

EAVAN BOLAND

The Emigrant Irish

Like oil lamps we put them out the back,
of our houses, of our minds. We had lights
better than, newer than and then
a time came, this time and now
we need them. Their dread, makeshift example.

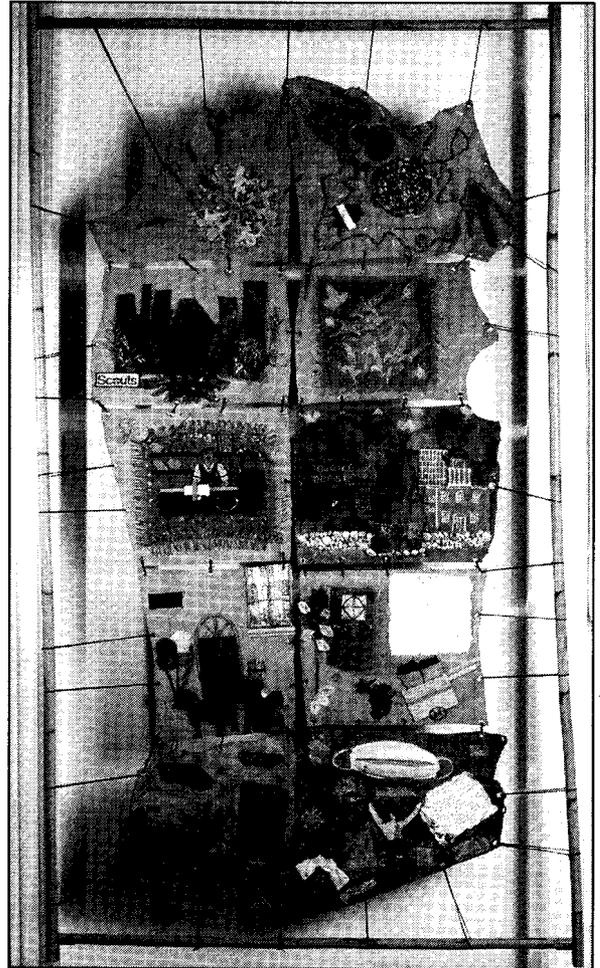
They would have thrived on our necessities.
What they survived we could not even live.
By their lights now it is time to
imagine how they stood there, what they stood
with,
that their possessions may become our power.

Cardboard. Iron. Their hardships parcelled in
them.

Patience. Fortitude. Long-suffering
in the bruise-coloured dusk of the New World.

And all the old songs. And nothing to lose.

This poem has been reprinted with permission from Wee Girls: Women Writing from an Irish Perspective (Spinifex Press, Australia, 1996). Eavan Boland, poet, lecturer, and reviewer, is a native of Dublin and was educated there and in London and New York before graduating from Trinity College, Dublin. She played a central role in the development of Arlen House, a feminist publishing house in that city.



Sharon O'Grady, Ann Burke, Gemma Hogan, Betty McDonnell, Aileen Foran, Bernie Walshe, Jean Clifford, Helen White, Maura White, Maureen Downey—Lourdes Youth and Community Services Project. "Individual Togetherness," wall hanging on a bamboo frame, 233 x 124 cm, 1992. (From Unspoken Truths, Irish Museum of Modern Art, 1996) Photo: John Kellett

"In our group we started to discuss things that were important to us as women, things that were significant to us personally, from our past, or just how we felt as women in our group and in our city. How we felt about the area we had grown up in. Things that were just a part of the past, which struck a cord in others, such as the rag man, the pawn office, the decline of the docks and how all our experiences of growing up in the same area were different."

—Maureen Downey, Lourdes Youth and Community Services Project

