

Boland, Eavan. *The Lost Land*. Manchester: Carcanet Press, 1998. Selected poems for this course: “The Harbour”, “Daughters of Colony”, “A Dream of Colony”, “A Habitable Grief”, “The Mother Tongue”.

Main aspects of form and content in the selected poems (theme, structure, imagery, lineation, sound patterns).

N.B. I will provide some examples here, but I do not expect you to reproduce the same ones in the exam. You should be able to find your own examples.

The collection of poems *The Lost Land* delves into the colonial past of Ireland: Ireland as a colony; resistance to colonization; the Anglo-Irish identity; Ireland’s participation in the English imperial project; Irish hybrid identity; Irish women and the patriarchal nation.

1. “The Harbour”

Theme: Ireland’s double, and contradictory, identity as a colony (Kingstown) and a contributor to the English imperial project (“frigates with thirty-six guns cruising”).

Structure: 2 main parts: 1. (stanzas 1-6) dealing with the colonial history of the harbour (“the tide of / empire”); 2. (stanza 7) how that history affects the first-person speaker (“I am / a part of your story and its outcome”). Part 1 could be further divided into 3 parts: 1. stanzas 1-2 (description and building of the harbour); 2. stanzas 3-4 (colonial past); 3. stanzas 5-6 (decay of the empire and of the harbour).

Imagery: “opulent horizon” (metonymy: profits arrive from rich distant countries), “obedient skies” (personification / pathetic fallacy: English power over the sky). City of shadows. Shadow: ghosts from the past.

Lineation: enjambment between stanzas 4 and 5: the Irish sea rising // and rising (ever-increasing English power).

Sound patterns: partial end rhymes that follow no clear pattern. Very soft musicality.

Alliteration: behind – barrier /b/ (stressing the solidity of the harbour); came and cut /k/ (stressing the conquest over the waters)

2. “Daughters of Colony”

Theme: Belonging (Irish) and alienation (Anglo) of the Anglo-Irish (the Protestant colonizers) in Ireland.

Structure: 3 parts. 1 (stanzas 1-5): The Anglo-Irish women have to leave Ireland (probably because of the anti-colonialist struggle); 2. (stanzas 6-9): The 1st-person poetic persona identifies with them and aims to write about their predicament; 3. (stanzas 10-11): the poem returns to the description of the Anglo-Irish women and their problematical connection with Ireland.

Imagery: the *distaff* side of history (female/ spinning instrument). Metonymy (dead and no longer figurative).

Lineation: Syntactic parallelism in ll. 1-2 (to highlight that these women are Anglo-Irish); stanza 5, ll. 2-3 syntactic parallelism with a variation.

Sound patterns: Quick rhythm of the poem because of its short stanzas and short lines. Stanza 10, Consonance (almost pararhyme): against – gust /g-st/ hostile situation.

3. “A Dream of Colony”

Theme: Revisiting the violence of the colonial past and the attacks against the Anglo-Irish.

Structure: 2 distinctive parts; 1. stanzas 1-8 (imaginary visit to an Anglo-Irish Big House and memory –moving backwards– of the violent confrontations); 2. the poetic persona’s self-questioning about the way Irish national identity has been formed.

Imagery: Dream (unreality of the situation because history is “unmade”: “raised and unburned house”; I-you split subject). Synecdoche: greatcoats, epaulettes (military uniforms of the Anglo-Irish).

Lineation: 2 one-line stanzas, with crucial questions about Irish identity and how the latter was configured.

Sound patterns: Stanza 1: alliteration (almost a pararhyme): gate -against /g-t/ (highlighting the idea of forcing one’s way through a dividing line); stanza 2: alliteration: grinding-gravel, consonant cluster /gr/ (making the dream more vivid with the sounds of the steps).

4. “A Habitable Grief”

Theme: Learning to live with the pain of losing your vernacular language and culture and accepting the new hybrid identity that history (including English colonization) has produced.

Structure: 2 main parts. 1. stanzas 1-4: autobiographical (being Irish in England and learning British English there as opposed to Gaelic or even Hiberno English). 2. stanzas 5 to the end: a general reflection on Irish identity, what it has lost (“lost land”) and how it has been transformed into a more plural and fluid society (“That contrary passion / to be whole”).

Imagery: Scar: a constant reminder of a past wound (colonization), although it has healed (new independent nation)

Lineation: Very short stanzas with short lines: quick rhythm and a declarative tone with concise statements about the fractured identity of Ireland.

Sound patterns: consonance in good–stead /d/, but also pararhyme: stood–stead /st-d/ to reinforce the value of that second language.

5. “The Mother Tongue”

Theme: The divisions at the heart of Irish identity (Pale, ditch, barrier, line, boundary)

Structure: 2 main parts. 1. stanzas 1-7 (history of the Pale built to “keep out” the Irish and “keep in” the English in Dublin). 2. stanzas 8-9 (the impact of that division on the speaker:

“a forked tongue” (bilingualism), monolithic identity vs. hybridity: “...and imagine /... my undivided speech... I hear/ what I am safe from. What I have lost”). Though the loss of pre-colonial culture is painful, the speaker seems to accept and celebrate her hybrid identity.

Imagery: “forked tongue” (usually with a negative meaning –as in a viper– but here with a positive meaning of hybridity); “twilight” (in-between identity).

Lineation: Irregular number of lines per stanza. Final line of the poem: parallelistic syntax but contrast in meaning: “what I am safe from. What I have lost”. The caesura (middle pause marked by a punctuation mark) stresses the division and the contrast.

Sound patterns: Pararhyme first-frost /f-st/. It draws attention to the hostile environment in which one forges one’s identity. Consonance: “Land. Ground. A line drawn in rain” /nd/ and /n/: emphasis on the colonial and anti-colonial fight over the land.

Although it is free verse, the sound patterns add musicality to an otherwise painful experience.