an observer from the outside would automatically get it wrong. Many would also object to its usage in the singular form, as one's "identity" tends to change according to — again — time and place.

A fair compensation for identity seems to be the usage of the concepts "subjectivity" and "self". I will use them side by side in the analysis part. With subjectivity I mean a consciously chosen position, which can be, for example, a feminist subjectivity. The element of voice seems to be central for subjectivity — a subject is a person who is able to speak for herself. Therefore, the definition of "subjectivity" in the present study begins from the title. Finding a voice in a certain place at a certain time could be translated into "becoming a subject". In the analysis part, there will be more discussion about Braidotti's formulation, the nomadic subject, and its possible usefulness as a category in the present data.

The concept of "self" seems to be a looser word for "identity" or "subjectivity". In my interpretation, whereas "identity" leads to analysing all the components the person in question might identify with, including the ones he or she is not able to articulate well, and whereas "subjectivity" entails conscious articulation and a loud voice from that person, "self" can be used more freely in contexts where it is not possible to get an analytic view of the analysant or where his or her voice is not particularly determined. I find "self" a less compelling construction than "identity". It seems that most people have one "self", multiple

"identities" and a potential "subjectivity", which has to be expressed with a voice.

2.6 The politicization of place and time

The last theoretical point must be made about politics. As mentioned before, the present study is a politological reading exercise, and its purpose is to highlight the political content of the data. In my discussion, nearly all variations of the stem "politics" will appear at some stage. Politics itself is not, however, an unproblematic concept but something that should be specified every time we speak about it. What is political, and for whom it is political? In particular, it seems that some issues become politicized in the course of time. It seems useful here to consult political theorists for a clarification of the concepts politics, political and politicization.

If politics is considered as prototypical human action, the two basic dimensions of human experience, place and time, seem to be the essential starting points for a study on politics. Kyösti Pekonen (1991:18) argues that issues become political when they are articulated as such in society. It is a matter of space and time: some issues are more political (ie. better articulated) than others, for example in the Republic of Ireland in the 1990's. In other words, the issues which become wiped out of public discussion are, in a sense, depoliticized: right now they are not questioned but there is a possibility that an individual or a group will start politicizing (articulating) them into the limelight. If there is no such possibility of articulation, we are living in a totalitarian system under which everyone is responsible for their words by their lives.

In feminist political theory, the thesis "the personal is political" is often a starting point in the articulation of political issues. It indicates that anything we find important in our personal lives can be brought into political discussion as meaningful issues. Tuija Parvikko (1986:98), a political theorist who has studied the Italian feminist movement in the 1960's and 1970's, asks if such a stance finally robs the political dimension of its specificity. In other words, is it

possible to call anything distinctively political after calling all issues on earth potentially political? Parvikko leaves the question unanswered, as probably would most political theorists. It is an eternal question which cannot be answered in a single study. However, it seems possible to think about any phenomenon having a potential for politicization. In fact, a common view today is that the concept "political" is empty as such, and it should always be contextualized if one wants to make it meaningful (Pekonen 1991, Palonen 1988:19).

Stop now that silly talk, can't you see that it leads nowhere? If you want to continue that ranting, could you think of going somewhere ekse? haven't you got anything better to do at this time of the day. I can't bear to listen to that anymore. Quiet NOW!

In everyday language, in particular in Finland, we tend to use a phrase "to talk politics". Such talk always leads to arguments, and in the situation there often is a person who wants to change the topic of conversation to avoid a real conflict. In our understanding, then, the political always includes at leat two contrary opinions (conversely, think about "talking politics" alone in a soundproof cell) and the possibility of conflict is always present. This pragmatic understanding of the concept is one of the best definitions I have found do far: it indicates that, as human dimensions, politics always involves action in the form of words or deeds, and that "talking" or "making" politics is always directed towards other people. In such interaction, contrary opinions are the core of our being together, the reason why we have come to a certain place at a certain time. The American political theorist Iris Marion Young (1990:234) shares this view by stating: "Politics must be understood as a relationship between strangers who do not understand one another in a subjective and immediate sense, relating across time and distance." Such a viewpoint leads to realizing that arguments can be beneficial, and out of the stragers' interaction something new may begin.

In the present data, six authors create their own political places and times and direct their political talk towards us, the readership. Consequently, I

consider the writing and receiving of their texts as prototypical political acts in which certain issues are articulated and debated. The fact that the texts have been published (and most of them much quoted) in Ireland or in Britain indicates that there has been a political community discussing their meanings even before us. The present study is directed toward a smaller audience than the original publications and still, hopefully, it is a new political space in which the contrary opinions meet again, maybe even with different implications than before.

The common-sense definition of the political has worked so far, and no objections to the claim that women should be granted a chance to "talk politics" should appear. The definition is universal, and a gendered dimension does not seem necessary at the first hand. However, a further look at our own experiences ("the personal") should indicate why gendered definitions of the political are still needed. It is the question "political for whom?", and my belief is that in most European countries today, the "official" political issues, discussed in the national and multinational decisionmaking bodies, are defined as such by a male majority or by standards set by men. In such a narrow political context, articulation of gender injustice are acutely needed. Another opinion for those tired of, or indifferent to, the State machinery is to create another realm in which other issues may become political.

Iris Marion Young (1990:9) and another American political theorist Jane Flax (1994:125) write about active citizenship, politics and justice as related concepts. Both women express a need for a public space in which active citizens may make claims about social justice. This ethical viewpoint of politics — as claims about justice for a certain group of individuals — seems to fit a feminist agenda particularly well, if we see feminism as a movement for women's rights. In the present data, some texts are more directly about women's rights (as a group) and other texts are, rather, individual expressions of one's place. However, there seems to be a clearly political content in those individually oriented texts which do not claim anything directly, as expressions of "belonging" or "not belonging" to a certain national heritage. When Irish women write about their lives, or about the lives of the women in the past, they always name experiences which have been so far obliterated by the State, the Catholic

Church or the male-dominated genres of Irish writing, including the writing of history. There does not always need to be an explicit claim for justice: the act of writing may itself become politicized in a certain context. In the Irish context, it seems that any text honestly dealing with sexuality, or, in particular, women's bodies, is a political act because it is considered inappropriate by the Catholic Church. (The censorship legistlation has loosened remarkably during the last 30 years, which makes discussion of many such texts possible.) For example, a film about a woman's sexual pleasures would, in my understanding, still be more politicized in Ireland than it would be in Finland where nearly anything dealing with sexuality is permitted.

With the insight provided by the theorists above, a brief definition of the political content of the present data will be sufficient so far. First, politics always requires interaction. The present texts are written for a public space, consisting of the writer and her audience. In the Irish context, a public space does not even have to remain virtual: on a small island it is possible for the readers to meet their favourite writers personally in poetry readings, lectures, debates etc. However, the interaction in the present study happens in a "virtual reality" because I am not based in Ireland while writing this. Second, if politics is considered as articulation, the fact that all the texts have been published indicates that they have been considered as meaningful in their contexts. Through publication, the writers gain a voice in a larger community than their immediate surroundings. What become politicized in that community depends on the readers: a writer may say that her opinion is "political" but it will not be politicized until the audience brings that opintion into active discussion. In the present study, it is my task as the audience to underline the political issues in the data. Third, I will pay attention to the conflict dimension in the data. The present virtual community also consists of persons who do not understand each other in an immediate sense. Conflicts and misunderstandings are an essential part of politics, and therefore of every politological reading, too. If the community silences a debate or a conflict, the process is always an act of depoliticization. Finding a voice of one's own and being able to use it has, thus, always a political potential, whereas being silenced or speaking in someone else's voice means that one is

denied political subjectivity.

Where do women stand in the above definition if compared to men? Are there still countries whose legistlation assigns women to the private sphere instead of the public? For how long did women have to write under a male acronym to get their texts published? For how long have women been accused of becoming like men when they enter the Parliament? And was it your mother ot your father who asked you to stop "talking politics"? Those questions in mind, we will next start looking for politics of time and place in Irish feminist writing.

3. SIX VOICES

I have chosen six contemporary Irish feminist writers' texts as the primary material for the present study. The reason why these particular writers were chosen is simple: their texts were the most interesting ones if considered from the point of view of "place" and location. In this chapter, some aspects of the writers' lives will be introduced. The biographical data given here should help understanding the texts as expressions of feminist subjectivity.

In my interpretation of the present data, all the texts count as distinctively feminist texts. To prove my point, it seems necessary to demarcate whom I consider as a feminist. A loan from Elizabeth Meese (1986:xii) will partly prove the point: a hypothetical feminist is a woman who is "not completely possessed by man and not fully alienated from herself as woman" and who "attempts to define herself as a speaking/writing subject." In particular, I am drawing on the latter part of the definition and looking for clues of feminist subjectivity in the texts. In the present data, the word "hypothetical" is not a necessary addendum to the word "feminist", as the women themselves include the word feminism in their texts or write in openly feminist publications. As they keep naming themselves as feminists, it is not the researcher's task to find other proof for their "hypothetical" feminism. The elder half of the women have also been pioneers in the Irish women's movement since its early days in the 1960's. It would be reasonable to also define them, apart from writing and speaking subjects, as acting subjects, as they are famous for importing illegal contraceptives into the Republic of Ireland or for marching in the Civil Rights demonstration on Bloody Sunday in 1972.

However, I am not completely satisfied with Meese's definition because she does not clarify what a woman "not completely possessed by man" entails. It seems more fruitful to look for another definition which is less based on a binary pair man/woman. It is quite impossible to judge to what extent someone else is "possessed by man" and to what extent she is in balance with her "womanhood". Rosi Braidotti (1994:196) defines a feminist as a critical and a creative thinker. She looks analytically at power and domination in all

discourses, "including her own", and is a creator of "new forms of representation and definition of the female subject". Self-reflexivity is a central part of feminist thinking, as a feminist also realizes her own power as a user of linguistic signs. This double aspect of feminist praxis — critique and creativity — can be found in the works of all six women presented in this chapter. From a combination of a critique of existing structures and creating new representations of women arises a more accurate definition of an acting/ speaking/writing subject, whom Meese is looking for in her own study.

Eavan Boland was born in Dublin in 1944. She spent most of her childhood as a daughter of a diplomat in England. She was educated in London, New York and at Trinity College, Dublin. Her poetry has been published since the late 60's and she is one of the most famous Irish poets of her generation. In addition to writing poetry, she is a regular reviewer for *The Irish Times*, and an essayist on women's writing. She also works as a freelance lecturer and runs writers' workshops. (GWL 1992; Hogan 1996:162.)

Boland writes extensively about the difficulties and constraints of being an Irish woman poet. The country's specific poetic inheritance has made it hard for women to enter a creative arena, where the poem is considered as feminine and the poet as masculine. In her poetry, she attempts at making women authors instead of objects of the poem, and at paying specific attention to the details of a woman's life. (Mills 1995:73–75.)

Boland is particularly worried about the fusion of the national and the feminine. Her goal is to deconstruct nationalist, "empty" female figures in her work. This project has kept her occupied since the beginning of her career as a poet:

> As a young poet, these simplifications isolated and estranged me. They also made it clearer to me that my own discourse must be subversive. In other words, that I must be vigilant to write my own womanhood — whether it was revealed to me in the shape of a child or a woman from Achill — in such a way that I never colluded with the simplified images of woman in Irish poetry. (Boland 1989: 241)

A subversive discourse implied to young Boland, in addition to breaking down the nationalist myth of the feminine, an ethical responsibility as well. Had the

issue been merely about a national recovery programme, Boland would have let go the traces of the past. But for her, images of woman-as-nation meant more than an expression of "the national experience". When reading texts written by Irish men she found "almost a geological weakness" in Irish poetry, an ethical problem:

> *Images are not ornaments; they are truths.* When I read about Cathleen ni Houlihan ot the Old Woman of the Roads or Dark Rosaleen I felt that a necessary ethical relation was in danger of being violated over and over again; that a merely ornamental relation between imagination and image was being handed on from poet to poet, from generation to generation; was becoming *orthodox poetic practice*. It was the violation, even more than simplification, which alienated me. (Boland 1989:241–242; italics mine.)

For Boland, there is always a real historical person behind each emblem. She felt that the orthodox poetic practice was violating the experience of real women whose voices were left silent in the nationalist genre. Therefore, it is not a surprise to find poems titled such as *Outside History* in her collections. There are many variations on a theme in her poetry, but the theme seems to carry on in every piece: how can a person or an emblem who has not been granted a voice speak. Boland looks less than listens: the element of voice is apparent everywhere in her writing.

Among Boland's wide publication are collections such as *New Territory* (1967), *The War Horse* (1975), *In Her Own Image* (1980), *Night Feed* (1982), *The Journey and Other Poems* (1986), *Outside History* (1990), *In a Time of Violence* (1994) and *Object Lessons* (1995). The present study concentrates on Boland's work in the 1990's.

Mary Dorcey was born in county Dublin in 1950. She is a short story writer, a poet and an activist in the women's movement. She is a "landmark figure in modern Irish literary history" because she was among the first writers to "come out" as a lesbian. Her work is a combination of Irish, feminist and lesbian elements, and many of her poems are written from a global perspective. The personal and the political are glued together in her poems of love in a world of violence and famine. She has published one collection of short stories, *A Noise from the Woodshed* (1989) and three collections of poetry, *Kindling* (1982),

Moving into the Space Cleared by Our Mothers (1991) and *The River That Carries Me* (1995). (Hogan 1996:370.) The poems analysed in the present study are from the latest collection.

Dorcey has travelled widely, and her work has been translated into Italian, Spanish, Dutch and Japanese. It is also taught on Irish Studies and Women's Studies courses in the Anglo-American world. Dorcey is currently working as a writer-in-residence in Trinity College Dublin.

Nell McCafferty was born in Derry in 1944. Raised and educated in Northern Ireland, she has been raising the "national question" since her involvement in the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960's. She moved to Dublin in the late 60's as a journalist for the *Irish Times* and became active in the women's movement. She is internationally known as the "passionate witness" of contemporary Ireland and as a campaigner of feminist issues. (GWL 1992.)

McCafferty is best known as a journalist. Her way of describing the lives of working-class people, especially those of women, could be called Dickensian, as her insight to the "social realism" of Irish life is beyond compare. It is often through simple statements that she proves her point:

> Middle-class women might one day be equal to middle-class men. Working-class women might one day be economically equal to working-class men. Between the classes and the sexes there will still be divisions. And there'll be no liberations at all. (in Levine 1982:225.)

One of her main concerns is undoubtedly economical: she is continuously defending the have-nots, be it a man or a woman. She pinpoints at the material divisions in Irish society in a pragmatic way: by writing about the people whom she meets. Among her methods of investigative journalism is sitting in a courtroom day after day; another method is empathy. Her friend June Levine (1982:204), author of a generation story about the women's liberation movement, observes her:

> Anyone can stop her in the street and tell her their life's story and she'll stand there listening, looking up intently until the rain sends them both into a doorway or a pub. Man, woman or child, Nell emphatizes with the victim. She is the victim of victims, not because of what they ask of her, but because of what she feels.

In this sense, McCafferty's texts stand out from the others in my data. They are pieces of highly affective journalism, aimed at influencing the general public. This does not mean that her writing would be less valuable a site for discussion on place and time.

Nell McCafferty is particularly famous for her statements about the situation of Catholic political prisoners in Northern Ireland. Her vision of feminism always includes the political divisions of the island, and she believes that Southern feminists should also be concerned about the situation in the North. (McCafferty 1984:347–52.)

McCafferty's selected articles appear in two compilations, *The Best Of Nell* (1984/1993) and *Goodnight Sisters* (1987). Her other books include *The Armagh Women* (1981) and *A Woman to Blame. The Kerry Babies Case* (1985).

Máighréad Mebdh was born in Newcastle West, co. Limerick in 1959. She has lived in Belfast and is currently based in Dublin. As a professional poet she has worked since 1988. She is particularly inspired by rap music and often performs her work at various rock concerts around the country. Her aim as a poet is "to rescue poetry from over-pagination" and therefore she concentrates on sounds and performance. Apart from rap, she is also affected by traditional Irish cadences, rhythms and expression. She has also revised an interest in Irish mythology. (Mebdh 1996c.)

Mebdh has published one collection of poetry, *The Making of a Pagan* (1990). Her latest collection, *Hunger* (1996–7), is being published on the Internet, one poem per month, and she has also completed a novel. The present data is from a feminist journal and from *Hunger,* which is a commemoration for the Great Famine. *Hunger* is an attempt to combine historical data, mythology and contemporary stylistic devices in an adventure in the world of sound. (Mebdh 1996c.)

Paula Meehan was born into a large family in Dublin in 1955. After a rebellious youth which included expulsion from a convent school, she was

educated at Trinity College, Dublin and in the United States. Besides writing poetry, she teaches creative writing in schools, universities, community groups and prisons. (Hogan 1996:838–9; Ireland's Women 1994:532.)

Meehan describes people skilfully: her portraits are clear and specified. Her poet colleagues have called her poetry "cavewoman music", which indicates something about her themes. (Hogan 1996:839.) Her collections include *Return and No Blame* (1984), *Reading the Sky* (1986), *The Man Who Was Marked by Winter* (1991) and *Pillow Talk* (1994). (Hogan 1996:838–9.) The poems in the present data were found in anthologies of women's writing and in a charity CD against family violence.

Ailbhe Smyth was born in 1946. She is the Director of the Women's Education Research and Resource Centre (WERRC) at University College Dublin. She writes extensively about feminism in Ireland in various international and Irish publications, and her name is also known as an editor of many anthologies and article compilations. The present data is picked from such sources. During the recent years, she has been particularly outspoken on the complex issue of abortion, and her activism has caused her trouble in her private life. She recalls having been named as "man-hating", "political", "self-righteous", "wearisome and PC sloganizing" and "a bloody shithead", among other names. (Smyth 1995b:192–4.)

Smyth's texts are the only academic articles in the present data. However, there is a continuity between her texts and the poems because of her use of language: it is remote from a dry academic jargon and approaches at times a literary text. My interpretation of her texts written during the last ten years is that there is a clear shift from a matter-of-fact reporting towards a more personal and innovative use of language.

Smyth's writing, consisting of accurate and vivid spatial metaphors, seems to be a treasure box for a researcher of "place". In particular, she discusses the position of Irish women's studies on the international agenda. However, the limitations of the present study give only a partial account of Smyth's politics of location, the focus being on the national level. Analyses of the international

feminist context will be beyond my discussion here.

The first word that came to my mind after having read ten articles by Ailbhe Smyth is passion. The second one was commitment. In her lecture in Turku in May 1996, she talked about the difficulty of being passionate in an academic community in Ireland (Smyth 1996). She felt that her discourse was not passionate enough, and that was the only unconvincing part of the lecture: her passion, at least from the Finnish point of view, was shining in the lecture room. Her message, that women's studies should not be separated from the women's movement which originated it, seems crucial for all feminist academic communities today.

4. COMELY MAIDENS

> The Ireland which we have dreamed of would be *the home* of a people who valued material wealth only as a basis of *right living*, of a people who were satisfied with frugal comfort and devoted their leisure to the things of the spirit; a land whose *countryside* would be bright with *cosy homesteads* whose fields and villages would be joyous with the sounds of industry, with the romping of sturdy children, the contests of athletic youths, *the laughter of comely maidens*; whose firesides would be forums for the wisdom of serene old age. It would, in a word, be the home of a people living the life that God desires that *men* should live. (de Valera 1943 quoted in Lee 1989:334; italics mine.)
>
> EAMON DE VALERA

A beautiful postcard with a white cottage and an idle old man with a tweed cap sitting on a bench in front of it. Serene old age. Time seems to stand still: there is no rush anywhere except to the pub session in the evening. Folk music and poetry, things of the spirit. Landscape marked with relative poverty, but this indicates a modest way of life, not plight or starvation. A small village, intimate personal relations, big families. Three pubs and a church. The quote above brings to my mind all the cliché postcards I have sent to my friends from Ireland. On the backside of the card one can often read the brand name *Real Ireland.* Why not *right living* or *cosy homestead*? The postcard that Eamon de Valera[4] sends us in the quote above is a simple picture: a kind of home, if home should be linked with warmth, closeness and familiarity. He names a place of his own design: illusory rural Ireland.

A television advertisement with fishermen wearing Aran sweaters and discussing in Irish in a horrible rainy weather. What are they talking about? Oh yes, IBM, about computers. Then came the Internet and... And what? Nothing changed really, they are still fishing. It is really safe to tune in to the Internet age: if the Irish-speaking fishermen have done that, you can do it, too. Advertising in the 1990s seems to be using Ireland as a trendy location as opposed to the urban, technocratic way of life. Pre-modern simplicity as opposed to postmodern

4 Eamon de Valera (1882–1975) was an Irish-Spanish emigrant from America who participated in the Easter Rising of 1916 alongside with his Irish-born compatriots. Apart from one woman, Constance Markievicz, and de Valera himself, all the other leaders of the Rising got killed. De Valera escaped the execution because of his American nationality and became Taoiseach (Prime Minister) in the government of the Free State in 1932. In 1959, he "retired" and became President. His party, Fianna Fàil, founded in 1926,still dominates the Irish political scene. (Hughes 1994:59,64,80; Lee 1989:331.)

confusion. Home as opposed to alienation. Was it security that I was looking for in Ireland all these years? Probably, or almost definitely. Such a powerful message, but is there such a secure place?

Old men in postcards and advertisements. Women and *comely maidens* here. Is the place the same for men and for women? How was the place made and who made it? I can hear the echo of *the laughter of comely maidens* from de Valera's illusion but I am still unaware what they were laughing at. Were they really having fun? The analysis of the present data will start from here, *the cosy homestead*, and it will proceed towards more complex places. There is an immense gap between the simplistic places appearing in de Valera's speeches and the places described by contemporary women writers. However, illusory representations of Ireland have not vanished in the 1990's, and the Constitution written under de Valera's reign is still in use. In the present study, I will therefore occasionally contrast the present data with some early 20th centrury texts written by Irish men to demonstrate the reader what kind of documents are being challenged and how they still bother the writers of the data.

The main purpose of this reading is to discuss how Irish feminist writers relate to the places of the past from the point of view of today. In the data, the writers visit their past without a specific chronology, and it would therefore be interesting to reflect the nature of the writers' memories by not establishing a chronology in the present discussion either. Such an approach would better reflect our relationship to history, in the words of Walter Benjamin (1940:179,186), as a "tiger's leap", the kind of sudden glimpse into the past which is always constructed in the present and which disappears at the moment when we start recognizing some familiar traits in it. However, for the Finnish readers' sake it seems clearer to visit the places of the writers' memories in a chronological order because they do not share the "folk memory" of the natives.

Memory, or in Koselleck's terms, the space of experience is the basic conceptual tool in the whole analysis. In chapter 2.3, an initial account of how our experiences may be constructed was presented. As stated before, our memories are always affected by new experiences, and they are always "flawed" in some sense. What is emphasized as essential by both ordinary people and

trained historians is always a subjective and political choice, and those who try to state otherwise are often speaking in favour of historical "foundationalism", a kind of approach that is doomed to fail eventually. In my limited experience, the works by political scientists have seemed to be more sensitive to temporalisation and conceptual change than the few historical studies I have been acquainted with. Some Finnish political scientists, for example, Kia Lindroos (1993:68) and Kari Palonen (1997:61–2), are particularly interested in the idea of politicization of the past as a subversive discourse. Lindroos draws on Benjamin's works and finds in them perfect examples of a rejection of "totalitarian" models of history. Palonen finds a similar challenge in Koselleck's conceptual history, which enables us to rewrite our space of experience disregarding any foundations[5]. It is a challenge for anyone interested in a subversive "politics of the past" at a time when not many expectations for the future can be drawn from earlier experience.

In my reading of Koselleck, Benjamin and the revisions of their texts, their challenges seem to offer a human (but not humanist in the 19th century sense) approach to the past. They challenge any belief that history could be written "objectively" or "faithfully" to the original sources and leave room for an understanding of the human motives, passions and emotions behind any version of past events. Because everything we say about the past is created here and now, it always implies that something is emphasized unfairly and a great deal more is forgotten. Nostalgia and amnesia are not missing from the present data either; however, most of the texts are ambitious attempts to reveal a more complex past than the official account in the history book. Some attention will also be paid to the shifts of temporalization inside the texts; for example whether there is a change in rhythm from past to present or whether the writers' historical experience is expressed as vital in their everyday lives in the 1990's.

The organisation of the analysis is the following: In chapter 4.1, the "pre-history" of the texts will be discussed. The actual temporalisation of the texts

5 For German speakers, Koselleck's idea of history writing is expressed in a triad *aufscreiben, fortscreiben, umscreiben.* I understand this as a process in which on can learn to reject a linear narrative and move towards a more diverse understanding of time. *Umschreibung* indicates that our space of experience can be continuously rewritten, in different versions, and in these versions a politically subversive stance may appear. (in Palonen 1997:61–62.)

begins from mid-1840's, and in chapters 4.2 and 4.3 the issues of rural poverty and the emigration caused by it will be dealt with. In chapters 4.4 and 4.5, we will explore the spatio-temporal aspects of nationalist icons and women's resistance to a simple national identity. In chapter 4.6, attention will be paid to what the texts do not discuss directly (but constanly do so in a more indirect manner): the above quoted illusion of Eamon de Valera and its implications to the politics of the island and, more specifically, to the lives of women. In chapter 4.7, the temporalisation begins from the texts' references to childhood: we will discuss here the meanings of family and home in the texts. Finally, in chapter 4.8, there will be a concluding analysis of the spatio-temporal relations of the texts. Its name, *Between the womb and the border*, may already at this stage be an indicator of the major thematic divisions among the present data.

4.1 Celtic revival and Early Christian elements

> that my pagan power is dead
> it was made for Hollywood/ not for me
>
> MÁIGHRÉAD MEBDH (1993:59)

Despite a common view of Ireland as a haven of extreme Catholicism, many people consider Ireland as a pagan place, full of tales from the Celtic era with a mystic relationship to the powers of the earth. Máighréad Mebdh states in her poem *Easter 1991* that a return to paganism is a sham: a good marketing device for Hollywood filmmakers but not of central meaning for the majority of people who are trying to make a living in a poor country. She speaks of social justice and curses the Catholic Church's domination of her past, disillusioned of the stories she was told at school.

In this chapter, aspects of paganism and early Christian mythology will be discussed from the point of view of the poet and the storyteller. This is the "pre-history" of some of the texts: the earliest historical elements reach back to the Celtic era which is estimated to have begun in Ireland during the second half of the first millenium BC. The pagan Celtic culture existed on the island even after the beginning of Christianization in the fifth century AD. (Ó CÓrrain 1989:1,8.)

As some of the writers of the present data refer to both pagan and Christian elements of the past, it seems necessary to start from their intersection.

