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The Descent into Hell
in the Poetry of Eavan Boland

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0. INTRODUCTION

When referring to an extremely unpleasant situation or experience, people spontaneously describe it as "hell". Nowadays a popular figure of speech, the notion of hell traditionally referred to an underground place of perpetual punishment or suffering from which there is no escape possible. Over the centuries, numerous writers have found hell an attractive setting for their work. This Underworld descent tradition is actually "a tradition of revision, of innovation against the horizon of the past" (Thurston 2009, 6). Indeed, the literary convention of descending into hell goes back a long way. It is one of the oldest and most often retold stories in western literature. The classic journeys to the Underworld by Aeneas and Dante have remained a major source of inspiration for many contemporary writers, as is the abduction of Ceres' daughter Persephone by Hades, the god of the Underworld.[1] Another captivating myth is Orpheus's descent in pursuit of his beloved Eurydice. All these mythological stories have exerted a popular influence on twentieth-century literature.

Generally, the infernal descent tradition draws together two different narrative topoi: the *nekuia* and the *katabasis.*[2] The epic *nekuia* is an invocation of spirits, whom the hero is confronted with without actually descending into the Underworld. This clearly differs from the hero's physical descent into hell, denoted with the Greek term *katabasis*, which can be literally translated as "a going down" (Falconer 2). In a metaphorical sense, the term is used "to refer to a story about a living person who visits the land of the Dead and returns more or less unscathed" (2). Michael Thurston claims that the traditional distinction between *katabasis* and *nekuia* is merely a matter of emphasis: the *katabasis* provides more detailed information about the physical setting of the Underworld and its inhabitants, whereas the *nekuia* devotes

[1]In accordance with Eavan Boland, I will intentionally use the Latin name Ceres (Demeter) and the Greek name Persephone (Proserpine).

[2]This distinction is discussed by Michael Thurston in *The Underworld in Twentieth-Century Poetry* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

more attention to the interaction with the dead or the "necromantic encounter" (Thurston 2009, 96). Bart Vervaeck points out that these two topoi correspond to an active and a passive portrayal of man respectively, yet this distinction has become blurred over time (14–15). Two canonical antecedents of the invocation and descent topoi can be found in Homer's *Odyssey* and Virgil's *Aeneid* respectively. Many contemporary writings are modeled on these two examples. The *nekuia,* however, is far more common in modern texts.

In her study of *Hell in Contemporary Literature,* Rachel Falconer explains that the idea of hell today is often invoked to convey the traumatic nature of a personal or historical experience. In many Holocaust testimonial narratives or memoirs of mental illness, for instance, the descent journey can offer a way of coming to grips with a past self. Moreover, Thurston reads the modern versions of the *katabasis* as a way of "cultural critique", while the *nekuia* is typically used to express literary critique and issues of poetic responsibility (2009, 6). As most critics conclude, the link between hell and the quotidian is a key consistency in twentieth-century descent literature. Different poets encounter a set of problems – public or private –, which require them to descend into hell in search of solutions.

This is also the case in the work of Eavan Boland (1944 –), one of Ireland's leading women poets. In Boland's oeuvre there are four poems that share the central conceit of the Underworld visit. Through an analysis of "The Journey," "The Making of an Irish Goddess," "The Pomegranate" and "Love," I will show how Eavan Boland restages this popular literary trope as a useful framework for accessing both historical and personal torment and addressing gender and poetical issues.[3] Although some of these poems have been studied before, the descent motif has not yet been explored at any length, certainly not across all of Boland's

[3]A large number of Boland's poems refer to the myth of Ceres and Persephone. One other example is "A False Spring", a poem that also addresses the Underworld descent. However, I will restrict my discussion to "The Making of an Irish Goddess" and "The Pomegranate," since the Ceres myth is more powerful at work in these poems.

work. I will indicate the interrelationship between the poems, by dividing them into pairs. In the first section of my discussion, the speaker visits the Underworld as a way of revisiting the past horrors of the Great Famine. The first two poems are attempts at seeking a truthful connection with the female suffering during this disastrous period. Boland self-consciously struggles to grasp a past that is fundamentally inaccessible yet to which poetry may afford a paradoxical mode of access. The second part of my discussion focuses more on personal experiences. In "The Pomegranate," Boland explores her relationship with her daughter through the myth of Ceres and Persephone, whereas "Love" addresses the speaker's recollections of her early married life with references to the story of Aeneas in the Underworld.

This essay will explore the difficulties of poetry, its relationship to loss and how these recurrent motifs are linked to the Underworld descent trope in Boland's work. I will first devote some attention to Irish poetry in general, dealing both with gender issues and subject matter. Secondly, I will situate Eavan Boland in the Irish literary field. More specifically, I will elaborate on her place among her fellow women poets. This controversial "threshold" position of hers connects very well to the thematic choice in the four poems under discussion. The speaker appears to linger in limbo, which shows how the boundary between tradition and revision, past and present, the living and the dead, is very obscure. This will become particularly clear with textual evidence from the poems, before arriving at my final conclusion.

1. THE IRISH LITERARY TRADITION

In the Irish storytelling tradition stories were passed down from father to son. The female storyteller was traditionally considered a curiosity, and so was her feminine subject matter. Ordinary women's lives were not considered worthy of the Irish poem and were likewise excluded from the Irish history books. This explains why it took such a long time for women poets to be accepted in the male-dominated poetic canon. Only recently has Irish women's writing begun to receive more attention. Tangible proof can be found in the apparent representation of female poets in recent Irish and international anthologies.[4]

The Irish literary imagination has generally been marked by a persistent mythologizing tendency or, in Boland's words, "a fusion of the national and the feminine which [seems] to simplify both" (*Object Lessons* 128).[5] Many contemporary women poets consciously challenge the one-dimensional metaphor of Ireland as a passive woman. This so-called demythologizing process is also notably present in the poetry of Eavan Boland. Unlike most of her male colleagues, Boland is not interested in a heroic past but in the ordinary lives of women, which are traditionally excluded from Irish poetry. Boland shares this feminist perspective with many others and her revisionist techniques are similar to those in the work of other Irish women poets.[6] Instead of radically rejecting the traditional imagery, she often evokes the same images only to undermine that tradition (Auge 122). Hence, Boland applies a

[4]The most important example is the *Field Day Anthology,* volumes IV and V of which finally include women poets in the Irish canon after considerable protest. These long-anticipated volumes appeared in 2002 and focus on *Irish Women's Writing and Traditions* (Schrage-Früh 13). Another example is *Wildish Things: An Anthology of New Irish Women's Writing* (Dublin: Attic Press, 1989), with an influential introduction by Ailbhe Smyth, in which she claims that "to tell our stories, we must write over the images and myths which overshadow us" (8). Hence, these female stereotypes must be directly addressed in order to change them. This explains why female mythic figures frequently enter Boland's poems.

