

Katarzyna Poloczek

---



# Towards Female Empowerment

The New Generation  
of Irish Women Poets:  
Vona Groarke, Sinéad  
Morrissey, Caitríona O'Reilly  
and Mary O'Donoghue



Studies in Literature

Literary Criticism

# **Towards Female Empowerment**

The New Generation  
of Irish Women Poets:  
Vona Groarke, Sinéad  
Morrissey, Caitríona O'Reilly  
and Mary O'Donoghue



WYDAWNICTWO  
UNIWERSYTETU  
ŁÓDZKIEGO

Katarzyna Poloczek

---

# **Towards Female Empowerment**

The New Generation  
of Irish Women Poets:  
Vona Groarke, Sinéad  
Morrissey, Caitríona O'Reilly  
and Mary O'Donoghue



WYDAWNICTWO  
UNIwersytetu  
ŁÓDZKIEGO

Łódź 2015

Katarzyna Poloczek – University of Łódź, Faculty of Philology  
Institute of English Studies, Department of British Literature and Culture  
90-236 Łódź, 171/173 Pomorska St.

REVIEWER

*David Malcolm*

TYPESETTING

*Przemysław Ostalski*

COVER DESIGN

*Studio 7A*

Cover photography: © Depositphotos.com/electropower

Printed directly from camera-ready materials provided to the Łódź University Press  
by Faculty of Philology

© Copyright by Katarzyna Poloczek, Łódź 2015

© Copyright for this edition by University of Łódź, Łódź 2015

Published by Łódź University Press  
First Edition. W.06958.15.0.M

Printing sheets 38.625

ISBN 978-83-7969-602-4  
e-ISBN 978-83-7969-944-5

Łódź University Press  
90-131 Łódź, 8 Lindleya St  
www.wydawnictwo.uni.lodz.pl  
e-mail: ksiegarnia@uni.lodz.pl  
tel. (42) 665 58 63

**to my Mother**



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface ix

## INTRODUCTION

**Female Empowerment in Theory and in Practice: Four Irish Women Poets** ..... 1

## CHAPTER ONE

**Power-With: Irishwomen’s Relational Empowerment and Women’s Empowerment in Connection** ..... 29

1.1. Female Relational Empowerment as “The Self-In Relation” in the Poetry of Sinéad Morrissey ..... 29

1.2. “To Act in Concert:” Women’s Mutual Empowerment in the Poetry of Mary O’Donoghue ..... 79

1.3. The Female Power of Relational Autonomy: Establishing Indoor and Outdoor Connections in the Poetry of Vona Groarke ..... 113

1.4. The Anxiety of Disconnected “Unmoored Pieces” in the Poetry of Caitríona O’Reilly ..... 173

## CHAPTER TWO

**Power At: Ecopower and Irish Women’s Ecological Selves** ..... 211

2.1. The Empowering Ecofeminist Care Ethic and Land Ethic in the Poetry of Mary O’Donoghue ..... 211

2.2. Mechanical Power versus Women’s Eco-empowering Criticism in the Poetry of Caitríona O’Reilly ..... 241



2.3. “Lay it down there on the newspaper; / let it settle, unearth itself.” Gendering Nature in the Poetry of Vona Groarke .....	292
2.4. The Empowered Female Environmental Consciousness as the Source of the Spiritual in the Poetry of Sinéad Morrissey .....	340

### CHAPTER THREE

<b>Against Power-Over: Irish Women’s Empowerment Through Resistance.....</b>	<b>387</b>
3.1. Resisting the Confinement of <i>Other People’s Houses</i> : Female Empowerment and Political Emancipation in the Poetry of Vona Groarke .....	387
3.2. Resisting Power Realised as Violence: “A Power Failure” and Female Empowerment in the Poetry of Sinéad Morrissey .....	437
3.3. Resisting the Victimisation of Women in the Poetry of Mary O’Donoghue.....	487
3.4. “Death, desirelessness: such kinless things.” Resisting female powerlessness in the Poetry of Caitríona O’Reilly.....	523
Conclusion.....	567
Bibliography.....	573

## Preface

I have dedicated this monograph to my Mother whose unremitting and unfailing support “empowered” me to work on this book. Many thanks to my fiancé for not losing faith in me and for his patience. Over the years, while conducting my research on contemporary Irish women’s poets, I have encountered many inspiring and helpful people to whom I am sincerely indebted for their advice, wisdom and encouragement. With regard to this book, my special thanks are directed to Michaela Schrage-Früh, her husband David and Frederic for their hospitality and kindness. I would like to thank Przemysław Ostalski for his help with typesetting of the book, and Richard O’Callaghan Ph.D. for proofreading of the earlier versions of the text. Last but not least, I would like to express my gratitude to Professor Jerzy Jarniewicz for inspiring me to read poetry.



## INTRODUCTION

### FEMALE EMPOWERMENT IN THEORY AND IN PRACTICE: FOUR IRISH WOMEN POETS

It is especially in the current era that women's relations to power need to be redefined and reconsidered. "For now is a time in which real change for women depends upon a willingness to engage with power with its seductions and responsibilities, democracy with all its open conflicts, and money with all its pleasures and dangers" (Wolf 53).<sup>1</sup> Elaborating this thought, Allen openly declares that

Power is clearly a crucial concept for feminist theory. Whatever else feminists may be interested in, we are certainly interested in understanding the way that gender, race, class, and sexuality intersect with power. (*The Power* 7)

Having admitted that female empowerment ought to be a relevant goal worth pursuing, one has to specify first what this term embodies. It happens because

---

<sup>1</sup> In further response to the question, "What interests feminists when we are interested in power?" (*The Power* 121), Allen explains in detail:

The first and perhaps most striking is our interest in understanding the ways men dominate women, an interest that remains the impetus of much feminist research . . . a second feminist concern with power: our interest in understanding the power that women do have – that is, empowerment . . . The third interest that feminist theorists bring to the discussion of power comes in the wake of charges that the mainstream feminist movement has marginalized women of color, lesbians, and working-class women. . . . That is, we have an interest in theorizing the kind of collective power that can bridge the diversity of individuals who make up the feminist movement. (*The Power* 122)

“Overturning patriarchy does not mean replacing men’s dominance with women’s dominance. That would merely maintain the patriarchal pattern of dominance. We need to transform the pattern itself” (Kelly 113–114). Therefore, the aim of this book is to explore the ways in which one can transform the pattern of female empowerment to make it relevant to women’s changing needs and do it without restructuring patriarchal understanding of power as domination. As if bearing that in mind, Kelly claims:

Rather than emulating Margaret Thatcher and others who loyally adapt themselves to male values of hierarchy, we must find our own definitions of power that reflect women’s values and women’s experience . . . not power *over* others, but power *with* others, the kind of shared power that has to replace patriarchal power. (114), emphasis original

In this monograph, the aforementioned processes are pursued in the works of four contemporary Irish poets: Vona Groarke, Sinéad Morrissey, Caitríona O’Reilly and Mary O’Donoghue. However before having a closer look at their poetic accomplishments, one needs to clarify the notion of female empowerment and the reasons why it means so much to women of the new generation. With this in mind, Allen observes that

Feminists are interested in empowerment because we are interested in how members of subordinated groups retain the power to act despite their subordination – more particularly, in our ability to attain certain ends in spite of the subordination of women. (*The Power* 126)

Furthermore, according to Wolf, women’s power stems from the basic tenets of the twenty first century feminism, outlined by her as follows:

1. Women matter as much as men do.
2. Women have the right to determine their lives.
3. Women’s experiences matter.
4. Women have the right to tell the truth about their experiences.
5. Women deserve . . . respect, self-respect, education, safety, health, representation, money. (*Fire with Fire* 138)

One of the broadest and the least controversial explanations of female empowerment is provided by Miller:

My own working definition of power is *the capacity to produce a change* – that is, to move anything from point A or state A to point B or state B. This can even include moving one’s own thoughts or emotions, sometimes a very powerful act. It can include acting to create movement in an interpersonal field, as well as acting in larger realms such as economic, social, or political arenas. (“Women and Power” 198), emphasis original

The conception of female empowerment to which this dissertation is to a large extent indebted goes back to Allen's study *The Power of Feminist Theory: Domination, Resistance, Solidarity* (1999). Likewise, starting from the definition of power as "the ability or capacity of an actor or set of actors to act" (*The Power* 127), Allen enumerates three categories of power: power-over, power-to and power-with (this division is reflected in the arrangement of the three chapters in this study). To be precise,

Power-over is the ability or capacity to act in such a way as to constrain the choices available to another actor or set of actors; power-to is the individual ability or capacity to act so as to attain some end; and power-with is the collective ability or capacity to act together so as to attain some common or shared end. (Allen, *The Power* 127)

Allen employs her triple division to "make sense of masculine domination, feminine empowerment and resistance, and feminist solidarity and coalition-building" (*The Power* 123).<sup>2</sup> As argued above, power-to is characterised by her "as the ability of an individual actor to attain an end or series of ends. This way of defining power-to suggests that the terms *empowerment* and *power-to* are roughly synonymous" (Allen, *The Power* 126), emphasis original. Along with bringing the issue of women's power into the limelight, Allen's book has contributed to the re-introduction of Hannah Arendt's philosophical works back into the modern feminist discourse. Allen's modern re-reading of Arendt has enabled contemporary scholars to appreciate this thinker's influence not just on philosophy but also on the women's movement in general. In *On Violence*, Arendt explains the phenomenon of power, highlighting its shared dimension (so important for feminists' social and political goals).<sup>3</sup>

*Power* corresponds to the human ability not just to act in concert. Power is never the property of an individual; it belongs to a group and remains in existence only so long as the group keeps together. When we say of somebody that he is "in power" we actually refer to his being empowered by a certain number of people to act in their name. (44), emphasis original

Hence as argued in *Hannah Arendt and Human Rights: The Predicament of Common Responsibility* (2006), "The 'I am able' must be understood as the ability to act in a public space, to move in a space of freedom with others"

---

<sup>2</sup> The first two types of power are elaborated in Allen's writing on the basis of Foucault and Butler (the empowerment phase). Her most vital contribution to power discourse is showing the co-existence of various aspects of power and their mutual interdependence. Allen's approach to feminism means bringing into focus the idea of women's coalition-building and solidarity, as illustrated on the example of Arendt's philosophy.

<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, Arendt argues that "[power] derives its legitimacy from the initial getting together rather than from any action that then may follow" (*On Violence* 52).

(Birmingham 55, 57).<sup>4</sup> From a feminist viewpoint, Arendt's notion of plurality reflects aptly the goals of the women's movement:

Power, which is synonymous with acting politically with others, must be inspired by the categorical imperative of the political: the principle of plurality provides us with a new law of humanity, demanding that each actor . . . has the right to appear with others, the right to act and speak within the political space. (Birmingham 60)

Furthermore in "New Faces of Power," Arendt's model of power is referred to as communicative: "communication is necessarily two-way, requiring that speakers and listeners engage in mutually meaningful conversation, debate and dialogue" (Ball 22).<sup>5</sup> In Lukes's view, "power refers to an ability or capacity of an agent or agents, which they may or may not exercise" (63), emphasis original.<sup>6</sup> On the other hand, Scott underlines what he calls "the transformative capacity" of power: "To act is to have causal powers, and these powers constitute the 'potency' that defines an organism as a human agent" (1). Similarly in *Power: A Philosophical Analysis* (second edition, 2002), Morris defines power as "a concept referring to an ability, capacity, or dispositional property" (13).<sup>7</sup> He elaborates this thought claiming that power is "the capacity to effect outcomes" (Morris 34). Unlike other scholars cited here, Morris draws attention to what he calls "the moral context" of power: "blaming, excusing and allocating responsibility" (38).<sup>8</sup> From a feminist viewpoint, the important aspect seems to be the notion of power-transformers:

Your powers include your ability to effect things directly, by yourself. But they also include indirect power, mediated through others . . . as power transformers . . . it is the power to determine how, through a process of collective decision-making, our individual powers are transformed . . . (Morris 45)

---

<sup>4</sup> Birmingham claims that "Arendt's understanding of . . . power is synonymous with action and freedom . . . legitimate power is precisely that power that allows the actor to appear in a public space with others" (56–57).

<sup>5</sup> This aspect of power as advocated by Arendt has attracted some criticism. Lukes offers a critique of Arendt's assumptions that "[p]ower is consensual" (32) and that it is a "co-operative activity" (35) in his book *Power: A Radical View*. According to Lukes, what is missing in this scheme is acknowledging the conflicts of interests (35–36) and divergent group interests.

<sup>6</sup> In Lukes's view, "[p]ower . . . is a *dispositional* concept, comprising a conjunction of conditional or hypothetical statements specifying what would occur under a range of circumstances if and when the power is exercised" (63), emphasis original.

<sup>7</sup> Morris distinguishes power from identification with resources or actions (19), selecting capacity as power's essential characteristic.

<sup>8</sup> Here the conclusion Morris comes to is quite surprising: the "connection between power and responsibility is, then, essentially, negative: you can deny all responsibility by demonstrating lack of power" (39).

Last but not least, when analysing the discourse of power, one has to pay tribute to the thinker and philosopher who has contributed most to examining, describing and explaining its phenomenon: namely, Michel Foucault. In his canonical works *Madness and Civilisation* (1961), *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1972), *The Birth of the Clinic* (1975), and especially *Discipline and Punish* (1975) and *The History of Sexuality* (1976, 1984, 1984), Foucault<sup>9</sup> has consistently explored the origin, scope,<sup>10</sup> and cause of power and the effects that power has upon people.<sup>11</sup> As claimed by him, indeed, whether one is aware of it or not, power is a part of everyone's daily experience, and there is no person who can exist beyond its space.<sup>12</sup> Besides, as Foucault observes

If power were never anything but repressive, if it never did anything but to say no, do you really think one would be brought to obey it? What makes power hold good, and what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it doesn't only weigh on us as a force that says no; it also traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse. ("Truth and Power" 120)

The above-mentioned understanding of power<sup>13</sup> is close to the arguments about female empowerment advocated in this dissertation. This interpretation does not deny or attempt to conceal power's most abusive forms or manifestations (domination and violence), neither does it reduce power to its

---

<sup>9</sup> As Foucault himself describes these studies, they have been "the goal of my work for the last twenty years:" ("The Subject and Power" 327). His *Power: Essential Works of Foucault 1954–1984*. Volume III probes the aforementioned theme in detail, among other writings, in his seminal essays: "Truth and Power," "The Subject and Power," "Space, Knowledge, and Power."

<sup>10</sup> Accordingly, Foucault introduces the threefold categorisation of power relations, objective capacities and relationships of communication. He claims: "It is necessary also to distinguish power relations from relationships of communication that transmit information by means of a language, a system of signs, or any other symbolic medium" (Foucault, "The Subject and Power" 337).

<sup>11</sup> Hence the following introductory remarks will draw primarily upon his synthesising and canonical text "The Subject and Power," first published in English as late as 1982, in which Foucault argues provocatively: "the human subject is placed . . . in power relations that are very complex. . . . – but for power relations we had no tools of study. We had to recourse only to ways of thinking about power based on legal models, that is: What legitimises power?" (327).

<sup>12</sup> Foucault articulates openly the most common objections against power only to refute them: "Isn't power simply a form of warlike domination?" ("Truth and Power" 123) or whether "power is that which abstracts, which negates the body, represses, suppresses, and so forth" ("Truth and Power" 125). Responding to the question "How is Power Exercised," Foucault explains "'How?' not in the sense of 'How does it manifest itself?' but 'How is it exercised?' and 'What happens when individuals exert (as we say) power over others?'" ("The Subject and Power" 337).

<sup>13</sup> Foucault enumerates five basic tenets that need to be examined when probing power relations: "the system of differentiations," which, among others, entails economic, juridical, cultural, linguistic, and semiotic variables; "the types of objectives," or the means by which power is upheld; "instrumental modes," the means by which power is exercised; "forms of institutionalization" of power relations; and "the degrees of rationalization," which facilitate the existence of power relations ("The Subject and Power" 344–345).



most extreme instruments. As argued in this book (see Chapter Three) after Foucault, to be able to talk of power, there has to exist the capacity for resistance: for no matter how subdued the subjects might be, it can be assumed that they can never be entirely deprived of the possibility of opposing. Beyond this condition, according to Foucault, one cannot talk of power at all.<sup>14</sup> Hence to claim female empowerment, one needs to prove that women, despite their state of being dominated and despite various forms of gender-established disempowerment, are not powerless simply due to their gender identification. As shown in McLaren's article "Foucault and Feminism: Power, Resistance, Freedom," or in Faith's "Resistance: Lessons From Foucault and Feminism," over the past decades, feminists have managed to overcome their earlier reductive and biased readings of Foucault<sup>15</sup> (i.e. depicting the philosopher as promoting corporeal docility or gender-blindness, for instance) to rediscover his work's potential anew.<sup>16</sup> After all, Foucault makes it clear that "The exercise of power . . . is something that is elaborated, transformed, organized . . . Power relations are rooted in the whole network of the social" ("The Subject and Power" 345). With regard to the social field, this domain has been extensively explored by Pierre Bourdieu who, like Foucault, has devoted most of his work to examining the phenomenon of power. Bourdieu's seminal works include *Language and Symbolic Power* (1982) [1991], *Acts of Resistance: Against the New Myths of Our Time* (1998), and *Masculine Domination* (1998). The key concepts that Bourdieu has developed have expanded the understanding of power, specifically in its gendered dimension (see *Masculine Domination* (1998)

---

<sup>14</sup> See also Hook (84).

<sup>15</sup> Compare Allen's account of Foucault's criticism in "A Theory for Women?" (especially Nancy Hartstock) and in "A Theory for Feminists" (*The Power* 37–53). See as well Lois McNay, *Foucault and Feminism: Power, Gender and the Self*.

<sup>16</sup> Allen maintains that the: "instances of constraint – that is, exercises of power-over – are, for Foucault, possible only insofar as the subject of the constraint is simultaneously enabled – that is, as a subject who has the capacity to act, who has the power-to. Thus, Foucault not only conceptualizes . . . power-over and power-to, he also integrates these two aspects of power in a complex and instructive way" (*The Power* 52). She sums up best Foucault's significance for feminist theory:

. . . Foucault's microphysics of power resonates with feminists' insistence that the personal is political, his account of the impact of disciplinary power on the body has provided feminists with a useful model for investigating the particular ways in which power shapes women's bodies, and his investigation of the institutional sedimentation of power relations has inspired feminist analyses of the sedimentation of male power over women in the institutions of the welfare state. Most important, however, for my examination of Foucault, his theoretical framework for the study of power offers feminists a conception that highlights the interplay between constraint and enablement . . . (Allen, *The Power* 52–53)

[2001]. With regard to his notion of symbolic power<sup>17</sup> (viewed by him as both arbitrary and relational) Bourdieu advocates:

Symbolic power – as a power of constituting the given through utterances, of making people see and believe, of confirming or transforming the vision of the world and, thereby, action on the world and thus the world itself, an almost magical power which enables one to obtain the equivalent of what is obtained through force (whether physical or economic), by virtue of the specific effect of mobilization – is a power that can be exercised only if it is *recognized*, that is, misrecognized, as arbitrary. (*Language and Symbolic Power* 170), emphasis original<sup>18</sup>

As argued above, symbolic power entails mostly unconscious involvement of those upon whom it operates and who fail to recognise this power's socially generated and arbitrary character (Thompson 23). With regard to this study, Bourdieu's theoretical thought is applied here as a diagnosis of the existing gender power asymmetry [*Masculine Domination* (1998)]. For instance, reflexivity (a notion which, in a way, corresponds to Foucault's resistance) is evoked in Chapter Three. However unlike Foucault, Bourdieu does not seem to suggest a coherent system of subverting what he calls masculine domination or other forms of symbolic power, although he recognises such a necessity.<sup>19</sup> It may even seem that making the debate on power more abstract, he has made it less real, hence, less perceptible – and, thus, more dangerous.<sup>20</sup> Aware of this critique, Bourdieu has explained the misunderstanding of his theoretical apparatus:

Taking 'symbolic' in one of its commonest senses, people sometimes assume that to emphasize symbolic violence is to minimize the role of physical violence, to forget (and make people forget) that there are battered, raped and exploited women, or worse, to seek to exculpate men from that form of violence – which is obviously not the case. Understanding 'symbolic' as the opposite of 'real, actual', people suppose that symbolic violence is a purely 'spiritual' violence which ultimately has no real effects. (*Masculine Domination* 34)

Since power is a complex phenomenon that resides on the borders of many academic disciplines and scholarly research programs, it cannot be analysed only

<sup>17</sup> According to Bourdieu, "Symbolic power, a subordinate power, is a transformed, i.e. misrecognizable, transfigured and legitimated form of the other forms of power" (*Language and Symbolic* 170), emphasis added.

<sup>18</sup> The pivotal words applied to define symbolic power appear to be misrecognition and recognition.

<sup>19</sup> The major objection against Bourdieu stems from his work's key strength: by transferring the discourse of power into a more "symbolic" linguistic, ideological, and theoretical state, he is accused of putting the discourse of power (and especially the discourse surrounding violence against women) into a purely theoretical and cut off from reality context.

<sup>20</sup> See the collection edited by Lisa Adkins and Beverly Skeggs: *Feminism after Bourdieu*.

from one perspective or area. Therefore apart from literary and cultural theory, the methodological background of this book involves sociology, philosophy and psychology. It operates on feminist epistemology, putting women – their relations, views and life choices – in the centre of the study. However the concept of female empowerment as advocated here is more than just an application of various practices and approaches. Neither does it mean that this dissertation follows their tenets uncritically. Instead, it puts them to test to see if their claims are verifiable and still relevant in the present day twenty-first century context. To make it specific, the book analyses the works of four contemporary Irish poets: Vona Groarke, Sinéad Morrissey, Caitríona O’Reilly and Mary O’Donoghue, (all born at the end of 1960s and beginning of 1970s): who have been witnessing (and creating) major social and cultural changes taking place recently in Irish literature. In her essay “Contemporary Irish Poetry,” Mary Montague (born 1964), not without bitterness, argues that:

To discover, in my twenties, some of the richness of female voices available (if, sometimes, rather difficult to find in those pre-internet days) was both liberating and dispiriting. Where had these women been when I was younger? Why were they not part of the ‘canon’ when they might have helped me negotiate the difficulties of growing into my female body, helped loosen the strangulation of my own voice? (108)

With regards to present-day Ireland, Montague admits that times have changed, and that “a young woman in Ireland today will at least find some of those female voices; and perhaps know with a little more certitude than I did, that she can claim her own voice within her own female human body” (108). What is more, not only are the Irish literary female voices of today more conspicuous than in the past but currently, as stressed unanimously by literary critics, it is women who innovate contemporary poetry in Ireland. Indeed, the change has taken place, to a large extent, due to the women poets of the new generation whose work is examined in this dissertation: Vona Groarke, Sinéad Morrissey, Caitríona O’Reilly and Mary O’Donoghue.

Vona Groarke is enlisted by Pat Boran among the poets who have contributed enormously to the development of the contemporary Irish poetic scene, not “in the slightest degree confined by the efforts of their fellows and all of whom engage with and enrich the history and traditions that continue to effect them as citizens, as readers and as writers, whatever their current geographic, historical or formal positions or interests” (“Introduction” 13–14). Vona Groarke was born in the same year as Mary Montague. She is the author of *Shale* (1994), *Other People’s Houses* (1999), *Flight* (2002), *Flight and Earlier Poems* (2004), *Juniper Street* (2006), *Lament for Art O’Leary*, *From the Irish of Eibhlín Ní Chonaill* (2008), and *Spindrift* (2009). In 2014, Vona Groarke published the volume *X*. From her first volume *Shale* (1994), Groarke’s poetry has been critically acclaimed both in Ireland and abroad. Noteworthy among Groarke’s numerous prestigious literary prizes are the Hennessy Award, the Davoren

Hanna Prize (2001) and the Stand International Poetry Prize (2000). Described in *The Poetry Ireland Review* as “an accomplished first collection” (Roche 106), Groarke’s poetic debut *Shale* (1994) won the Brendan Behan Memorial Award. The same year, 1994, Groarke received the award for the Best Poet of the Year. Five years later, Groarke won the Strokestown International Poetry Prize. As early as 1999, Groarke was considered to be “one of the most effective voices of her generation; her own poetic house is very much in order, and will always be worth visiting” (Denman 383). In his commentary upon Groarke’s poetic debut, Johnston reminds us of the poet’s earliest literary achievements:

Vona Groarke won the 1994 Listowel Writers’ Week sonnet competition and currently works as curator of Dublin’s Newman House. Awarding her the *Sunday Tribune* New Irish Writer of the Year and Hennessy Award for poetry, the judges praised her tremendous maturity, sophistication and wit. (“Surprised by Familiarity” 323)

Reviewing Groarke’s first volume, *Shale*, Anthony Roche praises the poet for an “imaginative process,” “witty exuberance,” and above all, “a strikingly individual poetic sensibility rich enough to inhabit a hundred empty rooms” (106–107). In this vein, with regard to *Shale*, Kelly admits that “Critics have been struck by Groarke’s sensibility, the assurance and regulated qualities of her voice” (“The Sinew of Memory” 64). Groarke’s second collection *Other People’s Houses* (1999) continues the themes introduced in *Shale*. In the *Irish University Review*, Denman stresses that the second volume

seems to represent the competent completion of a project that reached its natural culmination some time along the way, it is a measure of Vona Groarke’s undoubted skills as a poet that the poems hold the attention even after the central conceit has become a little threadbare. (383)

Writing about *Shale*, Wheatley observes that “[t]he volume’s elementary fresh and simple imagery recalls the American poet Louise Glück” (“Irish Poetry” 261). Much in line with the above, Lysaght praises *Other People’s Houses* for “a formal conservatism working in tandem with a modern idiom in familiar settings” and “operat[es] regularly on the discrepancy between traditional form and modern content in a gently ironic way” (“At Home and Abroad” 34). Likewise O’Rawe’s review of *Other People’s Houses* admires “the subtle sophistication and impressive formal range of Groarke’s poetic practice,” together with its “technical ingenuity” (“Habitations and Odysseys” 161). In a similarly favourable tone, Fadden comments about Groarke’s second collection:

Whereas other poets’ work may jump out and grab you immediately, bringing you back to reread gluttonously, returning to these poems may be necessary primarily to allow the suppressed narratives to fully emerge. The effect is not always truly revelatory but it is accomplished nonetheless. (32)

Analysing Groarke’s third collection *Flight* (2002), shortlisted for the Forward Prize for Best Collection in the UK and Ireland and awarded the

Michael Hartnett Poetry Prize in 2003, Carney, like Lysaght, compliments *Flight's* “quietness, formality and care of her method” (“Poets and Makers” 147). In other words,

They are poems ‘of the air displaced by flight’ . . . – and they put themselves forward inauspiciously, tentatively. But the poems assembled on the pages of this collection are in themselves anything but weak. Impeccable formal skills, impressive and sustained control of images, linguistic play and verse forms are all features here of a paradoxical poetry that is both quiet and diminutive but powerful and intense. (Carney, “Poets and Makers” 146–147)

In this manner, reviewing *Flight and Earlier Poems*, Phillips notices that “Groarke’s patient, serious poems, occasionally ruffled by wit, work things out in their own way . . . lines seem separated by a great deal of space” (236). Concluding, Phillips admits that:

Groarke’s poems often have an air of simplicity . . . . But their grounded, private acuteness, their silent insistence on discovering their own methods, makes them subtler and more complex than the poems of most of Groarke’s more extravagantly ambitious contemporaries. (237)

Correspondingly, Johnston’s review of *Flight* subscribes to the cited-above opinions: “This is fresh poetry, fresh moulding of language. Not all of these poems go off with a bang; but then again, someone else stepping on the same poem might just trigger its potential” (“Fashion and Profit” 248). In Carney’s view, “Vona Groarke has worked to create verbal patterns that are commensurate with the elusiveness and transience of such moments, real and imagined, and the result is formidable” (“Poets and Makers” 148). Subsequently, Groarke’s fourth collection *Juniper Street* (2006) is appreciated by critics due to its “meticulous attention to detail, to formal arrangement in her well-wrought poems” (Johnston, “Hauntings and Returns” 99). In addition, reviewers pay tribute to Groarke’s “precise, sensuous detail and sensitive, witty observation” (Johnston, “Hauntings and Returns” 99). In *The Irish Times*, Sampson describes Groarke’s fourth volume as “a poetry of poise and perfectly contrived effect” (“A Light Still” 12). She elaborates her opinion, arguing that “Nothing is clumsy here; nothing is under-achieved, nor is there any of that surplus of the unintended, in language or idea” (Sampson, “A Light Still” 12). As demonstrated, critics tend to agree that in *Juniper Street* Groarke’s

poetry is remarkable both for its use of metaphor and simile to create striking images that gleam and build into a luminous tapestry as the collection progresses, but also for its attentiveness to words as sounds that powerfully reverberate. (Johnston, “Hauntings and Returns” 100)

In other words, “Again, it is the act of writing that fastens and formalises experience. The past is never far from the present. Indeed, there is a sustained

focus on the process of writing throughout; it is often the poet engaged in the act of writing who speaks" (Johnston, "Hauntings and Returns" 101). And yet in the long run, with her persistence to explore mundane household reality of a woman poet, Groarke risks being compartmentalised as Eavan Boland whose poetry tends to be belittled due to her purportedly confined "women's" thematic grounds. As if addressing this accusation, in "Sufficient unto Our Day Recent Irish Poetry," Zwiep aptly argues that "[t]he subject of these poems is often domestic (not a pejorative term), focusing on relationships and houses (she is married and has two children)" (467).

Nonetheless it is owing to the mentioned "considerable technical virtuosity," "a gently ironic way" (Lysaght, "At Home and Abroad" 34), "witty exuberance" (Roche 107), "impressive and sustained control of images" (Carney, "Poets and Makers" 147) and "attentiveness to words as sounds" (Johnston, "Hauntings and Returns" 100) that Groarke manages to avoid being catalogued within stereotypically gender-related subject matter. Indeed, the nature of Groarke's "paradoxical poetry" (Carney, "Poets and Makers" 147) leads to the paradox of her writing's reception. Like her other famous predecessors such as the earlier-evoked Eavan Boland or Wisława Szymborska, Groarke consciously chooses a seemingly commonplace path of ordinary issues rather than the pursuit of monumental themes. In other words, Groarke's poems "entail a certain sacrifice – of grandiosity, of grand themes, of flight – and they put themselves forward inauspiciously, tentatively" (Carney, "Poets and Makers" 147). Other critics seem to subscribe willingly to this view, observing that "[t]he authority of her voice springs from what I will call an impressive plain style, distinctly unpretentious, clear in syntax, and even in line length" (Zwiep 467–468). With the above in mind, no wonder that among Groarke's literary inspirations critics enlist Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin, Medbh McGuckian (Grennan, "Coaxing a World"), Emily Dickinson, T.S. Eliot, Larkin (Lysaght, "At Home and Abroad"), Frank O'Hara, Virginia Woolf (Johnston, "Hauntings and Returns").

Although Groarke may have, like all the great poets do, her own recurrent topics to which she likes to return, she does it in a more and more mature way. In doing so, she continuously extends, alters and updates her scope of observation. Her last three collections: *Juniper Street* (2006), *Spindrift* (2009) and *X* (2014) mark clear stylistic and thematic changes, moving towards universal issues, approached through personal experience. Last but not least: there are not many poets whose most recent volumes are critically acclaimed to be the best out of their literary output. Such is the case with Groarke's *Spindrift* (2009), a masterly poetic achievement singled out for the Poetry Book Society Recommendation. In his review of *Spindrift*, "Landing a Poem" Brennan notices that "Groarke is an ambitious poet as well as a painstaking one . . . there is a sense that she is still tentative and that there is a long and rewarding road ahead" (277–278). In *The Irish Times* review entitled "Coaxing a World Into Plain View: Spindrift," Grennan relates to Groarke's poems as "luminous," endowed with a "seriousness of purpose, clarity of intelligence, exactitudes of feeling and,

most of all, a quiet mastery of language in its instrumental work as sound and cadence, as image, as metaphor, as just plain statement” (13). What is more, Grennan describes *Spindrift* as “her strongest collection so far,” adding that in this collection Groarke “comes clear in a complex, satisfying, distinct voice that is no one’s but her own” (“Coaxing a World” 13). In 2014, Vona Groarke published the collection *X*. John McAuliffe in *The Irish Times* review of her latest volume, entitled “X Marks a New Place for Vona Groarke and for Irish writing” claims that:

Groarke’s sixth collection . . . inhabits the empty space it describes in a way that feels new in Irish writing: the poems tell a story of reclaimed and recovered spaces, albeit hunted by memory . . . Groarke’s ability to conjure place and feeling is characteristic, but the poems[‘] are both fresh and familiar, even though the landscapes in which the poems occur remain almost entirely unnamed.

In conclusion, one cannot but agree that Groarke fully deserves to be called “a leading figure among the most accomplished poets of her (very talented) generation” (Grennan, “Coaxing a World” 13).

Sinéad Morrissey’s poetic debut *There Was Fire in Vancouver* (1996) came out two years after Groarke’s first volume *Shale*. Sinéad Morrissey won the Patrick Kavanagh Award for Poetry at the age of eighteen. Since then a lengthy list of Morrissey’s literary awards, prizes and scholarships has made her one of the most critically-acclaimed contemporary English-language poets. This is how Jean Bleakney recalls the beginnings of Morrissey’s literary career:

she had hardly walked through the doors of Trinity College in autumn 1990, when, aged 18, she became the youngest ever recipient of The Patrick Kavanagh Award . . . *There was Fire in Vancouver* appeared in 1996 and earned her an Eric Gregory Award from the Society of Authors, the most prestigious award for poets under the age of thirty. (“Poet in Residence” 12)

Along with Ciaran Carson, Morrissey is recognised as a successor of Seamus Heaney’s poetic heritage in the North. In “‘That Black Mouth’: Secrecy, Shibboleths, and Silence in Northern Irish Poetry,” David Wheatley argues that “Northern Ireland enters a new phase and younger talents such as Peter McDonald, Martin Mooney, and Sinéad Morrissey come to maturity in post-ceasefire, post-Belfast Agreement Ireland” (142). Similarly David Butler locates Morrissey in line with other “considerable figures on the contemporary poetry scene – Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin, Paul Durcan, John Ennis, Harry Clifton, Peter Sirr, Greg Delanty, Pat Boran” (“Alive Alive O” 82). George Shirtes admits “[t]he power of Sinéad Morrissey’s poetry lies in sharply pitched precise emotion and a fine ear and eye for texture. The beauty of her short poems is keening, compact and yet airy” (“The Sweet Dance” 95). Moreover other critics widely praise Morrissey’s erudition (see, for instance, Johnston, “Beyond Belfast”), pointing out to the numerous, intertextual references in her work.

Among her most significant poetic inspirations are: Frost, Lowell, Larkin, Kapusiński, Szymborska, and Lorca, to name but a few; “[e]lsewhere we are treated to vignettes of W. H. Auden and Alexander the Great, together with a mischievous piece of rhyming ‘Advice’ to fellow poets” (Phillips, “Criminal Records” 73). In the volume *Through the Square Window* (2009), a list of authors who have influenced her writing is impressive. Johnston admits that:

This is hard-worked poetry, slowly and steadily undertaken with obvious erudition – . . . the styles and spirits of other poets such as, among others, Louis MacNeice, Sylvia Plath, Elizabeth Bishop and Les Murray are tried out at various times while prose writers such as Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, Henry James, William Makepeace Thackeray, are invoked with the ambassador of the collection being Lewis Carroll’s Alice, the fearless explorer of Wonderland and other unfathomable realms. (“Beyond Belfast” 107)

Shortlisted for the T.S. Eliot Prize, Morrissey’s second volume *Between Here and There* (2002) was published after the poet’s return to Ireland after the time of living abroad. In his *Northern Irish Literature: 1975–2006: The Imprint of History*, Michael Parker remarks that “the majority of its poems must have been composed when Morrissey was between the ages of 24 and 30 – illuminatory moments from periods of private crisis feature predominantly” (227). As with her poetic debut, critics have enthusiastically received Morrissey’s *Between Here and There*. However there were also some rare voices arguing that “the earlier poems speak more convincingly” (Tillinghast, “The Future of Irish Poetry?” 181) and that “The later ones would appear to grow out of travel to places like Japan, New York, New Zealand – places that are not as evocative for this poet as those about the American Southwest or her emotional home places” ergo “they lack the rough edge of necessity” (Tillinghast, “The Future of Irish Poetry?” 181). Unlike quoted Tillinghast, Parker believes that “geographical and cultural relocations have enriched . . . [Morrissey’s] work and enabled . . . [her] to look back on . . . particular experiences, but also to look upwards and outwards to other cultures, places and times” (226). Similarly other critics praise the poems from *Between Here and There* for “[t]olerance and openness to diversity,” being “multilayered,” for their “visual understanding of language,” and being “an evocation of things that cannot be expressed” (de Angelis 148–151). In 2002, Morrissey won the Rupert and Eithne Strong Award. The poet’s third collection *The State of the Prisons* is appreciated for the fact that “[t]he more challenging the subject matter, the more precise Morrissey’s language becomes” (Phillips, “Criminal Records” 75). Furthermore,

The book also features commentaries on recent political events, and accounts of journeys abroad (to China, New Zealand, and Germany, continuing a “travelogue” theme that has run through both of Morrissey’s previous collections), together with lyrics on the more personal history of childhood and early adulthood. It’s a very broad range of subject matter, marshalled, for the most part, into exquisitely crafted poems. (Phillips, “Criminal Records” 73)



Phillips observes that in Morrissey's third volume, her poetic "monologues . . . engage with history and place [to] transport the reader to exhilarating new territory" ("Criminal Records" 75). By the same token, Parker thinks highly of Morrissey's "scope of her vision ranging far beyond Ireland and its history to embrace the current international crisis," as well as of the poet's "remarkable skills as a creator of others' voices," her "compressed sentences," and successful rendering of the archaized idiom (*Northern Irish Literature* 228–229). Reviewing *The State of the Prisons*, Topping agrees with Parker that "Morrissey's technical achievements in this collection are considerable. She has already proved herself to be as good a craftsperson as Michael Longley, and this collection only intensifies her clear mastery of form, especially the lyric, but also longer narrative / epic-style pieces" ("Justice Marries Humanity" 26). Likewise Topping concludes enthusiastically: "It is exciting to see her using new forms and admitting new voices to her work. This collection must surely now cement Morrissey's status as one of the most significant Irish poets to have emerged and come to prominence during the nineties" ("Justice Marries Humanity" 26). On the whole, reviewers of *The State of the Prisons* emphasise that Morrissey's "drift of language is excellent," adding that "she plays with form as well as with tone," and pay tribute to the work's "surprising spaciousness" (Shirtes, *The Sweet Dance* 95–96). David Butler in "Consolations of Observation" comments that Morrissey's "imagery is frequently both vivid and refreshing" appreciating her fourth volume's "economy and resonance" (106). In *The Irish Times* review of *The State of the Prisons*, entitled "Collections Connecting," Sampson admits with admiration that "It is, in short, a book of splendours," due to "its subject matter," "dangerous quietness," and "the intelligence of generosity" (11). Furthermore Sampson concludes in an affirmative tone: "this necessary book affords proof that a truer, more far-sighted poetics persists" ("Collections Connecting" 11).

Morrissey's fourth collection *Through the Square Window* (2009) was short-listed for the T.S. Eliot Prize and a Poetry Book Society Choice. The title poem of Morrissey's volume won the 2007 UK National Poetry Competition. The critics praise the book as a "grown-up, serious volume," "daring" in themes (Sampson, "Avoiding the Lure" 13). *The Irish Times* reviewer sums it up: "This collection is authentic . . . to a confident, inquiring intelligence that makes itself felt on every page," adding that *Through the Square Window* "promises yet more for the future" (Sampson, "Avoiding the Lure" 13). The poet was also awarded the prestigious Michael Hartnett Poetry Prize. Morrissey's fifth collection, entitled *Parallax* (2013) has won the T.S. Eliot Prize. All in all, the critics compliment Morrissey's "gift for scoring images that impress themselves on the mind" and applaud the way she "hangs her words in the air on tight-rope-like lines" (Johnston, "Beyond Belfast" 109). Accordingly, Eibhlín Evans appreciates Morrissey's poetry for having "fresh lines . . . [being] economical and direct, poised and subtle" (472). In this vein, Johnston admits that Morrissey "renovate[s] the cluttered spaces of contemporary poetry . . . cleaning the

windows of perception, the many-roomed house of Northern Irish poetry would appear to be in ship-shape and looking out, as ever, to sea” (“Beyond Belfast” 109). She points out that Morrissey “shows herself to be a compelling poet, capable of adjusting the way we see” (“Beyond Belfast” 109). In “The Future of Irish Poetry?” Tillinghast declares “that we are in the presence of a new talent” (179). Even more enthusiastically he affirms that “Work of this order renews one’s faith in the art of poetry” (Tillinghast 179). Summing up, he concludes: “Morrissey is an astute student of the human heart” (Tillinghast 180).

Born in 1973, Caitríona O’Reilly has published so far three volumes of poetry: *The Nowhere Birds* (2001), *The Sea Cabinet* (2006) and *Geis* (2015). Apart from her editing work (co-editor of *Metre* and the editor of *Poetry Ireland Review* since 2008), O’Reilly is a highly-acknowledged critic. As a poet, she is regarded as “a great new talent” (Carpenter, “Into Dazzle” 108) and “a poet’s poet” (Naiden 155) who “thrives on tensions, centrally via the paradoxes of language” and “brings a new pattern to them” (Carpenter, “Into Dazzle” 104). In 1999, the Arts Council of Ireland endowed her with a Literature Bursary. Carpenter writes about her: “Caitríona O’Reilly . . . is a poet well equipped to render richness and deprivation, both sensory and emotional” (“Into Dazzle” 104–105).

Emphasising her “doctoral thesis at Trinity College on American literature,” Naiden adds that O’Reilly is “a poet of occasional sheer beauty as well as wild disconcertions” (154). Further Naiden supports this opinion: “Caitríona O’Reilly is not at first an easy poet to understand, at first. Her poems ought not to be skimmed but pondered, in order to absorb their sinews and tendrils.” (155). Other reviewers observe that “She is not the first poet to have earned a PhD, nor will she be the last. But a way must be found to transmute all the learning into lore, in the way Ezra Pound did in his early poetry and then forgot how to do through most of the *Cantos*” (Tillinghast 183–184). The fascination with Sylvia Plath’s work reappears in critical studies of O’Reilly’s poetry time and time again, as in *The Irish Times* review of her second collection (2006): “If this sounds like Plath, it’s perhaps not surprising; since O’Reilly’s poetic project, too, is the appropriation of rich context, including Irish and British history, to personal meaning-making” (Sampson, “Stacking Myths” 10).<sup>21</sup> Moreover with regard to O’Reilly’s poetic “teachers,” critics point out as well her indebtedness to Lowell, and Eliot; not to mention Larkin, Wordsworth and Milton (Carpenter, “Into Dazzle” 104–106). Analysing her poetic debut *The Nowhere Birds*, Donnelly argues that “Caitríona O’Reilly’s first book . . . has the verve and excitement of life and language newly encountered” (“Making It New” 111). He appreciates the whole volume’s linguistic and thematic inventiveness, the assured “technical variety of the verse,” the poet’s “fine narrative gift,” and “the seemingly effortless control of the speaking voice” (Donnelly, “Making It New”

---

<sup>21</sup> However, linking O’Reilly’s doctoral dissertation to Plath’s influence on her poetry might be overhasty. MacNeice might be more appropriate to discuss as an influence in this place.

112). O'Reilly's first volume won the Rooney Prize for Literature and it got shortlisted for the Forward prize. The poet was praised for "a rare gift for the memorable image and a seemingly effortless ability to explore and exploit the formalities of poetic structures" (Donnelly, "Making It New" 112). The critics tend to agree that "*The Nowhere Birds* is thematically eclectic and the variety of the poems reveals a natural talent experimenting and making a mark" (Donnelly, "Making It New" 111). In his review of *The Nowhere Birds* Holdridge calls the collection "the maturation of a poet" during which O'Reilly "creates poems of an impersonal, indeed intellectual, variety" (377). Holdridge applies to her poetry the modifiers such as "self-conscious, philosophical, and widely travelled" (377). O'Reilly's second volume *Sea Cabinet* (2006) was endowed with the Poetry Book Society Recommendation:

The collection's three main sequences (once centred on Goya, one akin to Eliot's 'Landscapes' and the title sequence) acknowledge sources and transcend them. The use of personae is liberating and exacting: the notion of the artist as witness, tied to a medium, chronicler of horrors as well as pleasures, is always close. (Carpenter, "Into Dazzle" 106)

In her review of *The Sea Cabinet*, Sampson pays attention to its "unconventionality," the "strikingly ornate, often historically-derived imagery [that] generates a sense of coalescence, of the irresistible thickening-up of experience," and the poet's "haunted language" ("Stacking Myths" 10). In the same way, Gamble emphasises *The Sea Cabinet*'s "Prominent thematic concerns with environmental damage, travel and the fragile boundaries ordering the self and world strike chords" and "our relationships with the physical world, and the frequently complacent mental stances we adopt" ("Shaping Itself" 26). Like Gamble, Villar-Argáiz in "Between Tradition and Modernity: Twenty-First Century Ireland in Recent Works by Irish Women Poets" draws attention to an "ecological strand in O'Reilly's work" (123). Furthermore, the critic praises O'Reilly's poetry for its sense of "rootedness and attachment to . . . place" (Villar-Argáiz, "Between Tradition" 123). With regard to *The Sea Cabinet*, Gamble concludes that "O'Reilly has always been a stimulating writer, and these poems are no exception: their depths are not easily plumbed, and they thoroughly repay re-reading" ("Shaping Itself" 27). What is more, O'Reilly is also praised for "a gift for metaphor: here is a poet who asks from us patience and a willingness to puzzle out connections" (Zwiep 471). Similarly, Barra Ó Seaghdha observes that "Caitríona O'Reilly can enter into a subject successfully" (111). No wonder O'Reilly's most recent work: *Geis* (2015) has been impatiently awaited with much hope and expectation. Summing up, O'Reilly has been viewed as an aspiring and promising author, "on her way to becoming a stunning lyric poet" (Tillinghast 183) and "an accomplished young poet who is struggling . . . to emerge from the complications of the many things she can do well" (Tillinghast 182). Arguably, the slightly condescending tone with which critics sometimes discuss O'Reilly's poetry is undeserved because

her collections already perfectly fulfil the high standards and aspirations of a mature and talented poet. Justin Quinn enlists O'Reilly as belonging to "a gifted generation which includes Vona Groarke" ("The Weather" 486).

Mary O'Donoghue (born 1975) writes poetry, short stories and fiction [*Before the House Burns* (2010)]. The biographical note<sup>22</sup> informs us that "Her short stories have been included in *Agni*, *Salamander*, *The Dublin Review*, *Literary Imagination* and elsewhere" (McBreen 136). O'Donoghue's two volumes of poetry *Tulle* (2001) and *Among These Winters* (2007) have achieved a wide critical appraisal. For her poetic debut *Tulle* (2001), the poet received the Salmon Poetry Publication Prize and the Seán Dunne Young Writer Award. Among O'Donoghue's other literary awards, one could mention the prestigious Hennessy New Irish Writers' Award. With her academic and scholarly background, it is not surprising to discover in O'Donoghue a flair for words; she is a very idiom-conscious poet and a witty writer. In her self-ironic essay, "On Disgrace and the Need for a New-Fangled Envoy," O'Donoghue admits:

And I'm beginning to think that a main driver of my writing has been to make myself smile and or shudder or indulge the range of reactions between, and let readers go and find their own ice-breaking equipment. But of course, writers are doomed to be read and so we give up our home-spun enjoyments when the book goes Out There. (140–141)

Unlike the poems of three other authors analysed in this book, O'Donoghue's work is not frequently reviewed or commented upon. It needs to be emphasised that even though it receives less critical coverage, O'Donoghue's poetry is by no means inferior either as regards formal or linguistic aspects. One of the reasons for this inadequate critical attention may stem from her long-termed work and stay in the United States and her absence on the Irish literary scene. However when critics do examine O'Donoghue's poetry, they enumerate her among those women poets who do "expand their lyric into new territories" (Villar-Argáiz, "Between Tradition" 125), among which one can highlight "the modernization of Irish culture . . . interwoven, sometimes, with gender-focused themes" (Villar-Argáiz, "Between Tradition" 126). On the other hand, "[t]he travel experiences of writers such as Sinéad Morrissey and Mary O'Donoghue influence their poems, reflecting their desire to celebrate a cross-cultural form of Irishness, one that surpasses all sorts of geographical and gendered boundaries" (Villar-Argáiz, "Between Tradition" 131). Barra Ó Seaghdha locates Mary O'Donoghue among "writers whose promise intrigues or who are difficult to categorise" (112), but, at the same time, who "have established their own imaginative worlds" where "they have settled a little too comfortably within its borders" (112). In my reading of O'Donoghue's poems, I have paid a special attention to her exceptional sensitivity to sound, the way she "plays" or in her own words

<sup>22</sup> Included in the anthology *The Watchful Heart: A New Generation of Irish Poets: Poems and Essays*.

“orchestrates” her words on a page (musical metaphors are frequent in her writing), and how the poet takes delight in the lines’ auditory sense as well as a semantic and textual one. Another feature of her poetry that O’Donoghue herself admits is a love of words that are not frequently used nowadays: to appreciate O’Donoghue’s work, the most common lexical meanings will not suffice. As noticed by Eibhlín Evans, Mary O’Donoghue belongs to those “women poets [who] display individual voices and offer new expressive possibilities for familiar grievances” (471). All in all, it is only a matter of time until O’Donoghue’s poetry and fiction receive the full-length critical analysis they deserve. Hopefully, if this book could contribute to it, even in the smallest degree, its aim will be accomplished.

The opening chapter of this study: **Power-With: Irishwomen’s Relational Empowerment and Women’s Empowerment in Connection** deals with female empowerment that stems from women’s relational backgrounds. For decades, there has been a critical reductive tendency to perceive women’s poetry (or poetry written by women) via the prism of the relational problems frequently depicted by female authors. As a reaction against it, women poets have preferred to deliberately stay away from what used to be labelled as “feminine” issues. With this in mind, Chapter One proposes an alternative approach according to which women’s autonomy is not hampered but strengthened by female relational embeddedness.<sup>23</sup> Thus, Chapter One examines the poetry of Vona Groarke, Sinéad Morrissey, Caitríona O’Reilly and Mary O’Donoghue as empoweringly located within the relational structures of family, kin, romantic or friendly connections. However as demonstrated here, for women, such relations in order to be sustaining, have to be based on reciprocity, mutuality, empathy, autonomy, acting together with mutual benefit and respect for both sides. Additionally, to be considered as empowering, relationality must enhance female individual growth, without stifling women’s own choices and commitments. Nowadays with all their knowledge, education, experience, personal records and previous practices, Irish women poets analysed here: Vona Groarke, Sinéad Morrissey, Caitríona O’Reilly and Mary O’Donoghue re-examine carefully their (personal) connections in terms of empowerment and its limits, re-working their relational capital to stimulate and increase their own artistic development.<sup>24</sup>

The first sub-chapter “Female Relational Empowerment as ‘The Self-In Relation’<sup>25</sup> in the Poetry of Sinéad Morrissey” examines Irish women’s connections within family and kinship structures as constituting the empowering potential for creative and individual growth. Hence in Morrissey’s poetry, the female “self-in relation” (Surrey, “The Self-in-Relation” 51–66) is empowered

<sup>23</sup> See Surrey’s “Relationship and Empowerment.”

<sup>24</sup> The process is not as easy as it may seem, because, according to Jordan, “our culture has overemphasized the agentic, individualistic, competitive, lonely qualities of human life; and women have suffered, as their valuing of relationship, their immersion in caring and open need for connection have been denigrated” (“Empathy, Mutuality” 289).

<sup>25</sup> Surrey (The Self-in-Relation 51–66).

both by the knowledge gained from the previous generations of women in her family and by her own current experience of relationality. Therefore, the female speaker in Morrissey's poems frequently goes back in time to probe the complicated narratives of her ancestral connections to realise how empowering these relations can be for her in an artistic and personal dimension. That latter aspect is examined most meticulously through the persona's relations with her husband and her new-born son. Scrutinising from a de-familiarised perspective her child's speech acquisition means for the persona learning her own voice anew. The process of "growth-in-connection"<sup>26</sup> is discerned as a challenging and empowering practice whereby both sides can benefit from each other. In other words, the new perspective that Morrissey's speaker develops while mothering, or earlier looking back upon her own childhood, becomes inspiring for her as a woman and as a writer. Female empowerment in Morrissey's poetry is not viewed essentially.<sup>27</sup> What is more, women's relational empowerment is not based upon any gender essence; it arises from exemplary, diverse and particular relational experience that can be enriching only as long as is not falsified by the sameness.

The second sub-chapter, "'To Act in Concert': Women's Mutual Empowerment in the Poetry of Mary O'Donoghue" refers to the collective aspect of women's power. Female empowerment in O'Donoghue's poetry entails the participation and co-operation of other women. It re-addresses the currently questioned issue of sisterhood, reclaimed here as women's solidarity. By examining O'Donoghue's poems, this sub-chapter also challenges a dangerous patriarchal myth, that of women's inability to be loyal, supportive and co-operate with one another. Both Daly and Wolf rightly remind us that patriarchal culture incites competition among women and their rivalry for male partners and social prestige.<sup>28</sup> O'Donoghue's poems show how through friendship with other women, one can establish female empowerment. Specifically, Daly's Be-Friending (based on women's creativity, reciprocity and solidary defiance of patriarchal structures) appears significant here. Allen's reading of Arendt leads to the reformulating of the notion of (women's) solidarity<sup>29</sup> based on acting together and not on an "exclusionary and repressive concept that is always predicated on some inherent sameness or identity" (*The*

---

<sup>26</sup> The term coined by Surrey (Jordan, Walker et al., 174–177).

<sup>27</sup> See "parenting-in-connection" (Dooley and Fedele 233), Jordan ("The Meaning of Mutuality"), Surrey ("The Relational Self"), Walker ("Race, Self").

<sup>28</sup> In Jordan's words, "Patriarchy and existing power structures depend on isolation and disempowerment of women. Women are pitted against each other in competition for men and in the demeaning of women who choose to be with women" ("Relational Resilience 43).

<sup>29</sup> Allen's innovative interpretation of Arendt enables feminists to re-define the concept of solidarity beyond the framework of sameness. In other words in Allen's reading of Arendt, the ghost of the shared essence is warded off by shared action, as she herself puts it.

*Power* 123).<sup>30</sup> Nonetheless, the very concept of female solidarity looks insufficient without empathy. As an underlying and fundamental component of female empowerment, empathy constitutes a recurrent idea of this chapter. Without empathy, one can hardly imagine any meaningful connection between people, let alone a mutually empowering one. Whether teenage friends, female schoolmates, three middle-age “Hags,” or sisters in blood, O’Donoghue’s speakers manage to engage in and sustain “growth-promoting, life-enhancing, interactive” (Surrey, “Relationship and Empowerment” 164) connections with other women and act together for their common goals. On the whole, O’Donoghue’s female characters are active, rebellious and insubordinate to the Laws of the Father that aim to restrict women’s agency and freedom.

“The Female Power of Relational Autonomy: Establishing Indoor and Outdoor Connections in the Poetry of Vona Groarke” explores female empowerment drawn from relational autonomy. In other words, by analysing Groarke’s poems, this section challenges the view that autonomy demands putting aside one’s relational interconnectedness. The root of the controversy has been already implied in the first sub-chapter, namely, associating independence with the masculine vision of autonomy, separation, fear of commitments, emotional detachment, disengagement or relational disconnection. In contrast to this, Groarke’s poetry examines the potential of relational autonomy that does not juxtapose women’s personal freedom with social embeddedness. As an organising concept in her poems, Groarke chooses the signifier of home / house. It is around this unifying symbol that her persona locates her emotive, relational and personal (indoor and outdoor) connections. Being devoted to relational connections with her children and husband, Groarke’s speaker is, at the same time, committed to writing, her own creative ideals and personal values. In doing so, Groarke’s poetry demonstrates that both female and male autonomy is structured by the relations in which people function. Ergo, it is acquired as a result of connections and attachments, and it cannot develop properly outside a relational context.<sup>31</sup> As demonstrated in the examined works, balancing between various types of commitments is challenging for women but not impossible. What is more, in Groarke’s poems, women’s relational autonomy is an indispensable component of female empowerment. Without the fundamental ability to decide about their choices, values, and commitments, women can never be empowered.<sup>32</sup>

---

<sup>30</sup> Allen argues “Arendt implicitly rejects the notion that group solidarity rests on a shared identity if that identity is understood as resting on an inherent sameness, be it a shared essence, a shared experience of oppression, or what have you” (*The Power* 105).

<sup>31</sup> In other words, “It is . . . in virtue of our dependency on others in the family that we acquire a capacity for autonomy . . . our capacity for autonomy is acquired in contexts where we are dependent on others” (Barclay 57).

<sup>32</sup> Friedman states that “Autonomy is no longer thought to require someone to be a social atom, that is, radically socially unencumbered, defined merely by the capacity to choose, or to be able to exercise reason prior to any of her contingent ends or social engagements” (“Autonomy, Social” 41).

The last part of Chapter One, “The Anxiety of Disconnected ‘Unmoored Pieces’ in the Poetry of Caitriona O’Reilly” studies what happens when women’s connections with others are broken in a prolonged and habitual way, producing what is named by psychologists as a “chronic disconnection” (Jordan and Walker, “Introduction” 2). Additionally, it probes the consequences of such a condition in the sphere of female empowerment. Unlike the cases of the desired, casual and temporary disconnection [“move out of nonmutual, hurtful relationships” (Jordan, “Relational Awareness” 53)], the chronic disconnection leads to female disempowerment (Jordan and Walker “Introduction” 3). In other words, analysing O’Reilly’s poems, the final part of Chapter One examines the causes and effects of female disconnection to establish to whether in this state, any capacity or women’s agency is possible at all. The conclusion reached here evinces that disconnection is synonymous with powerlessness, as demonstrated in the cited research.<sup>33</sup> This happens because a woman becomes cut off from her relational capital (as discussed in earlier sections) that enhances female empowerment (i.e., women’s solidarity, empathy, “growth-in connection” and relational autonomy). In O’Reilly’s poems, without access to the resources that amplify her strength, disconnected female speakers are prone to feel incapacitated, which, in some cases, might even lead to psychosomatic illnesses (eating disorders, for instance) or clinical depression. Hence, the persona in O’Reilly’s poems seems to be immobilised by her need for relationality and connection, and the experience of having this need blocked and “switched off.” That is why O’Reilly’s poetry is full of anxious and eerie images that render the female voice’s disconnection and the pain it causes to her. Even though in-between the lines, the female speaker seems to admit her need for connection, she still appears to be too apprehensive to follow this urge.

The second chapter **Power-At: Ecopower and Irish Women’s Ecological Selves**, studies female empowerment derived from ecofeminism (or the ecopower) that constitutes for women a source of (self) knowledge and change and a chance for re-defining the relations of domination supported by the patriarchy.<sup>34</sup> The intrinsic assumption, as outlined by Warren and other ecologists cited here, is that there is a non-accidental correspondence between the subordination of nature and the subjection of women. Therefore, this chapter examines the ethical dimension of women’s relation to nature, perceiving ecocare and the land ethic as pivotal components of their own struggle for self-

---

<sup>33</sup> See the research conducted in Stone Center’s Jean Baker Miller Training Institute at Wesley College (1991, 2004).

<sup>34</sup> What is more, it can be argued that “feminism is a transformative philosophy that embraces the amelioration of life on earth for all its life-forms, for all natural entities. We believe that all oppressions are interconnected: no one creature will be free until all are free – from abuse, degradation, exploitation, pollution, and commercialization. Women and animals shared these oppressions historically, and until the mentality of domination is ended in all its forms, these afflictions will continue” (Donovan and Adams, Introduction 3).



recognition, hence, female empowerment.<sup>35</sup> As argued above, ecofeminism can be empowering for women, as they are able to scrutinise their cultural, historical, economic deprivations and dispossessions in a wider context of the parallels with the domination of the natural world.<sup>36</sup> The caring attitude towards both animate and non-animate co-participants of the natural world enables women to challenge the relations of superiority and supremacy that constitute the prevailing model of addressing nature in patriarchal societies.<sup>37</sup>

The opening part of Chapter Two, “The Empowering Ecofeminist Care Ethic and Land Ethic in The Poetry of Mary O’Donoghue” explores from an ethical standpoint, the oppression of animals and the violation of the land as the two key areas in which the patriarchal abuse takes place. This thinking leads to the formulation of new ecofeminist ethics that can be applied to critically analyse the existing *status quo*. Irish women poets of the new generation seem to encompass increasingly often eco (feminist) issues into their writing agendas. Addressing the environmental problems and, then, suggesting an alternative way of resolving it, may result in overcoming helplessness and, consequently, it may lead to female (eco) empowerment.<sup>38</sup> As shown in O’Donoghue’s poems, women defending the natural world, gain the feeling of interconnectedness with all beings and the sense of belonging to a large world-structure different from the patriarchal one.<sup>39</sup> In O’Donoghue’s poetry, female speakers who can draw their empowerment from these newly discovered resources, become more grounded and they offer their strength to those who may need it, if not more than at least as much as they do. Bearing this in mind, eco-ethics entails care and respect for all animate and non-animate participants of the natural world.<sup>40</sup>

---

<sup>35</sup> According to Kheel, “Ecofeminism is still in the process of forging connections between feminism and the environmental movement. If ecofeminism is to rise to the challenge of its potential, it must begin to move beyond abstract statements concerning ethical conduct and thought” (111).

<sup>36</sup> Merchant stresses that “[a]lthough ecology is a relatively new science, its philosophy of nature, holism, is not. Historically, holistic presuppositions about nature have been assumed by communities of people who have succeeded in living in equilibrium with their environments. The idea of cyclical processes, of the interconnectedness of all things, and the assumption that nature is active and alive are fundamental to the history of human thought” (293).

<sup>37</sup> In other words, “ecofeminist theory includes a systemic analysis of domination that specifically includes the oppression of women and environmental exploitation, and it advocates a synthesis of ecological and feminist principles as guiding lights for political organizing and the creation of ecological, socially equitable life-styles” (Lahar 1–2).

<sup>38</sup> The theoretical background for this section is mostly provided by Warren’s publications: *Ecofeminist Philosophy: A Western Perspective On What It is And Why it Matters* (2000) and two earlier volumes edited by her: *Ecological Feminist Philosophies* (1996), and *Ecofeminism: Women, Culture, Nature* (1997), as well as environmentalist works by Aldo Leopold, especially his canonical *A Sand County Almanac and Sketches Here and There* (1949).

<sup>39</sup> “If we really want freedom for all to live and exist – to live free from violation by the powerful, – power and privilege must not be more widely shared, they must be radically dismantled” (Kappeler 335).

<sup>40</sup> Considering all of the above, Leopold reminds us again that “The land consists of soil, water, plants, and animals . . . . Such collective functioning of interdependent parts for the maintenance of

Furthermore, the ethical attitude towards the whole natural world involves not only “the care, the respect, even the reverence” (Donovan and Adams, Introduction 7) but also “duties and responsibilities toward all of nature” (Vance 171), “the act of attention” (Kheel 109), “deplor[e]ing . . . all . . . expressions of violence” (Kheel 111), assuming a “nondominance position” (Vance 171), acting to “oppose animal exploitation” and “an anthropocentric perspective” (Scholtmeijer 234, 236) and “overcoming institutionalized barriers to our compassionate connections with animals . . . challenging the desensitizing ideologies and distancing mechanisms” (Luke 314).<sup>41</sup> All in all, O’Donoghue’s poems are non-judgemental and unbiased: hens and horses, cattle and lakes – all receive the same non-discriminatory and equitable care and attention in her eco-narratives.