In the Ireland of the Celts, the male Druid was a poet and a lawmaker, as well as a shaman, a philosopher, a physician, a judge and a prophet in one person. He passed on the laws and tales of the community from one generation to another by chanting them in a poetic form. The Druid was, without exception, a man but above him stood the King or the Queen. There were also minor poets, the bards, who were often in training to become Druids and whose tasks were not as widespread as their masters. Both poets were, however, treated as heroes in early Irish society alongside with brave warriors. A common theme in Celtic mythology is the journey to the island of Otherworld and back by boat. The poet was considered to be travelling between this world and Otherworld in a constant in-between state. The journeys to Otherworld were presented in a riddle-like manner, and the qualities of time and space were paradoxical in them. (Sharkey 1975:6,11, Johnston 1989:122.)

Irish history is full of powerful female figures, such as the Queen Maeve, who sent his brave warrior Cuchulain to war to be killed. The position of women in Celtic society was notably different from that of modern Ireland: matrilinear descent was common practice, young women (and men) were able to annul their marriage after one year, divorce was commonplace, children were often sent to foster parents, the sexuality of the both sexes was openly celebrated and made fun of in stone carvings and statues. The Celtic culture was primarily a rural culture, in which people appreciated the rhythms of nature and worshipped rivers as the Mother Earth. Their relationship to nature was respectful and psychic. The feminisation of nature was apparent: there were more goddesses than gods. In particular, a mother goddess with three personifications was a recurrent theme in Celtic mythology. (Sharkey 1975:5–23; McCurtain 1996:lecture.)

There have been many Celtic revivals in recent history, in Ireland and elsewhere.[6] As we shall see later, Celtic influences are also visible in the present

6 In this study, I am trying to avoid an overtly "Celtic" interpretation of the texts because it is easy to get lost into the trendy Celtic mists for good. It is possible to sense a Celtic revival in the form of paganism and shamanism in the Anglo-American world in general, but it is the kind of approach that would require a separate study altogether.

data, not as faithful imitations of a mythical past, but as active reconstructions. In the poems of Máighréad Mebdh and Mary Dorcey in particular, motifs such as spirals, sheela-na-gig and Otherworld occur side by side with more recent memories. These motifs will be discussed in the forthcoming chapters 4.2, 4.7 and 5.1.

Contemporary readers may find law and poetry rather distant genres of writing, and question the approach chosen in the present study to deal with both genres "together". The emphasis will, of course, be on poetry, but in the forthcoming chapters you will also find out about the Irish constitution and its role in women's lives. I consider the writers of the data as political agents who "sing" about possible changes in Irish legislation in a similar manner as their ancient predecessors, the male Druids and bards. The writers seem to have recognised their political responsibility as well as their artistic individuality. In Irish history, there is a clear continuity from the days of the Celts to the present day: the role of the writer has never been "only" artistic but Irish writing always invokes political passions. Most revolutionaries in the beginning of the 20th century had published poems or plays (of highly varied quality) and even the Irish second-wave feminist movement started from a circle of writers.

As shown in the role of the Druids and bards, law and oral poetry were almost inseparable concepts in Celtic society. When Ireland became Christianized during the sixth and seventh century, the crusaders were unanimously replacing the Celtic oral legislation with written words of God. The historian Donnchadh Ó Corráin (1989:13) quotes an Old Irish[7] legal poem in his article on early Christian Ireland: "the law of the Church is as a sea compared with streams". The "streams" were assimilated to the "sea" in great monastery towns, such as Armagh in Nothern Ireland and Iona in Scotland, the power-

7 Old Irish was the language spoken in Ireland in the Middle Ages. It became the language of the Church, too, and reached a significant degree of sophistication in the works of poets and monks. Many important continental works were translated into Old Irish, and the level of domestic literary production was high. The monasteries were, apart from being religious and political centres, also cultural centres where Celtic and Christian traditions were amalgamated in various forms.

In comparison, Old English was the language of the first settlers from England. Many of them became assimilated into the local lifestyle, although they had a different language. Later in Irish history, the ascendants of Old English families became dispossessed in much the same way as the native Irish, which is a proof of their "domestication" and difference from later English invaders. (Ó Córrain 1989.)

centres of Ireland and Britain at the time. What is interesting in the work of the Christian jurists is that they often replaced the teachings of Old Testament with the Irish "native" laws, and therefore skilfully gained the trust of the people. The followers of the Druids were made redundant, but some poets continued as advisors in monasteries after being converted into Christianity. (Ó Corráin 1989: 13–15.)

Apparently, the relationship between law and poetry has changed fundamentally since the days of the Druids in Ireland. In the following chapters, some contemporary Irish poets' attitudes to law (or to the State) will be explored, and, to a minor extent, there will be discussion on the written Constitution of the Republic of Ireland. There is no way of comparing Celtic legal poems and modern Irish legislation in detail in the scope of this work, but the example of Celtic oral laws will help us understand the importance of poetry in more recent history. At the stage when the Irish were deprived of their own institutions, the purpose of the oral tradition changed from law-keeping to challenging the status quo, or even law-breaking. In a sense, the writers of the present data are also challenging the status quo, the laws of the State and the influence of the Church. It could be stated that poetry has not lost its function as a source of subversion in the case of the present data.

In early Christian mythology, three figures, St.Patrick, Colmcille and St.Brigid, predominate the scene. Ó hÓgáin (1986) argues that these legends took the function of the pre-Christian legends and contained similar elements with the stories of the brave Cuchulain and the triple goddess. Paganism and Christianity continued to live side by side in Irish folklore.

A variation of the figure of St. Brigid appears in the present data in Eavan Boland's *Anna Liffey*. In the poem, Boland locates herself in the city of birth, and finds the essence of the city in the river Liffey. The source of the river she finds in Kildare, a place which was once occupied by a woman:

Life, the story goes,
Was the daughter of Cannan,
And came to the plain of Kildare.
She loved the flat-labds and the ditches
And the unreachable horizon.
She asked that it be named for her.
The river took its name from the land.
The land took its name from a woman.
(Boland 1994c:41.)

In Irish folklore, contends Liam de Paor (1986:56), stories in the name of *Life* were in wide circulation since the seventh century AD. There were many variants to the story; still, the main figure, Brigid, and the place, later to be called Kildare, remained the same in each version. According to one variant, Brigid, a young Christian woman with special powers, came to a pagan place of sanctuary, liked the place and wanted to start a monastery there. She asked the local prince for a patch of land and he refused to give it to her. Brigid took off her cloak and spread it on the ground. It covered a large area and flattened the land. An area called the plain of Curragh had developed, and the prince had to promise her a tract of land. (ÓhÓgáin 1986:25–26.)

On one hand, some variants of the Brigid legend emphasize an affinity with Virgin Mary, though Brigid does not give birth to a Messiah. On the other hand, there are parallelisms to the story of St.Lucy whose legend is also known in Scandinavia: Brigid, too, is celebrated as the patron saint of light and eyesight. Both Lucy and Brigid were told to have ripped of their eyes to scare away an unwanted suitor, and the eyes were restored by a miracle. (ÓhÓgain 1986:19–23.) If compared to the original heroism of the early versions of the legend, Boland's account of what happened in Kildare is simplified. She does not mention a miracle, only a relationship between an active woman and her favourite place. The place is named after *Life* but Boland does not imply that she was a saint. She de-Christianizes the story in the same manner as the early Christian monks Christianized Celtic mythology and uses it for her own purposes. The beauty of the place remains, and to this place Boland is trying to locate herself. The name of the place is female; it seems to be the only thing that matters to her in the legend of Brigid. She does not call the woman Brigid but *Life* (the name of the story), or *Anna Liffey* (the name of the river), and she

compares her own course of life to the course of the river. The fluid metaphors of *Anna Liffey* will be examined later in the present study, particularly in chapters 4.5, 5 and 6.

If we think about time and memory, the aspects discussed in this chapter and how they rise to the fore in the present data seem to be a journey to the ancient past, a kind of Celtic revival, though more critical than its precursor[8] at the turn of this century. The writers' memories extend to the times before English colonisation but less attention is paid to what happened in the centuries between the time of the saints and the Great Famine in the 1840's. The Vikings and the Normans are mentioned in the poems of Eavan Boland (*Anna Liffey*) and Mary Dorcey (*My Grandmother's Voice*); however, they do not seem to form a consistent theme. Apart from the Celtic and Early Christian references, the actual temporalisation of the present data starts from rural Ireland in the 1840's. This periodisation seems consistent with history writing in general as a point from which "the Irish question" could not be ignored as obsolete in the British Empire.

4.2 The unforgiving coast: rural poverty, the Great Famine and memory

The colour of this chapter is black. It is about women's memories of "the black 47", deaths and the portrayal of their ancestors as the black race. It will take us to the west coast of Ireland, where Irish was still widely spoken in the beginning of the 19th century. We will be dealing with the issues of rural poverty and land as a badge of belonging to a certain group. The writers of the present data are actively reconstructing the history of colonisation in their texts, and their texts about what happened 150 years ago reveal a complex relationship to their environment today. Sharing a similar history of dependence and rural poverty with the Irish, Finnish people seem to write less about the wood bark diet of

8 The cultural side of the nationalist movement consisted of various leagues and associations, e.g. the Celtic Literary Society, the National Literary Society and the Gaelic League. All of them sought inspiration from Celtic mythology, and most of them were excluded from women. (Innes 1993.)

their ancestors. Personally, I have only found out about the details of the famines in Finland for the purposes of the present study. In this chapter, I will try to explain why the writers of the present data consider their rural "roots" worth remembering. Why does their space of experience extend so far back in history?

Ireland went through its fiercest period of dislocation between the years 1846 and 1849. The population went down from eight million in 1845 to four and a half million by 1856. Some died in their home villages, some managed to take the boat, many of the emigrants died on the way to the New World, but many survived as emigrants. The dislocation was caused by a fungus called *phytophthora infestans*. In more familiar terms, the plight was called potato famine. Rural peasants' primary source of nutrition was in those days "the spud", to which they added dairy products and pork when they were available. (Mebdh 1996a:notes; Foster 1989:201.) In Ireland, it is still possible to hear very "black " jokes about potatoes and peasantry. By contrast, in the present data, the famine is taken seriously by the writers as something worth remembering and mourning.

Ireland was not the only European country suffering from famine in the 19th century. Still, historians estimate that it was the major social disaster of the century in Europe, the Great Famine. It is also well-known internationally, whereas the smaller European famines often get less attention. The historian Cormac O Grada (in Ikonen 1991:273) states that if compared to the Great Famine, the Finnish famine of the 1860's is the least known famine in European history. It is not collectively memorized in Finland either, and figures about it are not directly comparable to the Irish ones. Finnish historians (eg. Pitkänen 1991:41) estimate that in the peak years of "our" famine, 1867 and 1868, twice as many people died as in normal conditions. The overall impression one gets from the recently published Finnish famine history is that the 1860's famine was a consequence of many factors, mainly of the cold climate. It does not seem to form such a dramatic narrative as the Irish stories of the "potato people" do. Still, there are interesting connections and disconnections between the two countries' experiences, which cannot be all detailed here. Suffice it to say that in

both countries, rural poverty was an established fact in the 19th century and that the minority population was in a better situation than the majority. Both countries were late developers if compared to the extent of industrialisation in England and Central Europe, and this "backwardness", or "peripherality", seems to be a common theme for the Irish and the Finnish.

The political content of the Finnish famines have been relatively unexplored if compared to the range of literature published about the Great Famine in Ireland. One reason for the Finnish silence could be the difference in land ownership relations from those of the Irish. There was a system of tenantry in Finland as well as in Ireland, but one landlord had smaller possessions of land than in Ireland, and, more importantly, the tenant and the landlord were in most areas of the same ethnic and linguistic origin. Finnish landlords lived on their farms, relatively close to the tenants, and therefore it was impossible for them to ignore all the tenants' problems. Whether the myth of the free Nordic peasant is quite correct or not is not my task to verify here, but there seems to be a grain of truth in it, at least if compared to the situation of the Irish peasantry in the 19th century.

In her poem *Roses' Song*, Máighréad Mebdh (1996a) makes a rap song about the variety of potato brands and the ways of cooking and eating them:

> boil em peel em roast em mash em
> bake em fleatair boxty champ
> dig em drill em scraw n lazy
> dip em point em thumbnail stamp

According to Mebdh (1996a:notes), thumbnailing potatoes was a marker of poverty. Families in the countryside had to keep their thumbnails long for peeling the potatoes, as there was no cutlery. Mebdh portrays the lives of the peasants with accuracy: it is through concrete examples that the situation is best understood. At this point, a possible reaction from the reader's part is to contrast thumbnailing with the silver cutlery used on elaborate meals in the British manors. Rap rhyming enhances the experience: imagine cooking a potato meal for a large family day after day. It is monotonous but necessary. Rose's rap continues:

blacks n red nebs, irish apple
lumpers codders cups scotch downs
bucks white rocks american sailors
pink eyes leathercoats give em crowns
(Mebdh 1996a.)

All the names above are the names of potato brands. However, the last line can be read as if it were directed toward the landlords. Pink was the colour of the colonizers; the Irish were considered to be the black race. Cleanliness and dirt. "Give em crowns" can be read as an order to pay the rent. In the beginning of the Famine, the landlords still could get meat and dairy products from their tenants as a compensation for their unpaid rents. The Irish had to contend to eating the remaining potatoes from the previous year's harvest and sell their other products to the manor. However, it soon became obvious that there was no food for the animals either: everybody on a small farm ate potatoes on every meal:

children mothers fathers cattle
hens n chickens horses pigs
breakfast dinner supper school-time
suck em crunch em stuff em in
(Mebdh 1996a.)

The famine was proceeding in 1846 and the majority of the population was starving. The minority had its own means of buying food. In some areas, British upper classes arranged soup kitchens and other kind of relief for the tenants; in other areas, the landlords closed their gates, demanding only their overdue rents. The situation was the worst in the Western parts of the country, where people lived in densely populated cabin villages. The cabins, *clachans*, have been later called "tombs of the departed race" by artists and historians. (Foster 1989:201–204.) Their fate was the worst because the climate on the Western coast was demanding for any other crop apart from the potato, or, as Eavan Boland puts it in *The Singers*:

The women who were singers in the West
lived on an unforgiving coast (Boland 1994a:1.)

The nature did not yield, and the landlords did so only partially. The State was the slowest to react to the situation, although there was an abundance of food in other parts of the Kingdom. The *laissez faire* attitude of Anglo-Irish and British politicians at Westminster did not help at all. (Foster 1989:201-207.)

There are many interpretations of what actually happened during the famine. Today, the common Catholic nationalist reconstruction of the past is the slogan "There was no famine" written on the concrete walls of Belfast slums (e.g see Sainio 1996). On the other hand, the British contemporaries of the famine victims felt that Irish people died because of their laziness, and that the famine was a healthy lesson for the remaining population. It is important to ask here why people died, and what kind of traces the deaths have left to Irish writing in general. A delicate trace of the events of the 1840's can be found in contemporary Irish writers' definitions of land and "place". It is, of course, questionable whether all descriptions of place are influenced by the famine stories heard on history lessons in Catholic schools, but some affinities between the accounts in history books and today's writing can be justifiably recognized.

The immediate trace of the famine to Irish writing was silence. The British-born, Irish-descent literary theorist Terry Eagleton (1995:12–14) evaluates the meaning of the famine as a "negative revolution", which was left unrepresented in Irish literature for decades after it. The famine had a special "non-signifying" effect in the country, a kind of "traumatised muteness". It was a historical event hard to dicuss because it reduced history to nature; it disrupted people's "rational" sense of a shapely chronology. In many Irish historical accounts, the modern period is conceived to appear from an origin which escapes articulation, or, according to Eagleton, "an abyss into which one quarter of the population disappears". In my interpretation, the mere thought of starving to death brings people violently back to their own bodies: there are very little "outer" elements in the experience of starvation, only the sensations of one's body. It is an uncontrollable state, and therefore a dangerous and threatening topic to write about.

Eavan Boland's experience as a young student in the 1960's spending a weekend alone in a cottage in the West of Ireland seems to converge with

Eagleton's remarks. In *A Kind of Scar*, she recalls the moment when she heard her first "real" famine story, told by a person in a living connection to her historical landscape. The storyteller was an old woman who took care of the cottage where she stayed:

> She kept repeating that they were great people, the people in the famine. Great people. I had never heard that before. She pointed out the beauties of the place. But they themselves, *I see now*, were a sub-text. On the eastern side of Keel, the cliffs of Menawn rose sheer out of the water. And here was Keel itself, with its blonde strand and broken stone, where the villagers in the famine, she told me, had moved closer to the shore, the better to eat the seaweed. (Boland 1989:74; italics mine.)

At the time of the event, Boland could not articulate her relationship to the past. She was only staying in a beautiful place and suddenly found out that people had starved and died there. The old woman's relationship to her ancestors, on the other hand, was alive: she had been told the stories as a child and she passed them on, even to the odd weekender form Dublin.

The account above seems to exemplify Koselleck's formulation of the space of experience. For Boland, the moment in the 1960's appeared crucial retrospectively. "I see now", she says in 1989: she did not see then. The meaning of the Famine has changed for her as she has grown older. The space of experience has changed: extra layers of meaning have been added to her memories. In 1989 she is able to articulate what the encounter led her to discover since that night in the cottage: that the Irish past consists of suffering, and that this past has to be recognized if one wants to be responsible for one's account. Boland (1989:92) advises her contemporaries to join her in the rewriting of the past. This is a wish present in her horizon of expectation:

> If a poet does not tell the truth about time, her or his work will not survive it. Past or present, there is a human dimension to time, human voices within it and human griefs ordained by it. Our present will become the past of other men and women. We depend on them to remember it with the complexity with which it was suffered. As others, once, depended on us.

There may not be a truth about time, as Boland thinks or hopes, but there surely are simple and complex representations of the past. The slogan "There was no famine" is a simplified statement used for propagandist purposes in the Catholic ghettoes of Belfast; there are also attempts at giving the past multiple human

voices, as the present data will demonstrate.

In the Irish media and popular history writing, 150 years seems to be a safe distance for exposing the old wounds again. During the last two years, the Famine has been commemorated again, and there have been various attempts to rewrite the famine history. Máighréad Mebdh is one of the rewriters, and in her approach the traditional and the modern are intertwined. In the collection *Hunger* (1996), she tells the story of one family from the point of view of its women, a mother and a daughter. Quite contrary to the descriptions of history books, in which the dark illustrations of dying skin-and-bone women and children are left without a voice, Mebdh draws attention to the bodies and affections of women during the famine. The collection is an ambitious attempt to define what has earlier escaped representation, and to bring it as close to the reader as possible. The women speak: they have found a voice.

Threshold is the most physical poem of the collection. It is "a chant, a prayer to open the consciousness to voices from the past"(Mebdh 1996b:notes). Emphatically, Mebdh takes the role of Rose's daughter Brigid in it and imagines a death from starvation. Brigid is in a state where she reaches another world through her sickness and pain. She rises beyond her threshold and meets her imaginary lover:

> no matter how broken the ground will transport me
> through lashings of colour to light that consumes me
> there's holes in my body and all of them gaping
> to haul in the bleeding / to heave out the blocking
> the rocking is starting / I'm shaking and spitting
> my head is split sideways too rough for my sleeping
> (Mebdh 1996b.)

The physicality of the poems brings the experience of famine closer to the reader. Mebdh draws all the attention to the senses and to the body, and, instead of making the dying merely a horrifying experience, Mebdh portrays Brigid's state simultaneously with accuracy and with fantasy:

a roar from my chest and the singing removes me
eyes thinning out and my Soul staring down me
the Prince of my bed-foot is streaming around me
he's waited through days for the chance to embrace me
we're rushing through spirals of picture and sounding
and feelings too free for a flesh understanding
(Mebdh 1996b.)

Brigid meets her Prince at her bed-foot and rushes with him in spirals. Surprisingly, she is suddenly freed from her pain and can see and hear other things with the Prince. Mebdh refers here to two Irish traditions which are worth mentioning. First, the theme of Ireland as a young woman waiting for her prince to come to save her is a prominent one both in the early *aisling* poems written by the native poets, bards, as well as in post-famine nationalist representations of the liberation of the country. Ironically, *Threshold* carries elements of the *aisling* tradition, in which the norm, according to Seamus O'Neill (1996:44–45), was a "vision-poem" about a beautiful woman and a hero. Second, spirals can be linked to the ancient Celtic religion and art. For instance, spiral-shaped patterns can be found in Celtic stone-carvings and other objects; Mebdh (1996b:notes) herself states that some of the spirals referred to Mother Earth or the triple goddess. The rhythm of the poem is also "spiralling", reaching the end point in the final stanza:

through flurries / through battles
through love-making / haggles / hassles
hauling / bleeding / screaming / smoking thatch
the withering / cloud / crowds
thinning eyes
I rise
(Mebdh 1996b.)

Brigid rises with her lover in a flurry of voices and visions. She goes beyond the threshold.

A temporal dimension can be traced in *Threshold.* Mebdh writes about an imaginary experience the duration of which is not specified. Apart from bleeding, shaking and spitting, the dying girl sees and hears other events: battles, smoking thatch, haggles, crowds. Her death is tied to the land and her people, to the question of land ownership. The rhythm of the poem makes the

temporalization resemble a spiral: there is no linearity in the last stanzas of the poem. The girl's memory consists of overlapping elements which are not in any specified order. Mebdh is obviously trying to destabilize the conventions of linear time in history writing by bringing the events of the famine to the level of individuals.

Rose's song has a more openly political resonance than *Threshold*, if political is understood as an articulation of one's rights. If the styles of the poems are compared, rap seems to be more efficient for making a political claim than a traditional Irish metric used in *Threshold*. The rapper is the mother of the family, around the age of forty and married for more than twenty years. She does not dream of princes anymore: she works hard on the farm and, as indicated before, cooks the meals for her family of nine. While cooking she has subversive thoughts about land ownership:

> the land is ours and we'll reclaim it
> th'earl of devon may be fine
> but all our families owned this kingdom
> racin hound n watchin hind
> (Mebdh 1996a.)

The historian Nicholas Canny (1989:159) claims that the Irish, if compared to other European rural peasant societies, had the strongest "folk memory" of their glorious past: the people in the nineteenth century were fully aware of their Celtic ancestors and their kings and queens. It is remarkable that the ability to say "we owned this" was already there before widespread literacy. Rose is aware of the history of colonisation, too: she mentions the Earl of Devon and Sir Raleigh who brought the potato, "raleighs root", to Britain and Ireland. In her statement, she draws a picture of her landscape:

> raleigh's root will make or break us
> pray to god it never fails
> mountainsides n bogs sustain us
> spreadin out n growin tails
> (Mebdh 1996a.)

Rose lives in a place where people are fully dependent on their land. The bogland grows tails. Her portrait of the landscape is materialist *by economic necessity*. She does not contemplate on the idea of its beauty; she digs food from

the land for her family. It has always been so in her life:

> eighteen twenty two was hungry
> n I hope I'll never live
> to hear a starvin baby's wailin
> n to feel my body give
> (Mebdh 1996a.)

In *Rose's song*, we hear that the 1840's famine was not the first one in the course of Irish history. It was not the last one either; for example the turn of the century evidenced minor famines in the northern part of the island. [9] In fact, almost every century in Irish history is marked by famines which swept away considerable numbers of the population. Still, the potato famine was the Great Famine, with the most dramatic consequences, and it was the most political one in content. It begins a new period in Irish history: the profound question of land ownership and the dispossession of the majority of the population on the island could no longer be ignored by the Protestant élite. The British Government dangerously neglected its responsibility as a colonial power. There was no famine in the sense that food would have been available on the island, there was only a lack of money to buy the food. (Foster 1989:201–2; Eagleton 1995:24).

Even though the actual representations of famine are scarce even today, the theme is present in modern Irish literature in the way the writers talk about their place. Terry Eagleton (1995:4–8) compares Irish and English portrayals in late nineteenth century literature and painting and comes to an interesting conclusion. In short, according to Eagleton, a typical Irish description of landscape was far removed from the aesthetic, pictoresque, pleasure-oriented English portrait. In England, romantic connotations were attached to the word "land", whereas in Ireland land was treated either as an agricultural working environment or as a political slogan for various ethnic groups. In this sense, *Rose's song* is a perfect Irish landscape portrait: the author's perception of her place is tied to her social

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9 After the Great Famine, the Irish upper classes could no longer ignore the plight of the small farms. Relief was arranged effectively for the victims of the smaller famines, in the same manner as some enlightened landlords did in the 1840s. One of the most visible figures in famine relief was Maud Gonne, "the Joan of Arc of Ireland", whose contribution has often been underestimated as being W.B. Yeats' beloved. She spent long periods in co. Mayo in the 1890's arranging soup kitchens and financed everything herself. (Coxhead 1965:38–39.)

position as a tenant. She is more interested in providing food for her family than in the aesthetics of bogland. Eagleton (1995:7–8) makes a further comment which is worth mentioning: both Catholic and Protestant groups used landscape, or Nature, as a source of identification in much the same way, as "an ethico-political category", and an economic one too, "a matter of rent, conacre, pigs and potatoes". For the majority of the Irish, disregarding their religion, land was a symbol of necessity and a source of survival. In the nineteenth century, there was a settled Protestant farmer population in the North of Ireland whose potato crops also failed, and therefore the discussion about famine cannot be strictly separated to deal with the Catholic population only. Quite unlike on the eastern shores of the Irish Sea, land was not made an object of contemplation anywhere on the western shores during and after the Famine; its materiality and its usefulness were the main points in Irish post-famine representations. In addition to its material roots, land often got sexualized connotations as a political badge of belonging. For instance, in a stereotypical Catholic nationalist discourse, land was portrayed as a "torn victim of imperialist penetration". (Eagleton 1995:4,7.)

From a contemporary viewpoint, the metaphors of rape attached to land ownership and dispossession seem striking, and still familiar. In the patriots' rhetoric, land was a Woman whom both Irish and British men used or abused. Individual women were not addressed as actors on that land: the male landlord was the villain, together with British soldiers, and Irish male peasants were considered to be the hope of her suffering mother. These metaphors are constantly questioned in the present data, and the theme will be further discussed in chapter 4.4.

Eagleton's observations seem useful for the present analysis: a specific point of interest will be to find out whether or not contemporary Irish feminists' namings of place differ from the pattern familiar to earlier writing. Do women in the 1990s still describe their land as a working environment, or can some traces of pleasure and contemplation be found in the present writing? This question will be dealt with in chapter 5, in which happy places and shifting metaphors will be brought to the fore.