[5]Eavan Boland's prose work *Object Lessons:The Life of the Woman and the Poet in Our Time* (New York: Norton, 1995). All further references to this work will be abbreviated as *OL* and cited parenthetically in the text.

[6]In *Emerging Identities*, Michaela Schrage-Früh points out how this revisionism also goes on in the work of Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill and Medbh McGuckian.

"subversive" strategy; she does not totally abandon the existing structures, but transfigures the traditional poetic images in order to accommodate female experience (Conboy 67).

2. EAVAN BOLAND: A THRESHOLD POET

Eavan Boland's subversive poetics is particularly clear in her restaging of the classical male descent journey and her drawing on the Greek myth of Ceres and Persephone, turning it into a distinct Irish myth. In her poems we can also discover many subtle references to the Orpheus myth and the dangers inherent in the poet's ambition. It might be interesting to link Boland's concern with these stories, balancing on the threshold between the upper- and Underworld, to Boland's own borderline position as a poet.

Indeed, Boland can be considered a "threshold" poet in many ways. As an Irish woman poet, she occupies a very complicated, perhaps even controversial place among her fellow poets. While she openly critiques the national literary tradition of depicting women as "passive, decorative, raised to emblematic status" (*OL* 134), she has often been accused of simply replicating these mythical emblems (Craps 166).[7] Boland does indeed abundantly draw on ancient myths and literary conventions. Yet, her self-reflexive poetic voice has often not been taken into account by critics.[8] With her subversive techniques, she places herself somewhere "at the very borders of myth and history" (*OL* 172) or "in the liminal zone where personal circumstance transmutes into collective experience" (Auge 125).

In fact, many of her poems explore this tension between mythical and historical representation. They are mostly situated at twilight, right before darkness falls, which is the ultimate moment of transition. The female characters in the poems under discussion are also

[7]Stef Craps (2009) further refers to the responses by Longley (1994), Meaney (1993) and Wills (1991).

[8]In the critical discussion concerning Boland's poetic mission, I take my cue from the recent illuminating articles by Catriona Clutterbuck (1999, 2005) and Stef Craps (2009), which call attention to the pervasive self-reflexivity in her work.

"in-between" the present domestic sphere and the past mythical Underworld, sometimes even literally traversing the boundary. This is the case with Persephone, who neither belongs to the upperworld nor Underworld exclusively. Similarly, the poetic voice regularly switches between looking back and forward, recovering a lost past while anticipating future prospects. She wants to turn the culturally dominant interpretation of "his-story" into a new kind of "herstory," incorporating the ordinary women's stories into the larger frame of Irish history (Odden 10).

Boland's testimonial project balances between recovering the silenced histories of women and recording women's everyday domestic lives. Most of her poems thus chronicle a "history of the ordinary" (Hagen and Zelman 3). Especially over the past two decades, Boland's mature poetry has been marked by a paradigm-shift from "artistic experimentation" to a more "ethical imagination" (Allen-Randolph 1993, 129). In her recent volumes, we perceive a self-conscious poetic voice, who clearly distances herself from the inherited poem, while expressing a concern with the ethics of representation.

3. THE FAMINE POEMS

Part of Boland's subversive discourse are a number of poems in which the Great Famine is implicitly or explicitly referred to, in an attempt to bear witness to the previously silenced female suffering. Due to crop failures, mass starvation afflicted Ireland in the 1840s. This traumatic event led to the deaths of almost one million people. Millions more were forced to flee the country and make a better life elsewhere. One of the greatest ordeals in Irish history, the Famine was a telling example of what is called a 'hell on earth.' To go back to this horrific experience, one has to descend into the darkest realms of folk memory. But instead of focusing on the factual account of this national disaster, Eavan Boland is more concerned with

the unrecorded domestic implications of such a traumatic experience. She clearly shifts the attention to the female victims, who have always been outsiders in Irish history.

3.1. JOURNEY WITH THE MUSE

In her essay "The Woman The Place The Poet," Boland comments that "there is a duality to place," which also characterizes her poetry (*OL* 154). In fact, "there is the place that happened and the place that happens to you" (*OL* 154). In Boland's case, the first place is Dundrum, a Dublin suburb where she spent most of her family life. The other place is situated "a hundred miles southwest" (*OL* 154), a county town called Clonmel. Boland further reflects on a trip she once made to the latter place, almost situated back in time, where past women suffered from the appalling conditions in the local workhouse. In her attempt to reconnect with these poor women, Boland describes this place as her own personal "Underworld" (*OL* 174) and explains that, in a poem, "[her] journey would become a descent" (*OL* 158).

This is exactly what happens in "The Journey," the title poem in her fifth volume (1987). In this poem Boland rewrites the traditional male descent journey to bridge the distance between past and present, between "tradition and individual talent" (Thurston 2009, 88). She does so by contrasting the formal and rhetorical diction, drawn from Aeneas' famous Underworld journey, with the everyday language, adopted from the speaker's private domestic experience. A point in case is the repeatedly suggested downward movement: "down down down […] the way of stairs winding down to a river" (ll. 33–36). The Underworld setting they arrive at, however, is subtly personalized by the poet, bearing some resemblance to the speaker's suburban surroundings. This combination of tradition and innovation proves to be very useful in her attempt to revisit the painful suffering during the Famine. Moreover, Michael Thurston adds that Boland establishes a dialogue with "the patriarchal tradition […], us[ing] that dialogue to think through questions of poetic

responsibility" (2009, 96–97). As we will see, the issue of responsibility is a key feature in this poem.