The second part of Chapter Two, “Mechanical Power versus Women’s Eco-empowering Criticism in The Poetry of Caitríona O’Reilly” analyses the long-term effects that the industrialised worldview exerts upon the natural environment and the human mentality alike.<sup>42</sup> Examining O’Reilly’s poems enables one to structure the mutual intertwining of the patriarchy and the industrial forces which sustain it. This part studies the poetic representations of the mechanical model and associated with it aggressive industrialization process. The so called mechanical model grew in power around the sixteenth / seventeenth centuries, but its legacy has remained up to the present day, despite the changed circumstances and new technological advances.<sup>43</sup> As shown by O’Reilly, mechanical (and patriarchal) power is an absolute power that does not make concessions, especially not to those considered as less powerful (women, animals, other members of Leopold’s “biotic communities”).<sup>44</sup> On the whole, O’Reilly’s poems demonstrate that (ecofeminist) environmental preservation of all the participants of the natural world is the most effective response to the

---

the whole is characteristic of an organism. In this sense land is an organism, and conservation deals with its functional integrity, or health” (“Conservation: In Whole” 310).

<sup>41</sup> Vance observes that “Theorists who reject dominance and anthropocentrism may style themselves and their positions as biocentric, ecocentric, zoocentric, or simply antianthropocentric, but they all have a common starting point: they see no reason why moral considerability should begin and end with humans” (170).

<sup>42</sup> This section traces back the origins of the mechanical outlook to its beginnings in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as argued in a seminal book *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology and the Scientific Revolution* (1989). Other publications drawn upon in this section include Mianowski’s collection (2012) *Irish Contemporary Landscapes in Literature and the Arts* and *Out of the Earth: Ecocritical Readings of Irish Texts* (2010), edited by Christine Cusick.

<sup>43</sup> “The mechanical framework with its associated values of power and control sanctioned the management of both nature and society” (Merchant 235).

<sup>44</sup> In line with that concept, Leopold’s theory illustrates how all its layers mutually depend upon one another. He claims that “Land, then, is not merely soil; it is a fountain of energy flowing through a circuit of soils, plants, and animals. Food chains are the living channels which conduct energy upward; death and decay return it to the soil . . . . The upward flow of energy depends on the complex structure of the plant and animal community, much as the upward flow of sap in a tree depends on its complex cellular organization” (“A Biotic View” 268-269).

mechanised approach. In conclusion, power as promoted by ecofeminists is not based on the submission of nature or women; eco-empowerment stems from protecting and not mindlessly destroying of animate organisms and non-animate beings.

The third part of Chapter Two differs considerably from the previous sections. Unlike the earlier sub-chapters, “ ‘Lay it down there on the newspaper; / let it settle, unearth itself.’ Gendering Nature in the Poetry of Vona Groarke” focuses on “acting to overturn modern constructions of nature and women as culturally passive and subordinate” (Merchant xvi). To avoid gender binarism and clichés, Groarke studies relations between women and men in the context of nature, understood here as the constructed field upon which (as Judith Butler tends to describe it her philosophical works) “normalised and regulatory fictions” of gender are unveiled. Nature, hence, from the onset is to be comprehended as a construct, a collection of cultural, historical, etc., views, clichés and connotations associated with that concept. In addition, Groarke’s argument is more than proving nature or gender to be constructs. By transferring the whole debate into the seemingly neutral, phenomenological and biologic background, she subverts the nature / culture dichotomy. In doing so, Groarke focuses on the cultural and social dimensions of nature-gender correlations. Her poetry demonstrates how the process of nature-contextualising is carried out in language, and what linguistic means are employed to make it feasible and hide its arbitrary and conventional character. In other words, in Groarke’s poems, nature becomes the background and the screen upon which gender stereotypes of femininity and masculinity are projected. Applying a formal poetic schedule, Groarke creates in her works personified male and female characters from the plant world, and by making them “performatively act out” the excessive patterns of femininity and masculinity, she proves her point of the constructed character of the parties involved, including nature itself. As argued in this section, to Groarke, nature performs the function of “the third party” and “the third agent” (as defined by Griffin) in the women-men dyad (“Ecofeminism” 219). Questioning gender’s allegedly “natural” context discloses the fictions of gender’s own “naturalness” (Griffin, “Ecofeminism” 219). Laying bare the apparent “naturalness” of the narrated natural world triggers the empowering process of bringing to the discourse’s surface what is concealed (suppressed) in gender relations. In Groarke’s poetry, the textually empowering reading against the grain of gender of (eco) tales releases them from invisibility and it draws attention to what is hidden and silenced in-between the lines.

The final section of Chapter Two “The Empowered Female Environmental Consciousness as the Source of the Spiritual in The Poetry of Sinéad Morrissey” introduces another aspect in which relations with nature can empower women, that of appealing to one’s spiritual needs. In other words, for women, nature can be perceived as an open, ever-available, non-judgemental and non-discriminatory source of spirituality that may fill in the gap left in the absence or impossibility of the organised religion. Nonetheless, it has to be admitted that

Morrissey's poetry poses a true challenge in terms of this problem. Her poems are debates with God who has created the world and, then, abandoned it. The female speaker's attitude can be best captured by what one of the characters of Iris Murdoch's novel *The Bell* said: "there is a God, but I do not believe in Him" (308). Thus, Morrissey's poems are full of the traces of God's (previous) presence but not of His current guardianship. In this context, nature remains the only connection (mediator) reminding people that God had ever been present on earth. In Morrissey's earlier poetry, one might clearly detect the young speaker's arguments with the absent God. Because God seems to be inattentive, people try to look for Him even in natural disasters or cataclysms. It appears as if even God's supposed anger was more welcome by people than His silence and indifference. In Morrissey's more mature poems, her speakers perceive nature as the representation of Life, valid on its own terms, without regarding it as the reflection or emanation of deity. With regard to methodology, the following sub-chapter outlines feminist process theology. The scholar to whose academic work it is most indebted is Carol P. Christ who has a doctoral degree in Religious Studies from Yale University.<sup>45</sup> On the whole, in Morrissey's poetry, the natural world can be viewed as a female-empowering source of spiritual sustenance and affirmation. Such an approach is not synonymous with pantheism, though. It does not reduce the transcendental to natural manifestation. Quite to the contrary, it may even demonstrate the impossibility of transcribing women's need for the spiritual onto a natural platform. Nonetheless in relying upon nature-based spiritual resources, women are not dependent upon the patriarchal vision of God and the restrictions arising from it.

Chapter Three, **Against Power-Over: Irish Women's Empowerment through Resistance** deals with women's resistance to patriarchal domination in its most extreme form, namely that of symbolic and actual violence. The concluding chapter of the book analyses the defiant responses to attempts to subordinate women in an organised and systemic way by the means of cultural, political or historical instruments.<sup>46</sup> However even though power may not be negotiable or consensual, it always generates resistance: "Foucault (1982) also maintains that resistance is a *necessary precondition* for the operation of power: there can be no power without resistance" (Hook 84), emphasis original.<sup>47</sup> And this resistance (namely, how it is manifested) constitutes the subject matter of the Chapter Three. The first part of Chapter Three "Resisting the Confinement of 'Other People's Houses': Female Empowerment and Political Emancipation in The Poetry of Vona Groarke," examines women's subjugation as a part of

---

<sup>45</sup> It is mostly her recent works [such as *She Who Changes: Re-Imagining the Divine in the World* (2003)] that have influenced the feminist understanding of the spiritual in that section.

<sup>46</sup> For more on domination of women see Allen's *The Power of Feminist Theory*.

<sup>47</sup> Foucault argues that "power is not a matter of consent. In itself, it is not the renunciation of freedom, a transfer of rights, or power of each and all delegated to a few (which does not prevent the possibility that consent may be a condition for the existence or the maintenance of a power relation)" ("The Subject and Power" 340).

political and national domination of Ireland. In Groarke's poems, the discussed strategies of resistance are subversively transferred onto the "home front," onto the women's domestic and spatial area: interior design, architecture, house decoration, food supply and other domestic "backstage" activities. Groarke's persona tracks down the heterotopic narratives in the arrangement of the living space, in the decorative interior details, rendering the life philosophy of the owners and in the political message that the space around us is to communicate to the viewers. In Groarke's poetry, one is allowed an insight into the private face of power that is usually hidden behind its official representations. Whether inspecting colonial Big House architecture or a modern housing estate, Groarke's poems operate on bringing power contradictions to light and revealing incongruities disclosed beneath the surface of the discourse. To a large extent, that part draws upon Arendt's philosophical works and Hook's (2010) re-examining of the spatial discourse in *Foucault, Psychology, and the Analytics of Power*. Women's resistance in this section is manifested in their suspicion of the Grand Narratives, their immunity to pathos, and scepticism of the rhetoric of (Irish) nationalism. By the design of the space around them and their perceptiveness in reading visual codes of spatial organisation, women in Groarke's poetry resist ideology implied in latent constructivist messages. Hence it is neither a direct combat or armed resistance, but everyday domestic arrangements that can be an act of defiance against the Big House colonial and patriarchal discourse.

Quite a different aspect is probed in "Resisting Power Realised as Violence: 'A Power Failure' and Female Empowerment in the Poetry of Sinéad Morrissey." In Morrissey's poems, politically-grounded violence is examined in its civic dimension: how it affects voluntary and non-voluntary actors of its manifestation. Rather than weighing political rights or wrongs, Morrissey's work focuses on the way an individual is confronted in the face of violence. With regard to the Troubles in the North, the poet does not evoke historical or political arguments about the background of the conflict. Instead, in her poems, she looks at how daily existence in the shade of the acts of terror alters the lives and behaviour of average citizens, and how much people's day-to-day routine is transformed. In other words, Morrissey's poetry seems to resist power realised as violence mostly on the grounds of the effect it has upon ordinary people, depicting how it changes their perspectives, life choices and future options. Thus, resistance is presented here as written in the discourse of power, and even more in the discourse of violence. As shown by Arendt, the strategies of resistance to violence can be complicated when violence itself originates as a strategy of resistance. The following part demonstrates how resistance against violence becomes violence itself. "The practice of violence, like all action, changes the world, but the most probable change is to a more violent world" (Arendt, *On Violence* 80). Analysing international occurrences of violence (i.e. the Chechnya partisans striking back at Russian civilians or the terrorist attack of

11/9/ 2001), the section looks in a more detailed way into the causes and effects of violence to comprehend its derivational roots.

“Resisting The Victimisation of Women in the Poetry of Mary O’Donoghue” probes the strategies of women’s resistance against being victimised by violence applied to them. Therefore, examining the narratives inspired by Biblical, mythological, sociological (domestic violence) and historical sources, O’Donoghue seems to argue that women in patriarchal society have to resort to defiant acts of resistance to save their health, self-respect and dignity. The textual accounts of women’s narratives found in O’Donoghue’s poems testify that even when punished with death or torture, resistance is never entirely abandoned, though it may take different forms. In O’Donoghue’s poetry, resisting the victimisation of women is absolutely crucial for female empowerment. While scrutinising the institutionalised violence against women (especially domestic and sexual violence) depicted in O’Donoghue’s poetry, this section aims to resist turning women into a class of victims by the nature of gender stereotypes. The systemic process of female victimisation does not help the victims of abuse or violence. Instead of focusing on the perpetrators, it upholds masculine dominance by implying that women are natural victims, and, hence, making violence look less abhorrent.<sup>48</sup> As long as women are victimised, their strength and the potentiality of resistance is undermined or denied entirely. That is why “But grieving for the real victimization that women suffer must be a feminism that also teaches women how to see and use their enormous power so as never to be helpless victims again” (Wolf 142). Apart from other books and articles probing the issue of women’s victimisation, Bourdieu’s *Masculine Domination* (published in English in 2001) needs to be taken into account here in the first place.

The final sub-chapter of the book studies the manifestations of female powerlessness and the ways of resisting it. “‘Death, desirelessness: such kinless things:’ Resisting female powerlessness in the Poetry of Caitríona O’Reilly” analyses how powerlessness that has reached already women’s corporeal stage (affecting the female bodily “gravitation,” meandering through the maze of the alienated female body, seeing her health condition as fragile, facing the ageing process, fearing being undesired and desireless) can be rendered and, then, confronted via manageable textual imagery. Socially or culturally-induced female powerlessness (be it as a construct or / and an experienced practice) is not the ultimate and unalterable truth about the female existence. Hence, the distinction has to be made here between being deprived of power and being unable to attain it because of the reasons that are beyond one’s scope. Women’s power or female empowerment like everything else has its limits. Therefore, the concluding chapter of this monograph probes the boundaries of female

---

<sup>48</sup> During the process of victimization, women tend to be blamed to letting the acts of violence happen, as they did not prevent its occurrence. Blaming the victim strategy leads to the paradoxes that victims are criticised for their allegedly inappropriate behaviour, conduct, clothes, etc.

empowerment which are not usually subject to one's will or choice. For instance, the aforementioned existential fears such as "death, desirelessness . . . . kinless things" (the passage of time, loneliness, loss, death) that cannot be prevented. In this case, resistance does not mean a denial of one's apprehension or the elimination of its causes. Resistance here may appear quite paradoxical because it actually means non-action.<sup>49</sup> In other words, confronting the facts that cannot be altered makes one more powerful than renouncing the limits of one's power. In conclusion, O'Reilly's poetry shows that without acknowledging the power's boundaries, a woman cannot feel fully empowered.

---

<sup>49</sup> Compare Lukes 52.

## CHAPTER ONE

# POWER-WITH: IRISHWOMEN'S RELATIONAL EMPOWERMENT AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT IN CONNECTION

### 1.1. Female Relational Empowerment as “The Self-In Relation”<sup>1</sup> in the Poetry of Sinéad Morrissey

*We are constituted by our relationships and would be nothing without them. .  
. . Relationships are what we are. (Christ, She Who Changes)*

Searching for female empowerment's foundations, Jordan encourages women to recognise the potential arising from the relational connection model. In her view, this approach draws upon three main sources of women's power, enhancing the capabilities inherent in relational connections with the female self, others and the surrounding reality. To begin with, “[n]aming the strengths involved in relational competence, making these strengths explicit and clear, is a first step. . . . We also have to find ways to stay connected to our internal resources as well as the resources in the world around us” (Jordan, “Towards Competence” 24). Very much in the same vein, Maureen Walker argues that

---

<sup>1</sup> See Surrey (“The Self-in-Relation” 51–66). See also *Women's Growth In Connection: Writing From The Stone Center* (1991).



affirming relationality as a central figure in women's development (Miller, 1988) . . . provides a liberating language for conceptions of self – a language that says clearly and powerfully that to grow through action in relationship with others is both necessary and good. (“Race, Self” 92)

In other words, women's power in connection, defined as “growing through action in relationship with others” (Walker, “Race, Self” 92) is “the process of enlarged vision and energy, stimulated through interaction, in a framework of emotional connection” (Surrey, “Relationship and Empowerment” 171). Therefore, female relational empowerment results from

the mutual feeling of knowing and being with the other, immersed in experience along with our own. Such connections provide a continual source of growth for the individual and the relationship. This form of connection has startlingly positive effects which Jean Baker Miller (1986) calls “the five good things”: zest (vitality); a more accurate picture of oneself and others; an increased sense of self-worth; an increased desire and ability to act; and a desire for more connection. (Dooley and Fedele 230)

However before being able to participate in relational empowerment's “good things,” the necessary pre-conditions have to be fulfilled. Among others, Fletcher enumerates: “the ability to experience and express emotion, the ability to participate in the development of another, and an expectation that relational interactions can yield to mutual growth” (31). Furthermore, women's relational power is not superimposed or forced upon anybody, as it involves voluntary, mutual and enabling capacities.<sup>2</sup> As explained by Surrey, female relational empowerment comprises “power with others, that is power in connection” (“Relationship and Empowerment” 163). According to this view, such a capacity signifies

. . . the motivation, freedom, and capacity to act purposefully, with the mobilization of the energies, resources, strengths, or powers of each person through a mutual, relational process. Personal empowerment can be viewed only through the larger lens of power through connection, that is, through the establishment of mutually empathic and mutually empowering relationships. Thus personal empowerment and the relational context through which this emerges must always be considered simultaneously. (Surrey, “Relationship and Empowerment” 164)

Unlike traditional, patriarchal understanding of power based upon separation, disconnection and self-reliance, the “alternative model assumes that power or the ability to act does not have to be a scarce resource, nor based on zero-sum assumptions – certainly not in interactions between human beings” (Surrey, “Relationship and Empowerment” 165–166). The aforementioned outlook is

---

<sup>2</sup> As a logical extension of the aforementioned claim, relational empowerment means “an exercise of power that was covert and unobtrusive, where people behaved in a certain way, not because they were forced by ‘A’ to do so, but it seemed like the right, or only reasonable, thing to do” (Fletcher 16).

defined by Surrey as “the self-in-relation” (“The Self-in-Relation” 51–66). Consequently, Plumwood advocates the view of relational power that manages to challenge the contested here duality of either pursuing one's own independence or becoming completely fused with the other.

This view of self-in-relationship . . . is an account that avoids atomism but . . . enables a recognition of interdependence and relationship without falling into the problems of indistinguishability, that acknowledges both continuity and difference, and that breaks the culturally posed false dichotomy of egoism and altruism of interests; it bypasses both masculine ‘separation’ and traditional-feminine ‘merger’ accounts of the self. (“Nature, Self” 172)

Following this line of thinking, Surrey criticises the “developmental theory [that] stresses the importance of separation from the mother at early stages of childhood development (Mahler, 1975), from the family at adolescence (Erickson, 1963), and from teachers and mentors in adulthood (Levinson, 1978) in order for the individual to form a distinct, separate identity” (“The Self-in-Relation” 52). In view of that, she elaborates this concept as follows:

The notion of the self-in-relation involves an important shift in emphasis from separation to relationship as the basis for self-experience and development. Further, relationship is seen as the basic goal of development: that is, the deepening capacity for relationship and relational competence. The self-in-relation model assumes that other aspects of self (e.g., creativity, autonomy, assertion) develop within this primary context. That is, other aspects of self-development emerge in the context of relationship, and there is no inherent need to disconnect or to sacrifice relationship for self-development. (Surrey, “The Self-in-Relation” 53)

Considering the above, Morrissey's poem “Genetics,” being “a haunting exploration of how a separated mother and father have left their legacy in their daughter's hands” (Tillinghast 181) appears to be a reconnecting narrative of the female self-in relation, embedded in the generational family structures that enhance the speaker's relational empowerment:

The power to create, build, sustain, and deepen connection does not mean always being strong, but it does mean being able to stay connected through periods of ‘strength’ and ‘weakness’ and through wide ranges of different feelings. It is rarely possible to experience a full spectrum of empowerment in one relationship. For most people, empowerment occurs through the creation of multiple and varied, although often overlapping, relational structures for personal, educational, work, social, and political development. (Surrey, “Relationship and Empowerment” 175)

Included in *The State of the Prisons* (2005), “Genetics” renders female relational empowerment in the finest tradition of the seventeenth century English metaphysical poetry. Operating on a scientific conceit (such as genetic code), Morrissey's poem metaphorically depicts textually re-combined dynamics in blood-line relations. For that reason, the introductory triplet locates with

precision, nearby but not overlapping mother's and father's relational realms. The speaker's hands are the shared bodily territory where this genetic and emotional connection with her divorced parents is best manifested. Hence the opening declaration referring to her carefully studied hands / relations ("look at them with pleasure") testifies to the speaker's empowerment that she derives from her familial descent. Like the complicated DNA chain, the poem's rhyming villanelle pattern is equally intricate: the word "**palms**" is repeated in the first line, then in the sixth, and twelfth, to be unexpectedly rhymed with **psalms**. Morrissey's lyric about the child-parent connections retains the nursery rhyming: **hands – lands – friends – hands – stands – hands – demands – hands** (3–4–7–9–10–15–16–19). In regard to the remaining end (not fully rhymed) lines, **pleasure** (2) seems to reiterate in **the future** (17); **lovers** (5) partially resonates in **over** (11); and **register** (14) echoes with **river** (8). The poem's elaborate pattern aptly matches the persona's convoluted genetic and relational codes: parents' love, the child's birth, parents' divorce, and their textual re-union in the child's loving narrative / hands. Butler in "Consolations of Observation" argues: "Considering her separated parents in terms of her own hands in villanelle 'Genetics', the fingers being her father's while the palms her mother's, the poet notes 'My body is their marriage register. / I re-enact their wedding with my hands'" (105). The female voice in Morrissey's poem begins her narrative:

1. My father's in my fingers, but my mother's in **my palms**.
  2. I lift them up and look at them with **pleasure** –
  3. I know my parents made me by my **hands**.
- (TSOTP 13)

In addition, in "Genetics" the second triplet reintroduces a geographical / astrologic metaphysical imagery ("separate lands, / to separate hemispheres") as if taken directly from John Donne's poetry (compare "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning"). Similarly, the explicit evocation of "may sleep with other lovers" indicates its roots in the court lyric. As does the neatly contrasted textual counterpoint of the previously built argument: "but in me they touch where fingers link to palms." The speaker in "Genetics" admits:

4. They may have been repelled to separate **lands**,
  5. to separate hemispheres, may sleep with other **lovers**,
  6. but in me they touch where fingers link to **palms**.
- (TSOTP 13)

On the textual level, the persona in "Genetics" recalls the past distress caused by the disintegration of her parents' marriage. Emphasised with the time-distanced archaic idiom ("friends / who quarry for their image by a river") the daughter's relational crisis might be decoded in the context of the other expression ("the river of my childhood") included in the poem "Hazel Goodwin Morrissey Brown." Poignant "at least I know" renders succinctly the emotive process during which the child had to come to terms with her parents' separation

and now tries to “keep them together” “at least” in the image of her hands. She acknowledges:

7. With nothing left of their togetherness but **friends**
  8. who quarry for their image by a **river**,
  9. at least I know their marriage by my **hands**.
- (TSOTP 13)

In “Genetics,” the speaker’s belief that love, even once having come to a legal end, is always holy draws directly upon the seventeenth century poetic tradition. Subsequently, the metaphysical love is manifested in the conceit of a temple (see Donne’s “The Flea”) – the chapel made of the child’s hands is where the parents’ bygone affection finds its most sublimated and safe haven. The persona in “Genetics” argues:

10. I shape a chapel where a steeple **stands**.
  11. And when I turn it **over**,
  12. my father’s by my fingers, my mother’s by my **palms**
- (TSOTP 13)

The parental union in the child’s hands does not have to be sanctified either by the church (“demure before a priest reciting psalms”) or by the law (“My body is their marriage register”) but by their daughter’s love. The claim “I re-enact their wedding with my hands” reiterates Donne’s argument to whose poetic ancestry Morrissey’s narrative pays clear structural and verbal tribute (see “demure,” “quarry,” “hemispheres” etc.). The female voice in “Genetics” claims:

13. demure before a priest reciting **psalms**.
  14. My body is their marriage **register**.
  15. I re-enact their wedding with **my hands**.
- (TSOTP 13)

According to the logic of the rhetoric, the last stanza of “Genetics” brings the argument’s resolution in which Morrissey’s speaker reaches a conclusion to her pondering. Unexpectedly, in the closing passage, the new addressee appears. The persona’s invocation to the listening ear implies a readiness to hand down her own genetic code to another generation. The offspring would, then, also find in their fingers and palms, the traces of parental love that has given beginning to a new life. The speaker in “Genetics” pleads:

16. So take me with you, take up the skin’s **demands**
  17. for mirroring in bodies of **the future**.
  18. I’ll bequeath my fingers, if you bequeath your **palms**.
  19. We know our parents make us by our **hands**.
- (TSOTP 13)

Considering the above, the female self-in-relation is more than an amalgamation of the past and present relational connections and previous genetic codes. Partially repeating the encoded familial patterns, a new being produces its own generic and genetic structure. What is more,

It connotes also a way of being in the world as part of a unit larger than the individual, where the “whole” is experienced as greater than a sum of the parts. The relationship or the new relational unit (e.g., couple, family, friendship, network, or work groups) comes to have a unique existence beyond the individuals, to be attended to, cared about, and nurtured. (Surrey, “The Self-in-Relation” 62)

In other words, in “Genetics,” Morrissey’s involved poetic structure and a sophisticated narrative form accurately render the intricate complexity of the depicted relational and “genetic” permutations. Taking everything into account, in Morrissey’s poetry one can clearly observe what Jordan describes as the “relational resilience” (“Relational Resilience” 28–46). As demonstrated in “Genetics,” the relational resilience requires

. . . a movement out of narrow self-consciousness into the awareness of being part of something larger than the separate self, a ‘resonance with,’ whether this be a relationship with another person, feeling part of nature, or some aspect of spiritual involvement. It is when we feel most separate from others and from the flow of life that we are at most risk. (Jordan, “Relational Resilience” 36)

Consequently, the poem “Matter” examines life’s origin from the viewpoint of ancient philosophers and thinkers, a viewpoint that is contested by the female speaker. Hence on entering the philosophical debate with the way classical theorists interpreted the composition of matter and its original derivation, Morrissey’s persona writes her own narrative into these explorations. In other words, “Matter” operates on juxtaposing two dichotomous concepts of empowerment: the traditional power-over based on independence and separation from others and contrasted with it, female relationality which draws upon connections with others. In reaction to the power-over system, contemporary women thinkers advocate empowerment understood here as “power with others, that is, power in connection, or relational power. Thus we have talked about mutual empowerment (each person is empowered) through relational empowerment (the relationship is empowered)” (Surrey, “Relationship and Empowerment” 163). To put it straightforwardly, Morrissey’s “Matter” contrasts the masculine drive to gain exclusive control over the processes of pro-creation (represented by Aristotle, St Augustine, Paracelsus or Leeuwenhoek respectively) and the female relational empowerment (advocated by the speaker herself and the women narrated in the poem). For learned scholars of the past:

Matter is transitory and illusory . . . passive and inert, and that all motion originates from outside matter . . . . It is decided that in birth the female provides the matter (the menstruum, the yolk) and that the male provides the

form which is immaterial . . . It is decided that matter is dead . . . It is decided that the ovum is passive and the sperm is adventurous. That in sperm is the concentrated power of man's perfect being . . . Activity is the share of the men . . . Passivity is the share of the women. (Griffin, *Woman and Nature* 5, 8, 18, 24, 25, 38, 45)<sup>3</sup>

The female voice in "Matter" begins her argument with a lengthy exposition:

Aristotle observed and recorded it all –  
 that out of rainwater, the marrow  
 of the human spine, foam from the sea,  
 or the putrefying carcasses of bulls and horses  
 spring living beings: frogs, serpents, anchovies,  
 bees and scarabs, locusts, weevils, maggots.  
 (TTSW 13)

The elaborate six-lined sentence's structure functions like a meticulously arranged melodious catalogue, the selection of whose composites is determined by the reiterated sound pattern. To be precise, the cited fragment contains two lists: the opening register of the organic substances from whose matter life supposedly was to be generated, and following it, the inventory of animals' species that might be begotten in such a process. The first catalogue in "Matter" seems to be governed by the principle of the paired resonance. In view of that, the consonants "r" and "w" echo in "rainwater" and "marrow," consonants "f" and "s" resound in "of . . . spine, foam from the sea," then "r" and "s" pattern reverberate "or the putrefying carcasses of bulls and horses." The second list of animals that are to be brought to life is as carefully selected. Appropriately, it comprises the creatures of the earth: two types of beetles (scarabs and weevils), the sea beings (anchovies), the air spirits (locusts and bees) and animals living in-between several elements (such as snakes or frogs). Most of the aforementioned creatures (i.e. maggot or weevil) feed on dead matter. As in the previous case, a significant criterion for their selection is pronunciation and rhythmical composition. The latter catalogue is arranged in two lines of the three and five words: one-syllable, two-syllable and three-syllable sets respectively, completed with the two words of two syllables. The rhythmically regular enumeration creates an impression of scientific thoroughness and scholarly exactness. Morrissey's narrative does not go into details concerning Aristotle's opinions on each gender's role in conception. The poem reduces the thinker's input into this discourse to "observing and recording." However referring to other academic sources, one may explore Aristotle's philosophical views in that area:

<sup>3</sup> Carol H. Cantrell describes Griffin's book *Woman and Nature: The Roaring Inside Her* as a "forty-page long compendium of quotations and paraphrases from Western philosophical and theological writings in roughly chronological order, all having to do intertwined generalizations about the nature of matter and the nature of women" (200).

Aristotle's biological theory viewed the female of the species as an incomplete or mutilated male, since the coldness of the female body would not allow the menstrual blood to perfect itself as semen. In the generation of offspring, the female contributed the matter or passive principle. This was the material upon which the active male principle, the semen, worked in creating the embryo. . . . Power and motion were contributed solely by the semen. . . . The female supplied the nutriment – the catamenia, or menstrual blood – on which the qualities of the male could operate. (Merchant 13)

As shown, “Aristotelian philosophy, while unifying matter and form in each individual being, associated activity with maleness and passivity with femaleness. Form reigned superior over dead, passive matter” (Merchant 13). Antonio remarks that “Aristotle negatively defined the female role in reproduction in terms of the female's inability to transmit the active life principle to her offspring; in his view, she offered only dumb, inferior matter” (221). Consequently, the speaker in “Matter” continues her dialectic probing of Aristotle's opinions on living matter and on the role of small organisms that enhance the putrefaction process. In examining the problem, the female voice in Morrissey's poem seems to be unconvinced that decay-processing animals deserve a special place among others, just because their activity is supposed to facilitate a new life appearing on the remains of dead matter. Contrary to the above, what seems to enthrall the persona in “Matter” in the images of putrefaction is the subversive potential to deconstruct the old structures:

So long as the alluvial mud remained, or rotted  
wood, or rinsed white bones of crocodiles  
after the wash abated and the salvaged couple  
and their braying entourage were pitched  
on top of Ararat, wasps and gnats and fleas  
would manifest once more in clouds and colonies  
without a union of the sexes (like Mary)  
and the earth would effortlessly teem.

(TTSW 13)

In examining the ancient philosophers' studies on decay, the female voice in “Matter” challenges learned men's attempts to explain life's origin entirely from their own gender's perspective, diminishing or excluding entirely women's role in that process (“without a union of the sexes (like Mary) / and the earth would effortlessly teem”). As a result, the carnal “union of the sexes” is considered unworthy of great male philosophical minds. In this light, to beget a new life, a sexual act and female co-participation in creation are not regarded as necessary. In other words, the speaker in “Matter” undermines the patriarchal derivation of the matter procreation theory, according to which life could be manufactured without the mediation of women and sexual activity. Abundant with repugnant ingredients, the fragment cited below elaborates on the instructions, i.e. how to “make” an animal from faeces. One can only imagine what morbid experiments must have preceded the uncanny directions below:

Recipes for rats and 'small white puppies  
 a child might play with' followed  
 during the Middle Ages, which typically included  
 hay, excrement, dirty shirts, wool  
 simmered for an hour then hung to dry  
 in an outhouse or chicken coop

(TTSW 13)

No wonder that the female voice in the examined poem distances herself from the matter-generating recipes: "(the air of such places being itself / so mutable and laden with infusoria, it acts as a bridge to life)," openly mocking their pseudo-scientific foundations ("Golems / moulded from clay still needed a spell / to keep them animated"). What is more, Morrissey's persona doubts even more the lasting span of their alleged life-manufacturing effects ("growing bigger and more complicated, / the offspring of the elements / were in danger of winding down,"). Having articulated her objections, the speaker in "Matter" proceeds to stage another canonical male scientific authority – Paracelsus. Paracelsus is claimed to have believed in the "unity of vital spirit and phenomenal matter" (Merchant 102). His approach, defined as *vitalism*, "designates the unity of matter and spirit as a self-reflective entity, in which the spiritual kernel is considered the real substance and the material 'cover' a mere phenomenon" (Merchant 117). According to Paracelsus, "nature combines the seed of the man and the seed of the woman. Of the two seeds, the better and stronger will form the other, according to its nature" (qtd. in Merchant 18). On the basis of the above, some feminist researchers, like quoted here Merchant, argue that Paracelsus "in contrast to Aristotle . . . assigned equality to the male and female principles in sexual generation" (18). On this reading, Paracelsus's outlook on women was supposed to be more unbiased than his earlier predecessors:

Woman is like the earth and all the elements and in this sense she may be considered a matrix; she is the tree which grows in the earth and the child is like the fruit born of the tree . . . And yet the woman in her own way is also a field of the earth and not at all different from it. She replaces it, so to speak; she is the field and the garden mold in which the child is sown and planted.(Paracelsus qtd. in Merchant 26–27)

Unlike Aristotle and St Augustine, Paracelsus has gone further in his experiments in creating life out of dead matter. In "Matter," the scholar argues in his "laws of spontaneous generation" that the principles of sexless reproduction could be applied to human conception as well. Therefore Morrissey's poem draws upon the scientist's conviction that "*the semen of a man / putrefy by itself for forty days . . . shall begin . . . to live.*" Looked at from that angle, the rotting male semen is maintained to be sufficient to create a new life without the need of the female ovum. The persona in "Matter" argues that



yet Paracelsus, arch-advocate of decay,  
 saw no reason not to apply  
 the laws of spontaneous generation  
 to ourselves: *let the semen of a man  
 putrefy by itself for forty days in a sealed  
 cucurbite, it shall begin, at last, to live.*

(TTSW 13–14)

On the whole, the more allegedly “scientific” argument is put forward in “Matter,” the more overtly derisive tone the narrative employs. Accordingly, Paracelsus’s conviction that the human foetus can be generated from rotting human blood is rendered with the mocking alliterated auditory sound feast (“**f**ed, **h**uman, **f**leet **h**omunculus, **h**ad **f**eatures of a **h**uman”). The female voice in Morrissey’s poem ridicules:

Fed on an arcanum of human blood  
 and kept in darkness, his fleet homunculus  
 had all the features of a human child.

(TTSW 14)

In “Matter,” the passage’s ear-pleasing musical composition forms a clearly noticeable verbal and textual design. In line with that, the archaically stylised idiom (“arcanum” and “homunculus”) is structured within a neat sound base. What is more, the regular consonantal repetition (mostly “h” and “f” alternately, as shown in bolted letters above) is accompanied by a melodious vowel presence. Bearing that in mind, one cannot but appreciate the linguistic dexterity of the “arch-advocate of decay” or the visual-sound extravagance of “a sealed cucurbite.” In the microscopic study of semen, Leeuwenhoek, the seventeenth–eighteenth century scientist, resumes Paracelsus’s line of research. “After Anton Van Leeuwenhoek’s (1632–1723) introduction of the microscope, the problem of generation began to take on new dimensions in the controversy between spermists and ovists over preformation” (Merchant 162). Morrissey’s poem addresses Leeuwenhoek’s microscope experiments in detail:

Leeuwenhoek bore this experiment in mind  
 when, decades later, using his own microscope,  
 he scrutinised his sperm, magnified  
 as much as three hundred times and fashioned  
 like a bell, with the wrought perfection  
 of a tiny man curled inside each globule.

(TTSW 14)

As argued in “Matter,” the power-over model equates interdependence or the neediness of others with weakness and it advocates non-relational single male authority, which is not shared with women but yielded by men exclusively. With this in mind, Morrissey’s speaker wishes to resist the scientists’ misogynist attempts to edit out femininity from the discourse concerning conception. That is why in the analysed poem Leeuwenhoek microscopic study of sperm is textually

rendered in a hyperbolically absurd tone. The cited fragment deliberately shifts the focus from men-centred discourse to foreground women's perspective and imagery. For that reason, the simile "fashioned / like a bell" evokes the feminine correspondence to the bowl / cup, connoted with the uterus rather than the spermatogonium. Additionally, the sarcastic expression "with the wrought perfection / of a tiny man curled inside each globule," with its rounded shape, seems to be reminiscent of the female ovum. What is more, the derisive phrase "a tiny man inside" aptly ridicules the male-only reproduction. To balance the men's one-sex conception theory, the speaker in "Matter" introduces the model of female parthenogenesis:

Ovists may have envisaged instead  
 a sacred cabinet of children, encased  
 inside each egg, opening in time  
 both backwards and forwards  
 to the breaking of Eve and the End  
 of the World, the likelihood remained:  
 (TTSW 14)

However in "Matter" both single-sex reproductive paradigms (parthenogenesis and male-only conception) are questioned in Morrissey's persona's mocking idiom. An ironic "a sacred cabinet of children, **encased** / inside each egg" seems to echo derisively "a tiny man inside." Mary's immaculate conception ("the breaking of Eve and the End / of the World") works as a pun on "eve" as the temporal span and the female progenitor of humankind. In Morrissey's poem, the phrase "whether one believed in this . . . or whether one went back / to what the Greeks expressed / as the facts of reproduction," appears to synthesise all the previous claims about the reproductive discourse. It questions the misogynistic and pseudo-scientific approach ("the evidence of / a light-blached workshop and a knack / for polished glass,") according to which ancient thinkers perceived women as (redundant) containers and mere semen vessels for the male living matter. The referred to approach is juxtaposed with female relational empowerment and modern women's demand to decide about their own bodies and their own sexuality. Bearing that in mind, the persona in "Matter" expresses her / self in connection with women of the past, supporting "a woman's quest for contraception" that would allow them to control the reproductive process:

a woman's quest for contraception,  
 stacked against the odds of dogged visitors  
 finding lodging in the womb  
 at any beckoning, was hopeless.  
 (TTSW 14)

From time immemorial, as argued in the examined text, the perfunctory "dogged visitors" have made use of female bodies as they wished ("finding lodging in the womb / at any beckoning"). The out-of-date "contraceptive"

attempts enumerated in “Matter” testify to the inventiveness and despair of women left to their own devices with the family planning. Hence in Morrissey’s poem obsolete birth control methods are arranged in a form of the bizarre catalogue with alliterated lists (“**olive oil**, the **pulp** of a **pomegranate**,” “**burnt, brewed**,” “**inhaled, ingested, / inserted into**”). The repeated phrase “No wonder” emphasises the speaker’s understanding that women had to resort to inefficient and frequently detrimental to female bodies contraceptive practices, such as the ones itemised below:

No wonder Soranus suggested water from blacksmiths’.  
 No wonder olive oil, the pulp of a pomegranate,  
 honey, pine resin, mercury, beeswax,  
 pennyroyal, tobacco juice, arrowroot, tansy  
 were burnt, brewed, inhaled, ingested,  
 inserted into the cervix, or buried in fields left fallow  
 if the coppery stain of menstruation  
 persisted into the seventh day.  
 No wonder witches consulted the sky.

(TTSW 14)

Considering the above, Morrissey’s persona stresses that there is more to life’s origin than plain scientific facts. As shown in “Matter,” people’s views on conception have always been implicated in their normative and philosophical beliefs that express their values, current opinions and prejudice. What is more, even today’s modern advancement of knowledge cannot reduce the life’s beginning to pure science. For parents, as in Morrissey’s poem, their unborn child remains a living miracle. That is why the awareness gained due to modern medical discoveries of how the ovum becomes fertilised does not prevent the female speaker from imagining her child as a mysterious creature who has to “hiccup and kick / against the windowless dark.” The account’s tenderness diverges from the medical jargon’s dry idiom (see “feet to my heart / and skull to the pelvic cradle”). Beginning with a concessive argument “and though I know,” the persona in “Matter” voices her doubts with a contrastive statement “I still think.” She concedes:

And though I know, thanks in part to Pasteur –  
 to his gauze impediments and penchant  
 for boiling – how you came to enter,  
 how you came to roll and hiccup and kick  
 against the windowless dark, feet to my heart  
 and skull to the pelvic cradle, . . .

(TTSW 14)

Bearing it in mind, Morrissey’s speaker imagines her child’s life’s origin to be more than the matter to whom she and her partner have given the form (compare “our lovemaking as a kind of door / to wherever you were”). Conceiving of their son as sprouting from “an earthenware pot,” the female

voice in "Matter" mocks the related ancient theories about life starting in decaying organic substances. She says:

of our lovemaking as a kind of door  
to wherever you were, waiting in matter,  
spooled into a form I have not yet been shown  
by the unprompted action of nature,  
by something corrupting in an earthenware pot  
(TTSW 14–15)

Morrissey's poem's ending introduces a female alchemic figure (a woman scientist?) who composes her own recipe for begetting a child. Unlike ancient life-generating formulas abundant with putrefying ingredients, this method consists of invoking the benevolent forces of nature. Without God-like arrogant presumptions, the relationally empowered conception is filled with hopeful expectancy in connection with the female self, the world and others: "Stay the wind on a river eight weeks after equinox – / witness blue-green mayflies lift off / like a shaken blanket; add algae / and alchemical stones to the lake floor / in the strengthening teeth of winter, what swans" (TTSW 15). In *The Irish Times* review of Morrissey's collection (2009) *Through the Square Window*, Sampson aptly notices that "*Matter* . . . moves through 'the laws of spontaneous generation' to observe a contemporary conception . . . This slip into abstraction is executed with such grace that we believe we're reading about empirical science – then find out we've imagined conception afresh" ("Avoiding the Lure" 13). In conclusion, Morrissey's "Matter" probes two contrasting models of life's origin: one based on systemic power-over and disconnection from nature, body, women and human sexuality (see the patriarchal line of scholarly investigation) and the female self-in-relation empowerment in which all the creation is viewed as interdependent with other relational forces. Following this line of thinking, women's relational empowerment is the "power through connection . . . empowerment and the relational context through which this emerges must always be considered simultaneously (Surrey, "Relationship and Empowerment" 164). On a similar vein, Morrissey's "Apocrypha" mediates wittily on life's origin as being the outcome of (denied) relational context. The narrative's opening discloses the young speaker's girlish fears about the imagined horrors of the future labour:

When I was ten and convinced  
I would never have children  
  
simply by keeping my underwear on  
at night-time, I was disarmed  
  
by the history  
of Mary Ann Sexton –  
  
mother, camp-follower, picker

(TTSW 23)

What follows in Morrissey's poem is the humorously practical implication about "keeping my underwear on / at night-time" to prevent pregnancy. From an adult-narrated perspective, the persona in "Apocrypha" draws upon the anecdote about a woman impregnated when wounded by a sperm-covered bullet. Furthermore the phrasing "I was disarmed / by the history" constitutes a bitter pun on the discourse of war. Appropriately, the modifiers characterising Mary Ann Sexton are not any less unusual in their ambiguity. One might ponder whether in "Apocrypha" "a camp-follower" refers to the army-paid sexual worker or an ardent military follower. Whichever option is preferred, the implausible narrative about Sexton's "accidental" conception leaves one in astonishment. In regard to the previously analysed "Matter," both Morrissey's poems mock the phantasmagorical narratives concerning the miraculous and sexless ways of conception. The persona in "Apocrypha" relates:

and of how her womb  
was pierced by a bullet

still wet from the testicle  
of a Roundhead Lieutenant

at the Battle of Marston Moor.

(TTSW 23)

When attempting to apply common sense to the quoted events, one must dismiss them immediately. Nonetheless within the rationale of the discourse, it does not matter whether the related in "Apocrypha" occurrence actually took place or not. True or not, Morrissey's narrative seems to be definitely worth (re)telling, especially if one compares the atrocities of the military strife with the marvellous conception as its side-effect. As the speaker in "Apocrypha" herself is perfectly aware of the readers' potential disbelief, she tries to justify this unusual story with a qualified explanation ("As though the slaughter itself / required climax") then summing it up with a dismissive commentary ("this was as improbable"). The persona in Morrissey's poem speculates:

As though the slaughter itself

required climax and sought out  
the unlikeliest agents, or  
a new king pined  
to be born, this was as improbable

a conception  
as the physical laws of the earth  
and all the revolving planets  
could allow.

(TTSW 23)

On the whole, "Apocrypha" ends with a derisive implication that a woman seems to be doomed in the face of her reproductive fate when even the clothing barrier or the lack of sexual intercourse appear to be insufficient to prevent conception. In Morrissey's text, the fanciful textual paths into motherhood are accompanied with an erotic "stained, / indefatigable purpose / over my bedspread." The poem's concluding self-ironic statement ("I, too, would be done for") humorously depicts the persona's reconciliation with the unavoidably destined prospective pregnancy. In "Apocrypha," the couplet form aptly renders the notion of doubleness in coupling and, then, in pregnancy. In the review of *Through the Square Window* Sampson argues that Morrissey's "poems of pregnancy deliver an . . . existential drop" ("Avoiding the Lure" 13). The female voice in "Apocrypha" asks:

What hope was underwear now?  
If destiny hovered

with green wings and a stained,  
indefatigable purpose

over my bedspread,  
I, too, would be done for.

(TTSW 23)

In "Apocrypha," the aforementioned strategy of doubling dismisses once and for all the idea of single-sex reproduction explored before. Morrissey's poem's ending points to the conclusion about the interdependence of the sexes. Without the contribution of either one, life's origin seems to be impossible. All things considered, despite its self-mocking tone, the collection *Through the Square Window* (2009) from which "Matter" and "Apocrypha" are taken, examines mothering as a connecting experience, leading to mutual relational empowerment. As Surrey stresses "[b]y 'mothering' I do not necessarily mean what has been traditionally labelled as 'one-directional' mothering, but attentiveness and emotional responsiveness to the other as an intrinsic, ongoing aspect of one's own experience" ("The Relational Self" 37). Despite the theme's apparent familiarity and potential traps of over-emotive account, Morrissey's poems succeed in avoiding banality, confessionalism or sentimentalism. Quite the contrary, it is the very concept of "reclaiming" motherhood that critics regard as the most accomplished and rewarding in the volume *Through the Square Window*. Johnston observes:

Perhaps Morrissey's most remarkable achievement in this collection is the way that she makes motherhood and childhood strange. This, is, refreshingly, not the poetry of the unequivocal parental joy; human relations are marked by ambiguity in a world where nothing can be taken for granted, not least one's self. In a manner that is reminiscent of Plath and her ambivalent poetry of motherhood, the sonnet "*Love, the nightwatch . . .*" depicts the shock of giving birth in striking detail and with a truly extraordinary perspective to create a potent poetic after-shock of its own. ("Beyond Belfast" 108)

In “*Love, the nightwatch . . .*” addressed to the poet’s son Augustine, Morrissey’s persona wishes to record waiting for her child’s birth and commemorate the new-born’s first moments in the world. The lyrical and formally regular sonnet genre, with its full rhymes, provides a tight structural framework for the personal reminiscences. During the delivery, the female voice recalls feeling cared for (“attended”) and safe, as the protective company of her husband eases her fears and alleviates her labour pains. By squeezing her partner’s hand, the woman communicates to him the intensity of contractions and re-connects the man with the actual stage of the delivery process. The visible signs of their loving selves-in-relation remain on her husband’s hands much longer. In the same vein, Surrey reminds that “[T]he capacity to be ‘moved,’ to respond, and to ‘move’ the other represents the fundamental core of relational empowerment” (“Relationship and Empowerment” 168).<sup>4</sup> In line with that, the female voice in “*Love, the nightwatch . . .*” ponders:

Love, the nightwatch, gloved and gowned, attended.  
Your father held my hand. His hands grew bruised  
and for days afterwards wore a green and purple coverlet  
(TTSW 28)

As demonstrated in “*Love, the nightwatch . . .*” the bruises’ colour (“wore a green”) on her husband’s hands seems to be ironically connoted with the Irish male epic cycles. In the contemporary re-writing of the heroic tradition, it is the active and re-connecting participation of the father in the delivery process that breeds the persona’s appraisal more than valiant deeds of ancient heroes. Symbolically, guarded by his loving parents, the emergence of a new-born into the light seems to be religiously charged. In Morrissey’s poem, the holy discourse is continued in the simile of the child’s head to the shape of a baptismal bowl (“thumbed-in like a water font”). Subsequently, the tender “purple coverlet” refers to the alliterated “gloved and gowned.” The signifier “coverlet” reintroduces the melodious repetition of the echoed sound pattern in the subsequent words: “when he **held** you to the light, **held** your **delicate**, **dented** / **head**.” Morrissey’s speaker recalls:

when he held you to the light, held your delicate, dented  
head, thumbbed-in like a water font. They used  
stopwatches, clip charts, the distant hoof beats of a heart  
(divined, it seemed, by radio, so your call fell intertwined  
with taxicabs, police reports, the weather blowing showery  
from the north) and a beautiful fine white cane,  
(TTSW 28)

---

<sup>4</sup> Bergman and Surrey rightly point out that “[t]he zest and vitality of a couple’s relationship comes from *movement* – not from connection alone, but from *growth* in connection” (“Couple Therapy” 168), [emphasis original].

In “*Love, the nightwatch . . .*” the uniqueness of each and every childbirth experience is contrasted with homogenising hospital regulations, according to which a new-born has to be compartmentalised by the standard procedures (“stopwatches, clip charts”). In that estranging and depersonalised ambience even the child’s heartbeat may seem alien to the mother (“the distant hoof beats of a heart”). “Here, the instruments used in the operation are listed, as the mother fills her child in on the process of its entry into the world” (Johnston, “Beyond Belfast” 108). Additionally, what the persona in Morrissey’s poem records is the confusion arising from the interference of her infant’s voices with the annoying radio broadcast. Hence the first cry of the baby, superimposed on the background noise, as if trying to break through the surrounding din, announces loudly his presence to the whole world. The realistic account is soon taken over by the poetic image: “a beautiful fine white **cane**, / **carved** into a fish hook.” The sound pattern with a dominant “c” consonant remains central for the fragment beginning with “**children climbed**,” “**collapsing**,” and “**caving in**” – till the climactic “as you . . . **came** / –**crook**-shouldered.” The persona in “*Love, the nightwatch . . .*” admits:

. . . I was a haystack the children climbed  
and ruined, collapsing almost imperceptibly  
at first, then caving in spectacularly as you stuttered and came

– crook-shouldered, blue, believable, beyond me –  
in a thunder of blood, in a flood-plain of intimate stains.

(TTSW 28)

Comparing herself to a haystack (see “the children climbed / and ruined, collapsing almost imperceptibly”), the new parent renders the burden of overwhelming responsibility about the child’s current and future well-being. To the exhausted and astounded mother, the birth of the first child (the alliterated “**blue, believable, beyond me – / in a thunder of blood**”) seems to be a nearly surreal and unbelievable experience. In the analysed passage, the “intimate stains” of her own and the baby’s blood signify that the relational connection between them is sealed with mutual interdependence.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore Johnston comments on the polyphonic melody of the poem: the new-born’s “own wordless music,” “radio transmissions” and what she describes as “language’s own processes” (“Beyond Belfast” 108). In the critic’s own words:

Giving birth, the mother-as-speaker becomes a Plath-like metaphor: ‘a haystack’ . . . physical and metaphorical passage from one world to another is recorded through language’s own processes. It is clear that new parenthood

---

<sup>5</sup> According to Jordan, it happens because “there is clear symmetry in the mother-infant pair, particularly with regard to regulation, there are almost from birth, episodes of mutual recognition, (e.g., in gaze aversion or sucking). In the early days one sees the empathic attunement flowing largely from mother to infant, but, as Sullivan (1953) notes, there is early empathic responsiveness of the infant to the mother” (“The Meaning of Mutuality” 87).



has sharpened the poet's sense of the strangeness of the worlds in which we find ourselves, of the mysteries of existence – life before death, pre-verbal experience – and, above all, with language itself and how words shape and alter our ways of knowing and being in the world. Throughout, the processes of life and death, of nature and human nature, come under Morrissey's cool, relentless scrutiny. (Johnston, "Beyond Belfast" 108)

In a similar vein, Sampson observes that "*Love, the nightwatch* . . . is equally generous in the world it recruits to make sense of the moments of birth: from radio call signs to its metaphor of the mother as a haystack . . . .Nothing compromises the beautiful diction of this touching poem – and yet there *is* a wry, self-knowing akin to humour, on display" ("Avoiding the Lure" 13), emphasis original. Moreover Sampson praises this new tone in Morrissey's poetry, arguing that "all is not sweetness and light in Morrissey's imaginary; and with this new dark note, threat, or promise, the collection promises more for the future" ("Avoiding the Lure" 13).

Going back to the house inherited from her mother where the poet's son was conceived, the poem "Townhouse" constitutes a linking ground between the persona's family history and her child's infancy written into it. In other words, "Townhouse" fuses the present frame of reference (the speaker's son being raised in her mother's old house) with the past perspective (the persona's own childhood recollections). The female voice in Morrissey's poem relates this period as "These are our spell-safe days. / Before my mother dies, I inhabit a three-storey house / and exist, for the most part, on the middle floor" (TTSW 36). The house's number of floors represents an ideal in the Celtic tradition: beyond the binary duality and singularity. The proximity of the sea (signifying the waves of emotions) makes the dwelling nearly ideal, though the side garden spoils the perfect image somewhat. The need to put the patch of ground to rights, which is admitted by Morrissey's speaker, is completed with an unusual enjambed phrase "summer's eponymous flowers." The modifying adjective might indicate that the flowers lend their name to the time of the year. The female voice in "Townhouse" begins her story:

There is the view of the sea  
– dependable in its leave-taking –  
there is the shunted garden we have tried to fix

with shells and summer's eponymous flowers.

(TTSW 36)

As argued in Morrissey's poem, the speaker's house is significant for the couple's family history as their child has been begotten there ("We have accomplished the trick / of a child"). Now in the "staircased space," her son Augustine is about to learn to speak and walk. In the persona's view, speech acquires a material dimension. Thus it becomes manifested as "the wheel of speech," something so tangible that a child might even put into his mouth and spit it out. The speaker in "Townhouse" acknowledges:

We have accomplished the trick  
of a child, who, in this staircased space,

has been taking the wheel of speech  
into his mouth  
then letting it go

to test its new circumference.

(TTSW 36)

In "Townhouse," as words seem to have the weight of substance, their manifestation can be deposited, for instance, in the attic. Thus the mourning lament for the dying animal will be preserved in this holy relational and textual memory storage ("The attic is a reliquary / for the words my son will speak"). The persona in Morrissey's poem ponders:

The attic is a reliquary  
for the words my son will speak

when the artic fox is lost  
in snowmelt  
and my father too long dead to stop it happening.

(TTSW 36)

The poem "Augustine Sleeping Before He Can Talk" continues a mother-son diary of selves-in-relation, more advanced in "growth in connection" than "*Love, the nightwatch . . .*" or "Townhouse." In "Augustine Sleeping Before He Can Talk," the speaker's son does not yet possess discerning or verbal skills but he can experience the world through sensuous participation. Being aware of that, both Morrissey's speaker and her husband attempt to "interpret" the boy's surrounding immediacy into the language of colours, sounds, smells, textures, touch and taste. In doing so, the parents facilitate the child's connection with the world. It happens because:

Long before infants learn to speak, they come into relationship with others besides the mother, and with the physical world, with cribs, toys, sunbeams, shadows of leaves blowing the wind. The existence of the world and the existence of others can be doubted only by someone who imagines that he or she could exist apart from relationships. . . . relations are not antithetical to the development of the self; they are necessary to it. Good parents are those who encourage a child to grow and exercise its own freedom of judgement . . . . Relationships are internal; they affect and change us at the most basic level. (*She Who Changes* 74–76)

In view of that, as if referring to the analysed poem, Jordan reminds one that "safety and psychological growth arise in good connection, not in the experience of self-sufficiency, autonomy" ("Therapists' Authenticity" 70). In Morrissey's poem, Augustine's "palimpsest for the world" signifies the well-known reality being transcribed in a safe way into the baby's two-fold discourse,

which is coded in the appearing and disappearing colourful lights. The female voice in “Augustine Sleeping Before He Can Talk” argues:

The only places he can dive to are the senses.  
 The Christmas lights his father dangled from the corners  
 of his ceiling in July are his palimpsest for the world –  
 a winking on and off of ebullient colour, unnamed and so untamed,  
 to be committed to memory and then written over.  
 (TTSW 31)

As linguistic signification is not yet available to her son, the persona in “Augustine Sleeping Before He Can Talk” speculates whether the “unnamed and so untamed” sensations may be preserved in the child’s memory. In other words, Morrissey’s speaker doubts whether there can be any understanding or remembrance beyond language. That is why at the beginning she used to view Augustine’s pre-linguistic cognition as somehow limited: “For now on the world is simply to be crawled into.” On the other hand, it is precisely because words do not stand between the child and his experiential reality that his perception is neither confined nor shaped by this discursive medium. Not knowing that he is to be apprehensive about the sea’s immensity and being untainted with commonly accepted notions, the small boy conceives of the waves as “a bubbling, transmogrifying, all- / attracting mechanism.” Consequently, Augustine’s mother ponders:

For now on the world is simply to be crawled into, like the sea,  
 of which he has no fear, a bubbling, transmogrifying, all-  
 attracting mechanism that has not yet disappointed  
 with the mean-spirited vanishing act of an ink-black horizon.  
 (TTSW 31)

In other words, in “Augustine Sleeping Before He Can Talk,” the child’s pre-language phase appears to be especially puzzling for his poet-mother. While watching her son explore the world not yet discursively encoded, Morrissey’s persona can herself probe the mechanisms of “before speech” reality. The aforementioned phenomenon, developed by Zimmerman and Belenky, is called “connected learning.” Surrey explains that “[c]onnected learning means taking the view of the other and connecting this to one’s own knowledge, thus building new and enlarged understanding of broader human experience” (“Relationship and Empowerment” 171). In line with the above, the speaker in “Augustine Sleeping Before He Can Talk” discovers some benefits of her son’s developmental stage that are not so obvious. Namely, a good connection with the world can happen without the alienating frustration of the narrated discourse’s deficiencies: “not yet disappointed / with the mean-spirited vanishing act of an ink-black horizon.” In Morrissey’s poem, for the mother-son selves-in-relation, the “[m]utual ‘empowerment’ better connotes the true potency inherent in a growth-promoting, life-enhancing process” (Surrey, “Relationship

and Empowerment" 164). The persona in "Augustine Sleeping Before He Can Talk" relates:

He has already learned how the tongue contains more mystery  
 than the granite hulk of an elephant swaying suddenly into focus  
 under the dank and knotted overhang of Cave Hill, tossing  
 straw onto its shoulders to keep itself warm because it still  
 – and tragically – remembers Africa, that when he opens  
 his mouth to admit the spoon, anything can happen,  
 from passion fruit to parmesan. . . .

(TTSW 31)

In this vein, the female voice in Morrissey's poem comments upon the boy's early fascination with words creating the discursive reality: "He has already learned how the tongue contains more mystery / than the granite hulk of an elephant." In "Augustine Sleeping Before He Can Talk," bringing animals into existence from the pre-linguistic void by means of referential signification avails new possibilities for the child's cognitive development. Learning to be open to all aspects of life, Augustine discovers that experiential reality can provide one with continuous surprises: "when he opens / his mouth to admit the spoon, anything can happen." Moreover in Morrissey's poem, apart from their palatable qualities, the pronounced signifiers have a delicious melody to consume, very much pleasing to the child's ear (i.e. "**passion fruit to parmesan**"). Following the rhythm, the child grasps the relation between sound and its three-syllable appellation, perceiving the three-in-one signifier connection as natural. One cannot but admire the visually expressive illustration provided by his mother: "the three tributary- / sounds of his name that flow as one (as though summer's / hottest month had a feminine ending) he knows." Following the track of denominations, the speaker in Morrissey's poem ponders the relation of the child's name to its derivational source: the eight month of the year. In doing so, the persona additionally plays with gender stereotypes; the "feminine ending," "ine," added to the root "August" denotes the masculine gender. She argues:

. . . The three tributary-  
 sounds of his name that flow as one (as though summer's  
 hottest month had a feminine ending) he knows, and the purring  
 of cats and cars and the howling of dogs and fireworks.  
 His fingers adjust the tufts of the sheepswool coat  
 he lies on in his sleep. . . .

(TTSW 31)

Hence in "Augustine Sleeping Before He Can Talk," being able to notice the correspondence between the emitted sound and its signifying referent enables the child to perceive reality as relationally interconnected. What is more, the boy takes delight not only in the auditory but also in tactile sensations that surround him ("his fingers adjust the tufts of the sheepswool coat"). The mother's role, as Morrissey's persona advocates it, means enhancing the baby's sensory

development by providing a stimulating environment [“Tomorrow I’ll offer him the dent / of a worry stone and the fluted sticky centres of acacia flowers” (TTSW 31)]. It is especially significant because the developing child appears to believe that reality exists only when it is being observed by him. Therefore, the female voice in “Augustine Sleeping Before He Can Talk” elaborates this thought: “All this can only be where he goes – there can be no other possibility – / unless we accept that memory begins in the womb or back, / still further” (TTSW 31). In Morrissey’s poem, the ability to experience the world afresh, to see it every day as if for the first time with no previous reminiscences – all this appears to be a gift that only a child can be allowed:

. . . in the undiscovered bourne poor Hamlet dreamed  
of entering without map or compass as a deliverance  
from the sight of our back garden in September, the apple tree  
keeled over and cankered and the fuchsia disrobed.  
(TTSW 31)

The concluding fragment of “Augustine Sleeping Before He Can Talk” seems to assert that memory is earned in retrospection. Morrissey’s speaker appears to believe that fleeting childhood recollections might re-enter the boy’s consciousness when he gets older. The conditional sentence (beginning with “if he ever” e.g. “If he ever bombs inside,” “if he ever moves”) which terminates with the tentative main clause (“he may remember”) constitutes the framework between which the argument’s temporal span is elaborated. The persona in “Augustine Sleeping Before He Can Talk” wonders:

If he ever bombs inside a swimming pool, or deep-sea dives,  
or moon-walks, if he ever moves from balancing  
on some underwater floor, precariously filled with air,  
to pressing off the balls of his feet into his own ascent,  
(TTSW 31)

At present, Augustine’s imaginary fearless youth<sup>6</sup> is juxtaposed with his real, cautious infancy “a slow, alert surfacing towards the morning.” Despite its limits though, one of early childhood’s undeniable delights is being connected indiscriminately to every aspect of reality: “all clamouring to be experienced.” Morrissey’s poem ends with an accolade, praising what Louis MacNeice in “Snow” has captured as “[t]he drunkenness of things being various.” The speaker in “Augustine Sleeping Before He Can Talk” argues:

---

<sup>6</sup> According to the Dooley and Fedele, the child’s future boyhood is supposed to be filled with daring experiments: “(3–7 years): The cultural message is the invincibility of the *superhero*. Little boys are besieged by superhero figures that imply that becoming a man depends upon independence, strength, stoicism and total invulnerability, and defeat of all others” (235), emphasis original.

through a dense and illegible element, he may remember  
 what it felt like to wake when he was one, and that it was  
 a slow, alert surfacing towards the morning, the clock's face,  
 the seagulls and the sea's address, all clamouring to be experienced.  
 (TTSW 31)

Female empowerment, conceived of as Morrissey's persona's creative and relational strength, is also contemplated in other poems from the 2009 volume. Appropriately, "Cathedral" resumes the vein of probing the speaker's son's language acquisition. The poem analyses how Augustine begins to seek in words the connection upon which his still fragile reality could be better accessed. The aforementioned relation is rendered in "Cathedral" via the metaphor of the staircase which signifies the verbal ascension into the titular temple of language. Hence the poem links the child's early examination of his world and his learning to walk with the mastering of speech. All of the formative courses of action referred to earlier require experimentation and courage in exploring new (linguistic) territories and unknown grounds. In doing so, one cannot but appreciate the poet's apt rendering of language's materiality. In "Cathedral," the alliterated and sound-echoed "spiral staircase" testify to its being self-referential, whereas an assumed elevation could transport one from pre-linguistic earth to the discursive heaven. Designing her son's journey as "solid and obvious," the persona in "Cathedral" wishes to spread a safety net under her son's first linguistic expedition:

As though the world were a spiral staircase,  
 and the order in which you ascended it  
 already set, I wanted the words  
 you attempted first to be solid and obvious:  
*apple, finger, spoon. . . .*

(TTSW 53)

In other words, the apprehensive mother in "Cathedral" attempts to introduce her child into the world of words, step by step, with the mediation of the immediate, common real-life referents. By selecting the familiar terms, the speaker in Morrissey's poem wishes to build in her son's expanding reality an innocuous relation between the words and their equivalents. It happens because "'attachment' implies a state of emotional connection where the presence of the 'object' becomes related to a sense of well-being, security, and need gratification" (Surrey, "The Self-in-Relation" 61). However in "Cathedral" the mother's controlling guidance rules out unknown ("improbable candidates") linguistic terms, even if they sound attractive. Reading the ear-pleasing list of the rejected signifiers (such as "[t]he bat / hanging like a blister in your drool-proof") one cannot but regret the imaginative expressions that have been left out by the overprotective persona. The speaker in "Cathedral" claims:

. . . The bat  
 hanging like a blister in your drool-proof  
 baby book or the lovesick cricket  
 with its gossamer instrument  
 were surely to be held back:  
 until I could explain, until I could build  
 you a zoo of improbable candidates  
 and properly introduce you.