4.3. A kind of scar: leaving the backyard for good

> On Grafton Street in
> November
> I heard a mighty sound: a travelling man with a didgeridoo
> blew me clear to Botany Bay. The tune too far back to live in
> but scribed on my bones. In a past life I may have been
> Kangaroo
> rocked in my dreamtime, convict ships coming o'er the foam.
>
> PAULA MEEHAN (1993)

Leaving the land, either willingly or by force, is inevitably a memory which is "scribed on the bones" of Irish writers. This is the memory of the past, of the stories which the writers heard of the past generations, of the relatives who were shipped as convicts and sent to Australia, of the starving ancestors who did everything they could to get the money for a ticket to America, of the unmarried great-great aunt who got pregnant and disappeared to England. Therefore, in this chapter, Ireland will be portrayed as a point of departure. I am reading the history of Irish women's emigration through two poems and one article. The central question that will be asked here is: what is the place that the women in the texts are leaving like?

The history of colonisation is an apparent theme in the two poems studied here. The British rule is portrayed against the native Irish experience, with which the subjects of the poems identify. The heading quote is from Paula Meehan's poem *Home*, in which the author ("I") dreams about her past life as "Kangaroo": she is looking for a place in the past, which is "a tune too far back to live in", but still a steady part of her. She carries a trace of the British colonisation inside her, dreaming of being sent to Australia as a convict in the 19th century.

Before visiting the convict ship, the woman has been to a pub to listen to a traditional Irish session:

> A version I heard once in Leitrim was close, a wet Tuesday
> night in the Sean Relig bar. I had come for the session, I stayed
> for the vision and lore. The landlord called time
> the music dried up, the grace notes were pitched to the dark.
> When the jukebox blared out*I'd only four senses and he left me senseless,*
> I 'd no choice but to take to the road. (Meehan 1993.)

The landlord[10] interrupts the vibrant session, after which there is no more live music, only the noise of the jukebox. No more enjoyment, no more visions, just the mechanical tunes from a machine. The night in the pub leads the woman to make up her mind: in her mind, the British colonial rule and the man who left her "senseless" become one. She is looking for a home, but with the man/the colonizer she cannot build a good relationship which is needed for home-making. Instead, she has to become a nomad, to hit the road to find a peace of mind.

As discussed before, the Great Famine was partly caused by the ignorance of the colonizer: the British government left the Irish starving "senseless" in their cabins. As a result, Ann Rossiter (1991:225) estimates that between the years 1845 and 1870 at least three million people left Ireland, and many of them travelled with a family. However, as the conditions in the countryside stabilized, the more common emigrant figure was a young, single person. Ironically enough, according to Margaret McCurtain (1996:lecture), the Famine also served as a positive milepost in women's history: an increased mobility was allowed for young unmarried women in the post-famine years. Rossiter (ibid:225) estimates further that between the years 1885 and 1920 half of the Irish emigrants were women. This led to a "defeminisation" in the countryside. She contends that, if compared to other major European emigrant groups, for example the Italians and the Jews, the Irish stance was an anomaly, a mass female movement which was not led and financed by male relatives in the New World. Young women often were the first to leave their native villages, although not because of sheer rebellion: parents' approval was generally required. They moved to cities in Ireland and England, and the bravest and the most responsible daughters were allowed to emigrate to America or Australia. (McCurtain 1996; Rossiter 1991:229–30.)

What was unusual in the Irish stance was that sons were not usually allowed to emigrate at all. Free physical labour was needed on the farm, and

10 The Earl of Leitrim was a notorious landlord during the Famine. He used to shoot the tenants' stray animals on the way to an eviction, and as a result of his comtemptuous behaviour, got killed by a tenant. (Sawyer 1993:29). The location of co.Leitrim in the mid-West of the island indicates that it was among the areas which suffered most from the Famine.

girls were not considered fit enough for such hard work. The position of the eldest son was particularly bad, as he had to wait for his father's death before being able to get married. Before marriage, sons were treated as "boys" and they did not get a compensation for working in the farm. (McCurtain 1996.)[11]

In the light of the earlier prsented theories about space/time, this finding seems crucial. If women have been considered as chaotic "space" tied to material roots in Western philosophy, the Irish historical situation proves the situation to be quite the opposite. Young men were tied to their place and soil, representing stability, whereas young women represented mobility and fluidity, the kind of attributes often given to time. Even though their movement to the New World was primarily caused by sheer poverty, not necessarily by individualistic needs, this finding shakes the idea that women were always considered as rooted to one position in history, as well as the common feminist beginning of a sentence "women have always been", criticized by Adrienne Rich (1984:214). Rich believes that by crossing out that phrase, one can get closer to politics of location. It is indeed tedious to begin one's speech with "women have always been", for example, oppressed, drawn towards the powers of the earth, good at mothering etc. To know exactly about whom one is talking about and under which circumstances seem to be a farewell for such universal beginnings, according to Rich.

In a sense, then, one could state that daughters were in a better position than sons in the post-Famine situation. However, their duties did not generally end after leaving the land: the lucky emigrant daughter was expected to send her wages home and thus enable the rest of the family to follow her in the New World. A feminist recreation of the typical emigrant girl as a rebel opposing the oppression of women at home would not be accurate; however, her position was a novelty. McCurtain (1996) points out that the liberties given to daughters in the post-famine years tended to become a tradition in Irish families later on. In many cases, mothers and daughters formed conspiracies to send the daughter to the

11 The legend of the rural Irish bachelor stems from this particular problem. Many "boys" were already middle-aged at the time their father died, and if the farm was not exceptionally wealthy, a middle-aged farmer was not considered a good "match" for a young bride. However, arranged marriage prevailed in Irish countryside in the beginning of the 20th century.(Beale 1986:24–30.)

world, either to a convent to be educated as a nun, or abroad as a domestic servant. These were the common career options for rural Irish girls in the post-famine years and in the beginning of the twentieth century. "The comely maidens" simply could not stay on the farm by the fireside, they had to provide for themselves *by economic necessity*, or even provide for the whole family who stayed behind.

Emigration was often considered as a heavy expression of dissatisfaction in Ireland, even as an act of betrayal. The Catholic Church was particularly loud in its condemnations and accusals. By the turn of the century, many Irish intellectuals developed a discourse of "race" which was used particularly in the case of women's emigration. In his quasi-feminist pamphlet written for the the new women's organisation in 1911, United Irishwomen, George Russell[12] condenses the ideology of his time. He is a proponent of "development" in the position of women:

> *We* cannot build up a rural civilisation in Ireland without *the aid* of Irishwomen. It will help life little if we have methods of the twentieth century in the fields and those of the fifth century *in the home*./.../It is true that the consciousness of women has been always centred too close to the dark and obscure roots of the Tree of Life, while men have branched out more to the sun and wind, and today the starved soul of womanhood is crying out over the world for an intellectual lift and for more chance of earning a living. (Russell 1911:24; italics mine.)

Russell directs his speech to the new female members of United Irishwomen. However, his *we* in the first sentence of the quote is obviously a male *we*; women are invited to help men in their own narrowly defined sphere: *the home*. If compared to the ideology of the following Free State, which will be discussed in the next chapter, there is, despite his essentialist rhetoric, one decent point in Russell's attitude toward women. He portrays women as intellectual beings with passions and desires despite the fact that he assigns them to the home. His successors did not necessarily keep that point in mind in their legislation in the new, independent State.

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12 George Russell (1867–1935) is better known in the literary world as the pseudonym "Ae". He was a writer, a theosophist, a politician and a son of the Ascendancy, the settled Protestant minority in Ireland. According to Kiberd (1989:316), he was among "the urbanized descendants of country people" who "patented the idea of a rural nation". Nostalgic talk about forgotten roots was a certain feature of his circle.

Russell seems to be aware of the consequences of keeping women in the dark. He warns his contemporaries of their ignorance in women's affairs:

> If Ireland will not listen to this cry, its daughters will go on slipping *silently* away to other countries, as they have been doing — all the best of them, all the bravest, all those most mentally alive, all those who would have made *the best wives and the best mothers* — and they will leave at home the timid, the stupid, and the dull to help in the deterioration of the race and to *breed sons* as sluggish as themselves. (Russell 1911:24; italics mine.)

Russell's outburst raises a lot of questions and comments about his own politics of location. Even from today's viewpoint, they do not seem anachronistic, even though most readers would not take his discourse of "race" seriously anymore.

First, he is a representative of the Protestant community, whose daughters did not have to emigrate for the same reasons as the Catholic daughters did. "The race" is obviously the Irish Catholic race, and according to Russell it is deteriorating (not his British "race"). Second, why did the daughters have to slip away silently? Some of them, the less dutiful ones, lost contact with the native country after emigration. Apart from the general disapproval of a rural community, there must other reasons for their silence, secrets which they could not reveal to their family. Third, was Russell sincere in the earlier quote about women's intellectual starvation? It seems that he is using his earlier decent remark as a prey for his women readers. There is a hidden double-strategy in his text: at the time of the first wave of Irish feminism[13] he recognises women's need for self-determination to a certain extent, trying to keep women content with that, and, in the next sentence, he changes the strategy by limiting women's role to that of a birth-giving machine. Even more revealing, he writes about the sluggish mothers breeding *sons*, not daughters. As the primary builders of civilisation, the intellectual quality of sons is of central importance for Russell. What happens to the daughters is, in fact, outside his primary interests, as they will only be helpers in the project. His idea of the role of women is, after all, functional: as the Tree of Life they breed boys and take care of the needs of man

[13] The suffragette movement was a powerful social force in Ireland in the first two decades of the 20th century. It consisted of many subgroups, religious and social, moderate and militant, but the general point to be made about its action is that it was a separate movement from the British one. However, Irish women achieved the vote together with British women in 1918, not in an independent State. (Murphy 1989.)

as good wives. If the less important needs of women are taken care of *in the home*, they do not need to go abroad to fulfill their primary roles as wives and mothers. It is beyond Russell's imagination that some of the daughters may have slipped away because they preferred intellectual activities to home-making altogether. Or, even more unthinkable, what if they escaped because of their love for another woman?

From the discussion above, it is easy to make one conclusion: that young rural women were sick and tired of their position as a helper in the small farm. As the Irish agriculture was developing, the daughters' workforce was often compensated by machines. For most of the young women (and men), marriage was not an option because of their parents' poverty. There was no *home* to make for the average Irish woman in her early twenties, and she was frustrated in the countryside. Frustration also rises as one of the most prevalent themes in the present data, in the texts about emigration in this chapter and as we shall see later, throughout the body of the whole analysis.

Eavan Boland describes the feelings of a woman fleeing from Ireland in her poem *Mise Éire*:

> I won't go back to it —
>
> my nation displaced into old dactyls,
> oaths made by the animal tallows
> of the candle -
>
> land of the Gulf Stream,
> the small farm,
> the scalded memory,
> the songs
> that bandage up the history,
> the words
> that make a rhythm of the crime
>
> where time is time past.
> A palsy of regrets.
> No. I won't go back. (Boland 1994b:375.)

Her nation is no longer what it once meant to her: it is now a place where the same verse and the same song is repeated without an end. For instance, "oaths made by the animal tallows of the candle" indicate that the "folk memory" of the Celtic oral legislation is still fresh in the place where she is leaving from. People

memorize the dactyls dictated by early Celtic Druids and bards, and try to hide the wounds of colonisation, "to bandage up the history" with their oral tradition. The open wounds of the immediate past have to be covered well with the older material. Time stands still. For her, the country is a primitive and paralyzed place. She is looking for her "roots" in the stories of women who have turned their backs to "it" before her:

> My roots are brutal:
>
> I am the woman –
> a sloven's mix
> of silk at the wrists
> a sort of dove-strut
> in the precincts of the garrison[14] –
>
> who practices the quick frictions
> the rictus of delight
> and gets cambric for it, the rice-coloured silks. (Boland 1994b:375-376.)

The author ("I") finds herself in two "brutal" female personifications of the past: that of the prostitute and that of the emigrant mother. *Economic necessity* plays a key role in both of her past lives. In the first personification, she becomes a comfort lady for British soldiers on an army base in Ireland, whose services are compensated in the form of foreign fabrics. She wants to escape her rural past by serving her colonizers. The fine fabrics help her in the metamorphosis from a peasant girl into a decadent, slovenly lady. The lines above stand out from the rest of the poem stylistically and phonologically, emphasizing her transformation. The vocabulary becomes more complex, and the rhythm obviously fastens as we move on from the first stanzas. Even on the phonological level, the words pronounce quicker than before. *Mise Éire* leaps forward, from both the aspects of form and content. The temporalisation changes from a stand-still to an acceleration: from the small farm to British civilisation.

In the second personification, Boland becomes a mother who is trying to save the life of her child by taking the ship to Britain. The element of touch is

14 The historian R.F.Foster (1989:170) argues that British garrisons have left an essential mark to the "landscaping" of Irish towns. A garrison is, hence, a trace of the inheritance of Ascendancy, the first-or second generation British ruling class, in Irish culture today.

present throughout the poem, earlier in the fibres of silks and cambric, or here as she tries to keep her baby alive in her arms. In the stanzas below, the relationship between the mother and the child is taken to the phonological level in the longer, softer sounds. The rhythm of the poem calms down again in the last stanzas:

> I am the woman
> in the gansy-coat
> on the board of "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 (Boland 1994b:376.)

"The quick frictions" have been replaced again by a less hectic concept of time. On the board of "Mary Belle", there is not much to do but wait. The mother clutches to her child, as she will clutch to her accent, to the ultimate marker of difference in Britain. Her thick Irish guttural can be heard in the sounds discussed above. The reader hears the voice. She may be escaping the Great Famine with the only child she has left, or a convent where her parents have left her to give birth to an illegitimate child. Whatever her story is, her language will slowly develop into a new dialect, the language of homesickness, "a kind of scar". But in her circumstances, she cannot afford to care about the way she speaks. Instead, she will be:

> mingling the immigrant
> guttural with the vowels
> of homesickness who neither
> knows nor cares that
>
> a new language
> is a kind of scar
> and heals after a while
> into a passable imitation
> of what went before. (Boland 1994b:376.)

For the author, homesickness is the price of survival. Instead of chanting the dactyls and the songs of her displaced nation, she will displace herself by learning a new language in a new country, England. Her decision seems firm

and final. She won't go back.

The special effect of *Mise Éire* lies in the consistency between form and content. The formal aspects draw attention almost automatically: a linguist's scrutiny is not needed for experiencing the difference between the above cited stanzas. The changes in rhythm are, indeed, changes in the temporalisation of the poem's semantic world. Even in the present study, in which formal aspects cannot be examined in detail, it seems necessary to make some general notions about that consistency. In the present data, Eavan Boland's poems are the ones which make me take an occasional off-path as a stylistician.

* * *

Ailbhe Smyth brings the theme of emigration into the contemporary context. According to her, leaving the country for good is still a necessary survival strategy for Irish women in the 1990's. Her powerful rhetoric reveals a common pattern in Ireland: resistance causes trouble in her "backyard":

> In my backyard, women are systematically reduced to non-existence — "zeroed". Countless women have been (and are being) beaten into silence, through physical and sexual violence, through poverty and deprivation, through the legal, moral and psychological denial of rights and personhood. Resistant women are not allowed to speak "out" or to act "up" in public. If they find a way of doing so (not easy), they are ignored, or dismissed as mad, bad and stupid — neutralized. Countless women have left jobs, marriages, politics, the country because they cannot or will not put up with being kept down and out. These are not "choices" (i.e. freely made decisions), they are necessary survival strategies. (Smyth 1995b:201.)

Smyth's "backyard" is a violent place for a woman to live in. There is, however, an alternative for a feminist-minded woman from being "zeroed" and "neutralized", which becomes strongly articulated in Smyth's writing: political activism. It has been a "choice" for herself in the sense that she decides to speak "out" despite the threats she has received during her career. She has a job and she has not decided to leave the country. She has been dismissed, though. It is through "alternative" channels that she gets her political texts published: those who neutralize her would not touch the publications in which her texts appear.

What does Smyth's militant stance on the "backyard" indicate, then? In her words, it is possible to catch a glimpse of a ship, a modern "Mary Belle", with women travelling, this time alone, to Britain. In the first half of the 1990's, Smyth became a public figure in the Pro-Choice campaign, a loud voice speaking about reproductive rights in the Republic. Isolated extracts of her texts convey a sad scenery for all women, or at least for feminists. However, it is reasonable to keep in mind that Ireland in 1992 was not Afghanistan occupied by the Talebans in 1997. Irish legislation oppresses women in many instances, but apart from reproductive rights, women are *principally* granted with the same human rights with men. Still, some of the recent events in Ireland reveal disturbing undertows in the political climate of the country. For instance, in the second abortion referendum in 1992, people were asked to vote about women's rights to travel and abortion information during pregnancy. If the result had turned negative, there would have been only one possibility to guard the law: to stop all female Irish citizens in a reproductive age for pregnancy tests in harbours and airports. It is impossible to guess an early pregnancy otherwise, and usually women travel for abortions by themselves. Would they have restricted women from travelling alone, which is a common practise in fundamentalist Islamic countries? Would a man, a husband or a father, have been considered as an eligible witness to prove that a woman is not pregnant? Would a lonely position on the deck of the ship have been a nostalgic moment in the past?

In another text about abortion, Smyth (1993:138) calls her existence during the referendum campaigns "living in a police state." Had the restrictions of travel and information for pregnant women been accepted in Ireland in 1992, the situation could have been justifiably compared to the situation in Afghanistan in 1997. Considering Smyth's occasionally militant rhetoric from the viewpoint of physical self-determination makes it more understandable. The quote about "choice"on the previous page may seem philosophically naïve but if such a notion is based on women's experiences at a time when they are about to be denied their basic human rights, there is no need to question the plausibility of Smyth's stance. It must be read as a political statement in a particular context, not as a groundwork for feminist theory.

The problem of women slipping away *silently* to other countries, temporarily for abortions or permanently because of unemployment, pregnancy or discrimination has not disappeared in Ireland. *Silence*: not finding a voice where you live, not being able to go back with a voice if you leave. The present study, on the other hand, is about finding a voice, and the writers analysed here have certainly found their voices where they are situated. The texts by Meehan, Boland and Smyth are reconstructions of a situation in which women are leaving a secure place, home or a kind of home. In *Home*, Meehan illustrates a similarity between patriarchal rule and colonialism. If home is to be found in such a context, she finds homelessness the only escape from oppression: "I'd *no choice* but to take to the road". Similarly, Smyth refers to her country as a narrow "backyard" in which women are denied audible voices in the public sphere and "beaten into silence". Leaving home or the backyard is, according to Meehan and Smyth, a survival strategy. In Boland's *Mise Éire*, it is possible to trace a more self-determined stance: "I won't go back to it". The speaking "I" is stronger, and although the author imagines herself as a mother of a dying baby — emigration to Britain seems a necessity in that case — Boland gives the impression that the author has a possibility to go back to "it". Therefore, if compared to the blind woman in *Home* and the women Smyth is speaking for, the woman in *Mise Éire* seems to have acquired a voice and a subjectivity in exile from a stable home.

Finally, there is a connection, although a frail one, between the emigration accounts by Irish women and recent feminist theories. It has become increasingly popular in feminist cultural studies to discuss in shifting, fluid metaphors instead of referring to a solid "ground" of one's thought. A certain indeterminacy about one's place seems to be a strategy for avoiding essentialist constructs, such as "the oppression of women" and "patriarchy". For instance, Kathy Ferguson (1993) suggests a "mobile subjectivity" as a model for a feminist theorist: a person who refuses to stay in one camp of feminist thought. Similarly, Rosi Braidotti (1994) writes passionately about "nomadism" as a new intellectual tool for creating alternative feminist subjectivities, and refers widely to her own shifting positions in the world. Braidotti's own life experience as a multilingual and her thinking seem to converge in her theorizing. Furthermore,

there is a connection beyond the academic feminist world in her scheme: she is advocating nomadism as a "style of feminism that will allow women to rethink their position in a postindustrial, postmetaphysical world, without nostalgia, paranoia, or false sentimentalism." (Braidotti 1994:92.) Her words imply that one does not need to be an academic feminist philosopher to achieve nomadic thinking. However, one cannot avoid the question of "choice" here again: is it possible to be a nomad without consciously choosing one's thinking? The present data consists of texts in which women actively rethink their position, or the position of an imaginary author, without emphasizing choice, however. Many of the texts are marked by the concept of necessity: in the Irish case, the decision to leave one's place of "origins" has been fuelled by poverty and frustration.

Braidotti (1994:22) points out that her idea of a nomad cannot be compared to that of the migrant. She singles out the images of the migrant and the exile from nomadism: a migrant has a clear destination and often an economic motivation to leave, and the image of exile often invokes too serious repercussions, eg. memories of war and the question of "rights" (to enter, to belong) to be "metaphorized into a new ideal", whereas the nomadic subject might only displace oneself from the nostalgia for fixity and unity. In the present data, some elements can and will later be called nomadic; however, they do not have much to do with migration or concrete homelessness. In my understanding, a nomadic subject can be a person who resists a simple national identity and a simple home by questioning her place in the comfort of her own house as well as a widely-travelled cosmopolitan. A sensitivity to place counts more than actual location. In a sense, it implies a sensitivity to time as well, a willingness to re-think one's past without nostalgia.

In this chapter, Ireland has been examined as a point of departure. It has been my attempt to highlight the specificity of Irish women's migration patterns since the Great Famine and to bring this specificity to the fore in the analysis of the texts. The temporal scope is wide here, as there seemed to be a continuity between the texts situated in the past (Meehan, Boland) and the text situated in the 1990's (Smyth). The most interesting concept pair that appears in the extracts

above is that of necessity and choice, in the sense of being forced to leave and leaving by one's own choice. Linked to the issues of the womb, the discussion on choice extends to bodily self-determination. In chapters 4.6 and 4.7, there will be further discussion on choice and necessity.

4.4 I am Ireland: the poetic tradition and the iconic feminine

The Irish literary theorist Lia Mills (1995:69) examines contemporary Irish women's poetry as opposed to "the iconic feminine", the institutionalized mythical Woman constructed by male poets since the early days of the bards, or by the Catholic Church. She does not, however, revise the whole (male) canon of Irish poetry in her discussion; instead, she concentrates on nationalist constructions of "womanhood" in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century and compares them to women poets' work today. She argues that the most common female figures of the nationalist-minded male poets of the time were "the poetic muse, the virgin mother and Mother Ireland/Cathleen ni Houlihan". In short, Ireland was portrayed either as a beautiful young woman who is looking for protection from gentlemen, or as a religious, earthy mother whose sons have betrayed her and left her to suffer. Whatever the presentation was, Ireland became a "feminized" place in the nationalist discourse as opposed to the masculine Gaelic people inhabiting her. According to Mills, the "fusion of the feminine with the national" has become a challenge for women poets today. The most common strategy for the opponents of "the iconic feminine" is to establish a dialogue between the mythical reprsentations and the reality of Irish women's experience today. In short, the purpose of such a dialogue is to break the female figures free of the icons by giving them an active voice in a new context. Mills calls their strategy "ventriloquism", which means, in my interpretation, speaking in another voice which arises from the inside of the poet. Paying attention to the old iconography may even become frustrating at times, but Mills contends that the strategy of "ventriloguism" at least makes women's struggle visible. By imitating the voice of a nationalist poet, it is possible to dislocate the feminine

icon from its original context and subvert the meanings conventionally attached to it.

The most striking feature of "the iconic feminine" is that it is almost lifeless. It does not belong to this world, and it obscures the experience of the real-life women whom it is supposed to represent. Ailbhe Smyth (1990:8) encourages Irish women to participate in the myth-breaking process in the foreword of *Wildish Things*, an anthology of contemporary women's writing:

> To know and name our multiple and diverse realities we must first fight free of the one-dimensional metaphor we have been forced to become. To tell our stories, we must write over the images and myths which overshadow us.

The problem of the one-dimensional nationalist metaphor of "womanhood" is that it may dramatically affect women's political participation — by reducing it. A newly-established nation gives women the message that they are needed as helpers in the home through its one-dimensional metaphors: staying *in the home* is the national interest. A good patriotic woman obeys the message and forgets about herself. Smyth (1990:8) wants to pay attention to this historical fact in Ireland:

> Nationality is not, of course, the only sign of identity, but where the struggle to achieve it has been bitter and hard-fought, it cannot be assumed, never goes without saying. The hard fact for Irish women is that our voices have been overwhelmed as much by the needs of the nation as by the dictates of patriarchy. And there is nothing to be gained by denying this, whatever we might prefer to believe.

"The hard fact" that women have been put on the shelf because of the more urgent problems in the Republic of Ireland is visible in every piece of writing in the present data. In this chapter, I will be looking for objections to "the iconic feminine" in the works of Máighréad Mebdh, Eavan Boland, Paula Meehan and Nell McCafferty. The strategy of "ventriloguism" will be contrasted with two texts written by nationalist men, in which "the iconic feminine" appears in its full bloom. It is interesting to find out how the texts also work as namings of "place": if the icon of a poem is an incarnation of a nation, Ireland, she is the naming of "place" herself and inside her certain things are happening, or, if the icon is Virgin Mary herself, the writers describe the place in which it is situated

and the emotions involved in the situation.

There are two poems in the present data dealing with the same theme: the Mise Éire (I am Ireland) tradition, which was popular in Irish nationalism in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. In this tradition, Ireland (as an occupied land) speaks in the person of a woman, and the person may change shape during the story. The figure is not completely lifeless because she is given a voice but she is an "icon" in the sense that she represents the whole island instead of being an individual person. That she is imaginary, does not, in my interpretation, make her more "iconic" than a figure whose identity is apparent. After all, many of the poetry figures in the present data are imaginary; they have been created by the poet and cannot be recognized as autobiographical. Imaginary or real, a voice in a poem achieves a subjectivity of its own if it is located in a specified context. It is not an eternal representative of a nation or a bigger group of people, it is a person here and now, or there and then. In contrast, what I read as an "iconic" figure is the one who is supposed to represent *the* women of Ireland, or even the whole island as a "feminized" landscape.

Eavan Boland's *Mise Éire* was already discussed in the chapter on emigration. It is a poem in which a real-life historical subject, a prostitute or a mother, is leaving her nation "displaced into old dactyls" and her language which will soon develop in the new country into "a kind of scar" (Boland 1994a:376). Boland gives hints of "the iconic feminine" in the presentation of two real-life female figures who reject it: the prostitute prefers the luxurious presents from British soldiers to the traditional Irish poetry and its lies and cover-ups; the mother cannot afford to feed her child with the "old dactyls" either. Boland's references to Irish iconography in *Mise Éire* are subtle but simultaneously clear: women refuse to go back to where "iconic" poetry is made and turn towards Britain instead. In this chapter, however, another poem by Boland will be analysed in more detail in order to avoid repetition.

Stylistically, Boland is a subtle lyric who implies and gives small hints but does not say much directly. The reader is left to make her own conclusions, depending on his or her knowledge of Irish culture and history. The richness of

the present data is that whereas one writer is painting a dreamy picture, another writer is yelling the same message without sparing her voice. If compared to Boland's finesse, the presence of "the iconic feminine" is not exactly subtle in Máighréad Mebdh's *Easter 1991,* which is a *mimesis* of the male tradition of making a female incarnation of Ireland. By *mimesis* I mean that Mebdh partly imitates the style of male writers, such as Patrick Pearse and W.B Yeats, who both create in their works a lamenting old woman, Éire or Cathleen ni Houlihan.

