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**"The Limitation of Myth in the Poetry of Eavan  
Boland"**

**A B S T R A C T**

The study aims to shed light on the way Eavan Boland used mythology to disseminate her feminist perspective and revive these myths with a fresh spirit. In order to dismantle the patriarchal image of women that had turned them into mere objects, Boland reconstructed myths and carefully discussed the dangers of mythology. The study illustrates the limitations of mythology and how, with or without altering the myth, Boland couldn't find a remedy for women's issues. Myth cannot heal the wounds of women or provide solutions to their problems. Although Boland made efforts to challenge the stereotypical image of women, her characters never achieved true freedom or happy endings, which is evident in her poem "The Making of an Irish Goddess."

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تهدف الدراسة إلى تسليط الضوء على الطريقة التي استخدمت بها إيفان بولاند الاسطورة لبحث منظورها النسوي وإحياء هذه الأساطير بروح جديدة. و من اجل تفكيك الصورة الأبوية للمرأة التي حولتها الى مجرد شي، اعادت بولاند صنع الأساطير وناقشت بعناية مخاطر الأسطورة. توضح الدراسة محدودية الأسطورة و كيف أنه مع أو بدون تغيير الأسطورة، لم تتمكن بولاند من ايجاد علاج لمعضلة المرأة. لا يمكن للأسطورة إصلاح جروح المرأة أو تقديم حلول لقضاياها. على الرغم من أن بولاند بذلت جهدًا لتحدي الصورة النمطية للمرأة، الا أن شخصياتها لم تحقق أبدًا الحرية الحقيقية أو النهايات السعيدة وهذا واضح في قصيدتها " The Making of an Irish Goddess".

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** ايفان بولاند, الاسطورة, صناعة الأساطير , والتغيير

Eavan Boland (1944 -2020) is a famous South and North Irish poet. The Irish poetic environment has been altered since she began her career in the late 1960s. When Boland began writing, Irish poetry offered no precedents for her concerns or posture as a woman poet. She had to build her role and subjects via contemplation and practice (Gortschacher & Malcolm, 2021, p.454). Boland employs myth as a means of dealing with the violence of the world she lives in. As a female poet, she is well aware of the inhospitable myth terrain for women in general that is why she transcends the status of mythmaker to become a revisionist mythmaker. Boland states that mythical depictions of womanhood are ineffective in society. Instead, they function as an enigmatic and aesthetic ideal for Irish women (Snow, 2015, p.25).

Simpson and Roud (2000, p. 254) define myth as tales about divine entities organized in a coherent system, venerated as authentic and sacred, and sanctioned by kings and priests and closely associated with religion. Boland, a female poet

whose story is told through a female narrator, modifies the myth and reappropriates the lost lady and the lost land, whereas Clair Wills argues that the trope operates not just as a way for the poet to lament the loss of the land but also to repossess it (Wills, 1993, p.57).

Boland utilizes the strategy of revisionist mythmaking to destroy the traditional image of women in myths. Alicia Ostriker (1982,p.73) asserts that "the challenge to and rectification of gender preconceptions embedded in myth" are at the heart of revisionist mythmaking for women poets. Similarly, Adrienne Rich is credited with coining the phrase "revision" and notably defining it as "the process of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of approaching an old work from a critical direction is for women more than a chapter in cultural history. It is an act of survival". According to Rich, myths have provided and continue to provide rich repositories of stories, figures, and symbols that empower the marginalized, represent alternative knowledge systems, and therefore essential to the resistance and survival of these groups. Whether for colonized peoples, racial minorities, or other oppressed groups. Scholars and theorists have emphasized the empowering potential of women's "revisionist mythmaking" when conceptualizing the transnational and transgenerational project of women's "revisionist mythmaking" (Rich, 1972, p.18).

It is noticed that, despite her efforts to shatter the traditional picture of women in myths, Boland's characters never experience real independence or happy resolutions. Boland is unable to eliminate myth's inherent antagonism toward women in general, even with or without the rewriting of myth. For one reason or another, the limitation of myth is clearly shown throughout many of her poems. The analysis of "The Making of an Irish Goddess" is overtly proved that limitation. This poem is from the collection *Outside History* in 1990, in which Boland employs myth to empower women and to use them as witnesses of their torments.