(TTSW 53)

What the speaker's son is missing as a result of his parent's well-meant censorship is a new dynamic of the captivating and unexplored reality, not to mention the melodious reward ("bat-blister" and "drool-proof") when listening to the verbally and auditory accomplished imagery ("the lovesick cricket / with its gossamer instrument"). In "Cathedral," contrary to the mother's well-motivated intentions, without the forbidden "improbable candidates," the child's textual world will be much less colourful and absorbing:

But you were too quick –  
 like panic, there was no stopping it –  
 each day's vast, unbreachable  
 impact – . . .

(TTSW 53)

Driven by her attempts to edit the child's linguistic world as perfectly unscathed, the female speaker in "Cathedral" begins to realise that she can neither design or totally control her son's linguistic progress ("you were too quick"). The self-ironically "resigned" persona in Morrissey's poem accepts the fact that the indiscriminate din of experiential reality and language's "whatever ramshackle order," will reach her child's ears, this way or another, whether she likes it or not. The female voice in "Cathedral" admits:

. . . – and language,  
 in whatever ramshackle order  
 it made its presence felt –  
 a movable moon, the guts  
 of a clock, a fire escape –  
 rained down and into you, . . .

(TTSW 53)

In "Cathedral," the rain pouring down with a "flow of signifiers" upon everything and everyone becomes an apt metaphor of uncontrollable linguistic multifariousness. The downpour of words is then rendered with an intertextual image from Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* "like / Catherine Linton's wine-through-water / dream of the heath and expulsion / from heaven" (TTSW 53). *Wuthering Heights* reference makes Morrissey's speaker come to the conclusion: "I cannot . . . keep it off. I cannot / section it." Accordingly in "Cathedral," the textual water permeates everything, and it soaks through the conscious and

literal, the subconscious and metaphorical layers of language. The symbol of outpouring verbal liquidity (as opposed to the initially desired discursive solidity) is elaborated by Morrissey's persona as follows:

. . . I cannot hang  
a curtain to keep it off. I cannot  
section it. It is entering via  
the ear's aqueduct, every  
listening second, trickling in  
to its base equilibrium  
and carrying with it an image in negative  
to be absorbed by the brain and stored.

(TTSW 53)

In analysed poem, although already confronted with the child's fast developmental advancement, the first words of the poet's son: "*Bah! humbug!*" astonish his mother completely. The exclamation taken from the child's book sounds unexpected in Augustine's mouth. On hearing his first words, the flabbergasted parents in "Cathedral" look at their speaking son as if they have seen him for the first time:

*Bah! humbug!* you say, aged two,  
like the terrible man  
in the cape with the walking stick  
you glimpsed in the afternoon,  
and what we assumed you knew  
is jolted on its axis; . . .

(TTSW 53)

In "Cathedral," hardly do the parents recover from shock when there is more to follow. Their two year-old son delivers a creepy fragment remembered from the ghost story in which a dead child's spirit comes to dine with a boy's family. Hence Augustine's first sentence (its length and content) stuns his parents:

*at six o'clock the ghost  
of a child might come and eat porridge.  
We are speechless.*

(TTSW 53)

To conclude, the persona's closing statement in "Cathedral:" "We are speechless" constitutes an ironic pun on the child's quick and uncontrollable language acquisition. Unlike their son, his parents are lost for words as no adequate verbal declaration can fully express their reaction towards what they have witnessed. In Morrissey's poem, the relational empowerment that they all experience results from the cognitive dissonance that advances not only the child's progress but also his parents' development. As shown, this mutual



relational act appears to be empowering for all the parties concerned.<sup>7</sup> Bearing that in mind, the poem “Dash” explores another impossible parental attempt to maintain equilibrium between the child’s increasing individuation and the adults’ inability to catch up with it. The persona in “Dash” appears exhausted with the insatiable appetite for life that her son exhibits. What upsets her is the boy’s repeated wish to prolong the pleasurable activities endlessly. The female voice in Morrissey’s poem perceives the son’s continuous mantra (“*Longer please!*”) as the child’s refusal to accept any limits to his play time enjoyment. What is more, Augustine’s self-indulgence begins to infringe upon the parents’ freedom (see “employ to hold us hostage”). Ironic as it is, Morrissey’s persona fails to appreciate how successfully her offspring has learnt the effective function of words: make things happen the way the speaker intends. The speaker in “Dash” begins:

*Longer please!* – two out of fifty usable words  
you employ to hold us hostage –

longer in the cooling bath, longer  
by the playground gates, mowing imaginary grass,

longer driving your car-cum-aeroplane –  
and we want longer too –

(TTSW 54)

In the defence of adult self-governance, the parental couple in “Dash” forms a coalition, stressing a counterpoint in the argument: “and we want longer too.” In line with that, “[a]lthough some of the mother’s interests entail satisfaction of the child’s interests, they are not identical or even necessary similar. There is overlap, but relation is one of intentional inclusion” (Plumwood, “Nature, Self” 171).<sup>8</sup> The female voice in “Dash” declares:

but before we know what’s hit us,  
we’re standing on the roadside, staring west

at the last of a trail of dust, like the crowds  
who wait all day for a royal visit  
for it to simply pass them by –

<sup>7</sup> Drawing upon Miller, Walker advocates that “whenever two people interact with each other, each person is presenting something new – something different from what that would arise within herself. The ability to engage that ‘something new’ is the source of personal and relational growth (Bergman & Surrey, 1994)” (“Race, Self” 100). Also in the aforementioned case, the selves-in-relation in Morrissey’s poem – the parents and their child – learn something new from one another.

<sup>8</sup> The relational lesson that the child obtains is about “expecting receptivity and responsiveness to others in the home and community. Early childhood is the time . . . to note the importance of being honest in communications with others and of respecting others’ feelings, even though we might feel differently” (Dooley and Fedele 236).

before they've memorised the hair, the eyes,  
 the inscrutable footmen, the marvellous horses  
 (TTSW 54)

On the other hand, Morrissey's speaker's declaration: "and we want longer too" expresses the mother's amazement that the process of her son's growing up proceeds so rapidly, as if hurried by profuse, fleeting impressions – manifested with a titular punctuation mark. At this stage, the poem's real subject matter comes to the discourse's surface. Namely, that of maintaining the balance between the relational (parental-child) connection and disconnection. In other words, as argued by Morrissey, emotionally connected selves-in-relation cannot be each other's hostages. They have to allow for a space of their own, being co-dependant but not amalgamated. As an alternative, one can advocate a relational "parenting-in-connection" (Dooley and Fedele 233).<sup>9</sup> Although in "Dash" the future necessity to let their son depart from the family home seems to be disturbing for Morrissey's persona ("we're standing on the roadside," "who wait all day for a royal visit"), she is perfectly aware that she can neither slow down nor prevent the boy's fast growing up process.<sup>10</sup> As demonstrated in "Dash," oscillating between connection and disconnection is crucial to enhance the mutual "growth-in-connection." When this counterbalance is upset, as in a patriarchal context, disconnection becomes favoured over connection and promoted (especially for the masculine gender) as the most preferable course of action.<sup>11</sup> This model of upbringing encourages boys to be separate from their mothers and their kin structures alike.<sup>12</sup> The poem "Mother Goose" elaborates on the previously hinted at (compare the reference to the uncanny ghost story in "Dash") children's literature's impact upon infants' emerging relationality. To begin with, Morrissey's persona seems to be contemptuous about the lack of sufficiently realistic grounds in children's stories, especially objecting to literary characters' flamboyant construction. When switching off syllogistic reasoning, one might find some pleasure in the melody of the repeated sounds in "seethed with snails" or in the nursery-rhymed "snails and tails." It appears though that in "Mother Goose" it is not only the lack of the common sense that upsets the speaker in children's literature but the non-relational textual world, reduced to

<sup>9</sup> According to Dooley and Fedele, "disconnections are *opportunities* to deepen and strengthen the relationship. . . . Mothers can teach sons, by example, to move toward reconnection rather than becoming derailed by disconnection." (233–234), original emphasis.

<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, "Boys can learn to view disconnections as cues in their relationships – not to let go, but rather to find creative ways to reconnect. Mothers can then support, guide, and reassure their sons through small and large conflicts in their relationships." (Dooley and Fedele 231).

<sup>11</sup> Drawing upon Silverstein, they stress that "the root of sons difficulties as adults is linked to distance and disconnection in the mother-son relationship" (Dooley and Fedele 223).

<sup>12</sup> Jordan claims that "The boy is taught to see himself as standing *over* or *against* rather than *with*; in such a stance he is taught to deny basic human engagement and vulnerability" ("Relational Awareness 49), emphasis original. Likewise, Surrey maintains that "[f]or boys, then, 'separation' means not only a simple physical but an emotional disconnection, often with the goal of not being bound or 'controlled' by mother's feeling states or needs" ("The Self-in-Relation" 55).

the dull activities of the miserable literary characters (“pitiful women, / Polly and Suki, held to ransom over the tea kettle”). As a result, she argues that:

None of it was real: the errant lambs, the crooked stiles,  
the boys who seethed with snails and tails inside the pink exteriors  
(though this, admittedly, made sense); nor that dyad of pitiful women,  
Polly and Suki, held to ransom over the tea kettle.  
(TTSW 46)

To some extent in Morrissey’s “Mother Goose” the off-putting literary characters (e.g. Polly and Suki) in children’s stories function as what Walker describes as “controlling images” (142). Walker argues that “according to Collins, controlling images have the effect of making oppression appear to be a normal, natural part of everyday life. They take on special meaning because the power to define the images resides with the dominant group” (“Racial Images” 142). Moreover, the persona in “Mother Goose” questions the despondency and latent aggression that lurk behind the discursive reality of children’s stories. Such narratives portray a potentially threatening world where even the moon can be enslaved and where animals, instead of being the child’s best friends, are attributed with the worst human vices [“Swallow a fly and the rest of the animal kingdom grows jealous. / Blow your horn and the moon – huge and sad and defencelessly / edible – / collapses into the cow paddock” (TTSW 46)]. In the speaker’s view, children’s daily reality appears much more inspiring than its dejected, literary representations depicted in “Mother Goose.” Morrissey’s persona observes:

Still it goes on: on in that bashful exuberance of being five,  
of non-sequiturs, of summer stretched  
like a cradle of cats between the fingertips,  
of summer preparing to turn the key in the lock and you not  
noticing –  
(TTSW 46)

Despite the grim content, the linguistic layer of Morrissey’s poem is undeniably rewarding. Accordingly in “Mother Goose,” the oxymoronic phrase “bashful exuberance” (“of being five”) depicts the realm where a *raison d’être* is not needed, since the sense of time and dialectics are understood differently. The “cradle of cats” is a version of the “cat’s cradle” game played with a string. However without knowing the game’s rules, one might decode the sentence on its literal level and, then, arrive at an inconsequential argument. By this cunning trick, Morrissey’s speaker demonstrates appropriately how one’s understanding of what is and what is not considered as logical, is contextually bound, and how much it depends upon one’s age, education, background etc. Last but not least, one has to admit that Morrissey’s own examples in the narrative come directly from the discourse that is relevant to children (the realm of games, summer, etc.), which enables a meaningful insight into the minds of the young. The female voice in “Mother Goose” announces:

Lady, Lady, there's a hillside of handsome young men, pockets  
 spilling gold, selling tickets to London. They are expecting you.  
 Dizzy yourself by the mulberry bush. Grow your garden. Show  
 your shoe.

(TTSW 46)

In conclusion, "Mother Goose" ends with the wry thought that children's literary characters of today should be sent back to London. In Morrissey's poem, the fairy-tale "London" comes to signify derisively an (almost) imaginary place where heroes and heroines can practise their monotonous social rites with their concern about class and decorum. The speaker in "Mother Goose" concludes that currently available children's books do not stimulate the young ones' growth-in-connection, and that instead they promote competition and separation as the behavioural models to aspire to. As argued in "Mother Goose," as opposed to mutual relational empowerment, present-day children are conditioned into a model of power based upon self-sufficiency, egoism and a game of appearances. Subsequently, the poem "Through the Square Window" probes the mother's nightmare in which the family house is haunted by unknown spirits. Morrissey's persona argues: "In my dream the dead have arrived / to wash the windows of my house. / There are no blinds to shut them out with" (TTSW 32). Feeling besieged and powerless in preventing the ghosts from their unexpected visit, the female voice worries about her child's safety. The Delft – Delphi oracle sound similarity implies that the otherworldly visitors might have some prophetic message to convey to the speaker. The second triplet is organised around the eerie image of the clouds hanging over the mist-covered water. The rising fog contributes to the Gothic setting, appropriately intensifying the supernatural ambience of "Through the Square Window." The speaker in Morrissey's poem relates:

The clouds above the Lough are stacked  
 like the clouds are stacked above Delft.  
 They have the glutton look of clouds over water.

(TTSW 32)

Regardless of the hyperbolic mode typical for non-realistic narration, in "Through the Square Window" one does not obtain much details about the ghosts' appearance. Morrissey's poem contains only one explicit description of the spectral beings: "The heads of the dead are huge" (TTSW 32). Hence it could be speculated that it is not the very presence of the phantoms that troubles the speaker but the allegedly malevolent purpose of their visit. The persona in the examined text confesses apprehensively: "I wonder / if it's my son they're after, his / effortless breath, his ribbon of years" (TTSW 32). It becomes clear that the female voice does not mind the ghosts as long as they mean no harm to her sleeping baby. However in "Through the Square Window," the mother's anxiety does not appear to be grounded in reality, as her son is perfectly oblivious to the sounds and the creepy materialisation of the dead near him. Looking at her slumbering son, the persona realises that her child has not learnt

yet to make a distinction between the world of the living and the world of the dead. The borderline between these two spheres seems to be unquestionably believed in by adults. In Morrissey's poem, for the child, the night visitors with their alluring colours, shapes, and noises are a source of delight. The persona in "Through the Square Window" records:

but he sleeps on unregarded in his cot,  
inured, it would seem, quite naturally  
to the sluicing and battering and paring back of glass

that delivers this shining exterior . . .

(TTSW 32)

Seen from the child's perspective, the unexpected spiritual presence in Morrissey's poem amounts to an entrancing performance ["One blue boy<sup>13</sup> holds a rag in his teeth / between panes like a conjuror" (TTSW 32)]. Astonished by this extraordinary view, the speaker in "Through the Square Window" is equally taken aback by the sudden termination of the otherworldly spectacle. After the ghosts' abrupt departure, the light comes back into the child's room and to the entire surrounding reality. The speaker recalls:

And then, as suddenly as they came, they go.  
And there is a horizon  
from which only the clouds stare in,

(TTSW 32)

Although the spirits are long gone, the female voice in "Through the Square Window" still experiences shell-shocked symptoms: restlessness, dizziness, gasping for breath and feeling queasy. She appears to be overwhelmed with "the massed canopies of Hazelbank, / the severed tip of the Strangford Peninsula, / and a density in the room I find it difficult to breathe in" (TTSW 32). In consequence, the disagreeable bodily sensations wake the speaker up. The vision of the awakening persona's corked mouth seems to be ambiguous, especially with the reference to her tissues being flooded with so much fluid that the organism cannot dispose it by itself.<sup>14</sup> Being the externalisation of the maternal fears, the projected nightmare makes the persona in "Through the Square Window" realise that trying as she might to ensure her child's secure growth, she will never be able to eliminate the potential perils from his world. Happy or not, the female voice in Morrissey's poem has allowed her offspring to come to terms with all aspects of reality, even these unimaginable or potentially menacing. She concludes:

<sup>13</sup> Compare the famous painting by Thomas Gainsborough *The Blue Boy* (1770).

<sup>14</sup> The plugged bottle might indicate the nightmare being the result of alcoholic intoxication or some other form of excessive or (self) abusive behaviour on the part of the speaker.

until I wake, flat on my back with a cork  
 in my mouth, bottle-stoppered, in fact,  
 like a herbalist's cure for dropsy.

(TTSW 32)

In Morrissey's poetry, human and supernatural beings seem to co-exist side by side. Since the role of mothers / women is being the "keepers of the connections" (Dooley and Fedele 223). For Morrissey, women's relational empowerment appears to involve female selves-in-relation united with their past (family ancestors) and future connections alike. Hence as the poem's title ("My Grandmother through Glass") and its motto suggest, the worlds of the living and those of the dead are not entirely separate, and they are only provisionally divided with a "glass" border. Morrissey commences her narrative with an appropriate citation:

*Birth and death are doors: you go out through one  
 And come back in through the other.*

– Hugo Gloor.  
 (TWFIV 42)

To begin with, the first section of the seven-part narrative "My Grandmother through Glass" goes back into the persona's family history (with a special emphasis on its female line) as far back as she is able to recall. Exploring her family connections, Morrissey's speaker perceives them as a source of relational strength and female empowerment. It happens because for her "[c]onnection with others . . . is a key component of action and growth, not a detraction from or a means to one's self-enhancement" (Kaplan, "The 'Self-in-Relation': Implications" 208–209). The poem's body opens with a direct invocation to the late grandmother:

Your mother, perhaps, will greet you now,  
 Or the spirit-children you never had  
 Whose faces pushed against that line for years.  
 Hoping. Misting the glass. Dying to be born.

(TWFIV 42)

In the cited passage, the female voice in "My Grandmother through Glass" locates her dead grandma in the connecting kin network between the great-grandmother (who will welcome her daughter in the otherworld) and her relative's "spirit-children." Awaited with love, the grandmother's unborn offspring have their rightful place in the family system, as rendered in oxymoronic "Dying to be born." The reversed statement "born to be dying," depicting both life and death as parallel processes, advocates the interconnectedness of the spiritual and material world. In other words, Morrissey's persona's family connections embrace living and dead relatives, and even the unborn. The female voice in "My Grandmother through Glass" recalls a conversation with her grandmother:

You said you felt the weight of their plea  
 As eyes on your back in an empty room  
 Or a flock of pestering voices beyond your range.  
 Their whispering nagged your mind.

(TWFIV 42)

As demonstrated above, the speaker's grandmother seems to perceive the presence of her unborn progenies as almost physically tangible, though to some extent disquieting companionship. She admits sensing the spirit children's expectant pressure to come into the world (see "Whose faces pushed against that line for years," "the weight of their plea," "a flock of pestering voices," "nagged your mind"). The persona in "My Grandmother through Glass" ponders:

Then his pit accident, your hysterectomy  
 Or the usual, age-old seep of indifference  
 Stopped intercourse for good.  
 After that, those tiny moon-faces were crushed.

(TWFIV 42)

The cited emotive account clashes with the speaker's dutiful enumeration of the objective reasons for the dead woman's childlessness. In "My Grandmother through Glass," the line "or the usual, age-old seep of indifference" aptly renders the routine of the daily dismissal. Accordingly, the verb "seep" implies the duration that corresponds to the modifier "age-old," completed with apathetic sadness. The quoted passage reaches its climactic point in the expressive phrase "those tiny moon-faces were crushed," which nearly equates childlessness with infanticide. Morrissey's poem's tone, then, seems to alter once again to evince the cacophony of the polyphonic voices. With a turning point in the storytelling angle, the second section of "My Grandmother through Glass" throws a different light upon the late woman's life:

The one who broke rank, the one  
 With the mastered knack of negotiating glass  
 As you just turned twenty-two,  
 You bedded down in the three-roomed house

On Bamford Street, and called Rosemary.

(TWFIV 42)

Since the persona in "My Grandmother through Glass" does not provide the specific details of the intimate occurrence in which her grandma was involved "in the three-roomed house / On Bamford Street;" one may only speculate who is the man "who broke rank, the one / with the mastered knack of negotiating glass." In Morrissey's poem, the erotic (seduction?) scene is rendered in the idiom of military tactics (see "break rank," "negotiating"), which is further elaborated in the archaic, sensuous expression "You bedded down." Through the caring self-in-relation perspective, the speaker in "My Grandmother through Glass" tends to perceive the beloved relative as an inexperienced, young woman

("just turned twenty-two"), susceptible to the manipulation of others ("the mastered knack of negotiating glass"). The nominal utterance: "negotiating glass," reiterated in the poem's title, reminds the reader about the distance between the narrated character and the actual person. In Morrissey's poem, the capitalised denomination "rosemary" occurs in the text twice: first as the street's name, then reappearing as a herbal plant in "*There's Rosemary; that's for remembrance*," not to mention obvious religious connotations. The aforementioned strategy introduces a metanarrative dimension into the poem's structure, disclosing the passage's true subject: anamnesis in both senses of the signifier. The female voice recalls:

Your sister-in-law, Sarah, who knew all the herbs,  
Insisted. *There's Rosemary; that's for remembrance*;  
*Pray you; love, remember –*

(TWFIV 42)

In "My Grandmother through Glass," within the family chronicle of the kin women's entangled life threads, the vital share belongs to the speaker's great Aunt Sarah, "the daughter of a gypsy / And on her way out when my mother was born. / You said she loved your husband as her own" (TWFIV 43). It is not until after her death that Sarah's secret love for her brother-in-law is brought to light. The persona remembers finding Sarah's letters addressed to her grandfather:

Love poems to Grandfather

Were found in a drawer two days after  
The stroke that killed her. Her World War I  
Boyfriend had drowned in a submarine that lost  
Its way back to the light.

(TWFIV 43)

Apart from the unfulfilled love for her sister's husband and the dead wartime fiancé, Sarah's biography is afflicted by further losses: "She laid out the dead, delivered / The furious children, buried / Two sisters who were rotten with anthrax, / And never married" (TWFIV 43). On the whole, the speaker's kin-in-relation seems to be functioning on the border between the living and the deceased: aiding in the rites of passage into both these realms. Sarah has assisted in women's deliveries ["Dead a virgin, / She'd seen enough of childbirth" (TWFIV 44)] and prepared the dead for funerals. The compassionate way in which the speaker in Morrissey's poem recounts her great Aunt's life complexities indicates the deep relational bond between these two women. In tune with that, drawing upon Miller, Fletcher explicates the "model of relational growth" or "mutual growth-in-connection" (14) as "the belief in the power of relational interactions to affect change through mutual engagement and co-influence" (13). In "My Grandmother through Glass," with her defiant choices as well as her healing abilities (medicinal herbs), Sarah's individuality and knowledge seem to be much ahead of her times. That is why the persona in



Morrissey's poem draws relational empowerment from the connection with her sagacious and free-thinking ancestor. The part four of "My Grandmother through Glass" provides the details of another remarkable woman in the speaker's female blood line: her mother. In Morrissey's poem, the persona's mother teaches her daughter that women do not have to deny emancipation in favour of relationality. In other words, an self-governing but loving parent sets the pattern for the speaker's own personal development. It derives from "an *expression* of self in relationship, not egoistic self as merged with the other but self as embedded in a network of essential relationships with distinct others" (Plumwood, "Nature, Self" 172), emphasis original. The speaker in "My Grandmother through Glass" recalls:

My mother never forgot her gypsy blood  
And broke rank all her life.  
At four she caught cabbage butterflies  
On her own, at fifteen was gone

(TWFIV 43)

The persona in Morrissey's poem attributes her mother's free spirit to her ancestral female roots. The female family line's continuity is accentuated in the reiterated expression ("broke rank all her life"). Subversively echoing "the one who broke the rank," the phrase appears to be double-edged. On one hand, it seems to imply defiance, and on the other, an unpredictable whim. Very much in this complex vein, the persona in "My Grandmother through Glass" portrays her mother admiringly as an uncompromising, self-assured and liberated woman, following her own path but not always attending to her relation with her daughter (see "on her own, at fifteen was gone"). The euphonious, alliterated phrase "she **caught cabbage butterflies**" completes with the open-close consonantal flimsy, imitating the movements of the butterfly wings. The aforementioned image connotes tenderness, fragility, grieved transience, absence and the need for personal emancipation. Despite the deep feelings for her mother, the character whose presence remains a focal point in Morrissey's poem and who ensures the unity of the familial women's blood line remains the speaker's grandmother. All the narrative's subplots revolve around and are fused into the late woman's life story, complementing but not foreshadowing the matriarch's role. Agreeably in "My Grandmother through Glass" even the details about the persona's own birth and that of her brother's, are only mentioned in-between the grandfather's funeral information. In Morrissey's poem, the change in perspective from the persona's standpoint to that of the late grandmother becomes the textually re-connecting gesture. Discursively, one cannot pay more relational tribute to the other than to empower them (and relationally herself) by renouncing the narcissistic drive to put one's own speaking self in the narrative's centre. In this case, expressing her respect and gratitude, the speaker in "My Grandmother through Glass" allows selves-in-relation who have come before her in the female family blood line to "speak:"

For weeks, and three months after  
 You buried your husband  
 You heard she wasn't coming home.  
 Two years later she sailed in for a visit with a screaming boy and girl.  
 (TWFIV 43)

The fifth part of the cycle "My Grandmother through Glass" focuses on the speaker's relative Sarah. Morrissey's persona attributes her mother's nearly painless labour to Sarah's beneficial intervention. Accordingly, the female voice in the explored poem accounts for her coming into the world as follows: "Sarah helped with the delivery / From the other side. . . . She'd seen enough of childbirth to know / How the tunnel of pain can terrify" (TWFIV 44). "Opening the tunnel" for the speaker's mother so that the baby could go through it smoothly signifies Sarah's opening to the world and her re-connecting with her blood line. Self-in-relation, for the speaker, seems to mean here "stay[ing] connected to [our internal] resources as well as the resources in the world around us" (Jordan, "Towards Competence 24). In doing so, Sarah's wisdom becomes employed for the whole clan's good. Furthermore Sarah's loving approach becomes the gift for the speaker's future (compare "Sarah saw me off with a message of love"). In "My Grandmother through Glass," due to Sarah's re-connection with her female blood line, the whole family becomes relationally empowered. Morrissey's speaker relates:

And sent my mother sleep in labour, an afternoon  
 Of April rain, sagaciousness.  
 When she woke from her dreaming she just wanted to push.  
 The nurses wept with laughter

As I entered the world with a shower of blood.  
 Sarah saw me off with a message of love –  
 To give you all the kindness she never could. . . .  
 (TWFIV 44)

The part six returns to Morrissey's narrative's central theme i.e. that is to the elegy for the dead grandmother. The speaker in "My Grandmother through Glass" compares the late woman's passing away to "going through the glass," which is hinted at in the title, and later reappears in the defloration scene. In Morrissey's poem, the process of the grandmother's demise resembles a gentle and affirmative passage "into the arms / Of the children who cried to break into your body. / Your mother will be young again. / No negotiation from this side in" (TWFIV 44). It is only after grandmother's death that the route is closed, since the insight into it is not revealed to the living. In the analysed text, the love of the remaining ones for those who have departed "through the glass" is manifested in the re-connecting assurance that "memory followed you." The speaker in "My Grandmother through Glass" argues:

The glass descended and shimmered open  
 And then froze hard again beyond all normal view.  
 No doubt your own face changed.  
 No doubt memory followed you.

(TWFIV 44)

The cycle's final part is devoted to Morrissey's persona's acute grief after her grandmother's death. The bereavement takes place in the room where the speaker used to stay in her early years and where her memories of the late relative are the most vivid. Nonetheless the persona in "My Grandmother through Glass" relates her mourning in an undemonstrative way. Accordingly, the speaker's emotions concerning her loss can be read in-between the lines in the following expressions: "empty house," "the stopped clock," "the awful hush of your departure." What remains unrevealed in Morrissey's poem is the location of the subject that is "grown tall among my childhood photographs." It seems plausible that here the female voice refers to herself, to the desolate house or to the late grandmother. Most likely in "My Grandmother through Glass," the enigmatic expression applies to all the parties involved in the process of the woman's growth-in-relationality. The granddaughter says:

And me? I'll stand in your empty house  
 And regret my message.  
 Grown tall among my childhood photographs  
 Framed by your bed

And the stopped clock,

(TWFIV 45)

Ultimately in "My Grandmother through Glass," the persona's lament becomes articulated in a rebellious exclamation, unfailingly reminiscent of Dylan Thomas's "Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night."<sup>15</sup> Like Thomas's speaker, the female voice in Morrissey's poem makes the similar outburst: "I'll rage at such an absence." On the whole, the concluding lines in "My Grandmother through Glass" constitute a keening, which, unlike the nearly adjectiveless body of the poem, renounces the austere idiom in favour of open bewailing. The female voice mourns:

I'll rage at such an absence.  
 At what the sky stole.  
 And even the knowledge that sometime, way back,

Both of us were moon-eyed children

---

<sup>15</sup> Compare the poem's beginning

Do not go gentle into that good night,  
 Old age should burn and rave at close of day;  
 Rage, rage against the dying of the light.  
 (*Staying Alive* 379)

Who played together in the land of glass  
 Won't kill the awful hush of your departure  
 Or stop the flesh constricting in my heart.

(TWFIV 45)

In other words, Morrissey's persona in "My Grandmother through Glass" realises her self-in-relation by admitting an affinity with her dead relative ("Both of us were moon-eyed children") and acknowledging her indebtedness to her late grandmother ("Who played together in the land of glass"). Evoking the glass in the concluding passage of the examined poem sheds a new light on the speaker's relational connections. This time, however, the glass seems to be put in a different context. It is no longer a divisive barrier but a shared territory of what she defines as the playground. Like her deceased kin, the female voice in "My Grandmother through Glass" does not shun the borderline terrains. The glass allows an insight into things, at the same time separating one from their true essence. Remaining deceptively finite, like the vulnerability of human existence, the glass discloses its inconclusive fragility. It happens because in Morrissey's poetry "mutual empowerment, [is] where both parties recognize the vulnerability as part of human condition, approach the interaction expecting to grow from it" (Fletcher 31). Accordingly in "Bottom Drawer," the first part of *Mercury* cycle, included in Morrissey's collection *There Was Fire in Vancouver* (1996), the speaker makes another wistful attempt to reconnect with the departed grandmother by the means of her relational memory. However the question arises of whether by scrutinising the contents of her grandma's drawers ("intact as childhood"), the relative's life can be re-created in retrospection. In "Bottom Drawer," it is equally disputable whether "that precise outline of who she was" should be reconstructed from the written personal and intimate accounts that remained after the grandmother's death. The flimsy alterations of "what stars were hers, what frosts" appear to question the firmness of the speculations about the other woman's existence. The female voice in "Bottom Drawer" commences as follows:

#### BOTTOM DRAWER

Her bottom drawer lay filled with all her life:  
 Diaries and letters and photographs and gifts.  
 A testimony to every rage and every kiss  
 And every moment when the light gave shape  
 To that precise outline of who she was:  
 What stars were hers, what frosts.

(TWFIV 33)

Tempted to read "[a] testimony to every rage and every kiss. / And every moment when the light gave shape," the speaker in "Bottom Drawer" finally renounces interpreting her relative's life and stops searching her grandmother's private memoirs. She is aware that such narratives could function only as a screen for her own projections. The female voice in "Bottom Drawer" admits:

Intricate as a snowflake, intact as childhood,  
 No gaps where fear had burned the evidence;  
 No sudden invasions, or abandoned residence,  
 Or loss. She had it all by heart, document by document,  
 And kept it locked. A Chinese vase being painted in  
 By time, beautiful and brittle as bone.

(TWFIV 33)

In its nostalgic tone and carefully selected, familiar idiom, the second part of the poem “Bottom Drawer” betrays a clear fascination of debuting poet Morrissey with the writing style of her canonical predecessor Eavan Boland. This indebtedness seems to be especially visible in the first four lines of the cited fragment. The concluding passage in “Bottom Drawer,” however, leaves no doubt about Morrissey’s own distinct and clearly recognisable poetic voice. Moreover, the reference to a vase might be decoded as a polemic with Keats,<sup>16</sup> with its alliteration “beautiful and brittle as bone.” The poem’s rhymes are not full, as in “was – frosts,” or “gifts – kiss,” with one exception in the nearly doggerel “evidence – residence.” Taking things in perspective, in Morrissey’s works, the empowering relational connections with ancestors as well as bonds with the living family members embrace a full spectrum of speaking positions, weaving memories with a present mode of reflection.

The title of “Aunt Sarah’s Cupboards and Drawers,” included in the collection *The State of the Prisons* (2005) seems to echo the previously analysed “Bottom Drawer,” taken from Morrissey’s first volume (1996). For the speaker, aunt Sarah, with her visionary and fanciful approach to life remains a creative role model. Hence the female voice derives her empowerment from “a power rooted in relationality, mutuality, and cocreativity. This is an empowerment born of the relationships” (Howell 26). The notion of co-creativity is derived from Carol P. Christ who claims that: “individuals [are] interacting with and affecting each other, co-creating the world. Relationships are the building blocks of life. In them we grow and develop . . . . We are not only embodied, but embedded” (*She Who Changes* 69–70). Thus Morrissey’s speaker’s relation with Sarah perfectly fulfils the condition of co-creativity. Aunt Sarah’s stories enhance the imagination of the persona and spark off the emergence of her poems. In “Aunt Sarah’s Cupboards and Drawers,” the old lady’s peculiar habits fascinate her younger relative (“She weighs the hazards of waiting too long at a bus-stop / carefully on each palm”). In this way, Sarah receives from her niece acceptance and recognition.

The poem “Aunt Sarah’s Cupboards and Drawers” begins as a mid-sentence elaboration of its title. Initially, the reader is inundated with the sense of letting go: the aunt’s alleged passivity and her failing to cope with the routine of daily life (“she sits in her high-backed chair watching television”). The narrative’s setting is in a grim, dust covered room (“as dust falls over the soup-tin lids / in the tin cupboard in the kitchen”). In Morrissey’s poem, the “routine-centred”

<sup>16</sup> Compare the ending of Keats’s “Ode on a Grecian Urn.”

lines are measured with metrical regularity and linked by the repetition of the word "tin." The female voice admits:

Are a job she doesn't feel up to anymore.  
She sits in her high-backed chair watching television  
as dust falls over the soup-tin lids  
in the tin cupboard in the kitchen.

(TSOTP 39)

Soon instead of the conjectured pity, one begins to experience an increasing curiosity concerning the old lady's unconventional habits and activities. Not hooked on household chores, Aunt Sarah finds other aspects of life ("she followed the sun's eclipse") much more gripping. The persona's aunt prefers the world of her imagination and that of her own relatives ("cheerful with photos of relative's children"). The following sequence in "Aunt Sarah's Cupboards and Drawers" appears to break the pattern of a nearly realistic account with a note of surreal ambiguity and even menace:

Last year she followed the sun's eclipse  
by the day's collapsing wattage in her sitting room,  
cheerful with photos of relative's children.  
She said she watched as it shuttered each face in unison

and then released them. When she broke her lip  
she remembers something picking her up and then dropping  
her on it – *like cracking an egg* –  
and that the picking-up part was a cradling.

(TSOTP 39)

As the verb "shutter" in the cited passage implies destruction, one can only speculate what "shuttered each [child's] face." However within the framework of the light's eclipse (as in Shakespeare's 60<sup>th</sup> sonnet), the statement could signify the life's decline. But even when confronted with the impending darkness, the ageing woman commemorated in "Aunt Sarah's Cupboards and Drawers" still awaits the light's reappearance. In the context of the above, Sarah, in her facing up to both life and death, appears a courageous woman who stimulates other family members' relational development. It happens because Sarah's world is populated with the real or imagined occurrences that are far from being common. In "Aunt Sarah's Cupboards and Drawers," the eerie sensation of being suddenly lifted in the air, and then falling down, which is compared to the "*cracking an egg*," could be attributed to a whirlwind, hurricane, or her own inventiveness. Aunt Sarah contemplates the surrounding reality like Wordsworth, or other Romantic poets, employing "the colouring of imagination" to her "inner eye."<sup>17</sup> In Morrissey's poem, the reverberation of the musical motifs ("picking her up" echoed in "and that the **picking-up part**")

<sup>17</sup> See the *Preface to the Lyrical Ballads* and Wordsworth's "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud."

swirls and spins like the above-mentioned whirlwind. Once remembered sounds return in their familiar reiterations (“*cracking*” and “*cradling*”). The “unison” and “choir practice” complete the melodious celebration. In “Aunt Sarah’s Cupboards and Drawers,” the sentence’s rhythmical regularity adds seriousness to the unconventional account. As argued above, Aunt Sarah’s life is a thought-provoking inspiration for the persona’s own poetic work. As in the case of the late grandmother (compare “both of us were moon-eyed children” in “My Grandmother through Glass”), Morrissey’s speaker employs astronomical imagery to depict female co-creativity (“she always looks for Venus / and tells me more about the moon”). Viewed in this light, women’s relational power involves “attending to the individual – creating growth fostering conditions *within* people and . . . creating growth fostering conditions *between* people” (Fletcher 81), emphasis original. Aunt Sarah’s life inspires the speaker’s poetic imagination and her own creative potential. In that way, in “Aunt Sarah’s Cupboards and Drawers,” “growth-in-connection” is realised in practice. The persona in Morrissey’s poem recalls:

She always looks for Venus  
and tells me more about the moon than I can write down.  
She weighs the hazards of waiting too long at a bus-stop  
carefully on each palm

before going to town. Her life  
was wider than this once – choir practice, Butlin’s,  
walks to the neighbouring village in summer without thinking  
twice about it – but never by much.

(TSOTP 39)

In conclusion, the poem “Aunt Sarah’s Cupboards and Drawers” carries on the theme of the familial kin connections as a source of female relational empowerment. In other words, recognising how much of one’s development one owes to others remains the recurrent thought of Morrissey’s poetry. Due to the speaker’s admiration of Sarah’s imaginative approach, the ageing relative is not viewed as an odd, senile woman whose peculiar habits may be ridiculed. Perceiving the relational connection with her family member as stimulating empowers both the aunt and her niece. It enhances the “growth-in-connection” of both artistic women. That is why instead of passing value judgements, Morrissey’s speaker insists on seeing her aunt’s creative existence as both fulfilling and meaningful (“Her life / was wider than this”).

Following the female ancestry relational blood line, the invocation to Sarah re-emerges in the poem “Awaiting Burial.” The reference to the dead relative and the tunnel (during birth or while passing away?) constitutes the linking ground for the bipolarity of life-death processes [“A damaged hillside, night-time, / The tunnel you dreamt of” (TWFIV 41)]. The self-ironic paradox of Morrissey’s persona’s appeal to Sarah stems from the fact of asking the dead person about the possibility of the afterlife. After all, if the speaker entirely

discarded such an option, she would not be making inquiries about it to the deceased relative. The female voice in "Awaiting Burial" implores:

O

Sarah, speak to me, you've been through  
The journey, was there light on the other side  
(TWFIV 41)

In Morrissey's poetry, the persona's family network of interconnected relations comprises not only the living and the dead relatives but also the new members integrated into the kinship, like the speaker's stepfather and her mother's second husband. In other words, as proved by the poet, female relational empowerment can be drawn from any sustaining (not only blood), growth-enhancing relations. From supportive and motivating adults, children may learn how to uphold their "grow-in-connection" with others and their surrounding reality. The speaker's stepfather becomes her and her brother's guide to the natural world. In *The Irish Times* review of *The State of the Prisons*, Sampson stresses that "*Stepfather*, gives us New Zealand with odd echoes of Australian Les Murray's jaunty modernist astonishment" ("Collections Connecting" 11). Coming from New Zealand, Charles is referred to as "a bushman: had grown up in the bush Up North," who "had **shouldered** his way into adulthood, into being **army-wed**, / from the bed of an eel-breeding creek, **on the back of a Kauri trunk**, / against **the hard flat palm of a forest**" (TSOTP 49). In the cited passage, the bolted phrases impressively employ a dry, short, "masculine," consonantal, reporter-like style. The underlined, vowel-based and highly musical "feminine" phrases, such as "the bed of an eel-breeding creek" soften the ethos of the tough, self-made macho man. In Morrissey's poem, in-between the mellowed phrases (the vowel-onomatopoeic "**woo wood** pigeons," the sound-oriented "**thwack** and **clatter** of the **downpour**," the alliterated "**entrance** and **exit** were two **equidistant**," and subtle "**a lace of green needlepoint**"), one can detect the relational connection between Charles and his step children. The persona in "Stepfather" recalls:

. . . He could woo wood pigeons

just by talking to them and once one had rested on his hand.  
Away from the thwack and clatter of the downpour and where  
entrance and exit were two equidistant reminders of daylight

lived the glow-worms he spoke of, that were not worms at all  
but a little boy's peel-and-stick galaxy, a lace of green needlepoint,  
winking on after light-out over the bunk bed. . . .

(TSOTP 49–50)

Assisted by their stepfather, the city-born children are introduced gradually and safely into the natural realm that they fear instinctively [**Our breaths came**



**hard / and alien** in the clearing as we took its kiss on our skin”] (TSOTP 50), but which holds a fascination for them which they cannot deny [“the waterfall was the same: choked and slick and incandescent / in the dim cave it had made for itself” (TSOTP 50)]. In “Stepfather,” saturated with aquatic creatures, Waitakere Dam seethes with energy. The waterfall’s polished surface glows with fluorescent radiance. On the way home, Charles and his jungle world inspire the children’s imagination: “Our homecoming chorus the hunger / of owls, fierce and unassuageable – *morpork! morpork!* – / and Charles cocking his head at the sound of them as though they could speak” (TSOTP 50). The mighty figure of the stepfather in his triumphant pose [“stood like a conquistador, / hand on one hip, looking up” (TSOTP 50)] does not intimidate the children. His relational power stands for security and confidence [“all three of us steady in his flashlight’s wake” (TSOTP 50)]. The stepchildren admire Charles’s ability to introduce them to the world of wild birds and luminous beetles. They trust him as a caring and reliable guide, leading them through the unknown territories: “Charles cut the way out in front of us / without slowing, insisting we still had time, his mind – who knows – / on the nights he’d lain down on the floor of a Singapore jungle” (TSOTP 50). In “Stepfather,” during the Waitakere Dam and jungle trip, Morrissey’s speaker and her brother are fascinated with the natural world around them: “**the entire steaming basin of greenery swallowing water** / on your left side (my mother in her innocence asking, / the day she arrived from Ireland, *but who planted all this?*)” (TSOTP 49), they admire the “**solitariness of moss and lichen and spider orchids**” (TSOTP 50). In Morrissey’s poem, the accuracy and careful precision of the bolted expressions, together with their tonal and sound dexterity make one realise how much the new reality into which the children have been introduced has empowered their perceptive skills. Accordingly, in “Stepfather,” “relational empowerment refers to the process of enlarged vision and energy, stimulated through interaction, in a framework of emotional connection . . . . Both personal growth and intellectual development occur in this mode” (Surrey, “Relationship and Empowerment” 171).

Dedicated to the poet’s brother, “Home Early” re-connects the remote-in-time child’s recollections with a mature focused perspective. In Morrissey’s poem, the events depicted from the eight-year-old boy’s point of view are filtered through the present-day consciousness of an adult speaker. On the whole, the poem “Home Early” is an empowering narrative of siblings-in-relation. The poem outlines the case of the relational disappointment that has happened to the speaker’s brother. In fear of shame, the eight-year-old boy hides the fact that he misses his mom and that he would like to spend more time with her. It happens because the “closeness with mom has frequently been misunderstood and pathologized. The mother-son connection is ridiculed” (Dooley and Fidele 220). Accordingly, “Jordan (1989) defines shame as ‘a felt sense of unworthiness to be in connection, a deep sense of unlovability, with the on-going awareness of how very much one wants to connect with others’” (Hartling 105–106). “Home Early” begins with an italicised request addressed

directly to the persona's brother: "*Take off your glasses and see.*" The female voice establishes noticeably the dates when the recalled incident took place. The phrase "twenty-four years of adult distance / dissolved to childhood's porous instant" precisely depicts its emotional and temporal span. In Morrissey's poem, the expression "childhood's porous instant" makes it clear that the textual gaps in the narrative will be filled in with a current interpretation. Accordingly, the time interval is rendered by the twice-modified expression "blurred instantly" and "porous instant," implying that the evoked event is both out-of-focus and yet immediate and remembered vividly. In the examined passage, the verbs "blur" and "dissolve" convey the evanescence of the contemplated picture. The female voice in "Home Early" says:

*Take off your glasses and see.*  
 He took him at his word. The world blurred  
 instantly to a Sisters of Charity blackboard.  
 He was eight years old.  
 Twenty-four years of adult distance  
 dissolved to childhood's porous instant  
 (BHAT 35)

When the persona's brother regresses in time to his school years, the vision in "Home Early" acquires sharp-etched details: "as the contents of his pockets came to mind / the morning he left school / before he should have / sent home with a summer cold. / He remembered the sugared communion wafers / nuns sold in twelves" (BHAT 35). Nonetheless, the minute exactness of the past reminiscence may seem disquieting. As are the opening passage's particularised items that abound in the time-sequenced locations. The similar circumstantial accuracy continues in the following fragment:

Mid-morning heat the whole way home.  
 Chillies drying in hands. Women extending flour  
 so far it folded like material, and barrio boys  
 in their lowrider cars slung out by the drugstore.  
 A city in abeyance, an in-breath held  
 until the absence of those in school or work  
 could be refilled at five.  
 (BHAT 35)

Apart from the emphasised preciseness, Morrissey's poem astonishes one with the uncommon word collocations ("A city in abeyance" or "redefined the possible"), the extended similes ("Women extending flour / so far it folded like material"), the linguistic experiments ("The feminine underside of days / exposed her wayward"), and the rhythmical play with sounds ("Before he **stepped** inside he **stooped**"). By the means of the referred to literary devices, the speaker's vision obtains a dimension of not only the particular but also the

universal. In view of that, Morrissey's speaker evokes the memories:

The feminine underside of days  
 exposed her wayward, easy stride  
 and redefined the possible.  
 The palm tree in his front yard proffered shade.  
 (BHAT 35)

What is more, in "Home Early" the suspenseful narrative creates an atmosphere of the nervous apprehension of something striking about to happen [see "A city in abeyance," "he stooped and paused" and "The street seemed suspended between events," "A day of attention stretched deliciously / through noon and afternoon" (BHAT 35)]. In other words, it seems that the whole poem heads for a much desired climactic release of the gradually accumulated tension. As a result, the traces of the "eternally impending" force appear to signify dramatic events to take place. However despite the reader's heightened expectancy, in "Home Early" nothing critical or uncommon does happen. What the narrative highlights is a homesick boy, running away from the convent school who "thought he'd have his mother to himself." For a eight-year-old boy, to openly acknowledge longing for a relational connection with his mom seems formidable ("No room through all that time / for panic, temper, disarray"). This fear of emotional relationality is referred to as the "relational dread,"<sup>18</sup> or the "paradox of connection."<sup>19</sup>

Boys feel this paradox at a young age; they learn early not to fully represent themselves in relational encounters. Shamed for expressions of emotion, they begin to keep important parts of themselves hidden from others. They do this by developing a repertoire of behaviour for staying out of relationship. Miller and Stiver call these 'strategies of disconnection.' These strategies keep boys from experiencing the shaming and putdowns of boy culture at the cost of keeping them out of real connection with others. (Dooley and Fidele 228)

Although no electrifying events follow, the boy's failed hopes to spend more time with his mother and his relational deprivation appear dramatic enough to be remembered. In other words, "Home Early" relates a case of the disrupted

---

<sup>18</sup> Looked from a cultural perspective, the patriarchal model encourages and promotes disconnection especially among the masculine gender,

Stephen J. Bergman (1991) has coined the phrase "relational dread" as a phenomenon in boys and men that grows out from early emotional disconnection from mom. Boys lose their place within the relational context. Eventually, when faced with emotion and relationship, they freeze. They become immobilized. Isolated in their disconnection from mother, they don't know what to do or how be in relationship. Bergman aptly describes this experience of dread and the resulting avoidance of connection that has become an intrinsic part of traditional developmental models for boys. (Dooley and Fidele 227)

<sup>19</sup> The term coined by Miller and Silverman (1997) [Dooley and Fidele 228].

connection and “rapidly failed vision” of the attachment broken because of the unnecessary shame. It happens because in Morrissey's poem the “experience of shame and humiliation might be described as causing us to reflect upon *ourselves in relationship*. Therefore, it might be more accurate to say that these emotions make us *relationally conscious*” (Hartling 105),<sup>20</sup> emphasis original. The female voice in “Home Early” argues:

He thought he'd have his mother to himself.  
A day of attention stretched deliciously  
through noon and afternoon. No room through all that time  
for panic, temper, disarray. When he opened the door  
nuns' words floated uselessly.  
Vision failed rapidly.

(BHAT 35)

As argued in “Home Early” instead of a much needed narrative resolution, one is left with an inconclusive finale whose “[v]ision failed rapidly.” Then the discontinued vision is being contemplated from “[t]wenty-four years of adult distance.” The emotional and intellectual distance allows one a broader reading of the causes of this relational crisis. In the context of normative and normalising institutions,<sup>21</sup> such as the church-run educational establishments, one might refer to the phenomenon of “prosocial” shaming<sup>22</sup> employed as a disciplinary means.

The issue of unfulfilled relationality is further elaborated in “M.E.” The abbreviated solitary singularity of Morrissey's poem's title (“me”) stands in clear contrast with the idea of self-in-relation. As with “Home Early,” the four-lined narrative opens with the words quoted in italics. Similarly “M.E.” operates on the concept outlined earlier: the opening and concluding lines constitute the argumentative framework for the digressive imagery and the metaphorical extension of the main subject. Morrissey's narrative's theme, a daughter seeking a relational connection with her mother, is textually materialised into an obscure seaside image. Comparable to “Home Early,” in “M.E.” the suspenseful tension in-between the lines implies a sense of entrapment (“the footprint of an overweight six-foot fisherman, / scouring for bait”). In Morrissey's poem, the speaker's words additionally connote vulnerability (“Down by the latest tide line, where the sand caves in”) and the girl's upset physical and emotional balance (being “turned inside out”). What might surprise one is the usage of the possessive pronoun “our” rather than “your,” to precede “daughter.” This

<sup>20</sup> What is more, Hartling, after Klein, locates humiliation within social or even cultural patterns, associated with unequal power relations (Hartling 107, Walker 120–121).

<sup>21</sup> Hartling refers to this phenomenon drawing upon Klein's research. Dooley and Fedele indicate that “[s]haming men and boys for exhibiting vulnerable feelings may contribute to their risk of engaging in violent behaviour” (229).

<sup>22</sup> Following this line of thinking, Jordan argues that: “Shaming . . . is done to people by other people, usually to control or disempower them in some way. It plays a role in almost all socialization . . . towards independence and socialization toward gender role compliance . . . . Shaming serves to disconnect people from themselves, from their real feelings, and from others. It also serves to silence and to isolate people” (122–23).

meaningful alteration could point to the grown-up speaker embracing her younger version as her self-in-relation (compare “Sickness has turned our daughter inside out”). The female voice in “M.E.” recalls:

*Like that, Mummy!* I’ve been asking her what it feels like.  
Down by the latest tide line, where the sand caves in,  
the footprint of an overweight six-foot fisherman,  
scouring for bait. Sickness has turned our daughter inside out.  
(BHAT 23)

The receptive feedback that the speaker in “M.E.” was denied is essential in a sustaining relation as well as “responsiveness to the continuous existence of the other or others and the expectation of mutuality in this regard” (Surrey, “The Self-in-Relation” 61). Thus the lack of responsiveness in an asymmetrical relation prevents female empowerment from coming into existence. That is why when deprived of attention to her vital needs, instead of potency, the persona in “M.E.” experiences frustration and a lack of fulfilment.

To take place, female relational empowerment needs to be based on the mutual recognition of all subjects involved.<sup>23</sup> However the persona in Morrissey’s poetry admits in retrospection to being frustrated in her not always realised need for a relational connection with her mother. Such is also the case related in the poem “Hazel Goodwin Morrissey Brown.” Morrissey’s narrative promotes a textual image of the speaker’s mother, conjured up by her grown up and critical daughter. At first glance, Hazel Goodwin Morrissey Brown appears to be a nonconformist who is actively involved in the political movement and is always on the side of the disadvantaged. The activist in the worker’s movement, supporting the communist ideas of labourers’ rights is referred to as “salient, rehabilitated.” She is reinstated on the frontline to fight the enemy. Nonetheless in the speaker’s eyes, the mother’s political engagement is dismissively summed up as “your GDR-Worker phase,” which implies a superficial, temporary fad rather than a lasting commitment. She argues:

I salvaged one photograph from the general clear-out, plucked  
(Somehow still dripping) from the river of my childhood.  
You in your GDR-Worker phase, salient, rehabilitated:  
*Reagan, you can’t have your Banana Republic and eat it!*  
Your protest banner and your scrapped back hair withstood the flood.  
I’ve hung your smile beside your latest business card: *Nuskin Products.*  
(TWFIV 39)

In the same vein, the grown-up speaker in “Hazel Goodwin Morrissey Brown” depicts her early years as “the river of my childhood,” later employing even stronger words “withstood the flood.” In-between the lines, one might

---

<sup>23</sup> After all, “[i]t is the yearning for connection, rather than an innate need for separation or individuation, that fuels . . . development *both* in the here and now *and* in the past” (Fedele 206), emphasis original.





that laced the yard  
like illuminated Ferris Wheels in the fairs you ran away to in your sleep.  
(BHAT 57)

In "Pearl," the karmic rule of just retribution is captured by the image of the persona's mother being struck by a brick that she herself propelled into the air. The brick's unavoidable gravity (signifying the relational weight) is rehearsed now by the speaker's parent: whatever you throw out will come back to you with the same force. Morrissey's poem's middle part introduces a surreal ground to the narrative, the head injury causes a series of hallucinations (illuminated visions?) in which the speaker's mother visits "the underwater dynasty of kings and queens." The female voice in "Pearl" claims:

It made the day a room. And you were in it, above another room. And  
then you weren't.  
You saw the room through water. Then from underneath. Then as  
laughter.  
And you were a king's daughter, a king whose grandfathers you  
somehow knew  
and when you turned, your own great grandchildren swam into view,  
complaining and distressed. . . .  
(BHAT 57)

In that relational aquatic clan, the past and the present mingle with each other. In "Pearl," the all-embracing female blood line entails each woman's existence deliquescing into a sea of other related lives, re-connecting past, present and future generations. One is given simultaneously an enlightening insight into all the dimensions of the continuous ancestral selves-in-relations: from daughter, granddaughter, and mother to grandmother ("expanding lines of blood"). The speaker in Morrissey's poem argues:

. . . Time stretched like falling honey  
and you were everywhere, without a body, watching the ends of vision  
dissolve  
in expanding lines of blood. The things you told the doctor as you held  
your head  
and came up with from under, were amazing, if he could have been amazed.  
(BHAT 57)

The subsequent part of "Pearl" opens with a Japanese "Pillow Book" like list in which Morrissey's persona enumerates the reasons for her return to Ireland after living abroad for several years. The fragment: "whole **d**ays **d**issolve to **d**istance. And time is simmering liquid. And / space is gelatine" echoes in a re-connecting way with her the mother's earlier visions ("Time stretched like falling honey / and you were everywhere, without a body, watching the ends of vision / dissolve / in expanding lines of blood"). Surprising as it may seem, Morrissey's self-in-relation experiences similar sensations to the ones related by her parent: the temporal curve of "the past and future flattened." As shown





The poem's last line brings back the reiteration of the verb: "amaze" (compare the earlier "the things you told . . . were **amazing**, if he could have been **amazed**"). Looked at from that angle, in Morrissey's text, the pearl becomes the symbol of the female storytelling gift, transferred in the speaker's family from one women's generation to another. What is more, the titled gem amounts to female relational empowerment, treasured as a source of women's strength and creativity. As argued in "Pearl," power in connection comes to connote

the act of enabling, or contributing to, the development of another . . . In this definition, part of what it means to contribute to another's growth is to allow that person to contribute to your own growth, whether emotional, relational, or intellectual. (Fletcher 55–56).

The concluding triplet of the poem "Pearl," expressing the persona's **amazement** at the world's all-connected "treasures," becomes the manifesto of the speaker's empowering and mutual relation (you – I) with her mother and other creative women from her ancestral line ("You told me of the pearl" and "I want to see it, / finger it, believe it, be **amazed**"), and not only those connected with her in blood.

## 1.2. "To Act in Concert:" Women's Mutual Empowerment in the Poetry of Mary O'Donoghue

*We cannot tickle ourselves.  
Failed mission . . .  
(Mary O'Donoghue, "On Tickling")*

"Understanding power as the issue" (Fox-Genovese 24),<sup>26</sup> sisterhood involves and encourages "the ability to create a relational context for growth and empowerment [that] arises out of early self-with-other experiences" (Surrey, "Relationship and Empowerment" 171). In her defence of sisterhood, Fox-Genovese highlights its historical and current function as the "dominant metaphor for relations among women, and by implication, for relations among humans" (26). Accordingly, she argues that:

Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, sisterhood and feminism, although not always in the same ways, have helped women to identify the decisive features of their social, economic, and political vulnerability and to build foundations for their potential strength. Sisterhood has flourished even

---

<sup>26</sup> Fox-Genovese claims that "Understanding power as the issue, many feminists sought to secure its political weapons for women. They engaged the struggle for equal access to the public sphere, including the vote, legal equality, and employment. In addition, they struggled for respect for themselves and other women and . . . women's values throughout society" (24).

among women who remained uninterested in, when not actively opposed to, feminism. . . . Frequently unnamed, sisterhood has provided both the model for and the substance of those bonds through which women have nurtured, supported, sustained and valued one another. (Fox-Genovese 17)

The aforementioned bonds and activities were based on the assumption of women's shared problems and sometimes on shared aims and priorities. Allen recalls the positive attitude towards sisterhood and solidarity of the women grouped under the term of the second stage feminists. Accordingly,

Early second-wave feminists saw no problem with brandishing the slogan "sisterhood is powerful"; implicit in this slogan is an appeal to the common interests of women, a call for a response to a shared experience (oppression) that binds women together as sisters – hence, to solidarity (at least in one sense of that term). (Allen, *The Power* 103–104)

One of the undeniable strengths of this period (roughly speaking the 1960s and 1970s) is:

The capacity to engage in such creative relational activity with a group of peers has been shown to have a major impact on women's empowerment. The consciousness-raising groups of the 1960s and the emergence of "support" groups for women in response to nearly every life situation and social problem attest to the power of such groups in women's lives. (Surrey, "Relationship and Empowerment" 171)

The peak of postmodernism, however, has repudiated the "myth of sisterhood" on the grounds of its alleged essentialism, universality, and class-restricted range. Its "myth" is accused of sweeping women's difference and diversity under a carpet of uniformity.<sup>27</sup> Allen reminds that

However, by the late 1980s, the critique of any notion of the common interests of women, the common oppression of women, even the category of women per se, was in full swing. The critique rightly pointed out that attempts to specify the essence of women, or even the essence of women's experience of oppression, always held up certain women or the experiences of certain women . . . (*The Power* 103–104)

Just as with the cited objections against sisterhood, the prejudice against women's solidarity operates upon similar epistemological roots. In her chapter "Beyond Sisterhood: Rethinking Solidarity," Allen admits that "[a]s the identity politics debate has heated up and dragged on, appeals to feminist solidarity have grown increasingly problematic" (*The Power* 103). Following this line of thinking, she argues that

Hannah Arendt provides feminists with the resources necessary for reformulating solidarity as a kind of power that emerges out of concerted

---

<sup>27</sup> For more, see my article "From Kitchen Into the Bathroom: Feminist (Post) Theory in Crisis."

action – as something that is achieved through action in concert, rather than as the sister-feeling that automatically results from the sharing of a pre-given, fixed, and, hence, repressive identity. (Allen, *The Power* 104)

In other words, Allen claims that “Arendtian account of solidarity is particularly appealing because it does not rely on essentialist and, thus, exclusionary notions of group identity. Instead, the account of solidarity that can be culled from Arendt’s work grows out of the dialectical interplay between identity and nonidentity” (*The Power* 88). What is more, she emphasises that “solidarity should be understood as a particular way of exercising power-with . . . as the ability of a collectivity to act together for the agreed-upon end of challenging, subverting, and, ultimately, overturning a system of domination” (Allen, *The Power* 127). On the whole, the group character of female empowerment indicates that “[p]ower came into being when and where people would get together and bind themselves through promises, covenants, and mutual pledges; only such power, which rested on reciprocity and mutuality, was the real power and legitimate” (Arendt, *On Revolution* 173). In other words, in Allen’s reading of Arendt, female empowerment based on women’s solidarity relies upon “receptivity and reciprocity” (*The Power* 126) and, in consequence, what is called by Daly Be-Friending. Daly explains that the “Realization of participation in Be-ing . . . requires *Be-Friending* . . . the potency of women – a potency that needs to be actualized” (*Pure Lust* 373), emphasis original. Moreover Daly is explicit that Be-Friending is not simply synonymous with friendship among women *per se*. She clarifies the difference in the following passage:

. . . I do not mean to suggest that every woman, or even every feminist, can “be a friend to” or “be friends with” every other woman. It is clear, first of all, that there are limitations of time and energy. Second, there are serious differences of temperament and circumstances which make it impossible for some women to be friends with each other . . . (Daly, *Pure Lust* 373–374)

According to Daly, the main obstacle to Be-Friending is the phallically ingrained phobia of being labelled as a separatist or as a woman who prefers the bonds with other women over that with men. Daly claims persuasively that:

One of the basic blocks to Be-Friending, that is to radical ontological communication among women, is the embedded fear of separation . . . Just as the label “man-hater” in Woman-Hating Society functions to stop thought, so also the negatively charged use of the label “separatist” within the State of Separation hinders women from Be-Friending. (*Pure Lust* 363–364)

For that reason, “Be-Friending is radically connected with Be-Longing” (*Pure Lust* 375). In agreement with the above-cited passage, Daly reminds that the “spiritual / physical context” for developing sisterhood:

in which such friendships can flourish is woven / spun by the vast network of Be-Friending women, many of whom have not met each other. Yet all are extremely

important for the lives and friendships with all the others. This partially invisible network has commonly been called *Sisterhood*. (*Pure Lust* 386), emphasis original

In creating, and most of all, maintaining such a sisterly network, the role of empathy in the process of a woman's dialogue with her own self and other people seems crucial. Gruen phrases it as follows: "[t]he concern with empathic identification with the oppressed and the focus on the direct experience of actual dialogue are good places to start" (362). After all, "Our individual worlds are only as wide as our empathy" (Dunayer 23). Gruen develops this thought maintaining that "empathy does not require that our response rests solely on a being's likeness to us . . . diversity allows for significant moral changes" (363). Empathy is "possible because the self is . . . permeable, able to be affected by others" (Christ, *She Who Changes* 84). Similarly, Jordan advocates that:

Empathy always involves affective surrender and cognitive structuring, and, in order for empathy to occur, ego boundaries must be flexible. Experientially, empathy begins with the basic capacity and motivation for human relatedness that allows perception of the other's affective cues, verbal and nonverbal. This is followed by a surrender to affective arousal in oneself . . . thus producing a temporary identification with the other's emotional state. ("Women and Empathy" 29)

Taking everything into account, Jordan concludes that "[f]or empathy to be effective, there must be a balance of the affective and cognitive, the subjective and objective" ("Women and Empathy" 29). As demonstrated by Daly, what stops women from "Self-empowering" is the lack of solidarity and empathy among women. Women's Be-Friending could be a way out of the patriarchal deadlock that encourages women to perceive other women not as sisters but as competitors, rivals, and enemies. Daly explains the mechanism as follows:

The most effective means employed by males to induce women to perform this dirtywork has been and continues to be the manufacture of illusions which trigger the mechanisms of Self-hate and horizontal violence among women. Thus programmed and activated in the direction of Self-destruction, women actively will *not* to re-member deep Memory, for woman-identified knowledge has been made to seem repugnant. (*Pure Lust* 112), emphasis original

On the whole, O'Donoghue's poetic work focuses on the shared dimension of female empowerment: re-connecting with other women in empathetic, voluntary, mutual and friendly affiliations. Bearing it in mind, her poetry emphasises the value of "being-in-the-world" (Howell 74) in friendly co-existence with other women with whom it constitutes the source of female empowerment and grounding in the world. In view of that, in her analysis of Raymond's theory Howell reminds us that "[w]omen who are separated from the world, cannot cultivate female friendships that have the capacity to change the world" (74). Following this way of thinking, O'Donoghue's poem "The Witches of Móinín na gCloigeann" relates an empowering narrative of three (vide trinity)

middle-aged contemporary “Hags” living in county Clare. The text’s italicised opening familiarises readers with the way the women see themselves, and how they are perceived by local citizens. O’Donoghue’s poem is narrated from a plural, triple-voiced perspective (functioning like a kind of magic spell). Assuming the collective voice “we” is an expression of mutual female relational empowerment, “the ‘we’ is built on a sense of relational movement – of how we are and move together, of two voices in dialogue – something greater than the sum of the parts, informing and being informed by each person.” (Bergman & Surrey 177), emphasis original. “The Witches of Móinín na gCloigeann” speak of themselves as:

*We wax our jackets  
With cooking fats  
And polish our boots  
With Bovril.  
A trio of crabby bitches,  
Or lesbian New Age witches.  
The average council house coven.*

(T 32)

As shown above, the female friends of Móinín na gCloigeann refer to themselves as “coven,” the expression signifying the witches’ gathering place but here in a group of three rather than the usual thirteen. What is significant is that the word “coven” seems to echo, not accidentally, the denomination “covenant.” The three witches’ mutual empowerment is a perfect realisation of the idea of women who “get together and bind themselves through promises, covenants” (Arendt, *On Revolution* 173).