The poem's epigraph is an actual quote from Virgil, referring to Aeneas' "necromantic encounter" as described in Book VI of the *Aeneid* (Thurston 2009, 96).[9] In this episode, our hero finds himself on the threshold of the Underworld, brushing past the wandering shadows of mothers and children on his way to encounter his father Anchises. These particular lines provide some insight into the nature of the journey the poet-speaker is about to undertake. Boland is clearly not interested in the hero's adventures. Instead, she picks a marginal scene, describing the heartrending separation of mother and infant by premature death: "Immediately cries were heard. These were the loud wailing of infant souls weeping at the very entrance-way; never had they had their share of life's sweetness for the dark day had stolen them from their mothers' breasts and plunged them to a death before their time."

Boland's version of the story also begins "*in medias res*" (Thurston 2009, 96), taking place when darkness falls. At the beginning of the poem, the speaker accuses the traditional poets of wasting their lines on "the obvious / emblem" (ll. 8–9). Instead, her own poem seeks to address "the real thing", a mother's fearful anguish at the illness of her child, who "startled in a dream" (l. 19). The "antibiotic" (l. 2) might well be an apoetical topic, at least it has healing effects. The poet connects her personal worries over her child's illness with her vision of these other mothers lamenting the deaths of their children, who suffered beyond aid. Again, the poet confronts the personal and everyday with the poetic tradition.

Apart from the canonical texts by Virgil and Dante, the poem is also indebted to the Irish *aisling* tradition or (nationalist) dream vision poetry (Thurston 2009, 96). When the speaker finds herself in a drowsy mental state ("not sleep, but nearly sleep," l. 25), it is

[9]In *A False Spring*, Boland looks back on her younger self during college years, when she was "studying / Aeneas in the Underworld" (ll. 10–11). Her classic schooling explains her affiliation with mythology and the chosen setting of the Underworld.

Sappho, the archetypal woman poet, who suddenly appears to her. This important predecessor, replacing Virgil's Sibyl or Dante's Virgil, conducts the speaker and the reader on a journey to the past, down into the darkest corners of traumatic memory. The repetition of "down down down" (l. 33) evokes a sense of dislocation, indicating how a traumatic experience is by definition imagistic, wordless and spiraling ("the way of stairs winding down to a river" (l. 36)). For Boland, this journey goes downwards into hell as well as backwards into time.

Boland's subversive strategy is most clearly enacted in the conscious change to a female perspective: the male protagonist is substituted by a suburban mother. Moreover, the focus is no longer on the hero's challenges but on the pains of past generations of mothers and their infants. Boland accordingly depicts the Underworld as "an oppressive suburb of the dawn" (l. 44). The aforementioned "duality to place" (*OL* 154) is again visualized in the poem. First we get a detailed description of the speaker's domestic suburban surroundings: a messy room, full of clothes, books and unfinished drinks. Then we shift to an infernal and mythical setting, but one which still has some familiar suburban traits. This exemplifies the evolution in contemporary literature of an infernal setting which increasingly displays earthly features (Vervaeck 29).

So far, we have seen *how* Boland reworks the traditional descent journey. Now we can ask ourselves *why* she employs this particular literary trope. In this poem, the purpose of the Underworld journey is two-fold. First of all, hell functions as a psychological space, where one is confronted with feelings of suffering and loss. This is the central idea in Rachel Falconer's *Hell in Contemporary Literature,* in which she claims that the crucial function of the descent is "the idea of a self being forged out of an infernal journey" (4). Likewise, Boland's journey involves a retrospective reflection on mothers and children suffering from past plagues. An important aspect is the speaker's gradually increasing involvement in what

she sees. During her journey, she goes through two different stages. At first she experiences a sense of horror at the sight of these "terrible pietàs" (l. 56). But Sappho immediately cautions her to be "careful" (l. 57) in her judgement of these troubled women and emphasizes that they resemble the speaker in various ways ("like you;" l. 65). Dreading the illness of her own child, the speaker eventually shows sympathy for these shadowy mother figures from the past. However, she is unable "to reach or speak to them" (l. 73). Sappho turns the spotlight on the peripheral cases: the famished mothers who always belonged to the margins of Irish history. Although her guiding tour is instructive, the speaker comes back no wiser ("nothing was changed; nothing was more clear," l. 93).

Secondly, Boland's version of the descent serves a poetical function. In his extensive study of literary descent journeys, Bart Vervaeck subdivides this poetical function into three different poetical dimensions, each one concerning the poet, the language and the poetic tradition. I already indicated how the intertextual references to Virgil's *Aeneid* together with other formal features establish a dialogue between tradition and innovation. With respect to content, the poet also connects with the poetic tradition by tracing back her line of descent. The speaker is here accompanied by the enigmatic poet-muse Sappho. However, Sappho not only functions as a guide; she is also cast in a maternal role, treating the speaker as her "own daughter" (l. 85). This mother-daughter relationship seems to fill the need for literary foremothers in Ireland. As Sheila C. Conboy puts it, "Boland addresses the woman writer's problem of matrilineage by exposing within the typically masculine heroic structure the poet-speaker's wishfulfillment in having Sappho as her mother and guide" (70). Hence, the poem is also a celebration of the "poetic bond" between the poet-speaker and her guide (Conboy 69).

In addition, "The Journey" symbolizes a quest for inspiration, from the earthly male-dominated history to an underground actual female past.[10] This is what Vervaeck calls the "orphic dimension," when the descent functions "as a metaphor for artistic creation" (221). Orpheus is the prototypical poet, gifted with an extraordinary musical talent, who tries to bring back his beloved muse from hell. He descends into the Underworld, obtaining Eurydice's release by moving Hades with his song. In this case, poetry is presented as a conversation with the dead, a medium which gives the shadows back their voice. Like Orpheus, it is the poet herself who embarks on an Underworld journey. In his seminal essay "Orpheus's Gaze;" Maurice Blanchot draws attention to the failure inherent in this "orphic dimension" of poetry, which this poem specifically bears witness to. The poet Orpheus ignores Hades' prohibition against looking back upon Eurydice while retrieving her from the Underworld. His disobedience eventually results in the irrevocable loss of his beloved: she dies a second and final death. The poet's desire to look back, to recover what has been lost – Eurydice or a female past –, inevitably entails the risk of falsifying the authentic experience. Blanchot considers this act of looking back as a movement of inspiration, which is at the same time forbidden yet necessary to grasp the essence of the experience. Boland thus echoes Blanchot's argument that the descent into the Underworld is always marked by failure. "[T]urning away is the only way it can be approached" (170); it is precisely the poet's task to express the inexpressible. Eurydice – the Other – is the artist's ultimate and obscure goal. According to Blanchot, Orpheus's error is not his backward gaze as such, but lies in his impatient desire "which moves him to see and to possess Eurydice, he whose destiny is only to sing of her" (171). As is the case with Orpheus, who loses Eurydice while bringing her