Highly ironic, *Easter 1991* reverses the original meaning of a nationalist Mise Éire text. Whereas the male nationalists were blaming their fellow countrymen for letting a woman suffer under colonial rule, in Mebdh's version the woman-as-Ireland is attacking the nationalists themselves, the proponents of an independent State, on the 75th anniversary of Easter Rising. The earlier constructed icon starts to speak out against those who "liberated" her from colonialism. As before in *Rose's Song*, Mebdh is using rap as the method of making political statements. The vocality of the poem does not become articulate in a written thesis: a reader must imagine it chanted loud in a demonstration on the streets of Dublin to give the poem the justice it deserves. It begins with sickness:

> I am Ireland and I'm sick
> sick in the womb/ sick in the head
> and I'm sick of dying in this sickbed
> and if the medical men don't stop operating/
> I'll die (Mebdh 1993:58.)

Éire is particularly sick in the womb because she has had to give birth to too many children, or because it has taken her months to save the money for an abortion trip to Britain, and she has been four months pregnant when she has reached the clinic. The "medical men" are constantly inventing new operations on her, and in the 1980's they enforced their right-wing legislation in the issues of abortion and divorce to make the position of women even "sicker" than it was before. Éire is willing to leave the hospital, aware of the fact that her rebellious discourse is not proper there:

> I am Ireland and if I die
> my name will go in the censor's fire

my face in the mirror is shy/
I have painted it too many times
there's nothing to like about this kind of beauty
(Mebdh 1993:58.)

The common practice in the hospital is that if a subversive person dies, his or her thoughts will be obliterated. Éire is aware that if she dies, there will be nobody to speak for her or even about her. She is also worried about her artificial looks and hopes to be able to look more natural after leaving the hospital — alive. At the moment, it is other people who try to define what she is:

I am Ireland/ and I don't know what I am
they tell me things in sham films like The Field/
that the travellers are pink-faced romantics in fairy caravans
that my villages are full of eejits and lúdramáns
that my pagan power is dead
it was made for Hollywood/ not for me (Mebdh 1993:59.)

If Éire wants to achieve self-determination, she must look for the clues of her "identity" from somewhere else than Hollywood films. The romanticized view of Ireland is even more popular in North America than in Ireland itself. The problem of the "sham films", despite the fact that they bring a lot of money into Ireland in the form of tourism, is that they romanticize the phenomena which most acutely need to be changed and stop the people from seeing the core of the social problems, such as the position of the Travellers, the nomadic community of Ireland. What Mebdh also points out is that all the problems relating to national "identity" are essentially sexed, that her Éire has had abortions:

I am Ireland/ and I'm silenced
I cannot tell my abortions/ my divorces/ my years of slavery/
my fights for freedom
it's got to the stage I can hardly remember what I had to tell/
and when I do/ I speak in whispers (Mebdh 1993:59.)

"The iconic feminine" speaks honestly for the first time. She has been the silent incarnation of her people since the early days of Irish nationalism, and this is the first time that she has the courage to break the silence. Her silence has lead her into a mild amnesia: since the present day, she has used silence as a psychological mechanism of avoiding uncomfortable issues. Still, these issues,

abortion, divorce and political activism are vital for her own welfare. As she has been made a woman (by men, in their artificial womb), she is naturally more concerned about the welfare of women like herself. She has come to the stage when it is time to start caring about herself, at the age of 75 years:

> I am Ireland/ and I've nowhere to run
> I've spent my history/ my energy/ my power/ my money
> to build him up/
> and he gave me nothing back I didn't take myself (Mebdh 1993:59.)

In the hospital where she is lying (and dying, she is afraid), her position is stable in the sense that she cannot move. She has been forced to stay in bed, enforcing "his" ego. She is so tired of the job that she has to start looking for something else. The job of satisfying "him" does not give her anything back: it seems that nothing else but her own voice can satisfy her at this stage of her illness. Speaking will cure her, not the backup from men that she has been looking for, in vain. She can only find the medicine to the lethal sickness herself. Her father, husband or son cannot do that.

If compared to another version of *Mise Éire,* the controversy between "the iconic feminine", Woman-as-Ireland, and "him", her male creator, will become even clearer. Patrick Pearse was one of the nationalists who were executed on Easter 1916, 75 years before Mebdh's reconstruction of Éire had the courage to speak out. F.S.L.Lyons (1982:88) argues that among all nationalist "martyrs", Pearse was most willing "to make the ultimate sacrifice". His obsession with Messianism is revealed in his writing. Mebdh's *Easter 1991* seems to be a parody of Pearse's thematically, and even formally similar poem *Mise Éire* (in Kiberd 1989:284):

Mise Éire;	(I am Ireland;
Sine mè ná an Cailleach Béarra.	I am older than the Hag of Beare.
Mór mo ghlóire;	Great my glory;
Mé do rug Cuchulain còga.	I who bore the brave Cuchulain.
Mór mo nàire;	Great my shame;
Mo chlann féin do dhíol a máthair.	My children sold their mother.
Mise Éire;	I am Ireland;
Uaighní mé ná an Cailleach Béarra.	I am older than the Hag of Beare.)

The Hag of Beare is a variation of another nationalist icon, Cathleen ni Houlihan, a personification of two female figures, a young maiden who turns into an old woman and vice versa, depending on the situation. In Pearse's *Mise Éire*, the woman who is "older than the Hag of Beare" is a sorrowful character, an old mother whose sons have abandoned her and, even worse, sold her to an alien landlord. Her glorious past is the only source of pleasure left in her life: she remembers the times when she could boast of being the mother of Cuchulain, the greatest hero in Celtic mythology ever. If compared to the angry Éire in *Easter 1991*, she lacks a subjectivity of her own: her position in society is defined by her male relatives. Mebdh's Éire, on the other hand, is in the process of building one: she has stopped waiting for help from other people.

Pearse's *Mise Éire* is in Irish, which strengthens the effect of a simple message: the Irish children must take better care of their mother, even to the extent that they should learn their mother tongue.[15] Mebdh's *mimesis* of the poem contains a similar extract in Irish:

> Mise Éire/
> agus an ghaoth ag éirí láidir i mo chluasa
> agus n'fheadar an ébiseach nó bás a thiocfaidh
>
> Mise Éire/
> agus n´fheaddar an bhfuil mé óg nó sean
>
> Mise Éire/
> agus níl mé feitheamn a thuilleadh
> (Mebdh 1993:60.)[16]

Pearse's old woman is obviously dependent on her sons and she will continue

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15 Pearse (1879–1916) was an enthusiastic speaker of Irish. One of his jobs was that of the schoolmaster, in a private school St.Enda's which he had founded with his colleagues in Dublin. The school was bilingual and "experimental". Pearse used Celtic legends in his teaching as an inspiration for the young. In a British colony, his methods were truly unusual. (Lyons 1982:86–87)

16 freely translated as:
I am Ireland/
and the wind is getting stronger in my ears/
and I was not able to live or die when I came to Ireland/
I am Ireland/
and I'm not able to be young or old/
I am Ireland/
and I'm not waiting anymore.

her lament until she dies or until one of the sons comes to his senses and rescues her. Instead, Mebdh's Éire is ready to define herself after having the opportunity to speak. She ends her subversive rap song by stating her willingness to leave "him":

> I am Ireland/
> and I'm not waiting anymore.
> (Mebdh 1993:60.)

W.B. Yeats builds another influential female figure of Ireland in his famous, some would even say notorious, play *Cathleen ni Houlihan*, which was written and set on stage in 1902. Cathleen is a young maiden who takes the form of a poor old woman, and she has a vision about a brighter future. Her house has been occupied by strangers, and in the play, she is gathering her own forces to be able to kick them out. If compared to Pearse's lamenting old woman, Cathleen ni Houlihan is more powerful and she takes the initiative for her own good instead of merely lamenting her fate. When she is asked about her caretakers, she answers that she refused to live with any of the lovers. Yeats does not mention male relatives at all; even her troops consist of "friends", not sons. The role of Cathleen is to send men to war and to give them her moral support. The whole community must be there to encourage them. Yeats makes the Old Woman speak bluntly:

> OLD WOMAN. I have good friends that will help me. They are gathering to help me now. I am not afraid. If they are put down to-day they will get the upper hand to-morrow. *(She gets up.)* I must be going to meet my friends. They are coming to help me and I must be there to welcome them. I must call the neighbours together to welcome them. (Yeats 1902, in Ireland's Women 1994:276)

In fact, Cathleen has a similar, determined voice as Mebdh's Éire does. Both of the "ladies" know what they want: Cathleen wants to move back to her own house, Éire wants to stop supporting "him" because "he" did not give her the support that she needed. But whereas Yeats' Cathleen has a vision of doing it with the help of her male friends, Mebdh's Éire has decided to stop waiting for the help that never comes.

Conor Cruise O'Brien (1994:61) argues that Cathleen ni Houlihan was the most nationalist and the most propagandist work that Yeats ever wrote. A part of

his motivation to write the play came from his beloved, the nationalist activist Maud Gonne, who played Cathleen in the première. O'Brien suspects that Yeats was merely concerned about showing Gonne and her colleagues how effective a nationalist writer he was, and that the character of Cathleen was tailored to please Gonne. O'Brien's explanation seems plausible because Maud Gonne was certainly a woman who was not dependent on men, not on Yeats nor on the fathers of her children. Whatever the background of the play was, O'Brien (1994:112) states that the character of Cathleen ni Houlihan was later used in the nationalist uprisings and that "she goes a long way beyond that into the folk memory". If the Irish folk memory still consists of mythical female icons, what would be a more efficient way of expressing one's dissatisfaction of it than direct confrontation? Mebdh's militant rhyming in *Easter 1991* is the most direct attack against a romanticized Irish folk memory in the present data, and her strategy seems to work well.

As discussed before, the theme of silence, and of course breaking free from it, are the common denominators of many texts in the present data. Mebdh's Éire spoke with whispers if she ever had a chance to speak at all; the next poem brings the discussion on voice and voicelessness even further. In *Anna Liffey*, Eavan Boland studies the landscape of her native Dublin, and tells a mythical story of an active young woman, *Life*, who falls in love with a place. As was found in chapter 4.1., Boland refers to the early Christian legend of Brigid and reconstructs it in a new context. It just happened that *Life* found the land and wanted it named after her. The river crossing the land was named Liffey as well. Boland refers here to the arbitrariness of naming: those in power are able to decide which name should be given to a place. In *Anna Liffey*, Boland speaks in her own person to the river which got its name from the land. When she thinks about naming, language and her landscape, she suddenly finds herself in a loss of words:

/Tell me,
Anna Liffey,
Spirit of water,
Spirit of place,
How is it on this
Rainy Autumn night
As the Irish Sea takes
The names you made, the names
You bestowed, and gives you back
Only wordlessness?
(Boland 1994c:45.)

If Anna Liffey is the spirit of the river that runs across Dublin, she is not exactly "the iconic feminine" without an agency either. In Boland's account, Anna Liffey gives names to the river and to the whole city of Dublin just as *Life* gave her name to the land: she has a voice — but it is a temporary one. The river is constantly in motion, and, therefore, its voice cannot be tied to any particular position. It carries its names to the sea, where they are no longer heard. The sea renders Anna Liffey wordless because the sea does not care about language at all. For Boland, wordlessness is not necessarily a negative concept at all: going beyond language is a dream for many feminist writers and philosophers.[17]

Boland makes a difference between the female names given to the river in the city of her birth and the lives of the women who live there. This discovery is clearly similar to the discovery that the feminized idea of a nation erases the experiences of women living in its territory:

A river is not a woman.
  Although the names it finds,
    The history it makes
And suffers –
  The Viking blades beside it,
    The muskets of the Redcoats,
      The flames of the Four Courts
Blazing into it
  Are a sign.
  (Boland 1994c:43.)

[17] For example, the Italian feminist philosopher Adriana Cavarero (1996) finds Ondina, a figure of a mermaid created by the German writer Ingeborg Bachmann, an interesting figure to think about in terms of feminist theory, as someone who has escaped language and lives in a world of her own pleasures. (originally in Cavarero 1995: *Corpo in Figure*. Feltrinelli: Roma, see bibliography for an English reference.)

The female names, "iconic" or not, are merely signs, products of language. The name "Liffey" is a sign which refers to a physical river with a long and dramatic history. There is something special about the notion "A river is not a woman". It is a discovery after all those years of a false belief, a fragment of wonder.

Is it really not a woman? I always thought it was... I even hear it on the radio, performed by a group of men. "She's a river and she's moving there in front of me." Fluid femininity, solid masculinity. River: unpredictable and ever-changing. Floods and drought. Man, feet on the ground, cannot know what comes next. But what on earth has it got to do with you and me anyway?

Boland reminds us of our situatedness in a certain environment. Being born in Dublin, she has heard the stories of the river as a woman many times as a child. It has taken her some time to realize the difference between the representations of femaleness and her own life as a woman. In *Anna Liffey*, a woman makes a discovery about her relationship to the river. She celebrates the spirit of the river and calls it with a female name, but suddenly, she starts resisting the simple equation woman/river because of her own experience as a woman in Ireland. She notices that if a feminized naming of "place" is used in nationalist politics, the consequences can be serious for women. Instead of contending to her position as a member of a nation which values women as lifeless icons, she advices her readers to change the narrative plot of the nationalist story themselves:

> Make of a nation what you will
> Make of the past
> What you can -
>
> There is now
> A woman in a doorway.
>
> It has taken me
> All my strength to do this.
>
> Becoming a figure in a poem.
>
> Usurping a name and a theme. (Boland 1994c:43.)

Boland has become tired during the process of realization that a river is not a woman. In the same sense, she realizes that women in the past used all their energy to serve the nation. If women could resist becoming figures in a poem, or in the rhetoric of the State, it would be possible for them to participate in making Ireland a better place for all women to live in; it would also give them the energy to rewrite their past.

Last but not least, it seems almost obligatory to consider the role of the Catholic Church in nationalist myth-making. One of the categories of the "iconic feminine" which still remains beyond my discussion is the virgin mother. As members of the Catholic Church, women get trained to admire and worship this icon from an early age. Paula Meehan illustrates a girl's early experience in her first Holy Communion in *Don't Speak to Me of Martyrs*:

> And in there too a September evening
> the pro-cathedral, girls in rows at prayer,
> gaze at the monstrance, lulled to adoration,
> mesmeric in frankincense and candlelight:
>
> "Hail our life our sweetness and our hope
> To thee do we cry poor banished children of Eve
> To thee do we send up our sighs
> Mourning and weeping this valley of tears"
>
> I push back to the surface, break clear,
> the light has come on, fluorescent,
> and banishes my dreaming self.
> It is after all an ordinary room.
> (Meehan 1990:75.)

Meehan clearly prefers "an ordinary room" to the hypnotic atmosphere of the cathedral. The cathedral is somewhere beneath the surface, in the undertow of the everyday experience. The girls at prayer are horrified and fascinated by a statue or a painting of Virgin Mary — a kind of a trance. The smell of incense and candles heighten the experience, but Meehan still drags the subject of the poem to the fluorescent lights away from the Catholic iconography. Meehan fills the places with lights and shadows: the whole poem is a play between "up" and "down", "light" and "dark".

Nell McCafferty (1993:53–54) brings me to another place, to Granard, a small rural town in co.Longford, in the middle of the island. *Countryside: cosy*

homesteads. In January 1983, a fifteen-year old young woman called Ann Lovett died there after giving birth to a baby on a stony ground with no assistance. Nobody admitted to knowing about the pregnancy before the mother and the child were found. The place was highly symbolic: a grotto on the edge of the town, behind the Church and the graveyard, dedicated to the Virgin Mary. McCafferty takes her readers to that place:

> Contrary to the press reports, the grotto where Ann Lovett gave birth — where her baby died, where the priests gave her Extreme Unction and baptised the baby, where the doctor treated her, where the parents were brought to be with her — is not accessible to public gaze. It is the most secluded spot in Granard town, which is why the young go there when they are mitching from school. It lies just beyond, but enough beyond the Church and the row of houses opposite the Church which mark the end of the town proper. Beyond the Church and the houses, there is only a hill and beyond that, along the deserted country road, there is only the graveyard. (McCafferty 1983:53.)

McCafferty has obviously been there and studied the landscape and the atmosphere of the little town carefully. She sees the place in the eyes of a girl in labour pains, and makes the reader follow her logic: the place where she could give birth had to be remote from the town centre but not too far away; one can also imagine that in her anxiety, she was praying for forgiveness from Virgin Mary for her sins:

> Unless you turned sharp left up a broad, leafy walled lane and stepped through a gate into a lonely quarried dell enclosed by a tall thicket. High up on the granite face of the dell is the Virgin Mary. She can be seen from the public road, through the evergreen trees. A person lying on the ground at her feet would not be seen. A girl might give birth there and leave the baby behind. Other babies, in other places, have been left behind by young girls who then walked away.
> (McCafferty 1983:53–54.)

Virgin Mary could be seen; Ann was invisible for a long time after the baby was born. The baby died on the ground; Ann was still alive when the locals found them. An enclosed place with an ultimate icon who does not speak but occupies a place in young girls' minds. A simple interpretation would be that Ann sacrificed herself in front of Virgin Mary; the actual situation was more complex than that. However, the silence of the community about her pregnancy is what is at stake here: the people later admitted that they preferred not to know what was going on. Ann's family was not able to deal with the situation either:

> Those are Family Matters.
> Ann Lovett brought her pregnancy to full term.
> On stony ground.
> In winter.
> Mother and child died.
> Why? How?
> Ask the Family.
> We'll stand by them until they speak. Until they speak we'll stand by. You can't interfere with the Family, dead or alive.
> (McCafferty 1983:54.)

McCafferty takes me to the grotto: I am standing there, feeling the ice-cold ground, shivering in front of the statue. The place is scary, grave-like and absolutely quiet. McCafferty talks to me in short sentences: no further explanations are needed. She speaks out Ann's pain, or at least tries to: Ann herself could not speak in that little town in the middle of the island. She was silenced by the people around her who did not want to know, by the Catholic social teaching about motherhood and marriage, by her own guilt, shame and fear.

Ann Lovett's case is one of the most extreme stories told in the present data. Her death has been mourned by various women writers apart from McCafferty. Though she is not the only woman who has died for similar reasons in Ireland, her case stands out from all the other cases because of the place where she gave birth. The place was as "iconic" as possible, and the time of her death enhanced the news value of the case. It was the time when the Pro-Life campaigners were touring around the island for making the life of the unborn a constitutional right. Jars with foetuses in them were taken to schools for teenagers to be examined in the classroom. Later on in 1983, a referendum was held on the issue, and the Pro-Life campaigners won. (Mahon 1987:65–66.)

Out of the four texts discussed in this chapter, *The Death of Ann Lovett* is the most tragic one because it demonstrates the role of "the iconic feminine" in a real-life context: it can make a woman keep quiet, although it would be naïve in Ann's case to conclude that only the icons of the Catholic Church contributed to her silence. The fictional subject in Mebdh's *Easter 1991*, "sick in the womb", started to speak about her anxieties; Ann Lovett never had an opportunity to do that. She spent the last hours of her life in a place dominated by "the iconic

feminine"; the other fictional subject in Meehan's *Don't Speak to Me of Martyrs* escaped such a place to "an ordinary room". Though none of the poems in the present data are not directly about Ann Lovett, the writers are dealing with the silence and secrecy in women's lives in Ireland, and they are willing to break that silence in their writing. They, adult middle-aged women, cannot speak out *for* pregnant teenage girls but what they can do is to make the issues visible and audible in the general public. In this respect, writing is a prototypical political act, as an articulation of women's rights.

In this chapter, women's subversions of the nationalist tradition of "the iconic feminine" have been portrayed. The texts are expressions of fatigue of the one-dimensional metaphors of "Irish womanhood". In the iconic tradition, the image of Woman is tied to a rural place and to a romanticized, nostalgic temporalisation. Be it Cathleen ni Houlihan, Anna Liffey or Virgin Mary, the texts reveal that living as a woman in the middle of powerful iconography is not easy. In the Irish context, it seems that there is a need of constant rewriting of the same message. In the present data, every version of subversion is different in tone: they are all deliberately personal, consisting of the writer's own memories and experiences meddled with a discussion of the nationalist or religious myths. In the next chapter, I will explore another mythical dimension of the texts, namely the cult of nationalist heroes and heroines.

4.5 Hero(in)es and ordinary people

> A good nationalist should look upon slugs in a garden much the same way as she looks upon the English in Ireland, and only regret that she cannot crush the nation's enemies as she can the garden's, with one tread of her dainty foot.
>
> CONSTANCE MARKIEVICZ (1909 in Innes 1994:143)

Constance Markievicz participated in the Easter Rising in 1916 alongside with her male compatriots. In the metaphor above, she expresses her opinion about the presence of the English in her garden. Amusingly enough, the extract appears in her gardening column in a nationalist women's magazine *Beàn na hÉireann*. In addition to giving concrete advice in gardening, she found her

column a useful political mouthpiece. Markievicz was among the few people who were not executed as a consequence of the Rising; her sex was her saviour. Instead, after periods of imprisonment in Ireland and England, she refused the position of a minister in the British parliament Westminster and became a minister in the illegal Dáil and later in the first Dáil of the Free State. She was neither an angel nor a comely maiden: in photographs, she posed with a gun. She had a clearly articulated enemy and she wanted it out of the whole island. Could such a stance be possible in the 1990's as the "slugs" still reign in one end of the garden, or are such arguments too simplistic today?

In this chapter, I will present a continuum to the "iconic feminine", namely the cult of nationalist heroes, and to a minor extent, heroines, too. In the present data, both mythical icons and real-life Irish heroes and heroines appear side by side, and clearly contribute to the same phenomenon: the construction of the "folk memory", discussed already in the previous chapter. I would suggest, however, that in a political analysis, a slight difference should be made between the "iconic feminine" and actual historical subjects and I am trying to explicate that difference in this chapter by exploring the writings of Paula Meehan, Máighréad Mebdh and Nell McCafferty.

Paula Meehan (1990:74) calls the place in which nationalist relics are restored "a cobwebby state" and a "chilled vault". A place belonging to the past, but still fresh in people's memories. When reading women's descriptions of the suffering or the deaths of the nationalists, one cannot ignore the freshness of their approach. For instance, an observant reader can smell the martyrs' bodies apart from merely imagining the sight of them. The texts bring their writers' views of nationalism remarkably close to the reader; it is easier to grasp the emotional weight of the historical events though their "subjective" accounts than through a quasi-objective history book. The fact that women write poems about the events of 1916 in the 1990s suggests that the ghosts of the hero(in)es still occupy a central place in Irish "folk memory". If compared to my own position as a Finn, I cannot imagine such a close relationship between my own life and Finnish history that I could, for example, write a poem about the deaths of the

Reds in the Finnish civil war.[18] In my reading, I am therefore bewildered by the connections some of the writers make between their own "place" today and the history which they have been taught at school, at home, in the pub, by teachers, relatives and the odd passers-by.

Meehan's poem *Don't Speak to Me of Martyrs* is an expression of tiredness of the monuments and documents of the nationalist canon. Instead of rooting herself in the heroic past, the author of the poem seeks a place which is not predefined by somebody else. The poem starts with a father figure, a political demagogue:

> Up there on the platform a man
> speaks of the people: of what
> we need, of who we really are, of how
> we must fight to liberate ourselves. (Meehan 1990:74.)

The man is a patriot who knows what is best for his country, who speaks assuredly of the identity of Irish people and their needs. He knows what his people are, and he knows the solution to the Irish question: it is people's liberation, reddish in colour. He stands on the platform, and the author looks up to him. However, she is not listening anymore: the lights in the meeting hall interest her more:

> Down through the cigarette smoke
> the high windows cast
> ecstatic light to the floorboards
> stiletto pocked and butt scorched.
> but now such golden pools of sun to bask in there
> *I am fish,*
> *water my demesne.* (Meehan 1990:74.)

The woman starts swimming as fish. She is not interested in the stable identity imposed on her from the outside. She prefers the unpredictable, slippery movements of fish: to the official politics "up there" she remains cold as fish. Her thoughts ramble from a memory of her father visiting nationalist monuments

[18] I do not mean here that it would be unthinkable for *all* Finnish women of my generation, or of my mother's generation, to write about the civil war in a personal manner. However, such a stance that Meehan takes seems more unusual among Finnish women than Irish women. In Finland, it is more often the male historians' and filmmakers' task to revise the events of the struggle for independence. The same applies in Ireland, but at least there are some women writers joining the project.

in museums and the memory of her mother, nursing the little girl to sleep, to her first communion and Hail Marys. There is a hint of spookiness in the air:

> I wind up in the ghost place
> the language rocks me to,
> a cobwebby state, chilled vault
> littered with our totems;
>
> a tattered Plough and Stars,
> a bloodstained Proclamation,
> Connolly stripped wounded to a chair,
> Mayblossom in Inchicore. (Meehan 1990:74.)

"The ghost place" is found through language, on history lessons, in the oral tradition passing from one generation to another. The atmosphere has changed dramatically from the anticipating air at the political meeting: as a result of activism, one of the martyrs, James Connolly, is about to be executed. The socialist totems of the people's liberation are now covered in blood. British soldiers are killing the self-proclaimed citizens of the illegal Republic in Inchicore, West Dublin. This is the past of the nation the author is constantly reminded of: the memories are a steady part of her, she cannot let them go but she is, by no means, clinging into them. What happens today and what went on before cannot be strictly separated but looking at things from a different light than that of the smoky ecstasy at the political meeting may help:

> I push back to the surface, break clear,
> the light has come on, fluorescent,
> and banishes my dreaming self.
> It is after all an ordinary room. (Meehan 1990:75.)

After having spent some time in "a chilled vault" the author decides to push herself back to the surface, to the ordinary room. The movement from the depths to the surface is interesting here: the timeline seems to go from top to bottom instead of a horizontal line. When she gets to the surface, she is no longer a slippery fish as she was in her daydream. She becomes an ordinary person who lives in a city of new beginnings, and new definitions of "self" and "place":

And we are ordinary people.
We pull our collars up and head
for the new moon sky of our city
fondling each whorled bead in our macabre rosaries.
(Meehan 1990:75.)

In my interpretation, the "macabre" rosary beads are the past of the ordinary people: they carry them with them wherever they go. However, Paula Meehan suggests that it is possible to take distance from the "cobwebby state" into which Irish history and literature has placed her. Living people, bright lights, "the new moon sky" are a new starting point, although the rosaries are there.