Moreover, she utilizes myth to discover individuals' family relationships, which is a significant side of women's experience. She uses Ceres myth to reveal motherhood complexities. It is the poem that remembers the women who died during the Famine. Here, Boland uses the story of Ceres and Persephone, which is one of her favorite myths. Hades took Persephone with him to the Underworld to be his wife. Ceres is very sad about the abduction of her daughter, so she does not take care of the earth. As a result, the land becomes barren and people starve and get sick. Ceres and Hades finally come to an agreement, and Persephone is able to go back to her mother. But since she touched a pomegranate seed, she has to spend a third of each year in the Underworld. Her yearly trip back to the Underworld happens at the start of winter, which explains how the seasons change. Ceres's inconsolable grief over the kidnapping of her daughter may also be a sign of loss in general. In this poem, there is a clear shift from a mythical time experience to a historical time experience (Cousy, 2011, p.13). Boland translates this picture in the following lines:

But I need time – my flesh and that history to make the same descent.

In my body, neither young now nor fertile, and with the marks of childbirth still on it,(ll.11-17)

According to (Boland, 1996, p.80), women have always been seen as property in the Irish literature and masculine tradition. Her poetry actively challenges these myths by challenging the assumptions it is based on. Boland's endeavor is to transmit an authentic and dependable image of the reality. Boland (1996) asserts that she is aware of the transnational and trans-generational effects and she relates this with ethics:

It all comes back to ethics. If a poet does not tell the truth about time, his or her work will not survive it. Past or present, there is a human dimension to time,

human voices within it and human grief 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. (p.158)

Boland wants to experience the same resurrection, descend to the netherworld and rewrite history in a way to glorify the women's great exploits as the goddess Ceres. Boland intended this time not to change myth but to change history, which was unjust with women. Boland is interested in the Roman goddess and feels a connection to her because of two themes in the myth. On one hand, Ceres is linked to the fertility of the earth, and on the other hand, her mother loved her daughter Proserpina very much and feels a lot of pain when she loses her, or to put it more accurately, a mother who worries from what is known as empty-nest syndrome. At the end of the poem, the speaker brings up both sides of this connection: her "sickle-shaped" hand brings up Ceres's connection to farming and harvest, and her anxious look at her own daughter "in the distance" brings up her love for Proserpina. In contrast to this emotional connection, the speaker uses the Roman goddess as a figure of opposition to describe her own human life and Irish identity. "The central dimension of this opposition is the relation to time. While Ceres has no sense of time, the speaker is subject to time and therefore in need of it" (Gortschacher & Malcolm, 2021, p. 458).

In fact, it is noticed throughout the poem that there are three distinct temporal dimensions and realities that may be distinguished. There is Ceres' mythical and eternal existence first. The poem begins with a clear allusion to the mythical mother goddess entering hell to save her beloved daughter. In the original myth, it is Hermes ( who is the gods' messenger and the mediator between the kingdom of the living and the realm of the dead), not Ceres, who goes to hell to talk to Hades about getting Persephone back. In Boland's version, however, Ceres is shown to be an active and real participant. Since she is an immortal figure who does not live in

historical time, she literally has "no sense of time" when she descends to the underworld. The beautiful landscape she leaves behind does not change either. When Ceres looks back at Ireland, all she can see is a static scene in the countryside. This is shown by the series of changeless images (Cousy, 2011, p.13).

Ceres went to hell  
with no sense of time.  
When she looked back  
all that she could see was  
the arteries of silver in the rock,  
the diligence of rivers always at one level,  
wheat at one height,  
leaves of a single colour,  
the same distance in the usual light;  
a seasonless, unscarred earth.(ll.1-10)

This stanza is obviously distinguished by a resemblance that is typical of pleasant and oversimplifying legendary fictions. The American writer Karen Odden draws attention to the ways in which these myths tend to simplify the complicated and frequently harsh reality of everyday life, and definitely this is one of the main reasons behind Boland's revising the myth. The poet might bring up the story of Orpheus myth again. In the context of this poem, Eurydice's disappearance may represent a woman's past that has been violated by traditional Irish bardic poetry and sent back to the dark places of the mythological Underworld. Boland appears to be critical of this myth-making and simplification artistic fabrication that distorts the real event and lessens its traumatic repercussions. The poetic voice promises to be a more reliable witness than the legendary goddess, that is why she employs a

more reliable witness, which is real contemporary woman that is mortal but still shares Ceres' suffering. However, the vehicle Boland employs is myth "There is no other way: Myth is the wound we leave in the time we have."(ll.30,32) (Cousy, 2011, p.14).