[10]Over the years Boland came to see the difference between history and the past – "how one was official and articulate and the other was silent and fugitive" (Allen-Randolph 2007, 131–132). This opposition is analogous to the earlier distinction between myth and history respectively. Boland is especially drawn to the latter – almost Underworldly – place of whispers, shadows and vanishings.

back from hell, the speaker's impatient desire to recover this past misery is resolutely condemned. Although Sappho reminds the speaker that this horrible vision is beyond poetry, even a testimonial one, it is certainly "not beyond love" (ll. 80). Sappho wants her adopted "daughter" and disciple to remember forever the suffering of their female ancestors, whose voices can only be retrieved in memory:

> I have brought you here so you will know forever
> the silences in which are our beginnings,
> in which we have an origin like water. (ll. 86–88)

To Blanchot, "Orpheus's gaze […] is the nostalgic return to the uncertainty of the [work's] origin", which equals the authentic experience (173). For the poet, this is "the furthest that art can reach" (170). The speaker is not allowed to physically cross "the melancholy river" and thus denied access to the heart of the Underworld.

A third poetical aspect concerns the inadequacy of language, which I already touched upon in the previous paragraph. In the last stanza of "The Journey", the poet wakes up to find that "nothing has changed" (l. 93): her desire to know is unfulfilled, her epistemological quest remains unresolved. This absence of closure indicates the unbridgeable distance between the past and present. As Michael Thurston puts it: "Sappho […] shows Boland that poetry is limited in its capacity to respond to untold generations of maternal and familial suffering, but that poetry must act within those limits" (2009, 98). Only by making these shadows visible and their silences audible, can these past mothers be approached. Stef Craps agrees that the poetic mission "is not to break these silences by filling them up with words, but to preserve, honour, and respect them by listening to them and making them audible as silences" (171). By virtue of its suggestive power, the language of poetry is deemed fittest to articulate these silences.

The significance of this programmatic poem lies in Boland's revisionist treatment of the epic *katabasis* and *nekuia*, while connecting it to the modern concept of hell as a descent into a traumatic history. In "The Journey," Boland adopts the masculine literary motif of the descent journey, while shifting the focus to the female experience. Boland's descent also differs from the *katabasis* by Dante and Aeneas in that it has no voyeuristic purpose. Instead, her visit to the Underworld is an expression of empathy with the fate of its female inhabitants. Boland deliberately translates a male myth into a myth of mothers, featuring Sappho as the female version of the Dantesque Virgil. The poem addresses the speaker's wish to recover these lost female voices but ultimately leaves them as irrecoverable, since "every process of recovery itself involves an inevitable misrepresentation" (Villar-Argáiz 287). The poet recognizes that words are often inadequate to articulate the horror of an experience. Paradoxically, the poem strangely succeeds in expressing what is actually beyond expression. While this suffering is unspeakable, it can nevertheless be remembered "in the practices of 'love's archaeology' (l. 69), in actions of caring that reenact these mothers' love" (Thurston 2009, 98). As Stef Craps concludes, Boland's testimonial project is centred around an "ethical love", which is manifest "in her invention of a mode of writing that bears witness to its own incapacity of recovering what lies outside history" (165).

3.2. RE-MAKING MYTH

Another poem that commemorates the female victims of the Famine is "The Making of an Irish Goddess," the third poem of the *Outside History* sequence in the eponymous collection. Here Boland draws on one of her favourite myths: the story of Ceres and Persephone. Persephone was taken by Hades to become his spouse in the Underworld. Intensely mourning the loss of her daughter, Ceres neglects the earth so that the land becomes barren, leading to starvation and all kinds of diseases. Eventually Ceres and Hades reach an agreement and

Persephone is reunited with her mother. But since she has touched a pomegranate seed, she has to spend a third of each year in the Underworld. Her annual return to the Underworld coincides with the beginning of winter, which offers an explanation for the seasonal cycle. Ceres' inconsolable grief at her daughter's abduction may also represent more general feelings of loss.

Throughout this particular poem, we can trace a clear shift from a mythical to a historical time experience. In fact, we can distinguish three different time dimensions and perceptions of reality. First, there is Ceres' mythic and timeless existence. The poem opens with a direct reference to the emblematic mother goddess descending into hell to rescue her beloved daughter. Michael Thurston comments that in the original myth it is not Ceres but Hermes who descends into hell to negotiate the return of Persephone (1999, 12). In Boland's version, however, Ceres is presented as an active subject. As an immortal figure living outside historical time, she has literally "no sense of time" (l. 2) when making her descent. The idyllic landscape she leaves behind also remains unaffected by time. When Ceres looks back at Ireland, her vision is restricted to an unchanging pastoral scene, as the succession of static images demonstrates:

> the diligence of rivers always at one level,
>
> wheat at one height,
>
> leaves of a single colour,
>
> the same distance in the usual light; (ll. 6–9)

This stanza is clearly marked by a sameness that is typical of comfortable and simplifying mythological fictions. Karen Odden points out how these myths tend to reduce the complex and often uncomfortable truth of everyday experience (14).

Ceres' backward glance can be interpreted as an implicit poetical statement. The poet-speaker might again invoke the myth of Orpheus. In the context of this poem, the vanishing of

Eurydice may symbolize a female past violated by the traditional Irish bardic poetry, and thus banished once again to the dark realms of the mythological Underworld. Boland seems to criticize this simplifying and mythmaking artistic creation, which shatters the truthful experience and reduces its traumatizing effects. As opposed to the mythical goddess, the poetic voice claims to be a more trustworthy witness. As we will see, the (in)capacity of poetry is captured in the concluding lines, echoing Blanchot's argument as invoked in "The Journey." "In Boland's mature aesthetic," Catriona Clutterbuck reminds us, "the act of retrieval is in constant tension with its opposite, the act of losing" (77).