The covenant is the deep *agreement* that is present within the self and among selves who are increasingly in harmony with an environment that is beyond, beneath, and all around the nonenvironment of the patriarchal splits and barriers . . . . Sisterhood as cosmic covenant means beginning to re-name the cosmos . . . . “I am a witch; I am a witch; I am a witch.” . . . It is a way of saying, “I am, I am, I am.” With this declaration one joins the new coven and discovers the covenant. (Daly, *Beyond God* 159), emphasis original

The qualifying phrase: “*The average council house coven*,” as their location, could indicate that the “witches” are not well-off, as they inhabit the social welfare rent-reduced building. However in their case, three female friends sharing one location and their lives together does not seem to be a matter of social deprivation or economic necessity, but that of a conscious choice and an anti-patriarchal statement. In O’Donoghue’s poem, the sexist signifiers commonly employed as to degrade women (such as hags, “crabby bitches” or “lesbian New Age witches”) are reclaimed by the Be-Friended women performatively to weaken the labels’ pejorative denotations. Likewise Fox-

Genovese reminds that sisterhood enabled women<sup>28</sup> “to break out of their walls of silence and has permitted to forge a common language” (14). “Patriarchy and existing power structures depend on the isolation and disempowerment of women . . . Feminists are characterized as ‘ballbusters’ and ‘angry bitches’ . . . seen as troublemakers, to be doubted and judged” (Jordan, “Relational Resilience” 43). In regard to the witches of Móinín na gCloigeann, one might apply the alternative naming for these free-thinking women, namely – “Hags, Crones, Harpies, Furies, Amazons, Spinsters . . . the Spooking, Sparking and Spinning Voyagers [that] continue to move on” (*Pure Lust* 11).<sup>29</sup> In “The Witches of Móinín na gCloigeann,” the speakers’ self-reference as “lesbian” could signify their sexual identity and / or the kind of non-erotic women-to-women bonding, in a mutual and supportive friendship. Daly explains that the divisions among women arise from betrayals of “acting out of false loyalties inculcated by patriarchy” (*Pure Lust* 214). Hence “For Daly . . . lesbianism refers to woman-identified women who have rejected false loyalties to men. Lesbian communities, because of their marginal status, are somewhat beyond reach of patriarchal influence and act like pioneers in the dis-covering of female friendship. Lesbianism is ultimately threatening to patriarchy because it is more than physical contact between women” (Howell 71). In line with that, the three middle-aged “witches” can subversively make fun of the local villagers’ bias against them, and mock people’s fear of female friendship and of women’s ageing process (vide “vicious menopausal crafting”). With regard to Be-Witching, Daly employs the phrases of “Spiraling / Spinning,” “Spinsters Spin” (*Pure Lust* 404–405), explaining that “Be-Witching metaphors transmute the shapes of consciousness and behavior, that is, they change the context of perception. They do this by jarring images, stirring memories, accentuating contradictions, upsetting unconscious traditional assumptions, evoking ‘inappropriate’ laughter” (*Pure Lust* 405). This is how the speakers in “The Witches of Móinín na gCloigeann” recall their shared spinning Voyage:

We were vrooming round County Clare  
 In a did-it-ourselves camper van  
 (A 1960s ambulance from Halifax  
 Painted bubble-gum pink  
 With purple lighting flashes)  
 And came upon a village set into the rock.  
 (T 32)

The empowered women of Móinín na gCloigeann define themselves through their distinctive outward appearance (leather jackets and high boots), by means of their intentional disregard for keeping up social appearances (*crabby*) and

<sup>28</sup> Fox-Genovese narrows down this process to middle-class women (14).

<sup>29</sup> Accordingly, Three Voyagers / Witches’ “counteracting power derives its strength from the number of subalterns that it involves and the solidarity that they are able to achieve in mobilising their resources. It . . . is a collective attempt to influence the holding and exercising of sovereign power. It is, in one sense, power from below rather than power from above” (Scott 26).

ostentatiously provocative ill-temperedness. As stressed by Daly, “Women require the context of Be-Friending both to sustain the positive force of moral Outrage and . . . inventing new ways of living. Without the encouragement of Be-Friending, anger can deteriorate into rancor and can mis-fire, injuring the wrong targets” (*Pure Lust* 375–376). What is more, the speakers manifest their freedom by driving fast through the village in the brightly painted van that they have renovated themselves and in the loud sound their colourful vehicle produces (see the onomatopoeic “vrooming”). From the modern perspective, the women’s defiant behaviour constitutes both an artistic performance and a powerful political statement. Drawing upon Arendt, Scott argues “[p]ower comes into existence wherever members of a group are forged through such bonds of solidarity and organise themselves for collective action. Such a group acquires an identity and a purpose and enables or ‘empowers’ its constituent individuals” (10). In their rebellious spirit, the three women of Móinín na gCloigeann seem to resemble the ancient Irish triple-goddesses: sovereign, fearless, self-assured, and independent from men’s control.

Thus in O’Donoghue’s poem, Be-Friended Hags draw their female relational empowerment from creative, untamed femininity, cherished positively by them with joy, encouraging other women to follow. Daly reminds us that “Be-Witching women thus enchant others, chanting, calling, luring into Lust for transformation” (*Pure Lust* 389). In other words, “sisterhood does point directly to the revolutionary phenomenon of the bonding of those who have been conditioned to be divided against each other – a bonding that signals revolt and is in itself the beginning of liberation . . . the word “sisterhood” says revolution” (Daly, *Beyond God* 59–60). In “The Witches of Móinín na gCloigeann,” the passage below portrays middle-aged female friends as the picturesque hippie-travellers (Voyagers) on the road. Deciding to settle in “a village set into the rock,” they mockingly reject its pretentiously Americanised name “Boston” (see the ridiculing capitalised letters in an almost generic label “Massachusetts Man”). The Hags in O’Donoghue’s poem derisively speculate that:

Signposted as ‘Boston’.  
 Subtitled ‘Móinín na gCloigeann’.  
 Seems that some Massachusetts Man  
 Got the tourist equation arseways  
 And named the place in his likeness,  
 Instead of taking a piece of Ireland with him.  
 (T 32)

For the three friends who have made their home in an Irish village, a foreign, commercial place re-naming strategy is based on appropriation of the local patterns to the global ones which are imagined to be superior. Their opting for the Irish name “Móinín na gCloigeann” signifies the women’s attachment to their own culture and communal heritage. Feeling their empowering connection with all beings (respect for the animals’ bones scattered all over the territory), and their own being part of the world, the Be-Friended Hags build their relations



on empathetic coexistence and challenging of the hierarchical order. The Be-Friended women argue that

Personally, we prefer the real name  
Of a bleached meadow bobbed with skulls.  
In gesture, a cow's cranium  
Hangs from our lintel, bizzie-lizzies

(T 32)

Being aware of the realities of the world they live in, the witches of Móinín na gCloigeann are not easily discouraged by the rural people's prejudice toward their re-settlement. They state that: ["The Rural Resettlement sorted us out / With a house (after some minor resistance / To the co-habitation of three women / In their various forties" (T 32)]. As argued (see "some minor resistance"), sisterhood has always been perceived as the potential danger to the patriarchal rules:

The development of sisterhood is a unique threat, for it is directed against the basic social and psychic model of hierarchy and domination upon which authoritarian religion as *authoritarian* depends for survival. This conflict arises directly from the fact that women are beginning to overcome the divided self and divisions from each other. (Daly, *Beyond God* 133), emphasis original

In O'Donoghue's poem, the female friends approach life with a sense of irony ("bizzie-lizzies"), taking advantage of the villagers' superstitious beliefs. They make profit by "home-brewed aphrodisiac," produced from the dried goats' excrement. In doing so, the "witches" mock the commercialised New Age fad of the "natural health remedying" and "home-brewed" products:

. . . We scabble a living  
From natural health remedying  
And home-brewed aphrodisia:  
Pulverised currants of goaty dung  
And the morning dandelion sap that hangs  
Like spit freshly mustered and spat.

(T 32)

The Be-Friended women (like the three witches from *Macbeth*) draw their mutual female empowerment from weaving their existence freely, "spinning out . . . afternoons." "The knowledge woven through acts of Be-Friending is characterized by the woman-identified recognition of connectedness that inspires and sustains the Weavers" (Daly, *Pure Lust* 377). The three speakers in "The Witches of Móinín na gCloigeann" admit:

And we stay in the house quite a bit.  
Spinning our afternoons  
To Mary Whelan's nasal buzz  
And our vicious menopausal crafting:

(T 33)

Textually, many expressions in O'Donoghue's poem seem to be wryly transformed, which implies their subversive discursive potential. For instance "spinning" comes playfully close to "sinning," being a verbal pun on the people's bias against the Hags' allegedly "immoral" lifestyle. In the cited passage, "play poker" might indicate a card game but also keeping fire. "Eat rose-hips" refers to rose berries but separated with a hyphen – it denotes devouring the fleshy bodily parts. In "The Witches of Móinín na gCloigeann," the phrase "grow / Haggedy in this place of rocks and bones" delineates a boggy place, but also the Be-Friended witches growing more "cranky and bad-tempered," in the eyes of the patriarchal society. "For Hags, this means sharing, on many levels, activities . . . our creativity . . . This means Realizing of the Lust to share Happiness, to respond with Others to the Wild calls of Be-Longing, implies waking Weird Powers of Be-Witching" (Daly, *Pure Lust* 386). The speakers acknowledge:

Schemes for the hexing  
 Of Lisdoon-bound mismatched men.  
 Unsexing their dreams of a folt  
 Of yellow hair and strong-beamed  
 Women with fields to their name.  
 We play poker, eat rose-hips and grow  
 Haggedy in this place of rocks and bones.  
 (T 33)

When other women are disrespected or abused, the witches of Móinín na gCloigeann can cast a malevolent spell. They do not have any forbearance for the "mismatched male" patriarchal fantasies about the "yellow hair and strong-beamed / women," idealised female saints, as opposed to their real life sexual partners. In the analysed poem, "sisterhood has evoked the purportedly noncompetitive, noncontractual bonds of familiar affection and devotion" (Fox-Genovese 20–21). O'Donoghue's narrative completes its circular structure with the conclusive repetition of the first stanza. As proved in O'Donoghue's poetry, "[s]isterhood has thus afforded a network of mutual support – a fund of collective strength and affection from which women could draw upon for still private battles in the home or on the job" (Fox-Genovese 14). Bearing the above in mind, in the poem "Osh Kosh B'Gosh" one can appreciate women's solitary empowerment drawn from the female adolescent friendship. Thus O'Donoghue's "Osh Kosh B'Gosh" meditates on a different aspect of sisterhood: that of the formative connection of three teenagers who support one another at school and in private life. Drawing upon Aristotle's words that "nobody would choose to live without friends even though he possessed all other goods" (*The Promise* 17), Arendt explains:

Aristotle concludes that it is friendship and not justice (as Plato maintained in the *Republic*, the great dialogue about justice) that appears to be the bond of communities. For Aristotle, friendship is higher than justice, because justice is no longer necessary between friends. . . the truthful dialogue each of the

friends can understand the truth inherent in the other's opinion. . . . one friend understands how and in what specific articulateness the common world appears to the other . . . kind of understanding – seeing the world (as we rather tritely say today) from the other's point of view. . . . (*The Promise* 17–18)

In line with that, O'Donoghue's poem "Osh Kosh B'Gosh," dedicated to (the poet's school friends?) *Aine and Trina*, begins in the "plural" or rather triple voices of teenage female friends. The statement: "We're all three of us" might imply that the girls' collective self is made up of the three intertwined identities. In "Osh Kosh B'Gosh," the unifying aspects that are enumerated by the speaking voices are the girls' need for independence ("let-outs"), their self-assertive personalities ("little big-shots"), their preference for explorative adventures, and taking no notice of patriarchal obstacles or gender impediments ("stop all the lights for us"). The three personas in O'Donoghue's poem declare:

We're all three of us  
let-outs, little big-shots,  
would you credit the cut of us,  
someone had better  
stop all the lights for us.

(ATW 61)

As shown in "Osh Kosh B'Gosh," the poem focuses on the features shared by the adolescent girls that constitute the background for their Be-Friending. "Most essential is the fact that Be-Friending is woven of the fibres of women's lives . . . . Gestures, witty comments, facial expressions, glances, a certain light in the eye, caresses, styles of clothing, ways of walking, choices of occupation, of environment – these are a few of the signals of a woman's participation in Be-Friending" (Daly, *Pure Lust* 385). In "Osh Kosh B'Gosh," the depicted girls are characterised by their emancipation and self-realisation, stereotypically connoted with the masculine gender. The three teenage friends desire to lead an empowered, active and fulfilled life. The modifier "active" seems to be crucial here because it is the *sine qua non* condition for female empowerment. After all in O'Donoghue's poem "Be-Friending is radically active" (Daly, *Pure Lust* 319). It happens because "passive potency is a capacity to receive something from something else, active potency is the ability to effect change" (Daly, *Pure Lust* 169). The speakers in "Osh Kosh B'Gosh" admit:

Lawks, the state of us,  
kitted out in a gallimaufry  
of cast-offs from America,  
bits and bobs from Franciscan  
grand-aunts, scratchy  
Yonkers jumpers, nylon  
slacks from Tenafly.

(ATW 61)

In O'Donoghue's poem, the words that describe best the three friends' personalities are courage and passion (compare "lawks, the state of us"). The speaker and two other girls are claimed to have come from a similar non-affluent milieu. The charity clothes, posted by the wealthier relatives from America, and the distantly-related nuns' gifts – indicate the teenagers' impoverished family background. Nonetheless, the peculiar combination of gaudy, cheap and second-hand garments constitutes not the source of the female friends' shame but their shared pride. From the available resources, the three girls can create a truly unique and highly eclectic fashion outfits: partly vintage and "nearly new:" "In the photograph two of us / wear little capes for the opera, / rabbit fur **saddling** our **sh**oulders, / trussed to our throats by **pom-poms**" (ATW 61). What is more, the girls' relaxed attitude towards their physical appearance betrays no signs of the constraining patriarchal significations of femininity that teenagers could feel obliged to follow. Both their playful clothes and their defiant behaviour signify a considerable amount of female agency and freedom. Although the word "harness" might imply a limit on movement, in the below-quoted passage it denotes the opposite. The following account indicates the three friends' being at ease with their developing adolescent female bodies and their awaking sexuality. Wearing comfortable, though not prescriptively "girlish" attire, they pursue the activities whose choice is not restricted by gender stereotypes. In "Osh Kosh B'Gosh," "the . . . friendship is the sharing of Happiness, female-identified" (Daly, *Pure Lust* 385). The personas in O'Donoghue's poem describe themselves as:

Harnessed tight, one of us  
inside checkered dungarees,  
flush with her belly  
and snug to the crotch,  
like a tiny hucksterish man.

(ATW 61)

In other words, the three girls draw their Be-Friending empowerment from being together and supporting one another in their daily activities. In "Osh Kosh B'Gosh," the mutual power that the teenage friends share results from their solidarity: standing by one another, regardless of the Laws of the Father. In O'Donoghue's poem, the sense of loyalty and care that the young women give to one another is not based on essentialist roots, but on the individual and personal bonds that the three girls have developed together.<sup>30</sup> By the same token, Daly argues that the friendship between women is not satisfying without Be-Friending. "Lacking such a context, women do sometimes reach immensurable depths in their friendships, but there is almost always . . . a vague sense of

<sup>30</sup> Allen expresses such an understanding of women's mutual empowerment: "we need a theory of power that can conceptualize solidarity . . . we shall have to formulate our conception in such a way that it is able to avoid the charge that solidarity is an exclusionary and repressive concept that is always predicated on some inherent sameness or identity" (*The Power* 123).

something missing, or something lost” (Daly, *Pure Lust* 379). In “Osh Kosh B’Gosh,” the teenage friends do not seem to be confined by socially restrictive rules and the dividing walls of patriarchy: “The sun-spangled wall behind us” (ATW 61). The aforementioned statements evoke another crucial aspect of female relational empowerment: its uncompelled and open-choice character, based on women’s own preferences in tune with their own sense of freedom. Gruen reminds us that “[i]t is within friendships that support, respect, and mutual growth most readily occur” (360). In reference to artistic freedom, O’Donoghue’s personas draw upon the mid-sixties creative London designer, Mary Quant known for structural design and miniskirts. Textually in “Osh Kosh B’Gosh,” the clothes’ signification and its significance remain the principles organising the teenage girls’ discourse. However the expressions contrasted with the fortifications and the lichen (the parasitical plant and the dermatological disease) may evoke sinister connotations. The female personas argue:

These clothes on us  
might well bring on  
the bullies. But this morning  
we swagger our couture,  
and we’re cool as you please,  
and we don’t give a damn,  
for we are. The next. Big thing.

(ATW 62)

The poem’s final passage reinforces the earlier-evoked note of the menace: “These clothes on us / might well bring on / the bullies.” The sentence seems to imply that freedom manifested in the girls’ conduct and in their outfit could instigate people’s hostility and even aggression. In O’Donoghue’s poem, the adverbial clause of contrast beginning with: “But this morning” reveals the speakers’ awareness of the risk involved in female empowerment: the girls know that it is not tolerated in patriarchal discourse and that it is punitively disciplined. Despite being conscious of putting themselves in jeopardy, the three teenage empowered friends do not let themselves be intimidated, which testifies to their strength of character. Such a defiant attitude is not common in patriarchal society where “women have been conditioned to distrust each other and rely upon men with power for support” and “to lean on father-figures instead of finding strength in the self” (*Beyond God* 136, 143). The concluding declaration in “Osh Kosh B’Gosh:” “and we’re cool as you please,” “and we don’t give a damn” reaffirms the tripled pattern of Be-Friending female empowerment. The final assertive words in O’Donoghue’s poem – “for we are” – constitute the pronouncement of the girls’ self-governance, resulting from their mutually empowering sisterhood. The closing phrase which is extended with the complement: “The next. Big thing” refers to the girls’ themselves (“we are big

thing”) to the teenagers’ solidarity<sup>31</sup> and “their existential courage” (Daly, *Beyond God* 38–39). In the similar vein, the poem “Good Speech” elaborates on teenage Be-Friending, tested against the oppressive authority of the normative educational system. This time, the Received Pronunciation is designed to instil obedience and docility in the schoolgirls’ heads, conditioning them to follow slavishly the prescribed rules of “Good Speech.” O’Donoghue’s poem commences with a derisively prescriptive definition:

What is Good Speech?  
Good Speech  
is Speaking Out  
Clearly and Distinctly  
with Proper Emphasis  
and Expression

(ATW 17)

In contrast to the quoted solemn exposition, the first stanza of “Good Speech” begins with a cheerful onomatopoeic exclamation: “Ay! Eee! Eye! Oh! You! / First verse of ‘Norman the Zebra / at the Zoo’” (ATW 17). However the pronunciation textbook’s infantile title appears ridiculous when employed in the adolescents’ class [“We are fourteen / and we hate Wednesdays” (ATW 17)]. In O’Donoghue’s poem, not only are the age group’s instructions miscarried, so is the historical and political context in which the Irish teenage girls are educated. They claim:

for we must lose  
our muckle-mouthedness  
and become Violet Elizabeth Botts,  
sugaring and plumming our epiglottis.

(ATW 17)

In “Good Speech,” the nonsense of “becoming Violet Elizabeth Botts,” appears to be supported by the colonial, supposed superiority of English culture and its linguistic medium. Enforced submission (“for we **must** lose / our **muckle-mouthedness**”) in the girls’ renouncing their own national language is administered to edify the English paradigms of the Received Pronunciation (see “*This, That, These and Those Thistles*”). In response to the linguistic indoctrination, the female students in “Good Speech” react with mockery and a note of pubertal humour. Likewise, “Within this context, women can hope to Realize our potential for finding and developing deep, Self-transforming friendships. Such friendships imply the communication of Happiness” (Daly, *Pure Lust* 386). The speakers in “Good Speech” recite:

---

<sup>31</sup> Daly asserts that “our liberation consists in refusing to be ‘the Other.’ . . . the new sisterhood is saying ‘us versus nonbeing’” (*Beyond God* 34). She elaborates this thought, claiming that “Women now have a special opportunity to create an *affirmative way* that is not simply in the arena of speculation, but especially in the realm of active self-affirmation . . . through the existential courage” (*Beyond God* 38–39), emphasis original.

*This, That, These and Those Thistles.*  
 Lose the lisps, and the gap-toothed  
 whistles. Soft and hard palate?  
 Search around in some  
 boy's mouth to find them.

(ATW 17)

In O'Donoghue's poem, behind the teenage laughter, there lurk poignant memories of shaming and humiliation: "'The Marrog from Mars' lurches / his way through the nightmares / of the girl in our class / with a stammer" (ATW 17). The fact that regardless of her disability, the student with the speech impediment is made to undergo the very same training as the rest of the group discloses an oppressive and homogenising face of the educational system. In that sense, in "Good Speech," women's sisterhood / solidarity is understood as assuming responsibility for one another. Namely

. . . taking of responsibility is explicable only through relations that forge identities, in situations in which there can be no clear-cut distinction between self and other, egoism and altruism. What emerges is a picture of the construction and constant transformation of identities through relations of sympathetic identification that underlie, but are also themselves made possible of by, the taking of responsibility. (Lloyd 117–118)

With this in mind, in "Good Speech" the Be-Friended girls' resistance towards the classroom brainwashing leads to the emergence of a shared, plural identity (see the profuse "we" pronoun), which enhances the subversive, contesting mimicry of the applied instructions. The speakers in O'Donoghue's poem declare:

We are dulcet.  
 We are pregnant  
 in our pauses,  
  
 as silver-tongued  
 as Demosthenes  
 or Audrey Hepburn.

(ATW 17–18)

In the examined text, the expression "pregnant in our pauses" may mean the weighty, grave silence, but it could also signify the girls' sexual initiation. The female students pretend to copy the lady-like behaviour, imitating the purportedly superior foreign sounds, the eloquent rhetoric, and the seemingly impeccable manners of the aristocratic celebrities. In-between-the-lines, however, they let others know that they do not take the rules of "Good Speech" seriously and that their ambition is not being "as silver-tongued / as Demosthenes / or Audrey Hepburn." In O'Donoghue's poem, what the conditioning process appears to be targeted at is developing culturally and gender-oriented hypocrisy much more than "Received Pronunciation." In

addition, the female students are perfectly aware of that fact, performing the implicit travesty of the implemented instructions [see “We secrete,” “We pantomime” (ATW 18)].<sup>32</sup> In the cited passage, it is conveyed by the abundance of active verbs, stating the activities conducted together by the Be-Friended girls.<sup>33</sup> The poem's final line reveals the corruptive influence that the “Good Speech” inculcation has exerted upon the young learners' minds and bodies. By admitting: “We make ourselves sick” (ATW 18), the female students imply playing truant to skip the unwanted classes. But, on a more serious note, the necessity to participate in a farcical disciplinary process evokes in the teenagers (self-) disgust and sickness (nausea). In other words, the young women's deep objections to “Good Speech” are internalised on the corporeal level. In O'Donoghue's poem, the possible outcome of such miseducation is inducing in the female students a sense of self-aversion for the compliance with the self-demeaning class requirements. Such a procedure is especially dangerous for female teenagers because “belittling of women's intellects – probably more than any other form of disparagement – undermines female hope and courage . . . Deprived of trust in her own mind, the courage of her own convictions, a woman is rendered helplessly passive and filled with Self-loathing” (Daly, *Pure Lust* 165). Daly names the process related in “Good Speech” as the “training of a woman not to Realize” (*Pure Lust* 165).<sup>34</sup> And she adds sarcastically “When properly programmed, a woman becomes an avid consumer of mediated ‘knowledge.’ . . . cajoling women to accept defeat” (Daly, *Pure Lust* 165). In conclusion, O'Donoghue's poem's title appears to be bitterly ironic, as the so called proper speech, instead of improving the young women's sense of self-confidence, worth and dignity turns out to be the instrument of conditioning the female teenagers into their subordinate political and gender roles. Developing plural identity enables the adolescent girls of “Good Speech” to feel empowered in a situation beyond their control. As proved, in O'Donoghue's poem, young women need to be Be-Friended not only with one another, but also with their own female selves. O'Grady explains this concept as follows:

For Janice Raymond the notion of women's friendship with the self represents an act of personal and political defiance against women's training in male-defined societies to take care of the needs of others often at the cost of being absent to a knowledge and appreciation of one's own needs, values, interests, and beliefs . . . So often women reveal qualities of acceptance, tolerance,

---

<sup>32</sup> In consequence, “Sisterhood has contributed to the creation of political female beings by freeing women from the continual replay of familial psychodramas, by freeing women from the necessity of continually reproducing their own childhoods and even their own narcissism. So understood, sisterhood might be described as political” (Fox-Genovese 15).

<sup>33</sup> “The context of Be-Friending is not woven entirely of books, of course. The products of women's creative activism . . . are fundamental constituents of the context of Be-Friending” (Daly, *Pure Lust* 385).

<sup>34</sup> Daly elaborates this thought arguing that “Women are universally trained not to Realize” (*Pure Lust* 164).



patience, compassion, and support toward others that are absent in relations with the self. (107)

As demonstrated in “Good Speech,” the only positive outcome of patriarchal determinative training is its unintended side-effect: the emergence of women’s rebellious coalition against its repressive methods. This way “purportedly noncompetitive, noncontractual bonds of familiar affection and devotion” (Fox-Genovese 20–21) of sisterhood and Be-Friending become in women’s discourse a valuable source of female empowerment. Correspondingly, Surrey defines such a type of female relational power as “‘being together,’ ‘moving together,’ and ‘acting together’” (“Relationship and Empowerment” 163). Looked at from that angle, Be-Friending<sup>35</sup> as depicted in “Good Speech,” “Osh Kosh B’Gosh” and “The Witches of Móinín na gCloigeann,” amounts to the women’s social, political and personal empowerment. For the female speakers in the analysed O’Donoghue’s poems,

friendship implies a sharing of activity – in a special sense, intellectual activity the necessary context will be one that awakens and encourages women to exercise their powers to full capacity. It will inspire women to share Happiness . . . called Be-Friending. (Daly, *Pure Lust* 379)

By the same token, the persona in “Widening the Canal” depicts the Be-Friending connection with women in her family as empowering. The poem explores the theme of sisterhood both in its literal and metaphorical sense. On one level, O’Donoghue’s narrative relates the hierarchical, in respect to one’s age difference and life experience, relation between sisters. On the other hand, it shows the interrelated female connections when older women “widen the canal” for the younger ones who will go after them. Symbolically, the strenuous squeezing through the tight birth canal is depicted as an empowering path that opens up unknown territories for female advancement. In “Widening the Canal,” the labour pains invested in this arduous rite of passage “make it stronger.” Thus in O’Donoghue’s poem, every subsequent sister Voyager who follows in the steps of the first explorer will find it easier to go through this ground-breaking journey. The speaker recalls:

The oldest sister is ground-breaker  
For all the girls who follow after.  
Her birth takes that bit longer:  
She widens the canal. Makes it stronger.

(T 1)

---

<sup>35</sup> This is how Daly relates the empowerment, experienced also by the narrated characters of “Good Speech.” “Women who are risking Realizing soon realize that this event is not at all a passive reception of a revelation . . . It is continuing manifestation of be-ing; it is participation in creation, overcoming the reason-blocking elementary constructs, unfolding the potentialities of be-ing” (*Pure Lust* 164).

The female voice in "Widening the Canal" depicts an affirmative vision of Be-Friended sisterhood whose collective strength and communal wisdom accumulates, reinforced by each and every other sister who walks on this shared path. In O'Donoghue's poem, younger women who are lucky to draw upon the experience and sagacity of elders will benefit from the space won by the women who preceded them. In "Widening the Canal," the active verbs "wriggle," "slither" and "jerk" render the spontaneous, unrestrained, even spasmodic moves, signifying a high degree of female freedom. O'Donoghue's persona argues:

The youngest sister slips through quickest.  
The canal is at its broadest, she is the littlest.  
Plenty of room to wriggle and slither,  
Jerking her safety rope along the route with her.

(T 1)

Following this line of thinking, "Ljubljana" reaffirms the sisterly empowering connection that a woman / sister might experience, even being far away from her female relatives. In O'Donoghue's poem, having received the postcard from the capital of Slovenia, the persona calls her sibling to mind, hearing her name in the flowing stream: "**Ljubljana** . . . brook / bubbling." The plosives' melody of the alliterated "b" is further reiterated in "**b**abble of **b**aby in the **b**ath." The speaker in "Ljubljana" ponders:

Ljubljana: an oily brook  
bubbling over the rock-sounds  
of my sister's name, the pout  
and babble of baby in the bath.  
A name more suitable for her  
that all the nicknames  
I've laboured over. . . .

(ATW 63)

The persona in O'Donoghue's poem cherishes the denotation "Ljubljana" because the word has the root "love" in its derivation, heard even in the softness of the Slavic consonantal clusters. In the foreign sounds, the speaker finds a familiar connection with her absent sister: "A name more suitable for her." Contemplating the postcard sights, the female voice in "Ljubljana" follows the melody of "queasy-green / **rock** spilling from the **roof**" more than the visual imagery or its textual account. In the examined passage, the expressions "queasy-green" and "the **strange** people / which I can't explain" (ATW 63) intensify her sense of longing for her world-travelled sibling. Because of that awareness, the bond between two sisters appears to be more resilient. Comparably to the cited fragment, the humorous image of "Vlad Dracul's house / [is] studded with windows" is commented with the same alienating modifier: "(**Strange** choice of a gaff / for a vampire)" (ATW 63). Unlike the persona's ironic detachment and her rational analyses, the travelling sister in "Ljubljana"

absorbs the fleeting moments with sensuous delight: “Can’t believe / we’re here” (ATW 63). Furthermore, sisterly Be-Friending manifests itself in the way with which O’Donoghue’s speaker examines her sibling’s handwriting. The elongated, vertical letters denote her sister’s aspirations for height, expansion and freedom. The voice in the analysed poem compares it to American soaring multi-storey buildings, towering over the background. Describing her own polished, rounded handwriting, the persona juxtaposes it with her relative’s perpendicular Gothic letters. In “Ljubljana,” the absent sister’s handwriting seems to be enigmatic, impenetrably guarding the mysteries of its owner [compare the historical and religious connotations of “the Rosetta Stone,” “Amber and copper and gold and umber, / Empress Elizabeth’s burnished lavabo / hoards light like sun in a chalice” (ATW 64)]. The female voice in O’Donoghue’s poem observes:

. . . Her handwriting is  
skinny skyscraper letters,  
like an American city, so in love  
with ascenders. This handwriting,  
nothing like my own rotund alphabet,  
infuriating her every professor  
with barcoded meaning, smug  
and defiant as the Rosetta Stone  
until de Sacy coaxed out its secrets.

(ATW 63)

The subsequent part of the tour includes Vienna where the ecstatic exclamations and the affective expressions outdo the descriptive function. The female voice, this time without objections, joins in excitement, subscribing to her sister’s relish: “We still use the same fizzing rhetoric, / champagning our enthusiasm over everyone” (ATW 64). O’Donoghue’s persona exclaims:

“Oh Vienna!” The Ultravox riff  
makes me laugh out loud at my desk.  
She tells me I would love it there.  
“Lots to tell. Lots indeed.”

(ATW 64)

The birth of the plural “we” sisterhood in “Ljubljana” is further extended in the elaborate comparison. Claiming that “we’re like E.M. Forster sisters,” the speaker does not simply mean the blood ties but solidary Be-Friending. The two sisters in O’Donoghue’s poem make a team in which each of them is assigned a different but complementary function. The female voice seems to be the responsible, provident sister, accumulating the relational capital and taking care of the family’s bonds, whereas her adventurous, thrill-seeking sibling is located in the here and now, rejuvenating the family resources. The easy-going sister teaches the foresighted one how to draw pleasure from life: be spontaneous, open and non-controlling. The plural voices in “Ljubljana” declare:

We're like E.M. Forster sisters:  
 I'm the one stashed away in rookery  
 while she journeys out, fritters money,  
 beguiles old codgers, sends back stories.

(ATW 64)

In "Ljubljana," in the Be-Friending process, both sisters can learn from each other, enhancing each other's emotional and intellectual advancement. As shown here, the mutual gain that sisters draw from their relation can be called after Wadel "the embedded outcome:" "such as increased competence, increased self-confidence, or increased knowledge" (63). In O'Donoghue's poem, women's mutual empowerment has to be seen as a two-fold activity that involves, on one hand, "a skill in empowering others: an ability to share . . . one's own reality, skill and knowledge in ways to make it accessible to others" and, on the other hand, "skill in *being* empowered: an ability and willingness to learn from or be influenced by others" (Fletcher 64), emphasis original. O'Donoghue's "The Devonian Period" probes another case of "embedded outcomes" shared by two female relatives. The poem analyses an attempt to re-establish a broken connection with an expatriate kin (Bridget), arriving in Ireland to visit a family that she has not seen for a long time. "The Devonian Period" assumes a form of the fleeting impressions recorded in a mosaic of the numbered sequences. The first scene takes place at the airport; against the background of the multi-national flood of strangers, Bridget looks vulnerable and fragile:

She is small and big-eyed  
 as a child, flushed,  
 stalled amid the savvy  
 and rush of Arrivals.

(ATW 65)

In the airport scene, the persona in "The Devonian Period" perceives Bridget as being overwhelmed by the surrounding crowds and apprehensive about their meeting. The expatriate appears to be nearly driven by the luggage trolley which "skids and judders / on its rubber wheels, / a curvetting horse on linoleum" (ATW 65). Accordingly, the speaker in O'Donoghue's poem recalls her relative as being almost physically shrunk:

She navigates  
 the babel-full hall.  
 .....  
 We meet. I am five feet five  
 and a half. Her nose meets  
 the notch in my collar-bone.

(ATW 65)

In "The Devonian Period," as time progresses, the female relatives' reunion is rendered symbolically by their shared, generously sliced brown bread. In O'Donoghue's poem, the visitor from abroad appreciates this welcoming

gesture, although she does find it a clichéd representation of repatriates' native land fantasies. The ironic distance is manifested in the adjectives: "tomb-stone thick" and the phrase: "of my widest, most / diasporate desires." In light of the above, re-establishing the kin connection is depicted by the female voice as an empowering but on-going process. The speaker in "The Devonian Period" records:

That week, we breakfast  
on brown bread sliced  
tomb-stone thick,  
the bread, she's sure,  
of my widest, most  
diasporate desires.

(ATW 66)

Despite the initial note of distrust, the distance between the two related women seems to diminish. When travelling on the train, they establish tactile contact; touching each other's hands ["We link arms on the train," (ATW 66)]. They appear to travel at night, as implied by the phrase: "chat to our hollow-faced / reflections in the dark / window" (ATW 66). What is more, the surrounding dimness in O'Donoghue's poem might imply that they are moving in the dark, and that they are uncertain how to behave and relate towards each other. In "The Devonian Period," the image of the ox-bow appliance and "crooked elbows" suggests the lack of comfort in this social occurrence, during which neither party feels at ease:

. . . wince at the pain  
of brakes rounding ox-bow  
turns, crooked elbows,  
along the track.

(ATW 66)

Another glimpse of the relatives' shared experience does not look promising either. In "The Devonian Period," the subsequent zoo scene is populated with the distressed animals, ("chimpanzee screams"), looking diseased and in pain [compare "A raccoon seething / with rabies" (ATW 67)]. The line "Grey belly / heaving like a fat, furred / heart between branches" (ATW 67) conveys the creature's displayed pain. It looks like temporary suffering, though, as the female is likely to be giving birth:

The drop of something  
through the dark, a pouchful,  
its soft fall and settle  
in the high grass.

(ATW 67)

As the poem proceeds, it turns out that in the past there were numerous occasions for the speaker and Bridget's closer connections, as the female voice

in O'Donoghue's text makes a comparison between "then" and "now." What is more, the previous contacts between the two women might have been of a much more affective nature, bearing semblance to sisterly Be-Friending. Accepting the friendship with Bridget as a point of reference, the speaker in "The Devonian Period" sums up the changes in her behaviour via this comparative perspective. For that reason, she acknowledges:

My temper, she knows,  
is less igneous now,  
slower to heat and erupt,  
cooling off quickly to leave me  
stone-faced, impassive,

(ATW 68)

Considering the above, it appears that Bridget remembers the speaker's former self: a woman who could act upon impulse, giving way to her emotions. Due to the Be-Friending with Bridget, the persona in "The Devonian Period" is reminded of whom she was or might be in the future. In O'Donoghue's poetry, owing to the empowerment resulting from the bonds of sisterhood, women's identifications might develop and enhance. It is due to the re-established relational connection with Bridget that O'Donoghue's persona may confront her present predicament and current life attitudes. The female voice in "The Devonian Period" recalls:

she unrolls, carpet-wise,  
chaotic, in my house:

anarchic bedclothes;  
a festoonery of jewellery  
that mocks my one neat box;  
the origami of receipts

(ATW 68)

As argued, the friendly reunion with Bridget in "The Devonian Period," reminds O'Donoghue's speaker of whom she used to be before having her life compartmentalised into neat drawers. In the analysed poem, the qualifying adjectives: "stone-faced, impassive" imply a reserved woman who has lost her spontaneity in favour of propriety. In contrast to the persona, Bridget presents herself like a colourful, energetic free spirit, bringing some fresh air into the speaker's carefully-organised life.<sup>36</sup> Taking this into account, the female voice in "The Devonian Period" admits that whom she has become over the years is the

---

<sup>36</sup> Jordan explains that: "The observing, often judging self can then make empathetic contact with the self as object. . . . The motivational and attitudinal state of nonjudgement and openness, taking an experience seriously, and readiness to experience affect and understanding may contribute to important shifts in the inner experience of troublesome self images" ("Empathy, Mutuality" 286).

outcome of accumulating internal and external experiences, facts, events that have grown on her, layer-by-layer. In O'Donoghue's poem, the passive voice of "our ways are crusted into us. Without even thinking" indicates the persona's quiescent inertia in acquiring the aforementioned incrustations, as if they amassed on her self's surface, without the woman's awareness or her intentional participation. The dexterous encrustation image is further elaborated into smearing the leftover food morsel on Bridget's face. The persona in "The Devonian Period" sums up her argument:

Our ways are crusted into us.  
 Without even thinking  
 I dab a crumb from the corner  
 of her mouth and, blinking  
 hugely blue, marram-lashed,  
 she lets me.

(ATW 68)

In conclusion, in the Be-Friending connection, the incrustations accumulated over time as depicted in O'Donoghue's poem are not meant to divide women from one another. The accumulated layers of meanings are added on a daily basis onto life's narrative, like the smeared crumbs of the thickly sliced bread. The final line in "The Devonian Period:" "and she lets me" suggests openness on the part of both women to participate in a mutually empowering relation. As if elaborating this thought, Howell argues that female friendship involves an integrative aspect of empowerment "without resorting to unilateral, nonreciprocal, competitive, or disconnected definitions of power" (76). Hence in O'Donoghue's poetry, being able to draw female empowerment from interdependence and reliance upon other women leads to appreciating female solidary bonds. As a result, it reposes trust in other women, which, on the other hand, contributes to women's own self-confidence. Thus, in consequence, it enhances their sense of relational power. In other words, female empowerment arising from relational connections is presented by the poet as beneficial for all the parties involved, as it enables women to realise their resources according to their own needs and priorities. Summing up, Howell points out that "[f]emale friendship is a context within which women may regain the integrity of their disintegrated Selves and restore the prime order of women in women's relationships" (73). In the poem "Potato Cakes," dedicated to the poet's mother (*Ita O'Donoghue née Creighton*), O'Donoghue's persona probes the empowering dimension of the empathetic "figure-ground experience"<sup>37</sup> between herself and her parent. The speaker in "Potato Cakes" recalls her mother preparing meals as a way of expressing her love and care about the whole family, uniting the clan's members over one table. It happens because

---

<sup>37</sup> In the same vein, Surrey advocates that "[m]ovement-in-relationship refers to the alternations and fluctuations of figure-ground experiences moving toward mutual empathy and shared understanding" ("Relationship and Power" 171).

Food brings a community together. . . . Sharing food and feeding one another affirm our good will. Food is a part of our rituals of celebration and of mourning, trystings and weddings, funerals and farewells. Feeding each other, we affirm our desire for life itself. . . . Eating is an act of transubstantiation, a sacred communion with the earth on which we feed and which, one day, our bodies will feed as well. (Gaard 158)

In view of that, the female voice in O'Donoghue's poem remembers the taste of the meal fried by her mother for lunch. The speaker in "Potato Cakes" cherishes this empowering and reconnecting experience with all her senses: enjoying the shape, their texture, the touch of the liquefying butter, the spotted colours of the dough, the sizzling sound of the frying fat: "Flabby triangles / With forks of butter melting, / Riling down the sides / Of cakes, piebalded brown / In a cast-iron pan" (T 46). O'Donoghue's persona recalls:

We tramped  
The *trompe l'oeil* lino  
Of your wood-smoky kitchen  
Every lunchtime  
For hot potato cakes.

(T 46)

Hypothetically, in "Potato Cakes," the image of the non-working, house-bound mother, absorbed in food preparation could evoke difficulties with the identification on the part of her independent daughter. Women's commitment to their family's wellbeing and health has traditionally manifested itself in gathering people together around co-celebrated meals. However the maternal figure ("wizened thin") in "Potato Cakes," with her self-made cigarettes ("Smoked your own roll-ups") and pitch-black dyed hair ("Dyed your own")<sup>38</sup> does not look like a sacrificial Mother Ireland in the kitchen. In O'Donoghue's poem, the image of an "Italian matriarch" induces the solidary connection with her grown-up daughter. Appropriately, the female speaker in "Potato Cakes" takes pride in remembering her mother as being empowered by her own choices. Admiring her parent's independent character, the persona cherishes the Be-Friending bond with the woman who gave her life:

You were wizened thin.  
Smoked your own roll-ups,  
Dyed your own hair

Sooty black.  
In a wedding photo  
You look like  
An Italian matriarch.

(T 46)

<sup>38</sup> "Problems with empathy for females . . . typically involve difficulty reinstating a sense of self and cognitively structuring the experience" (Jordan, "Women and Empathy" 30).



In addition, in “Potato Cakes,” the hereditary spine illness that runs in the family unites the women of two generations. When threatened herself with the bone disability, the mother’s suffering is empathetically recognised by her daughter. It proves that “[e]xperientially, empathy. . . involves temporary identification with the other’s state, during which one is aware that the source of the affect is in the other” (Jordan, “Empathy and Self” 69). Reconnecting to her mother, the female voice in O’Donoghue’s poem admits: “I have taken on / Your iodine-coloured eyes, / Twig wrists / And risk of scoliosis” (T 46). To some, what the poem “Potato Cakes” depicts may look like a wistful, even idealised childhood narrative about emotional familial connections. However the relations between mother and daughter are anything but uncomplicated. In the patriarchal context, mothers and daughters are taught to regard each other as rivals:

Mothers in our culture are cajoled into killing off the self-actualization of their daughters, and daughters learn to hate them for it, instead of seeing the real enemy. If they begin to see, the pain drives them to their paternal analysts, who help them to understand that they must hate their mothers for not having destroyed them enough to erase the pain. Still, the destruction has not been complete, and women are beginning to dream again of a time and space in which Mother and Daughter look with pride into each other’s faces and know that they both . . . now are sisters . . . (Daly, *Beyond God* 149–150)

The grown up speaker in “Potato Cakes” creates the textual territory where she can look at her mother with pride and acceptance. While not implying here that their relation was deprived of the above, O’Donoghue’s poem enables their textual re-union without guilt or blame. Structurally, in “Potato Cakes,” its unassuming simplicity of both form and content works better than any linguistic embellishments. Unlike the previous poem’s simple form, O’Donoghue’s “Ess” operates on a sophisticated, curved graphic design, resembling the earlier-mentioned bone illness it denominates. In other words, the narrative’s graphical layout imitates the spinal curvature in the scoliosis, the hereditary disease from which O’Donoghue’s mother suffered. Thus through the curved female family tree, the persona in “Ess” traces back her ancestral roots. The poem “Ess” belongs to a series of poems of Be-Friending narratives where the female speakers relate to others via empathetic identification.<sup>39</sup> Hence in “Ess,” persona’s empathetic expressions: “my mother was sequestered,” and “she lay furred / in a hospital corner” aptly render her mother’s infirmity that put an end to her carefree childhood (see “the lipstick language of kittenish / girls”). The referred to vulnerability transformed the female voice’s mother into a scared patient, awaiting in fear the necessary medical treatment. Attempting to regain her agency, she imagined to be capable of speeding up the recovery process

---

<sup>39</sup> Jordan argues that “[i]n empathy there is likely a rapid oscillation of accommodation of images of the self to images of the other, and assimilation of the images of the other to the images of the self” (“Empathy and Self” 70).

herself: “persuade a curvature / back to straightness.” O’Donoghue’s speaker recalls:

Pre-teenage, my mother was sequestered  
 from the lipstick language of kittenish  
 girls. Instead she lay furled  
 in a hospital corner; waited  
 for the switch of bone  
 to persuade a curvature  
 back to straightness,

(ATW 27)

Linguistically, in the examined passage, the alliterated “lipstick language” is then echoed partially in “lathe inlaid,” and “bone boomeranged.” The spine curvature in “Ess” is poetically conveyed as “unruly fretwork spine,” “an arc / of bone boomeranged,” “her lopsidedness.” Following the line of overcoming her frustrating impotence, the speaker’s mother fantasised that she could decompose her bones into loose particles, removing the unwanted illness from her body “dusting her in the / gritty powder of her lopsidedness.” In the cited expression, the pronoun “her” refers to the young patient’s potential death-wish, desiring release from pain and the enforced bed-confinement. The female voice in O’Donoghue’s poem records:

an ivory lathe inlaid  
 from her father into her  
 unruly fretwork spine.  
 One night she dreamt an arc  
 of bone boomeranged  
 from her hands and smashed  
 on the wall, dusting her in the  
 gritty powder of her lopsidedness.

(ATW 27)

In her empathetic identification, the speaker in “Ess” imagines how the hospital environment must have overwhelmed her mother with the strange sounds and its routines: “hospital clinicked and tinkered / around her” (ATW 27). Observing its own organisational logic and established rituals, the medical staff did not seem to show much interest in the young patient’s emotions. Around the trapped girl, life would go on, but all she could do was to watch it as a passer-by. Hence in O’Donoghue’s poem, it is the empathetic Be-Friending connection that allows the persona to feel for her mother’s powerless condition. The hospital’s institutionalised indifference could assume a more abusive form: “her purse / was stolen” (ATW 27). As in the case of the nurses’ negligence, the girl kept the inside knowledge about the aforementioned mistreatments to herself, which made her secretive hospital existence even more solitary [see “a heart inside / out, left flabby and drained” (ATW 27)]. As the narrative proceeds, O’Donoghue’s poem’s latter part transfers the chronological framework to the persona’s own youth when the periodical check-ups for scoliosis were taken for

her and her sister. In “Ess,” the medical apparatus appeared to both siblings as estranging as it once did for their mother. Referring to the hospital as Merlin “not for magic / or legend” depicts the diagnostic process as mysterious and incomprehensible to the children. Going through the unpleasant procedure together (see “We hugged metal and held ourselves stiff / against the omniscient flare of x-ray bulbs”) has brought the two sisters closer to each other. Developing an empathetic bond between the siblings, as in the earlier case of the speaker’s mother, allows space for Be-Friended sisterhood. The persona in “Ess” remembers how:

School-girls, my sister and I made  
 six-monthly trips to Merlin. Not for magic  
 or legend, but to scarper down a corridor dressed  
 in blue paper, holding shut our whispering gowns.  
 We hugged metal and held ourselves stiff  
 against the omniscient flare of x-ray bulbs.  
 (ATW 28)

In O’Donoghue’s poem, the ambience of illness (real or potential) seems to permeate the speaker’s early years. The alienating, fricative sound of “scoliosis” resembles in its pronunciation the snake’s tongue [compare “scoliosis was hissing through our home” (ATW 27)]. In its graphic representation, the textual bent curvature of the spine reminds one of the sinuous movement of the reptile serpentine body [“the word / spiralled in and out of itself, / a warped scroll” (ATW 27)]. In “Ess,” symbolically, the curved signifier of scoliosis appears to evoke fear in the siblings. Once traumatised by the childhood illness, the persona’s mother instilled her former anxiety in her adolescent daughters, transferring upon them her fears. It was not until the sisters’ favourable diagnosis that the scoliosis dread in the speaker’s family was put to an end. In O’Donoghue’s poem, to establish the empathetic connection with her mother, the adult persona had to be able to perceive both the similarities and the differences of their medical, emotional and cognitive condition.<sup>40</sup> Subsequently, empathy is shortlisted by Fletcher as one of the key relational skills [alongside with “mutuality, reciprocity, and a sensitivity to emotional contexts” (84)] required to sustain any meaningful human connection.<sup>41</sup>

O’Donoghue’s speaker’s empowering empathy would be further directed to her grandmother (*Nora Daly, née Walsh*) to whom the poem “Stroke” is dedicated. The narrative’s dramatic and yet affectionate tone appears to be determined by the old lady’s life-threatening illness. Surrey proves that “empathy . . . requires an ability to build on the experience of identification with the other person to form a cognitive assimilation of this experience as a basis for

<sup>40</sup> Jordan argues that “[i]n order to emphasize, one must have a well-differentiated sense of self in addition to an appreciation of and sensitivity to the differentness as well as sameness of the other” (“Empathy and Self” 69).

<sup>41</sup> Following this line of thinking, Jordan cherishes “[t]he skills of mutual empathy, connection building, empowering others, anticipatory empathy” (“Towards Competence” 24).

response" ("The Self-in-Relation" 54). As in the case of her mother, the female voice in "Stroke" perceives the vulnerability of an infirm grandmother against the background of the institutionalised and impersonal medical care. The speaker in "Stroke" discerns how drugged by the medications and plugged to various machines the old woman gradually loses control over her bodily functions. In O'Donoghue's poem, even the grandmother's hands seem to live their own life. One limb reacts convulsively and jerks; the other one lies motionlessly, as if they were already disconnected from each other, and from the rest of the woman's body. Since the particular limbs fail to cooperate, the grandmother's organism seems to be functioning in an uncoordinated way. The persona in "Stroke" brings to mind:

Your arms  
 On the off-white counterpane:  
 One twitching, stout hand flipping  
 As though  
 You were plying dough.  
 The other,  
 Its sulky freckled sister  
 Asleep to the nips  
 Of random needle pricks.

(T 47)

Empathetically, the speaker in "Stroke" notices that each breath causes enormous anguish in her grandmother's body ["Painstaking breaths / Riffle through your teeth" (T 47)]. The old woman suffers but she still tries to think clearly ["Your eyes turn back / Into your head" (T 47)] and comprehend logically what is going on with her ["Trying to see / What turmoil happened there / Two days ago" (T 47)]. The sharp mind of the ill woman does not want to yield to the feebleness of her malfunctioning organism. But her willed endeavours to overcome the illness bring no effect. In O'Donoghue's poem, the persona's grandmother has changed from "[t]he large genteel" woman into a weak and frightened elderly patient, ignored by the abrupt and indifferent medical staff. The speaker in "Stroke" recalls:

Not stroked  
 But struck,  
 The large genteel grandmother  
 Clapped out of you,  
 Left petrified hulk of a woman,  
 The pleas of her eyes  
 Neglected by brusque nurses.

(T 47)

As shown above, the fact that the old woman's infirm body shrinks almost perceptibly is skilfully captured in O'Donoghue's narrative. When nearly all the strength and hope abandon the aged woman, it is as if her former self physically leaves her body with a clapping sound. In rendering this process, "Stroke"

masterfully joins the corporeal and spiritual dimensions of the female existence; there is no split here, no dichotomy, the mind and the body are one, and each affects the other. In tune with that, Surrey reminds us that empathy as practice involves activating many varied skills in a person: “the ability to experience, comprehend, and respond to the inner state of another person is a highly complex process, relying on a high level of psychological development and learning” (“The Self-in-Relation” 54). In the examined poem, *Be-Friending* enables the granddaughter to activate her compassion and understanding for the old woman’s physical and emotional condition. As before the subsequent poems “*Corpuscles*” and “*Edict*” fall within the empowering relations defined as “sympathetic identification and solidarity” (Lloyd 114). Like the earlier analysed poems, “*Corpuscles*” and “*Edict*” refer to re-connecting empathetic experiences with those suffering from serious afflictions (life-threatening and terminal illness).

The word “sympathy” comes from the Greek word “*pathos*,” which means passion or deep feeling . . . Though sympathy is often said to mean “suffer with,” it more accurately means “sharing deep feeling with” someone, because *pathos* includes suffering and love, joy and sorrow . . . [Because] . . . we can genuinely care about others as well as ourselves . . . sympathy is the source of ethical behaviour. (Christ, *She Who Changes* 83–84)

The poem “*Corpuscles*” manages to maintain a perfect balance between the affective component of empathy [“feelings of emotional connectedness, a capacity to fully take in and contain the feelings of the other person” (Kaplan, “*Empathic Communication*” 46)] and the cognitive part of it (“one’s integral sense of self and the capacity to act on the basis of that sense of self” (Kaplan, “*Empathic Communication*” 46)]. Like “*Ess*” and “*Stroke*,” “*Corpuscles*” probes an empathetic concern about the health of the beloved. As argued, O’Donoghue’s poem spans both the cognitive dimension of the self and the emotive ability to imagine being in the shoes of the other. Activating the affective dimension of sympathy, the persona in “*Corpuscles*” brings to mind the future fantasies and past recollections about her partner’s health:

. . . I think about your blood

test, how you’ll have the outcome by now.  
How they chose the big lively vein  
that twists vine-like down your arm,

then they plunged and drew like a sump.

(ATW 55)

Recalling her partner’s bleeding that frightened her one day, the female voice in “*Corpuscles*” compares his veins to grape vines. The aforementioned simile appears to aptly render the shape of their relational interconnected network and the colour of the sap they produce. In O’Donoghue’s poem, the intensity of

bleeding is equated by the speaker with the bog marshland, irrigated with rainfall. Accordingly in "Corpuscles," the eerie Pollock-like blood spots get arranged into artistic abstractionist compositions. It seems that in evoking these familiarising connotations, the female speaker in "Corpuscles" tries to rationalise and tame her concern about her partner, in both a cognitive and empathetic manner:

That evening, drops of your pipetted,  
a palette enough for a Georgia O'Keefe,

a grid of round red sweets. I have  
never seen you bleed, not in the crime  
scene way of "bleeding profusely",

(ATW 55)

Following this line of thinking, in the speaker's eyes, the blood spilt on the pillow assumes a poppy-like form ["though one nose-bleed was satisfying, / patterning the pillow with flattened / poppies" (ATW 55)]. In "Corpuscles," the dried coagulants on the man's thigh resemble the insects' shell ["Even the large gash on your thigh / had turned to nice chitin by the time" (ATW 55–56)]. Additionally, the voice in O'Donoghue's poem reproaches herself for not noticing bleeding earlier ["I saw it, and itched to prise off a rusty / flake for the pink of skin caught off guard" (ATW 56)]. The more she tries to verbalise or discursively render the alarming context, the more one realises how terrified the persona must be.

The capacity to engage in an open, mutually empathic relational process rests on . . . the capacity to be responsive and "moved" by the thoughts, perceptions, and feeling states of the other person. In such empowering interaction, both people feel able to *have an impact* on each other and on the movement or "flow" of the interaction. Each feels "heard" and "responded to" and able to "hear," "validate," and "respond to" the other. Each feels empowered through creating and sustaining a context that leads to increased awareness and understanding. (Surrey, "Relationship and Empowerment" 167), emphasis original

Finally the female voice in "Corpuscles" comes to acknowledge her apprehensiveness about her lover's health overtly. Frightened and uncertain, O'Donoghue's persona tries to pray, not entirely believing it will help – but separated from her beloved by a continent there is nothing else she can do. The visualisation of the "awkward boxer-fisted" indicates that the speaker's whole body is mobilised and alert, waiting for the outcome of her partner's medical examination. In O'Donoghue's poem, the referred to image recurs in the last line "My heart unfists in one swift graceful systole," implying guilt that the persona's organism, unlike that of her partner's, pumps blood into her veins with no difficulty. The speaker in "Corpuscles" admits:

And I make awkward boxer-fisted  
prayers for your corpuscles, shallow-shaped  
bowls, tiny red rubber diaphragms.

We talk long distance late that night. Your voice  
chirrupy, Guinnessy, curious about Virginia.  
My heart unfists in one swift graceful systole.

(ATW 56)

In “Corpuscles,” the moving imagery of “shallow-shaped / bowls, tiny red rubber diaphragms” renders the speaker’s empathetic connection with her beloved man’s fragility. In the analysed poem, the adjectives relating to the partner’s tone over the telephone: “chirrupy, Guinnessy” lively and agitated, as if talking compulsively do not indicate whether his excitement is a sign of suppressed anxiety or relief. It seems that for O’Donoghue, female empowerment is synonymous with relational values, such as “caring, connection” (Fletcher 19). In line with that, “[c]onnection occurs when we experience a sense of mutual engagement, empathy, authenticity, and empowering within the context of relationship. We have the mutual feeling of knowing and being with the other, immersed in their experience along with our own” (Dooley and Fedele 230).<sup>42</sup>

Like “Corpuscles,” the poem “Edict” is related from an affectionate, inter-subjective, time-distance (fifteen century) perspective of a husband whose wife has contracted a contagious and terminal disease. The speaker’s empathy operates with “the other-acknowledging, other-respecting, other-helping drive that reunites the separated” (Kahane 32). O’Donoghue’s narrative gives a poetic account of the 1439 legal decree forbidding kissing for fear of “the spread of the plague” (T 15). In “Edict,” the rhymed one-syllable opening line: “I go to the cot” (T 15) conveys a tender image of an infant’s bed or a tiny hut. In the examined text, all these potential meanings carry the message of safety and shelter that a caring husband attempts to secure for his dying spouse. The poem “Edict” does not mention “the unspeakable” disease explicitly. Its morbid textual designation is hinted in-between-the-lines: “where death has blackened my wife” (T 15), as if the very mentioning of the disease’s proper name could make the sickness spread. Regardless of infection, O’Donoghue’s persona does not shun tactile contact with the infected partner. In a considerate gesture, he admits to “clamp her plucking hands / between my own” (T 15). The speaker in “Edict” recalls the passing of his wife:

Her fingers are bulbous  
blue-purple,  
the nails sunk like chinks

---

<sup>42</sup> Consequently, Jordan proves that “Empathy is the affective-cognitive experience of understanding another person. Intersubjectivity carries with it some notion of motivation to understand another’s meaning system from his or her frame of reference and on-going and sustained interest in the inner world of the other” (“The Meaning” 83).

in the stretch of flesh.  
 Stain from a copper ring,  
 the grey-green of lichen  
 looped round one finger.  
 Lumps on her neck  
 swell by the hour. Hens's eggs  
 laid under the skin  
 below her ears.

(T 15)

As demonstrated in "Edict," the empathetic connection makes O'Donoghue's speaker attend to his beloved, ignoring his own safety and taking no notice of the danger. When looked at with deep attachment, the woman's disease-deformed body ("blue-purple," "a copper ring," "the grey-green of lichen") does not seem to look repulsive to her husband. In his loving eyes, these colourful marks on the dying wife's body become embellishments, i.e. lichen is not a skin defect but a mossy plant. As the female corporeal disintegration proceeds, the spouse's affection re-unites textually what has been split by discomposure and illness. The speaker in "Edict" relates:

I wait for the cough  
 to clamour behind her ribs,  
 and bright blood slicks  
 her lips. I tilt for a kiss  
 and sip sickness,  
 drink the sour blight  
 to put me asleep with my wife.

(T 15)

The persona in "Edict" wants to assimilate the disease into his own body, drinking it like the venom from a cut wound "tilt for a kiss / and sip sickness, drink the sour blight." In the analysed passage, the alliterated "sip sickness" and "bright blood" become lyrical but not sentimental, expressions. The question arises as to whether his statement: "to put me asleep with my wife" implies a death-wish to pass away with his spouse, or to be able to experience what she does. O'Donoghue's "Edict" seems to remind that "power is expressive of love and nurtures the freedom of the other. It is love that affirms selfhood in oneself and the other" (Howell 31). Thus instead of being self-defeating, the empathetic experience of co-experiencing in O'Donoghue's poems may be regarded as empowering. In the poems analysed so far, finding the expression of oneself through and in the other can be seen as empowering. In O'Donoghue's poetry the awareness that one relies on others as much as they do on us – enhances women's power because "the development of persons requires relations of dependency on other persons" (Mackenzie and Stoljar 7). However as shown, currently, mutual empowerment based on empathy, sisterhood, solidarity and interconnectedness tends to be perceived with apprehension or disbelief; "the separate-self paradigm would suggest that separation and disconnection is the primary state of affairs ('We are born alone; we die alone')" (Jordan, "Relational



Awareness” 47). In contrast to that view, in O’Donoghue’s “On Tickling,” the speaker’s opening observation that “We cannot tickle ourselves,” as to do “So we need the hands / of others,” becomes a declaration of mutual empowerment. In line with the above, the persona in “On Tickling” commences her narrative in a plural voice:

We cannot tickle ourselves.  
Failed mission, a niggle

and prod between bars  
of the rib-cage, ouching

ourselves with the same  
indignation of smarting

skin when a scab  
is pulled too soon

from its smooch  
of a wound.