Similarly, Sabina J. Muller (2007, pp.84-58) asserts that each myth conceals a wounded fact, that is why Boland refers to myths as wounds or scars. One should not be deceived by the wound's ability to heal into myth. For Boland, the myth acts as a powerful reminder that something is wrong, much like a scar whose tissue is fragile. Azhar H. Mankhi and Abbas S. Hamad (2022, p. 298), assert that the coexistence in harsh circumstances forces the individual to evaluate and reconsider both himself and his environment. Additionally, it turns out to be a significant turning point for both man's life and his ontological understanding of himself. This is noticed in this poem, whereas the old mythical goddess seems to be frozen in time, the new goddess is fully aware of time, who is speaking, says that time has changed her and she is no longer young, fertile, or beautiful. In "The Making of an Irish Goddess," the speaker more directly compares her search for her daughter to the story of Ceres' journey into the underworld. Ceres goes on her journey "without a sense of time," and when she looks back, all she sees is "an earth with no seasons and no scars". But the speaker of this poem cannot see things the way the goddess does. For her to go down, she needs a sense of time, which gives her a sense of history. As the seasons change and man-made scars harden in the earth, the speaker can see what this goddess of agriculture cannot see (De Oliveira, 2017, p. 66) as:

But I need time—  
my flesh and that history—  
to make the same descent.  
[.....]

the failed harvests,  
the fields rotting to the horizon,  
the children devoured by their mothers  
whose souls, they would have said,  
went straight to hell,  
followed by their own.(ll.11-13,ll.24-29).

In this stanza, a second dimension of time is mentioned that is a humanistic one, it is a voice of a suburban woman who is aware of her identity. Thamir Az-Zubaidy (2019, p. 1202) states that the process of relinquishing one's identity may take the form of a monologue. According to Fatima H. Aziz (as cited in Az-Zubaidy, 2019, p.1202), using this technique, various thoughts interact as experiences of different things and a mental or emotional crisis are revealed. Az-Zubaidy also asserts that the process of forming one's identity is seen to be a process that lasts a lifetime which involves cultural, psychological, and cognitive influences. It is the outcome of the past, present, and future. According to this perspective, in this poem, the woman has become fully aware of who she is and is no longer an unconscious object; instead, she is full of courage and ready to share an opinion that indicates her empowerment, as the speaker says "But I need time" (l.11). Iklas M. Nati and Lameaa A. Rashid ( n.d. p. 9) state that the emphasis on strong and confident female characters is done in order to plant the seeds of transformation and empowerment for the future generation. They bravely challenge the rigid patriarchal society and demonstrate that women can be more than just a man's shadow.

Cousy (2011, p.14) states that A first-person speaker appears to speak in place of Ceres, calling for the proper recording of historical time. The word "But" (l. 11) marks the first turning point, which displays the contradictory conflict between the

female voice and the goddess. Unlike the old goddess, the speaker acknowledges that she needs time. Here, the poetic voice clearly indicates that she is not the mythical Ceres, choosing instead what Boland refers to as the "human dimension [of] time". By declaring her desire to "make the same descent" (l.13), the speaker equally aligns herself with the Roman goddess. In this poem, the direct "I" seems to be both personal and archetypal, reflecting injustice suffered by women in general.

The essential experience of the Great Famine of the 1840s, the pivotal agricultural and historical turning point in modern Ireland, is revealed here by time as experienced by a mortal woman and a mother, which the god's-eye vision completely destroys. The poem is told from a human woman's and mother's point of view. Boland employs myth to criticize dogmatic conventions about a woman's position in the world. She uses ancient mythology to guide women not to allow any patriarchal organization whether literary, social, or religious to silence and impose reality on them. So, the use of the myth in this poem is very different from the old myth of the Greek and Roman immortals, because it describes a place on the body where a woman gave birth, leaving the body stitched, scarred, and blemished. Boland says that she can only make "an accurate inscription" of the nation's founding trauma by looking at these traces of human life and pain, she intends doing that through reflecting a realistic experience of the Irish suburban women (Thurston, 1999, P. 12).

Likewise, Wasan H. Keif and Shireen S. Hamad (2022, p. 457), state that myth is used to refute the notions that women are destructive objects, weak beings, or beings without bodies. Helene Cixous (as cited in Keif & Hamad, 2022, p.457) claims that women should utilize their writing as a way to reclaim their bodies and, by extension, their goals and identities. According to Cixous, a woman must "write

herself" and "put herself into the text - as into the world and into history - by her own movement."