In the second part of the poem, Ceres is replaced by a first-person speaker who pleads for an accurate registration of historical time. The first turning point, signalled by "But" (l. 11), reveals how there is an ambivalent tension between the goddess in the opening line and the female voice. The speaker admits that, unlike the ancient goddess, she "need[s] time" – time as the reliable "history" of embodied female "flesh" (ll. 11–12), which Michael Thurston considers as "the embodiment of some disembodied past" (1999, 238). Here, the poetic voice clearly distances herself from the mythic Ceres, opting for what Boland elsewhere calls the "human dimension [of] time" (*OL* 153). At the same time, the speaker somehow aligns herself with the Roman goddess by expressing her wish to "make the same descent" (l. 13). The candid "I" in this poem seems to be at once individual and archetypal, reflecting unjust female suffering in general. As opposed to Ceres, the speaker embodies a more humanized mother figure who is highly involved. She can only truthfully represent the experience of women in Ireland by bearing the physical mark or "blemish of a scar" (l. 20) of their past suffering. The earlier monotonous description of "a seasonless, unscarred earth" (l. 10) is in sharp contrast to the more "accurate inscription" of the historical and psychological landscape *scarred* by "that agony" (ll. 22–23). The mention of "the failed harvests" (l. 24) in the next stanza may lead to an ambiguous interpretation. On the one hand, it might be the result of Ceres' negligence of

the earth due to her despair over the loss of her daughter. On the other hand, these crop failures may be interpreted as a concrete sign of the Irish Famine. The latter interpretation seems more likely since the speaker here turns away from myth and focuses instead on the dark pages in *Irish* history. The poem rewrites the myth of Ceres into a 'real' history featuring 'real' people. Karen Odden emphasizes that "it is not Ceres, goddess of the earth, who goes *down* to hell but the children and mothers of Ireland who go *through* the hell of the famine" (15; my emphasis). According to the poetic voice, the awful fate of the Famine mothers "must be" (l. 21) internalized by a new Irish mother goddess.

At the end of the poem a third shift in time occurs: the familiar mythical plot is transformed into a unique individual story. The narrator's autobiographical traits become clear in her account of a personal anecdote, which is described in more detail in Boland's prose memoir *Object Lessons*. While the second part of the poem still dealt with a general historical fact, the conclusion ("in my case," l. 33) is much more concrete. This particular case study is precisely located in both time ("this / March evening," ll. 33–34) and space ("at the foothills of the Dublin mountains," l. 35); details that might indicate the speaker's refusal to be deported to the realms of mythology. Yet, there are again some affinities with Ceres. For instance, the hand of the speaker is "sickle-shaped" (l. 38), referring to the fertility goddess who is in charge of the harvest. Like Ceres, the poetic voice is also looking out for her daughter, though not in hell this time. Here the mother tries to distinguish her daughter from the crowd. Odden reads this passage as the speaker's attempt to single out her own personal story ("my own daughter;" l. 40) from general history ("from / all the other children in the distance," ll. 40–41) (16). This shows once more how the speaker is mainly concerned with the individual stories of ordinary people (women) as a means to counter myth and to get to the heart of Irish history. However, the image of the daughter with "her back turned to me" (l. 42) implies that this attempt is not at all self-evident. Unlike the original myth, the poem offers no

closure. On the contrary, the poet-speaker recognizes the inevitable loss of her daughter, who is unable to answer her gaze and "resembles Eurydice more than Persephone" (Auge 125).

By way of conclusion, we can consider the speaker's realization that "myth is the wound we leave / in the time we have" (ll. 31–32). Jody Allen-Randolph points out that in this poem "myth is revealed as a wound […] precisely because it is a form of artistic manipulation which restricts human reality; it is an attempt to deny history by being human without being mortal" (21). Poetry can only be truthful when turning away from myth and bearing witness to its wounding effects. That is why the scar trope is so present in Boland's poetry: the scar as a result of the repeated injury by the mythmaking tradition and its misrepresentation of women and history. Instead, the poet must humanize the mythical representation of Woman and re-possess the inaccurate national history. Boland herself does so by reworking the traditional conventions. We can link this back to the title of the poem: "The Making of an Irish Goddess" can be interpreted as a critique of the aforementioned mythmaking agenda. However, Boland seems to fall back on precisely those mythical images, which she actually denounces. Throughout the poem we notice a constant negotiation between Ceres and the speaker. Boland's project, it seems, lies in a 're-making' of a truthful *Irish* goddess. In presenting this alternative image, the poetic voice wants to restore the suggestion of actual human suffering. Yet, her subtle allusion to the Orpheus myth reveals her sensitive awareness that what is lost can never be fully recovered.

4. THE DOMESTIC POEMS

The other two poems are accounts of the poet's personal experience as a mother and wife. They were published together in the 1994 collection *In a Time of Violence* and belong to the same *Legends* sequence; a series of poems which centre around myth. Boland's preference for the term "legend" over the term "myth" clarifies the nature of these poems. She obviously

wants to place these myths in a historical setting, turning them into *human* myths, with clear autobiographical traits. These embodied myths do not feature otherworldly characters, but everyday mothers, husbands and daughters (Schrage-Früh 71). In these poems, the notion of hell concerns the speaker's direct surroundings. Hence, Boland's approach echoes the postmodern discourse: she turns the great heroic stories into "tableaux vivants", banal slices of life devoted to the domestic experience and daily routines of housewives.

4.1. A DAUGHTER LOST IN HELL

Boland returns to the theme of mother love in "The Pomegranate," which can be read as a sequel or conclusion to "The Making of an Irish Goddess." Whereas the latter poem focused more on general feelings of loss, Boland here elaborates on her personal mother-daughter relationship, which the concluding verses of "The Making of an Irish Goddess" only hinted at. These closing lines refer to an autobiographical anecdote in which she identifies with all those other mothers, who, like her, "must have measured their children against the seasons […] as an index of the coming loss" (*OL* 168). In this poem, Boland again departs from the Ceres myth and further reflects on the themes of irretrievable loss and the cruel passing of time.