(ATW 12)

In the cited passage, the phrase “failed mission” suggests that it is only once the separatist course of action falls through that the individual allows the thought of mutual interdependence: “there is primary energy that flows toward others, toward joining with others in an expansive sense of interconnectedness” (Jordan, “Relational Awareness” 47). In other words, “On Tickling” seems to remind that “There is nothing wrong with someone who wants to give and serve and contribute to the growth of others. There *is* something wrong with a culture that cannot appreciate and validate the centrality of connection in the world” (Jordan, “Towards Competence” 25), emphasis original. In “On Tickling,” the quoted expressions “niggle / and prod between bars” aptly render the frustration when the self-oriented strategy to “tickle oneself” comes to nothing. In O’Donoghue’s poem, the solipsistic notion of body is rendered in a kenning-like riddle: “the rib-cage.” Unfair as it may seem, it is only through the self-inflicted injuries of estrangement, alienation and solitariness, not until the outer (“selfish”) layer gets inflamed or irritated (onomatopoeic “ouching / ourselves”) and the sore tissue needs tending that one may begin to regard mutual interconnectedness as needed. The speaker in “On Tickling” continues:

So we need the hands  
of others, guitarists

to start a jazzy strum,  
to riff the rungs

on that ladder of bone,  
tinkle our ivories

with oh-so-acute  
attention to the note

struck from floating  
spars, broken bars

at the bottom, . . .

(ATW 12)

In O'Donoghue's poem, the hands of others, playing their "jazzy strum" on the persona's body provide her with a fulfilment of the tangible-felt connection. "On Tickling" wittily "plays upon" sensuous vocabulary, cataloguing different verbal ways that bodies might be stroked, brushed, caressed, fondled, tapped etc. It is followed by the carefully sequenced enumeration of tactile sensations, acted out on the following corporeal parts, ("ladder of bone," "tinkle our ivories" "with oh-so-acute / attention to the note" "at the bottom"). Structurally, O'Donoghue's poem's composition of the short, two-lined stanzas intensifies the impression of it being addressed to the followers of relationality not yet advanced in their understanding of this concept. On the other hand, the couplet form conveys the notion of togetherness and doubleness. Bearing female mutual empowerment in mind, the speaker in "On Tickling" finally seems to be ready to acknowledge: "so we need the hands / of others." In the analysed poem "our definition of relationship implies a sense of knowing oneself and others through a process of mutual relational interaction and continuity of 'emotional-cognitive dialogue over time and space' (Surrey, "The Self-in-Relation" 62). One could add that for O'Donoghue, "[w]e are not individuals apart from our relationships. In other words, individuals are constituted by relationships" (Howell 90). In "On Tickling," the organising metaphor of playing together in concert comes directly from Arendt's notion of power which: "corresponds to the human ability not just to act but to **act in concert**. Power is never the property of an individual; it belongs to the group and remains in existence only so long as the group keeps together. When we say of somebody that he is "in power" we actually refer to being empowered by a certain number of people to act in their name" (*On Violence* 44), emphasis added. As a result of engaging in Be-Friending concert with others, in "On Tickling" one can create a body of agents who can act in unison and yet still retain their individuality.

. . . united entity emerges from the interaction of lovers, one that involves the lovers **acting in concert** across a range of conditions and for a range of purposes. This **concerted action**, however, does not erase the existence of the two lovers as separate agents with continuing possibilities of acting on their own, and for their own individual purposes. (Friedman, *Autonomy, Gender* 118–119), emphasis added

In O'Donoghue's exploring of the relational process one cannot but appreciate the musical orchestration with words and their sound. Let one examine, for instance, an alliterated sequence: "smarting / skin when a scab / is

pulled too soon / from its smooch.” In “On Tickling,” employing the metaphor of human life as a concert that is co-performed with other “guitarists,” one could see that: “[i]n the process of self-creation, we exist by virtue of our relationships. This means that relationships form the self through their casual efficacy” (Howell 90). The relationally empowering self-formation is compared in O’Donoghue’s poetry to the intense and swift orchestration of notes. In their rising and falling melody, the persona in “On Tickling” begins to realise her empowerment:

. . . until  
we curl foetal,  
  
spineless hedgehog,  
a ball of squealing,  
  
hating, and wanting,  
another arpeggio.

(ATW 12-13)

Nonetheless as argued earlier, in “On Tickling,” the reliance upon others entails admitting one’s neediness, which is traditionally perceived as weakness (see “spineless hedgehog, a ball of squealing”). Patriarchal conditioning teaches one to cherish one’s self-governance, equating dependence on others with subordination. In other words, “Those who buy into the competitive, individualistic model often believe that those who urge cooperation do so because they do not have the strength or the resources to ‘go it alone’” (Jordan, “Towards Competence” 24). What is more, the reliance upon others seems to be associated with a relapsing merging with and complete dissolution into the maternal encompassing self. Therefore in “On Tickling,” the regression (“curl foetal”) into the earliest developmental phases seems to be a defence strategy against yearned for and at the same time feared closeness with others (“hating, and wanting”). The experienced anxiety in O’Donoghue’s poem stems from the apprehensiveness of rejection and from the fear of renouncing one’s independence. However it is acknowledging the connection with others that leads in “On Tickling” to mutual empathetic and Be-Friended female empowerment. On the whole, referring to the notion of women’s power, Friedman reminds us that:

The mutual empowerment of a sufficient number of women . . . seems necessary in order for any number of women to attain the critical political mass necessary to bring about, for example, culturewide economic or legal change. Indeed, the enhanced personal autonomy that is possible for many of today’s young women who decline to call themselves feminists might not have been possible were it not for the collective action of yesterday’s feminists who worked in solidarity to break barriers to women’s participation in all major social institutions. (*Autonomy, Gender* 71)

### 1.3. The Female Power of Relational Autonomy: Establishing Indoor and Outdoor Connections in the Poetry of Vona Groarke

*Let the morning have us, and the afternoon.  
I am here, blessed, capable of more.  
(Vona Groarke, "Aubade")*

When defining autonomy, Friedman refers to it as “the fullest human possible development of moral personality” (“Autonomy, Social Disruption” 47). Nonetheless in feminist discourse, the notion of autonomy has always evoked contradictory receptions. Some feminists are on principle sceptical about autonomy, questioning its alleged unaccountable and antisocial foundations.<sup>43</sup> These arguments entail, among others, accusations of autonomy being in conflict with “the idea of the socially obligated and personally responsible freedom” (Fox-Genovese 7). Furthermore, it can be also viewed *per se* as an unattainable goal that can never be fulfilled. Fox-Genovese advocates that “feminist theory has remained torn between . . . the illusion that the abstract possibilities of ‘autonomous’ individualism could be fully realized for women . . . and the illusion that the individualist view of woman-as-other can, by some miraculous transubstantiation, be converted into a general and ‘feminist’ law of female experience” (138). Along with these objections, one should address as well epistemological and socially-based misconceptions that some feminists hold against autonomy,<sup>44</sup> [such as the juxtaposition of the socially formed self and the detached, “autonomous,” self-centred,<sup>45</sup> seeing autonomy as “the achievement of isolated social atoms that promotes independence, self-sufficiency, and disconnection from close interpersonal involvement with others” (*Autonomy, Gender* 41)]. To be fair, one has to admit that the above-cited arguments have some culturally and historically determined grounds. In patriarchal understanding, “[a]utonomy has often been conceptualized in terms of traits that suggest an antifemale bias” (Friedman, *Autonomy, Gender* 101). In other words, for many centuries, the gender of autonomy has been stereotypically connoted as masculine. Friedman admits that “gender stereotypes . . . treat autonomy and independence as male but not as female character ideals” (*Autonomy, Gender* 83). According to such biased beliefs, “autonomy is [seen] a masculine but not a

<sup>43</sup> According to Fox-Genovese, “women have always had to wrestle with the knowledge that individualism’s prestigious models of authoritative subjectivity have refused female identification. Feminism . . . owes much to the male-formulated ideology of individualism, as it does to the special experiences of women who have been excluded from the benefits of individualism” (225).

<sup>44</sup> In *Autonomy, Gender, Politics* (2003), Friedman rebuts other objections against the ideal of autonomy: its inconsistency with the selves’ theory (30–36), its being questioned by determinism (36–41) either on social or psychological grounds, its alleged damage to the disadvantaged (41–45), its elitist character (45–47), its moral susceptibility (50–51), and the perception of the possible dangers in its implementation (47–50).

<sup>45</sup> Compare the earlier-cited quotation (Fox-Genovese 7).

feminine preoccupation and . . . for men, it is regrettably associated with individualism, independence, disconnection from others, and a tendency to see other persons and close relationships as threatening to the self” (Friedman, *Autonomy, Gender* 84). Friedman concedes that:

Popular culture has long lionized the self-made man, the ruthlessly aggressively entrepreneur who climbs over the backs of his competitors to become a “captain of industry”; the rugged individualist, the loner, the “Marlboro man” fighting cattle rustlers out on the open range; and the he-man, the muscle-bound “superhero” avenging his way to vigilante “justice” . . . . What we have here is a cultural glorification of men (but seldom of women) who are independent, self-reliant, aggressive individuals who defy and defeat the social actors who try to control them or make them settle down to conventional lives. (*Autonomy, Gender* 91–92)

It is precisely due to such popular culture patterns that individualistic thinking has not always been seen as beneficial to feminist discourse.<sup>46</sup> Nonetheless, despite these objections, the majority of contemporary feminists tend to agree that “[i]t would be self-defeating . . . to reject autonomy altogether as a value for oneself” (Friedman, “Autonomy, Social Disruption” 47). Following this line of thinking, Friedman highlights autonomy as “crucial for women in patriarchal conditions, in part *because* of its potential to disrupt social bonds” (“Autonomy, Social Disruption” 46–47) [emphasis original] that, as she points out, are oppressive to women. Replying to the question why the concept of autonomy ought not to be discarded by women, regardless of its former negative connotations undermining autonomy’s role in female lives, one can refer to some key arguments cited below:

Once women admit that autonomy might be a value for us, it would be difficult to deny its value for persons in general. The capacity for autonomy seems instrumentally valuable as a means of resisting oppression and intrinsically valuable as part of the fullest humanly possible development of moral personality. In these respects it seems valuable for anybody. (Friedman, *Autonomy, Gender* 111)

Moreover modern scholars deny forcibly that “there is any incompatibility between autonomy and the motivationally social self” (Barclay 60), advocating that autonomy is realised fully only in social connections (Barclay 67). In this vein, Barclay argues that “autonomous persons not only come after and before other persons, but to flourish they must live concurrently with other persons as well” (58). Friedman endorses to this view maintaining that relational:

---

<sup>46</sup> Acknowledging the roots of feminist ideology in the individualist thinking, Fox-Genovese points out that “Feminism, as the daughter of individualism, carries the potential of bringing individualism back to its social moorings by insisting that the right of individuals derive from the society rather than from their innate nature. Feminism, as a daughter of women’s exclusion, understands that social opportunity must lie in access to the various social roles that society offers” (241).

autonomy is thus a product of social conditions of various kinds, both those that contribute to socializing someone as a self with autonomy-conferring character traits and behavioural competencies . . . and those conditions that a person subsequently encounters and engages as someone with an already formed, though still revisable, character and set of concerns. (*Autonomy, Gender* 15)

The re-defined notion of relational autonomy assumes that “the development of persons requires relations of dependency on other persons” (Mackenzie & Stoljar, “Autonomy Refigured” 7).<sup>47</sup> Bearing that in mind, the following chapter aims to prove that the relational practices of female selves are not to be considered as contradictory to women's autonomy, in either its personal or social dimension. It happens because “whatever we call individual autonomy is actually socially embedded. Autonomy must be reconceptualized in social, relational, or intersubjective terms” (Friedman, *Autonomy, Gender* 37). Drawing upon the concept of relational autonomy, it has to be underlined that

. . . persons are fundamentally social beings who develop the competency for autonomy through social interaction with other persons. These developments take place in a context of values, meanings, and modes of self-reflection that cannot exist except as constituted by social practices. (Friedman, “Autonomy, Social Disruption” 40)

In view of that, female relational autonomy (realised in connection with others) is seen as the source of women's power because as argued earlier, both women and men can develop only in their relations with other interacting agents.<sup>48</sup> Considering the above, early work by Vona Groarke: *Shale* (1994), *Other People's Houses* (1999), *Flight* (2002), *Flight and Earlier Poems* (2004) as well her later collections [especially *Juniper Street* (2006) and *Spindrift* (2009)] can be characterised as meditating on the relational nature of women's autonomy. What is more, Groarke's poetry explores both personal and social predicament that women face when developing and maintaining their

---

<sup>47</sup> In line with the above, Spretnak argues that:

We need new words – or, at the very least, some means of diminishing between the old “Lone Cowboy” sense of autonomy and the ecological / cosmological sense of uniqueness coupled with intersubjectivity and interbeing. The objectivist, mechanistic, and arrogant framing of a number of core concepts in the Western philosophy tradition inhibits the development of a deeply relational sensibility that is attentive to contextual dynamics of great subtlety. (“Radical Nonduality” 433–434)

<sup>48</sup> Friedman enumerates the conditions that have to be met to consider female “choices and actions . . . as autonomous:” “First, they must be self-reflective in being partly caused by the actor's reflective consideration of her own wants and values,” “Second, they must be self-reflective in mirroring those of her wants or values that she has reflectively endorsed,” “Third, the underlying wants and values must be important to the actor,” “Fourth, her choice or behavior must be relatively unimpeded by conditions, such as coercion, deception, and manipulation” (*Autonomy, Gender* 14).

empowerment in relationships. Carol P. Christ challenges the clichéd beliefs about irreconcilability of artistic autonomy with relationality:

Most of us unconsciously think of writers, artists, and composers struggling alone in garret rooms – even though many of them have comfortable lives as well as wives and husbands and children. We are used to thinking that the freedom to create is incompatible with personal relationships and physical comfort. In the same way many people automatically think that women’s freedom requires leaving home and family behind . . . . Some women are afraid to call themselves feminists because they assume women cannot be both free and related to others. (*She Who Changes* 73)

In other words, Groarke’s speakers come to a decision to fulfil their autonomous female selves within the social framework of relational connections. Accordingly, Mary Zwiép in “Sufficient unto Our Day Recent Irish Poetry,” sums up Groarke’s early work as “domestic” and relational: “The subject of these poems is often domestic (not a pejorative term), focusing on relationships and houses (she is married and has two children). The authority of her voice springs from what I call an impressive plain style, distinctly unpretentious, clear in syntax, and even in the line length” (467–468). In addition, Groarke’s personas face the modern women’s dilemma: how to be committed in relational contexts, not sacrificing, at the same time, the source of female empowerment – women’s autonomy. Carol P. Christ asks the rhetorical question that might as well have been voiced here:

But what if relationships and freedom are connected? Like two sides of the same coin? . . . creative freedom is connected is co-creative, always in relation to someone or something. Individuals with creative freedom are embodied and involved . . . . Creative freedom makes new relationships and makes existing relationships new. (*She Who Changes* 74)

In Groarke’s poetry, women’s personal, creative and relational autonomy is externalised onto their immediate living and affiliation conditions. Carol P. Christ maintains that “[t]he exercise of the creative freedom is always relational, as individuals always make themselves and the world in relation to the creative freedom of other individuals. Creation is always co-creation” (*She Who Changes* 100). Thus in Groarke’s poems, women’s autonomous selves are mapped onto and written into the constructed houses’ textual representations that female agents relate to. Reviewing Groarke’s second volume, Lysaght notices that “houses and homes are the poet’s theme here, on foot of the recent experience of house-hunting and moving into a new house” (33). Accordingly, Denman argues that

Vona Groarke’s second collection, *Other People’s Houses*, has as its unifying theme the fact that all the poems are about the houses in some way or another. In this she is picking up a thread of from her first well-received book, *Shale*. Six poems in that collection had its titles with the word ‘house’ or ‘home’ in them . . . . As a result her second collection has the appearance of not so much

a step forward in her poetry, but simply a stretching of material dealt with in the first book. (383)

According to Collins, in *Other People's Houses* Groarke's "approach has both flexibility and range, though, and moves easily from childhood memories, through historical reflections to consider ideas of subjectivity and relation to others" (149). As shown earlier, for Groarke, the model of "the internal relations among past, present and future mental and bodily states, in particular an agent's awareness of these relations" (Mackenzie "Imagining Oneself" 129–130) is embodied in the mental image of the house. Rita Kelly in her review of *Other People's Houses* admits that "[i]t is quite daring too to take the House theme and stretch it over a collection, something as familiar, comfortable, ordinary and universal. The notion of sheltering ourselves from an inclement planet with whatever household gods are dear to us; even if we don't have a house we still aspire to one" ("The Sinew" 64). The hazards of pursuing in detail the house theme, already raised with regard to her first collection, are explicitly articulated by Aidan Fadden in his review of *Other People's Houses*:

Taking the extended conceit of the house, Vona Groarke runs the risk of boring the reader, being too homely, too personal, making too many variations on a single theme. Her point, that so much of life is linked to an acute sense of place, is valid but it can initially come across as being a bit too claustrophobic and self-contained at times. (32)

David Wheatley in "Irish Poetry into the Twenty-First Century" observes that "*Other People's Houses*, written against the backdrop of the economic upturn of the late 1990s and its spiralling property prices . . . takes for its epigraph Emily Dickinson's 'One need not be a chamber to be haunted, / one need not be a house'" (262). Wheatley on the other hand praises the collection's "vein of sexual and social comedy," "profusion of contemporary references and satirical barbs" (262). In her first collection, *Shale* (1994), Groarke's "poems strive to recover, or remember something of what has happened in a variety of rooms and houses, as their titles attest: 'For the Unkempt House'; 'The History of My Father's House'; 'From A Disused House'. . . and the empty rooms which fill the volume are only ever temporarily occupied" (Roche 106). The only major critical flaw noticed by the reviewers of Groarke's poetic debut is voiced by Johnston. While appreciating Groarke's "lightness . . . technically achieved poems . . . good poetic imagery," Johnston points to "a straightforward prosiness" (323) of her early poems. To some extent, the aforementioned textual shortcoming might be traced back in the analysed below "Home."

Included in Groarke's debut collection *Shale* (1994), the poem "Home" conceives of the persona's dwelling place as a material and symbolic signifier of her relational empowerment where inhabitants' motivational needs (including the speaker's own need for autonomy) ought to be addressed. Young advocates that "[w]e dwell by making the places and things that structure and house our activities. These places and things establish relations among each other, between



themselves and dwellers, and between dwellers and surrounding environment” (“House and Home” 51). Similarly, Collins in “Architectural Metaphors: Representations of the House in the Poetry of Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin and Vona Groarke” points out that “the house in its accretion of layers of meaning, in its ghosts of previous inhabitants and remembered experiences, facilitates the inter-relationship of past and present. It foregrounds issues of enclosure and freedom and raises questions concerning kinship and sexual relationships” (142). As argued earlier, Groarke’s poetry explores the notion of home as constructed from, and upon, the inhabitants’ relational connections. In other words, for Groarke, women’s autonomy’s relational empowerment proceeds through a relational perspective of a spatial location. It happens because

. . . people’s existences entail having some space of their own in which they array around them the things that belong to them, that reflect their particular identity back to them in a mirror. Thus it is basic to the idea of home to have a certain meaning of ownership, not as private property in exchangeable goods, but in the sense of meaningful use and reuse for life. (Young, “House and Home” 73)

Hence in Groarke’s poetry, the house / home signifier exemplifies a need for the place that women could define as their very own, being the tangible manifestation of their autonomy, the place that they have selected, occupied and designed in accordance with their own needs, taste and requirements. Accordingly, the female voice begins her narrative, presenting her hopes and expectations associated with the couple’s “Home:”

I always thought this house would hold us;  
what we left would stay here, undisturbed,

except to be explained as stories told  
of changes that we made to what we found.

(FAEP 27)

As shown in Groarke’s “Home,” relational autonomy is organised around what Catriona Mackenzie explains as “a network of interrelated emotions, beliefs, desires, and mental and bodily traits and dispositions, shaped by the influence of the past and directed by self-concern for the future” (“Imagining Oneself” 133). The pronounced by the speaker in “Home” desire to make things “stay here, undisturbed” discloses the persona’s fear of changes, domesticated by her only in its manageable textual form of the “stories told / of changes that we made to what we found.” Hence in Groarke’s poem, the personal traits of the house’s inhabitants are inscribed into the interior design (“the worn upholstery, a cracked door-frame, / the bathroom wall with all our heights marked in”). In other words, “Home” becomes not only the expression of female relational autonomy but the persona’s creative empowerment because “the idea of home and the practices of homemaking support personal and collective identity in a more fluid and material sense, and that recognizing this value entails also

recognizing the creative value to the often unnoticed work that many women do” (Young, “House and Home” 75). The female voice in Groarke’s poem continues:

In details like the worn upholstery, a cracked door-frame,  
the bathroom wall with all our heights marked in,  
I found the proof that something would survive  
of years lived here, and that in finding it –  
(FAEP 27)

On the whole, the home-making process entails much of women’s creative energy and time-consuming activities: “Often a home reflects a woman’s taste and sensibility. Often it’s the style and image she projects of herself and family” (Young, “House and Home” 63). In her homemaking effort, the persona in “Home” realises her empowering belief in the enduring character of the household connections, bearing their relational signature, “the proof that something would survive / of years lived here.” In line with that, “Homemaking consists in the activities of endowing things with living meaning, arranging them in space to facilitate the life activities of those to whom they belong, and preserving them, along with their meaning” (Young, “House and Home” 63). Groarke’s speaker in “Home” explains that

on a Sunday visit, or a Christmas stay –  
we might come upon a store of memory  
that would remind us, call us to ourselves.  
(FAEP 27)

In other words, in the light of the female relational empowerment, the house comes to connote a signifier of all its lodgers’ present identifications (“that would remind us, call us to ourselves”), bonding past recollections and their shared familial history. As demonstrated above, by the home’s steady point of reference, the house’s inhabitants are constantly reminded of whom they are. Furthermore in the name of “the temporality of preservation,” “[t]he stories must be told and retold to each new generation to keep a living, meaningful history” (Young, “House and Home” 65). In Groarke’s poem, home preservation is, thus, intimately linked with maintaining the relational continuity and upholding the whole family’s living memory’s empowerment: “The preservation of the things among which one dwells gives people a context for their lives, individuates their histories . . . . Preserving the meaningful identity of a household or family by means of the loving care of its mementos is simply a different order of activity” (Young, “House and Home” 64–65). In line with that the persona in “Home” locates her hopes for the relational endurance in the house where she lives in with her whole family:

I always thought this house could keep us safe,  
as when, running from the car  
to the front door, late at night,

I knew it was where darkness could not reach.

The dark can make no difference here.

(FAEP 27)

“Everyone needs a place where they can go to be safe. Ideally, home means a safe place, where one can retreat from the dangers and hassles of collective life” (Young, “House and Home” 73). That is why Groarke’s “Home” is believed to be the site of light where no “darkness could not reach.” However the repeated mantras “I always thought this house would hold us;” and, then, “I always thought this house could keep us safe,” conveyed in the ultimate past simple tense, seem to undermine its previously assumed uninterrupted endurance. Carol P. Christ argues that building female relational autonomy is not a finite act but an on-going process subject to constant changes and altering variables:

“Everything will be all right.” When we think this way, we do not expect the relationships to change and we are thrown off balance when they do. When we accept change as a part of life, we know that our lives can and will change in relationships – for better or for worse . . . . The world is filled with free and creative individuals, related to each other . . . . We act and are acted upon. We are changed by others, and we have choices. (*She Who Changes* 81, 45, 82)

The poem “Home” concludes with a gaunt vision of the house emptied of human expectations, with the birds nesting upon the chimney and the unbound wind blowing in the chambers. Paradoxically, this seemingly bleak image, on closer examination, appears to be more inviting than the earlier voiced grievances of let-down hopes. This is how Zwiép comments upon Groarke’s persona’s sense of disillusionment: “In ‘Home’ she returns to a place where she once lived, thinking of comforting details (“the bathroom wall with all our heights marked in”), but the house can no longer keep her ‘safe’ in the way she expected. It is ‘vacant,’ ‘blown open’: ‘I knew it was where darkness could not reach’” (468). The speaker in “Home” argues:

Our house has been blown open  
to a vacant future, bleak as January,

in which no window is lit  
against the dusk and disregard,

(FAEP 27)

For that reason, the cited passage “house has been blown open / to a vacant future, bleak as January,” grim as it may seem at first – is also liberating. It promises relief from daily (self) deceptions that accompany one’s routine existence. Hence the air of autonomy, allowed into the atmosphere that is cosy but also claustrophobic and stuffy with high hopes, reminds the speaker that women’s relational empowerment ought not to be exclusive with an ideal of freedom. Accordingly, “[w]omen do want to be free, but few of us want the freedom from relationships . . . . What most women want is freedom from

relationships that harm the self and freedom to co-create relationships of various kinds in which our individual freedom and that of others can flourish" (Christ, *She Who Changes* 185). The speaker in "Home" concludes:

where the only sound is the rooks in the chimney,

and the wind sifted through the hall,  
closing, opening the kitchen door.

(FAEP 27)

On the whole, in Groarke's poetry, the "houses" signification connotes more than simply residential venues, meeting the aesthetic, functional and pragmatic needs of its inhabitants. In other words, Groarke's poems probe the house imagery as a formative stage leading to female relational empowerment. What is more, as argued, the sense of security that home / house gives is essential to women's autonomy. Considering the above, in "Home" the final image of "closing, opening the kitchen door," aptly renders the "ebbs and flows" of female relational autonomy, operating between closeness and distance, attachment and independence. It happens because woman's abandoning of her autonomous self does not improve her relations with others. Quite on the contrary; giving up what Barclay defines as the female "motivational self" instead of empowerment, only provides frustration, which adversely affects her relations with others that one is trying to improve. In agreement with this, Friedman warns that for a woman "[t]o reject personal autonomy is . . . to give implicit support to the alternative to autonomy for women which is women's heteronomy – that is, women's deferential submissiveness to others in the living of their own lives" (*Autonomy, Gender* 72).

Elaborating this idea, the poem "The Glasshouse" from *Other People's Houses* (1999) probes the potential threat to female relational autonomy with regard to altering circumstances. The persona in "The Glasshouse" appreciates the couple's connections' solidity (epitomised by the stones accumulated by them over the years). She acts as if she wished to freeze the ever-changing relational reality into the rock-hard assemblage. Empowering as this idea might appear at first, in the long run, the treasured pebbles offer a poor substitute to the true relational potential whose boundaries and conditions are constantly (re) negotiated and updated and never solidified once and for all. Autonomous female selves "have many aspects, parts, dimensions, and levels, they are a unity, a unity in diversity" (Donner 382). What is more, Groarke's poem's self-ironic title might evoke the proverbial wisdom about people living in glass houses who ought not to throw stones. "The Glasshouse" opens with the speaker recalling the beginnings of her stone collection. The core of the relational resources ("lapis lazuli, / an uncut nugget") reminds one of a nearly organic being (see "blue-veined"):

It started with lapis lazuli,  
an uncut nugget of blue-veined grey

that was your first gift to me.

Since then we have marked time or  
love with stones like agate, quartz and amber,  
which are, for us, just one way to remember.

(OPH 48)

As shown in “The Glasshouse,” the stones given to the partner on momentous occasions (“marked time or / love”) have become the couple’s code for their intimate attachment (see “one way to remember”). In other words, the gathered pebbles have come to establish the solid groundwork of the spouses’ relational capital. Thus the accumulated stones / stories / memories in “[t]he activity of remembering an event . . . not only preserve[s] my knowledge of the event, but also rekindle[s] the emotions associated with that event, leaving me to some extent in a similar condition as the one I was when I experienced the event” (Mackenzie, “Imagining Oneself” 130). Looked at from this angle, in Groarke’s poem, the collected pebbles amount to the signifiers of the by-gone events that the husband and wife attempt to preserve as their emotional link with each other and their shared past. The persona in “The Glasshouse” looks back upon her life:

For ten years, husband, we’ve been piling stones  
and shifting them, in weighty bags, from one  
place to another, and then home

to a house we wished on the lines of *armour*  
*courtois* or happenstance, or some more  
improbable stuff than bricks and mortar.

(OPH 48)

However, on further reflection, in “The Glasshouse,” the material signification of the couple’s relational connection might evoke more equivocal associations than simply its durability and steadiness – just as much as “heart made of stone” does not connote permanent affection but quite the contrary. On the textual level one can also find a trace of the related ambiguity: the expression “weighty bags” hints at the heavy relational burden that needs to be carried. Comparably, in Groarke’s poem, “piling stones” might betoken the strenuous work to be done. The effortful activity of moving this load from one location to a new site for over ten years seems to be reminiscent of the prolonged construction process of Stonehenge. Ergo, bearing these images in mind, one might speculate that the persona in “The Glasshouse” perceives her social embeddedness not as empowering but as overpowering. In other words, Groarke’s speaker appears to view her relational capital as burden rather than as an interpersonal potential. On the whole, the “self-determining self is continually remaking itself in response to relationships that are seldom static” (Donchin 239). That is why in Groarke’s poem, the implied inertia connoted by the weighty stones seems to impair the persona’s dynamic relational autonomy. The

persona in "The Glasshouse" does not see the attachment to the unchanged fixity of the past recollections as an incentive to their shared empowerment. The speaker is aware that petrified in stone, fixated images of the partners' former selves and their bygone aspirations may no longer be adequate to the truth of the relation's present moment. The female voice in "The Glasshouse" ponders:

When we had nothing to speak of, we used stone.  
Now that our house is set to dwell upon  
a solid, shored-up bedrock of its own,

we think of it as bulk and not detail.

(OPH 48)

In addition, the stones in Groarke's poem are employed by the couple as discursive void fillers ("When we had nothing to speak of, we used stone"). In this context, the declaration "that our house is set to dwell upon / a solid, shored-up bedrock of its own" appears to be an expression of the speaker's wishful thinking rather than a description of the actual state of affairs. Their joined together stones / moments have got transfigured into the spouses' collective memory "bulk and not detail." To some extent, in "The Glasshouse," the stones could be paralleled with the recorded traces of "a trail / that would take us from our first word / to our last," if only the speaker was fully convinced about such equivalence. Judging by the female voice's tentative mode of speaking, she appears to be more than hesitant to apply this correspondence. The fragment below indicates clearly that although the persona in "The Glasshouse" articulates her doubts openly, she undermines their discursive strength further with a conditional clause and a qualifier "almost:"

So what chance now for our bag of polished shale  
to be turned out and worked into a trail

that would take us from our first word  
to our last, if it has been said or heard,  
in the here and now of language almost shared?

I could say that one is glazed with rain  
the way your hand was when you wrote your name  
(OPH 48)

The poem's subsequent fragment continues the diffident tone introduced above, with the repeated conjectural expressions ("I could say that" and "I could say that there is," "which I think may," "as though you had been") complemented with the alterative options suggested abundantly (i.e. "or that one has" "or that one is"). Undoubtedly in "The Glasshouse," these applied textual strategies result in laying bare the speaker's textual and relational insecurity. On the other hand, they might testify to her relational autonomy as allowing room to "think otherwise" as Mackenzie puts it. From a broader perspective suggested by

Collins, “[f]or Irish women poets the house represents a material site, where their own roles as women can be explored, and an imaginative one, allowing them to structure the psychological explorations in their poems” (143). For that reason she delineates the ability to make “the house . . . the particular focus of imaginative states . . . a framework for speculative enquiry . . . both transformed and familiar at the same time” as identifiable in “poems by many contemporary Irish women” (Collins 149). In other words in “The Glasshouse,” imagining other alternatives of the speaker’s life opens the space for her autonomy to be re-activated. The female voice in Groarke’s poem admits:

Or that one has the smoothness of your cheek,  
that one is dimpled like the small of your back,  
or that one is freckled like your sunburned neck.

I could say that there is one which is warm,  
as though you had been holding it in the palm  
of your hand, a while before I came;

that one is perfect as the white of your eye,  
and there is one which I think may  
just remind you, afterwards, of me;

(OPH 48–49)

As shown above, the cited passage of “The Glasshouse” contains a fragmentary vision of the beloved one: one gets to know only the glimpses of his cheek, back, neck, palm and eye. The line: “I think may / just remind you” suggests the couple’s relational detachment, as if the warmth of their emotional connection was transferred (frozen?) onto its material stone signifiers (“I could say that there is one which is warm, / as though you had been holding it”). It seems that in Groarke’s poem the partners’ need for relationality can only be articulated through the medium of the collected together pebbles (“there is one which I think may / just remind you, afterwards, of me”). As a result, the textual intrusion “afterwards” seems to imply the speaker’s fading hope in her relationship’s permanence. The persona in “The Glasshouse” acknowledges with candidness:

that the hilt of one could hurt us,  
or pierce the walls of a delicate house  
that, in the end, may be as breakable as glass.

But it cannot slip from your hand or  
from my own, my love, not now . . .

(OPH 49)

Despite its seemingly solid structure, the insecure persona in “The Glasshouse” is perfectly aware of the fragility of the relational construction the couple create. Finally, she manages to bring to the discourse’s surface her apprehension about the connection’s vulnerability, being susceptible to (outer /

inner) attacks and (self) destruction as the titled glass construction (compare “could hurt us, / or pierce the walls of a delicate house / that, in the end, may be as breakable as glass”). Having articulated her deepest fears, to reaffirm herself, Groarke’s persona abandons her previous self-effacement, assuming a strong voice that resonates with conviction. In doing so, she wishes to ward off the possibility of failure (see “But it cannot slip from your hand”). Summing up, the speaker in “The Glasshouse” draws her empowerment from relational autonomy, “standing side by side” and acting together. Her affirmative declaration proves that “[a]utonomy ought not to be conceived as independence or isolation from others; it ought to be conceived as a way to foster nonoppressive relationships of care” (Dodds 222). The female voice in Groarke’s poem declares:

stones that we picked in time are thrown asunder  
  
on Ballagan Point, where we stood lately, side by side  
with stones in our pockets and stones in our hands,  
to promise each other the sky, and its blue-veined clouds.  
(OPH 49)

Discarding the collected over the years of her marriage pebbles in all directions indicates that instead of the rock-grounding, Groarke’s speaker chooses the freedom of the “blue-veined clouds.” The symbolic emptying her pockets of the stones’ solidity means reuniting the persona’s past self and her future purpose. As demonstrated in “The Glasshouse,” female relational empowerment requires throwing away one’s stony certainty and accepting the dynamic of other (people’s) altering variables at present and in the past. On the whole, in Groarke’s poetry, women’s relational independence “involves acting and living according to one’s own choices, values, and identity within constraints of what one regards as morally permissible” (Friedman, “Autonomy, Social Disruption” 37). Such (self) empowering knowledge might only be acquired in a social context. In other words,

The joining together of the terms of *relational* and *independence* expresses the insight that relationships are necessary in human life and that life-sustaining relationships promote the independence of both partners. In this model, selfhood is not gained by becoming independent of relationships, but by learning to live independently and interdependently within them. (Christ, *Rebirth* 141), emphasis original

Thus for Groarke, viewing other people’s houses, imagining the lives of strangers and forming a mental picture of the house’s history, facilitates women’s relational grounding. As argued in “The Glasshouse,” it is due to the power of autonomy that women “represent to ourselves the different kinds of life we believe we would live, given the different options, and by evaluating our responses to these representations we gradually get ourselves into a position to make a decision” (Mackenzie, “Imagining Oneself” 138). “The Lighthouse” is an accomplished example of women’s “thinking otherwise” (Mackenzie,



“Imagining Oneself” 138), where Groarke’s speaker admits: “I heard her tell the story another way” (OPH 34). In regard to “The Lighthouse,” the reviewers acclaim the poet’s ability to “think otherwise,” arguing that:

The central piece in the collection is ‘The Lighthouse’, which is not at all about a marine lighthouse but about a rural interior transformed by the arrival of the electric power scheme and the new light. The poetic power of the poem comes from its telling the story ‘another way’, adopting the perspective of a woman who lived through the times before and after the coming of the light; this opens up a sensitivity which sees the brash new electric light as a damaging exposure rather than a new enablement. The poem works because it does not rely on an appeal to nostalgia, as it so easily could have, but on a complex of gentle reversals which question progress and the way we respond to our particular worlds. (Denman 383)

With it in mind, the critics regard Groarke as “one of the most effective voices of her generation; her own poetic house is very much in order, and will always be worth visiting” (Denman 383). On the whole, the volume *Other People’s Houses*

. . . operates regularly on the discrepancy between traditional form and modern content in a gently ironic way, and this serves also to subvert any tendency towards self-aggrandisement in the speaker . . . Groarke’s account of human relationships is more celebratory than Larkin’s. In the tile poem, the poet and her husband have moved on from a previous house, but they are sustained now, as before, by the fun and the intimacy of their relationship. (Lysaght 34)

As already hinted, not all relational occurrences and connections might be qualified as suitable for enhancing women’s relational autonomy. Writing about the poet’s second collection, O’Rawe comments: “Household histories and childhood memories prepare the ground for the collection’s titled poem: a lyrical reflection on the resistance of a loving companionship to temporality” (161). Hence “Other People’s Houses,” dedicated to Groarke’s husband Conor, constitutes a retrospective journey into the couple’s relational history. In doing so, the female voice in Groarke’s poem pays a visit to “the house where we / once lived:”

Last night I walked to a house where we  
once lived. It’s not looking good.  
There’s been a fire and the roof’s caved in.  
The garden’s scotched with grass and weeds  
and most of the windows are through.

(OPH 52)

In “Other People’s Houses,” the temporal distance seems to be short; the speaker records her fleeting impressions from the day before. As a matter of fact, she sums it up with a succinct verdict: “It’s not looking good.” With disconsolate scrupulosity, the persona in Groarke’s poem enumerates the disasters that have befallen the familiar place (“a fire and the roof’s caved in,”

“grass and weeds,” “windows are through”). The female voice in “Other People’s Houses” leaves little room for the speculations about why the dishevelled state of the building upsets her so much. She explicates directly that, to her, the ruined building is a profanation to the intimate moments she once shared there with her partner. In Groarke’s text, examining the dilapidated state of the location (marriage?) makes the speaker aware that neglected relations deteriorate like empty houses:

The ceiling of the sitting room is upended  
on the floor. No trace now of the yellow  
couch that was our ‘amour prop’,  
or the stack of romantic novels you had me  
stand up on to save your aching back.

(OPH 52)

As if alienated from her former self, the persona in “Other People’s Houses” looks upon the days gone by with astonishing estrangement. Establishing the emotional link with her past recollections, Groarke’s speaker grieves for the miserable condition of the household objects, once applied by the couple as “‘amour prop’” for their love. As the former witnesses of relational connection, the objects, like the earlier collected stones, are the material signifiers of the couple’s one-time bond. In Groarke’s poem, instead of finding comfort in recollections of the past, the persona’s autonomy seems to be impaired by the constant comparison between the long-ago idealised memories and the disappointing present-day reality. Thus, in “Other People’s Houses,” the overriding nostalgic tone of the narrative appears to indicate the mourning for the bygone intensity and exciting newness of the relationship’s early stages. The female voice in “Other People’s Houses” brings to mind:

Or the radio we lived by in those days,  
you with your cricket and creaky plays  
on the BBC; me with my news on the  
hour, every hour, lest something  
outside of us should ever change.

(OPH 52)

Idealising her relational past, the speaker in “Other People’s Houses” laments the missed certainty of “the good old days” which were once hoped to last forever “lest something / outside of us should ever change.” In Groarke’s persona’s much romanticised memories, no shortcomings of her youth, whether a sweaty mattress, or the long walk necessary to obtain even the most basic items, seem to diminish the magic of her relational narrative’s beginnings [“Or the soggy mattress where we sailed / beyond the beyonds and, somehow, / back again to wake each morning / to the blue of your eyes and the three / mile trek for newspapers and milk” (OPH 522)]. The female voice in the examined poem recalls the couple’s first dwelling where her writing career would begin. For her, it remains the site where their mutual connection would evolve into a

reciprocated, mature relation, and the place where their shared future was “sealed” (when “thought / I would throw in my lot with yours”). The speaker in “Other People’s Houses” continues:

Or the porch where I used to write those  
flowery poems before I knew you so well,  
halfway between In- and Outdoors,  
where one time, looking two ways at once,  
I saw you stranded in both, and thought

I would throw in my lot with yours.

(OPH 52–53)

In “Other People’s Houses,” the moment of reflection would follow then, when the female voice admits that “We lived in / other people’s houses then.” The statement could imply that in their past, the couple lived by the dreams of others and not their own. Alternatively it might imply that they have become “others” to their younger selves, not having much in common with the way they used to be. In its plain frankness, such awareness is both alienating and re-connecting at the same time. The question arises whether, as an autonomous agent, the speaker in “Other People’s Houses” feels ready to leave her romanticised past and move into the unknown future. She sums it up as follows:

Which is about it. We lived in  
other people’s houses then. Now,  
we have a stake in place of our own  
which keeps us steady and tied.

I want you to know, not that nothing  
is lost – even that I could not promise  
so much – but that something remains,  
here, even after so many years:

(OPH 53)

As the poem “Other People’s Houses” proceeds, the couple’s relational signifier becomes the “stake,” an emblematic wooden bar in the ground, supporting or marking their intimate territory that “keeps us steady and tied.” Hence in Groarke’s poem, the aforementioned imagery might be connoted with secure permanence but, on the other hand, it could imply the lack of flexibility and mobility (“Now, / we have a stake in a place of our own”). In other words, the speaker’s relational capacity oscillates somewhere between the referred to earlier poles. Despite things not being the same as in the beginning, the relational empowerment may still emerge (“something remains, / here, even after so many years”). With the repeated cyclic routine, the persona in “Other People’s Houses” wants to emphasise that in long-termed relationships, the value of the familiar and known could be comparably equated to the freshness of the early years’ novelty. She declares:

the starlings are still nesting in the eaves.

And last night as watched them  
 their circular orbit put me in mind  
 of the rhumba you danced with a bumble-bee  
 right there at the gate, on the day that we left  
 this house behind us, together and for good.

(OPH 53)

In superimposing the past recollections of her partner on the day they moved houses (“the rhumba you danced”) and the new imagery from their current house (starlings’ “circular orbit”), the female voice in “Other People’s Houses” sees that “personal empowerment and the relational context through which this emerges must always be considered simultaneously” (Surrey, “Relationship and Empowerment” 164). The subsequent poem “Indoors” gives an account of a woman’s relational autonomy being narrated by a female artist, weaving simultaneously various threads into the texture of the family discourse [“It breaks apart as water will not do / when I pull, hard, away from me, / the corners bunched in my two hands / to steer a true and regulated course”(OPH 11)]. The abundant first-person phrases (“**I** pull, **I** plunge, **I** smooth, **I** cast, **I** am, **I** step in, **I** step out”) render the creative act with which Groarke’s persona autonomously identifies herself and into which she is ready to invest her time and energy. The female speaker in “Indoors” can feel empowered by her actions “because . . . we emotionally invest ourselves in those aspects of our identities and self-conceptions and those social spheres . . . that reinforce our sense of self-worth” (Mackenzie “Imagining Oneself” 142). In Groarke’s poem, the exuberance of the emancipating, self-assured expressions gives testimony to the persona’s agency. O’Rawe rightly notices that “ ‘Indoors’ is as much about genre as it is about gender, and Groarke is nothing if not committed to an audacious revisiting of established poetic forms and themes” (161). Here the critic illustrates the claim by expounding the narrative’s subject: “this poem reconfigures the artistic frustrations of woman as haberdasher; her desires and reveries depressed by domesticity” (161). The persona in Groarke’s poem relates:

I plunge the needle through and through,  
 dipping, tacking, coming up again.  
 The ripple of thread that follows pins,  
 out of its depth, a shallow hem.

(OPH 11)

In “Indoors,” the awareness of the speaker’s relational autonomy empowers her to mark her self’s boundaries and situate her own textual location, as manifested in the line: “Which brings me to the point where I am.” In other words, the female voice possesses not only a firm sense of her social and familial embeddedness, but above all, the consciousness of being autonomous and potent. As a result, the speaker in “Indoors” argues:

I smooth the waves and calm the folds.  
 Then, to ensure an even flow,  
 I cast a line which runs from hook to hook  
 (OPH 11)

Empowered by her self-worth, Groarke's persona can derive from her "indoor" work a sense of meaning. The darkness that she employs as her creative material does not seem to frighten her. In the examined text, even the claustrophobic and sinister phrases ("unruffled dark," "the room closes round me" and "[t]he path is darkened where I walk") do not intimidate the female voice, equally neither her autonomous actions nor relational activities are impaired by the surrounding blackness. According to O'Rawe, "[t]he mundane chore of curtain-making becomes a mode of escape" (161). However, it is not an escape from reality or the speaker's own self. O'Rawe rightly points out that "'Indoors' . . . skilfully subverts the commonplace opposition between interiority and exteriority" (161). The persona in Groarke's poem concludes:

Which bring me to the point where I am  
 hanging a lake, by one shore, in my room,  
 to swell and billow between the light  
 and opaque, unruffled dark.  
 I step in. The room closes round me  
 and sparsely puckers when I move my limbs.  
 I step out. The path is darkened where I walk,  
 (OPH 11)

"Outdoors," the complementary poem to "Indoors," closing the volume *Other People's Houses* further elaborates the role of women's relational autonomy in dichotomous indoor / private vs. outdoor / public realms. The persona in "Outdoors" seems to critically scrutinise what they, as a couple, have built together so far. "What does it matter that we have made a home," the speaker asks rhetorically of her husband. She continues:

What does it matter that we have made a home  
 where we can draw the curtains and talk of tomorrow,  
 if we are thinking of this: the shapes we made in darkness,  
 our kitchen at sea on the lawn, our table set out  
 in the branches, our faces marooned in stars?  
 (OPH 54)

It seems that in "Outdoors," the stability the couple both yearned for begins to be a hindrance for them. Their unsettled minds dream of "the shapes we made in darkness" "our kitchen at sea on the lawn, our table set out / in the branches, our faces marooned in stars." In other words, the spouses' relational fantasies appear to drift away from their mutual connection (see "sea" and "marooned"). The speaker in "Outdoors" notices how easily it is to lose the sense of grounding in one's own home, self and relational connections:

It happens so easily. We've been watching trees  
gather shadow on the wall, on the lookout  
for a moment when we might call it a day  
and settle for the night. But only our room  
is losing ground, while nothing outside is lost.

(OPH 54)

In conclusion, O'Rawe argues that the "two closing poems, 'Outdoors' and 'The Haunted House', return us to the threshold of the collection, and onwards to the conclusion that there is always something more to a habitation than a name" (161). As if addressing the aforementioned statements, Gaard reminds us that "home is not a static place or destination, not a noun but a verb, a process of creating relationships to place, to creatures, and to people . . . . In every present moment, home is where you are" (199). Groarke's third volume *Flight* (2002) resumes the motifs of women's creative empowerment realised in a relational patchwork. Reviewing *Flight*, Fred Johnston in "Fashion and Profit," praises Groarke's "fresh poetry, fresh moulding of language . . . [and] visual interpretation" (248),<sup>49</sup> concluding that "[l]ove poems are the only things no one bothers to censor" (248).

In this vein, the love poem "Coming To," dedicated like "Other People's Houses" to the poet's husband, meditates on the side-effect of the "together for good." The female voice in "Coming To" seems to wonder whether, and if so how, long-termed connections can debilitate women's freedom. In a word, "Coming To" recounts the persona's failed empowerment due the speaker's abandonment of her autonomy in favour of the fused "we-couple" identification. It happens because, apart from being together, "[i]t is crucial . . . that each lover remains, in some sense and for some purposes, a separate self with her own capacities for the exercise of agency . . . a separate self with capacities to make choices and to act on her own" (Friedman, *Autonomy, Gender* 119). Accordingly in "Coming To," the vital question about female autonomy can be articulated as follows:

What might it mean for the identity of two separate individuals to merge in such a way as to become a "we"? Is the *we* of romantic love, in some sense, a new entity with an identity over and above those of the lovers? Or, rather, is it merely a metaphor of that describes the mutual coordination of the lovers' still-

---

<sup>49</sup> Carney argues that:

Her opening volume, "The verb 'to herringbone'", with its tricky, philosophical title, hints at the intricate and minuteness of stitch and pattern that characterise the subtle, intelligent poems that follow. Metaphors of sewing have appeared in Vona Groarke's previous collections. Here the etymology of the verb 'to herringbone' suggests not only the work that must be put in to create the doubling back, 'veering off' pattern, but also the work involved in the unpicking of the stitches, or, to push it too far (although some parallel metaphors of quill, bone, strands, threads and calligraphy maybe excuse this) the de-boning of the fish. And certainly, the poems in this collection demand careful readings and re-readings. (146)

separate identities and agencies? (Friedman, *Autonomy, Gender* 117), emphasis original

In other words, the problem examined in “Coming To” testifies to a paradoxical truth that women’s empowerment deteriorates when the female autonomous self is replaced by a romantically merged “we.” In the long-term emotional relation, “[r]omantic love might well involve unique sorts of mergers, especially in virtue of the special capacity of sexual intimacy to cross or blur the boundaries of embodied personhood and link selves profoundly” (Friedman, *Autonomy, Gender* 117).<sup>50</sup> However, as argued above, “a romantic merger might diminish the autonomy of one or both of its partners” (Friedman, *Autonomy, Gender* 117). As stressed by scholars such as Friedman (*Autonomy, Gender* 129–132), it is usually women’s rather than men’s autonomy that becomes more restricted in such interpersonal contexts. In Groarke’s poetry, the deficiency in female autonomy leads to resentment manifested either latently or overtly in the partners’ daily confrontational contests. Likewise “Coming To” opens with the precarious stage of the relational deadlock. The commencing image of the boxing match operates on the comparative ground of the fist, the ring, and the counting down to the end of the fight. Locating the conflict in the setting of the flowing river softens its confrontational dimension. The phrase “the final drips traipse / from your ring” plays upon the double meaning of the ring: the wedding symbol and the boxing arena. The speaker in “Coming To” observes:

Like a fist unplunged from the river  
and held on high for us to count  
until the final drips traipse  
from your ring back to the deeps

we wake to this: . . .

(FAEP 78)

In “Coming To,” admitting “we wake to this” implies that the relational conflict occupies most of the couple’s daily reality. By assuming the plural voice, the female speaker in the cited passage presumes that the narrated angle is shared correspondingly by both its participants. In other words, while abandoning her own autonomy of vision, Groarke’s persona, at the same time, projects her own perspective onto that of her partner’s:

. . . a first skin  
still impressed by dreams that slip  
through the eye of daylight  
to arrive at ours. . . .

(FAEP 78)

---

<sup>50</sup> Consequently, Friedman enumerates at least three ways in which lovers might be merged: “in *subjectivity*, that is as the subject of experiences,” “in *agency*, that is, as persons exercising their capacities for action” and “*objecthood*, that is, as the object of attention or concern, or recipient of harms or benefits” (*Autonomy, Gender* 119), emphasis original.

Either in clash or in contentment, the speaker in "Coming To" gets trapped in the idea of the "merger of the two identities into a 'we'" that "erodes the boundaries between lovers" (Friedman, *Autonomy, Gender* 116).<sup>51</sup> In Groarke's poem, the fusion is textually rendered in "we wake," "at ours," "for us," "dawns on us," "[w]e could go on," etc. Paradoxically, the threatened individuality and discursively denied conflict is not the most unusual scenario that may happen to the couple:

To say that intelligent embodied love is the ground of being and that the self is formed in relationship does not mean that conflict and suffering can be avoided . . . the other or others on whom we are dependent have their own needs, some of which have nothing to do with ours . . . in human relationships, one person often needs what the other cannot give or can give only at what seems like great cost to the self. Because we are different, both limited and enriched by our particular backgrounds and perspectives, we will not always see things the way others do. Thus, conflicts and judgement will arise. (Christ, *Rebirth* 143)

As Groarke's poem proceeds, the initial imagery's roughness is juxtaposed with the vulnerability of the subsequent expressions (see "a first skin / still impressed by dreams"). In "Coming To," the new day's advent evokes the qualified hope in the speaker ("already spilled / too far and wide for us") that their relational closeness might still be restored ("your shoulders round / on promises"). Although the quilt's bleached colours imply the faded passion between partners, the word "coverlet," with its caring, all embracing sound, incites a longing for a shared intimacy. The female voice in "Coming To" recalls:

. . . And whole days

blanched on the coverlet  
where your shoulders round  
on promises already spilled  
too far and wide for us.

(FAEP 78)

Subsequently, the speaker in "Coming To" enumerates the hopeful significations: "Here's one: the edge of a curtain / lifted by a strand of air so lissome" (FAEP 78). With its connotations of the supple body and limbs, the modifier "lissome" introduces a sensuous level to the narrative, emphasising the erotic context of the couple's morning. In the examined fragment, the recalled intimacy reinstates the relational expectancy that "it could happen like this / over and over." In terms of their intimate connection, the pulse of the lover's "coming to" might mean the man's emotional return to his wife, or simply his temporary

<sup>51</sup> Drawing upon Nozick, Friedman wonders whether "a 'new' identity is forged . . . 'additional' to those of two lovers" or "'each becomes a psychologically part of the other's identity,' and the identity that each partner had as an individual becomes altered in the process" (*Autonomy, Gender* 117–118).



sexual satisfaction. It becomes clear that for the female voice, these two are fused. She records:

the day dawns on us all over again.  
Another: that it could happen like this

over and over; a last half-hour steeped  
in the not-yet-said, and my poring  
over it for fear I'd miss a pulse  
in your coming to. . . .

(FAEP 78)

Regardless of the temporary change, Groarke's speaker's autonomous empowerment remains suspended in time ("a last half-hour steeped / in the not-yet-said"). What is more, the persona in "Coming To" appears to be apprehensive about the situation's relational outcome, arguing that "And still – / everything now is held like breath / between the second last and final / notes of a song turned lightly / to summer and its slipshod overtures" (FAEP 78). In the emotive attention given to her lover, the female voice in "Coming To" contemplates every detail of the sleeping man's body, imagining it to be "in need of my fingers." She admits:

Which brings me to the sight of you  
coming up from the lock, your mouth  
streaming, your hair in need of my fingers  
and a wide, complicit sunlight on your back.

(FAEP 78)

In "Coming To," in the abandonment of her own self in favour of the union (merger) with the beloved one, the speaker's autonomy becomes threatened. In the name of this fusion, Groarke's persona attempts to narrate herself into the man's corporeal identity. Convincing herself that she is still wanted by him, the female voice in "Coming To" tends to equate neediness with love. As a result, the woman's empowering process falls through. It happens because power can arise only when female selves are well-defined and clearly independent.<sup>52</sup> Considering the above, the poem "Coming To" terminates on a bitter note in the hypothetical, second conditional clause. Speculating how different things might be, Groarke's persona subconsciously concedes that right now they are not the way she hoped them to be:

The way you wake. The way  
I'm waiting for you.

---

<sup>52</sup> According to Donner, "an ability to rationally scrutinize their different aspects as well as their relations and connections and to endorse, commit to, or reject and repudiate those aspects and relations . . . relations and connections with many things outside of their boundaries . . . . This may be described in metaphysical terms by saying that selves have both intrinsic and relational properties" (382–383).

We could do this all morning.  
We could go on and on.

(FAEP 79)

In "Coming To," it could seem that the emergence of "I" should mark the (re) appearance of the autonomous female self. As a rule, a woman's self-asserted first-person expressions give testimony to the speaker's agency and self-worth. But it does not happen in this poem. The abundance of "we" expressions, including the very endnote, overshadows the single "I" phrase. As a matter of fact, the sole first person utterance ("I'm waiting for you") underlies the persona's lack of separate grounding and her being trapped in a relational impasse out of which she sees no way out ("We could go on and on."). All in all, Groarke's poem's ending seems to reintroduce three merged identities:<sup>53</sup> that of the speaking voice ("The way / I'm waiting for you"), the beloved one ("The way you wake") and the couple's relational identity ("We could do this all morning"). However the speaker in "Coming To" seems to forget that "a new merged identity, a *couple* . . . makes up only a part of the lives of each lover. Each lover remains, to some extent, and in some ways, a separate self" (Friedman, *Autonomy, Gender* 121), emphasis original.<sup>54</sup> Linguistically, "Coming To" abounds with tentative, self-effacing expressions (i.e. "that it could happen like this / over and over;" "We could do this all morning. / We could go on and on"). To some extent, one may repeat after Carney that generally Groarke's poems from that period "both in methodological and thematic senses, are interested not in what has happened as such, but rather in what might happen or might have happened, or in the things that happen on the underside, in the corners, 'on the lee side of an air.' . . . The poems are not analyses, not observations, but the delivery of oxygen to things that would not otherwise have life at all" (146–147).

Following the vein of "oxygen delivery," the poem "Breath," published in *Flight* (2002), examines Groarke's speaker's attempt to draw female empowerment from preserving her own artistic freedom within the existing relational framework. Thus not only has the female voice a sense of her relational embeddedness but also the consciousness of a potent agency arising from her creativity. In autonomous attachments, the process of building connections involves not only affection but also the conscious will. By declaring to her lover: "let it happen. Let it be you," the female voice in "Breath" acknowledges her lover's freedom and respects him as a separate being. In

<sup>53</sup> On the whole, the female voice has to "come to terms" with the fact that even "[r]omantic mergers can vary in degrees of stability and modes of action. They can be settled and stable or they can be highly dynamic, shifting, and unstable, needing constantly to be renegotiated and reaffirmed" (Friedman, *Autonomy, Gender* 119).

<sup>54</sup> Accordingly this thought can be elaborated as follows "Aspects of personal identity that were important to each before the romantic relationship brought them together as couple still persist in their lives. As well, those romantic loves that end during the lifetimes of the lovers show that romantic mergers need not be permanent and may obviously be reversed or transcended" (Friedman, *Autonomy, Gender* 118).

“Breath,” in the empowering process of being relationally connected, and not losing her independent self, Groarke’s speaker issues the dialogic idiom, inviting her partner to participate (see the inclusive expressions: “See here” and “Look up”). In the artistic context, the persona’s autonomy, despite the declarative oxygen-like openness (“So yes, let it happen. Let it be you. Breathe”) seems to be implicated in a relational conflict between the poet-wife and the poet-husband’s (competing) textual worlds. Irrespective of the discourse surface’s provocative elegance, manifested in a sophisticated alliterated sequence (“someone else’s hand will scuff its sleek veneer / and set it skywards, like seagulls astir / on the estuary”), Groarke’s persona enters a subversive play with the narrative’s textual levels. She encourages:

See here. The dust that beaded the inside of your cheek  
falls still on these letters, on the pages of a book

where someone else’s hand will scuff its sleek veneer  
and set it skywards, like seagulls astir  
on the estuary, cheers from the pitch,  
sleet from the Cooleys blown that way, and this.

(FAEP 105)

In regard to the implicit poetic contest between husband and wife, structurally, “Breath” operates on contrast, opposition and disparity. To illustrate the point, one can examine the linguistic cluster of the positively connoted “sleek,” contrasted with the superficiality of “scuff” and the false pretence of “veneer.” Groarke’s clichés, as if word-for-word taken from the Petrarchan sonnets of the romanticised “beads,” “falling on these letters,” “on the pages of a book” are aptly juxtaposed with the realistic, dried dirt spectacles in her partner’s mouth. In doing so, the persona in “Breath” saves the simile from the pretentious comparative ground, as she does in the vision of propelling the book into the atmosphere, with a very high velocity, comparable to the “seagulls astir / on the estuary” or “cheers from the pitch.” As argued in “Breath,” it is mostly by destabilising the fixity of language and constantly challenging the obviousness of its collocations that Groarke’s speaker realises her relational potential as an autonomous woman and a writer. In “Breath,” evoking an uncommon, monosyllabic image of the “the thin skin of the dome,” fired in the air to be shot, Groarke’s speaker seems to be drawing upon Coleridge’s “Kubla Khan” (the dome reference). The female voice mocks this literary tradition with the subsequent line: “even the clouds condense the moment.” The derisive idea of the words solidified into things acquires in Groarke’s poem not only a philosophical but also a double-edged “atmospheric” dimension, much in the narrative’s vein, whose wry weather metaphors textually organise the entire argument (compare earlier “sleet from the Cooleys blown that way”). The speaker in “Breath” continues:

Look up. Winter skeets the thin skin of the dome  
and even the clouds condense the moment

into the here and now of your high mouth,  
this flurry of words, or the thought  
of what becomes you, what you might yet create.  
So yes, let it happen. Let it be you. Breathe.

(FAEP 105)

In Groarke's "Breath," the persona's concluding passage ironically targets her partner's literary hopes ("your high mouth, / this flurry of words") about his future poetic glory ("of what becomes you"), creative heritage ("what you might yet create") and of being admired by posterity. The transcription of the sensory experience into its linguistic signifiers deprives the "condensed" "moment of here and now" of its indefinite textual openness. That is why "Breath" ends with an airy relational declaration: "So yes, let it happen. Let it be you. Breathe." Groarke's poem's ending appears concessive, as if acceded to after some doubts: "So yes, let it." It could suggest that the speaker's qualified consent "let it be you," could in fact mean: "let it be not me," and then instead of relational empowerment, it would signify the persona's resignation from her own autonomy for the sake of her partner. As an extension of this problem, the poem "Nouns and Verbs," from the 2002 collection, conveys the relation's dramatic turning point to which the lack of balance in the partners' autonomy has led. Ironic as it may seem, "the capacity and aspiration for autonomy is not something we are born with but something we develop in society. The fact that any of us has the capacity for autonomous agency is a debt that we each owe to others" (Barclay 57). Examining her "capacity for autonomous agency," the persona in "Nouns and Verbs" aims for the space between the image and its verbal referent ("Between the lighthouse and the vied-for verb / to fix what the beam was doing to the air"). Subversively detached, the female speaker in Groarke's poem entertains a derisive image of the petty, quarrelsome couple ("two bickering visionaries on the hoof") assured of their own artistic genius ("we scattered brilliance with our every move"), set against each other in their poetic rivalry for more accurate "Nouns and Verbs." It is only after weighing their odds in the linguistic competition that the conflicted couple accepts each other's balanced chances for victory but even this realisation cannot put an end to their (poetic? relational?) confrontation. The speaker in "Nouns and Verbs" begins:

Between the lighthouse and the vied-for verb  
to fix what the beam was doing to the air,  
we scattered brilliance with our every move,  
two bickering visionaries on the hoof  
between dawned-on and uninvited skies,  
flights of fancy and our manky shoes,

(FAEP 77)

The female voice in “Nouns and Verbs” is aware that “we are quite compatibly both autonomous agents and deeply social selves” (Barclay 68). The dichotomy between the alliterated “**f**lights of **f**ancy” and the down-to-earth “our manky shoes” yields Groarke’s persona’s textual location. In the cited passage, the verbal phrase’s enjambed, missing subject (“and came to rest”) is followed by the alliterated enumeration contest (see “‘shimmy’, ‘shoulder’, ‘segue’”). The speaker in “Nouns and Verbs” admits:

and came to rest on ‘shimmy’, ‘shoulder’, ‘segue’,  
 calling it quits, not seeing how the vague  
 cliff was pinning itself down to a thin line  
 that we’d have crossed with even one  
 more unilluminated step, to wimple (indeed)  
 our own way to the furies underneath

(FAEP 77)

In “Nouns and Verbs,” the textually exercised artistic autonomy could empower Groarke’s speaker not only to transform the couple’s connection’s dynamic but also to redefine her own location within the unsatisfactory relational framework. Instead, absorbed in their competition, the partners in the examined poem come dangerously close to falling into the crevice in the rock, which constitutes a blatant metaphor of their relational crisis (“vague cliff . . . pinning itself down to a thin line”). Not being able to stop, the couple find themselves one step (“even one / more unilluminated step”) from going separate ways, or rather nose-diving into the “the furies underneath.” In “Nouns and Verbs,” the hurtful words carry the contesting lovers down the slope like an avalanche, undetected by the rest of the world (“like dust; like plucked feathers”). What follows later is outrage (“with their ultimate nouns”), resentment (“unwavering calm”) and finally quiet resignation (“a silence to steal clamour / from adventurous mouths”). In Groarke’s poem, the lack of verbal counterbalance or any appeasing token of good intentions, makes the spouses’ soon reconciliation dubious. As demonstrated, the woman’s need for emancipated but still relational agency may not always be realised with no losses. The persona in “Nouns and Verbs” ponders:

with their ultimate nouns and unwavering calm or,  
 deeper still, a silence to steal clamour  
 from adventurous mouths, while nothing occurred  
 that wasn’t spray thrown up by fine words  
 coming down a-tumble round our ears  
 like dust; like plucked feathers.