De Oliveira (2017, pp.67-68) states that Boland's portrayal of this national trauma, or its healing in the speaker's present, is based on the same mother-child relationship that sends Ceres into hell. Boland says that the worst thing that happened because of the Famine is that mothers eat their own children, sending their souls to hell and then their own shortly after. The "accurate inscription" is the "embodied memory" of this horror, and it should not be read in poetic mythologizing or historical narrative, but on the speaker's own motherly realistic body and in that body's self-protective but showing expressions:

In my body,  
neither young now nor fertile,  
and with the marks of childbirth  
still on it,  
in my gestures—  
the way I pin my hair to hide  
the stitched, healed blemish of a scar—  
must be  
an accurate inscription  
of that agony: (ll.14-23)

Thurston (1999, p. 13) asserts that an Irish woman nowadays is like a mother who was living in poverty during the Starvation. This poem demonstrates not only Cerean's search for her daughter, but also an epic echo of Aeneas' going downward to converse to the ghost of Anchises and to reimagine, at that moment, the classical figure of pietas. Abad (2003, p.1) states that the Roman ideal of pietas, which

Virgil's Aeneas represents, means doing what is right by the gods and people and following one's fate or calling. Pietas was a moral attitude and devotion that governs how people treats each other. It includes respect for parental authority, mutual loyalty between spouses, loyalty to the republic, and devotion to the gods. The Romans thought of pietas as an important and unique part of their national character that set them apart from other people. Its best example and archetype was "Pius Aeneas," who left burning Troy after a sign from Jupiter told him that his relatives had done something good (Kranjc, 2012, pp. 10-11). Thurston (1999, p. 13) asserts that the protagonist holding his child by the hand and his father on his shoulder as Troy burns behind them. Boland's narrator "carries her national/historical Mother on/in her body and for her daughter". At the conclusion of the poem, Ceres and Aeneas fragments are assembled to show how they fit together;

holding up my hand,  
sickle-shaped, to my eyes  
to pick out  
my own daughter from  
all the other children in the distance;  
her back turned to me.(ll.37-42)

More relevantly, the Irish goddess is constructed from happenings that have occurred in Ireland over time, especially the Starvation. The mother in this story shades her eyes from the changing light over the foothills of Dublin. She looks for the future (her daughter) like Ceres and reveals the heritage (mothers who lived during the Irish Starvation) like Aeneas. She finally harvests (with the "sickle-

shaped" hand that "picks") her daughter from the present's underworld because she lives in time and carries that history within herself (Thurston, 1999, P. 14):

There is no other way:

myth is the wound we leave

in the time we have

which in my case is this

March evening

at the foothills of the Dublin mountains,

across which the lights have changed all day,(ll.30-36)

Muller (2007, p.248) states that, in contrast to the majority of the other poems, the speaker and Ceres are not fully identified in this poem. They do, however, have certain things in common, such as the quest to seek their daughters, whether it be in the realm of Hades or in the darkness of a Dublin evening. They share a characteristic, first, the sickle used to chop the corn, which is seen in the mother's "sickle-shaped" hand concealing her eyes, and both of them are of a similar age and this is the second similitude, "neither young now nor fertile". Thirdly, and this is a crucial point, they are both related to famine. The speaker of the poem recalls Ireland's Great Famine of the 1840s and one of its most horrific outcomes, the cannibalism instances in which mothers devoured their own children: "Demeter played the famine as her last card" producing it herself.

At the conclusion of the poem, there is a third change in time: the familiar plot of a myth is turned into a new, personal story. The narrator's autobiographical traits become obvious when she tells a personal experience, which Boland's prose work *Object Lessons* goes into more detail about. Even though the second part of the poem is still about a general piece of history, the ending is much more specific.

This case study is very specific about where it is in time and space, which could mean that the speaker does not want to be sent back to the world of mythology. Still, she has some associations in common with Ceres. For example, the speaker's hand is "sickle-shaped," which refers to the goddess of fertility who is in charge of the harvest. Just like Ceres, the poetic voice is watching out for her daughter, but this time it is not in hell. In this scene, the mother tries to make her daughter stand out from the crowd (Auge, 2004, p. 125).

Karen Odden (as cited in Auge, 2004, p. 125) thinks that the speaker is trying to separate her own story from general history in this passage. This shows again that the speaker is mostly interested in the personal experiences of normal individual (women) as a way to dispel myths and get to the heart of Irish history. "However, the image of the daughter with - her back turned to me implies that this attempt is not at all self-evident. Unlike the original myth, the poem offers no closure". On the other hand, the poet-speaker knows that her daughter will die because she cannot answer her gaze and looks more like Eurydice than Persephone (Auge, 2004, p. 125).

