

That the Science of Cartography is Limited

– and not simply by the fact that this shading of
forest cannot show the fragrance of balsam,
the gloom of cypresses
is what I wish to prove.

When you and I were first in love we drove
to the borders of Connacht
and entered a wood there.

Look down you said: this was once a famine road.

I looked down at ivy and the scutch grass
rough-cast stone had
disappeared into as you told me
in the second winter of their ordeal, in

1847, when the crop had failed twice,
Relief Committees gave
the starving Irish such roads to build.

Where they died, there the road ended

and ends still and when I take down
the map of this island, it is never so
I can say here is
the masterful, the apt rendering of

the spherical as flat, nor
an ingenious design which persuades a curve
into a plane,
but to tell myself again that

the line which says woodland and cries hunger
and gives out among sweet pine and cypress,
and finds no horizon

will not be there.

Poems for Dec. 5

(Above)

Eavan Boland, *In the Time of Violence* (1994)

(Right)

Eavan Boland, *A Poet's Dublin* (2016)

IN OUR OWN COUNTRY

They are making a new Ireland
at the end of our road,
under our very eyes,
under the arc lamps they aim and beam

into distances where we once lived
into vistas we will never recognise.

We are here to watch.

We are looking for new knowledge.

They have been working here in all weathers
tearing away the road to our village –
bridge, path, river, all
lost under an onslaught of steel.

An old Europe

has come to us as a stranger in our city,
has forgotten its own music, wars and treaties,
is now a machine from the Netherlands or Belgium

dragging, tossing, breaking apart the clay
in which our timid spring used to arrive
with our daffodils in a single, crooked row.

Remember the emigrant boat?

Remember the lost faces burned in the last glances?
The air clearing away to nothing, nothing, nothing.

We pull our collars tightly round our necks
but the wind finds our throats,
predatory and wintry.

We walk home. What we know is this
(and this is all we know): We are now
and will always be from now on –
for all I know we have always been –

exiles in our own country.