Máighréad Mebdh brings martyrdom to the contemporary context in *Easter 1991*. As seen before, the poem resembles a telegram or the headlines of a newsreport. Apart from being a highly reactive poem, it also has an informative function. It tells, for example, about the death places of political prisoners sentenced for affiliation with the IRA:

Sharon Gregg dies in Mountjoy
Feargal Gallagher dies in Cullyhanna
Patrick Sheehy dies in Nenagh
Dessie Ellis is handed on a stretcher to my enemy/
the facts are loud/
(Mebdh 1993:59.)

Mebdh states the "facts" only and does not take the topic of "heroic" death any further. For her, the deaths of these people are not glorious in the same sense as the deaths of the martyrs of 1916 were for the Catholic population of the time. However, Mebdh mentions "my enemy", Britain, which is again a loud statement against British rule in Northern Ireland. As found in chapter 4.4, the poem is an answer to the nationalists' portayal of Éire encouraging her sons to gather arms against the common enemy. Understood as an ironic continuum of the same tradition, the "enemy" belongs to the mythical construction, the feminine Ireland, and not to Mebdh herself. Still, there is a more literal way of reading the poem, in which there is no doubt about Mebdh's sympathies in the Northern Irish civil war. Her position to the question of the border is not unproblematic, and it will be dealt with further in chapter 4.8.

Nell McCafferty shares the interest in the affairs of Northern Ireland with Máighréad Mebdh. In the present data, she is not as "loud" in her opinions as Mebdh is but she is, however, talking from a Northern Catholic point of view. Born in the "Bogside" in Derry, she pays attention to the lower social ranking of the Catholic population in the North, and decides to deal with the border as an issue which people have to cope with (McCafferty 1984:351). In a text directed to the feminists of the world, ironically in a massive publication called *Sisterhood is Global*, she compares the situation on her island to that of Iran, South Africa and Palestine and states: "...we have found that we cannot deny our history and it comes back to haunt and divide us. What the hell." (ibid:348.) McCafferty manages to illustrate in five pages an antithesis of the whole idea of the book: that sisterhood is not global in Ireland and that people living outside the island may find it hard to understand the absurdities of the situation "between the womb and the border".

She recalls the early days of activism in the women's movement and reveals their "secret strategy":

> It was our fervent hope of those embarked on that Pill train that the Irish government would arrest us on our return, making us instant martyrs and obliterating all our sins. *If you want to progress socially in colonized Ireland, we told ourselves, the first thing you have to do is go to jail.* Look at Eamon de Valera. Look at Countess Markievicz, who came out of jail to become the first woman ever elected to the British Parliament of Westminster, the first woman Minister (of Labour) in an independent Irish Parliament, the first female commandant of the IRA... (and her Polish and aristocratic by marriage, at a time when neither Poles nor aristocrats were fashionable or popular.) (ibid:349; italics mine.)

The historical martyrdom strategy did not succeed in the 1970's: the women did not get to jail and none of the activists were treated as martyrs or heroines afterwards. McCafferty seems to be totally disillusioned with the possibility of having new nationalist, let alone feminist hero(in)es in contemporary Ireland. Instead, she treats everyone with a blink in the eye, including the hero Eamon de Valera and the heroine Constance Markievicz, and manages to find humorous elements even in the issue of Ireland's partition. Her birthplace, for example, is a place where the men kill each other but it is also a place where Southern women travel to buy condoms for their men. She ends her report by comforting her

international audiences with a "bit of good news":

> Ireland has an official policy, supported by its women and men, of international neutrality. We absolutely refuse to fight with anyone beyond our territorial waters. (ibid:351.)

The two other texts by McCafferty in the present data do not share the humour of the previous one. In this chapter, one more text by McCafferty (1980:19–22) will be discussed to point out a difference between Mebdh's statement about the "enemy" and prison life. In 1980, according to McCafferty, a group of Northern political female prisoners in Armagh started a dirt strike to protest against being denied to wear their black berets as a sign of their "imaginary" political status. As a punishment for disobeying the rule, the women were denied bodily integrity for 24 hours. After releasement from the special cells without washing facilities, the women decided to continue the policy of non-washing. McCafferty writes about the situation after 200 days have passed since the beginning of the strike, and makes a plea for Southern feminists to take the issue seriously:

> The windows and spy holes are boarded up. Flies and slugs grow fat as they grow thin. They eat and sleep in this dim, electrically-lit filth, without reading materials or radio or television. They are allowed out for one hour per day, hopefully to stand in the rain. The consequences for these women, under these conditions, will be, at the least, urinary, pelvic and skin infections. At worst, they face sterility, and possible death. (McCafferty 1980:19.)

"It is my belief that Armagh is a feminist issue", states McCafferty (1980:20) to all women who count themselves as feminists on the island. There are no accusals of enmity or of an illegal border, the only thing she wants to change for the time being is the condition of women in British prisons. She demands that all women, despite their suspected crimes, were provided with a right to bodily integrity, not as a special right for political prisoners but as a universal human right.

According to McCafferty (1980:18), there was menstrual blood on the walls of Armagh prison. The kind of protest the women were involved in was not "heroic" by any means, even to a lesser extent than the deaths of the prisoners in Mebdh's *Easter 1991*. The women in McCafferty's text do not even

have names: they are just women with normal bodily functions. A heroine with a name would not be reported to menstruate in a filthy prison cell, even if she did so. Other things about her bravery would be reported, as was in the case of the early nationalist women prisoners in the 1910's, including Constance Markievicz. Furthermore, there is still another female figure to be considered: the iconic feminine. An icon would not have periods at all: only immaculate conception would be possible for her.

This is the main point of my argument in the two previous chapters: that women's lives in "the real world" differ dramatically from the earlier representations of Irish "womanhood" as selfless dedication to the nation, and that the writers of the present data all wish that the age of icons and heroism were gone. Apart from the differences of tone and attitude in the texts described above, the writers seem to converge in this issue.

4.6. Silent sisters and the rhetoric of "home"

Eamon de Valera (1882–1975) was one of the central makers of the Republic of Ireland. Prime Minister after gaining independence from Britain, and at old age the President of Éire, he was the personification of the politics in the postcolonial Free State after 1921. His ideology was marked by paternalism and protectionism, and his unfulfilled goal was an all-Ireland republic. (Hughes 1994:59.) In the famous quote about "comely maidens" in the beginning of the analysis section, he shortly expresses his political utopia. The kind of Ireland he wanted to build was a rural society detached from worldly influences, a haven of "right living" by the will of God. In his dreams, an Irish home would be filled with "the laughter of comely maidens". Young women would not be interested in emigration: there would be enough work for them *in the home.*

De Valera drafted a new Constitution, *Bunreacht na hÉireann*, for his country in 1937. Third in order in the history of Ireland and second in that of the Free State, it was the successor of the previous Constitutions but it also contained many features which can be interpreted as de Valera's personal

political statements. One of the most striking articles in the Constitution which is still in use in Ireland in 1997 is the article on the position of women. In this chapter, the clauses of that article will be read as an example of the kind of vision which the present writers deconstruct in their texts.

De Valera was himself born in the United States. When his Spanish father died, his impoverished Irish mother sent him to Ireland to be taken care of by her relatives, only at the age of two. J.J. Lee (1989:207) proposes that one of the main reasons why de Valera clung to his ideal-type of the Irish family is to be found in his childhood. It seems as if, argues Lee, de Valera was trying to forget the fact that he was abandoned by his mother by creating a selfless Woman who commits all her energy to motherhood in the Constitution. Even later in his legistlative career, he showed little compassion to single mothers who were in the same position as her own mother was; the idealized Woman ran over the issues which were at the time important for women (Lee 1989:331).

Basil Chubb (1992:42), a political theorist, remarks that *Bunreacht na hÉireann* was "literally de Valera's Constitution." He personally presented it to the Dàil and to the citizens, and consulted only some officials and the Catholic clergy when drafting it. Obviously, no women participated in its making. The TD[19] Gemma Hussey (1995:418) remembers that there were three women representatives of Fianna Fáil sitting in the Dáil in 1937, who did not make any relevant contribution to the debate on the clause about women's "preferred constitutional activity". They became later known, Hussey contends, as "the Silent Sisters." Evelyn Mahon (1988:56) claims that their silence made de Valera believe that 99% of Irish women were happy with the clause.

On 29 December 1937, de Valera proudly presented his product, the revised Constitution, to the people in a radio broadcast. Coming to the article 41, he read Irish women their constitutional rights:

19 abbreviation for *Teachta Daile*, a member of the Irish Parliament.

> 41. 2. 1' In particular, the State recognises that by her life within the home, woman gives to the State a support without which the common good cannot be achieved.
>
> 41. 2. 2' 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.
> (*Bunreacht na hÈireann.*)

The story of Irish women and "place" unwinds itself here: whatever women may have said about their location, and it is a complex, shifting network indeed, the official opinion about their "place" is stable and simple. The ultimate State document assigns Woman as a mother in the home. How could de Valera's viewpoint be argued in a similar, simplistic vein? Sixty years have passed since the drafting of the Constitution, the modernisation of Irish society has lead to the dispersion of de Valera's protectionist dreams, and the island has had an active feminist movement for nearly thirty years. De Valera's discourse, however simple it may seem, is not comparable to any feminist discourse in the 1990's. Playing with the idea of a time-machine is only amusing: de Valera could not win the debate with contemporary Irish feminists. But how is it that despite the amount of articulate women, the position of women in the Republic in general is closer to the comely maidens in the cosy homestead than to the angry suffragettes? An outline of statistic figures on the socioeconomic realities of Irish women may reveal something:

> In 1992, 32% of Irish women of working age were in the labour force, earning an independent income through paid work, in comparison to 70% of men./.../
> Ireland had the highest rate of female unemployment in the EU in 1992./.../
> Ireland has one of the lowest levels of childcare provision in the EU./.../
> 53% of Irish women working full-time in the home are totally economically dependent on their spouses./.../
> (NWCI 1995:7,22.)

In more general terms, Eurostat estimated in 1991 that women's economic activity rate was the lowest in the European Union: 31.9 % of all adult women were working. The average figure in the Union was 43.4%, in the United Kingdom it was 51.6% and in Denmark 61.1%. In the six counties of Northern Ireland, the figure ranged from 41.4% to 47%, being lower than in the United Kingdom in average, but still markedly higher than in the twenty-six counties.

(Monk and Garcia-Ramon 1996:3–4.)

My interpretation of the clauses 41.2.1 and 41.2.2 is affected by the present data, the statistics and my experiences in the Republic. Aware of the fact that it is impossible to answer de Valera, the only strategy available is to use the imaginary time-machine and hand over to him my thoughts:

A plot, a conspiracy. About the patriarchal family. Women disempowered on the shelf. Reluctance to change the plot: the more important issues have to be dealt with first, the trivial ones can wait. Can a few words actually hurt somebody? A mere question about political correctness: nothing to do with here and now, the real life. Women, please go home and wait, will you? You will be served after the nation. The national interests are here now, you'll be back tomorrow, OK? But whose nation is this? Are women living here? Or just a few good nationalists? What are women doing here, did they write the plot, or did they just give the patriots their support? Support troops, in the home, helping to achieve the common good.

The rhetoric has to be changed.

Instead of studying my own thoughts, I am now interested in what Irish women themselves make out of the two sentences. In the present data, the clauses has not been directly challenged, which is understandable: the clauses do not obviously inspire creative writing. Another possibility is that the clauses are forgotten in daily life. Constitutional clauses rarely belong to the "folk memory" of a people, only to the memory of the social scientist or the lawyer. In Ireland, the situation is, however, curious: some constitutional questions, such as abortion and divorce, lead to referendums and still, the basic clauses about the position of women remain untouched. On the other hand, in my understanding, the writers' texts, some of which are clearly opposed to the idea of domesticity, lead to the Constitution because it is the ultimate stage of confinement of women *in the home*. The writers are silent about the document itself but highly vocal about its contents. I read all the texts in my data as subversions of predefined "placements" of women, and, therefore, it seems interesting to find out what other women -and men — have said about de Valera's constitution.

As any texts, legal texts can be interpreted in a multiplicity of ways. The lawyer Yvonne Scannell (1994:201) finds the clauses 41.2.1 and 41.2.2 "grossly offensive to the dignity and freedoms of womanhood" but, simultaneously, she gives room for the more traditional interpretation in which de Valera's message is taken literally and seen as "a tribute to the work that is done by women in the home as mothers". The extract speaks of the state's paternalistic protection: no *mother* is *forced* by economic necessity to work outside the home to the neglect of her duties there; it also speaks of women's *life within the home*, not only of her work there, and there is a serious essentialist implication in it. J.J. Lee (1989:206–7) mentions that de Valera was asked to amend his words into *her work for the home* but he rejected this suggestion, as he believed that Woman's role went beyond mere work and that his own definition of Woman honoured her more.

Bunreacht na hÉireann speaks of mothers neglecting their duties but does not say a word about the duties of the fathers. It fails to recognize women's personal life choices by referring to an universal Woman. In short, the Constitution represents a patriarchal family model in which the father is automatically the breadwinner and the representative of the public sphere and the mother is confined to the domestic sphere. Women become complementary supporters who are best suited by nature for work in the home. De Valera's viewpoint was in accordance with the Catholic social teaching of the time, but after the drafting of the Constitution, when many women's organisations protested against the article, he even admitted himself to having a bad reputation with women. (Mahon 1988:56, Scannell 1994:201.) Nothing happened to the two sentences, however. Were they considered important at all, or were de Valera and his successors actively trying to stop the discussion?

Evelyn Mahon is another contemporary critic of the Constitution. She asks accurately: "How are we to explain that Ireland has resisted modernizing influences and become, as it were, the last bastion of the traditional 'protection' or enslavement of women in the family?"(Mahon 1987:53–54) There is no answer to be found to her question in the present data, and neither can Mahon explain it herself. The two sentences in the Constitution seem to be some kind of

forgotten relics in the law book, which some feminist critic happens to dig out every once in a while. But there is more to it: the fiercest battles in the last twenty years of Irish history have been directly about women and the Constitution. As it is first stated that Woman belongs to a patriarchal family in which there is a working husband, it is logical to follow the story by stating that this Woman can have as many children as God gives her. Woman's life within the home has to deal with children: she could not spend all her life within those walls cooking dinners for her husband only. *The neglect of her duties in the home* can be read primarily as an instruction imposed on mothers: a working mother reading the Constitution is supposed to feel a sting of guilt at that stage. Guilt is definitely the most efficient tool for making Woman do something. But do the women in the 1990's take de Valera's instructions seriously?

Basic Chubb (1992:37–38) believes that a Constitution should reflect the political beliefs and values of the inhabitants of the country, or, at least those of the dominant group, if the country is not under the control of an external power. Put more precisely, its worth can be evaluated by the extent to which it does reflect those beliefs and values. Collins and McCann (1991:93) continue the analysis by calling the Constitution "a working set of rules and principles". They consider it a central document for Irish politics, a locus of debate about rights and obligations. The Constitution is bound by the concerns of its maker(s) but any alterations to it will measure the pace of change in the Irish political climate. In Ireland, every alteration to the Constitution has to be made through a referendum, which makes the Constitution more vibrant than in many other countries, such as Finland. It is therefore not quite right to call it a relic: people may start a protest against it and change it more easily than in many other European countries.

There have been fierce debates about women's bodies in the case of abortion, and about women's rights related to the breakup of a marriage; political values and beliefs have been contested on this era. But there has been no referendum on the "place" of women. In 1995, the National Women's Council of Ireland, an umbrella organisation for Irish women's groups and organisations, urged its members to discuss the possibility of a wholly revised

Constitution. The current Constitution is, according to NWCI, totally based on a concept of a nuclear family, at the expense of all individuals who make up such a unit and who are left outside a family founded on marriage. NWCI recommends a revised constitution to place the rights of individuals before the rights of an obscure "family". (NWCI 1995:7.) However, even NWCI does not mention directly the clause 41.2 as something that needs special attention.

Based on the notions above, it will be logical to ask whether the clause 41.2 still reflects the values of the majority of Irish people in 1997. How to measure the pace of change in Irish attitudes to women's "place" when the clause has remained unchanged for 60 years? If the Constitution is supposed to reflect the values of the citizens, this means that, for the time being, the majority of Irish people do not consider women's assigment in the home worth fighting against. If the Constitution is revised in the near future, will there actually be a heated debate on the meanings of the clause 41.2, or will the clause be omitted in consensus?

In this chapter, none of the texts of the present data was discussed. Boland, Dorcey, McCafferty, Mebdh, Meehan and Smyth have not obviously found the clause 41.2 interesting enough to write about. From an outsider's point of view it is interesting as a curiosity, as a last trace of conservative Catholicism on a changing island. Should any attention be paid to a constitutional clause at all in a study about the politics of creative women's writing is another question altogether. However, it has been my idea to problematize its content and explicate the "facts" behind it to a non-native reader. In the next chapter in particular, a tentative connection between the clause 41.2. and the present data will be revealed to the reader.

4.7 What would our mothers say?

> Understand the things I say
> don't turn away from me
> Cause I spent half my life out there
> You wouldn't disagree
> d'you see me, d'you see me
> do you like me standing there
> d'you notice, d'you know
> do you see me, d'you see me
> does anyone care
>
> THE CRANBERRIES (1994)

> ...in a country which can be crossed in a good car in no more than four hours, what would our mothers say? And whatever they said, would our fathers blame our mothers?
>
> NELL MCCAFFERTY (1984:349.)

Ireland is an island of close-knit rural communities where people know each other and often supervise each other's doings. In such a context, it is particularly interesting for villagers to know how the neighbours' children are coping with their lives in big cities or even abroad. The second quote above is from Nell McCafferty who participated in the early activities of the women's movement in Dublin in the early 1970's. "What would my mother say if I became arrested for importing illegal condoms to the country?" must have been a relevant question for a young women's liberation activist at a time when sex was an absolute taboo in general discussion on the island. The influence of the parents' opinion must not be underestimated in a situation in which a woman decides whether to become involved in feminist politics or not.

In this chapter, the importance of family ties for the writers' namings of place will be discussed, particularly from the point of view of mothers and daughters. The women have spent half, or at least one third of their lives "out there", in the words of the Irish rock group the Cranberries, and in their writing, the references to their early experiences can be easily read as a naming of place. The place in which they were born and/ or raised serves as a starting point, which cannot be completely ignored if one wants to understand the place from which they are speaking now. Fortunately, most of the writers in the present

data write their personal histories in their texts. In a sense, these namings tell me to try to understand the texts, not to turn away from them. *Does anyone care?*

I will analyse here four poems about the relationship of the author and her place of birth. Three of them emphasize the mother-daughter relationship, and in one of them both the mother and the father get equal representation. Bearing in mind the assignment of mothers *in the home*, this chapter will concentrate on viewing the daughters' descriptions of their mothers' lives and personalities, and on the difference between the lives of two generations. There is a clear generational gap here: the writers of the texts analysed here were born in the 1950s and have obviously been freer to choose their orientations in life than their mothers. The mothers must have been young at the time of the drafting of the current Constitution, and therefore possibly affected by the Catholic social teaching of the time, whereas their feminist daughters must have had alternative role models in their youth in the 1960's and 1970's.

If the "place" of a mother is defined in the Consitution as a fixed, essentialist state, it will be interesting to explore the descriptions of motherhood by women who actively challenge "the iconic feminine" in their texts in general. In this chapter, contrasted to the earlier chapters in which the focus was on women's criticism of women's "place" in history in general, the writers are speaking about their personal histories in a specific place: home (in the meaning of their parents' house). My hypothesis is that one's personal history is more difficult to question than a nation's history, and that such direct confrontations against one's parents for bad upbringing may not be as necessary in feminist politics as correcting the bias in history writing or in public policy.

In my analysis, I am interested in the weight that motherhood gets in the texts. Is motherhood described as a fluid, changing position, or as a fixed state? Is it a temporary phase in a woman's life and essentially a choice, or an eternal fate that a "normal" woman cannot escape? When talking about their mothers, the writers reveal interesting points about themselves and their own "place". They talk about their own life choices and about the influence of their mothers on their lives. In particular, they reveal alternative sources of influence and inspiration: if they do not care so much about what their mothers would say,

there must be some other "places" which seem to count more in the process of building a subjectivity.

In a sense, then, the mother-daughter relationship is also a political relationship loaded with conflicts, peace negotiations and a potential for a new beginning. It is indeed a relationship in which two people do not immediately understand each other but which can in the long run be turned, as the data indicates, into a source of empowerment.

* * *

Sometimes
when my mother speaks to me
I hear her mother's voice:
my grandmother's
with its trace of Belfast accent
which carried with it
something from every town
the Normans passed through.
(Dorcey 1995b:87.)

In her poem *My Grandmother's Voice*, Mary Dorcey writes about the women in her family: her great-grandmother, her grandmother and her mother who have all passed on to her words, expressions and gestures. The voices of these women who have been there before her seem to be her ethnic background. Her great-grandmother was a Protestant from Ulster. Therefore, her ancestors carry a trace of a Norman heritage of conquerors and colonizers. [20] Dorcey is aware of her own position as a lesbian if compared to the lives of the female generations before her: she will be the first woman in the family line without the gift and burden of reproduction. Her ancestors never had the time to sit down and write their stories. Dorcey is not occupied in running the household chores in the same way as they were, but she will never have a child to whom she could tell her stories. She speaks of the women in her family with love and affection, and feels

20 Normans were the tribe which invaded both Britain and Ireland in the eleventh and twelwth century AD. Britain became Anglo-Saxon after the conquest, and people of Norman heritage continued populating Ireland after the actual invasion. According to the historian Katharine Simms (1989:53), the invasion gave Irish people a wider sense of "community". At least the learned men, such as the bardic poets, considered themselves as members of a Western cultural community together with e.g. Icelandic saga writers.

sorry for them because the reproduction chain will stop in her:

> And hearing them -
> this fertile
> and ghostly orchestration -
> I am sorry to have brought them
> to the end of the line.
> Stopped them in their track
> across millenia.
> From what primeval starting point
> to here?
> A relay race
> through centuries
> from mother to daughter -
> an expression passed on
> a gesture,
> a profile.
> (Dorcey 1995b:88.)

Will she be the last person to speak some traces of a Belfast accent? She is "here" and not prepared to conceive.The movement across millenia has stopped to where she is now. All the women of her "race" have lived in expressions, gestures and profiles from an unknown starting point to "here". How could she pass on something to the next generation? The only thing she can do is to recreate the stories she has heard on paper, to honor her ancestors by giving their stories the time they never had:

> I lift my pen
> quickly, wanting
> to set down all the stories
> spoken by these busy, garrulous
> long lived women
> who never had a moment
> to sit down
> or lift a pen.
> (Dorcey 1995b:89.)

In the poem, Dorcey begins her transcription work with enthusiasm. She values the lives of the women before her in her writing and emphasizes this as a consciously made choice. But how does a lesbian member of a family write about motherhood? What is important for her in the inheritance from her ancestors? Dorcey does not write about their daily tasks but only about their voices, gestures, posture, wit and sense of humour. As a child, she has been observing the way the women spoke or carried themselves. It is therefore not the

traditional woman's role as a housewife she has inherited from her ancestors but something more "spiritual". Dorcey is well aware of her Irish roots but does not feel compelled to make the same life choices as her ancestors did. It is the voice that remains in her as "a ghostly orchestration" and continues living in her texts after her own death. The movement from the "primeval starting point" is not stopped "here": Dorcey passes the voice in her writing to the next generations. Time does not stand still.

From a wider perspective, the poem can be read as an expression of "ethnicity". If compared, for example with Maighread Mebdh's *Easter 1991*, Dorcey seems to withdraw from the issue of the legitimation of the Irish border and tells the story from another viewpoint. She refuses to go beyond the stories of her ancestors, perhaps because of the serious implications a wider knowledge about a "home" or "nation" may cause. I do not know a more fascinating way to define one's background than telling the love story of one's great-grandparents in the quote below: such knowledge indicates good oral storytelling traditions in the family. Dorcey finishes her poem and starts reproducing a text, a new story — a genealogy. Note the names of the religions written without capitals: for Dorcey, it is love that counts more than religion:

> I begin.
> A young woman, a protestant
> from Belfast,
> married a sea captain,
> a catholic
> who drowned at sea . . .
> (Dorcey 1995b:89.)

* * *

Paula Meehan illustrates the question of maternal inheritance in her poems *Pattern, Don't Speak to Me of Martyrs,* and *Home.* The central message of all three poems is that the author seems to have escaped her mother's influence, and created a "place" of her own. Meehan's work differs from Dorcey's in the question of reproduction: she does not relate her own "choice" to the reproductive choice of her mother's. It is purely a daughter's point of view at stake in all of the three poems.

I read *Pattern* as an autobiographical poem, and the other two without a clear indication of authorship. *Pattern* is a highly personalized poem, in which exact sentences and little details make it sound too realistic to be an anonymous story. It is a story of growing up as the eldest daughter in a poor Dublin family. The mother worked hard, had several children and died at the age of forty-two. Meehan illustrates a stormy relationship, which did not end happily:

> Little has come down to me of hers,
> a sewing machine, a wedding band,
> a clutch of photos, the sting of her hand
> across my face in one of our wars
>
> when we had grown bitter and apart.
> Some say that's the fate of the eldest daughter.
> I wish now she'd lasted till after
> I'd grown up. We might have made a new start.
>
> as women without tags like *mother, wife*
> *sister, daughter*, taken our chances from there.
> At forty-two she headed for god knows where.
> I've never gone back to visit her grave.
> (Meehan 1991:119.)

Meehan has only a few souvenirs from her mother: she did not leave too many things behind. The mother died when she was a teenager, and the memory of her death is traumatic for her: she remembers their violent fights and regrets the fact that they did not have a chance to start an adult relationship, which might have healed the scars of the daughter growing up. The tags "mother" and "daughter" were too limited and made them grow apart from each other. As a result of her mother's sudden death, Meehan refuses to visit her grave. The refusal can be interpreted as a refusal to consider her mother's influence as a major factor in the adult definition of herself. The mother works in the home on her knees: she is assigned to this inferior role by history:

> And as she buffed the wax to a high shine
> did she catch her own face coming clear?
> Did she net a glimmer of her true self?
> Did her mirror tell what mine tells me?
> I have her shrug and go on
> knowing history has brought her to her knees.
> (Meehan 1991:120.)

Meehan cannot know what her mother was thinking when she was scrubbing the floor, or if she caught a sight of "her true self" on a waxy reflection. She can only shrug her shoulders, in the same manner as her mother did. In addition to that, the historical explanation to why her mother was so keen on cleaning is the only one she can find: that history brought her to her knees. Her own past differs remarkably from what she can make out of her dead mother's life, based on the few photographs and other haphazard evidence she has collected. Her mother gave up dreaming and started following "the pattern", whereas Meehan herself reached out for the world:

> /I was sizing
> up the world beyond our flat patch by patch
> daily after school, and fitting each surprising
> city street square to a diamond. I'd watch
>
> the Liffey for hours pulsing to the sea
> and the coming and going of ships,
> certain that one day it would carry me
> to Zanzibar, Bombay, the Land of the Ethiops.
> (Meehan 1991:121.)

