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At the launch of Paula Meehan's *Imaginary Bonnets with Real Bees in Them* Paula Meehan's *Real Bees* Eavan Boland

At the launch of *Imaginary Bonnets with Real Bees in Them* by Paula Meehan (UCD Press, Dublin, €20), which took place on 15 June 2016 at the Royal Irish Academy, Dublin, Eavan Boland gave the following encomium.

THERE ARE THREE lectures here, given by Paula Meehan during her time as Ireland Professor of Poetry. Each one is complicated by passionate memory and personal honesty.

When I look for words that might draw these lectures together I keep thinking of a single sentence in the second lecture, 'The Solace of Artemis'. The lecture itself is an ambitious meditation on nature and human nature; on what survives and what is put at risk. At the end of it, Paula imagines herself returning to the child she once was, ready to tell her past self, as consolation and encouragement, something she has learned with time and writing: 'nothing is ever lost that has made its way into poetry'.

These words summarise the theme of this book. The transfer of experience into language – from memories of childhood, from the city of Dublin itself, from the adventures and trials of the body – all these are made safer because they have found their way towards poetry. What I especially admire here is that the process which describes this transfer – the lectures themselves – has a unique alloy of wisdom and intimacy, managing to give out the quality of a rich private conversation mixed with a real public dignity.

But it also seems to me important this evening to add something; to make a note here not just of what these lectures say but what they signal. After all, they are the clearest and most lasting evidence we will have of the path Paula took as she set about fulfilling the responsibilities of the Ireland Professorship: an appointment which is itself a unique gift to the Irish community.

As was true of other Ireland Professors, those responsibilities took her into small towns, large Universities, classrooms, workshops, conversations. Above all it took her into the hopes and dreams of other writers and readers in Ireland – all those encounters marking out that fragile, essential boundary which connects poets with their own moment and their own community.

Paula Meehan – as I and so many people here have seen – brought both generosity and initiative to these encounters. This book is just one of the outcomes of that rare energy. These lectures, in turn, point us back to how important it is that such encounters continue to happen and continue to be supported. Bob Collins, who is the Chair of the Board of Trustees of the Ireland Chair, in his eloquent preface to what by the way is a beautifully realised book by UCD Press, puts it so well when he says 'Poetry though created alone is a profoundly communal engagement'.

It's a commonplace when we talk about translating poetry to say that it's possible to translate a poem but very nearly impossible to translate the poet. Time, distance, the visual distortions of history, complicate the task of reaching the poet, even if we can import their poem with some credit into a new language. This book goes a long way towards dismantling that bleak wisdom. It does translate the poet. It lays out the stages of the struggle, the journey, the arrival through which Paula Meehan became the wonderful poet she now is. I am certain this book will bring exactly that comfort and inspiration to readers that she imagined bringing to her younger self. I know it will be read and re-read by emerging poets. And indeed by anyone who wants to lecture on poetry. And, to finish, I just want to add that I am myself as a poet honoured to be here this evening, to be part of this celebration, and to see this book take its first steps into the hearts of many readers.