In spite of the contradictory opening lines, seemingly affirming the simplification of myth, "The Pomegranate" is thematically closely related to "The Making of an Irish Goddess" and equally corresponds to Boland's revisionist project. In fact, "the poet is required to mythologize experience before he or she can recreate it in text" (Clutterbuck 82). Through the myth of Ceres, we saw how in "The Making of an Irish Goddess" Boland tries to capture the horrors of the Famine, including the infertile soil and the subsequent starvation. Next to being the goddess of agricultural fertility, Ceres is also the personification of motherly relationships and thus the ideal starting point to explore the theme of mother-love. In "The Pomegranate," Boland draws again on this ancient myth in an attempt to articulate the everyday experience

of motherhood. She connects her personal life with "the only legend [she has] ever loved" (l. 1), that of "a daughter lost in hell" (l. 2) and a mother's attempt to rescue her.

This myth is particularly apt, because it can be approached from two different perspectives. In fact, it functions as a fluid means of identification or "a frame of reference" (Schrage-Früh 73). As Boland writes: "I can enter it anywhere" (l. 7). First, the speaker identifies with Persephone, an "exiled child" (l. 11) in London's "underworld" (l. 12) of "fogs and strange consonants" (l. 9). These lines refer to Boland's isolated childhood experience in London, which can be connected to Persephone's confinement in the Underworld. "Later" (l. 12), she looks at it through the eyes of Ceres, "searching for [her] daughter at bed-time" (l. 14). In the second part of the poem, after the visual break reflecting the change in seasons, Boland meditates on her fear for the "coming loss" (*OL* 168), inherent in her daughter's grow to maturity. As the title indicates, the key symbol in this poem is the pomegranate, which functions as an emblem of change, a sign of the daughter's awakening sexuality. The speaker's child has now become an adolescent, standing on the threshold of adulthood.

In his post-colonial reading of Eavan Boland's poetry, Pilar Villar-Argáiz points out how the eating of the ancient fatal fruit was necessary for the poet to become mature: "By viewing her childhood exile as a journey into the Underworld, Boland believes that this painful experience in her life has provided her with the potential for growth, insight and transformation" (154–155). This resonates with Rachel Falconer's argument that every descent involves a transformation or rebirth of a new self (4). It is indeed in the Underworld that "Persephone is transformed from an innocent and virginal child into an autonomous and compelling figure with a new power and status" (Villar-Argáiz 154).

This poem illustrates the same "duality to place" (*OL* 154) that we encountered in "The Journey." The speaker makes a clear distinction between the Underworld, "the place of death, / at the heart of legend" (l. 37–38), and the actual suburb, which "has cars and cable

television" (l. 44) and which literally presents "another world" (l. 46). Although there is no outward resemblance, these two worlds seem to have more in common. In her most recent prose work, *A Journey with Two Maps*, Boland realizes that "the underworld is with us all the time" (97). So the suburban setting is by no means any safer than the mythological Underworld. Just like Persephone, the speaker's child "can be / hungry" (ll. 41–42). Hagen and Zelman interpret these verses as a "hunger for experience, for that which lies apart from the comfort of the home and of the close parent-child bond" (110).

In "The Making of an Irish Goddess," the mythic character Ceres had "no sense of time," whereas this embodied version of Ceres acknowledges the "beautiful rifts in time" (l. 48) as the only gift a mother can offer her daughter. The static images of the changeless landscape are replaced with a dynamic seasonal imagery. As summer comes to an end, the speaker realizes that winter is "inescapable" (l. 22), that time of year when Ceres has to take leave of her daughter. The poet here stresses the centrality of the aforementioned "human dimension [of] time" (*OL* 153). Winter does not only announce darkness and barrenness, more importantly, it is a prelude to maternal loss.

At the poem's end, the mother-speaker suffers from an inner conflict. She wonders whether she should "warn" (l. 42) her hungry daughter not to eat the pomegranate, for "[t]here is still a chance" (l. 42) to save her. But at the same time she realizes that she can only watch powerless. The story will repeat itself again, "[t]he legend will be hers as well as mine," but the mother "will say nothing" (l. 54) to avert the daughter's mistakes. Finally, she gives her daughter the opportunity to live her own life. Andrew Auge concludes that Boland's revision "culminates not in a return or restoration of the lost daughter, but in the mother's recognition of the daughter's inevitable loss" (125). That's why the Ceres myth is central to "Boland's value system; it is instructive to her, reminding us that loss accentuates value as darkness frames light" (Hagen and Zelman 4). Indeed, the poem does not offer resistance to the perils

of growing up, but results in the acceptance of loss as an expression of her mother-love. The mother understands that she must embrace that distance to allow her daughter's maturation.

4.2. Lost Love

Relatively little has been published regarding the last poem, which belongs to the same sequence as the previous poem. "Love" recounts the illness of a child and its consequences for the romantic love between the parents. Just like "The Pomegranate," this poem is autobiographically inspired. The speaker addresses her husband ("I am your wife," l. 20) and reflects back on an intense period in their marriage, "when myths collided" (l. 2). She further connects her personal experience with the myth of Aeneas in the Underworld. Michaela Schrage-Früh argues that Boland "refers to a myth of love and a myth of death, both of which reflect what happens to the couple in their 'ordinary existence'" (72). She applies myth to her personal situation, rather than describing her emotions to fit some mythological scenario. This is precisely how Boland humanizes myth.

In "Love," the speaker looks back on her American years when she and her husband were very close, until one of their children "was touched by death in this town / and spared" (ll. 14–15). This unsettling event makes the speaker recall Aeneas' visit to the Underworld, which shows the poem's indebtedness to the convention of the epic *nekuia*. When "[d]ark falls," the speaker perceives "this mid-western town" (l. 1) as an Underworld setting: she imagines her husband as the hero Aeneas and the Iowa river as the river Styx. Like Aeneas "on his way to hell" (l. 6), unable to make contact with his dead battle-companions, the speaker's husband cannot hear her. In line with her revisionism in "The Journey," Boland deploys the Underworld journey to revisit a painful experience; in this case, the fear of losing both her child and husband.