(FAEP 77)

Structurally, Groarke’s poem “Nouns and Verbs” is composed of an eighteen-lined long sentence, divided into three sestets. With its theme of how to render one’s relational emotions into textual signs, the poem is regular in form (**aa / bb / cc** rhymes repeated in each sestet) even though not all of them are full

rhymes. There is one more thing; the telling title puts the conveyed "story" within the inverted commas of the discursive framework:

The indifference in this collection to whether a thing occurred in what we call fact, history, nature or reality on the one hand, or in the mind of the poet, the reader, or the page on the other, is significant. The hypothetical quality of many of the scenarios is connected to the collection's interest in writing and in doing some patient, diminutive work that is barely there to begin with, but ends up in something durable . . . Vona Groarke has worked to create verbal patterns that are commensurate with the elusiveness and transience of such moments, real and imagined, and the result is formidable. (Carney 148)

In this vein, the poem "To Be Said," from Groarke's debut volume *Shale* relates hypothetical events that have not happened yet and – what is more – may never occur at all. Thus what the female speaker in the analysed text employs can be defined as "future-directed fantasy" (Mackenzie, "Imagining Oneself" 132). Mackenzie explains the process as follows: "I imagine from my point of view a life that is still recognizably mine but one that diverges at some point in the future from the life I am likely to lead or believe that I will lead" ("Imagining Oneself" 132). It happens because an autonomy-oriented female self is more likely and more willing to explore various alternative options instead of being attached to one assumed prognosis. Despite employing the imperative mood ("Let's walk," "Let the waves," "Let you say nothing" and "Let the shingle cup") and resolute future predictions ("We'll hold" and "I'll say"), the female speaker in "To Be Said" seems to be tentative and insecure about the relational aftermath of her stroll with her beloved. Groarke's persona's apprehensiveness appears to be well-grounded, because "each individual faces the insecurity of investing herself in relationships . . . that the other participants might, on critical reflection, come to reject" (Friedman, "Autonomy, Social Disruption" 45). Hence what the female voice in the studied poem does is look ahead into the future, as if trying to determine the outcome of the unreal tense in the equally unreal relational context. The persona of "To Be Said" argues:

Let's walk the shoreline with it all  
to be said and nothing between us but salt.  
Let the waves trip on the part of your name  
I don't dare. Let the shingle cup your footfall  
and the sea-wind straddle the breath you don't use.  
We'll hold our tongues. Let you say nothing,  
and then, with your voice in my mouth,  
I'll say nothing back.

(FAEP 80)

Furthermore most of the focal issues in Groarke's narrative are defined by negation ("nothing between us but salt," "I don't dare," "the breath you don't use," "Let you say nothing" and "I'll say nothing back"). In other words, what is implied in-between the lines is the fact that the female speaker does not seem to believe in the possibility of both candid and meaningful conversation between

herself and the man she is addressing. Thus the silent nothingness between them appears to be preferable to another futile attempt to get through the partner's indifference. In the context of the relational crisis, the persona in "To Be Said" fears to bridge the gap between them by means of touch. In consequence, she renounces tactile corporeal contact, transferring it entirely onto the natural world (compare "the waves trip on the part of your name," "the shingle cup your footfall / and the sea-wind straddle the breath you don't use"). Notwithstanding initial declaration "it all / to be said," Groarke's speaker abstains from articulating her thoughts, believing that silence and not words might bring her closer to the person she loves. Paradoxically in "To Be Said," the shared silence, instead of being a heavy unspoken load, turns into a tangible and sensuous connection, enabling them to re-establish the broken bond. The textual sign of the couple's reinstated attachment is the poem's rhythmical melody whose metrical regularity soothes one with the promise of the set order and restored balance of relational ebbs and flows.

Groarke's fourth volume *Juniper Street* (2006) marks a continuation of the poet's "so deep a preoccupation with houses" (Johnston 99). Johnston argues that "*Juniper Street* develops Groarke's consideration of the idea of home, the always shifting state of belonging in time and space, present and past, as she meditates on the various structures in which we live – physically, imaginatively, emotionally, historically, linguistically – and on how these also come to inhabit us" (99). However *Juniper Street's* reflections are carried out from a broader, cosmopolitan and inter-cultural perspective.

Here, the modern, urban building, heavily geometric yet verging on the abstract, signals at once Groarke's concerns with home, with the cosmopolitan – Juniper Street itself being a route in Philadelphia – as well as with the artist's attention to matters of detail, of focus, light, angles and structure . . . Groarke in this poetry of precise, sensuous detail and sensitive, witty observation is similarly concerned with the navigations of the poet as painter, with the ambiguities of perception and the duplications, multi-layered nature of words as signifiers. (Johnston 99)

Included in 2006 collection: "Juniper Street," "We Had Words" and "Boat" probe deeper the persona's problems with activating women's power in the context of familial and marital affiliations. Following this line of thinking, the volume's titular poem "Juniper Street" explores further the difficulty of fulfilling female relational independence, depicted against the speaker's daily suburban background. To some, the residential location may seem to be a kind of compromised realisation (albeit a limited one) of the concept of autonomy, but from the persona's viewpoint, the site is envisaged as a threat to her artistic and personal freedom. Block stresses that: "[t]here is a particular isolation in the spaciousness and comfort of our suburbs . . . the cost of our detachment and disconnection is not only our isolation, [but] our loneliness" (2). In "Juniper Street," by assuming the plural voice "we" (see "We go to sleep," "We sleep," "We wake"), Groarke's speaker does not mean only her own family but also other

inhabitants of the suburban areas who follow a similar daily routine and live by comparable time cycles. To some extent, being an inhabitant in one of the uniform dwellings is supposed to be “filling the need for belonging” (Block 2).<sup>55</sup> But not for the speaker of “Juniper Street:”

We go to sleep by artificial moonlight.  
The floodlit stadium times itself out at midnight  
and a thicker weave of darkness plies the room.  
(JS 52)

Posing for the lunar light, the female voice in “Juniper Street” wants to avoid the “artificial moonlight” (“the floodlit stadium”), which irritates her with the intensity of its dazzling electric reflection. Groarke’s persona’s defensive reaction stems from the fact the human biological clock cannot be regulated by means of the artificial spotlight’s cycles. With the light switched off, on the other hand, the residential estate overwhelms its inhabitants with pitch darkness. Longing to sleep outside on the veranda, the speaker and her partner dream to cherish the arched roof made from the curve of the wind. The subdued sunset is filtered through the blinds. The persona in “Juniper Street” admits:

We sleep under the eaves, where nights of late  
have eddied in the wind’s plump, elevated arch.  
We wake to only dawn’s blindsided glaze.  
(JS 52)

Living beyond the natural cycles, in “Juniper Street” the suburban existence is oriented towards putting off the fear of mortality. In accordance with the above, in Groarke’s poem, the blooming tree’s flowers deep-frozen in the fridge symbolically aim to “freeze” the transient moment from passing. Unable to enjoy the fleeting bush’s prime, and, then, allow for its gradual decline, the estate’s residents try to prevent the plant’s dwindling to deny the existence of death. The female voice in “Juniper Street” recalls:

Just last week, the icicle tree at our door  
was in full bloom. The breeze made a show of it.  
We picked one bud with the longest stem  
  
to set in the freezer where it has since drooped,  
given itself up to the kitchen’s heated breath.  
Now March is opening and closing, like a valve.  
(JS 52)

---

<sup>55</sup> Block argues “To belong is to act as an investor, owner, and creator of this place . . . . As if we came to the right place and are affirmed for that choice. To feel a sense of belonging is important because it will lead us from conversations about safety and comfort to other conversations, such as our relatedness and willingness to provide hospitality and generosity” (3).



Unreal as the suburban life might appear, the relational problems that the female speaker in “Juniper Street” has are very much a reality. To fulfil her creative autonomy, the persona’s priority is finding time for her own poetic and critical work within a daily routine of household chores and child-rearing. Since for a female voice, “autonomy does not imply the simple shedding of social influence but the ability to fashion a certain response to it” (Barclay 55), a mother of two cannot find time for herself until after sending her offspring to school:

I am queen of the morning: nothing to do but to fiddle  
words or quote the gilt-edge of our neighbour’s forsythia

gaining on our own trim laurel shrub. . . .  
(JS 53)

Therefore the time left after the children’s departure to school, devoted to writing, marks the boundaries of the speaker’s relational freedom and her individual self-conception. In view of that, “Juniper Street” defines the limits of Groarke’s persona’s “configuration of emotions, beliefs, dispositions, and desires that constitute [our] point of view” (Mackenzie, “Imagining Oneself” 135). Then, to preserve her autonomy, the female voice in the examined text must find time to realise her self-conception and its “beliefs, dispositions, and desires” which are manifested in writing. In Groarke’s poetry, women’s relational independence has to be consistent with “her self-conception: and her values, ideals, commitments, and cares, in short, what matters to her” (Mackenzie, “Imagining Oneself” 133).<sup>56</sup> Defining herself ironically “I am queen of the morning,” the persona in “Juniper Street” ridicules the stereotype of the poet isolated in her ivory tower, beyond and outside the social context. Nonetheless from a cultural and gender perspective, there is more to this picture than this:

The freedom, power, status, and self-realization of men is possible precisely because women work for them. Gender exploitation has two aspects, transfer of the fruits of material labor to men, and the transfer of nurturing and sexual energies to men. (Young, “Five Faces” 183)

The female voice in “Juniper Street” makes fun of the clichéd notion of the “non-working” housewife, having nothing to do before the rest of her family returns home (“nothing to do but to fiddle / words or quote the gilt-edge of our neighbour’s forsythia / gaining on our own trim laurel shrub”). The laurel wreath mocks the author’s own fantasies about her poetic fame. Groarke’s persona’s

---

<sup>56</sup> Friedman warns: “autonomous persons are differentiated selves with identities and commitments. They are products of socialization by other selves . . . . Second, autonomous persons must have the . . . abilities to understand one’s own wants and commitments . . . . Third, autonomous self-reflection requires meaningful options that can be weighed in light of wants, values, or other points of reference” (*Autonomy, Gender* 15).

pun on words: “**gilt-edge**,” read as “**guilt-edge**,” shows clearly that the relational freedom of the woman who instead of doing her household chores writes poetry, is paid off with guilt and remorse. One needs to add to it, the gendered-biased accusations of selfishness directed against autonomous women who pursue their “self-defining commitments” (Friedman 131).

Women's identities, characters, and self-defining commitments have come to be viewed by many people as important, whether or not they are dedicating their lives to the care and nurturance of husband, children, or other loved ones . . . . The newer self-fulfillment ideals . . . are based on the premise that deeply the deeply self-defining commitments of individuals should have the substantial priority in governing how they interact with romantic partners. (Friedman, *Autonomy, Gender* 130–131)

Ironic as it may seem, in “Juniper Street,” the queen of the morning's enshrined time, assigned to her writing, is partly used up in reconsidering her marital relation. In Groarke's poem, the husband's absence needs to be textually compensated by the metonymic touch of his glove whose warmth and tangible roughness have to fill in for his missed hands. Sampson in “A Light Still Burns” draws attention to the comforting and bonding aspect of the analysed passage, claiming that “the poet experiences her husband's reassuring body heat” (12). Nonetheless, in the cited passage, the expression “on the turn,” implying a stale condition, signifies an undesirable state of relational affairs. Looked at from this angle, in Groarke's poem, “this whole new world,” seems to be applied by the persona in a bitterly ironic context, parallel to Huxley's *Brave New World*. The persona in “Juniper Street” admits:

. . . I slipped your leather glove onto my hand  
and felt the heat of you as something on the turn  
that would carry us over the tip of all that darkness  
and land us on the stoop of this whole new world.  
(JS 53)

In “Juniper Street,” the blurred relational panorama dissolves like the melting snowfall and ice (see “Snow-melt in the gutters,” “ice slurs,” “the Swiss Alps”). Turned upside down, the image makes the snowfall appear much higher than “the roof line” and the mast with the flag. Contrary to expectations, “ticking flagpole” is personified as one of the relatives to whom all family members seem attached (“sees out the month with us”). In Groarke's poem, in its shifting “opening and closing” swaying movement, the third month of the year is compared to the archaically denoted door (*CED*) (“a valve”) and an anatomical organ. Textually, the narrative's triplets abound in old-fashioned idiom usage (see “slur,” in its meaning “smear”). The speaker in “Juniper Street” recalls:

Snow-melt in the gutters keeps new time,  
ice slurs on the lean-to, the Swiss Alps  
of the swimming pool drape over our own roof line

and the ticking flagpole sees out the month with us.  
 This morning, the trash was dappled on the lawn  
 where squirrels are sifting with Victorian aplomb,  
 tails aloft like pinkies off a cup. . . .

(JS 52)

Considering the above, the suburban residents depicted in “Juniper Street” seem to experience relational disempowerment, being “separated from nature, other humans, and their bodies and senses” (Howell 43). Looking at the squirrels’ sniffing around in the upturned garbage bins, the speaker in Groarke’s poem dismisses the view as a performative show of appearances (“tails aloft like pinkies off a cup”). It happens because in “Juniper Street,” animals pretend to be humans whereas objects “copy” animals: the clock might imitate birdsong (“Chrome riplets from / next door’s chimes, like first notes of some oriole / or wren”) and the bell could even deceive the hawk, taken in by its recorded sound (“slip over the path, are pounced on by a hawk”). The female voice in the analysed text describes:

. . . Chrome riplets from  
 next door’s chimes, like first notes of some oriole  
 or wren, slip over the path, are pounced on by a hawk

in the ginkgo, preening himself to call upon a light  
 just come into its own. Then the laburnum school bus  
 swerves into view, and the children’s on-the-run

goodbyes settle on the porch with my unplanted kiss.

(JS 52)

As proved in “Juniper Street,” the relational existence in the suburbs appears to be an imitation of something else, a simulacrum of real life already under erasure (see “on the-run,” “unplanted”). Pretending to be a bird, the yellow-flowered Chinese ginkgo tree (“preening himself to call upon a light / just come into its own”) needs light to be foregrounded. The school bus in Groarke’s poem is compared to the laburnum tree, and the mother-child bond needs to be cultivated like a plant in front of their house. The female voice in the cited passage relates this experience as follows: “the children’s on-the-run / goodbyes settle on the porch with my unplanted kiss.” Praising Groarke’s poetic genius, Sampson claims that “Indeed, ‘Juniper Street’ is the book’s undoubted masterpiece, its observations of a new life in suburban North America lifted out of the conventional by the poem’s admission of interpersonal life” (“A Light Still Burns” 12). Suburban life’s complexities and the costs of female autonomy are further scrutinised in Groarke’s “Here.” Included in *Flight* (2002), the poem probes how daily encroachments on the speaker’s empowerment affect her perception of the surrounding reality. Located (or rather locked) in the claustrophobic district, busy with two small children, Groarke’s persona has to invest much effort so that her artistic self might develop, or at least survive

dormant. Through the negative lens of her much restrained freedom, the speaker in "Here" tends to see herself as disempowered and, in consequence, perceives her whole neighbourhood as hostile. Starting on an affected note, the female voice in "Here" declares sinisterly:

We should know if we're done for  
by the time the news from the outskirts filters through.  
Whatever that may mean. It all seems steady enough:  
not a whisper out of place in the goings-on. . . .  
(FAEP 101)

In "Here," with this dramatic entrance in mind, one cannot but ponder on the speaker's being "done for." In the same disquieting vein, the female voice appears to sense the tension in the nearby reality, detecting all around her the signs of impending danger. To her, even the sound of the **buzzer** "that sports its bluster" sounds alarming. In Groarke's persona's apprehensive mind, she needs to be alert not to be taken in by the appearances of suburban calmness. Considering the above, the speaker's credibility does not seem to be firmly established in the discourse. In this suspenseful passage, the critical way in which she views the world around her is strongly tainted with her fault-finding attitude. One can observe it, for example, in the selection of pejorative adjectival modifiers in the phrases: "pock-marked lovers and their flawed rebuffs." Following this way of thinking, the suburban couples in "Here" are considered by the speaker as blemished with physical (emotional?) scars and let down in their relational refusals and rejections. The female voice confesses:

. . . At five,  
the buzzer sports its bluster and fools no one.  
By nine, the streets are trying on the usual  
pock-marked lovers and their flawed rebuffs.  
(FAEP 101)

Accordingly in "Here," the acquiescent, suburban way of life is conceived of by the female voice as a rehearsed spectacle where the spontaneously manifested emotionality and a direct expression of female dissatisfaction are not approved of, and, thus, daringly practised by few. In Groarke's poem, the silent majority seems to get by with the performative role-playing stereotypically assigned to them. The speaker in "Here" observes:

Every doorway opens on a theatre of speculative odds  
and only the maudlin and the outraged know the score.  
The rest of us trade what allure we can in whatever  
episodes we might concoct. . . .  
(FAEP 101)

In "Here," the tone of resignation and disappointment permeates Groarke's narrative. It is rendered in the concessive phrases (see "what allure we can in whatever / episodes we might," "Whatever that may mean," "moves on to

what's possible"). As the time passes, the speaker in the examined passage seems to join in the residential inertia, withdrawing from the participation in an active life. Accordingly, the persona in "Here" considers her suburban existence as surreal and "strange," as if not hers any more. Saliently giving in to whatever might come, or what will never come, she admits: "While the evening takes / its wide-open trumps and moves on to what's possible / elsewhere" (FAEP 101). However Groarke's speaker is not entirely reconciled with a residential stupor. Her discontent with the daily letting go is voiced in a form of rhetorical questions. What is more, the persona's emotional state discloses that her sense of self-defining commitments is seriously undermined. Friedman is right to remind us that:

We live, however, in a social context that still features lively traditional ideals pressuring women to a greater extent than men to sacrifice their own distinctive and separate interests for the sake of preserving love relationships. Traditions of love and gender still hold women more responsible than men for sacrificing their independent selves to sustain heterosexual love relationships. (*Autonomy, Gender* 132)

It appears that in "Here," a potential reason for the speaker's dissatisfaction is the fear of maintaining her emdeddedness at the cost of giving up her own autonomous self. The female voice in Groarke's poem fantasises about somebody upon whose shoulders she could place the daily burden of responsibility for her own unsatisfactory existence ("Who will take this on"). She imagines that giving up a part of her authority as a self-governing agent might relieve her of the tiring relational accountability. She ponders:

. . . Leaving the question of who cares now  
for the override of lazy compensations,  
or the clutch of the here and now with its glib relief?  
Who will take this on, when we already bank upon  
the casual distractions of the doomed?  
(FAEP 101)

The above-quoted linguistically accurate fragment implies that the persona in "Here" imagines her life to be devoid of "lazy compensations" or compromises. Nonetheless even this wishful thinking does not remove the bitter flavour of failure and insincerity. In the analysed fragment, reducing her relational reality to the transient moment's actuality (see "the clutch of the here and now with its glib relief") might only make it more bearable to be processed in the smaller, more digestible parts. In Groarke's poem, the subtle trait of the suburban self-deception is rendered in an oxymoronic expression "glib relief:" on one hand, smooth-tongued, on the other hand, hypocritical and dishonest. The speaker in "Here" wonders what could happen if she developed a habit of relying upon "the casual distractions of the doomed." It is only by critically re-applying the abandoned autonomous choice that the female voice might put to test the related claims. She argues:

The mountains drag and the roads fill with those who chose  
to gamble on the latest, meagre word.  
The town reeks of elsewhere and its borrowed lexicon  
of how things ought to be. Last week, they found a skull  
on a gatepost. . . .

(FAEP 101)

The speaker in "Here" seems at a loss as to whether she should give up her relational expectations for a potentially more realistic scenario. She appears to entertain the thought of sacrificing her autonomy in favour of inaction's compliant convenience. Not ready to take any decision, the persona in Groarke's poem openly mocks those who still "choose to gamble on the latest, meagre word." Although in the examined fragment, the verb "gamble" implies a high risk scenario of rather low odds ("meagre"), at least the suburban residents whom she ridicules have the courage to act, even if that leads to another failure. Not being able to take any steps herself, Groarke's persona ironizes about others' yearnings to start over ("The mountains drag and the roads fill"). In "Here," the fantasies of the idealised "elsewhere" appear to be sickening to the speaker (compare the verb "reek" in "the town reeks of elsewhere"). So do the second-hand arguments repeated mindlessly (see "its borrowed lexicon") and the whole prescriptive ideology "of how things ought to be." The female voice in "Here" indulges in her travesty up to reaching a morbid tone: "Last week, they found a skull / on a gatepost." It turns out that sometimes even the suburban dwellers' hidden frustration may take a violent form and it gets vented out in acts of vandalism or aggression. The female voice admits:

. . . Lately, it was a pewter plate on a building site  
with the words 'Ye citizens, hold fast' somehow intact.  
Then the rose window of the church was smashed  
and mailbags were vexed with a shrill, repeated note.

(FAEP 101)

Nonetheless in Groarke's poem, the social transgressions are amongst the few contraventions in the daily suburban reality. The speaker sums it up as "Since that, nothing much." The subsequent expression: "Helicopters at dawn" indicates that the outskirts' inhabitants know how to look after their security and defend themselves against real or imagined dangers. After all,

To own a space is to have autonomy over admission to the space and its contents . . . Privacy refers to the autonomy and control a person has to allow or not allow access to her person, information about her, and the things which are meaningfully associated with her person. (Young, "House and Home" 74)

In "Here," the reasons for Groarke's persona's disconsolate existence might stem from her giving up female autonomous empowerment for the sake of the compromised safety of her beloved ones. In the cited below passage, the image of the speaker's children sleeping with "their arms above their heads" might

connote a heavy sleep. But it also renders the symbol of surrender i.e.: “hands up,” especially when connoted with the poppies “giving up.” Together with the verbs of decline and withering (“sear”) and the mechanical droning of “throb,” it seems that Groarke’s persona perceives her residential existence as capitulation. Instead of the expected comfort, the speaker in “Here” views the loss of her freedom as demeaning and distressing (see the modifier “ambiguous” and “sear”). The plants’ poor physical condition, their gradual declining vitality – all testify to the trees’ being as dried up inside as the suburban inhabitants looking at them. Apart from emotional and physical dwindling, the poem’s recurrent theme, that of (self) deception, reappears in the finale. The ambiguous denomination “rook,” whether referring to the bird species or (life) frauds, renders the speaker’s mixed feelings about her undeniably rational yet not sufficiently self-governing existence. Carol P. Christ reminds us that “it must not be denied that relational independence can be difficult for women to achieve in modern societies” (*Rebirth* 141). The persona in “Here” concludes:

Since that, nothing much. Helicopters at dawn.  
My children sleep with their arms above their heads.  
The poppies give themselves up to a northerly.  
The same rooks throb the rim of the windmill  
and branches, like ruptured sails, sear ambitious trees.  
(FAEP 101)

Apart from the discussed linguistic dexterity (compare “branches, like ruptured sails, sear ambitious trees”), the closing lines of “Here” amaze one with their melodious mastery, rhythmical accuracy, unvarying metrical regularity and elaborate sound patterns. The best example of the latter is the onomatopoeic and rhythmical imitation of the windmill’s regular routine in the following line: “the same rooks throb the rim of the windmill.” Accordingly, the metaphor of the daily relational routine conceived of as tedious and repetitive windmill-like work reappears in *Juniper Street*’s poem “Windmill Hymns.” Due to a retrospective insight into the speaker’s relationship, “Windmill Hymns” offers readers a substantial amount of the “healthy dose of autonomous scrutiny” (Donner 384) throughout the seven-year balance of the marital gains and losses.

Whether or not one should make a particular romantic love relationship an enduring part of one’s life and a deep self-defining commitment depends on whether the relationship nurtures or stifles the self that one already is. There is nothing inherently sacred about any one romantic love relationship, nothing that morally requires one to modify one’s deepest self for the sake of entering it. (Friedman, *Autonomy, Gender* 135)

Groarke’s persona in “Windmill Hymns” begins her narrative in a solemn voice (“In the shadow of the windmill we put down our lives”). The subsequent reflections do not differ much in the gravity of tone. In the studied text, one can sense the relation’s weightiness, connoted with circumference, despondency and heavy burden (compare “put down, girth, ballast”). “Because of society’s

expectation that a woman is primarily responsible for the care of 'her' children, a woman often feels that she must cope alone with overwhelming duties and responsibilities" (Christ, *Rebirth* 141). Bearing that in mind, even the poetic embellishments (see the elegantly alliterated "amber absolute") cannot ease the ambience of exhaustion and disenchantment prevailing in the analysed narrative (see "foreclosed, shiftless, the sun on its back, dereliction, shut down on the chance of things ever picking up"). The persona in "Windmill Hymns" admits:

In the shadow of the windmill we put down our lives.  
Something about its girth and ballast, the sun on its back,  
its shiftless, amber absolute foreclosed on other options.

(JS 12)

On closer examination, Groarke's speaker's retrospective account appears to be tainted with estrangement and disbelief, as if she was scrutinising somebody else's life narrative. One might wonder whether the female voice in "Windmill Hymns" acknowledges her autonomous input in creating the dissatisfying context. "Taking responsibility also means attempting to understand and transform the suffering that we have caused others and the unresolved suffering within ourselves" (Christ, *Rebirth* 144). Admitting co-responsibility or not, by recounting the past events, the persona in Groarke's poem tries to comprehend what has happened to her life, and how she has found herself where she is. The female voice in "Windmill Hymns" continues:

We put down our lives as if for a moment – a break for tea  
or to deal with an enquiry in the yard – and something about

its dereliction shut down at once on the chance of things  
ever picking up again. . . .

(JS 12)

With the benefit of hindsight, the speaker in "Windmill Hymns" realises that if the relational connection is suspended even once ("We put down our lives as if for a moment"), or left aside for a while, it may not be reclaimed at all ("its dereliction shut down"). Even though life is expected not to alter within the relational gap, the reality never remains "frozen" or unchanged. Besides, such a life-halt always produces far-reaching relational consequences. Trying as they might, the couple might not be able to resume their connection's lasting state. The female voice in Groarke's poem sums it up:

. . . Now, seven years on, this is us  
finding the storeys equal to our time and too ornamental.  
Even its decay does not refuse the compliment of sunshine,

(JS 12)

The persona in "Windmill Hymns" wishes to go back to the beginning of her marriage, which is summed up by her as the serious relational impasse (see "its decay" and "too ornamental"). The ironically self-declared "ornamentality" ("the



compliment of sunshine, / the way the moon rubs against it”) might imply that the couple’s marital life has been picturesque only on the outside, whereas the true, silenced problems were hidden behind the eye-pleasing appearances. That is why in Groarke’s poem when coming to the relational standstill, the speaker is about to call it a day:

. . . What we were after was a stopgap  
for the lives we thought we’d live, that wouldn’t be banked  
in small talk, disappointments, lack of cash; the intended,  
blue-sky lives that would have us tilting at an evening do,  
with arms like French film stars and mouthfuls of moonlight

to slip us downstream into bed. That was then. I lie. It never was.

(JS 12)

As shown in “Windmill Hymns,” the yearning for a marital “stopgap” and a life without “small talk, disappointments, lack of cash” testifies to the couple’s dissatisfaction with their relation and the day-to-day routine. To ward off her sentimental, escapist fantasies, the persona in Groarke’s poem derisively conjures up a gushed “blue-sky lives” romance, “like French film stars and mouthful of moonlight.” The speaker’s mock-romantic travesty of the “lived happily ever after” seems to be located in the unreal past, imagined and never actual. Referring to the confrontation of the lovers’ imaginary paradise with the mundane reality, the female voice in “Windmill Hymns” admits bitterly: “I lie. It never was.” This is how she relates the experience of the couple’s daily reality:

This instead is the relief of getting nowhere, of knowing  
from the start how it must end. The same momentum,  
selfsame pace that drags itself and all its consequence  
over the bones of another rattled year. . . .

(JS 12)

Overpowered with her daily chores and failing to realise her autonomous identity, the speaker in Groarke’s poem cannot but perceive her “windmill existence” as a dead-end path (“getting nowhere, knowing from the start how it must end”) and a vicious circle (“The same momentum, selfsame pace that drags itself”). Carol P. Christ reminds us that “[u]nderstanding that relationships create, nurture, and sustain the self also means recognizing that relationships can damage and destroy it” (*Rebirth* 138). In “Windmill Hymns,” instead of female empowerment, the persona’s embeddedness becomes one more duty to shoulder in her dull, daily agenda. However Groarke’s speaker’s failure to preserve some degree of independence within the relational no-win situation is not a rare case:

Women usually bear greater share of the emotional work needed for lovers to survive as a couple. This could happen because women are more dedicated to maintaining their love relationships than are their male partners. Or it could happen because their male partners pressure them into making greater contributions. (Friedman, *Autonomy, Gender* 128–129)

In "Windmill Hymns," the dejected female voice does not seem to see a way out of her relational crisis. That is why she concessively acknowledges with a note of resignation:

... I suppose, at some point,

it will stop, and all the shunt and grind of the day-to-day  
come creaking towards another new conclusion, a new plan:  
the last sacks loaded, the carts dismissed, handshakes,  
gates pulled shut from the outside and then a silence  
gaining on the sails, settling there, the way birds do, the air,  
(JS 12–13)

The rhetorical questions in "Windmill Hymns" quoted below, despite the speaker's eerie assertion: "The damp, the mould will all do now" (JS 13) constitute a feeble attempt to seek a solution to the marital standstill. The repeated parallel structures ["How long before the wood / lets itself down on willowherb that finds itself at bay in shuttered light;" "How long until the weeds take hold / and starlings, like quicksilver, like silverfish, like a fastness / of silver spilled out on the stones?" (JS 13)] render a mood of textual entrapment. The implied wish to leave the ghosts of the past behind might be indicative of the couple's potential better future ("before the doors give up the ghost; the floor shrug the way windows / cannot bring themselves to do, until local lads with slingshots / and deadeyes see to them?"). Structurally, the examined fragment of "Windmill Hymns" abounds with the verbs of action signalling movement ("finds itself at bay," "shrug," "see to," "take hold," "fastness of silver" etc.). The on-going changes are contrasted with the couple's own passivity:

... And us? We don't move.  
Our way of holding on, of saying, 'We've stayed too long',  
is like the way the children have of stopping play  
to stand stock-still under the whirl of starlings' hide-and-peek.  
(JS 13)

In "Windmill Hymns," the lovers' inertia might testify to their need for (self) preservation. It seems to indicate that they fear any (relational) alterations.<sup>57</sup> Cut off from her empowering autonomy's resources, the exhausted speaker internalises her frustration in a rather bleak image: "what's missing should be called 'the coping' makes me / want to lay my face against the stone." As argued

---

<sup>57</sup> For a change in their relationship dynamic to occur (which would allow women's relational autonomy to be reactivated), both partners' openness and trust in each other's good will would be required. A way out of relational autonomy's impasse enabling the partners to redefine power dynamics within their relationship might happen in the following manner: "The shared activities and projects of love in particular engage us jointly with our lovers over the whole trajectory of agency: attending to situations, evaluating circumstances, making decisions, expressing our concerns in action, and living with the consequences of our choices" (Friedman, *Autonomy, Gender* 134).

earlier, Groarke's persona is no longer willing to appease her resentment about the loss of independence (see "our way of holding on, of saying, 'We've stayed too long'"). At the same time, she opposes taking a relational vacation from their connection and the couple's shared life. The persona in "Windmill Hymns" defines the "stock-still" as a childish game, reminiscent of her earlier sentimental Parisian fantasies. She admits:

That what's missing should be called 'the coping' makes me  
 want to lay my face against the stone; let ivy root in my teeth;  
 weather grout my skin, my eyes take on the evening and its down.  
 Let my children stand within an inch of my life, so the way  
 their breath aspires could be the sky, or something close, to me.  
 (JS 13)

Summing up, in "Windmill Hymns," difficult as it may be, Groarke's persona seems to be determined to retain her autonomy of independent commitments, choosing, at the same time, to carry out her personal freedom within the embedded connections. The line: "their breath aspires could be the sky, or something close, to me" points to the truly empowering aspect of the speaker's relationality: her two children. The poem's conclusive vision is constituted by the adjacent image of the air (the sky) being made up of the speaker's offspring's peaceful breaths. Despite the contextual aspect, in the cited passage, the mastery of the last sentence lies in the (seeming) contradiction between the syntactical dexterity and the skilfully located pauses in enjambment and punctuation. The apparent paradox of relational autonomy can be explained as follows:

Relationships define whom we are. We do not have identities, characters, or self-defining commitments apart from relationships, although we might have mere desires and preferences. Relationships are thus necessary conditions for the very having of a stable self-identity. At the same time, in order to sustain these crucial, identity-conferring relationships, we may have to sacrifice or submerge some of our own desires and preferences, in particular those that would interfere with our efforts to preserve our relationships. (Friedman, *Autonomy, Gender* 134–135)

With the above in mind, looking back upon her life, the female voice in "The Boat" admits honestly: "It's not what I'd have chosen at this time." Hence to realise her true needs, Groarke's persona would have to be connected with the meaningful aspects of her self: partner, children and nature (see "the bird's nest scattered on the grate"). Instead, the alienating ambience ("wounded music") of the suburban existence leads to the decline of the vegetation ("This morning the grass at the sycamore was scorched"), the decline in human relations, and even a decline in the creative process ("these pages were out of sequence on the desk"). The speaker in "The Boat" confesses:

It's not what I'd have chosen at this time,  
 not with the bird's nest scattered on the grate

or the wounded music of the house alarm  
 coming in waves across darkness and two streets.  
 This morning the grass at the sycamore was scorched  
 these pages were out of sequence on the desk.

(JS 32)

In Groarke's poem, the disquieting ambience finds its expression in her partner being depicted as a solitary boat in need of the familiar guiding lights to return home. Retrospectively, the speaker in "The Boat" continues a critical examination of her past decisions. This is how she conveys her independent outlook on her relational connections:

What will it be tonight: a small boat lightly edging home  
 to be met by the faces in half-light at the port?  
 I will know it as the one I have arranged  
 and must soften with quilts and coats,  
 make sure you have food to last and an address.  
 I will push the boat to sea when the oarsman nods.  
 Wait for me. I have only this to finish.

(JS 32)

As shown, the persona in "The Boat" sees her role in marriage as "arranging," "softening," and "making sure." Obviously, one perceives the selection of the action verbs as auxiliary rather than autonomous. In the declaration that the female voice has to "make sure you have food to last and an address," one can recognise not only care but the speaker's overwhelming solitariness. Groarke's relational dissatisfaction comes to the discourse's surface in the final plea, addressed to her partner: "Wait for me. I have only this to finish."

Love can also promote the growth of competencies for autonomy. In this respect, even a merger of identity with someone who is more autonomous than oneself might become the very vehicle by which one learns through emulation and participation to become more autonomous. (Friedman, *Autonomy, Gender* 133–34)

In Groarke's "The Boat," the male textual creation seems to triumph over his longed for real-life presence. One can hardly dismiss the thought that the titled boat could be a verbal euphemism for a coffin. In the examined passage, partner's detachment might result from a metaphorical relation's death. In "The Boat," the textual distance is further rendered via "a series of musings and digressions voiced from an in-between time, action delayed until the page has been filled, ending self-reflexively with the imperative: 'Wait for me. I have only this to finish.' It is out of these moments of waiting, of hanging between, that the poems are formed" (Johnston 101). A similar relational suspension is conveyed in the poem "We Had Words" by means of the post-apocalyptic scenery, or more literally, the hurricane's smite ("Another hurricane, the third this month"). Though being away from the cataclysm's epicentre, the female

voice in “We Had Words” perceives the residential area as affected by its pestilential side-effects:

Another hurricane, the third this month, strikes at the heart  
of a city far from here. Tomorrow, its leftovers will fill our drain  
and leak into the basement to advance on our low-tide mark  
a seepage shot with grit and aftermath. . . .

(JS 30)

Commenting appropriately that “[t]omorrow, its leftovers will fill our drain,” the speaker in “We Had Words” proves that, for her, the phenomenological world functions as a cause and effect reality where every event produces consequences not only for those immediately involved. As a result, the female voice in Groarke’s poem claims to be suffering from insomnia. She admits;

. . . My sleep tonight  
will be a skimming stone affair: every hour fulfilling an ellipsis  
predicted by the last. This day, all day, is hypothetical.  
When it steals inside an offhand dusk, not even I  
will muster a send-off beyond the thought of dusk in darkness,  
a breathless stowaway, like your words on the flip side  
of my tongue, one almost completely slipped inside another.

(JS 30)

In “We Had Words,” the sleep-deprived persona conceives of the surrounding reality as if existing in inverted commas. In the immediacy filled with the missing fragments and blank spaces, Groarke’s speaker’s autonomous existence loses its sharp, tangible contours, becoming “hypothetical.” As a result, in “We Had Words,” the persona’s sense-perceptions seem to be subdued and subsided by her blocked autonomy’s potential. In the examined poem, the interrupted interpersonal connections are manifested verbally in the metaphors (“skimming stone affair,” “fulfilling an ellipsis,” “it steals inside,” “a send-off beyond the thought of dusk in darkness,” and “a breathless stowaway”). Groarke’s speaker’s clogged senses might stem also from “the word poisoning” with its hurtful content, which is stored “on the flip side / of my tongue, one almost completely slipped inside another.” The question arises whether in “We Had Words” the speaker’s impaired independence appears to be the cause or the effect of her emotional distress. She recalls:

I was saying, likening the way you like to single out  
a single word to bear the weight of this, to boarded windows  
and spineless pines bent double in thin air; cars afloat  
on streets that have lost the run of themselves by now;  
a casket in a clutch of branches, an item of clothing  
tied to a TV aerial, for help. . . .

(JS 30)

In the cited passage, there is a lengthy enumeration of Groarke’s persona’s relational power cuts. The analysed fragment of “We Had Words” contains a

stanza-long subordinated clause, separated from the rest of the sentence with commas. The main clause begins with "I was saying," and, then, it digresses into an adverbial clause, opening with "liking the way you . . ." This utterance, in turn, goes on for four more lines of the listed catalogue, never reaching its argumentative point, until the final expression, with a comma: "for help." Although the conclusive phrase does refer to the preceding "item of clothing / tied to a TV aerial, for help," it might be the direct complement to the statement: "I was saying." The past tense of the whole passage locates the female speaker's autonomous preferences into the distant and completed period. To express the former times' tone, Groarke's persona plays with the sound of the words, whose intentional repetitions resonate like an echo of the bygone era. The aforementioned strategy is manifested in the root reiteration of "likening the way you like," repetition of "to single out / a single word," "spineless pines," complex pattern of duplicated "word to bear the weight of this, to boarded windows," and "a casket in a clutch of branches, an item of clothing." One cannot help noticing that the restated sounds are as if "bent double in thin air." The speaker in "We Had Words" concedes:

. . . It bypasses us completely.  
Your full leg, white as that whiplashed shirt, has drifted  
over mine. A siren flares on the pike. It plays itself out  
in hours perched on high ground; our breath brimming over;  
our new words islanded and arch, to steer us wide of harm.  
(JS 30)

In the light of the straightforward declaration: "It bypasses us completely," which follows the catalogue of objects, it appears that the persona in "We Had Words" questions the empowering potential of her relational autonomy. However if one pursues this thought further, one might notice that the speaker's discourse relies heavily on doubleness, not only of sounds but of the shared contexts. Accordingly, in "We Had Words," all the listed items seem to support one another, either physically or emotionally. This finds its verbal expression in "bear the weight of this, to" "in a clutch of," and "tied to . . . , for help." Thus, in acknowledging the need for help, the persona expresses her readiness for emotional and physical contact with her partner. In Groarke's poetry, women's relational empowerment assures that "[a]lthough the focus of the activity is on others, there is an implicit belief that empowering another is a mutually beneficial process" (Fletcher 56). That is why the speaker perceives her partner's bodily gesture of propping his leg against her as a token of the relational reconnection. The persona in "We Had Words" looks at her lover's limb, as if seeing it for the first time. Astounded with the limb's paleness, she is equally taken aback with her lover's body complete openness to her, rendered in the modifier "full." It becomes clear that

. . . sexuality can be a powerful expression of our connection to others and to  
all beings in the web of life. Sexual energy can be an almost irresistible force

drawing us to connect with another human body. Sexual experience can be ecstatic, taking us out of our ordinary selves, opening up our deepest feelings, connecting us to the soul as well as the body of another, expanding the limited boundaries of the ego . . . sexuality can also become a mode of deep communication, a profound expression of intelligent, embodied love. (Christ, *Rebirth* 147)

Consequently, the female voice in “We Had Words” comments upon the re-established contact: “white as that whiplashed shirt, has drifted / over mine.” However an attempted proximity is accompanied nearly instantly with the warning sound of an alarm (“a siren flares on the pike”) which “plays itself out / in hours perched on high ground.” The unnerving signal does not prevent the lovers from being connected. In Groarke’s poem, their bodily unison is expressed in the singular form of the phrase “our breath,” instead of the grammatically correct “our breaths.”<sup>58</sup> When the persona in “We Had Words” concludes: “our new words islanded and arch, to steer us wide of harm,” it becomes evident that the speaker’s hope seems to be restored, though not uncritically.<sup>59</sup> Elaborating the aforementioned idea, the poem “Terms and Conditions” ponders whether autonomy could pose a threat to the speaker’s relational connections. The persona also learns that “social disconnection involving *no* failure to fulfil moral responsibilities to others, to the degree that this is possible, does not involve a moral wrong to anyone else” (Friedman, *Autonomy, Gender* 42), emphasis original. In “Terms and Conditions,” Groarke’s persona re-visits what she defines as “a familiar room.” What constitutes her “familiar room” is a set of beliefs about relational empowerment with others and the world, operating on the “the drawstring certainty of anything you ever turned / your hand to.” The context for the present confrontation is different though. In Groarke’s poem, its array has been re-shifted and is “not here, where your room is busy / being someplace else.” The speaker in “Terms and Conditions” declares:

Back into a familiar room, see what you know,  
as though you yourself had pulled the thing together  
with the drawstring certainty of anything you ever turned  
your hand to. But not here, where your room is busy  
being someplace else. The pattern on the sofa’s wearing thin.  
The rug also is withering and even the view is slinking off

to brighter sights elsewhere. . . .

(JS 43)

<sup>58</sup> Thus, the previously banished ghost of the romantic merger reappears again, making the empowerment of the speaker questionable. It happens because “Love does not take place in a social vacuum. It is influenced by traditions, practices, and social and political institutions. It is guided by norms and stereotypes . . . . The idea of a merger of identities is one of these norms – to women’s frequent disadvantage” (Friedman, *Autonomy, Gender* 127).

<sup>59</sup> Hence, the “concern is that autonomous people will disrupt or desert valuable, *shared* relationships” (Friedman, “Autonomy, Social Disruption” 45), emphasis original.

The female voice in "Terms and Conditions" elaborates a set of instructions on how to re-invent her autonomous space anew: "Put down your hand / as though from an instrument when the music gives itself up. / What is there? Perhaps, a book, an opened envelope, or a box / of safety matches on the desk. You choose" (JS 43). In Groarke's poem even the reality outside the window becomes narrated so that the textual world might complement the experiential reality. The fusion of both realms assumes the function of "your imprint . . . upon this place" and "every incremental word that marks a place out for itself." The persona in "Terms and Conditions" continues:

. . . Someone has set  
a fire although the window is open so the book becomes  
a commentary on what's happening to the room.

You know it. All the words inside are inscribed  
on your memory, the way your imprint is upon this place.  
The air is stranded when you so much as lift your hand  
and every incremental word that marks a place out for itself  
is discernible, if you could only see it or look inside.

(JS 43)

In "Terms and Conditions," the speaker's un-actualised need to control her relational environment is summed up in the unreal tense: "All this could be yours." In saying so, Groarke's persona wants to claim a sort of marital retribution for the years of sacrifice of her own autonomy. As if addressing that issue, Friedman recalls Beauvoir's statement that "[n]o man is divine enough to deserve such sacrifice. A woman will realize that fact soon enough, after which she will spend the rest of her life trying to hide, from others and herself, the sad pointlessness of her sacrifice" (*Autonomy, Gender* 137). Hence, instead, the speaker in "Terms and Conditions" exercises the competence of her autonomy in practice as being carried out by her decisions which are in tune with her real needs and beliefs. "Thus, autonomous choices and actions are those that mirror wants or values that an acting person has reflectively reaffirmed and that are important to her" (Friedman, *Autonomy, Gender* 14). The female voice in "Terms and Conditions" admits:

But your line of vision sags against the window  
  
and you hear again your voice that says, 'All this could be yours'.  
It echoes like a debt collector's bell, making even the pink roses  
hold their breath, and you're not moving now. Not a whisper.

(JS 43)

The speaker in "Terms and Conditions" acknowledges her relational and literary indebtedness to others, to begin with her intertextual tribute to MacNeice in the poem's motto ("*Yet the burnt poet loves the fire*"). Since "autonomy is . . . something we develop only in society. The fact that any of us has the capacity for autonomous agency is a debt that we each owe to others" (Barclay 57). After



all, we all relish the textual and relational roses “borrowed from someone else’s room.” The presence of other hands (“the fire is set to warm to another hand”) and other addresses make us whom we are. Elsewhere Barclay re-states this thought: “our autonomy competence is a debt we owe to others” (58). The speaker in “Terms and Conditions” concludes:

. . . The envelope addresses itself  
again to someone else. The fire is set to warm to another hand.  
Even the roses are borrowed from someone else’s room.  
(JS 43)

In “Oranges,” from the volume *Flight*, Groarke’s speaker is looking through the window into her own house, contemplating “her life without her.”<sup>60</sup> Carney comments about this strategy employed in *Flight*: “In several poems, most obviously in ‘Oranges’, the speaker like Mrs Ramsay in *To The Lighthouse*, looks at her life, and sees it blazing and guttering in the moment it takes to see it. Vona Groarke has worked to create . . . such moments, real and imagined” (148). The critic praises *Flight*’s “[i]mpeccable formal skills, impressive and sustained control of images, linguistic play and verse forms are all features here of a paradoxical poetry that is both quiet and diminutive but powerful and intense” (147). Following this line, Collins argues that

For Vona Groarke such spatial divisions are . . . placed in a specifically familial frame, . . . she uses interior or domestic space as a means of investigating the relationship of self to others and of exploring where the individual can fit in the social arrangements of the world. ‘Oranges’ from *Flight* (2002), is a poem that engages directly with the representation of boundaries: here the poem itself enacts the uneasy emotional drifts in lines that part in the centre and shift to each side. (152)

The structurally accomplished poem “Oranges” addresses the persona’s inmost relational fears. Graphically divided into two separate parts, Groarke’s poem strikes one immediately with an uncommon textual layout: the Christmas tree space being left in the middle of it. At first glance, such a layout might connote homeliness. However on closer examination, when the comely tree-shape stops being fore-grounded, one notices the breach in the centre of Groarke’s narrative, with its uncanny gaping hole. In other words, what comes into view is the disquieting void, keeping two split halves apart from each other. The crack in the poem’s structure appears to convey the speaker’s relational autonomy’s double-voiced text: the narrative with her located within (inside) the family script and also outside (beyond) of it. In the examined text, it is the latter option that evokes Groarke’s speaker’s apprehension. The female voice in “Oranges” ponders:

---

<sup>60</sup> Paraphrase of the film’s title *My Life Without Me*, directed by Isabel Coixet (2003), based upon Nancy Kincaid’s book *Pretending the Bed is a Raft*.

Say you approach	your house in winter
home from work	or in from the shops.
The light is on	in your living room
and the blind	still up. So you stop
to watch the shape	your family makes
against your home.	Your lover reaches
to a higher shelf.	He could see you
if he turned his	head your way.
Your daughter	reads some words
you did not write.	Your son juggles
two oranges	or is in flight
between corners	of the room.
Your life shines	without you.
The keys blaze	in your palm.

(FAEP 65)

When peeping through the window, what amazes or rather upsets the persona in “Oranges” is how well everyone and everything and in her family works while she is not with them. The sentence: “Your life shines without you” could indicate Groarke’s speaker’s relief that things go smoothly even when she is not at home. In reality, the female voice in “Oranges” feels threatened rather than relieved by this realisation. The persona in Groarke’s poem appears jeopardised because if the family manages to function without her, then, she can be perceived as redundant or even replaceable. Drawing upon Kymlicka, Barclay further explicates that “the claim that an autonomous or self-determining person can question her social roles and values does not mean she questions them all at once, that she rejects them all” (55). Insecure as she is, the female voice in “Oranges” decides to take the risk involved with being an autonomous person instead always being ready to assist others with her continuous presence.

The separateness that enables the speaker to look at her family from a distance, yet closely, also creates apparently contradictory feelings of belonging and being excluded. These feelings, rather than being simultaneous, may indeed be separated as one moment is from the next; much of Groarke’s poetry thrives on this kind of hesitation between emotional states and it is one of the aspects that makes the dialectic between her poetry and that of other women so fruitful . . . . It is particularly apt given the evocative power of Groarke’s work and the watchfulness of her poetic persona. Yet the poem ends in hesitation, as its structure has suggested all along, and the emotional resonance returns to the speaker herself. (Collins 152–153)

Unlike “Oranges,” dedicated to the poet’s daughter Eve, the oxymoronic poem “Tonight of Yesterday” explores the empowering aspect of maternal relational autonomy. Groarke’s text assumes the form of the bed time narrative that sums up the whole day, preparing the small girl for sleep. In “Tonight of Yesterday,” the lullaby’s function is to assure Eve that her life is safe and following the right track “the evening . . . has kept a place for” her, and “settled on / the morning.” In Groarke’s poem, one senses the textual admiration that the

speaker as a poet and mother has for the neologisms invented by her daughter (i.e. “flyblown” for the dandelions). The persona is aware that this linguistic freshness will gradually be replaced with the conventional significations, taking the place of the child’s own creativity. The persona in “Tonight of Yesterday” maintains:

The evening slips you into it, has kept a place for you  
and those wildwood limbs that have already settled on  
the morning. The words you have for it are flyblown now  
as the dandelion you’ll whistle tomorrow into a lighter air.  
(FAEP 64)

In “Tonight of Yesterday,” Groarke defines her daughter as follows: “You are all about tomorrow,” looking ahead to the child’s future and imagining it to be soon. In the examined poem, the persona does not intend to hurry the child’s developmental process (see the poem’s title). Focused on “but, tonight,” she is teaching her to enjoy the present moment, the taste of the berries, the warmth of the sunlight, and the colours of the sunset. Like the opening, the narrative’s closure re-establishes in the girl a sense of (self) assurance, depicting the universe to her as a familiar place where Eve securely belongs. In doing so, the speaker in “Tonight of Yesterday” reinstates in her daughter the belief that her life is “an open book” that she will, day by day, autonomously write herself:

But, tonight, your sleep will be as round as your mouth,  
berried with the story of sunlight finally run to ground.  
You are all about tomorrow. The moon has your name  
memorized: the curl of your back; your face, an open book.  
(FAEP 64)

The female voice in “Away” realises in practice (regardless of the geographical distance) her autonomy within the family milieu, pursuing her own commitments. It may happen because “the competencies for autonomy include such skills as critical reflection, evaluation, and imagining alternatives” (Friedman, *Autonomy, Gender* 133).<sup>61</sup> In “Away,” a woman working abroad maintains a meaningful connection with her children via modern technology. Being physically remote (“I am three thousand miles ago”), the mother still remains emotionally available to her daughter and son. What is more, the absent parent is responsive to her children’s vital needs and interests. The “away” mother does what all good carers do, she helps her offspring with homework, motivates them to make more effort and encourages extra-curricular activities. Stimulating her children to develop their own interests, she also discusses their favourite TV programmes etc. Nonetheless, the time difference (“five hours in

---

<sup>61</sup> Friedman elaborates this idea: “Someone who becomes more autonomous concerning some tradition, authorship, view or value in her life does not stop depending on other persons or relationships, nor does she evade her own necessarily social history of personal development . . .” (“Autonomy, Social Disruption” 41)

the red”) is experienced by Groarke’s persona as time irrecoverably lost that she “owes” to her offspring. Motivated by this imaginary guilt, the speaker in “Away” is trying to make it up to her progenies (“breakfast to their lunch, / lunch to their dinner”). It seems that the amount of time that the speaker devotes to her children, together with its considerate quality, might well exceed that of parents staying with their children under the same roof, but who are not very attentive to their offspring’s development, or who ignore their essential emotional needs. The female voice in “Away” admits:

I babysit by Skype,  
breakfast to their lunch,  
lunch to their dinner.

I straighten uniforms, ask French,  
nag music practice, argue *Friends*,  
trim their Bebo access.

I touch their silky faces on my screen.  
I am three thousand miles ago,  
five hours in the red.

(S 26)

In “Away,” what is longed for in the familial connection is not merely visual or auditory communication but the direct tactile contact. Via the computer screen, the mother in Groarke’s poem cannot hug her children no matter how much she may yearn for their tangible feel (see “I touch their silky faces on my screen”). Appropriately, the poem’s modern vocabulary, frequently oxymoronic, renders the woman’s relational dilemma. Not being able to sense her children, the mother “touches” their pixel representations on her screen; not being able to be with them, she has to “babysit by Skype;” not being able to straighten their clothes or tidy them up in person, she “does” it via the Internet (“I straighten uniforms”). The sad irony is that, instead of talking about her children’s school friends, they discuss the TV show of the same title (“argue *Friends*”). As a discerning observer, the persona in “Away” is fully conscious of these relational deprivations, she knows that her life is gradually becoming more and more virtual. In Groarke’s poem, the expressions cited below aptly relate the speaker’s self-awareness: “cyber wire, / a virtual hair’s breadth awry,” “these synapsed hours,” “my webcam image / ruffed.” She wonders:

What would it take –  
one crossed cyber wire,  
a virtual hair’s breadth awry –

for these synapsed hours  
to bloat to centuries,

(S 26)

Nonetheless, it is precisely because she lacks direct contact with her children that Groarke's speaker in "Away" resists the Internet illusion of immediacy which incites the need for emotional connection that can never be satisfied online. Promising to get people closer to one another, the cyber world only succeeds in serving up their visual representations, and not the true objects of one's longing. Hence the virtual relational life always "almost is" but never really happens. In Groarke's poem, the phrase "a virtual hair's breadth awry" conveys the nearly imperceptible but still existent note of failure. The persona in "Away" is aware that, for her children, she begins to exist not as a real, embodied and incarnated human being but as a "webcam image," the digital broadcast that can be interrupted any time or disappear within a split second due to transmission breakdown ("one crossed cyber wire") or even worse, being switched off by the user. In the analysed text, what Groarke's speaker fears most is that, in her children's eyes, she might lose her material credibility as a living person and as a mother and will be reduced to a mere simulacrum ("to be rescinded / to a Botticelli blue"). In the end, her parental image will become as out-of-the-date as the portrait of a dead ancestor hanging on the wall ("ruffed and pearled"). In the world of moving pixels, the persona's message directed to her children, expressed via the "vintage words," might not reach their ears as quickly and be as effective as a missive from the talking ghost from the painting. The persona in "Away" asks:

to be rescinded  
to a Botticelli blue,  
my webcam image

ruffed and pearled,  
speaking vintage words  
into spindrift?

(S 26)

Taking everything into account, the titular concept unifying Groarke's 2009 volume *Spindrift* appears to resemble a cosmic relational black hole that might suck into itself everything within its orbit. Its nominal signifier (the poem for its motto cites *The Oxford's Dictionary of English* entry: "spray blown from the crests of waves by the wind") reappears in many poems in *Spindrift*. The notion evokes associations of mobility, fragility, evanescence, transient and transitory matter that is made of particles and atoms, everything but solid. With regard to *Spindrift*, Rory Brennan in "Landing a Poem" notices that "[t]here is something rather inadequate about the title. While a synonym for spray does suggest the transitory nature of human affairs it is too light and tenuous to suggest the weight of such uncertainties on our lives. *Spindrift* is a better title for a poem than for a collection" (277). Nonetheless, despite its ephemeral composition, the mental image of spindrift evinces loosely connected particles that function in co-relations and co-dependencies to form one (family) structure. Similarly, in *The Irish Times* review of *Spindrift* Eamon Grennan argues that "[l]iving between the

active energy of 'spin', and the patient, watchful openness of 'drift', the poems of *Spindrift* let us know what lyric consciousness and lyric poem really mean" ("Coaxing a World" 13). Furthermore, Grennan stresses that

Here is an imagination open to a broad spectrum of life as it is, dealing with the small circle of family, the smaller circle of intimate relationship, the wider circle of the social world. Each of the poems gives me the sense of going on a journey . . . from a witty imagism to a tender, familial in memoriam . . . . Many of the poems in this collection are love poems, both oblique and direct, dealing with that trickiest of subjects, sexual relations. ("Coaxing a World" 13)

Hence, the failed internet connection in "Away" becomes a bitter metaphor for Groarke's speaker's "spindrift" relational bonds with her family. In visualising her panic attack, the persona in the cited fragment envisages herself being imprisoned alone in front of the computer screen ("the room of an obsolete / laptop") waiting forever for the connection that does not happen ("I Skype and Skype / and no one answers"). In Groarke's poem, this frightening image embraces the persona's qualms of conscience about not being "there" for her family, not knowing what is going on, and not experiencing events in real time, only finding out about the current family narrative selectively and retrospectively. The crucial aspect of Groarke's speaker's nightmare is not being present if her children should need her help or support. She admits:

for me to be headlonged  
into light years off

to the room of an obsolete laptop  
where I Skype and Skype  
and no one answers,

(S 26)

In "Away," the final element of the persona's relational fears involves her children's getting used to living their lives without her. On closer examination, these parental worries from the digital era do not differ that much from those that children's guardians had centuries ago. No parent can ever be with their offspring "twenty-four seven" and no parent can ever live their children's lives for them. Outside and even inside the family, children must have some autonomous space of their own, beyond their parents' supervision. In line with this thinking, Friedman reminds us that

[r]ecent reconceptualizations of autonomy thus do not require someone to be a social atom: radically socially unencumbered, defined merely by the capacity to choose, or able to exercise reason prior to any of her contingent ends or social engagements. Our reflective capacities and our own identities are always partly constituted by communal traditions and norms that we cannot put entirely into question without at the same time voiding our very capacities to reflect. (*Autonomy, Gender* 104)

Whether they like it or not, as argued by Groarke, parents have to come to terms with the fact that their children's autonomy will increase with the course of time. All things considered, difficult as it might be to maintain long-distance relations, it is not impossible. Even if for some time, as in "Away," one has to make do with digitalised representations of the beloved (see the pun with "online" and "on the line" in "my daughter's skirt / on the line"). As long as "the real thing" means satisfying connections between people, the media that uphold such a relation remain of secondary importance. The persona in "Away" admits:

where I Google Earth to see  
if the world namechecks  
this morning

my son's bike in the garden,  
my daughter's skirt  
on the line?

(S 27)

As argued above, several poems from *Spindrift*, among them "Power Cut," meditate upon the arduousness of maintaining long distance relations. In "Power Cut," engrossed in darkness persona feels apprehensive when confronted with her enforced sensory deprivation. In Groarke's poem, the surrounding dimness amplifies the speaker's alienation and her sense of being out of place in a foreign country away from her family. She defines her relational self on exile as a "remnant / envoy / to a province of depleted relevance, outlying home." In "Away," by the means of the idiom imitating an out-dated relic of the past, Groarke's persona renders her own power crisis, being cut off from the empowering family relational resources upon which she cannot rely when living abroad. She concedes:

My mobile baubles now and then. Otherwise, mute as a sod  
of turf,  
it squats on the mantelpiece. I might as well be a remnant  
envoy  
to a province of depleted relevance, outlying home. I am too  
much me.  
A full moon hangs in the balance. Am I nothing without love?

(S 58)

In "Power Cut," her mobile phone appears to function as the persona's main connection with the rest of the world. The female voice in Groarke's poem feels attached to the mechanical device as to almost an organic being or an animated creature ("baubles now and then," "squats on the mantelpiece") or a part of the home country's landscape ("a sod / of turf"). In-between the lines, one can read the speaker's solitariness ("Otherwise, mute") and home-sickness ("outlying home"). Surrounded by shadows, Groarke's persona in the examined passage is left alone with her own thoughts and fears, with nobody else to distract her from

them. "I am too / much me," she comments upon her state. Like the previously analysed poem, "Power Cut" terminates with a question mark. The poem's final rhetorical question touches on the dilemma of the speaker's relational autonomy. How is she to define herself without referring to the people that she loves? After Frankfurt, Mackenzie reminds us that "the boundaries of a person's will are defined by what she cares about" ("Imagining Oneself" 134). Although the persona in "Power Cut" characterises herself via her relations with others, her autonomy comes to the surface in the voiced rebellious statement: "Am I nothing without love?" Groarke's suspended endnote appears to be her protest against dissolving her own autonomous self within the sphere of attachment. As if the female voice demanded that her own self-value should be acknowledged within but also beyond the social realm. Friedman advises that:

Thus, in order to be truly capable of acting to sustain the relationships that matter to her most, a woman must be prepared to ward off threats to those relationships, including threats arising from the concerns and behaviors of her relational partners. She must have the ability to persist in the pursuit of what she cares about even in the face of some opposition by others, including her own partners. That is, in order to sustain the relationships she deeply cares about, she must possess some minimal level of autonomy competency. . . .  
(*Autonomy, Gender* 139)

"Love Songs," the subsequent poem from the long-distance communication series, records the melodies of e-mails, text messages, ring tones, which are employed instead of direct contact. The persona in "Love Songs" confesses:

Your email shimmers  
in my inbox.

Here are your words,  
inestimable, smooth  
to my fingertip,  
as though, by touch,  
they could be made  
to open a chink more.