Modern poets challenge the idea of one-dimensional metaphor of Ireland, which is seen as a passive woman. Boland tended to demythologize experiences in her poetry in which she is different from male poets. She is not interested in this poem to retell heroic history but her focus is on the daily lives of ordinary women that are conventionally banished from Irish poetry. According to (Muller, 2007, p.249) Boland does not intend to fully reject the idea of Ireland as a woman, but rather rewrites it by presenting actual women and their unique stories, creating a more accurate representation of both the individual and the country. Boland obviously believes that the Demeter myth more adequately describes women and women's experiences than most myths do. The *aisling* tradition is also criticized by Boland in the essay *Outside History* because it frequently conveys the idea that the lost

nation may be "reborn as a triumphant woman," meaning that the land and its inhabitants may one day also achieve victory. Yet, the truth is that the country has been conquered, the community is in misery, and while things might get better, they can never truly change. Due to this, she chose to portray defeated women and a defeated nation rather than a country that has triumphed, which might be interpreted as an effort to shatter the false hope that prior writings had offered. According to (Mankhi & Nati, 2019, p. 13296) violence regenerates itself by creating more violence and transforms the psyche in moral and emotional ways, this fact is proved in this poem, according to (Gortschacher & Malcolm, 2020, p. 459), after comparing how the cycles repeat itself and how myths do not change over time, the speaker then goes on to explain the function of myth for her and mankind after juxtaposing human mortality with mythological timelessness. The paradoxical manifestation of myth, which alludes to its eternal counterpart, is now set within the context of human temporality and suffering. Az-Zubaidy (2018, pp.83-84) attributes this fact to the transgenerational transmission of these traumas, he argues that the traumatic memory causes a disruption in the passage of time by revealing the ongoing influence of the past on the present. In addition to serving a therapeutic function, acknowledging past atrocities and exploring traumatic experiences also serve an ethical function that, according to Marianna Hirsch and Leo Spitzer ( as cited in Az-Zubaidy, 2018, p.84) can transmit and convey across generational and political limitations and requires our determined and collective efforts to prevent or end the recurrence in the future.

The title of the poem shows how the speaker rewrites the old myth of Ceres as a mortal woman who represents Irish history instead of "Miss Ireland" and Cathleen Ni Houlihan. As the author, Boland wants to make sure she does not make another woman into an object. If you "make" a Goddess, she cannot "be" a Goddess. But because the speaker is self-aware and ironic about the contradiction, this iconic

figure can be seen as a realistic representation of Ireland in her female experience of pain and loss, shown by the impending painful loss of her daughter, as in the ancient myth, as a natural result of being human, alive, and subject to time (Gortschacher & Malcolm, 2020, p. 459).

In this poem, Boland freaks out and transforms the persona from the mythical to an ordinary realistic individual to be more trustworthy eyewitness on the traumatic life of women. Shaymaa Z. Al-Wattar (2020, p.17) states that the poet effectively weaves together myth, history, and daily life. As the title indicates, the poet is creating—or, more precisely, re-creating—the ancient mythical goddess. By doing so, she gives her a voice and the qualities of a real personality that, as a male-created figure, she lacks. As actual women are, in Boland's words, "associated with the living stream rather than with the monumental," the process of creating the goddess is not yet complete. This is clear evidence that myth is so limited to achieve any rectification for woman's problems.

### Conclusion

Boland believes that by challenging and subverting the traditional narrative, she will put an end to the suffering of all women. However, as her poetry develops, Boland comes to realize that the adherence to myths contradicts and undermines the terrible event she is trying to portray and rectify. It is not just the apparent simplicity of the traumatic experience that prevents myth from achieving Boland's objectives; rather, the problem goes deeper than this. The fact that myth is fundamentally patriarchal in its formation, in which women have a subordinate position, is the other major factor behind the limitation of myth. Critics like Luce Irigaray and Diane Purkiss, who are acutely aware of the problematic nature of myths and the limitations of the myth-revisioning process, explicitly acknowledge this problem. It is noticed that however women try to deconstruct the patriarchal restriction on women, they return to the same circle from which they intend to sail

away. No matter how hard they try, female authors can only "mimic" the discourse that is mainly generated by men, any attempt to challenge it, will only serve to show a backfire effects and reinforce its oppressive social structure. Despite the fact that Boland has succeeded in reviving myths in her poetry by using myths to lend them a personal touch or by promoting the idea of freeing myths from the burden of exclusivity, she is still unable to accomplish her desired purpose.

Women will never be able to rewrite myth effectively, because they exist outside the framework of its construction.

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