For Meehan, there certainly was a world beyond her family's small, polished flat. In Dublin, she could go to the harbour to watch the ships leaving for exotic countries. By walking the streets of her home town after school, she started to widen her perspective "patch by patch". Her mother, on the other hand was expecting her last child and "wrapped/ entirely in her own shadow, the world beyond her/ already a dream, already lost."

Meehan remembers all the sacrifices her mother made for her. The most vivid memory is her mother sewing clothes for the children, often out of old, worn-out clothes. She was also hoping to teach her daughter the basics of handiwork, or as Meehan half-ironically points out, her wisdom of life as well. Her mother was not keen on flying or swimming: she preferred to bring her daughter's feet on the ground. This seemed to be the only thing her mother was passionate about at the end of her short life. At that stage, "home" was a firm, no-nonsense place for Meehan, if compared to the riverbanks where she used to dream about her exotic future:

Sometimes I'd have to kneel
an hour before her by the fire,
a skein around my outstretched hands,
while she rolled wool into balls.
If I swam like a kite too high
amongst the shadows on the ceiling
or flew like a fish in the pools
of pulsing light, she'd reel me firmly
home, she'd land me at her knees.

Tongues of flame in her dark eyes,
she'd say, "One of these days I must
teach you to follow a pattern."
(Meehan 1991:122.)

In the stanzas above, a sewing pattern is turned into a pattern of life from mother to daughter: the adolescent Meehan did not have the opportunity to learn her mother's patterns. She did not become a housewife nor a dressmaker. She taught herself to fly and became a poet instead.

In *Don't Speak to Me of Martyrs*, the author of the poem is travelling in her childhood memories, and she follows her father to a dramatically different place from that of her mother's:

I am following my father's steps
on a rainy day in the National Museum
by talisman of torc, carved spiral
Sile na Gig's[21] yoni made luscious in stone.

And somewhere there is vestige
of my mother nursing me to sleep,
when all my world was touch,
when all my world was peace. (Meehan 1990:74–75.)

The father belongs to a public place, watching historical monuments and documents, one of which is an exaggerated stone carving of female genitalia. It is *the* representation of women among pictures of men and writings by men in the museum. The image leads to another image of her mother, a peaceful and tender moment before a child falls asleep. A somewhat grotesque monument,

21 Sile na Gig (or: sheela-na-gig) is an ancient stone carving symbolizing a woman, often found on the walls of the early churches or castles of Ireland. The woman's genitals (yoni) are highly exaggerated in these pictures, often implying autoeroticism. Some interpreters find this an evidence of the Church's negative attitude to women; others see sheela as a positive figure, relating women to a time before nationalist icons. (Mills 1995:76.)

from the modern point of view, is contrasted to a real-life episode in a mother-daughter relationship. On one hand, in the public where her father walks, women are portrayed as a Sheela-na-gig, as something horrifying and worth taking some distance from. On the other hand, the monument with its carved spiral patterns refers to old Celtic mythology, in which women's capability of reproduction was, apart from fearing it, also worshipped. However, the daughter knows better: her private experiences of motherhood are quite the opposite to fear and horror but she does not idealize motherhood either. She remembers her mother but does not worship her. She stays for a while in her childhood world of touch and peace but does not stand still. Her parents' influence is not the ultimate point of reference when she is looking for answers to her questions.

In the poem *Home*, Meehan tells the story of another daughter looking for a place. The author is looking for a home, a new place to which she could attach herself after a violent experience. One solution in such a crisis situation is to look for a place near your mother, or even in her womb where the author places herself for a while:

> /My rhythm
> catatonic
> I lulled myself back to the womb, my mother's heart
> beating the drum of herself and her world. I was tricked
> by her undersong, just close enough to my own.
> (Meehan 1993.)

Her mother's song resembles her own song, it is so close that it almost plays a trick on her. Lulling yourself back to the foetal position is a certain way of defending yourself from the world. An experience of domestic violence can cause a long period of closing yourself from the world: the only safe place is the imaginary womb. For the author, however, the womb is not a permanent place: her mother's drum cannot attract her for good. She cannot faithfully repeat her mother's story, nor look for shelter in her presence for the rest of her life. The mother's story is "close enough" to become an easy choice for her daughter to follow, but the daughter does not find her home in it as an adult.

* * *

If compared to the earlier discussed nationalist representations of "the iconic feminine", both Dorcey's and Meehan's accounts seem to bring about alternative interpretations of motherhood. Both writers are describing a close bond between a mother and a daughter but it is not, however, their fate to follow the path of their mothers who spent their lives *for the common good in the home.* For Dorcey, the fact that she will not have children is the main difference between her and her ancestors; she is the first woman in the family line to choose whether or not she will conceive. In Ireland, the "choice" is not taken for granted even today: in the rhetoric of the right-wing Pro-Life forces, the "choice" is made, if not a crime, at least something that God has not destined for the womankind. In addition to discussing her "choice", she disrupts the tradition of "the iconic feminine" by giving her female ancestors one feature that stands in her poem above the other features: a voice. She does not glorify their toiling for other people but honours them as individuals, as separate subjects from the other family members.

For Meehan, it is her sharp ability to analyse different parts of her background, historical and personal, that liberate her from the pattern which her mother wanted her to follow (*The Pattern*). In the two less clearly autobiographical poems the message is similar: the author talks about "a vestige" of her mother's presence (*Don't Speak to me of Martyrs*) or about having been "tricked by her undersong" but not for good (*Home*). In all three poems, the author is reaching out to the world instead of staying where her mother was. Meehan portrays her mother's life in more detail in *Pattern* than Dorcey her ancestors' lives in *My Grandmother's Voice*, and by concentrating on what her mother did in the house, scrubbing floors, sewing and telling her daughter off, she gives a more traditional impression of her mother than Dorcey does. The mother in *Pattern* is not "iconic", however: she has a voice and a clearly articulated history. But whereas Dorcey honours the women's voices in her family line, Meehan's memories of her mother's voice are more wounded and

fragile. Dorcey's mother's voice has a historical continuity which makes it beautiful for the daughter; Meehan's mother's voice was situated in a "here and now" context and it was nagging, sometimes even aggressive.

Examined at a microscopic level, the two poems seem to have different concepts of time and place. In *The Pattern*, Meehan speaks of the place where she comes from as a past place from which she learnt to take some distance after her mother's death. "The pattern" can be read as Womanhood in the Constitution, and this is something against which she has been actively fighting since she was a teenager. Meehan's critique is not directed toward the mother herself but toward history which brought her mother on her knees. This history is the common history shared by men and women: a history in which women were subsumed under the rule of men, or patriarchy. Meehan wants to reject this history in her own life: she does not emphasize the continuity between generations. On the other hand, Dorcey's past is something that she wants to conserve because she does not see history as "the official story" told in Ireland but as a genealogy of stories told by the women in her family. Dorcey wants to contribute to the "pattern" in her family, though in a different way from her ancestors. The place from which she is coming from in *My Grandmother's Voice* is a place full of strong women, and the time that she is concerned with cannot be measured by male-ordered calender.

* * *

I have purposefully read the poems analysed in this chapter in the light of the clause 41.2 in the Irish Constitution. The *woman* of the Constitution seems to be a forgotten relic for the writers of the present data, whereas they are willing to memorize the lives of their own mothers *in the home*. In the 1990's the domesticity of Irish women is a myth and a fact simultaneously: the statistics reveal a slow development towards the disintegration of the male breadwinner model, whereas the present data and other channels express alternative ways of living and a willingness for quicker and more radical reforms in society. However, the extracts about mothers and daughters in the data are not such acute

expressions of sickness and tiredness as we have seen in the earlier chapters, for example about the iconic feminine. My interpretation of the texts is that for the writers of the present data, it may have been easier to decide whether one wants to follow the mother's patterns or not than to decide whether one wants to subscribe to the "folk memory" of the island or not. As experiences, childhood memories and the national folklore are always overlapping, but *in the home* (which is not such an eternal construct as national/ist documents may convey) there is always room for individual variation. Even if a mother tries to force her daughter to follow "a pattern", as an individual, she will find her loopholes and secret places in which she can be different. We will start from this formulation of individual space- time in chapter 5.

4.8. Between the womb and the border

In 1984, Nell McCafferty (1984:347–351) divided Irish feminist groups' interests into the issues of the womb and the issues of the border. The geographical division was almost clear-cut: in the Republic, most feminists were devoted to the issues of abortion, contraception and family laws, whereas in Northern Ireland, feminism could not be separated from the general political situation of the province. In the North of the 1990's, it is still possible to find Catholic women defining themselves as "nationalist feminists" or as "republican feminists" (see e.g. Hackett 1995) whereas in the South, feminists tend to consider such historical categories as nationalism or republicanism as anachronistic and to withdraw from their usage. In the present data, six texts contain references to the partition to the island. However, only one text states clearly its inner "policy" towards Britain:

> I am Ireland/ and the Angelus Bell is tolling for me
> this illegal border will always be/
> unless we get up off our bended knee
> the priests run for my schools and my history
> there's no free state in the Catholic See
> (Mebdh 1993:60.)

As already discussed in chapter 4.5, Máighréad Mebdh's statements in *Easter 1991* are exceptional in the present data. None of the other writers express their opinion about the border between the North and the South as explicitly as Mebdh does: "this illegal border will always be /unless we get up off our bended knee". What stands out here is the change in pronouns from "I" to "we": Mebdh is addressing the listeners of the complaining Éire here. Who are the "we" with bended knee here? Whose icon is this particular Éire?

Mebdh refers mainly to the events of the South, though the poem should appeal to the nationalist minority in the North with its references to the situation of Northern political prisoners. The religious divide is not absolute here, however, as Éire expresses her dissatisfaction with the Catholic Church. If the poem is read as Mebdh's personal political stance — if she includes herself in her "we" — I would suggest that she is a Catholic-born, anti-Church republican. She wants to get rid of the border and live on a united island where the Catholic Church would not dominate in all walks of life. Her hostility is not directed towards the Protestants in the north, but towards the Catholic "medical men" in the south and towards Britain. However, her solution to the "problem" of the border — it is not a problem for everybody living in Ireland — would be acceptable for only a small Catholic-born minority who a) aspire for the unification of the island, b) share a common hatred of British imperialism but accept the presence of Protestants on the island, c) do not identify as devout Catholics and therefore accept the loosening of the "Rome Rule", which is much feared by Protestants. Anyone who has read about the conflicts in Northern Ireland and about the diversity of ethnic and religious groups living there will agree that Mebdh's solution is utopian. It is in her horizon of expectation as a hope, but its applicability is another question altogether.

Eavan Boland finds another strategy to deal with the problematic division of the island. In *Anna Liffey*, she compares her experiences of motherhood to a sense of belonging to her national heritage:

My children were born.
My country took hold of me.
A vision in a brick house.
Is it only love
That makes a place?

I feel it change.
My children are
Growing up, getting older.
My country holds on
To its own pain. (Boland 1994c:45.)

As a mother of young children, she obviously felt more tied to her house in the Dublin suburbs, and she believed that her maternal feelings for the children could spill over to concern the whole country. When the children are about to leave the house and she notices the first traces of ageing in her body, she also notices that the country which she once loved, is still holding on to the problem of the border. Her awareness of the "national question" seems to have grown in the recent years: the similar kind of revelation is at stake here as in Boland's discussion about the Famine, "I see now, I didn't see then."

Ailbhe Smyth is more famous in Ireland for her activism for abortion rights (issues of the womb) than her opinions about the border. However, in her recent writing (Smyth 1995a) she also looks for possibilities for interaction with Northern feminists on the "bogland" where they live. In a single paper, she discusses the recent political crises of both the North and the South and tries to find a connection between gender relations and the division of the island. For example, at the time of the beginning of the peace negotiations in 1994, the Republic went through a legitimacy crisis: the government broke down because the Taoiseach[22] had appointed the same judge who had prevented the girl "X" from travelling to Britain in 1992 as the Attorney General in the High Court. The same judge had recently delayed the processing of the case of a paedophilic priest. While the government should have been busy with the issues of the border, it had to discuss the internal affairs first, dealing again with sex and the Church. This lead to the resignation of the Taoiseach and the newly appointed Attorney General. In the new government, which did not include Fianna Fàil,

22 Taoiseach is the Irish term for prime minister.

abortion briefly rose as an issue alongside with the issues of the border. (Smyth 1995a:7–29; 39.)

Smyth (1995a:39–41) is excited by the changes in the political climate of the country, and calls the chain of events "dam-bursting". For her, the situation is particularly vivid because, at the time of the crisis, she was herself in the United States at a conference organized as a common platform for both Southern and Northern Irish women. She asks herself: *How could I forget where I was when the dam burst?* She remembers the day because she was simultaneously trying to build a common ground for Northern and Southern feminists on the expenses of American women. Despite the fact that common ground could not be achieved in a week, she is happy with the results of their own negotiations. She pays attention to the recent "untalkative" history of the island and concludes:

> But we did talk, and we didn't (on the whole) twist each other's words. I don't think we proved anything, except that our confusions and uncertainties about ourselves and each other, about the past, the present and the future will take a lot of talking to sort out.
>
> *Bogland, they say takes a long time to regenerate.*
> (Smyth 1995a:41.)

Smyth clearly hopes for a more talkative future. It is the element of voice at stake here: Northern and Southern women can continue to meet in the future, too and create their own political space by raising their voices as political subjects. She does not make the process of regenerating a bogland look easy, but for her the only way to avoid further divisions and conflicts is to keep talking — and listening to each other.

In the present data, there are many attempts to deal with bodies, history and national politics together. If there was a clear division between the womb and the border in the Irish women's movement in the 1970's, it seems to have broken down to a certain extent in the present data. All the writers take up both aspects into account well in their texts. Not all texts contain both elements: in the texts based in the 19th century there is no border, and some texts deal with a smaller scale than national politics. However, McCafferty's original critique of feminists' centredness on either the womb and motherhood or on the border and nationalism is not valid in the case of the present writers. As we have seen in this

part of the analysis, the meeting place of the womb and the border in the present data is often a woman's body, the writer's own body as a site of politics of location, or the bodily experience of an imaginary author, a woman in the past. To start one's analysis from one's own body seems to be the best strategy to avoid universalisms, such as the commonly used "Irish womanhood".

Next from the body comes one's most immediate surroundings. Many of the texts draw surprisingly exact maps of the landscape in which the writer moves. On one hand, many texts pay homage to the beauties of Irish nature and to a rich cultural city space. On the other hand, some texts reveal more depressing scenes, for example, a rural village dominated by a Madonna figure in front of which a young girl died. The most problematic place in this reading appeared to be "home", and the figure will be even further problematized in chapter 6. In particular, if "home" is tied with other figures such as "nation" or "woman", the combination seems to become instantly unfavourable for women who are trying to break free from the persistant traditions of Catholic nationalism on the island.

To think about Ireland in other terms than "home", "nation" or the iconic feminine must be a difficult task for people born and raised in the midst of powerful national mythologies, and the present data does not seem to offer so many alternatives for a possible renewed figure of Ireland. Re-naming one's country in more dynamic terms than home or nation is probably a project of a lifetime, and the writers of the present data have the rest of their lives for it. Some ideas for a possible re-naming do occur in the data: Dorcey's account of her female relatives' voices as a kind of genealogy in *My Grandmother's Voice*, or Boland's appraisal of voices and landscape in *The Singers*, for instance. Those poems suggest that it is not necessary to leave the idea of Ireland as one's point of reference altogether but it is still possible to think about the place as something more dynamic than the worn-out nationalist metaphors. Dorcey and Boland both build a bond between themselves, the readership and the female generations of the past, and perhaps it is just this intergenerational exercise they engage themselves in that frees them from one-sided views of nationality.

The element of voice seems to be radically in opposition with the kind of history writing the writers of the present data are hoping to free themselves from. If History is viewed as something rational, objective and flawless, written down in the annals and therefore "original", the present data is not historical. Although based in the past, many texts are purely fictional, and some seem to be clearly autobiographical but none of them are "objective" in the sense that a historian could track the course of events down and verify their truthfulness. Instead of calling the texts history writing, a more accurate term for most of the articles or poems would be storytelling. For example, in *My Grandmother's Voice* and in *The Singers*, the presentation of the past women's lives in the data is also oral instead of merely textual, and, in particular, the themes of the poems, storytelling and singing, involve a voice that changes every time a story is told and sings a different song every day. Dorcey and Boland do not even try to claim that they know "objectively" what the lives of Irish women in the past were like and, still, they seem to have a sense of how their lives were constructed, and how information was passed on to the next generation. They respect the voices more than the written tradition because they know that their past could not have been written down "totally" by anyone. Their texts can be read as a rebellion against "totalitarian" forms of history writing, but this is, of course, only one approach.

Taken to a psychological level, one suggestion to the question why the women write about the past the way they do is that they do not seem to have an urge to know for sure about their origins or foundations. To write or speak about some rather unspecified "women who were singers in the West" or about the busy ancestors who did not write down their stories is a sign of a return to the age of small stories: a denial of certain answers and absolute truths. Because the historical data is simply not available for them in a complete package, the writers of the present data show that they are happy with stories re-told with a dynamic voice and changing vocabulary. The sense that there were people who made a difference before them seems to be more important for the present writers than definite knowledge about their doings. They do not want to capture the past into a neat form but to make their stories from the past flow into the present

moment. The possibility that some of the readers will also find their stories moving and empowering is perhaps the main goal of their writing, not an increase in historical information.

The overall conclusion of this reading is that the most effective strategy against one-sided images of women, whether in history writing, in literature or in legislation, is to give them a voice and a body. If there is no material left of the "real" women in the past, one has to invent their stories, to base them on the traces which still are available. If the text is about the writer herself, an accurate politics of location, by telling the readers when, where, why and under which circumstances the text was written, is a part of the same strategy. In particular, if the text deals with highly contested meanings, such as the legitimation of an opinion about the Irish border, abortion or the Famine, politics of location is acutely needed to avoid dangerous generalisations.

The most delightful conclusion to which the women writers of the present data come is that there is a way out of "the cobwebby state". In the next chapter, before the end of our journey, we will briefly discuss this aspect.

5. WHERE IS HOME *NOW* ?

In the previous chapter, our schedule was heavy with historical places and dates. We visited St.Brigid's Kildare in the seventh century, a secular Brigid's *clachan* in the 1840's, an emigrant ship, the iconic Ireland's sterile hospital, the dead bodies' Inchicore in 1916, de Valera's cosy homestead in 1943 and Paula Meehan's childhood home in the 1960's, all found in the writers' space of experience. In this chapter, the discussion is concentrated on the places where the texts leave us, which is the present of the texts. If the focus in the previous chapter was on the past in the present, the setting will change here to the future in the present. The analysis in this chapter is not as meticulous as before; it is only my intention here to discuss, in Koselleck's terms, how the space of experience affects the horizon of expectation.

This reading is a "provisional" reading: very little contextual information will be given here if compared to its abundance in the first reading. The nature of the extracts analysed here is different from the extracts in the first reading: they do not require such a heavy interpretation. For someone less specialized in Irish issues, this chapter may be a break and a relief.

The overall theme of this second reading is destabilisation and dislocation. First, we will visit three "privileged" locations, in which the writer reflects her current life in terms of the future. Second, we will see how the meanings of "home" vary within the texts and what kind of functions the destabilisation of home may have as a feminist strategy in Ireland.

5.1. "I am not an ordinary woman": displacement and privileged places

Starting again from the pre-history of the story, we will return to the Celtic mysteries. Mary Dorcey's poem *Night Passage* is a kind of riddle inspired by Celtic mythical stories of the poet and the Otherworld. As we saw in 4.1., the Celtic mythology is full of stories in which heroes, in many cases the poet

himself, makes a heroic voyage to the Otherworld and back. The poet, neither asleep not awake, is in an in-between state, neither "here" nor "there". Such an undetermined location appeals to Dorcey's own life:

> Night passage is the best thing
> neither leaving nor arriving.
> A ship travelling in darkness
> between here and there.
> (Dorcey 1995c:34.)

For her, the mystic night passage is a productive state of mind: as a Celtic poet on a ship to Otherworld, she does not have to fix her location onto a particular point. She writes about her "here" and "there", the city where she can live with her lover, and the countryside which seems to suit her better, but she is lonely in an empty house. An imaginary night passage — the Celtic poets were at their most productive in the night, neither asleep nor awake — is the best solution for her:

> There have been places crowded by you
> and places desolate for the want of you.
> Sooner or later
> everywhere becomes somewhere.
> Night passage is the best thing
> before there becomes here.
> (Dorcey 1995c:34.)

The poem consists of an unconventional concept of time/space, which was typical for the Celtic riddles. In fact, it is an illustration of how time and space can be conceived as interrelated dimensions, a problematics which was discussed in 2.3. There is movement "between here and there", but it is "neither leaving nor arriving". A space there definitely is: it is a ship in movement on a sea. Simultaneously the space is time, a duration of one night after which it ends. Or, conversely, time is space, conceptualized as movement on a metaphorical sea. One dimension cannot be had without the other.

The second interesting point in *Night Passage* is its lack of contextual specificity. It is not a typical exercise of politics of location: it could have been written by a man or a woman from any period of time with cities, houses and furniture, presumably even from whatever civilisation to which those concepts

are common. It totally lacks historical specificity, and this apparent "timelessness" is its beauty. A reader who knows about the structure of Celtic riddles is able to trace its "roots" to West Europe. However, it appeals to a universal readership, to anyone who knows what it feels like to be displaced from a safe point of origin. For Dorcey, this transition state is "the best thing": it is her source of creativity, an obvious loophole from the pressures of the "real world". It is also an individual space, reserved for herself only, not even her lover can enter it. Do not all writing subjects need their night passages, their secret spaces-in-time which make writing possible?

In another poem, *The Breath of History*, Dorcey continues the journey into privileged places. For her, the things we usually take for granted are sources of joy, apparently after she has read the news from Bosnia:

> I am not an ordinary woman.
> I wake in the morning.
> I have food to eat.
> No one has come in the night
> to steal my child, my lover.
> I am not an ordinary woman.
> (Dorcey 1995a:1.)

Contrasted to ugly and violent scenes, Dorcey celebrates her place, the privileged view she sees from her window, the beautiful Irish nature:

> A plum tree
> blossoms outside my window,
> the roses are heavy with dew.
> A blackbird sits on a branch
> and sings out her heart.
> I am not an ordinary woman.
> (1995a:1.)

An ordinary woman, for Dorcey, is someone who cannot enjoy her scenery, whose environment is either destroyed, polluted or filled with threats of violence. Her own extraordinary location is a harmony with nature and "self":

I live where I want.
I sleep when I'm tired.
I write the words I think.
I can watch the sky
and hear the sea.
I am not an ordinary woman.
No one has offered me life
in exchange for another's.
(1995a:1.)

She has not been forced to leave her house, and this relative stability makes her happy. Aware of the ordinary women's displacement and traumatic experiences, she invites all her "privileged" readers to honour their current location, to find that they are not as "ordinary" as they may think:

Come celebrate each
privileged, exceptional thing:
water, food, sleep –
the absence of pain –
a night without fear –
a morning without
the return of the torturer.
(Dorcey 1995a:2.)

A life without fear is exceptional on the global scale, and it should be celebrated. What is particularly empowering in her words is that she does not make her reader feel guilty about a secure location. Instead, she sets a criteria against which she measures her life as "not commonplace" and makes her readers re-evaluate their situation but no-one is accused of ignorance. Still, in her horizon of expectation there is a shadow of the past, an ever-present possibility of becoming ordinary:

But who knows –
tomorrow or the day after . . .
I feel all about me
the breath of history –
pitiless
and ordinary.
(Dorcey 1995a:3.)

The breath of history, for Dorcey, is neither a nostalgic nor an empowering concept: she remembers about history the wars and the violence, it is "pitiless". Aware of the possibility of an armed conflict on her own beautiful island, she

cannot stay at an idyllic cotton-wool present. A responsible location for Dorcey seems to be knowledge of the events of the world and the history of her own country, but from that location it is still possible to enjoy her uncommon present. The breath of history must make her more cautious about the future but it also seems to make her value her life in Ireland. It is a beautiful place where she has chosen to live, but it is not taken for granted.

This questioning of fixed, stable mediocrity is, in my understanding, a strategy of displacement available for anyone. One does not have to be a cosmopolitan feminist theorist to achieve a mobile politics of location: it is possible to achieve a critical stance to one's location in the world even without postmodern theorizing. The places where Dorcey takes us, the mythical inner space in *Night Passage* and the idyllic nature in *The Breath of History* are places where a feminist, defined as a critical and creative thinking/acting/writing subject, can occasionally enjoy life in present. In the present data, such expressions of happiness, or even priviledge, are in a minority position because of the serious nature of the phenomena described. However, Dorcey suggests that it is possible to write positive words from a conservative state famous for its non-feminist legislation, and this seems to be her special talent. Her message is that a happy location, a temporary one, never fixed, does not have to mean ignorance of the past or future; on the contrary, sometimes an increased spatio-temporal awareness may help to enjoy the present moment. Similar to the joy of place in Eavan Boland's *The Singers,* it is possible to find in Dorcey's texts personal expressions of joy, gratitude and hope, combined with responsibility and knowledge.

The Singers is not a poem about destabilisation or dislocation, but rather about one place where women find strength to live, to speak, to sing. The place is "the unforgiving coast", where the weather is unpredictable and where the element of danger is always present. For the women singers in the poem, this place is their ultimate source of power:

> And only when the dange
> was plain in the music could you know
> their true measure of rejoicing in
>
> finding a voice where they found a vision.
> (Boland 1994a:1.)

The Atlantic coast with "exhausted birds" is the place where women get their music: their joy can only be heard if the music is situated in that context. The women in *The Singers* can, in fact, be from any period of time but the context still remains the same. It was originally written for Mary Robinson, and Robinson herself quoted the poem in her presidential speech in 1990. The fact that the poem was spread to the world by the first Head of State of Ireland enhances its impact for a foreign reader. The "singers" may in fact be understood as any active women in Ireland, also as politicians, who recognize the meaning of their own location and find strength from it.

If compared to the portrayal of land in chapter 4.2 as a working ground and a realm of necessity, it seems that in the 1990's such a grim description is no longer taken for granted by Dorcey or Boland. For them, land can also be a beautiful sight or a source of empowerment. However, their descriptions of contemplation and joy are bound together with phrases such as "the unforgiving coast" or "the breath of history", which indicates that their portraits are not exactly the kind of care-free, escapist landscape portraits of the 19th century English tradition either. Traces of famine and violence appear in their writing as an undertow, as a recognised possibility, but their horizon of expectation seems to be inclusive of other possibilities, too.