(S 48)

In Groarke's "Love Songs," the daily music of communication devices ("Your email shimmers / in my inbox," "The flare of the mobile phone") is meant to conceal the physical absence of the message's senders. Instead of a person who is missed, there "are your words." In the cited passage, the adjective "inestimable" appears to convey the text's importance to the recipient but it also implies that its significance is literally beyond assessment. What is more, in the examined poem, "smooth" invokes pejorative associations with the superficiality and insincerity of polished talk. Even when collocated with the follow-up of "smooth / to my fingertip," the expression still marks the lack of fulfilment qualified by "as though." The entire conditional clause "as though, by touch, / they could be made / to open a chink more" expresses inefficacy. What it



communicates is the relational incapacity to produce a relevant change in the existing *status quo*. In Groarke's poem, the phrase "by touch" renders the lack of tactile contact. The declared failure to "open a chink more" might evince the cracks in a relational structure that is beginning to fall apart. Or quite the opposite: the quoted expression might display the communicative fiasco to make more room for personal contact desired by the speaker. The female voice in "Love Songs" continues:

I would have you lie down  
 on young heather,  
 all the years between us  
 pressed clean like sheets of linen,  
 and everything that might have been  
 come round again  
 as the sea worn  
 on your wrists.

(S 48)

The tentative conditional mood in "Love Songs" is rendered in the unreal future perfect in the past, the marker of completed occasions that although hypothetically feasible, never really took place. The utterances: "I would have you lie down" and then "everything that might have been / come round again" indicate clearly that Groarke's speaker is not reconciled with the events that are over and done. In "Love Songs," their shared relational past does not seem to bring the partners together. Instead, it divides them ("all the years between us / pressed clean like sheets of linen"). Examining *Spindrift* Rory Brennan in "Landing a Poem" argues that Groarke's "real gift is to tease out erotic risk in a love poem, to shine a light into the abyss over which lovers leap. Peril is perhaps her true theme" (277). One could not agree more with that statement. The speaker in "Love Songs" admits:

The bruise on my forearm  
 puts me in mind  
 of the hole in your sleeve  
 through which I would,  
 if so allowed,  
 sieve every waking hour.

(S 48)

In Groarke's "Love Songs," the textual recollection of an unavailable lover is as futile as an attempt to alter the past. Every single detail of the persona's former life appears to be, one way or another, by the power of wistful analogy, linked with the current context. In doing so, the speaker in "Love Songs" makes sure that the partner that she misses remains (textually) present in her life. The symbolism of "the hole in your sleeve," reminiscent of the earlier evoked "open[ing] a chink more" aims to establish a connection between the separated partners. However the final image of "sieve every waking hour" resumes the vein of fruitless effort, further qualified by the tentative "if so allowed." Last but

not least, in "Love Songs" the sequence's commencing sentence ("The bruise on my forearm") makes one wonder why a signifier of the persona's bodily harm is triggered by her memories of the lover. The female voice observes:

The flare of the mobile phone  
in my hand  
is an outcrop of sunlight  
in which we sit  
eavesdropping the gossip  
of bracken and fern  
while I watch your freckles ripen  
to the same shade  
as my own.

(S 48–49)

In "Love Songs," the cited fragment appears to suggest face to face contact between lovers ("we sit / eavesdropping the gossip / of bracken and fern / while I watch your freckles ripen / to the same shade / as my own"). In Groarke's poem, the verbs: sit, watch, eavesdrop all imply the couple's intense involvement in the events they experienced together. However the dramatic scene still takes place on the indirect plan: the alarming rescue relational signal is being sent off by the mobile's light ("The flare of the mobile phone / in my hand / is an outcrop of sunlight"). Like "Away" and "Power Cut," the poem "Love Songs" terminates with a rhetorical question that provides no answer. As in the earlier-analysed poems, the suspended question mark constitutes the speaker's protest against the confinements upon female autonomy. Groarke's poem "Love Songs" concludes with juxtaposing the ageing process and ageless love. The female voice in the examined text challenges the stereotypical beliefs associated with women growing old, namely that of not being perceived any more as sexual beings. She asks rhetorically:

What will I do  
when I am too old  
for such love songs?

(S 49)

Preceded by the motto from Leonardo da Vinci ("*An oyster opens wide at full moon*") Groarke's poem "Texts" attempts to find an adequate expression of the emotional content, condensed within a limited number of signs, digits and letters. Brief text messages are regarded as even more informal than e-mails. However in "Texts," it is not the degree of formality or even less the discursive constraints that discourage Groarke's persona: it is the very nature of words that they fail to convey affective capacity. Already in the first lines, the poem dismisses the possibility of communicating love, either textually or discursively ("If there were ever words that knew of love"). Like Winterson's *Written on the Body* whose narrator states immediately that the novel is not

about love but about the loss of love, Groarke's poem "Texts" appears to express the impossibility of writing love poetry. Nevertheless, on the whole

The poems in *Spindrift* serve as a reminder that in the strongest poetry there's always the sound of someone confronting with courage and craft the outer and inner worlds of hazardous matter. What these poems possess are seriousness of purpose, clarity of intelligence, exactitudes of feeling and, most of all, a quiet mastery of language in its instrumental work as sound and cadence, as image, as metaphor, as just as plain statement. (Grennan, "Coaxing a World" 13)

In "Texts," such a self-professed disbelief in words' relational potential is further expanded into a search for an objective correlative or for the tangible equivalent of one's autonomous sense-perceptions apprehended with all five faculties. For Groarke's speaker, only a sensuous / textual substance as multifarious as this, might become close to submitting love's complexities. She ponders:

If there were ever words that knew of love  
 what could be done: wrap them in sunlight  
 or give them footsteps that are only, in fact,  
 rain falling from leaves? Swaddle them on a rib  
 or a skiff afloat an open moon; send them ahead  
 like a text to alight on a new lover's mobile?

(S 45)

In her quest for the relational rendering of autonomous, emotive sensations, the speaker in "Texts" calls forth the forces of nature: the glitter of sunlight and fish, the sound of rainfall etc. The volume's leading metaphor of spindrift (compare "Away") is tied up with the recurrent motif of the openings (compare the last two poems). In Groarke's poem, the dynamic images of the sea-blown particles are credited with the power to create new spaces ("the openings that spindrift makes / when it falls back on the sea") and bringing into existence new chances for contact. In the analysed passage, all these natural world metaphors ("rain makes: / every drop coining a selfsame moon") appear to be encoded as modern digitalised connections ("as that phone's / initial zero"). By the act of equivalent correlations, IT communication seems to be elevated to nature's own cryptograph. The persona in "Texts" meditates on:

A dazzle of minnows in a rock pool might be  
 as close to love; a metaphor no more significant  
 or marked than the openings that spindrift makes  
 when it falls back on the sea. Or that rain makes:  
 every drop coining a selfsame moon as that phone's  
 initial zero. Or the centre of a love affair,  
 a clearing where the response lands, disclosing  
 in its silver ringtone, one silver disclosure.

(S 45)

As demonstrated here, the idiom in the poem's final part changes. This time, in Groarke's "Texts" the comparative relational ground becomes not the natural environment but once again the human world of technology. The "centre of a love affair" seems to echo the IT call centre. Even the organic-connoted clearing becomes the landing ground for the transmitted reply. The text's content remains ostentatiously repetitive ("silver ringtone," "silver disclosure") with the sound reiteration of "disclosing" and "disclosure." One cannot help thinking that in comparison to the earlier elemental imagery, the text's message turns out to be a failed mission. Promising to disclose the secret, it reveals nothing, "pinpointing your absence in this and every night," as the speaker of "Other People's Lives" puts it in conclusion. The persona in "Other People's Lives" [compare the title poem of *Other People's Houses* (1999)] keeps waiting for a love letter that never arrives. Not accepting just passive expectancy that most likely will never be resolved, the female voice in "Other People's Lives" actively exercises her autonomy and composes the message, recording the relationally relevant sights and familiar sounds, evoking the shared memories:

That letter you promised me writes itself  
in a sheaf of streets with their bar hubbub:  
bottles poured onto a midden in a lane, the old jazz riff,  
a clasp of laughter, some half-shouted name.

(S 37)

All in all, the female voice in "Other People's Lives" is looking for her absent beloved in language but even there her images and words are only borrowed ("to account for / my guest metaphors"). She admits:

I might as well be out on the rocks, leafing through  
an archived sea for a single entry to account for  
my guest metaphors; to ascribe to me some pageantry,  
street hymns yeasting, nightly, within these tepid hours.

(S 37)

In Groarke's "Other People's Lives," unlike in other poems from *Spindrift* analysed so far, the persona does not leave the rhetorical question suspended in the air ["What has the measure of the all-insistent, offshore boom / of other people's lives?" (JS 37)]. Neither does she resolve that question. All she can do is to try to define the problem if only by negation: stating what it is not (see "Not the wood pigeon," "Not the cigarette's calligraphy," "Not the halogen," "nothing to explain"). In "Other People's Lives," such a conclusion may not bring the solution, but it diagnoses the whole situation adequately, namely "clattering aloneness" and "pinpointing your absence." Groarke's speaker concludes:

. . . Not the wood pigeon that, at least  
for now, has stopped clattering aloneness in the rowan.  
Not the cigarette's calligraphy that has nothing to explain.

Not the halogen light that islands the deck,  
pinpointing your absence in this and every night.  
(S 37)

In light of the culturally coded autonomy, the male absence seems to be more permitted than the female non-attendance. Examining Groarke's love poems, the male presence is all too often defined in the discourse by its absence. Such a pervasive lack can hardly be justified by geographical or physical distance. The male non-attendance appears to be more of the emotional type when the speaker of "Beyond Me" confesses: "a loneliness plump with your absence, that balances, / tightrope and fall, to either side of me." All the objects at home seem to be on alert for the return of the one that is gone ("The knives / are resting on their polished sides"). The female voice argues:

The hours stack up like saucers. The knives  
are resting on their polished sides. A widening stream  
from the back-door light is the last thing sure of itself.

Rain falls in reams: whatever else there is allays  
a loneliness plump with your absence, that balances,  
tightrope and fall, to either side of me.  
(S 43)

The persona in "Beyond Me" does not want to mark time passively, just waiting for her lover. In tune with her autonomy, she attempts to change things, suggesting some alterations that might lead to a desired relational change ("to have you turn in my direction"). The female voice in Groarke's poem defies the gender stereotype of an unassertive and inactive woman who leaves the decision to the man. In contrast, the autonomous speaker in "Beyond Me" communicates her expectations clearly:

What do I ask? To make something of these lines  
extend to you; to have you turn in my direction;  
the long-life bulb by my front door illuminate your hand.  
(S 43)

As argued in "Beyond Me," the persona is left with is a discursive meditation about the missed lover ("I have thought of you") but not his physical presence. All the more, she longs for the tangible signs of his existence ("Even a single hair on your pillow knows all there is of you"). She records:

Even a single hair on your pillow knows all there is of you:  
even more than I, though I have thought of you,  
made much of your fern eyes and speckled wrist  
(S 43)

In Groarke's "Beyond Me," the speaker is fully aware that her absent lover will never be more than a textual "a version of you between / unyielding sheets."

In mid-argument, the female voice appears to be nearly reconciled with her lover's continued absence.

Yet I will press a version of you between  
unyielding sheets. Here is one element:

the world means more to me because you're in it.  
(S 43)

The speaker's declaration: "the world means more to me because you're in it" constitutes the acknowledgement of the relational truth, even though the world of her beloved is "beyond her." Accepting the relational reality as it is, Groarke's persona feels empowered ("I can rest too, / lay myself down and leave the sun / and outstretched trees alone"). The speaker in "Beyond Me" confesses:

You settle beyond me and I can rest too,  
lay myself down and leave the sun

and outstretched trees alone.  
They can find their own way  
while I tinker with knives and hours

(S 43)

On the whole in "Beyond Me," the conclusion appears to be both dispassionate and resolved. Groarke's persona's firm declaration: "I have nothing to ask," marks the sign of her self-governance. As in "Other People's Lives," the speaker finalises her argument with negated statements: "nothing to ask," "it is not over," "I will not again." It is as if by this moment, not knowing yet which way she will follow in the future, the autonomous female voice in "Beyond Me" is only certain which way she will not take:

and one strand of your hair.  
I have nothing to ask.  
It is not over. I will not again.

(S 43)

To sum up, in "Beyond Me," the problem arises that Groarke's speaker's final declarations seem to be self-contradictory. "It is not over" suggests the ongoing relational process. On the other hand, since it appears to be interrupted in a half-sentence and it seems to lack a main verb assertion, "I will not again" implies the refusal to repeat what was, and the refusal to return to the previously rehearsed failed relational scenarios. On closer examination, in "Beyond Me," the statement: "it is not over" could express the persona's will to maintain social relations, whereas "I will not again" would indicate her autonomous decision to modify the unsatisfactory context in which her relationality has been formerly realised. One can even elaborate the relational paradox depicted in "Beyond Me" as follows: "we cannot be autonomous in the absence of social relationships" (Barclay 67). What is more, "the development of persons requires

relations of dependency on other persons” (Mackenzie and Stoljar 7). Hence “interpersonal relations will prove to be consistent with the ideal of autonomy, once we develop an appropriately social conception of it” (Friedman, “Autonomy, Social Disruption” 41). Considering the above, “Aubade” seems to be the poem that sums up best the speaker’s relational dilemmas considering female empowering autonomy. The persona in “Aubade” recalls:

You say that you heard piano chords rustling in the night;  
 that you woke once and saw me there, and again.  
**Then I was gone.** The sea under your bed said something  
 like your name: you thought you’d drown.  
 (S 24)

In the cited fragment, the underlined second-person passages in the first stanza prove the lack of balance between the scarce bolted first-person expressions (“saw me there,” “Then I was gone”). Its concluding phrase “Then I was gone” could be read as well as “I” was gone: the disappearance of the speaker’s freedom from the discourse and her life altogether. The female voice in “Aubade” ponders:

This morning your fever slinks away  
 like a dog bested by the hubbub of city-fed  
 and workday birdsong come into its own.  
You call. You want some toast.  
 (S 24)

The second stanza of “Aubade” contains no first person’s statements, with a fewer number of highlighted second person expressions as well. Although less numerous in quantity, the you-claims become much more demanding and imperious in their content (“You call. You want”). The persona in Groarke’s poem suggests:

The trees are bone dry; sunlight hunkers behind them.  
Your hair fronds when **I lift your** head  
 as if out of a sea pulling away. **I offer you**  
 the lidded cup. You take it and you drink.  
 (S 24)

In “Aubade,” the subsequent fragment upholds the unbalanced relational division of roles: the female side as the initiator (“I lift your head,” “I offer you”) and the male partner as the addressee (“You take it and you drink”). In Groarke’s poetry, the commitment to the relationship’s maintenance is not always realised by both genders in a comparable amount. It happens because in patriarchal culture, relations tend to be maintained at the cost of women’s autonomy:

Historically recent traditions of love and marriage places a heavier responsibility on women than on men for providing care and nurturance, and

care and nurturance tend to be viewed even today as women's work. Thus, women tend to give more care and nurturance to their male lovers than they receive in return (although norms and practices are changing). That sort of asymmetry tends to diminish women's autonomy more than that of their male lovers – and *that*, I maintain, is moral problem. (Friedman, *Autonomy, Gender* 129)

The last stanza of “Aubade” reverses the ratio of the first / second person pronouns. Unlike in the poem's opening, its conclusion abounds in emancipating, autonomous first-person expressions of female agency (bolted below). The discussed asymmetry seems to be balanced with the equipoise of me / you relations. The speaker asks:

Let the worst **I ever do to you** be die.  
 Turn your head sideways, dear, so **I can** watch you sleep.  
 Let the morning have us, and the afternoon.  
**I am here, blessed, capable of more.**  
 (S 24)

As demonstrated in “Aubade,” while maintaining her relationality (“Let the morning have us”), Groarke's speaker does not wish to abandon her autonomy either. The persona's final announcement: “I am here, blessed, capable of more” captures best the empowering essence of female autonomy when the woman feels empowered to make her own free choices and decisions in agreement with her true wants and needs. What is more, whether engaged in social, personal or romantic relations, or outside them, the independent female speaker in Groarke's poetry is fully aware that “she is not nothing without love,” as nothing and nobody can take away her self-agency. That is why this realisation, stemming both from female empowerment and autonomy, makes her “**capable of more**,” emphasis added.

#### 1.4. The Anxiety of Disconnected “Unmoored Pieces” in the Poetry of Caitríona O'Reilly

A child, I shut my eyes like oysters  
 on the green light, weird particles migrating upwards  
 (Caitríona O'Reilly, “Fragment”)

One could hardly disagree with the claim that “the central desire of all people is to connect with others” (Jordan et al., “Therapists' Authenticity” 65). What is more “people gain a central sense of meaning, well-being, and worth through engagement in growth-enhancing relationships . . . movement toward increasing connection . . . [is] at the core of human development (Miller, 1988)” (Jordan, “Relational Awareness” 47). The strength of connections, which can be referred to as relational empowerment, arises from women having access to their own



inner and outer resources, capabilities, and their own power. How power is defined and expressed is crucial. For instance, there is the power to name, to shame, and to define another's value or lack thereof, the power to distribute resources. If this power is expressed unilaterally, it reduces the strength and power of the other person or group of people who do not hold this power. As it is held onto and denied to others, it creates disconnections and disempowerment (Jordan & Walker, "Introduction" 5). As argued above, disconnection, understood as a form of women's disempowerment means "difficulty in creating or sustaining a healthy relational context. Kaplan (1984) suggests that the constellation of factors that can lead to depression includes inhibition of action, which follows from the loss or distortion of a relational context" (Surrey, "Relationship and Empowerment" 166). Therefore, disconnection "[i]n a relational model of psychological development . . . is viewed as one of the primary sources of human suffering" (Jordan, "Relational Awareness" 47). In other words, disconnectedness is an "interruption of the flow of connection with all be-ing" (Howell 69). This happens because "disconnection from oneself, from the natural flow of one's responses, needs, and yearnings, creates distress, inauthenticity, and intimately a sense of isolation in the world" (Jordan, "Relational Awareness" 47). For that reason,

When we are in a disconnection . . . we feel cut off . . . experience the pain of not being understood and not understanding the other, and feel the confusion about what is happening. The five outcomes of disconnection are decreased energy, confusion and lack of clarity, decreased self-worth, inability to act, and turning away from relationship. (Dooley and Fedele 230)

At this stage, one needs to introduce a distinction between the temporary and occasional disconnection that accompanies most relations, and the chronic, clinical disconnection that makes any healthy connection with others impossible. What needs to be stressed is that "the source of pathology is *chronic disconnection*, not just disconnection; and chronic disconnection results from non-responsiveness of one person (particularly the more powerful person)" (Jordan, "Therapists' Authenticity" 68), emphasis original. In consequence,

Most chronic disconnections . . . lead to a sense of isolation and ultimately interfere with growth as more and more of our experience gets split off from the flow of relationship. Most change occurs by our being able to bring aspects of ourselves into relationships with other persons where we get new responses, build new images, and create new actions. Fixed, chronic disconnections derail our development, particularly if they contribute to a wariness of new connections. Many severe and chronic disconnections do just that. They leave us with an extreme fear of relationships as well as an extreme yearning for connection; (Jordan, "Relational Awareness" 53)

One of the sources of chronic disconnection and the anxiety arising from this state can be traced back to the experienced trauma and / or deep personal humiliation (Jordan, "Restoring Emphatic" 122–123). Hence "[i]n trauma a

vulnerable person is violated by a powerful other who does not respond with empathy or concern to the injured person. This leaves the victim feeling as if she / he does not matter and is not respected – a state of disconnection . . . feels terribly unsafe” (Jordan 50–51). In other words, chronic disconnection is likely to stem from violating the woman's personal, emotional and corporeal integrity. As a result, the sufferer becomes alienated from her own body and self. The chronically disconnected woman seems unable to trust her own sensations, opinions, judgements, reactions and, in consequence, other people. As a result forming any sustaining connection becomes problematic, if not impossible.

When we are hurt, misunderstood, or violated in some way, when we attempt to represent our experience to the injuring person and we are not responded to, we learn to suppress our experience and disconnect from both our own feelings and the other person. If, on the other hand, we are able to express our feelings and the other person responds with care, showing that we have had an effect, then we feel that we are effective in relationship with others, that we matter, that we can participate in creating growth-fostering and healthy relationships. (Jordan and Walker, “Introduction” 2)

Hence on the personal level, “[w]hen people are unable to move from disconnection to connection, the resulting combination of immobilization and isolation may become a prison, (not unlike Jean Baker Miller's notion of ‘condemned isolation’ [1988]) and may contribute to psychological anguish, physical deterioration, and sometimes even death” (Jordan, “Relational Resilience” 28). Considering the above, Jordan recommends that women pursue several ways to get out of chronic disconnection. The aforementioned steps that facilitate overcoming the anxiety of disconnection entail:

. . . awareness of the forces creating the disconnection, discovery of a means for reconnecting, and building a more differentiated and solid connection. The movement into and out of the connection becomes a journey of discovery about self, and relationship – about “being in relation.” The importance of connectedness is affirmed, and one's capacity to move into healthy connection is strengthened. (Jordan, “Relational Awareness” 42)

Bearing this in mind, one still has to emphasise that overcoming disconnection is not a simple, volitional act or a decision. On the contrary, women's relational capabilities that are required to do so might be severely hampered and this will prevent her from breaking the vicious circle by herself. In other words, “[t]ransforming disconnection is not about taking action, doing, fixing, changing or controlling. It is about dealing with the fear that largely determines people's movement into separation and isolation. Safety in separation is part of the model of separate self;” (Jordan, “Relational Awareness” 56). Looked at from that angle, O'Reilly's “Pandora's Box” meditates how to counteract disempowering disconnection that condemns the speaker to separation from herself, others, and the world in general. Accordingly, O'Reilly's poem probes the reasons for the female self's

“condemned isolation,”<sup>62</sup> inside the prison of her troubling past. In other words, “Pandora’s Box” implies that what constitutes the underlying cause for the persona’s current disempowerment is her fear of leaving the locked, menacing room of her childhood<sup>63</sup> (vide the poem’s title). Thus although visiting the speaker’s childhood becomes a nightmarish experience for her (comparable to the act of opening “Pandora’s Box”) such a confrontation is not devoid of cathartic potential in the long run. Appropriately, the anxious female voice argues:

I might lift the eaves again  
and startle a small room still lit from within  
and finger the traces I left there.

The considerations of days  
lurk behind porous walls.  
They cling there like stains.

(TNB 23)

At first sight, O’Reilly’s narrative seems to operate around the persona’s unnerving doll house reminiscences. Despite its articulated negativity, the first stanza of “Pandora’s Box” appears to hint that one can arrive at a logical (or at least linear) sequence of the bygone, disquieting events. Nonetheless as early as the second stanza, the lingering, nearly psychotic, ambience returns to the discourse’s surface. In the analysed passage, coming to life surrounding walls disclose ghastly representations of the potentially unimaginable crimes (“lurk behind porous walls. / They cling there like stains”). In O’Reilly’s poem, the uncanny expression “porous walls” renders the organic, bodily roots of the persona’s childhood nightmares. In view of that, the collocation “cling,” linked with “stains” involves the synaesthetic sensation of colours experienced in an auditory way. At this stage, O’Reilly’s speaker’s distressing memory box turns into a classic haunted house, brimful not only with the imaginary ghosts of the past but also with tangible corporeal evidence. In “Pandora’s Box,” creepy dried skin cells, mysterious liquid representations (blood stains?) and the repellent scent of sweat on the pillows – all manifest themselves in abundance:

Carpets soaked in the seepage of dreams,  
flakes of skin  
piled on surfaces as thick as dust.

There’s a head-shape in the pillow  
like a big fingerprint.

(TNB 23)

From an already open “Pandora’s Box,” there flow unleashed spectral genies, which have been imprisoned there for too long. In the studied text, nonhuman

<sup>62</sup> See the earlier-cited Jordan (“Relational Resilience” 28) explaining Miller’s term.

<sup>63</sup> The concept attributed to Prof. Jerzy Mellibruda.

(mostly animal) images creep into the troubled (sub) consciousness of the agitated speaker. The aforementioned claim, which is manifested in “Memories flutter up like insects” is further amplified as the ear-displeasing alliterated “small shrieks.” Furthermore in O’Reilly’s poem, the phrase “an **ink**-up window-pane / with **clotted** stars” implies that the world of the past is narrated into the present discourse retrospectively. What does fall within the present frame of reference is the sinister (because still unexplored) world “outside the shut box” (“black beach with an ocean on it”). The speaker experiences:

Memories flutter up like insects –  
 small shrieks, minor crimes inside  
 an inked-up window-pane  
 (TNB 23)

Paradoxical as it may seem, it is the present disconnected existence with its bleak future that appears to intimidate the persona in O’Reilly’s poem more than the already familiarised past nightmares. Yet despite a frightening fate, the reality outside “Pandora’s Box” does suggest a degree of agency, promising with its unwritten blank pages a glimpse of personal emancipation (see “a wide sea”). Hence hope for overcoming O’Reilly’s speaker’s anxiety lies in her addressing the fearful separation from the surrounding world (compare “breathing in waves,” “black beach,” “tiered like plate glass,” “starfish waiting to be caught”). The female voice in “Pandora’s Box” concludes:

and now, outside the shut box,  
 this black beach with an ocean on it  
 breathing in waves,  
 tiered like plate glass,  
 and the whole world at night-time  
 a wide sea full of starfish waiting to be caught.  
 (TNB 23)

Likewise in “Diary of a Conformist,” while looking back upon her childhood memories, the mature speaker probes another dimension of her present angst. O’Reilly’s persona’s unwanted isolation is juxtaposed with the desired need “to escape,” to fly away (like birds) and depart (like clouds, in an aptly phrased and sounded “with restless ceremonial”). What follows in the explored text is a verbally and syntactically regular line, with an accurate linguistic expression of the overwhelming hollowness: “the small **birds shriek** and toss / their bodies to the wind like empty gloves” (compare the earlier mentioned “**small shrieks**”). The speaker in “Diary of a Conformist” admits:

and the small birds shriek and toss  
 their bodies to the wind like empty gloves.  
 I wonder whether seagulls cry or laugh  
 and pray I might be one of them at last

if it means escape from the top bunk bed  
and the cracks in the ceiling, the swollen tonsils,  
the doll's house and the colouring pencils.

(TNB 16)

In "Diary of a Conformist," the fragmented perspective ["Where the gable bisects the potting shed / is a blue triangle the size of my head / over which gulls sometimes pass" (TNB 16)] is that of the bed-confined child whose solace stems from watching enviously the unrestrained migrant birds. However in O'Reilly's poem, due to the projection of the speaker's own discomfort, the observed avian creatures look as if being maimed and victimised ["their tensile / cries like steel wire, their guts unravelling / grotesquely down the garden in the end, / victims of the tabby-cat and wind, / mincemeat made of their wings' corbelling" (TNB 16)]. It becomes evident that the textual world of the persona's childhood, instead of being a safe or idyllic place, evokes the unsettling Grimm brothers' fairy tales. The grown-up female voice refers to this uncanny stylistics, ironically remarking that: "open-mouthed granny sits / digesting wicked children." She elaborates it:

Later, when she switches off the light  
the willow-patterned wallpaper grows ears  
and eyes and tusks and trunks, while near  
the door are dogs with eyes like dinner-plates.  
Outside, Stephen's open-mouthed granny sits  
digesting wicked children as they pass her.

(TNB 16)

However as shown in "Diary of a Conformist," the speaker's home environment does not appear to provide security either. In the darkness, the apprehensive child's mind starts working intently, imagining "the willow-patterned wallpaper grows ears / and eyes and tusks and trunks." What is more, in the examined passage, the allegedly re-affirming adult presence seems equally otherworldly and alienating ["Heaven knows what thermometer's telling / my mother, as she waves it around like a wand" (TNB 16)]. Disconnected from a sense of safety, the anxious speaker in "Diary of a Conformist" doubts even her own existence's actuality. Hence O'Reilly's persona's shadowy narrative appears to be located on the verge of a dream discourse and the retrospectively imagined past. That is why even the grown-up female voice herself does not seem to know whether her vision is real or whether it belongs to the realm of fantasy. She acknowledges:

I unknot my hair and do my school tie up  
and swallow my porridge. On the front step  
I turn to examine the face of my mother.

She nods blankly as ever. . . .

(TNB 16–17)

Although the anxious persona in "Diary of a Conformist" becomes fully awake, the subsequent narration still resembles an uncanny Freudian dream-work condensation rather than a realistic description. The female voice in O'Reilly's poem creates an aura of the extraordinary that surrounds her and the world she lives in ["I catch my breath. / Surely she's noticed that something's amiss?" (TNB 17)]. The uncommon signs that are recorded by the alarmed speaker appear to be highly disturbing. Following this line of thinking, the restless speaker superimposes personified features upon ordinary objects such as the road construction material. The inanimate things' eerie agency to act on their own is disclosed in the onomatopoeic "tarmac hisses / and bubbles up and spits like witches' broth / and gives off such a stench it's hard to breathe" (TNB 17). Much in the same vein, in "Diary of a Conformist," the sickly trees are claimed to "suppurate as if rinsed / in acid" (TNB 17), discharging gases while fermenting ("frothing"), and dying slowly "barkless and bare" (TNB 17). O'Reilly's narrative's suspense is intensified by the *déjà vu* impression of the school-going journey. As previously, the self-conscious mature persona seems to be disconnected from her ability to distinguish her past imaginings from the disquieting reality. The apprehensive speaker in "Diary of a Conformist" recalls:

The walk to school is like a dream  
I've had before of a forgotten scene  
where the leaves on the bushes writhe and roar  
and the sky reddens. Except that here  
the light is gentle and the sky is clean.

(TNB 17)

In O'Reilly's poem, for the female voice even the supposedly familiar school experience turns out to be estranging. The odd fusion of the scientific idiom and a dogmatic religious approach produces an ideological cacophony in the confused speaker's mind. The way the grown-up persona comments upon the aforementioned incongruity lays bare the absurd in the literal minded reading that is involved in ideological indoctrination "And in school they teach me to remember, / remember my nine-times table. Father Geoghegan / tells us the story of the wise and foolish virgins" (TNB 17). The persona in "Diary of a Conformist" admits:

*Watch therefore, for ye know not the day nor  
the hour . . . . But isn't the day already over?  
Or is it just that night and day are merging?*

(TNB 17)

Therefore in failing (refusing?) to comply with either of discourses, the speaker in "Diary of a Conformist" escapes into the world of fantasy again, becoming even more disconnected from her discerning and sensuous perception. What increases the alienating effect is the fact that O'Reilly's persona attempts to support her discursive thesis with the pseudo-systematic argumentation ["I've decided that after all I haven't woken, / because all the clouds are coming from

the East / today, although the wind is in the West” (TNB 17)]. Nonetheless in the surreal vein of dream-logic, the cited below passage evolves into an anti-realistic and openly fanciful vision:

And the sun still shines and no bones are broken  
and in the bay the yachts are taken  
in the swing of the swell, their masts

ticking and ticking like metronomes.

(TNB 17)

Structurally, Donnelly praises in “Diary of a Conformist” “a fine narrative gift founded on an assured interplay between the colloquial voice and formal control of the six line stanza” (112). On the textual level, O’Reilly’s poem ends with a nonsensical italicised litany, in which the anxious persona confesses her personal allegiance of faith. As a result, the disconnected narrative’s pieces that imitate seemingly plausible statements are mixed with the overtly senseless phrases. The declaration: “*I believe in the detail in the carpet*” is joined in one line with “*and the see of Rome,*” and is followed by the mock-religious clichéd proverb (“*The family that prays together stays together*”). “Diary of a Conformist” ends with a speaker’s derided proclamation of faith:

*I believe in the faces of my father and mother.  
Their smiles are my prevailing weather.  
I believe in the sanctity of the home.  
I believe in the detail in the carpet and the see of Rome.  
The family that prays together stays together.*

(TNB 17)

Accordingly, the poem “Poliomyelitis” operates around the discourse of childhood memory located within one selected textual signifier, that of the swimming pool. O’Reilly’s poem’s title appears to resemble in sound the paralytic disease “polio” and the proper noun “pool.” Likewise, both the persona’s disconnected state and the titular poliomyelitis render her immobilised and incapacitated condition which hampers her free existence. The female voice in “Poliomyelitis” recalls:

The pool at the centre of the broken-tiled room  
was once a swimming pool for local boys

with boils on the neck and chilblained knees.

(TSC 11)

In brief, O’Reilly’s narrative relates the disempowering imagery of the abusive damage done to the speaker’s mind and body (see “to invade another element, breaking the surface / till the room’s air fills with black butterflies / brushing their wings against my mind’s ceiling”). Following the vein of sickness and disintegration, in “Poliomyelitis,” the pool’s current dilapidated state is

reminiscent of its former users' disabled condition (see boils and chilblained knees). Analysing the poem, critics notice that:

'Poliomyelitis', with a 'condemned' swimming pool at its centre, works over various strata: paralysis and obsessive returnings to a 'taint' moving elusively from finely imagined realities ('local boys // with boils on the neck and chilblained knees') to invasions of 'another element', a dream-like glide from 'the pocked silt' to nymphs and this final startling image: 'till the room's air fills with black butterflies / brushing their wings against my mind's ceiling.' O'Reilly's special power is to impregnate a place or an occasion with associations beyond itself: she achieves this through an academic awareness that is unpretentious and a sense for historical and cultural collisions and riddles in language that make the verse 'dazzle' beyond simple effusion or dry reflection. (Carpenter 105–106)

In addition, in "Poliomyelitis," the deplorably rundown sports venue appears to be an ironic remnant of the generosity that the "Big House" English exhibited towards the Irish people. As a signifier of the unwanted intrusion, infringing on personal and political freedom, the dubious charitable gift is resentfully perceived by O'Reilly's speaker as "encroachment on the choked-up / gorge." In the analysed poem, the dilapidated emblem of the colonisers' bygone glory is rendered in a sarcastic vision of the grass covering the construction's holed roof, which is compared to a senile patriarch's disgusting nasal hairs ("grass sprouts from the rafters of the Big House / now, like hairs from a pensioner's nose"). The persona in "Poliomyelitis" resumes her story:

Their old joints murmur like the sea's

gradual encroachment on the choked-up  
gorge of nineteen-fifties *noblesse oblige*:

grass sprouts from the rafters of the Big House  
now, like hairs from a pensioner's nose.

(TSC 11)

Embodied by the ramshackle building's decline, the place's atrophy is emphasised by the pool being avoided not only by humans but also by animals. Thus in "Poliomyelitis," the pool's disintegration (manifested by the reeky, contaminated water) puts off the living creatures from coming close. Surprising as it may appear, as soon as the speaker promises to preserve in her memory the appalling scent of the infected water, the figure of her father emerges in the narrative. In O'Reilly's poem, the location side by side on one line of the signifier connoting contagion, and the recollection of her (toxic?) parent appears to be unsettling. On the top of that, the speaker's father seems to be the central figure around whose textual manifestation the poem revolves. It happens despite the fact that paternal presence is only briefly mentioned in one enjambed line ("I carry the taint of it / away like my father"). The speaker in "Poliomyelitis" states:



The swimming pool was long ago contemned  
though a rusty ladder still dissolves at one end

and even the gulls won't land on water  
this brackish and rancid. I carry the taint of it

away like my father, . . .

(TSC 11)

In "Poliomyelitis," the aforementioned disquieting imagery is further elaborated into a dwindling underwater world, populated by the hostile otherworldly and intrusive creatures. In the persona's agitating vision, the aggressive naiads make incisions into the reality of humans, violating their integrity ("breaking the surface"), and inducing some form of unwanted contact ("black butterflies / brushing their wings against my mind's ceiling"). As a result of the overwhelming angst, O'Reilly's speaker's formative self becomes further disconnected. The question of whether the female voice is haunted by her own imagination's creations or real-life memories remains open. She continues her relation:

. . . bend over it in dreams  
to watch the dead plants thrive beneath the water,

the pocked silt open and the nymphs rising  
to invade another element, breaking the surface

till the room's air fills with black butterflies  
brushing their wings against my mind's ceiling.

(TSC 11)

Following the childhood reminiscences' vein, the poem "Six" recounts a summer holiday injury that occurred when "The blond medallions of the aspen / shook and burned on the first day / of summer" (TNB 13). Aged six, the female voice in O'Reilly's poem recalls her infantile sense of freedom experienced when playing at the bay. It is only in the couplet stanza referring to her grandmother that an uncanny sensation (evoking the granny's wound and "cool dark room") creeps into the narrative. The persona in "Six" recalls:

. . . I wore my gingham pinny  
and no knickers and waved wildly

at the boats rounding the bay,  
snagging the waters to a silver V.  
Granny had her wound dressed  
as usual in her cool dark room.

(TNB 13)

Relating the speaker's account of her own broken arm, O'Reilly's narrative's idiom imitates the child's indiscriminate way of experiencing reality. In the

girl's eyes, all the events require attention and are considered as of an equal importance: the bay, granny's wound, scrambled eggs, and the unfortunate fall, etc. In the examined poem, the blithe holiday spirit is manifested in an alliterated "giggling to the grassy bank." The female voice in "Six" remembers how

Mummy made scrambled eggs for tea.  
Charlie and I jumped like fleas

off the old stone house and fell  
giggling to the grassy bank.

(TNB 13)

Consequently in O'Reilly's poem, the bodily injury is narrated by the speaker of "Six" with a sense of curious surprise rather than dramatic shock. Assuming the child's perspective, the persona appears to be astonished at what happened, as if not fully comprehending its consequences. Hence the adult speaker's vivid but, on the whole, detached ("I stepped into nothing") account of losing consciousness is followed by the memories of the broken glass and of the torn cotton dress. In "Six," the corporeal disintegration is remembered by O'Reilly's persona as dissolving into nothingness and splitting into numerous pieces of the fragmented self. She reminds herself of the details:

One, two, three steps back  
for a good long run, four, five, six . . .

I stepped into nothing.  
Fragments of green and brown glass

(TNB 13)

With regard to the accident, it appears that in the analysed poem it is not the speaker but her brother who seems to be really frightened and worried. Accordingly, the female voice in "Six" recalls Charlie's open-mouthed expression ["Charlie stared / frog-eyed at my arm, bent / improbably back at the elbow" (TNB 13)]. O'Reilly's speaker brings to mind how sullen her sibling must have felt when blamed for his younger sister's injury ["In hospital, Kermit looked peeved / about the confiscated chocolates / and sulked at the end of my bed" (TNB 13)]. What is more, the persona's grandmother claims to have had prophetic dreams about the accident ["Granny saw gingham in her dreams / vanishing over a cliff-edge" (TNB 13)]. The speaker in "Six" continues her narrative:

Every day the student doctors came

and took more notes, staring  
and rattling their stethoscopes.

I fretted in wicker chair,  
inserting a knitting-needle

(TNB 13–14)

Being the centre of everybody's attention, the suddenly recognised speaking voice in "Six" willingly puts up with the medical staff's and her family's interest. Paradoxically in O'Reilly's poem, the persona's accident appears to have empowered the six-year-old girl. The speaker has obtained the care and consideration from her family that she requires, the elder brother could support his younger sister, and the granny has been appreciated for her wisdom and prophetic skills. In other words, the traumatic event has restored a missing balance in the whole family system, assigning each of its members their rightful place and giving each of them what they need. Thus, because of the crisis they have faced together, the family's harmony in O'Reilly's poem seems to be reinstated as much as the speaker's own recovery:

I couldn't tell what I'd broken.  
Charlie was suddenly childish,

and anyway, he was a boy.  
I collected autographs and pouted.

When they finally sawed the cast off,  
my arm, like a helium balloon, floated.

(TNB 14)

In "Six," despite the ostensibly optimistic assumptions, the poem's concluding image depicts the persona's hand gliding on the surface of the air, separated from the rest of her body. This defiant corporeal rebellion indicates that the disconnection in the speaker's (family) system has already been transferred onto a bodily level. Hence to counteract the disintegration effectively would require much more effort than the temporary improvement discussed earlier. And so in "Pisces," included in the cycle *Two Night Time Pieces*, the female voice recalls retrospectively:

Thirteen Februaries slept through,  
before I learned what going under meant.

Pale and thin as sheets,  
the near fields burst free of mooring.

Then the turn of the tide,  
the sea stack,

(TNB 18)

As shown above, the persona in "Pisces" perceives her youth as being passive, as if in hibernation (see "Thirteen Februaries slept through"). In her numb disconnection, the female voice's early years are marked with a craving for independence (see "the near fields burst free of mooring"). In "Pisces," the textual turning point ("Then the turn of the tide") coincides with O'Reilly's speaker coming into adolescence:

Those teenage dreams  
 were cuttle-ink tattoos  
 describing blue-rinse mermen,  
 each muscular wave awash  
 with sex and phosphor.

(TNB 18)

In O'Reilly's poem, awaking sexuality emerges in "Pisces" in "teenage dreams," populated with male sensuous sea creatures that come out of the water to lure the persona's body and mind with their erotic appeal. In his article "The Future of Irish Poetry?" Tillinghast relates his reaction to the examined text:

The first of her 'Two Night Time Pieces' called 'Pisces', is a place where something vital and not at all impersonal or mortifying tries and succeeds in making itself felt through a scaffolding of perceptions that are perhaps so precise and "poetic" that they actually get in the way. This very sexy poem made me gasp with pleasure and interrupt the person who was reading beside me in bed, to insist she hear it read aloud: (182)

The speaker of "Pisces" admits being moved by her teenage erotic fantasies to the point of sensing them as being materialised onto her body: they were tangible with the smell, touch and sight of the immense sea. She admits sincerely: "I was awash and rocked, / rocked hard to wake / and woke, drenched to the roots, / my flannelette pyjamas stiff with sand" (TNB 18). Commenting upon the poem's idiom, Tillinghast argues:

"Blue-rinse mermen" is overly fussy, and I even have my doubts about "cuttle-ink tattoos", which is *recherché* in a manner reminiscent of Marianne Moore. But the assonance, the repetitions, the wood-block tones of "awash and rocked, / rocked hard to wake // and woke, drenched to the roots" are thrilling. And the domestically diminutive, adolescent note introduced by "flannelette pyjamas" reminds me, in its rightness, of Leonard Cohen's line in 'Back on Boogie Street' from *Ten New Songs*: "I've tidied up the kitchenette, / I've tuned the old banjo." ("The Future of Irish Poetry?" 183)

Following this vein, O'Reilly's poem "Fragment," which is narrated from the present perspective, continues the speaker's adolescent reminiscences, located in "the Plath-influenced ominous landscape" (Tillinghast 182). In the night (marish) context ["This night-breathing deceives, it is so calm" (TNB 12)], the long unseen faces and events come to the surface of the discourse, brought ashore by the tide of the past ["The headland glitters with beached faces, lunar stares, / a tidal moon-haul of wrecks and drownings" (TNB 12)]. O'Reilly's disquieting narrative seems to be submerged in the discourse / sea of disconnected memories, castaway with the textual fleeting glimpses floating on the water. The speaker in "Fragment" brings to mind:

My mother feared the wash and plunge,  
 that huge pull from the loosening shore.  
 Night after night she surfaced there again  
 in the small hours, the shallows, panting:  
 her near death refreshed by nightmare.

(TNB 12)

Hence in O'Reilly's poem, cut off narrative "Fragment/s" that have been brought ashore haunt the anxious speaker with the verbal melody of "Their gazes are blank and lasting, /outfacing constellations even, crystalline" (TNB 12)]. The second stanza evokes a ghastly image of the persona's mother, depicted as an unnerving drowning phantom, returning in the speaker's troubling recollections (compare "choked throat"). In regard to the speaker's "choked throat," Surrey tells us how "Carol Gilligan (1982) has described this as a loss of women's voice, the inability to find a language and system of logic to represent our experience" ("Relationship and Empowerment" 169). In the childhood memories, the maternal figure appears to be keeping safely to the shore, scared of the deep water, and avoiding the loss of the firm ground under her feet. The female voice in O'Reilly's poem regresses:

A child, I shut my eyes like oysters  
 on the green light, weird particles migrating upwards  
 from the bed, from whose choked throat  
 arose the swallow-sound I'd closed my ears on.  
 Now as I watch her sleeping and submerged

(TNB 12)

In "Fragment," the cited stanza re-establishes the first-person frame of the past reference ("a child, I shut my eyes"). In the examined passage, what appears to best render the anxious persona's vulnerability is the image of her-self as a glued eyed oyster, coiled-up within, as if barely daring to look at the world. The speaker's disconnected self in O'Reilly's poem seems to have disintegrated into the "weird particles migrating upwards / from the bed." What is more, the haunting image of the drowning mother (compare an alliterated "sleeping and submerged") does not seem to leave the female voice alone. Zwiep argues in "Sufficient unto Our Day Recent Irish Poetry" that:

Catriona<sup>64</sup> O'Reilly has a gift for a metaphor: here is a poet who asks from us patience and a willingness to puzzle out connections. "Fragment," the opening poem, begins with a description of a calm, nighttime sea, but then evokes its fearful powers – her mother's nightmares after a "near-death" encounter with the waves. Her reaction to this is hallucinatory: (471)

O'Reilly's linguistic rendering of the unsettling experience in "Fragment" seems magnificent. In the poem, the astounding collocation "those obsessive dead" captures the essence of the speaker's own projective and compulsive

---

<sup>64</sup> The poet's name's misspelling, original.

plunging into the water of the departed and not allowing them to rest in peace. By entering the territory of the other world ("I see them, those obsessive dead – / their watery features sea-blurred, merged, evasive"), the female voice in "Fragment" disturbs the dead's quiet obliteration with her intrusive need to be re-connected with her past and with those who have passed away, especially her mother (compare "I hold my breath above her sinking head"). Concluding, O'Reilly's persona acknowledges:

I see them, those obsessive dead –  
 their watery features sea-blurred, merged, evasive.  
 I hold my breath above her sinking head,  
 dreading their opaque past and fossil histories,  
 inky and indistinct as night water.

(TNB 12)

Structurally, O'Reilly's speaker's anxiety tends to be manifested in "Fragment" on the textual level via the seemingly detached speaking tone. It happens because "[d]isconnection, or separation, would more accurately be characterized by indifference, withdrawal, diffidence, or 'false compliance'" (Kaplan & Klein, "Women's Self" 125). What is more, culturally conditioned, the "discontinuity of adolescence can leave women feeling disconnected from their own experience of trust and power and power in relationship, in the affective connotations and interactions between people" (Surrey, "Relationship and Empowerment" 169). Similarly, other researchers<sup>65</sup> point to what is defined as "incompatibility of femininity and adolescence" (Fine & Macpherson, "Over Dinner" 220). One might venture to speculate that the referred to incompatibility contributes to the female disconnection experienced by the personas of O'Reilly's poems. Fine and Macpherson explain this phenomenon by the means of the cognitive dissonance that adolescent girls tend to experience.<sup>66</sup> Furthermore as Fine and Macpherson<sup>67</sup> argue, one of the sites where female disconnection tends to be located is the female body that undergoes changes in adolescence when it becomes perceived / coded in patriarchal culture as sexualised and conspicuous. Accordingly, one can enumerate three key areas of

<sup>65</sup> Furthermore, Hudson gives an invaluable insight into the analysed problematic:

femininity and adolescence as discourses [are] subversive of each other. All of our images of the adolescent – the restless, searching teen; the Hamlet figure; the sower of wild goats and tester of growing powers – these are masculine figures . . . . If adolescence is characterized by masculine constructs, then any attempt by girls to satisfy society's demands of them qua adolescents is bound to involve them in displaying notably a lack of maturing but also a lack of femininity. (qtd. in Fine & Macpherson, "Over Dinner" 220)

<sup>66</sup> Compare (Fine & Macpherson 220, 241).

<sup>67</sup> When examining teenage girls in their study, Fine and Macpherson noticed that "For them, femininity meant the timing of adolescent passions, outrage and intelligence. Feminism was a flight from 'other girls' as unworthy and untrustworthy. Their version of feminism was about equal access to being men" ("Over Dinner" 220).

internalisation of women's disconnection: "eating, sexuality and outrage" (Fine & Macpherson, "Over Dinner" 221). During adolescence, "[g]ender determines that the young women are subject to external surveillance and responsible for internal body management, and it is their gender that makes them feel vulnerable to male sexual threat and assault" (Fine & Macpherson, "Over Dinner" 229), emphasis original. Reviewing O'Reilly's first volume, Jefferson Holdridge aptly observes that:

Caitriona O'Reilly's debut collection, *The Nowhere Birds*, grows in strength as the volume progress. Many of the earlier poems are concerned with childhood and adolescence, while the later poems are more self-conscious, philosophical, and widely travelled. The effect, and one that is intended one suspects, is of watching the maturation of a poet. (377)

Like the previously explored childhood narratives, O'Reilly's poem "Perdita" leaves little, if any, room for juvenile light-heartedness let alone untroubled teenage reminiscences. The poem's title is derived from a Latin root "perditio," signifying destruction, loss or literally: ruin (*CED*). According to *The Collins Dictionary*, in Christian discourse, the word "perdition" functions as a verbal synonym of hell. As stated by *CED*, it symbolises the "final and irrevocable spiritual ruin . . . that the wicked ones are said to be destined to endure forever." Furthermore the heroine's name brings to mind Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*'s Perdita, the lost daughter of king Leontes (abandoned by her father, who wrongly suspected his wife's infidelity), found and re-united with her family after sixteen years. O'Reilly's poem is addressed to the listening ear, referred to as "father," which could denote either male parental authority or the masculine religious establishment. In both cases, nonetheless, it does imply the patriarchal power that is imposed over the female voice, whose understanding or forgiveness the speaker in "Perdita" appears to seek. She declares:

I cannot feel found.  
I filled your absence in me  
with all the wrong things, father,  
fardels, odd bits, gewgaws,  
waves in tendrils and trees like lobster claws  
and howling. Being chased.

(TNB 11)

In O'Reilly's poem, the persona's confession that she "cannot **feel found**"<sup>68</sup> seems to be a way of acknowledging her overwhelming disconnection. This alliterated phrase is further extended to "I **filled**," and it resonates as well with "things, **father**, / **fardels**." Moreover the declaration: "I filled your absence in me / with all the wrong things, father" reveals O'Reilly's speaker's emotional angst. Accordingly in "Perdita" the entrapment experienced by the persona (compare "being chased") gives way to troubling sensations that are judged by her as

<sup>68</sup> See the reference to the found daughter of Leontes.

“wrong” and, hence, induce in her a haunting sense of guilt. For young women, “the probability of experiencing the body with embarrassment (the form par excellence of the experience of the ‘alienated body’), malaise, timidity or shame rises with the discrepancy between the socially demanded body and the practical relation to the body that is imposed by the gazes and reactions of others” (Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination* 65). In line with this, Daly explains the meaning of the ritual of confession in patriarchal society:

Women are ‘encouraged’ to confess, which is to perform repeated acts of attempted linguistic Self-annihilation and reconstruction. As a consequence of confessionalism, then, not only a woman’s conversation but also her body-language becomes aphasic. Moreover, such unnatural, disjointed expressions of repression are reproduced without genuine variation, fixed according to prescribed patterns, standardized, beaten into Self-denying stereotypical shape. The entire lifetime of a patriarchal woman is a series of confessions. (*Pure Lust* 141)

In tune with the above, “[s]hame is another major factor that takes us into isolation. When we feel it is unsafe to bring various aspects of ourselves directly into relationship, profound disconnection results (Jordan 1989). The belief that no empathic response will be available from another person leads to deep withdrawal and immobilization” (Jordan, “Relational Awareness” 52). What is more, in “Perdita” the persona’s statement “your absence in me” hints at the almost somatic dimension of the connection being broken, as if the patriarchal presence was essential to replenish the existential void in the speaker’s mind and body. On the other hand, sometimes disconnection from a male parent, especially during a daughter’s adolescence, might result from her father’s own self-imposed distance:

The uneasiness in fathers becomes even more marked in adolescence, when their daughters’ sexuality does begin to develop more clearly. We know some fathers become overtly involved with their daughters at this stage, either by being openly sexual or overtly possessive and restrictive, stating the need to protect them from the sexual dangers in the world. Another common response is for fathers to withdraw and distance themselves from their daughters to ward off their own their own sexual impulses. (Stiver, “Beyond the Oedipus” 116)

In O’Reilly’s poem, the question arises of whether it is the father or the daughter who perceives the mutual connection as indispensable and sees its lack as being more detrimental. In other words, one may wonder whether the persona in “Perdita” articulates her own viewpoint or that belonging to the father’s discourse (The Law of the Father). On the other hand, the declaratively admitted “absence” might signify the speaker’s need for her own space to develop her distinct personality and her separate self. It can be also related to “*presence of absence and absence of presence*” (Daly, *Pure Lust* 147), emphasis original.

Phallic *presence of absence* is experienced by women as a growth of nothingness, an expansion of emptiness that fills the mind. The meaninglessness of male-centered myths and ideologies is experienced as



mental / spiritual bloat . . . The emotional responses that it elicits also pre-occupy the mind, weighting it down with guilt, anxiety, despair. Its victim becomes absent to her Self . . . . It is the absence of soul. (Daly, *Pure Lust* 147), emphasis original

What seems to be stunning in “Perdita” is the fact that “all the wrong things,” as the persona in O’Reilly’s poem refers to them, do not constitute religious cardinal sins, major moral flaws, or even social offences, but are nothing more than a mass of trifle and idiosyncratic traits that one needs to form to become a fully individuated adult. Drawing upon theologian Valerie Saiving, Carol P. Christ reminds us that “the traditional definition of sin . . . is not necessarily helpful to women . . . renouncing ego might make sense for many men who already have a strong sense of self. For women a spiritual path may involve learning self-love rather than selflessness . . . self-assertion rather than self-negation . . . . Women need to learn to trust their own authority, not give it up to another” (*She Who Changes* 155). Accordingly, Daly enumerates as one of the key women’s wrongdoings “the ‘sin’ of complicity in self-destruction” (*Beyond God* 51). The female voice in “Perdita” admits:

There’s a mesh of dark inside my head  
 behind the face  
 purely my mother’s –  
 like air shelled in light, a purple bubble,  
 the thin skin over a scream.

(TNB 11)

The haunting visions that worry the speaker in “Perdita” (“waves in tendrils and trees like lobster claws / and howling”) point to the entanglement she tries to resist, signifying a need to escape from oppression (“Being chased”). The cited line operates on the repeated sound circularity (“tendrils and trees like lobster”), which additionally increases the sense of the female voice’s emotional and textual en-closure. When admitting in a self-effacing way that “there’s a mesh of dark inside my head,” the persona in “Perdita” seems to judge herself according to the Father’s Laws and standards, not her own. “Women have been conditioned to see any act that affirms the worth of the female ego as blameworthy” (Daly, *Beyond God* 54). In O’Reilly’s poem, the speaker’s own imagery of “air shelled in light, a purple bubble,” and, most of all, “the **thin skin** over a **scream**” (musically, nearly rhymed) turns out to be precise enough to identify the stifling confinement that she experiences. Being subdued and unable to express the true reasons for her anxiety, the female voice in “Perdita” is forced to bear her disconnection in silence. Even when connected to her anger, she may not, as suggested by Daly, move so easily beyond “anxiety, depression, guilt, frustration” (*Pure Lust* 203).<sup>69</sup> In O’Reilly’s poetry, the amassing of

<sup>69</sup> Daly reminds that “A woman then recognizes that when she experiences real anger . . . at her oppressor / suppressor she is moved to action . . . . She sees that in contrast to this, if she is merely frozen in states that can be accurately labelled ‘hostile,’ or ‘bitter,’ or ‘resentful,’ she is not moved

suppressed tension and unjustified guilt has to find some release. Usually, it surfaces in self-destructive female disconnection where the anger of the sufferer is turned against the only target available to her – her own self. This case is the subject of “Thin,” which is analysed below. In the poem, O’Reilly’s persona’s disconnection becomes the hated target of her bodily dietary suppression and obsessive corporeal control rituals. In other words, “Thin” addresses the speaker’s anxiety concerning the disconnected, anorexic “unmoored pieces.” As proved by psychologists and psychiatrists, anorexia, like other eating disorders, can occur “when women become alienated from their own relational needs” (Surrey, “Relationship and Empowerment” 166).

The body of the poem “Thin” is meticulously divided into six lined stanzas; each of them containing six key words: **room**, **roof**, **dinner**, **skin**, **glass** and **bone**, arranged in several configurations of line endings. In the third stanza, the words: “skin and glass” are substituted with the similar-sounding “skin and class.” The conclusion is captured in a triplet with the three words repeated: “glass, bone and room.” On the whole, the choice of the focal words is not accidental. As the persona in “Thin” gives an account of her anorexic experience, all the aforementioned designations relate different dimensions of her disconnected state. Respectively, the signifier **room** denotes the sensation of confinement within the female bodily framework; **roof** shows the limits of perception (endurance?) and, hence, it might refer both to inner and outer reality.

The signifiers **skin** and **glass** are correlated, as they recount a sense of woman’s skin (body) being perceived as a dividing wall that separates her, like glass, from the outside world and, again like glass, it allows some transparency but is far more fragile and breakable. The disconnected “skinned” body image seems to be multiplied by the reflections in the (looking) glass “constantly exposed to the objectification performed by the gaze and the discourse of others” (Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination* 63). However, “[t]he relation to one’s own body cannot be reduced to a ‘body image’, in other words the subjective representation (‘self-image’ or ‘looking-glass self’), associated with a certain degree of ‘self-esteem’, that an agent has of his or her social effects” because the (looking) glass) needs to embrace as well “schemes of perception and appreciation inscribed in the bodies of the interacting agents” (Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination* 63). Last but not least, **dinner** constitutes the fantasised-about fetish, being the alleged site of all evil that is both loathed and desired, transferred and targeted. Finally, **bone** gives an insight into the ideal, aspired to state of the organism where no fat / sex is allowed to exist. In O’Reilly’s poem, all these referents perform several syntactical and linguistic functions, being interchangeably predicates, having a nominal or a modifying status. What remains constant is the corporeal and discursive exhaustion, testifying to the limits of the linguistic puzzle, which, in turn, leads to the persona’s

---

to act . . . Given the conditions of enforced reduction of woman’s activity, strength . . . force . . . a woman is still imprisoned within the State of Appeasement she suffers from the lowering of . . . vitality” (*Pure Lust* 203, 256).

imprisonment with / in the language and inside her own disengaged corporeality. The female voice in “Thin” begins her narrative as follows:

It is chill and dark in my small **room**.  
 A wind blows through gaps in the **roof**,  
 piercing even the eiderdown. My **skin**  
 goose-pimples in front of the cloudy **glass**  
 though there was scalding tea for **dinner**  
 with an apple. I’m cold to the **bone**.

(TNB 20)

In “Thin,” the first stanza outlines the preliminary conditions of the persona’s anorexic state: the disconnection from the female body and its surroundings resulting in acute physical and emotional anguish experienced by the persona (compare the choice of adjectives: chill, dark, small, piercing, windy, cloudy, scalding, and cold). As argued earlier, O’Reilly’s poem narrates the speaker’s disconnection on many overlapping levels: that of the self, body, emotions, social relations etc. As the stanza proceeds, the persona’s account becomes more and more self-centred: “My skin / goose-pimples . . . / . . . I’m cold to the bone.” Perceiving her skin as inflamed and broken (the dim glass), the female voice in “Thin” shivers with cold. Her bodily temperature must be low, since her digestion has slowed down considerably or even completely ceased (her entire meal is limited to hot tea and a single piece of fruit). The speaker continues:

I don’t sleep well either. My hip-**bones**  
 stick in the foam mattress, and **the room’s**  
 so empty. My sister is having **dinner**  
 with a boy. Awake under the **roof**  
 I watch the stars bloom heavily through **glass**  
 And think, *how shatterproof is my skin?*

(TNB 20)

As shown above, the female voice in “Thin” acknowledges to be suffering from insomnia; she does not hide the protruding, sharp bony structure either. In her physically and psychologically disturbed state, the anxious persona feels acutely alienated, not only from her own body but also from other people, with nobody to talk to and with nobody to understand her condition. The envious thought of her sister being on a dinner date keeps the female voice awake at night. In O’Reilly’s poem, one might only hypothesise whether it is the romantic company or the food that the speaker misses most. On the declaratory level, the aforementioned craving triggers in the persona the need to separate her self even more. She desires to hide behind the glass, hoping that it will prevent her from being shattered into pieces or crushed to smithereens. The speaker in “Thin” identifies her emotional need for relational connections solely with their allegedly disintegrating and self-annihilating potential. She acknowledges:

I doze till six, then drink semi-**skim**  
 milk for breakfast (the bare **bones**)

of a meal) before nine o'clock **class**.  
 It's kind of hard to leave my **room**  
 for the walk to school. No **roof**  
 over me, and eight solid hours till **dinner** –  
 (TNB 20)

In O'Reilly's poem, the daily anorexic diary involves a short nap demanded by the speaker's exhausted and malnourished organism, followed by a liquid meal [compare "(the bare bones / of a meal)"]. What is more, the apprehensive female voice appears to betray the first symptoms of agoraphobia when admitting: "It's kind of hard to leave my room." It seems plausible that the anxious persona in "Thin" feels threatened when being outside her room. Moreover beyond her room's protective cocoon, controlling her dietary habits may be problematic: "No roof / over me, and eight solid hours till dinner." In any case, the food that she denies herself becomes the object that O'Reilly's speaker fantasises about and desires most, taking the place of her sexual appetite which has been suppressed. She confesses:

. . . All day my dreams of **dinner**  
 are what really get under my **skin**,  
 not the boys. My tongue sticks to the **roof**  
 of my mouth again in class. I'm such a **bone-**  
 head! And my stomach's an empty **room**.  
 My face floats upwards in a **glass**  
 (TNB 20)

All in all, the female voice in "Thin" cannot focus on anything else but food connotations and her obsessive bodily control. With her fixation, O'Reilly's persona appears to be completely disconnected from the outer world and her own organism alike ("My face floats upwards in a glass"). Her daily routine becomes measured by the morsels of food and cups of water. Surrey points out that

. . . the ability to feel "connected" is this way, to feel and enjoy bodily pleasure, may be partially a function of healthy enjoyment of food, since food is so basic to life. One of the dangers of increasing fear and guilt related to eating may be a decrease in the capacity to experience eating as a simple pleasure. I suspect that with less "permission to eat," hunger mounts to an unbearable tension state, and eating or bingeing becomes a response to this state. ("Eating Patterns" 244)

While performing her anorexic rituals, the persona in "Thin" bitterly acknowledges her sister's indifference in pretending "not to notice" her problem. For the first time the thought of her parents' reaction to her condition occurs in her weary head (discourse). It is symptomatic, nonetheless, that the female voice in O'Reilly's poem can easily imagine her parents' disapproval but not their concern about her. That is why even her relatives' imagined rage is qualified by her with the tentative: "I suppose." The speaker in "Thin" dreams:

of Coke at lunchtime. One **glass**.  
 I make it last the whole day till **dinner**:  
 hot tea and an apple in my **room**.  
 My sister seems not to notice the **skin**  
 around my mouth or my ankle-**bones**.  
 If our parents knew they'd hit the **roof**

(TNB 20)

In other words, the anorexic persona in O'Reilly's poem wants to re-create her self and re-construct her disconnected body anew so that it becomes detached from any physiological or emotional needs that might relate the speaker to the surrounding reality and other people. Following this line of thinking, the female speaker in "Thin" conceives of her body as a fragile construction (see "My ribs rise like the roof / of a house that's fashioned from glass") that could disintegrate when confronted / touched by / connected with the relational dynamic of others (compare "I might even ping delicately like bone- / china when flicked"). O'Reilly's persona seems to be pleased with the corporeal transformatory results that she has achieved, boasting with satisfaction that "No dinner / for six weeks has made this skin / more habitable, more like a room." The female voice in "Thin" ponders:

I suppose. My ribs rise like the **roof**  
 of a house that's fashioned from **glass**.  
 I might even ping delicately like **bone-**  
 china when flicked. No **dinner**  
 for six weeks has made this **skin** –  
 more habitable, more like **a room** –

(TNB 21)

The concluding triplet in "Thin," nonetheless, instead of being an aspired liberating vision of freedom evokes the saddening sense of entrapment and pain that accompanies the anorexic self-destructive metamorphosis. The speaker in O'Reilly's poem look as if being ensnared within her disconnected, false anorexic shell (as the professionals describe this medical condition).<sup>70</sup> Not being able to tune in to her true wants and desires, all her energy is channelled into maintaining the empty eating rituals and bodily manipulation. One cannot but doubt the last line's sublimated assertion that "This skin is a more distinguished room." It is difficult to believe that the denial of corporeality and sexuality might ever constitute a source of female empowerment, self-dignity and self-worth. The speaker of "Thin" contemplates

. . . a ceiling that shatters like **glass**  
 over those diners off gristle and **bone**.  
 This skin is a more distinguished **room**.