In the second stanza, “love” (l. 10) is personified and presented as a fifth element, “a brother of fire and air” (l. 12). However, the couple soon discovers the transitory nature of their love, having “the feather and muscle of wings” (l. 10). Even though they “love each other still” (l. 22), the intensity of their love has faded and belongs to the past forever. Their current relationship is one of “day-to-day and ordinary distances” (l. 23). Although there are many great love poems, Boland tells in an interview, “[t]here’s little about the ordinariness of love, the dailyness of love, or the steadfastness of love” (Allen-Randolph 2007, 127). In her next volume *Against Love Poetry* (2001), Boland discovers that true love lies in the daily practices of an ageing love, not in those great romantic moments.

However, the speaker desperately wants to return to the love she shared with her younger husband. Seeing her husband “as a hero in a text” (l. 29), she longs “to cry out the epic question” (l. 31) to her “dear companion” (l. 32):

> Will we ever live so intensely again?
> Will love come to us again and be
> so formidable at rest it offered us ascension
> even to look at him? (ll. 33–36)

These lines are reminiscent of the Cumaean Sibyl’s warning to Aeneas that the descend into the Underworld is easy, but that the ascension is far more difficult (Thurston 2009,. 71). A fitting example is Orpheus’ impatient desire to look back before reaching the world of the living. The exploration of a problem by going down is feasible, but finding a solution to the problem, a way up to effect change, is much more challenging. Moreover, the questions she addresses to her husband highlight the uncertainty on the part of the speaker. It seems, however, that these questions about the future cannot be resolved. The poem reaches no closure: “But the words are shadows and you cannot hear me. / You walk away and I cannot follow.” (ll. 37–38).

Boland's essay "In Search of a Language" describes her reading experience of the Sixth Book of the *Aeneid*. She devotes particular attention to the part where Aeneas' old adversaries and comrades in hell "raised *exiguam vocem* – a feeble voice" (*OL* 86) to hail their hero. Their failing voices represent the failure of language to fully reconstruct experience. As Boland herself puts it: "[i]n the face of that underworld, and by the force of poetry itself, language had been shown to be fallible. The heroes had spoken, and their voices had not carried. Memory was a whisper, a sound that died in your throat" (*OL* 86–87). These lines repeat her poetical statement about the inadequacy of language, which I already indicated in "The Journey." They symbolize the poet's search for a language that can truthfully represent human suffering, "a poetry which can fathom silences" (Allen-Randolph 2007, 131).

As with the suffering of the famished mothers and children in "The Journey," the poet cannot directly communicate the original experience. No matter how vivid her memory, she seems unable to communicate with it. She can only remember it, for some emotions and experiences cannot be articulated in words. According to Catriona Clutterbuck, Boland understands "that poetry must fail to represent the experience of loss until it confronts the incommunicable elements within that experience, and that, commensurately, this material silence serves the ethically risky freedom of the artist" (78). Furthermore, the last pair of poems, part of the *Legends* sequence, illustrate how "myth – or a sense of myth – is created and revealed by intense emotional relationships or experiences such as love or fear of loss, rather than the other way around" (Schrage-Früh 72).

5. CONCLUSION

Eavan Boland's revisionary treatment of the descent into hell helps her to retrospectively construct a distinct poetic voice, which is both Irish and female. By revising this typical masculine literary trope, she challenges the male-dominated poetic tradition, while claiming her own place as an Irish woman poet. This motif of the Underworld journey not only allows the poet to reflect on herself, but also to examine her relationship with past and present generations of women. At the same time, Boland questions the validity of artistic representation.

This essay has argued how these four poems together dramatize some key elements of Boland's poetics. First of all, we can read Eavan Boland's rewriting of the descent journey as expressing mild dissent with the female underrepresentation in the Irish poetic tradition. In the first two poems she devotes her attention to the "hellish" experience of the female victims during the Irish Holocaust. In addition, she challenges the false myth of femininity, especially through the lens of Ceres, whom she depicts as an active mother-figure. Boland's choice for the Hadean setting is not only based on tradition, it can also be motivated by her attempt to retrieve an underground female past. Indeed, the Underworld has strong female connotations, with Persephone as queen of the ghostly realm.

Secondly, Boland emphasizes the limits to artistic responsibility or "poetry's efficacy to affect the world" (Thurston 96). This is what Catriona Clutterbuck calls "the paradox of the acknowledged powerlessness of art" (78). In fact, Sappho's guidance in "The Journey" is paradoxical: the female suffering defies description, yet the poem is precisely a way to articulate it. The medium of poetry has a strong imaginative power, but at the same time Boland recognizes its limits. Although her poems can imagine a bridge between past and present, we are never able to fully cross that bridge. In the poems discussed here, there is neither a comfortable ending nor sense of reassurance. This ties in with Maurice Blanchot's

argument that the descent into the Underworld is always marked by failure. With her frequent references to the Orpheus myth, Boland illustrates this (in)capacity of poetic language. "The Orphic descent," Michael Thurston concludes, "seems to invite a different kind of attention to poetry and its purposes, while the Persephone descent foregrounds specific kinds of relationships and the conditioning power of gender" (2009, 184).

Throughout Boland's poetry, the 'I' or poetic eye, functions as an inclusive and empathetic subject. Likewise, Catriona Clutterbuck defines it as " a means of access – a self-consciously limited vehicle of entry – to the experience of [the] other" (73). Boland does not assume the responsibility or right to speak for others. She does not perform some kind of "ventriloquism" (Hagen and Zelman 5). Instead, Boland's self-conscious mode of writing bears witness to poetry's limits.

Despite its powerful images, mythology proves to be inadequate to approach the truthful experience. Boland defines myth as the wound by which our personal lives are constrained. In her poetry instead, myth is re-appropriated in order to breathe life into those mute women who have previously been sublimated by the poetic tradition. Boland creates new, Irish and ultimately human myths, which form interesting starting points to confer upon the future.

In conclusion, Boland's revision of the infernal journey serves a "bridge-building purpose": a way of "establishing meaningful connections between past and present", myth and reality, tradition and innovation, public and private experience (Hagen & Zelman 6, 8). The Underworld descent provides an apt structure for capturing and understanding a traumatic Irish past by connecting its observable remnants to painful experiences in her personal life. The result is a highly subjective poetry, which is written in a tentative style and continually questions itself. Her poetic subjects balance somewhere on "the edge of dream" (*OL* 172), the place where Boland locates herself as a poet.