5.2. Home, mobile homes and symbolic homelessness

In this final analysis chapter, we will visit constructs called "home" in the present data. There are many metaphorical homes in the present data which will eventually be left altogether, and, on the other hand, in some texts, home will not be mentioned at all. As we saw in chapter 4.7, in the Irish Constitution, home, Woman, and nation seem to operate on the same metaphorical axe, as a

mythic narrative about stability and safety. In this chapter, this narrative will be questioned by selected examples from the data. In chapter 4.8, we already visited some childhood homes in the past. Here, we will look for contemporary homes in the present of the texts, and discuss the meaning of a stable place for the writers today. It would indeed be possible to find homes in every text in the present data, but we will focus here on those namings of place which present a some kind of horizon of expectation. As there literally are no happy, stable homes in the present data, dislocation will be the overall theme of our discussion here.

In *Rose's Song*, Máighréad Mebdh builds a kind of home, an imagined community[23] in the 1840's where people "pull together" in the name of God. It is a colonial place, and the native people seek empowerment from the knowledge that they, despite their poverty and dirty clothes, are nobler than the landlords:

> up in heaven saints can see us
> they know that our hearts are pure
> pink-faced men may call us savage
> we're the spirit's epicures
> every day is my forever
> no-one knows tomorrow's song
> put your head down work for others
> share with neighbours make em strong
> we're the One we pull together
> we could build the pyramids
> see the dress n you see nothing
> noble is as noble lives (Mebdh 1996a.)

Rose is a country woman whose space of experience consists of memories of earlier natural catastrophes. Her temporalisation is "cyclical": famines and better times follow each other, as do rural movements of resistance. On the eve of the Great Famine, she cannot speculate on "tomorrow's song" on earth. Still, there is hope in her horizon of expectation: "up in heaven saints can see us". She knows that if her community keeps up with the communitarian lifestyle, they will eventually receive a higher reward than "pink-faced men" in the Hereafter. However, her song about life in Newcastle West is shadowed by fear about

23 The concept "imagined community" is borrowed from Benedict Anderson (1983). It basically means that all nation-states are mythical constructs, which only exist in the minds of the population. If a nation is an imagined community, it is very close to the idea of home.

tomorrow, by a faint knowledge that there is something wrong with the potatoes and that her family's story on this side of the horizon will not end well.

Returning to Eamon de Valera's cosy homestead from 1943, we can find there a common feature with Mebdh's place from the 1840's, namely the sense of superiority about "right living":

> The Ireland which we have dreamed of would be *the home* of a people who valued material wealth only as a basis of *right living*, of a people who were satisfied with frugal comfort and devoted their leisure to the things of the spirit; a land whose *countryside* would be bright with *cosy homesteads* whose fields and villages would be joyous with the sounds of industry, with the romping of sturdy children, the contests of athletic youths, *the laughter of comely maidens*; whose firesides would be forums for the wisdom of serene old age. It would, in a word, be the home of a people living the life that God desires that *men* should live. (de Valera 1943 quoted in Lee 1989:334; italics mine.)

In 1937, Eamon de Valera still believed in the same kind of community as Mebdh portrays in *Rose's Song*. Ninety years after the Great Famine, Ireland still was predominantly a rural country lead by small farmers, schoolteachers and shopkeepers. De Valera's illusion about the Ireland "which we have dreamed of " is oriented towards the future: the experience of the Famine is not visible in the pretty postcard he sends to his people. He is trying to build a rural paradise by obliterating the experience of famines from the scene. It is a stable place, not even disturbed by nature. It must have seemed for de Valera that it would be possible to keep the positive, communitarian aspects of colonial Ireland, to "purify" this space of experience of famine and dispossession and build a new State on that vision.

If compared to the two imagined communities, in *Easter 1991*, Mebdh is disillusioned about Ireland as a home:

> I'm sick of this tidy house where I exist/
> that reminds me of nothing
> not of the past/ not of the future (Mebdh 1993:60.)

In a text situated in her own time, Mebdh does not glorify the communitarian spirit of the Irish. "This tidy house" is definitely not a home for her, or more precisely for the feminized figure called Ireland, it is a place which has drawn her to amnesia and to a lack of visions about the future. The poem cries for

dislocation from neatness, tidiness, from an illusory rhetoric about homes. The future has to be something that she makes herself, the figure of the prince is no longer helpful for a woman in the 1990's:

> I'm sick of standing on the shore/
> waiting for some prince to come on the tide (Mebdh 1993:60)

As said before, the poem ends by a statement that the woman will not wait anymore. She will move away from the earlier definitions of her "state", from the doctors who pretend knowing better, from princes and from Catholic priests. Mebdh does not imply that the new place for Ireland would be a home, but at least it seems that it will be a place with a fair knowledge about the past and more realistic plans for the future.

In an article about Irish feminism and backlash, Ailbhe Smyth (1995b) keeps a diary about her life during and after the second abortion referendum in the Republic in 1992. During the course of events, she begins to question her fixed position as an academic and a feminist activist. In the first entry, she still has a "home":

> My home is in the Women's Liberation movement — but my job (yes, I know, at least I have one) is in academia, seriously and exclusively in women's studies. Will I ever get to work from home? (Smyth 1995b:192.)

During the referendum campaign, Smyth is fully occupied with her "home", by speaking in public about abortion and women's rights. Such a position is obviously not favourable for the administration of her University, and in less than a year's time, she starts hearing gossip about her workplace being transformed from the Women's Education, Research and Resource Centre into a Department of Gender Studies. Smyth is appalled by such plans and fears that after a possible redundancy, there may no longer be a "home" to return to:

> The message is coded, but clear: The University is an Equal Opportunities employer. Gendered People Are strongly encouraged to apply. Feminists go home. (But where is home?) (Smyth 1995b:198.)

For Smyth, her "home" is no more a secure place because she has to defend it in public. She is invited to talkshows to discuss feminism, and the audience gives

her hostile feedback about her position. Furthermore, she is puzzled by the recent trend in feminist studied towards postmodern destabilisation:

> How strange. A destabilized and displaced world, yet which looks identical to the old one in all its systems and structures. Who is the dreamer? (Smyth 1995b:196.)

As a pioneer in the women's movement, it is difficult for her to leave concepts such as "patriarchy" or "revolution", and she believes that the current trend towards questioning the stable structures of society is just another strategy to keep her off the streets. Still, she asks postmodern questions, such as "where is home?" and uses irony as a strategy to question fixed meanings in her language.[24] Her politics of location in the texts of the present data is thus marked with ambiguity: it does not stay on one spot but moves between attacks towards postmodernism and purely acceptable postmodern practices. She is honest about her confusion in the world of postmodern thought, and she articulates her fears about being left behind in academia if she does not follow its trends. This is probably, or hopefully, a common experience for most students and scholars today, and it is healthy to read writers such as Smyth who dare speak out their confusions.

Smyth ends her diary with a definition of feminism not as a home but as a movement towards power-sharing between men and women on a global scale:

> Feminism is for change, yes, and that is not easy (no-one ever said it was.) It is not about just any old change: feminism is a vision of the world in which women would enjoy (and not constantly have to struggle for) the same freedoms as men, a world where gender — neither maleness nor femaleness — would no longer be a qualification for the exercise of power. A vision, a body of ideas, a politics that seeks to (re)create the world in terms of justice and equality is not a problem — it is an aspiration, a hope, the promise of optimism. (Smyth 1995b:204.)

I read the definition above as a statement to which most Western feminists disregarding their theoretical background can commit themselves. For Smyth, feminism is a promise of a better future: it is in her horizon of expectation as well as in her present life as a feminist activist. The definition above is not specifically

24 Irony is "officially" considered as *the* technique of a postmodern thinker. Kathy Ferguson (1993) discusses its impact for feminist thought, and, in particular, for feminist politics. Ferguson believes that it is possible to find common political programmes for feminists from different "camps" by using good-humoured irony. It is a means to accept unperfections and to question stable "truths".

"Irish", although it appears in an Irish context. Smyth speaks about the power relations in the world, and sees connections where some postmodern thinkers only see disconnections. This is not to say that her texts lack contextual specificity: in fact, she is particularly outspoken about "her place" as an educated, middle-class feminist activist based in Dublin. However, she believes that it is possible to speak about the world, in general terms.

If we think about politics of location and Smyth's definition of feminism, some objections about "(re)creating the world" may rise on the first hand. First, there are other equalities than the equality between men and women. Should feminism be tied to the other movements against discrimination, or should it be treated as a single "body of ideas"? Second, whose world is it that Western feminists are recreating? These questions are eternal problems in feminist and other movements — on a global scale — but would it be possible to maintain such macro-level definitions of feminism by simply checking their content by asking the critical questions of politics of location? In her text, despite the personal difficulties feminism has caused her, Smyth holds on the belief that world-wide feminist alliances are not a problem, that feminist politics is not a problem. If combined with the critical "where?" questions, her definition of feminism seems clear and empowering.

In chapter 4, we came to the conclusion that none of the present writers define the Irish State or the nation as a home. In fact, if the metaphor home is used in the present data, it is mostly in a temporary and critical sense.

In *Home*, Paula Meehan ends the blind woman's lonely journey on a spot that she calls home:

> I'm on my last journey. Though my lines are all wonky
> they spell me a map that makes sense. Where the song that is in
> me
> is the song I hear from the world, I'll set down my burdens
> and sleep. The spot that I lie on at last the place I call home.
> (Meehan 1993.)

The woman, "a citizen of nowhere, nothing to my name", hears the tunes of home at the end of her life. It is a place mapped by other people: she could not find it herself although she tried to, all her life. It is a passive place where she

can finally sleep; the places where she has been to on the road, on the other hand, were lively, happening places.

As a strategy, Meehan's words resemble Virginia Woolf's: "as a woman I have no country, my country is the whole world" (quoted in Rich 1986:211). The blind woman's ideal home is a place where she hears the song from the world: the songs of the country where she moves around are "close" but not quite her home. It is a strategy of denying a simple national heritage, the clichés of Irish history, but simultaneously, the "global" end of the poem seems to take the denial too far. First, Meehan portrays an active, thinking woman (battered but still a subject of her own life, speaking and making choices) who questions all stable places but still moves in a distinctively Irish context and is influenced by its events, and finally she dies at "home", which is quite a disappointing place. The only interpretation I find for the text is that "home" is, after all, a finalistic point after which nothing happens in life, and that it may be better to leave the construct altogether, and live happily ever after. Why look for an imaginary construct "home" all your life if there are other places where you can try to live?

Another suggestion for the usage of "home" is from Eavan Boland in *Anna Liffey*. There are many homes in the poem, and their meanings are shifting as Boland herself is growing older. As well as challenging stable categories such as "woman" and "nation", discussed in chapter 4.5, she seems to explode a monolithical "home". In chapter 4.9, we saw that she linked her feelings and knowledge about her country to the different stages of motherhood. As a mother of young children, she could make a home of her brick house by calling her children in. The vowels of the children's names sounded like home to her. As a middle-aged woman, when her children are about to leave the house, Boland is no longer sure about her home. She asks:

> I turn off
> The harsh yellow
> Porch light and
> Stand in the hall.
> Where is home now?
> (Boland 1994c:45.)

In the poem, Boland goes through the pain of sending her children to the world and noticing the first traces of old age. Her middle-aged "self" becomes displaced from all points of origin: it is not situated in the house, in a country or in the city space which she has so far explored. She has to come in terms with her body and the limited time that has been given for it in this world. Boland reaches towards eternal philosophical questions, such as what the body or the language mean to her:

> In the end
> It will not matter
> That I was a woman. I am sure of it.
> The body is a source. Nothing more.
> There is a time for it. There is a certainty
> About the way it seeks its own dissolution.
> Consider rivers.
> They are always en route to
> Their own nothingness. From the first moment
> They are going home. And so
> When language cannot do it for us,
> Cannot make us know love will not diminish us,
> There are these phrases
> Of the ocean
> To console us.
> (Boland 1995c:45.)

At this stage of her life, she has to leave a stable home and think in more fluid metaphors. Her life as a woman has been marked with certain pleasures and burdens. Her location in a body, however, will not last forever. The river metaphor for a life course is particularly comforting in terms of place and time: Boland thinks that there is an end to her bodily experience in linear time, but something about her will remain, as the river reaches the ocean. From that point on, home is found in the ocean, not in the country or in the brick house. Her particular, distinguished body will dissolve, and still:

> In the end
> Everything that burdened and distinguished me
> Will be lost in this:
> I was a voice.
> (Boland 1995c:45.)

The voice: a perfect definition of subjectivity. "In the end", after the body has vanished, there is still a voice left in the ocean. Home, in the sense of comfort

and stability is in the phrases of the ocean. Just listen, Boland says. *Just listen.*

The difference between *Home* and *Anna Liffey*, despite the fact that they both make the reader think about mortality, is that the poems end up with very different metaphors. The blind woman in *Home* falls asleep on a spot which other people, "they", have shown to her. On the other hand, Boland feels that her life will end in the ocean, in a vast space where there still are active voices, speaking comforting phrases for the rivers. Whereas the woman of *Home* denies belonging to any place before finding the ultimate resting point, Boland temporarily locates herself in Ireland, in the brick house with the children. She does not deny the meaning of her physical location in the "real" world altogether but she gives it a temporal limitation. The metaphorical river (the body from birth to death) could be called a mobile home, which changes its meanings during its course and looks for a formless and timeless continuity in the ocean.

In the present study, I have highlighted *Anna Liffey* three times. It is the longest poem in the data, and consists of multiple levels which open up differently after each reading. Its complexity, however, teaches me an important lesson about poetry: that not all poems cannot really be "interpreted", they have to let just live and breathe. "I was a voice" is a beautiful resumé of a life, and it indicates political subjectivity. This is the only interpretation that does justice to the poem. *Just listen.*

6. CONCLUSION

In the analysis part, twenty texts written by six Irish feminist writers have been explored from the points of view of time and place. Throughout my reading of the texts, I have tried to demonstrate how close-knit those two basic dimensions of human experience are — how it would be impossible in a study such as the present one to discuss place without historical specificity, or time without an indication where the text was written and in which context it is based. The time span of the present data is remarkably wide, whereas the places where the texts take us are more or less restricted to one island. We are dealing with the historical consciousnesses of six individual Irish women, which appear in different versions in their diverse texts. In this final chapter, I am trying to discuss the overall meanings of the present data, and, if possible, to present the "results" of the study in the light of the theories presented in chapter 2. In particular, I want to pay attention to the various ways of making politics, or, in other words, becoming a political subject, by writing.

First, and most importantly, the most particular naming of place in many texts of the present data is the writer's or the author's own body, *my body*. I became fascinated in the various ways of writing the body in the present data: the ageing body, the body language between mother and daughter, the starving body, the touch of silk on the prostitute's body. If women's bodies were brought to the centre of general political debate by the pro-Life movement in the Republic of Ireland in the 1980's and again in 1992, as a non-specific Woman, whose primary task is to reproduce without conditions, there is a possibility for feminists to break that myth by bringing the bodily experience of individual women as close to the reader as possible. Not all the texts about bodies were originally written to support pro-Choice campaigns, but the texts should make the readers more aware of the fact that there is no unitary female experience which could be ordained by law. After exploring the diversity of bodies as the most immediate places, or as speaking positions, in the present data, it seems that this activity — writing the body- is a common strategy for the writers of the present data, whether intentional or not. It seems to be directed against "the

medical men" who were operating the feminized Éire in Máighréad Mebdh's *Easter 1991*, those who still persist on seeing women as a group with common interests *in the home*.

Many texts in the present data begin or end up with the body as the closest location of the writer. Again in Adrienne Rich's (1984:21) terms, this portrayal does not have to be a graphic portrayal of one's body parts or pleasures: it is enough to articulate the places where that body has been and where is currently located, and to base one's writing there. In the present data, therefore, some texts work as almost classic examples of Rich's politics of location (as a full account of the places where *my body* has been) whereas in other texts the portrayal of bodies is less central.

For example, Boland's *Anna Liffey* seems to fulfill the conditions for a successful politics of location: Boland portrays accurately the places from where she speaks (city space, brick house, river run) and does not deny the importance of those surroundings to her current world-view. She also gives her body a temporal specificity by defining its various stages (youth, motherhood and older age) and its obvious end. Another vivid example is the portrait of the mother in Meehan's *The Pattern*: by telling her mother's life story from her youth to her death Meehan shows that she cannot wholly escape her past in the childhood home. She remembers the ways her mother moved around in the house, how she hit her when they were arguing, how she shrugged her shoulders in the same way as she does now. Her memories do not mean that she would ever make the same choices in life as her mother did — on the contrary — but that she still keeps the image of her mother's body in mind and compares it to her own. In the poem the relationship between the mother and the daughter is the immediate place for a politics of location: it seems to have determined many things in Meehan's later life.

During the completion of the present study, I have come to understand politics of location as a willingness to take responsibility of one's position in one's own community, in the country where one lives, and finally (after the two first basements) in the world. Indeed, it seems that the first stages of the process from *my body* to one's own life story have to be dealt with first before achieving

responsibility on a global scale. I am particularly inspired by the texts in which the fictional women in the past are given bodies because it facilitates contemporary readers' understanding of the local and national context. The texts in which fictional historical female subjects speak with their own voice are an indication of the possibility to make the past more meaningful for women in the future. This re-writing of history is a political project: an unorthodox text, or, in fact, any text, about a past event will always be contested in a community of people who do not immediately understand each other.

To borrow a metaphor from Walter Benjamin (1940:181), the writing of a new interpretation of a past event could be understood as "brushing history against its grain". For Benjamin, this is the task of a historical materialist, who is opposed to the mainstream culture's celebration of traditions and cultural treasures. No cultural document is free of barbarism, it is always a sign of the victories of the ruling class on the expenses of those in the margins. A critic of this barbarism can, however, use history in the present moment for his or her own revolutionary purposes. According to Benjamin, it is a "tiger's leap" into the past under the broad sky of history, a temporary flash of past events which appear suddenly and then, at the stage of being recognised, disappear for good. In my understanding, the writers reveal that they are close to this kind of view of the past: most of the texts about a more distant past are fragmentary or told in the form of a story. None of the writers seem to be in favour of "totalitarian" history, the kind of grand narrative about a people and its sufferings and victories.

In the present data, there seem to be two kinds of approaches to the past: in the first approach, history is re-written by making women its major subjects; in the second one, history is considered as a burden which can be thrown away eventually. An interesting "result" is that none of the present writers fall exclusively under either approach, but that fragments from bothapproaches can be found in their different texts. For example, Máighréad Mebdh seems to have renewed her interest in Irish history in the recent years: in *Easter 1991* she writes about tiredness of a history dominated by the Church and in 1996 she launches her own historical project, a collection of poetry about the Great Famine from

women's point of view. I have outlined the approaches as "the empowering past" and "the disempowering past". In fact, it seems that the approaches are not exclusive at all, and in "real life" hesitation between them always occurs.

A .The empowering past

- attention to the lives of individual women in history, fictional or real
- memory as a tool to overcome painful moments in history: grieving as a means for a better understanding
- fight against amnesia and nostalgia
- tales of legends and heroines used for own purposes: "make of the past what you can" (Boland 1994c)
- historical landscape as a source of joy and energy
- not "correcting" the male bias in history but writing history in own terms

B .The disempowering past

- expressions of tiredness of the monuments and documents of the past
- fight against nostalgia: the "so what?" attitude
- temporalisation from the present to the future: the role of the past is secondary
- no implicit continuity between the speaking "I" and the earlier generations
- anonymous city space or nature as empowerer
- acknowledging the male bias in history and therefore leaving the whole historical discourse

In the Irish context, the assumption that we always hesitate between using history as a tool for understanding one's own location and rejecting its meaning for the present "self" becomes plausible. Ireland is a good example of a country where the past is not only remembered for personal pleasure but it easily becomes a political football between at least three major cultural groups: Northern Protestant (with many subdivisions according to sect), Northern Catholic and Southern Catholic. Apart from religious divides, there seems to be an academic, "revisionist" style of history writing in which British colonialism is described "objectively" and a more popular style of writing which appeals directly to the national mythology of the general public.[25] In the present data, women's expressions of tiredness of history seem to be an opt-out from those

25 Margaret Ward (1991) confirms my view that most of the present sources are evidence of "revisionist" history writing. For example, R.F. Foster, F.S.L. Lyons and J.J. Lee are among the major names in this "value-free" and "objective" field of study. Unfortunately, this objectivity usually results in the marginalisation of women, which is hidden under a belief that it is "gender free".

camps. By placing herself in an anonymous city or in the middle of a seemingly "timeless" nature, an Irish feminist writer may take distance from daily national politics and from the cultural divisions on her island.

The two problems in Ireland, and in any place where history is discussed as meaningful for the present, seem to be the problems of amnesia and nostalgia. On one hand, the undesirable events in the past are "forgotten", either because of earlier canonisation or more deliberately, and on the other hand, the glorious days are emphasized as "the golden age". Eamon de Valera's illusion of comely maidens is an extreme expression of both amnesia and nostalgia, and it is a much quoted vision in Irish history writing. My intention in the present study has not been to show how "pure" or "enlightened" women writers' visions of history are if compared to those of male politicians but rather, to find out how the historical canons have been used or resisted. In the present data, the choice of themes, ie. Celtic motives, the Famine and revolutionary figures, suggests that women, too, are influenced by the historical canon: what themes the writers consider important are by no means original in Ireland. Resistance to the status quo cannot be found so much in the themes themselves but, rather, in the ways that those themes are approached. The peculiarity of the data is in how the same story is re-told for different purposes than before. It can also be argued that some texts' resignation from history is a form of amnesia: to tell the world that one's history is no longer relevant can lead to "global" illusions and to a complete denial of the meaning of politics of location, which emphasizes historical responsibility and situatedness in one's place of enunciation. True, but the counter-argument is to ask whether it is possible to be historically responsible all the time, and if such worrying is really worth it.

The interpretation of the two prototypical approaches in the present data depends on whether one reads the texts as an individualist or from a more "communitarian" point of view. The feminist ideas of social justice and historical responsibility are clearly designed for the common good of all groups in the community. The world would be a drastic place without such good will, and there seems to be a need for socially and historically responsible writers in Ireland as well as in other countries. However, to work as the conscience of

one's community may wear the writer out and it seems that there is also a need for more "irresponsible" texts. Furthermore, as the present study indicates, writing about happiness, joy and the basic pleasures of life does not need to be contrary to feminist ideas. A feminist text does not always have to be an angry attack against the wrongs of patriarchy, although in extreme circumstances such an attack may be the only way to get one's voice heard. For example, if Mary Dorcey's mystic poem *The Night Passage* and Ailbhe Smyth's (1993) article about "living in a police state" are compared in terms of tone and purpose, it is possible to think about feminist writing not as a unified genre but as a heading under which highly different texts can be situated.

Why I have read those two texts, and, indeed, all the texts in the present data, as political is a good question to ask now. I will repeat again the key rule: what is political always depends on the context. In the Irish context(s), it seems that any articulation about a woman's need for personal space is political because of the long-lived tradition of women's domesticity. Being "between here and there" (Dorcey 1995c:34) is radically different from leading one's life "within the home" to be able to fulfill one's duties "to the common good". To a certain extent, I have read all shifting spatial metaphors in the data as opposed to a single "womanhood" or to the ideology of the Constitution. In many texts, there is no stable home for the subject of the text to be based in but a movement "between here and there", an earlier home which has become something else in the course of time (Boland 1994c, Smyth 1995b), a metaphorical or real "house" not portrayed as a home (Mebdh 1993; Boland 1994c) or home as a final resting place only at the end of one's life (Meehan 1993). Furthermore, the denial of a simplistic home seems to extend to the denial of another mythical construct, the nation. If the two constructs are considered to operate on the same continuum, the most extreme tradition for contemporary feminist writers to oppose is the tradition of the "iconic feminine", in which Woman is simultaneously assigned to represent both domesticity and the nation.

Besides the basic idea of politics as articulation, the present data suggests that it is still possible to speak of a trend called "the politics of the past". Koselleck's ideas of temporalisation and, in particular, his famous concept pair

which I have tried to keep along thoughout my discussion seem to prove the point here. If his fundamental idea that any information about past times is stored in our space of experience chaotically is taken into consideration at all, we should start questioning any historical approach that claims to be more correct than others. Koselleck's idea is in my understanding "fundamental" in the sense that it should make people question their own relationship to the past but totally opposed to any kind of "fundamentalism" or a more modest belief in foundations. If all historical documents are written by human beings with a similar system consisting of the intertwined dimensions, experience and expectation, it would be absurd to think of one document being more truthful than the other. Every text about the past has been a process in which the writer has had to locate him or herself somewhere in place and time. The process consists of choices and they are always political. Every text about the past consists of its own inner politics but some are more transparent for the reader than others.

It has been easier to read documents such as poems, informal articles or pamphlets politically than those texts from which the writer has deliberately tried to erase anything that refers to personal commitment. My exercise of "reading the political" has mainly consisted of creating an arena for different texts and finding connections and disconnections between them. I have intended to leave room especially for the diversity of opinions, emotions and approaches in the data and to find its subversive content from the points where one explanation would not be sufficient. Put as simply as possible, the political core of the data is the diverging interpretations of what happened before in Ireland and the relationship of these constructed pasts to the women's visions of their future.

A common vision of the future in the data is that women cannot afford to wait anymore. This idea is closely linked to the ideas of temporalisation presented both in the theoretical and empirical parts of the study. Waiting means standing still on one spot, and nearly all the material I have obtained about Irish women assure that despite the fact that Irish women's roles were (and still are) defined to a great extent by the Catholic Church from above, there has been room for individual variation for longer than we might expect on the local level.

Women's emigration figures from the 19th century and the contemporary poems about outspoken women in the past both reveal a different reality than most history books in which women count as politicians' wives. Even if many events in general Irish history do seem depressing from the feminist point of view (see appendix 2), there are many smaller stories which reveal different patterns, often invisible for foreigners and Irish people alike. In particular, the essentialist idea that "women have always been" linked to one place, to earth and to a curious philosophical term, immanence, and, conversely, that "men have always" had a chance to follow time, to move more freely than women and to reach towards the other term, transcendence, should be left behind by now. For myself, this is perhaps the best outcome of the present study. The realization that feminism can be a totalizing ideology as well as a bunch of useful strategies to make women's voices heard was necessary lesson for me to learn.

Personally, I have found it useful to read both "general" and "particular" accounts of Irish history side by side while completing the present study, and the outcome is a mixture of encodings in my space of experience. The responsibility of all choices made in the present study is wholly mine, and I am aware of the possible misunderstandings my physical remoteness may have caused. For example, the availability of background material was at some stages a real problem and it lead me to use a chaotic "cut and paste" technique, which would no longer be acceptable in further studies. On the other hand, the remoteness has been an asset, as I have been able to look at things from a truly independent angle. In fact, it has made the study in its current form possible. I would not have chosen such a complex approach and taken a relatively long time to write this if I had had better resources.

During the completion of the present study, many alternative ways of approaching the theme "Irish women, time and place" have occurred to me. The most fascinating approach would be empirical: to compare Northern and Southern, Protestant and Catholic women's views of place and temporalisation by interviewing them and by active participation in, for example, the life of women's organisations on both sides of the border. Another suggestion for further study would be to carry out a similar kind of study in another context. I

am tempted to suggest a study on contemporary Finnish women's writing from a similar point of view, and yet, I cannot imagine a potential data for the study. There must be subversive feminist writing in my own country, too, but I have not yet found it. From a more global point of view, it would be interesting to compare place and time in Irish women's writing with women's writing in another postcolonial country with a similar history of partition.

The richness of the present study has been in its pedagogy; it has taught me, among other things, lessons about doing research, history, feminisms (always in plural), women's lives, and the political force of creative writing. The main problem, which has obviously become clear to the reader at this stage, was limiting the scope of the study: being an all-important topic for myself, I wanted to include a huge bulk of information in one text. The present version is the most reduced version I could produce, and it still contains too much information for a non-committed reader to process in such a limited length. Perhaps a text about shifting locations is supposed to "move" itself. I have written the present study as the writers' ghost and their styles have influenced me. Hopefully they will also "move" and influence you.

7. EPILOGUE

October 1995. Inchicore, West Dublin. The ghosts of the martyrs of May 1916 were present but less powerfully than the people who were living beside the old British army barracks. For a moment, standing on the top floor of a council house with a child and a pram and listening to the stories of the locals, I thought I could locate myself in that landscape but this was just a mindgame, or a souvenir from a historical place:

The concrete staircase smells of urine and there are hasty scribblings (not graffitis and not exactly tags: what do you call them?) on every imaginable wall. Darren loves Maggie. Scumbag. F*** you wanker. *The area is so quiet in the mornings, almost spooky I'd say; in the evenings you start hearing the noises much too well, coming out of the broken windows, covered with cardboard and plywood. But right now, no sounds, no people around, no signs of life.Trying to make my way to the fifth floor and the lift is broken. What happened to it in two hours, I wonder? It was OK earlier when we left, I swear. And why does it happen at least once a week?*

I am a single mother of three, aged twenty-two, just moved in to this council house area. I have been living in a women's shelter for some months now: my parents threw me out when I started expecting the second and my boyfriend went to jail for beating me and some other people up. We lost our earlier place because we stayed at the shelter for too long. I was lucky to get this flat, although it is here (the place is notorious for drugs, AIDS and unemployment) and the lift is broken. I don't know in which order I should move my children, the pram and the shopping to the fifth floor. I cannot leave the things down here until I get the kids up; I cannot leave the kids down here until I get the things up. The welfare just bought me a new pram for the little one, 150 quid it was, and if it gets stolen like the previous one, I'll be in trouble. They don't teach me how to manage situations like these on the community women's course.

Shite! The family resource centre is not open until noon. I was hoping that they'd mind the kids, or the shopping, or the pram. At this time of the day

nobody seems to be around except the snotty teens, flunking from school. But I can 't see any of the regular teens here either. My neighbours never come out of their flats until late afternoon, except on the dole registration days. An hour's wait only: the boy is screaming, making a scene about the swings. There are no swings here, they wouldn't stay there anyway. The nearest park is an hour's walk away with these mutant ninja turtles. Wasn't I witty, ha ha !?! The boy got the mutant ninja T-shirt from my sister for his birthday and he's been wearing it ever since. Can't even wait until it dries after the washing. The clothes dry slowly — you can't even hang them outside on a line on a dry day. And of course there's no balcony.

Well, I guess I have to try the crèche. I don't like the idea of going there today, the kids are having their free day (the course was cancelled again: no money to employ a substitute teacher, they say) and they all start screaming when we get near it. But I don't know anyone from the first three floors except the junkies. Maybe the crèche can look after my things instead of the kids. It'll take us days to get the three of them up at the same time, the girl will put everything in her mouth when she's climbing, and I can't carry her and the baby at the same time, the stairs are so slippery. Extra slippery after a wild weekend: it is amazing what a variety of slimy things can come out of the human body.

But I am only imagining...

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APPENDIX 1. THE POEMS

EAVAN BOLAND

Mise Éire

I won't go back to it -

my nation displaced into old dactyls,
oaths made by the animal tallows
of the candle -

land of the Gulf Stream,
the small farm,
the scalded memory,
the songs
that bandage up the history,
the words
that make a rhythm of the crime

where time is time past.
A palsy of regrets.
No. I won't go back.
My roots are brutal:

I am the woman -
a sloven's mix
of silk at the wrists,
a sort of dove-strut
in the precincts of the garrison -

who practises
the quick frictions,
the rictus of delight
and gets cambric for it, rice-coloured silks.

I am the woman
in the gansy-coat
on the board of "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 who neither
knows nor cares that

a new language
is a kind of a scar
and heals after a while
into a passable imitation
of what went before.

Anna Liffey

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

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

There, in the hills above my house,
The river Liffey rises, is a source.
It rises in rush and ling heather and
Black peat and bracken and strengthens
To claim the city it narrated.
Swans. Steep falls. Small towns.
The smudged air and bridges of Dublin.

Dusk is coming.
Rain is moving east from the hills.

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

I praise
The gifts of the river.
Its shiftless and glittering
Re-telling of a city,
Its clarity as it flows,
In the company of runt flowers and herons,
Around a bend at Islandbridge
And under thirteen bridges to the sea.
Its patience at twilight -
Swans nesting by it,
Neon wincing into it.

Maker of
Places, remembrances,
Narrate such fragments for me:

One body. One spirit.
One place. One name.
The city where I was born.
The river that runs through it.
the nation which eludes me.

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

I came here in a cold winter.

I had no children. No country.
I did not know the nature of my own life.

My country took hold of me.
My children were born.

I walked out in a summer dusk
To call them in.

One name. Then the other one.
The beautiful vowels sounding out home.

Make a nation what you will
Make the past
What you can -

There is now
A woman in a doorway.

It has taken me
All my strength to do this.

Becoming a figure in a poem.

Usurping a name and a theme.

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

And from source to mouth,
Is another one.
And in my late forties
Past believing
Love will heal
What language fails to know
And needs to say -
What the body means -
I take this sign
And I make this mark:
A woman in the doorway of her house.
A river in the city of her birth
The truth of a suffered life.
The mouth of it.

The seabirds come in from the coast.
The city wisdom is they bring rain.
I watch them from my doorway.
I see them as arguments of origin -
Leaving a harsh force in the horizon
Only to find it
Slanting and falling elsewhere.

Which water -
The one they leave or the one they pronounce -
Remembers the other?

I am sure
The body of an ageing woman
Is a memory
And to find language for it
Is as hard
As weeping and requiring
These birds to cry out as if they could
Recognize their element
Remembered and diminished in
A single tear.

An ageing woman
Finds no shelter in language.
She finds instead
Single words she once loved
Such as "summer" and "yellow"
And "sexual" and "ready"
Have suddenly become dwellings
For someone else -
Rooms and a roof under which someone else
Is welcome, not her. Tell me,
Anna Liffey,
Spirit of water,
Spirit of place,
How is it on this

Rainy Autumn night
As the Irish sea takes
The names you made, the names
You bestowed, and gives you back
Only wordlessness?

Autumn rain is
Scattering and dripping
From car-ports
And clipped hedges.
The gutters are full.

When I came here
I had neither
Children or country.
The trees were arms.
The hills were dreams.

I was free
To imagine a spirit
In the blues and greens,
The hills and fogs
Of a small city.

My children were born.
My country took hold of me.
A vision in a brick house.
Is it only love
That makes a place?

I feel it change.
My children are
Growing up, getting older.
My country holds on
To its own pain.

I turn off
The harsh yellow
Porch light and
Stand in the hall.
Where is home now?

Follow the rain
Out to the Dublin hills.
Let it become the river.
Let the spirit of place be
A lost soul again.

In the end
It will not matter
That I was a woman. I am sure of it.
The body is a source. Nothing more.
There is a time for it. There is a certainty
About the way it seeks its own dissolution.
Consider rivers.
They are always en route to
Their own nothingness. From the first moment
They are going home. And so
When language cannot do it for us,
Cannot make us know love will not diminish us,
There are these phrases
Of the ocean
To console us.
Particular and unafraid of their completion.
In the end
Everything that burdened and distinguished me
Will be lost in this:
I was a voice.

MARY DORCEY

The Breath of History

I am not an ordinary woman.
I wake in the morning.
I have food to eat.
No one has come in the night
to steal my child, my lover.
I am not an ordinary woman.

A plum tree
blossoms outside my window,
the roses are heavy with dew.
A blackbird sits on a branch
and sings out her heart.
I am not an ordinary woman.

I live where I want.
I sleep when I'm tired.
I write the words I think.
I can watch the sky
and hear the sea.
I am not an ordinary woman.
No one has offered me life
in exchange for another's.

No one has beaten me until I fall down.
No one has burnt my skin
nor poisoned my lungs.
I am not an ordinary woman.
I know where my friends live.
I have books to read,
I was taught to read.
I have clean water to drink.
I know where my lover sleeps;
she lies beside me,
I hear her breathing.
My life is not commonplace.

At night the air
is as sweet as honeysuckle
that grows along the river bank.
The curlew cries
from the marshes
far out,

high and plaintive.
I am no ordinary woman.
Everything I touch and see
is astonishing and rare -
privileged.
Come celebrate each
privileged, exceptional thing:
water, food, sleep -
the absence of pain -

a night without fear -
a morning without
the return of the torturer.

A child safe,
a mother,
a lover, a sister.
Chosen work.
Our lives are not commonplace -
any of us who read this.

But who knows -
tomorrow or the day after . . .
I feel all about me
the breath of history -
pitiless
and ordinary.

Night passage

Night passage is the best thing
neither leaving or arriving.
A ship travelling in darkness
between here and there.

I thought it was the city
I wanted.
I went to the city.
But it was too much for me.
Too many talking,
too many breathing,
too many watching
so as not to be seen watching.

I went to the country
thinking I wanted the quiet,
the space of it, the open skies.
But at night
the silence woke up
and stalked me about the house.
It knocked against the furniture
and rattled the air
until my heart rang like a bell.

There have been places crowded by you
and places desolate for the want of you.
Sooner or later
everywhere becomes somewhere.
Night passage is the best thing
before there becomes here.

My grandmother's voice

Sometimes
when my mother speaks to me
I hear her mother's voice:
my grandmother's
with its trace of Belfast accent
which carried with it
something from every town
the Normans passed through.
My grandmother,
mother of seven, who will not be quiet yet
twenty years after her death.

Sometimes when I look at my mother
it is her mother I see -
the far sighted gaze,
the way of sitting
bolt upright in a chair -
holding forth, the quick wit,
the fold her hands take in her lap.
The sweep of her hair.

And listening closely
or caught unaware,
I hear my great grandmother
echo between them:
A glance - a tone.
My grandmother's
mother

who died giving birth
to her only child.
Whose words and stories
pent up in her daughter
flowed on
into the talk of my mother.
I catch them now in my own.
My head sings with their conversation.

And hearing them -
this fertile and ghostly orchestration -
I am sorry to have brought them
to the end of their line.
Stopped them in their track across millenia.
From what primeval starting point
to here?
A relay race
through centuries from mother to daughter -
an expression passed on
a gesture,
a profile.

Their voices reverberate in my head.
They will die with me.
I have put an end to inheritance -
drawn a stroke across the page.

Their grace,
their humour,
their way of walking in a room.

The stoicism
that carried them all this way
has stoppped with me;
the first of their kind
who will not bear their gift
and burden.

I lift my pen
quickly, wanting
to set down all the stories
spoken by these busy, garrulous,
long lived women
who never had a moment
to sit down
or lift a pen.

I begin.
A young woman, a protestant
from Belfast,
married a sea captain,
a catholic
who drowned at sea . . .

MÁIGHRÉAD MEBDH

Easter 1991

I am Ireland and I'm sick
sick in the womb/ sick in the head
and I'm sick of dying in this sickbed
and if the medical men don't stop operating/
I'll die

I am Ireland and if I die
my name will go in the censor's fire
my face in the mirror is shy/
I have painted it too many times
there's nothing to like about this kind of beauty

I am Ireland/ and I don't know what I am
they tell me things in sham films like The Field/
that the travellers are pink-faced romantics in fairy caravans
that my villages are full of eejits and lúdramáns
that my pagan power is dead
it was made for Hollywood/ not for me

I am Ireland/ and I'm silenced
I cannot tell my abortions/ my divorces/ my years of slavery/
my fights for freedom
it's got to the stage I can hardly remember what I had to tell/
and when I do/ I speak in whispers

I am Ireland/ and I've nowhere to run
I've spent my history/ my energy/ my power/ my money
to build him up/
and he gave me nothing back I didn't take myself

inside my head the facts are loud/
only two women's shelters in Dublin/
on Stephen's Day a man petrol-bombs one/
and on the same day/ gets out on bail
abortion is a criminal offence
abortion information is stopped
divorce is denied/
the gardai don't interfere
the facts are loud/
Sharon Gregg dies in Mountjoy
Feargal Gallagher dies in Cullyhanna
Patrick Sheehy dies in Nenagh
Dessie Ellis is handed on a stretcher to my enemy/
the facts are loud/
Bishop Cathal Daly wants less talk of AIDS
thousands emigrate each year
half of my childern are poor
and the poorest of all are my daughters

I am Ireland/ and the poor die young
and the poor are easily sold

and the poor are the ones who fight
and because they fight/ they die

I am Ireland/ and the Angelus Bell is tolling for me
this illegal border will always be/
unless we get up off our bended knee
the priests run for my schools and my history
there's no free state in the Catholic See

I am Ireland / and I'm sick
I'm sick of this tidy house where I exist/
that reminds me of nothing
not of the past/ not of the future
I'm sick of depression
I'm sick of shame
I'm sick of poverty
I'm sick of politeness
I'm sick of looking over my shoulder
I'm sick of standing on the shore/
waiting for some prince to come on the tide

Mise Éire/
agus an ghaoth ag éirí láidir i mo chluasa
agus n'fheadar an ébiseach nó bás a thiocfaidh

Mise Éire/
agus n´fheaddar an bhfuil mé óg nó sean

Mise Éire/
agus níl mé feitheamn a thuilleadh

I am Ireland/
and I'm not waiting anymore

Threshold

no matter how broken the ground will transport me
through lashings of colour to light that consumes me
there's holes in my body and all of them gaping
to haul in the bleeding / to heave out the blocking
the rocking is starting / I'm shaking and spitting
my head is split sideways too rough for my sleeping
a roar from my chest and the singing removes me
eyes thinning out and my Soul staring down me
the Prince of my bed-foot is streaming around me
he's waited through days for the chance to embrace me
we're rushing through spirals of picture and sounding
and feelings too free for a flesh understanding
through flurries / through battles
through love-making / haggles / hassles
hauling / bleeding / screaming / smoking thatch
the withering / cloud / crowds
thinning eyes
I rise

Rose's Song

boil em peel em roast em mash em
bake em fleatair boxty champ
dig em drill em scraw n lazy
dip em point em thumbnail stamp
blacks n red nebs, irish apple
lumpers codders cups scotch downs
bucks white rocks american sailors
pink eyes leathercoats give em crowns
children mothers fathers cattle
hens n chickens horses pigs
breakfast dinner supper school-time
suck em crunch em stuff em in

the land is ours and we'll reclaim it
th'earl of devon may be fine
but all our families owned this kingdom
racin hound n watchin hind
raleigh's root will make or break us
pray to god it never fails
mountainsides n bogs sustain us
spreadin out n growin tails
eighteen twenty two was hungry
n I hope I'll never live
to hear a starvin baby's wailin
n to feel my body give

diggin haulin pullin cleanin
rearin hens n feedin pigs
weavin spinnin women talkin
women workin out the men
I'm still healthy out at forty
many others worn away
seven children them god left me
stout god-fearin born to stay
Rory Máire Peig n Brigid
Cathal Rena Séamus beag
rearin families them that's older
livin hard cause livin's rough

up in heaven saints can see us
they know that our hearts are pure
pink-faced men may call us savage
we're the spirit's epicures
every day is my forever
no-one knows tomorrow's song
put your head down work for others
share with neighbours make em strong
we're the One we pull together
we could build the pyramids
see the dress n you see nothing
noble is as noble lives

they say that we're potato people
lazy indolent and crude
their excuse for lashin at us
when they pass us on the road
throw us out n burn the roof-tree
fire will blaze inside their heads
i forgive em death will give em
farthings for their silver beds
men that dig like my sad Peadar
they're the ones that find the gold
there's a palace up there waitin
for our sweet potato-fold

PAULA MEEHAN

Don't Speak To Me of Martyrs

Up there on the platform a man
speaks of the people: of what
we need, of who we really are, of how
we must fight to liberate ourselves.

Down through the cigarette smoke
the high windows cast
ecstatic light to the floorboards
stiletto pocked and butt scorched

but now such golden pools of sun to bask in there.
I am fish,
water my demesne.
The room pulses in, then out of focus

and all this talk of armalite and ballot box
is robbed of meaning, becomes
sub-melody, sonic undertow,
a room of children chanting off

by heart a verse. I am nine or ten,
the Central Model School,
Miss Shannon beats out the metre
with her stick.

I wind up in the ghost place
the language rocks me to,
a cobwebby state, chilled vault
littered with our totems;

a tattered Plough and Stars,
a bloodstained Proclamation,
Connolly stripped wounded to a chair,
Mayblossom in Inchicore.

I am following my father's steps
on a rainy day in the National Museum,
by talisman of torc, carved spiral,
Sile na Gig's yoni made luscious in stone.

And somewhere there is vestige
of my mother nursing me to sleep,
when all my world was touch,
when all my world was peace.

And in there too a September evening
the pro-cathedral, girls in rows at prayer,
gaze at the monstrance, lulled to adoration,
mesmeric in frankincense and candlelight:

"Hail our life our sweetness and our hope
To thee do we cry poor banished children of Eve
To thee do we send up our sighs
Mourning and weeping this valley of tears"

I push back to the surface, break clear,
the light has come on, fluorescent,
and banishes my dreaming self.
It is after all an ordinary room.

And we are ordinary people.
We pull our collars up and head
for the new moon sky of our city
fondling each whorled bead in our macabre rosaries.

Don't speak to me of Stephen the Martyr
the host snug in his palm
slipping through the wounded streets
to keep his secret safe.

The Pattern

Little has come down to me of hers,
a sewing machine, a wedding band,
a clutch of photos, the sting of her hand
across my face in one our wars

when we had grown bitter and apart.
Some say that's the faith of the eldest daughter.
I wish now she'd lasted till after
I'd grown up. We might have made a new start

as women without tags like mother, wife,
sister, daughter, taken our chances from there.
At forty-two she headed for god knows where
I've never gone back to visit her grave.

First she'd scrub the floor with Sunlight soap,
an armreach at a time. When her knees grew sore
she'd break for a cup of tea, then start again
at the door with lavender polish. The smell
would persolate back though the flat to us,
her brood banished to the bedroom.

And as she buffed the wax to a high shine
did she catch her own face coming clear?
Did she net a glimmer of her true self?
Did her mirror tell what mine tells me? I have her shrugh and go on
knowing history has brought her to her knees.

She'd call us in and let us skate around
in our socks. We'd grow solemn as planets
in an intricate orbit around her.
She's bending over a crimson cloth
the younger kids are long in bed.
Late summer, cold enough for a fire,
she works by fading light
to remake an old dress for me.
It's first day back at school tomorrow.

"Pure lambswool. Plenty of wear in it yet.
You know I wore this when I went out with your Da.
i was supposed to be down in a friend's house,
your Granda caught us at the corner.
He dragged me in by the hair - it was long as yours then -
in front of the whole street.
He called your Da every name under the sun,
cornerboy, lout; I needn't tell you
what he called me. He shoved my whole head
under the kitchen tap, took a scrubbing brush
and carbolic soap and in ice-cold water he scrubbed
every spick of lipstick and mascara off my face.
Christ but he was a right tyrant, your Granda.
It'll be over my dead body anyone harms a hair of your head."

She must have stayed up half the night
to finish the dress. I found it airing at the fire,
three new copybooks on the table and a bright
bronze nib. St. Christopher strung on a silver wire,
as if I were embarking on a perilous journey
to uncharted realms. I wore that dress
with little grace. To me it splet poverty,
the stigma of the second hand. I grew enough to pass
it on by Christmas to the next in line. i was sizing
up the world beyond our flat patch by patch
daily after school, and fiting each surprising
city street to city square to diamond. I'd watch

the Liffey for hours pulsing to the sea
and the coming and going of ships,
certain that one day it would carry me
to Zanzibar, Bombay, the Land of the Ethiops.

There's a photo of her taken in the Phoenix Park
alone on a bench surrounded by roses
as if she had been born to formal gardens.
She stares out as if unaware
that any human hand held the camera, wrapped
entirely in her own shadow, the world beyond her
already a dream, already lost. She's
eight months pregnant. Her last child.

Her steel needles sparked and clacked,
the only other sound a settling coal
or her sporadic mutter
at a hard part in the pattern.
She favoured sensible shades:
Moss Green, Mustard, Beige.
I dreamt a robe of colour
so pure it became a word.

Sometimes I'd have to kneel
an hour before her by the fire,
a skein around my outstretched hands,
while she rolled wool into balls.
If I swam like a kite too high
amongst the shadows of the ceiling
or flew like a fish in the pools
of pulsing light, she'd reel me firmly
home, she'd land me at her knees.

Tongues of flame in her dark eyes,
she'd say, "One of these days I must
teach you to follow a pattern."

Home

I am the blind woman finding her way home by a map of tune
When the song that is in me is the song I hear from the world
I'll be home. It's not written down and I don't remember the
words
I know when I hear it I'll have made it myself. I'll be home.

A version I heard once in Leitrim was close, a wet Tuesday
night in the Sean Relig bar. I had come for the session, I stayed
for the vision and lore. The landlord called time
the music dried up, the grace notes were pitched to the dark.
When the jukebox blared out*I'd only four senses and he left me senseless,*
I 'd no choice but to take to the road. On Grafton Street in
November
I heard a mighty sound: a travelling man with a didgeridoo
blew me clear to Botany Bay. The tune too far back to live in
but scribed on my bones. In a past life I may have been
Kangaroo,
rocked in my dream time, convict ships coming o'er the foam.

In the Puzzle Factory one winter I was sure I was home.
The talking in tongues, the riddles, the rhymes, struck a chord
that cut through the pharmaceutical haze. My rhythm
    catatonic
I lulled myself back to the womb, my mother's heart
beating the drum of herself and her world. I was tricked
by her undersong, just close enough to my own. I took then
to dancing; I spun like a Dervish. I swear I heard the subtle
music of the spheres. It's no place to live, but -
out there in space, on your own, hung aloft the night.
The tune was in truth a mechanical drone;
I was a pitiful monkey jigging on cue. I came back to earth
with a land, to rain on your face, to sun in my hair. And grateful,
    too.

The wisewomen say you must live in your skin, call it home,
no matter how battered or broken, misused by the world, you
    can heal
This morning a letter arrived on the 9 o'clock post.
The Department of Historical Reparation, and who did I
    blame?
The nuns? Your mother? The State? *Tick box provided,*
we'll consider your case. I'm burning my soapbox, I'm taking
the very next train. A citizen of nowhere, nothing to my name.

I'm on my last journey. Though my lines are all wonky
they spell me a map that makes sense. Where the song that is in
    me
is the song I hear from the world, I'll set down my burdens
and sleep. The spot that I lie on at last the place I call home.

CHRONOLOGY

This chronology contains only the years needed for following rationale of the present study. It is by no means "Irish history in brief" but a list to accompany the reading of this individual work.

500 BC	Estimated beginning of the Celtic period in Ireland.
500–700 AD	Christianization of Ireland: flowering monasteries.
650–750	Writing of Irish vernacular law in progress.
800–1000	Viking invasions.
1000–1200	Norman invasions: colonisation of Ireland.
1800	Act of Union.
1845–9	The Great Famine, causing mass emigration to America.
1870–1900	Land acts and fierce battles over Irish Home Rule.
1890–1900	Minor potato plights throughout the island.
1902	*Cathleen ni Houlihan* by W.B. Yeats.
1911	Foundation of *United Irishwomen* (later *Irish Countrywomen's Association*), the largest women's organisation in Ireland.
1913–6	Preparations for a military rising both in the Protestant and Catholic organisations, North and South. Trafficking of illegal arms.
1916	Easter Rising and the proclamation of the Irish Republic in Dublin, lasts five days, sixteen rebels executed afterwards.
1918	General elections; suffrage extended to include women. An Irishwoman, Constance Markievicz, becomes the first female MP in the Westminster Parliament but she opts out and joins an illegal government in Dublin.
1921	Anglo–Irish treaty leading to partition of the North and South.
1922	Civil war, inauguration of Irish Free State
1926	Establishment of Fianna Fàil by Eamon de Valera
1932	De Valera becomes *Taoiseach.*
1937	Constitution of Éire replaces the Free State Constitution of 1922.

1943	De Valera's famous speech of *comely maidens* and *the cosy homestead.* During WWII, Ireland closest to the protectionist idyll because of its neutral position.
1948	Ireland becomes a Republic.
1968	Civil Rights movement in Northern Ireland; beginning of the "Troubles".
1969	The Irish women's liberation movement (IWLM) formed.
1971	The Pill Train organised by IWLM: illegal contraceptives brought into the Republic.
1972	The "Bloody Sunday" in Derry: thirteen civil rights demonstrators shot by British soldiers.
1973	Ireland and Britain join the EEC.
1980–1	Hunger and dirt strikes by political prisoners, both men and women, in Northern prisons.
1983	Fifteen-year-old Ann Lovett dies of lonely childbirth outdoors; abortion constitutionally banned in the Republic.
1986	Divorce constitutionally banned in the Republic.
1990	Mary Robinson elected President of the Republic.
1992	The "X" case; constitutional clause on abortion enforced, travel and abortion information allowed for pregnant women, dismissal of women writers in *The Field Day Anthology.*
1994	Peace negotiations begin in Belfast; political turmoil in the Republic, partly because of abortion and Church sex scandals. New "rainbow" coalition government, Fianna Fàil into opposition.
1995	Divorce referendum: constitutional ban removed.
1997	First divorce cases in Irish courtrooms. Negotiations on a constitutional reform: possible removal of the clause 41.

APPENDIX 3. MAPS

Map base freely modified from Ireland.jpg in University of Texas Library Online, University of Texas, Austin, 1997. 27.4.1997 available in the www/format at: http://www.lib.utexas.edu/Libs/PCL/Map_collection/europe/Ireland.jpg