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APPENDIX A

The Journey

for Elizabeth Ryle

Immediately cries were heard. These were the loud wailing of infant souls weeping at the very entrance-way; never had they had their share of life's sweetness for the dark day had stolen them from their mothers' breasts and plunged them to a death before their time.

Virgil, The Aeneid, *Book VI*

And then the dark fell and "there has never"
I said "been a poem to an antibiotic:
never a word to compare with the odes on
the flower of the raw sloe for fever

"or the devious Africa-seeking tern
or the protein treasures of the sea-bed.
Depend on it, somewhere a poet is wasting
his sweet uncluttered metres on the obvious

"emblem instead of the real thing.
Instead of sulpha we shall have hyssop dipped
in the wild blood of the unblemished lamb,
so every day the language gets less

"for the task and we are less with the language."
I finished speaking and the anger faded
and dark fell and the book beside me
lay open at the page Aphrodite

comforts Sappho in her love's duress.
The poplars shifted their music in the garden,
a child startled in a dream,
my room was a mess –

the usual hardcovers, half-finished cups,
clothes piled up on an old chair –
and I was listening out but in my head was
a loosening and sweetening heaviness,

not sleep, but nearly sleep, not dreaming really
but as ready to believe and still
unfevered, calm and unsurprised
when she came and stood beside me

and I would have known her anywhere
and I would have gone with her anywhere
and she came wordlessly

and without a word I went with her

down down down without so much as
ever touching down but always, always
with a sense of mulch beneath us,
the way of stairs winding down to a river

and as we went on the light went on
failing and I looked sideways to be certain
it was she, misshapen, musical –
Sappho – the scholiast's nightingale

and down we went, again down
until we came to a sudden rest
beside a river in what seemed to be
an oppressive suburb of the dawn.

My eyes got slowly used to the bad light.
At first I saw shadows, only shadows.
Then I could make out women and children
and, in the way they were, the grace of love.

"Cholera, typhus, croup, diptheria"
she said, "in those days they racketed
in every backstreet and alley of old Europe.
Behold the children of the plague,"

Then to my horror I could see to each
nipple some had clipped a limpet shape –
suckling darknesses – while others had their arms
weighed down, making terrible pietas.

She took my sleeve and said to me, "be careful.
Do not define these women by their work:
not as washerwomen trussed in dust and sweating,
muscling water into linen by the river's edge

"nor as court ladies brailled in silk
on wool and woven with an ivory unicorn
and hung, nor as laundresses tossing cotton,
brisking daylight with lavender and gossip.

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

"love's archaeology – and they too like you
stood boot deep in flowers once in summer
or saw winter come in with a single magpie

in a caul of haws, a solo harlequin.”

I stood fixed. I could not reach or speak to them.
Between us was the melancholy river,
the dream water, the narcotic crossing
and they had passed over it, its cold persuasions.

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

“remember it, you will remember it”
and I heard her say but she was fading fast
as we emerged under the stars of heaven,
“there are not many of us; you are dear

“and stand beside me as my own daughter.
I have brought you here so you will know forever
the silences in which are our beginnings,
in which we have an origin like water, ”

and the wind shifted and the window clasp
opened, banged and I woke up to find
the poetry books stacked higgledy piggledy,
my skirt spread out where I had laid it –

nothing was changed; nothing was more clear
but it was wet and the year was late.
The rain was grief in arrears; my children
slept the last dark out safely and I wept.

APPENDIX B

The Making Of An Irish Goddess

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.

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,

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:

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.

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,

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.

APPENDIX C

The Pomegranate

The only legend I have ever loved is
the story of a daughter lost in hell.
And found and rescued there.
Love and blackmail are the gist of it.
Ceres and Persephone the names.
And the best thing about the legend is
I can enter it anywhere. And have.
As a child in exile in
a city of fogs and strange consonants,
I read it first and at first I was
an exiled child in the crackling dusk of
the underworld, the stars blighted. Later
I walked out in a summer twilight
searching for my daughter at bed-time.
When she came running I was ready
to make any bargain to keep her.
I carried her back past whitebeams
and wasps and honey-scented buddleias.
But I was Ceres then and I knew
winter was in store for every leaf
on every tree on that road.
Was inescapable for each one we passed.
And for me.
It is winter
and the stars are hidden.
I climb the stairs and stand where I can see
my child asleep beside her teen magazines,
her can of Coke, her plate of uncut fruit.
The pomegranate! How did I forget it?
She could have come home and been safe
and ended the story and all
our heart-broken searching but she reached
out a hand and plucked a pomegranate.
She put out her hand and pulled down
the French sound for apple and
the noise of stone and the proof
that even in the place of death,
at the heart of legend, in the midst
of rocks full of unshed tears
ready to be diamonds by the time
the story was told, a child can be
hungry. I could warn her. There is still a chance.
The rain is cold. The road is flint-coloured.
The suburb has cars and cable television.
The veiled stars are above ground.
It is another world. But what else

can a mother give her daughter but such
beautiful rifts in time?
If I defer the grief I will diminish the gift.
The legend will be hers as well as mine.
She will enter it. As I have.
She will wake up. She will hold
the papery flushed skin in her hand.
And to her lips. I will say nothing.

APPENDIX D

Love

Dark falls on this mid-western town
where we once lived when myths collided.
Dusk has hidden the bridge in the river
which slides and deepens
to become the water
the hero crossed on his way to hell.

Not far from here is our old apartment.
We had a kitchen and an Amish table.
We had a view. And we discovered there
love had the feather and muscle of wings
and had come to live with us,
a brother of fire and air.
We had two infant children one of whom
was touched by death in this town
and spared: and when the hero
was hailed by his comrades in hell
their mouths opened and their voices failed and
there is no knowing what they would have asked
about a life they had shared and lost.

I am your wife.
It was years ago.
Our child was healed. We love each other still.
Across our day-to-day and ordinary distances
we speak plainly. We hear each other clearly.

And yet I want to return to you
on the bridge of the Iowa river as you were,
with snow on the shoulders of your coat
and a car passing with its headlights on:

I see you as a hero in a text —
the image blazing and the edges gilded —
and I long to cry out the epic question
my dear companion:
Will we ever live so intensely again?
Will love come to us again and be
so formidable at rest it offered us ascension
even to look at him?

But the words are shadows and you cannot hear me.
You walk away and I cannot follow.