(TNB 21)

<sup>70</sup> See Morag MacSween's *Anorexic Bodies: a Feminist and Sociological Perspective on Anorexia Nervosa*.

In line with the above, in "Eating Patterns as a Reflection of Women's Development," Surrey claims that:

*The loss of the inner voice, of the awareness of one's own needs, desires, or interests in the effort to respond to external expectations is a crucial issue in understanding basic aspects of women's psychological development. . . . The ability to feel "alive" inside, to feel connected to oneself, is important in all human functioning. Its loss or diminution is central to understanding problematic eating patterns as well as other common occurrences – for example, vulnerability to depression. (244), emphasis original*

Structurally, the mathematically-cut into pieces, enjambed structure of "Thin" seems to imitate the ritual of portioned food that the anorexic person performs to ensure her control over her bodily functions. As a further extension of the anorexic process, O'Reilly's poem "After a Death" meditates on an ultimate bodily disintegration, which resembles a near death experience where all sensory and experiential stimuli are eliminated from the persona's normal functioning. The anorexic voice in "After a Death" confesses:

For a whole week  
a large emptiness shrieks  
endlessly around the hills, made bleak

and salt-striated  
under its unabated  
sea-stung blast. . . .

(TNB 54)

As argued above, the poem "After a Death" allows one an insight into the almost terminal anorexic condition which constitutes a real threat to female physical survival. In her on-going denial of food, the female persona in "After a Death" seems to have reached a critical stage in which the previously aspired for bodily hollowness turns into "a large emptiness shrieks." In the examined passage, the melodiously mellowed, alliteratively fused expressions ("salt-striated / . . . sea-stung," and "under its unabated") make one infer that the speaker's sense of her distinct corporeal boundaries is undermined. Thus, the restless female voice in O'Reilly's poem does not seem to be able to grasp her bodily contours otherwise than as an evanescent aura or an evasive corporeal emanation, anything but the physically tangible flesh, blood and bones. In "After a Death," the almost-starved-to-death anorexic female body is compared to "the desiccated / caked salt," "shattered like ice sheet, and lets the cold bald" (TNB 54)" hence rendered as sore and vulnerable, unable to defend itself any more against the abuses being inflicted on it. The anxious speaking voice comments upon her state: "February light in. / It startles the walls. We've been / rocked to our own roots too, it seems" (TNB 54). At this stage, the persona's worn-out corporeal structure does not seem to be fit to endure any more self-inflicted deprivations. Thus its self-contained and destabilised construction begins to

collapse. To avoid facing the unwanted truth of the frightening reality, the speaker in O'Reilly's poem retreats again into a world of fantasies. However even in her imaginings, the female voice in "After a Death" cannot escape the reality of emotional and physical disconnection and on-going bodily disintegration. The corporeal fragmentation in the cited below passage comes to the discourse's surface in "damage," "breakage," "crack" and "split up." O'Reilly's persona continues:

I examine  
 the gable end for damage,  
 breakage, and find there a tiny hairline  
  
 crack, a replica  
 in pebble-dash of the Nile delta,  
 far away on the varicose, split lip of Africa.  
 (TNB 54)

After the series of defamiliaring, foreign-located images (see Nile delta and Africa), the disconnected female speaker in "After a Death" (compare "far away," "a replica") feels up to leaving her seemingly protective anorexic shell. In doing so, she assumes narration in the first person, which is indicative of her emerging female agency. For that reason, the persona in O'Reilly's poem no longer wishes to hide behind elaborate metaphors. She discloses openly the truth about the pain she experiences when her tormented body fails to cope with the debilitating dietary treatment imposed on it. The speaker in "After a Death" confesses:

My heart knocks  
 painfully in its small box  
 of spectacular solitude, whispering to itself, anoxic.  
 Jaundice results  
 from pathological blockage of the bile ducts.  
 Sclerosis. Silting. Failure of flux.  
 (TNB 54)

Hence the persona in O'Reilly's poem has achieved her aim in becoming nearly invisible and entirely disconnected. Paradoxically, she feels miserably confined and claustrophobic: "painfully in its small box." She is sick and tired of her chosen "spectacular solitude" and is suffocating because of the lack of fresh air ("anoxic"). In "After a Death," the quoted fragment's last word, "anoxic," echoes the very label "anorexic," resembling it not only in its sound but also in its symptoms (denoting shortage, deficiency or deprivation). What follows in the examined text is an extended list of the medical conditions that might accompany anorexia nervosa as its physical or mental side-effects. The persona's catalogue of real or potential illnesses is arranged neatly in the alliterated pairs: "Sclerosis. Silting. Failure of flux." The female voice in "After a Death" imagines:

Those spidery  
 red veins in the yellow eye  
 she rolled and rolled at me, until the eye congealed,  
 (TNB 54)

Quite unexpectedly in "After a Death," the pronoun "she" (in "**she** rolled and rolled at me") comes to the surface of the discourse. As its referent in the poem is unclear, the pronoun's emergence causes textual confusion, leaving the question open of whether the persona means a real person or her own anxious alter ego. In O'Reilly's poem, the speaker's relational or physical blindness ("the eye congealed, / ignorant of the sun") becomes a signifier of turning her back to the sun / life. As Surrey argues below, an anorexic's decision to start eating again is also an expression of the need for re-establishing the earlier contested connection with her self, her needs, wants, desires, body, others, world etc.

Emotional openness and sharing, cooperation, attention to and concern for the needs of others, and participation in others' growth are not of direct value in this world. When these basic relational needs are not valued or given outlets for development, there is a sense of being out of touch with oneself, disconnected, and unsupported. . . . and food becomes an important arena for acting out this disruption. Eating becomes an attempt to reinstate the sense of connection. (Surrey, "Eating Patterns" 247–248)

That is why in "After a Death," in the last possible moment, despite the unsettling "spidery / red veins in the yellow eye," the self-preservation instinct comes into being to remind O'Reilly's speaker about her will to live. The first-person self-defined potent agent "I, a tree of veins, / an anorexic plant" re-directs itself to the sun, despite its feebleness. This leaves hope for the woman's future recovery. The persona in "After a Death" declares:

ignorant of the sun  
 towards which I, a tree of veins,  
 an anorexic plant, still shook and leaned.  
 (TNB 54)

The ambience of the female self's corporeal disconnection reappears in the poem "Possession" where as in "After a Death," O'Reilly's speaker's undefined addressees come into view. The numerous referential pronouns: "you," "we" and "our" indicate that the female voice in "Possession" is making an attempt to relate to others. The poem's very second modifier indicates that O'Reilly's persona still conceives of relationality in "**that anxious way**." It happens because "when people have suffered hurt, danger, humiliation, and many other kinds of disconnection, they continue to try to find whatever connection they can. Now, however, they feel they can do so only if they keep significant amounts of their experience and responses out of connection. This is what we call *the central relational paradox*" (Jordan et al., "Therapists' Authenticity" 65), emphasis original. In O'Reilly's poem, claiming "**that anxious way** you



have of closing . . . was never really yours,” the female voice in “Possession” projects her own bodily disconnection onto her lover’s gestures. Though textually referring to her partner, the modifier “anxious” conveys the speaker’s ambiguous relation to her own self. She brings to mind:

That **anxious** way you have of closing doors  
 (like the brown of your eyes and hair)  
 was never really yours.  
 My arms and elongated nose were owned before –  
 fragments of jigsaw  
 in the rough art of assemblage whose end we are.  
 (TNB 38), emphasis added

In “Possession,” the quoted lines provide a further insight into how the speaker in O’Reilly’s poem perceives her relations with others. Namely, arguing that “My arms and elongated nose were owned before” the female voice equates sexual connection with the titular possession (see “owned”). What is more, O’Reilly’s persona still does not appear to have a full awareness of her body image’s completeness, viewing it as the “fragments of jigsaw” and “the rough art of assemblage whose end we are.” The sense of experiencing her body as disconnected is a primary cause of the speaker’s declared anxiety and uneasiness.<sup>71</sup> Apart from the aforementioned “**fragments**,” O’Reilly’s narrative’s other pivotal recurrent semantic root is “**member**” (re-**member**” and “**dis-member**”) and its subsequent variation “**number**.” Since connectedness with the loving other appears to be new to the speaker, the sensuous contact results in confusion, fear and astonishment, instead of the expected satisfaction. In “Possession,” these mixed feelings towards relational intimacy are articulated by O’Reilly’s persona openly: “I don’t know where we live / or whose voice I still / hear and remember.” Apart from two lovers, the ghosts of their troubling memories seem to reside with them in-between the sheets. The female voice in “Possession” admits:

Sometimes I don’t know where we live  
 or whose voice I still  
 hear and **remember**  
 inside my head at night. In darkness and in love  
 we are **dismembered**,  
 so that the fact of our coming to all  
 becomes a morning miracle. . . .  
 (TNB 38)

---

<sup>71</sup> Bourdieu admits “This particular way of bearing the body, of presenting it to others, expresses, above all, the distance between the body as practically experienced and the legitimate body, and, by the same token, a practical anticipation of chances of success of interactions which helps to define those chances (through features commonly described as assurance, self-confidence, ease, etc.)” (*Masculine Domination* 65).

Paradoxical as it may seem, the speaker in "Possession" appears to equate emotional and bodily union with self-dissolution<sup>72</sup> and further fragmentation. However the persona's lack of a clear sense of her own distinct self makes her fear that by being in connection with the other she might disappear entirely. Addressing that issue, the female voice in O'Reilly's poem admits her own disbelief that she might be capable of closeness without her self's disintegration. She sums it up as follows: "in darkness and in love / we are dismembered." In "Possession," the speaker's anxiety becomes articulated in the invocation to her lover, which is reminiscent of the seventeenth century English metaphysical poetry. She suggests:

. . . **Let's number**  
 our fingers and toes again.  
 Do I love you piecemeal  
 when I see in your closing hand a valve-flower  
 like a sea-anemone,  
 or is it our future I **remember**, as the White Queen  
**remembered** her pinpricked finger? . . .  
 (TNB 38)

When paradoxically pondering whether "is it our future I remember?" the apprehensive persona in O'Reilly's poem is learning to move on, leaving the troubled past behind her. In "Possession," practised bit by bit, day by day, "piecemeal love" seems to work for her better than sentimental declarations. She announces that:

. . . All of you  
 that's to be known  
 resides in that small gesture.  
 All though our days consist of letting go –  
 since neither one can own  
 the other – what still deepens pulls us back together.  
 (TNB 38)

At the end of O'Reilly's poem, the female voice in "Possession" seems to comprehend that an intimate connection between people is realised in what she herself calls "small gestures" and it remains in continuous renegotiations of proximity and distance:

In the interplay of bodies and heightened feelings, in finding interest in the response of the other, in coming to know the impact of one's own action on the other and opening to the other's affecting us, there is opportunity for such intensity, pleasure, growth . . . . It is the interaction, the exchange, the

---

<sup>72</sup> Nonetheless, according to Jordan "[w]hen empathy and concern flow both ways, there is an intense affirmation of the self and, paradoxically, a transcendence of the self, a sense of the self as part of a larger relational unit . . . . This does not imply merging, which suggests a blurring or a loss of distinctness of self" ("The Meaning of Mutuality" 82).

sensitivity to the other's inner experience, the wish to please and to be pleased, the showing of one's pleasure and the vulnerability that that implies which distinguish the mature, full sexual interaction from the simple pleasure of sexual tension. (Jordan, "The Meaning of Mutuality" 90)

Revealing the speaker's sensuous fascination with her lover's body, the succinct haiku "Watermark" meditates on the nature and duration of sexual relations. In O'Reilly's poem, the moving simile ("the slow uncurling of your palms / like beech-leaves making shadows over water") is constructed according to the poetic imagist tradition, captured best in Pound's acclaimed image dictum of the "emotional and intellectual complex." In other words, "transformation of disconnection is an openness to being moved by the other person. Also essential is an openness to being seen by the other person. Thus, we must open ourselves up to being known, to being moved, and to moving another person" (Jordan, "Relational Awareness 55–56"). The speaker in "Watermark" argues:

Among the signs that lovers' bodies give  
I loved the slow uncurling of your palms  
like beech-leaves making shadows over water:  
how my skin was awash for days on end  
with the impress of hands on a river.

(TNB 36)

O'Reilly's poem aptly renders a subtle image of an evanescent, erotic imprint upon the lover's body and self. In "Watermark," with an almost extra-sensory touch, the erotic connection is barely sketched on the water's / skin's textual surface. Made up of multiply-reflected water marks, the intimate signification is discernible only at a certain angle of light. This nearly invisible relational pattern in "Watermark" becomes the couple's own exclusive but also fleeting signification. The bodily signs of relationality tend to disappear from the discourse's surface as soon as one attempts to pin them down with the ascribed meaning. O'Reilly's poem magnificently oscillates between the human need for permanence and the ephemeral fragility of connections between people where every endeavour to define their ever-changing and evasive character is doomed to failure. As the reviewer of *The Nowhere Birds* observes: "For O'Reilly and for the reader, nothing is static, as the fluidity of her short poem 'Watermark' shows" (Naiden 154). In O'Reilly's poem "Envy," the anxiety of being dissolved in a connection that is too-encompassing re-emerges in the disquieting melody of "**dream**, an illusion of **perpetual departure** / from **darkened doorways**, crackling," "absorbed like **stolen silver**." The speaker in "Envy" declares:

This was your dream, an illusion of perpetual departure  
from darkened doorways, crackling upper floors  
whose light your eyes absorbed like stolen silver.

(TNB 22)

In the examined text, one can sense the feeling of the menacing insecurity (“dangerous as radium”) on the part of the speaker, which might result from the (over) “exposure” of her vulnerability to others. Looked at from that perspective, the previously narrated sensuous “watermarks” are transformed here into the violent trademarks of ownership “burn on your thigh.” As was the case earlier, the fear of closeness overpowers the female speaker’s experienced need for it. She wonders:

And a crooked sign hung where the sun was  
in the dull sky, dangerous as radium.  
There was an ink-blot or bluish burn on your thigh  
that meant exposure. . . .

(TNB 22)

What is more, it appears that in “Envy” “you” to whom the poem is addressed could be the persona’s own self. The aforementioned claim becomes plausible in the light of the expression “the thin streets with their high walls,” overtly referring to her walled, anorexic identity. So does the concluding line of “Envy” stating that “you woke with fingermarks around your bony wrists.” O’Reilly’s poem seems to ponder how, on one hand, not to turn into the “bodies of stone,” and, on the other, avoid ending up suffocating in the desired but dreaded connection with the other. In “Envy,” the image of the female self-stifling in the covetous grip of the other becomes an embodiment of the speaker’s phobia of dependency. The female voice in O’Reilly’s poem relates:

. . . You went on dreaming nevertheless,  
down the thin streets with their high walls,  
courtyards filled with bodies of stone, cypresses,  
and the linden tree, prodigal within limits.  
You woke with fingermarks around your bony wrists.

(TNB 22)

As demonstrated, in the case of women, dependency seems to be especially socially and culturally marked: “For women, then, to be dependent and adult is usually understood as being immature, childish, and, at best, neurotic” (Stiver, “The Meaning of ‘Dependency’” 148).<sup>73</sup> However, “[o]ne can see ‘healthy’ dependence, then as offering a context for growth and development. The more one feels one can count on others and be heard, understood, and validated, the more one feels worthy and the more solid is one’s sense of self” (Stiver, “The Meaning of ‘Dependency’” 160). Furthermore, O’Reilly’s poem “The Hotel” allows the reader yet another glimpse into the “uneasy” nature of mutual

---

<sup>73</sup> Accordingly, Stiver advocates that: “one notes that the term *dependent* has been used to describe as a need state (longing, oral needs), an affective state (feeling of helplessness, neediness), a personality trait (dependent, demanding), and even a personality type (passive-dependent, oral)” (“The Meaning of ‘Dependency’” 148), emphasis original.

interconnectedness. Being the hotel's "**uneasy guests**" appears an apt extension of how partners feel in each other's company. One can record the following correspondences: lovers' awkwardness ("a country house transplanted to the town"), insecurity (see "was it the time of year?") and alienation (compare "we never saw a soul"). The persona in "The Hotel" begins:

That hotel we found ourselves **uneasy guests** of  
 was like a country house transplanted to the town.  
 Was it the time of year? We never saw a soul  
 in the breakfast room, not even a fork was smeared.  
 (TNB 49), emphasis added

Moreover, the female voice in "The Hotel" seems on edge, easily upset with any inconvenience that she may encounter in this claustrophobic venue. In O'Reilly's poem, the sense of entrapment is amplified by the bright, reflected light, emitting "violent sound," the mirrored images that unable to distinguish one from the other, endlessly multiplying the illusory views. The failure to establish the tactile contact is caused by the misrecognition of the speaker's own corporeal parts. The traces of others' presence make her feel threatened. The female voice in "The Hotel" remembers how:

The light cord in the bathroom made a violent sound.  
 Somebody's sock was under the bed.  
 Our room was full of mirrors – I tried to touch you  
 but saw my own hand coming towards me.  
 (TNB 49)

As shown, what really worries O'Reilly's speaker is the distance between herself and her partner that begins to manifest itself conspicuously in the place where the couple are with each other all time, have nothing (and nobody) else to relate to. The persona in "The Hotel" recalls:

. . . Our bodies were bloated,  
 weighty and coarse. We couldn't move an inch.  
 Out breaths jellified on the bathroom glass  
 (TNB 49)

In O'Reilly's poem, with their relationship's uncertain future, it is only the emerging profuse rhetorical questions that indicate how obsessively the speaker tries to find a way out of the overwhelming situation. As argued above, the anxious persona in "The Hotel" feels entrapped and confused. She misses the boundaries of her own and her lover's separate bodily frameworks, as if everything around them was smudged and "jellified." To some extent, lacking a firm sense of her corporeal boundaries might imply that O'Reilly's speaker has problems with self-identification, thus, neglecting her own needs and wants. On the other hand, the boundary could be viewed as "a place of meeting rather than an armored dividing line, protecting against an impinging outside world" (Jordan, "Therapists' Authenticity" 70). Nonetheless while trying to get hold of

the loose fragments, the female voice in *The Hotel*” attempts to resist the on-going disconnection between her self and her body, which results from her relational vulnerability. On the other hand, as Jordan advocates:

. . . vulnerability per se is not the problem. Awareness of vulnerability, in fact, suggests to me good reality testing. It is the *disowned* vulnerability that becomes problematic. An openness to being affected is essential to intimacy and a growth-enhancing relationship; without it, people relate inauthentically, adopting roles coming from distanced and protected places. Open sharing of our need for support or acceptance may be an essential factor in developing a sense of close connection. (“Relational Resilience” 33), emphasis original

Turning away from the real source of her discomfort, the female speaker in “*The Hotel*” attempts to detach herself from the location’s lifeless background, which she compulsively perceives all around her. In the examined text, the outer reality seems to be considered by the persona as her mind’s discursive product. In doing so, she deludes herself that she has an absolute power over her own textual creation. Acting upon this assumption, the speaker in “*The Hotel*” blames herself for being dismissive and critical of “the mean life thriving” in this ghastly place. Once she has realised her disapproval, the female voice in O’Reilly’s poem records with an irrational guilty feeling her disconnection from the disappointing materiality “when we took our breath away they’d cease. / Was this *our* fault, I asked myself?” (TNB 49) The surreally sinister ambience returns in her thorough inspection of the hotel’s nooks and crannies [“We left the mean life thriving where it was, / in corners where the spiders hide their eggs” (TNB 49)]. The speaking voice in “*The Hotel*” confesses:

I felt a need to agitate the pane.

We saw the ones with tails begin to dance  
but the rest stayed still, like the pupils  
in a dead eye. They’d never stir again.  
Even the jigging ones had so little life

(TNB 49)

As the poem proceeds, the apprehensive persona in “*The Hotel*” feels surrounded by the dreaded “tribunal” of elderly men whom she suspects of plotting against her and judging her behaviour. Her thinking reflects what Daly defines as the “life-violating tendencies of patriarchy, which is essentially the State ruled by old men” (*Pure Lust* 102). O’Reilly’s poem terminates with the lovers’ hasty escape from the disquieting place. It appears that it is the allegedly threatening company of others (upon whom the speaker projects her relational fears) that induces a near paranoia in O’Reilly’s persona. For the anxious speaker in “*The Hotel*” relational distance becomes a way to alleviate her emotional discomfort and release her tension. Nonetheless this way of solving her problem, without addressing its underlying roots, leads to further disconnection instead of the aspired to empowerment. She concludes:

The breakfast room was full of greying men  
 who shushed and wagged their fingers and their heads.  
 It seemed a tribunal, so we left them there  
 and found our own way out along the stair.

(TNB 49)

Summing up, in “The Hotel” the qualifier that renders best the narrative’s mood is **uneasy**, which seems to appropriately convey O’Reilly’s speaker’s way of relating to the outer world and her own inner presence in it. Drawing upon Gilligan, Surrey notices that

The “**dis-ease**” of feeling and living this incongruity has profound implications. . . . these inconsistencies become “raised as personal doubts that invade women’s sense of themselves, compromising their ability to act on their perceptions” (p. 49) and their ability to be empowered through the creation of and reliance on mutually empowering relationships. (“Relationship and Empowerment” 169), emphasis added

With regard to inconsistencies and **dis-easiness**, the poem “Duets” probes the cacophony of female and male voices, blending in one dissonant tune. The gender-orchestrated fugal disconnection seems to be diagnosed as resulting from both sexes’ generic inability to join in a harmonious concerto. The undertones of the woman’s melody are subtle (“cambric”) but solid (“whalebone”). The female musician appears to be well-grounded in reality (“well-hammered-in”). The speaker in “Duets” notices:

Underneath, her voice is  
 a whalebone-and-cambric  
 arrangement, a set of stiff stays  
 or pegs, well-hammered-in.  
 She is a house with firm foundations

(TSC 20)

In “Duets,” the female artist is appreciated for her reliability (“**firm foundations**”) all the same her strength is qualified [“Her **fabric** pulls apart / in the upper floors only, / where something can be heard / **fluttering** with calculated frailty” (TSC 20)]. The woman’s “calculated frailty” implies a note of premeditated insincerity, although the referred to modifier might mean the awareness of her own limitations. In O’Reilly’s poem, the phrases cited below leave little doubt as regards the quality of the woman’s performance: all of the utterances contain a trace of their own decline. They respectively suggest the qualities of damaged or inferior value (i.e. “attenuated,” “fringed,” “dropped”). As “Duets” progresses, the disquieting mood in O’Reilly’s poem increases (i.e. “trapped,” “tired”). The image of “an ornamental dove trapped / in an attic, beating tired wings” astonishes one with the insinuated compulsory confinement from which the woman cannot get out, being incarcerated like a caged bird. In the analysed passage, the modifier “ornamental” seems in tune with “coquette” and “can-can dress.” The section devoted to probing the woman’s own song

terminates with the conclusion: "her voice has entered every corner of itself."  
The fragment enumerates:

a coquette's attenuated eyelash  
or lace-fringed can-can dress,  
a spinning coin dropped

on a polished table,  
an ornamental dove trapped  
in an attic, beating tired wings.

(TSC 20)

The male song in "Duets" seems to be marked with the aspired to ascension: "The boy's voice is an arrow pointing upwards" (TSC 20). His tune signified by the (ever)green developing plant is distinguished with liveliness. However the conclusive "crown" points to the direction which the melody follows, namely, it proceeds towards its own greatness. The lofty grandeur of the Gothic architecture is absorbed in its own holiness (i.e. "the gothic hollowness / of cathedral pipes"), being self-referential ("a cylindrical sound") and focused only on its own excellence ("crossing its own vast space"). This is how the persona in O'Reilly's poem describes it:

Its flute-notes issue from an instrument

still half a sapling, with green feet in the ground  
and a flicker of leaves around its crown.  
It has the gothic hollowness

of cathedral pipes, a cylindrical sound,  
which is the shape a boy's voice makes  
crossing its own vast space.

(TSC 20)

In "Duets," instead of a choir singing in unison, one hears a concerto of two discordant and strident soloists, disconnected from each other and their listening audience. Nonetheless sometimes "connection" may also mean enslavement, like in O'Reilly's poem "Netsuke." Its title refers to a Japanese-derived decorated device used to tie something up. The fastening utensil's function, joining loose things together, seems relevant in the context of the poem's interpretation. It is also significant that the netsuke performs both a useful and aesthetic role (it may be embellished with elaborate carvings and ornamentations). In "Conflict and Culture," Langdon Hammer claims

Art and violence come together in O'Reilly's "Netsuke" in a different way. The poem is a dramatic monologue spoken by a geisha. The beautiful woman, kept by her lord, is like the precious bone or wood carving – "netsuke" – that is fastened to the obi binding the man's kimono and holding in place his pipe, purse, and writing tools. At the end of the poem, the courtesan takes her lord's knife and draws her own blood. (69)



Hence the speaking voice in “Netsuke” belongs to the Japanese geisha, a woman accomplished in the art of providing highly-qualified companionship for paying men (*CED*). As *The Collins Dictionary* explains, the signifier blends two different words, cultures and languages: *gei* is the Japanese denomination for art, and in Chinese *sha* refers to a human being (*CED*). Although geisha means an artful person, educated in learned rhetoric, music, literature etc., the main purpose of her lengthy and sophisticated training is to please the demanding male customers who purchase her sexual services. In other words, the aim of the geisha’s education is not self-perfection but refinement in her auxiliary role, becoming the men’s ideal erotic companion. The paradox resides in the fact that the acquired knowledge breeds self-awareness, which amplifies the woman’s discomfort, both physical and emotional. As demonstrated in O’Reilly’s poem, the self-demeaning process of conditioning is, thus, accompanied with a sense of distress and internal conflict experienced by geisha. In “Netsuke,” the geisha’s outer shell (sole) is referred to as “thin,” in contrast to the world’s impression being “dense” and “thickened.” The speaker in O’Reilly’s poem confesses:

I walk on thin soles  
this dense season.

No wind lifts the leaves,  
the thickened stream

shakes no reeds.

(TSC 24)

Furthermore in “Netsuke” even the fan, a traditional attribute of the geisha’s profession works like a protective shield against the world behind which the woman tries to hide her anguish, which is concealed additionally beneath the thick layer of make-up: “I spread my fan, / hide half my wan / face, pale with lead, / pale with the shit / of nightingales” (TSC 24). In O’Reilly’s poem, the oriental, culturally enforced paleness is achieved by both self-degradation (the animal faeces) and the ingredients that are dangerous to the woman’s health (lead). This is how the female voice sees her other “embellishments:”

The marks they limn  
on my nape  
might have been  
knife marks,

(TSC 24)

The letters calligraphed on the back of geisha’s neck resemble the cuts on her skin incised on the woman’s body in a manner resembling cattle branding. In other words, “It is through the training of the body that the most fundamental dispositions are imposed, those which make a person both *inclined* and *able* to enter the social games most favourable to the development of manliness”

(Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination* 55–56), emphasis original. Thus in O'Reilly's poem, the twice-repeated word "stark," in its archaic sense (*CED*) "harsh," "fierce" and "brutal," connotes both the bodily harm exercised upon the woman's maimed skin and upon her mutilated psyche alike. Additionally, the speaker in "Netsuke" associates sexual contact with abuse and disgust; the erotically united people remind her of abominable insects, injured birds or rats. O'Reilly's persona reacts to the scenes of coupling with embarrassment and revulsion:

women and men coiled  
round each other

like worms,  
a tongue-cut sparrow,

a nest of rats.

(TSC 24)

On the whole, the titled netsuke in O'Reilly's poem serves to connect the objects of pleasure to the body of their owner. To some extent, the speaker identifies herself with that connecting function. It is comparable to her own profession: the go-between the male fantasy and the female reality. For the persona, such physical and emotional connection is tainted with objectification, she feels reduced to being a mediating function between "his genitals."<sup>74</sup> The female voice in "Netsuke" concludes:

They keep his objects  
from sliding down  
that long silk cord

he hangs beside  
his genitals, and being  
lost. . . .

(TSC 24)

In geisha's eyes, the sexual act, depicted by her in a derogatory and mechanical way and rendered in archaic language (i.e. "blade") is devoid of any closeness. Jordan argues that "When sexuality becomes mechanical meeting directed toward orgasmic discharge only, a performance of the ego or narcissistic exercise of the self, a conquest of one by another, it becomes one of the most profoundly lonely and limiting experiences" ("The Meaning of Mutuality" 90). In "Netsuke," the expression: "a stone lip / in the stone garden" indicates the persona's disconnection from her body and her detachment from her sensuous self. In consequence, she feels lifeless and numb: "When I draw / his blade across my / arm it resembles / water dripping over / a stone lip / in the stone garden" (TSC 25). On the whole, one can draw a parallel between geisha's

<sup>74</sup> Compare Irigaray's *This Sex Which Is Not One* and *Speculum of the Other Woman*.

humiliation and her being burnt with hot wax and carved with a knife. The enforced “incised smile” conceals the reality of the woman’s affliction. The female voice in “Netsuke” recalls: “runny wax / from a candle, / the new moon’s / incised smile” (TSC 25). Like the objectified, whitened-faced geisha, the wooden manikin (who is the speaker in “Persona”) seems to be disconnected to the point of becoming a subject-less and life-less prop. Miriam Gamble in her review of *The Sea Cabinet* “Shaping Itself In Shadow” rightly notices that in:

“Persona”, O’Reilly presents an extreme version of self-detachment, or self-fragmentation, going so far as to set forth the alternative self – the self seen, rather than the self speaking – as the correlative of a persona, with the disturbing difference that this one is not created, but the ‘real thing’. Self-detachment is not, admittedly, a new conception in her work in *The Nowhere Birds*, she writes of being both “dismembered” and self-effaced.” (26)

Thus, the female voice in O’Reilly’s “Persona” wonders “And what can I do with these dark adhesions, / These unmoored pieces of the night? / They breathe their black into my day” (TSC 14). The disconnected fragments of her self that make up the speaker’s fractured identity appear to be perceived by her as useless rubble. They function as the remnants of the past from which the “Persona” disconnected herself and of which she appears to be scared (they breathe their black into my day”). The “dark adhesions” accumulated over years, nowadays constitute the source of the speaker’s anxiety. She asks apprehensively:

What can I do with these dark adhesions?  
If dreams are rooms in which my self accretes,  
They also breathe their black into my day.  
(TSC 14)

To avoid the unwanted confrontation with her “unmoored pieces,” the speaking voice in “Persona” creates her alter-ego ligneous “manikin.” With its unsettling associations of the medical anatomical model, the wooden dummy is equipped with “the painted, carved face” and “slyness of my puppet-smile.” What is more, the manikin seems to be immobilised and completely at the mercy of its user, as the only thing that can “get these wooden limbs to work” is the arrival of “the lost loved one.” No wonder “Persona’s” “puppet-smile” echoes “Netsuke’s” “incised smile.” The speaker in O’Reilly’s poem confesses:

As a mannikin, I set myself to work  
  
In dreams or rooms in which my self accretes.  
See me there with the painted carved face.  
As a mannikin, I’ve set myself to work  
Until the lost loved one appears  
(TSC 14)

In “Persona,” the powerlessness of the speaker’s experiencing herself “as a manikin” implies a chronic disconnection from her own identity. Jordan explains

that in “the lack of movement and negative feelings that characterize acute disconnection settle in, and one feels depressed, out of touch, stuck. The pattern of immobilization, fear, and self-blame leads to a heightened sense of isolation” (“Relational Awareness” 50). Likewise Daly in her writing traces back the roots of women’s anxiety to patriarchal incapacitation.<sup>75</sup> Following this line of thinking, in her review of *The Sea Cabinet* Sampson argues that “*Persona* [is] a formally-satisfying pantoum which proceeds by full, – or near – repetition of whole lines in a telling imitation of obsessional thought” (“Stacking Myths” 10). The critic concludes that “If this sounds like Plath, it’s perhaps not surprising;” (Sampson, “Stacking Myths” 10). The female voice in “*Persona*” continues:

I cannot get these wooden limbs to work  
 Until the lost loved one appears  
 To shrink at the slyness of my puppet-smile.  
 Chrysanthemum dragons shimmer in the room.  
 (TSC 14)

As shown earlier, it is only when being perceived by her lover that “*Persona*’s” movements and actions are activated. It happens because

women as symbolic objects . . . being . . . [kept] in a permanent state of bodily insecurity, or more precisely of symbolic dependence . . . exist first through and for the gaze of others, that is, as welcoming, attractive and available *objects*. They are expected to be ‘feminine’, that is to say, smiling, friendly, attentive, submissive, demure, restrained, self-effacing. (Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination* 66), emphasis original.

Structurally, O’Reilly’s “*Persona*” takes the form of a ballad, with the repeated passages and melodious alliterated phrases (see “I say, / and **sh**rink at the **s**lyness of my puppet’s **s**mile” and “chry**s**anthemum dragons **s**himmer”). As the poem terminates, the repetitive structures occupy more and more place in O’Reilly’s narrative. The mechanical droning of the echoed lines and reiterated expressions fill up the discourse, as if the speaker was unable or unwilling to reveal anything more, being stuck in a (self) duplicating process. In reference to “*Persona*,” Gamble claims that O’Reilly draws attention to the meta-linguistic aspect of this narrative: “What troubles her here, though, in a poem which may initially seem so mechanical as to be rendered empty of the effects of form, is less the absence of the self than exactly that artificiality with which the poem and, therefore, the speaking self, are afflicted. Self, muse and written result are fluid terms” (26). The speaking voice in “*Persona*” concludes:

---

<sup>75</sup> She claims that “[a]s one woman has remarked, a depressed woman is a perfect tool of the patriarchy. Because of her frustration and low self-esteem she . . . lacks the energy to fight back or to move ahead and has an insatiable need for male approval. She is psychically impotent” (Daly, *Pure Lust* 204).

*But nothing is different from nothing, I say,  
These unmoored pieces of the night,  
These chrysanthemum dragons shimmer in the room –  
Still the mud-brown river is clotted with débris.*  
(TSC 14)

Summing up, the all-pervasive ambience of anxious impotence in O'Reilly's poem ["I cannot get these wooden limbs to work. *Nothing is different from nothing, I say,*" (TSC 14)] is complemented with the gradual disappearance of the female voice ("shrink"). Disconnected from her female empowerment, the speaker in "The Persona" turns into the lifeless manikin unable to realise her self or draw fully upon her relational capabilities.

When an important relational context cannot enlarge to allow for mutual experience and the movement of dialogue, women feel disempowered. If this connection feels severed there can be a sense of deadness, blackness, and even terror; some have described this experience as a "black hole." If the connection is only partially maintained, there can be a fragmentation of self. Here there can be feelings of stuckness, flatness, nonvitality, confusion, or blurred focus; . . . a "grey-out". (Surrey, "Relationship and Empowerment" 172)

## CHAPTER TWO

### POWER AT: ECOPOWER AND IRISH WOMEN'S ECOLOGICAL SELVES

#### 2.1. The Empowering Ecofeminist Care Ethic and Land Ethic in the Poetry of Mary O'Donoghue

In winter, they are frozen weight,  
whiskered lips drawn back  
(Mary O'Donoghue, "Spectacle")

As demonstrated by the scholars cited in this chapter, the empowering dimension of ecofeminist thought stems from challenging both the domination of women and nature on the grounds of ethics and the standpoint of care. Warren explains that "[a]ccording to ecofeminists, 'nature' (referring to nonhuman animals, plants and ecosystems) is included into those Others who/that have been unjustifiably exploited and dominated. 'Nature is a feminist issue' might well be called the slogan of ecofeminism" (*Ecofeminist Philosophy* 1).<sup>76</sup> That is why being empowering for women themselves, "[e]cofeminism challenges all

---

<sup>76</sup> Furthermore, Warren elaborates this thought claiming that "there are important connections between the unjustified dominations of women, people of colour, children and the poor and the unjustified domination of nature" (*Ecofeminist Philosophy* 1).

relations of domination. Its goal is not just to change who wields power, but to transform the structure of power itself” (Starhawk 76). Zabinsky argues in this vein: “The voices of ecofeminism are diverse, but their common thread is the recognition of the relationship between the domination of nature and the domination of women. . . . Value-hierarchical thinking within oppressive contexts maintains the domination of the superior group over the inferior group” (“Scientific Ecology” 315–316). Consequently, King advocates the need to “enter into . . . a genuinely ethical thinking – where one uses mind and history to reason from the ‘is’ to the ‘ought’ and to reconcile humanity with nature, within and without” (“Healing” 116). With regard to nature and women, viewed historically and culturally as men’s others, “ecofeminism by speaking for *both* the original others, seeks to understand the interconnected roots of all domination as well as ways to resist and change” (Plant, “Searching for Common” 156), emphasis original. It can be argued that:

Both feminism and ecology embody the revolt of nature against human domination. They demand that we rethink the relationship between humanity and the rest of nature, including our natural, embodied selves. In ecofeminism, nature is the central category of analysis. An analysis of the interrelated dominations of nature – psyche and sexuality, human oppression, and nonhuman nature – and the historic position of women in relation to those forms of domination is the starting point of ecofeminist theory. (King, “Healing” 117)

Appropriately, Warren distinguishes numerous levels and various categories of women – nature interrelations: ethical, historical, political, sociological, economic, spiritual, literary, linguistic, epistemological, empirical and conceptual (*Ecofeminist Philosophy* 21–38). In her own words, Warren enumerates five tenets of an ecofeminist approach:

- 1) there are important interconnections among the unjustified dominations of women, other human Others, and nonhuman nature;
- 2) understanding the nature of these interconnections is important to an adequate understanding of and solutions to these unjustified dominations;
- 3) feminist philosophy should include ecofeminist insights into women – other human Others – nature interconnections;
- 4) solutions to gender issues should include ecofeminist insights into women – other human Others – nature connections; and
- 5) solutions to environmental problems should include ecofeminist insights into women – other human Others – nature interconnections. (*Ecofeminist Philosophy* 43)

Nonetheless altering the above-quoted interconnections cannot be done without dismantling the “oppressive conceptual framework,” applied to ensure women’s and nature’s subjugated status (Warren, *Ecofeminist Philosophy* 46). Warren defines this system as “*the logic of domination*,” emphasis original, disclosing its assumptions as “a logical structure of argumentation that ‘justifies’ domination and subordination. A logic of domination assumes that superiority

justifies subordination. A logic of domination is offered as the moral stamp of approval for subordination, since, if accepted, it provides a justification" (*Ecofeminist Philosophy* 47).<sup>77</sup> As if responding to that question, Code reminds us that "[e]cological thinking . . . infiltrates the interstices of the social order, where it expands to undermine its intransigent structures" (198). Furthermore, she compares the emergence of ecological thinking to "Kant's Copernican revolution" in its decentralised perspective, challenging the "[e]thical self-mastery, political mastery over unruly and aberrant Others, and epistemic mastery over the 'external' world" (Code 198). Moreover, she advocates that:

Ecological thinking – a peculiar late twentieth-century phenomenon – examines the potential of epistemic and ethicopolitical practices to produce *habitats* where people can live well together, locally and globally, and respectfully within the physical and natural world. This refocusing links ecological thinking's decentred aspects to its horizontal patterning. Both require conceptual and geographical remappings of terrains where practices are engaged and theoretical conclusions constructed . . . (Code 199), emphasis original

With the above in mind, Lahar<sup>78</sup> proposes to "treat ecofeminism as a moral theory" (8); similarly Code argues that: "[b]eing-in-the-world guided by ecological thinking differs radically from the masterful way of autonomous man, whose assumption that he can be master of all he surveys allows surveying to substitute for engaged participation and mastery to suppress diversity for the sake of instrumental simplicity" (200). Furthermore, she<sup>79</sup> appreciates ecological ethical thinking due to "its commitment to complexity" and "sensitivity to detail" (Code 199), "respect for particularity" and "methodological pluralism" (Code 200). The ethical dimension of ecofeminist philosophy, as Warren explicates it, is targeted against "*value-hierarchical thinking* (*Ecofeminist Philosophy* 46), emphasis original. Following this line of thinking, ecofeminist ethics can be described as "contextual," "inclusivist," "structurally pluralistic," "antireductionist," "theory in process," (Warren, *Ecofeminist Philosophy* 98–99;

---

<sup>77</sup> Moreover, this repressive conceptual structure is based upon binary oppositional value thinking (Warren, *Ecofeminist Philosophy* 46) and its self-legitimising power is "exercised as power of Ups over Downs" (Warren, *Ecofeminist Philosophy* 46). Consequently, Warren sums it up as follows: "the focus of ecofeminist philosophy is unjustified Up-Down systems of power and privilege, particularly patriarchal Up-Down systems, as well as on the actual social contexts in which Ups are beneficiaries of such unjustified Up-Down systems" (*Ecofeminist Philosophy* 65).

<sup>78</sup> Moreover, the transformatory dimension of ecofeminism is explored by Lahar: "The central theme of most versions of ecofeminism, therefore, is the interrelationship and integration of personal, social, and environmental issues and the development of multidirectional political agendas and action. Ecofeminism is transformative rather than reformist in orientation, in that ecofeminists seek to radically restructure social and political institutions" (2).

<sup>79</sup> Following the same way of thinking, Code adds that "Ecological thinking is more finely attuned to differences, as it resists the desire . . . to assemble the confusion of the human and natural world into maximally homogeneous patterns" (199). She emphasises that "ecological thinking thus resists the epistemic practice common in science-venerating cultures of superimposing a grid on events and situations . . . and letting aberrations fall through the cracks" (Code 199–200).



Warren and Cheney, “Ecological Feminism” 249–253). “Warren has argued ‘the shift *from* a conception of ethics as primarily a matter of rights, rules, or principles’” (Warren and Cheney, “Ecological Feminism” 252), emphasis original. In other words, ecofeminists remind us about “conceiving of ethics as growing out of what Cheney (1987, 144) calls defining relationships [that] include those of moral agents with the nonhuman world, including animals” (Warren and Cheney, “Ecological Feminism” 249). Wilson points out that “[t]he care orientation seeks to find a perspective in which such mutually exclusive dichotomies do not rise” (“Kant and Ecofeminism” 399–400). Broadly speaking, the ecofeminist ethical outlook is based upon the ethics of justice and care. “[T]he care perspective assesses moral conduct in terms of such values as care, friendship, and appropriate trust, which are not themselves reducible to a consideration of rights or rules. Selves are conceived as rational, embedded, partial, interdependent, and historically situated. Morality is a matter of values, virtues, and vices, which are not unpacked in terms of hierarchically ordered, ahistorical principles of justice” (Warren, *Ecofeminist Philosophy* 106). Code borrows Conley’s phrase “*a way of inhabiting the world*” (200), emphasis original, to render this type of thinking, and she relates it to values such as “*integrity . . . ‘consistency, coherence, and commitment’*” (202), emphasis original. Warren develops that idea, claiming that

Caring relations initiate human beings into the kind of interpersonal relationships and cultural awareness that full moral concern requires – both the commonalities and the differences among humans, humans and nonhuman animals, and human cultures. Rather than focus moral discussion on the basic value of equality . . . care focuses moral discussion on the basic value of care about others – others acknowledged as both similar and different. It affirms that human society should strive to enhance the quality of care in the world, including the nonhuman natural world, rather than the quality of equality through sameness. (*Ecofeminist Philosophy* 142)

Furthermore, Vance cites Marti Kheel’s words that “‘we cannot even begin to talk about the issue of ethics unless we admit that we care (or feel something)’ (The Liberation of Nature, 144)” (183). This happens because “many of us understand caring as intrinsic to our moral agency. For example, Carol Gilligan discusses the approach to morality in which ‘responsibility signifies response, an extension rather than limitation of action. Thus it connotes an act of care rather than the restraint of aggression’ (Gilligan 1982, 38)” (Luke 313). Drawing upon the notion developed by Robin S. Dillon, Antonio proposes an ethical theory based on care and respect.

. . . “respect” has been defined as attentiveness to both the mutual interests of and the differences between human and nonhuman animals . . . . “Care” is the desire to preserve the existence and to promote the good . . . in our active moral response to their needs . . . . Our desire for their continued existence directs our moral will to act respectfully on their behalf, even though the care can never be fully reciprocated in kind. (215)

In other words, “caring is best defined as a state of consciousness and a form of behavior, each inextricably linked to the other” (Vance 184). Among other components of care, Vance enumerates nurture, protection and training as well as “attention both to the individual and its environment” (184). According to Leopold, “[a]n ethic may be regarded as a mode of guidance for meeting ecological situations so new or intricate, or involving such deferred reactions, that the path of social expediency is not discernible to the average individual . . . . Ethics are possibly a kind of community instinct in-the-making. All ethics so far evolved rest upon a single premise: that the individual is a member of a community of interdependent parts. His instincts prompt him to compete for his place in that community, but his ethics prompt him also to co-operate” (“Land Ethic” 203–204). And further: “[a] land ethic, then, reflects the existence of an ecological conscience, and this in turn reflects a conviction of individual responsibility for the health of the land. Health is the capacity of the land for self-renewal. Conservation is our effort to understand and preserve this capacity” (Leopold, “Land Ethic” 221). Appropriately, he notices that:

Philosophy, then, suggests one reason why we cannot destroy the earth with moral impunity; namely, that the “dead” earth is an organism possessing a certain kind and degree of life, which we intuitively respect as such. Possibly, to most men of affairs, this reason is too intangible to either accept or reject as a guide to human conduct. But philosophy also offers another and more easily debatable question: was the earth made for man’s use, or has man merely the privilege of temporarily possessing an earth made for other and inscrutable purposes? (Leopold, “Conservation in the Southwest” 95)

Leopold elaborates this thought, claiming persuasively that “[w]hen any one part lives by depleting another, the state of health is gone . . . . Culture is a state of awareness of the land’s collective functioning. A culture premised on the destructive dominance of a single species can have but short duration” (“Land-Use” 300). Leopold argues that “[c]ivilization is not, as they often assume, the enslavement of a stable and constant earth” (“The Conservation Ethic” 183). He adds that “[a]n ethic to supplement and guide the economic relation to land presupposes the existence of some mental image of land as a biotic mechanism. We can be ethical only in relation to something we can see, feel, understand, love, or otherwise have faith in” (Leopold, “The Land Ethic” 214). Developing this theme, Leopold argues:

A land ethic of course cannot prevent the alteration, management, and use of these ‘resources,’ but it does affirm their right to continued existence, and, at least in spots, their continued existence in a natural state. In short, a land ethic changes the role of *Homo sapiens* from conqueror of the land- community to plain member and citizen of it. It implies respect for his fellow-members, and also respect for the community as such. (“The Land Ethic” 204), emphasis original

Following this line of thinking, O'Donoghue's poem "Path Findings" operates around the concept of ethical relations with the land, animate and non-animate beings. Structurally, "Path Findings" is composed of a series of the loosely linked animal and plant images that make up the narrative's mosaic construction. Brendan O' Sullivan and Karen Ray from Cork University emphasise that:

. . . a full understanding of landscape character can probably only come about through an assessment of landscape *values*. These are often the more intangible elements of landscape. They may manifest themselves as something quite concrete and coherent, like a treasured view, or a scattering of physical traces of a particular historic area. And yet they may be completely abstract, like those attached to myth, legend, or even memory and a sense of place. (221), emphasis original

The poem "Path Findings" is organised through the perspective of a land ethic and landscape values, according to which O'Donoghue evokes the four mental pictures of the natural world and contemplates them being altered (or more precisely impaired) by the human intervention. Such a caring attitude derives from the emergence of an ecological self, "empowered to act on the behalf of other beings – or on the behalf of the larger whole – and the empowerment itself seems to come 'through' that or those for whose sake one acts" (Macy qtd. in Warren, *Ecofeminist Philosophy* 32). Hence "[t]o care empathetically about the person, the species, and the great family of all beings, about the bioregion, the biosphere, and the universe is the framework within which ecofeminists wish to address the issues of our time" (Sprenak 12). In accordance with that idea, the first sequence of "Path Findings" depicts the skeletal framework of a plant consumed by fire:

The skeleton  
of a fern,  
like a lizard  
burnt down  
to black bones.

(T 34)

In O'Donoghue's poem, the equating of the plant's death in fire to that of an animal (who might have been killed in flames as well) advocates for the unity of all beings in the natural world. Like the rest of "Path Findings," the cited passage is linguistically and structurally well-composed. The stanzas, cut into the lines consisting of short expressions, or even one word, leave space for the much appreciated silence. They encourage meditation on the reasons for and the purpose of the human-induced transformations and the alleged improvements in the natural habitat. In the analysed poem, after almost every phrase, there is a pause that masterfully renders the joining of seeming dissimilarities. As a result, the subsequent images in "Path Findings" develop before our eyes slowly, as if accumulating or growing like organic entities:

A piece of sand-stone  
 the size of a scone  
 with an upper row  
 of teeth  
 embedded round its waist.  
 (T 34)

In the quoted fragment, the rock is connoted with the scone by its similarity in shape. Furthermore in "Path Findings," the sand-stone (split for its functional utility) and the textual phrases (discursively chopped into fragments) both bear the conspicuous traces of human interference. The line "teeth / embedded round its waist" personifies the rock as a living being whose bodily integrity has been violated:

An obsidian-coloured  
 slug,  
 ridden through  
 by a tricycle wheel,  
 looks like the sign  
 for "Bumpy Road".  
 (T 34)

Glittering with slime, black-tinged slug evokes associations with the volcanic lava. In its contrasting contours and colour, the snail's black dead body reminds O'Donoghue's speaker of the road sign warning cyclists of the forthcoming dangers. However in "Path Findings," the implied jeopardy refers solely to the animal kingdom which stands no chance of survival (see "ridden through") during its confrontation with people. Although the speaking voice in the analysed poem does not revert the narrative's viewpoint to that of the slug's, depicting the events from a human angle is even more dramatic, as it additionally emphasises people's indifference towards nature: "separated from the land by many middlemen, and by innumerable physical gadgets. He has no vital relation to it; to him it is the space between cities . . . . In short, land is something he has 'outgrown'" (Leopold, "The Land Ethic" 223–224). The persona in "Path Findings" records:

The glossy crow  
 interrupted,  
 dunking its chisel beak  
 among the fatty  
 pink beans  
 of a rabbit's giblets.  
 (T 34)

The poem's last image re-introduces a non-human perspective. Killing for food and consuming another animal is presented by O'Donoghue with no sentimentalised assessment. In "Path Findings," the crow eats the remains of the rabbit because it constitutes its food, no violence or aggression is involved in this act of dining, disturbed only by the onlookers' presence. This time the

human interference is not confined to a physical interruption. It also intrudes by imposing an anthropocentric (or more precisely androcentric) system of values with its own interpretation of beauty and notions of rightness. Despite these stereotypical cultural norms, in O'Donoghue's poem, the carnivore feeding on carrion looks stunningly captivating ("the glossy crow"), whereas the cuddly, furry rabbit is depicted as "fat, pink." Being the nourishment for predators, it constitutes an essential part of the food chain. As argued, "[h]uman hunter-prey situations are different from nonhuman animal predator-prey situations. When human hunters kill, they perform an action (i.e., a willed event) that is one among several possible alternative acts available to them. When nonhuman hunters kill, they perform a behaviour (not an 'act' or 'action') that is governed by instinct. As such, nonhuman animal predator-prey relationships, unlike human predator-prey relationships, are not moral relationships" (Warren, *Ecofeminist Philosophy* 132). Referring to people killing for entertainment, it has to be stressed that

In reality, hunters bear little resemblance to other predators in the natural world. The vast majority of animals who hunt do so for reasons of survival; in contrast to humans, most predators would not survive without meat. In addition, unlike other predators who kill only the weak or sick, hunters typically select the biggest and healthiest animals for their prey. (Kheel 96)

The poem "Path Findings" relies much on vowel – consonantal sound patterns: "pink beans" is almost echoed in the matching resonance of "chisel beak." The "r" sound from the "crow" is reiterated in "interrupted." The subsequent passage, on the other hand, has the "s – r" dyad (human versus nonhuman element). This nonhuman-connoted "s" will reappear in "sand-stone / the size of a scone," and it is repeated in "slimy" and in "obsidian," "slug" and "sign." The human-related sound "r" is restated in "ridden through / by a tricycle" and "road." Appropriately, the poem's mood is elegiac. Its pensive tone is rendered by numerous mournful alliterative devices ("burnt . . . to black bones"). In other words, in "Path Findings" it is the human interference, sometimes even people's very presence that affects, in most cases adversely, the natural ecosystem. In consequence, the ethical relation between the human and nonhuman environment is violated. Maybe that is why one needs to be constantly reminded of the derivation of the word "ecology:"

Since we are seeking an ecologically sustainable way of life, let's look at the word *ecology*. It comes from the Greek *oikos*, meaning "home," clearly an indication that home means much more than the nuclear family. As it is in the natural world, where all life is interrelated, teeming with diversity and complexities, so it is with everyday human life. (Plant, "Learning"133), emphasis original

In line with it, Plumwood highlights that anthropocentrism "treats nature as lacking continuity with the human and stresses the features which make humans different from nature, rather than those they share, as constitutive of human

identity. It leads to a view of the human as outside of and apart from a nature which is conceived as lacking human qualities such as mind and agency, these being appropriated exclusively to the human. Human virtue is often defined in terms of the exclusion of what is assimilated to nature or animality . . . . Identification and sympathy are blocked for those classed as nature, as Other” (“Androcentrism” 340). Appropriately in “Chert,” the textually merged persona (a woman and the titular type of the rock) appears to exemplify the re-combined land ethic. In other words, one cannot determine whether O’Donoghue’s speaker is compared to the multi-layered encrusted grounds or whether the sedimentary settlements are personified as a self-assertive woman. It looks that what reconciles these two possibilities is the Leopoldian resilient and tenacious energy that circulates in human and nonhuman toughened beings. What is more, “[t]he expanded Self (or ecological self) is continuous with the narrow self (or person), and totally dependent upon it. The Self is created by an identifying subject – ‘The ecological self of a *person* is that with which this *person* identifies’ (Naess 1988: 22, emphasis added)” (Milton 84). The voice in “Chert” argues that:

she is almost as hard  
 as obsidian ornaments  
 from Mesopotamian temples,  
 (ATW 46)

In O’Donoghue’s poem, the signifier “obsidian” evokes connotations with the darkness of the hardened magma. Linguistically, the way the referred to passage renders peeling off the outer boulder is ingenious. The word “wizen” introduces the dimension of the time-induced deterioration, leading to things being desiccated and shrunken. Consequently in the vein of time-based connotations, “wizen” seems to be applied here in its archaic sense as “weasand,” meaning the trachea (*CED*). Then, it denotes the anatomical windpipe, an insects’ respiratory system or even plant vessels. In “Chert,” one cannot but admire how the carefully selected idiom fuses (on its very literal and lexical level) many relevant meanings, blending the “natural and cultural creations” into a single discourse’s derivational root. In “Poetry in Hard Times,” Pat Boran draws an apt comparison: “Good poets work like gardeners with the language; they meet it as a living thing and feel it change and grow and wither and seem to die but then, miraculously, spring to life again, with the passing of the lines, the stanzas, the days and months and years” (10). In addition, O’Donoghue’s poem’s graphical layout resembles the sedimentary structure, with the subsequent coatings put on one another:

tough as chert flakes  
 that shaved the wizen  
 of membrane from wild hides,  
 (ATW 46)



Of an evening when the sky flushed  
 With the pinky-ness of squashed toes,  
 Someone tracking the spoor  
 Of crackawlee goats across the Burren  
 Came across it in the dusk. Titanic.  
 A bronze erratic,  
 Brazen and jeering at the sky.  
 A gigantic thumb.

(T 38)

In “Colossus on the Rocks,” what follows after the vocal gratification is a series of thematically joined images. In the examined poem, they relate ironically to the Irish context (see “Titanic”), at the same time, alluding to its legendary and communal function (see the pun on “bronze” and “brazen”). In the cited fragment, the modifier “erratic,” signifying a random (even anomalous) changeable quality and an aimlessly wandering vagrant, also possesses a specific geological designation. Namely, it denotes the rock which was moved by the glacial shifts, hence, distinct in its form and structure from the neighbouring indigenous stone constructions (*CED*). In the vein of the mythological discourse, the discovered *menhir* seems to be portrayed as a bold, ancient wanderer with a scoffing appearance. The phrase “a gigantic thumb” brings the stone’s perplexing charm closer to the mundane reality. Not without amusement, the female voice in “Colossus on the Rocks” relates the social reception of the newly-found ancient stone:

When goggling crowds gathered  
 And *The Clare Champion* smashed tradition  
 To shriek lurid pre-millennial warnings,  
 The theories thickly sprouted.

(T 38)

Inspired by the Clare Champion’s astonishing disclosure, profuse hypotheses concerning the rock’s origin multiply. People’s speculations vary from the *menhir*’s being connoted with sexualised masculinity [“A *phallic* thumb, said someone who ogled / Every upright as a monument of manhood” (T 38)], through the Celtic alphabet-related scripture [“An *ogham* thumb? Someone **saw** in **its** / Striations a language, not the carved / Bend-lines of stubborn bones” (T 38)] to its presumed, almost organic and self-instigated development [“Someone else imagined it had grown / Like a gentian, unfurled itself and wriggled up / From a cleft in the pitted stone” (T 38)]. Completing this absurd list, the female speaker in O’Donoghue’s poem concludes derisively: “What no-one figured was that it had swam / And crawled here like a jumbo caterpillar” (T 38). Furthermore the thumb’s assumed ancient derivation reminds one of the (Greek? Irish?) mythological sagas in which the valiant warriors’ epics commemorated their brave deeds. The persona in “Colossus on the Rocks” notices:

Its owner was toppled to the stumps of his knees  
 After the earthquake in Rhodes. The feet of Helios



Chafe themselves in the dark  
 Under a school on a hill. His hand with the arrow  
 Sundered and spread in finger-morsels across the bay.  
 An intact thumb ended up beached on the Burren,  
 Tarnished and ludicrous in that belligerent tract  
 Of clint and grike.

(T 38)

In response to those speculations, the speaker in “Colossus on the Rocks” ridicules the alleged scientific value of the stone’s origin hypotheses. However accepting this discovery as a natural (and not human or supernaturally-induced) formation, seems to be beyond the sensation-seeking people’s conceptual apparatus. The rock’s Celtic derivation appears to be the nation’s most preferred option. The ironic conclusion that “the novelty has eroded” wittily renders the decline in the public’s interest and the soil erosion of the stone “polished to a mirror.” The female voice in O’Donoghue’s poem concludes:

These days the novelty has eroded.  
 Its thumbnail, polished to a mirror,  
 Reflects spinning rings  
 Of Celtic wedding carousers.

At night a shadow stops to thumb across folds of limestone,  
 Seventh-wonder shard probing secret slugged places of rock.

(T 38)

O’Donoghue’s narrative’s final image depicts a solitary Colossus, left on its own, with solely its shadow to keep it company. Hence in the examined poem, the mystery of “the seventh-wonder shard probing secret slugged places of rock” remains unsolved. The syntactic and sound mastery of the quoted phrase has to suffice as the reader’s recompense. And it certainly does. In conclusion, O’Donoghue’s “Colossus on the Rocks” bitterly reminds us that “we must find another relationship to nature besides reification, possession, appropriation, and nostalgia” (Haraway qtd. in Code 201). In this vein, the poem “Slugga” elaborates O’Donoghue’s speaker’s approach to the natural world. Situated between “the plateau” and “child-play” memories territory constitutes the textual location where an ethical relation needs to be developed from “love, respect, and admiration for land, and a high regard for its value” (Leopold, “The Land Ethic” 223). In the cited below passage, the expression “on a whin” (referring to the nonhuman beings, plants and rocks) seems to resemble, with good reason, the phrase “on a whim,” signifying the thoughtless destruction of the natural environment, spurred by the desire for a quick profit. In O’Donoghue’s poem, whinstone denoting a smooth and solid type of rock, usually of volcanic origin, brings back to mind the evoked lava-like slug (see “Path Findings” and also “Chert”) not to mention the stone connotations in “Colossus on the Rocks.” The speaker in “Slugga” argues:

The plateau of my child-play  
 was pocketed with sunken jaws  
 that opened and closed on a whin  
 Scraggy and ankleed like kid-goats,  
 we didn't make much of a lunch  
 when we slid into teeth right up to our ribs.

(T 53)

The female voice in "Slugga" recalls youngsters playing on an imaginary island, hiding in the clusters of the undergrowth, and swimming in the lake, regardless of the hazardous whirlpools. It is only when spending time unkempt that the speaker and her companions conceive of as the land as a living organism and of themselves as its integral part. Referring to human-natural interconnections, Milton reminds us that: "[t]his is a complex and ambiguous relationship variously expressed in at least four different ways: it (the object identified with) is *similar* to me (Naess 1988), it *is* me, (Livingstone 1981, Macy 1987), it is *part of* me (Naess 1989), *I* am part of *it* (Seed 1985)" (76), emphasis original. The persona in O'Donoghue's "Slugga" continues her recollections:

Clumped bushes made an island  
 to inveigle our crawl across the lake  
 and risk the suckle of three fabled eddies.

Thoughts of being guzzled down  
 into Loch Bunny's drowned bowels  
 kept us parallel, in the bellyless shallows.

(T 53)

Thus, the lake in "Slugga" appears for children to be a living and uncontrollable creature who might devour the dare-devils, absorbing them inside its pouch. The elements of danger and potential violent death come to the surface in the phrase "Loch Bunny's drowned bowels." In the quoted fragment, the syntactically elaborate expression "kept us parallel, in the bellyless shallows" manifests how children learn to respect the boundaries of the natural world's territory and "preserve the integrity, stability" of their surrounding reality. This approach underlines that

The norm of biocentric equality is that all things in the biosphere have an equal right to live and blossom, to reach their own individual unfolding. The axiom of biocentric equality assumes that all entities in the ecosphere have equal intrinsic worth. It is related to the norm of self-realization in the sense that if we harm the rest of nature, we are harming ourselves. One implication of the norm of biocentric equality is that humans should live with minimum (rather than medium or maximum) impact on other species. (Warren, *Ecofeminist Philosophy* 84)

Consequently, the poem "Concerto" operates on the "ethic of flourishing," coined by Cuomo, and further explained as a "commitment to the value of flourishing, or well-being, of individuals, species and communities" (Warren,

*Ecofeminist Philosophy* 37). O'Donoghue's "Concerto" depicts the self-enhancing potential of that reinforcing notion. The poem's mood is permeated with a respectful exploring of the natural world, taking place on many levels, since as its musical name suggests, it involves a piece of music performed by solo artists, accompanied by the orchestra. "Concerto" opens with the performative, bodily presentation "of hands flung in a dance, / a frantic raking." The stage is framed with the falling leaves:

The window, leaf-filled, is a picture  
of hands flung in a dance,  
a frantic raking and combing of air.

(ATW 16)

What follows in O'Donoghue's poem is the combined participation of other nonhuman artists: "the raccoon couple / staggery as drunks, / navigate back to their souterrain pad" (ATW 16). Trying to reach their underground hiding, the animals in "Concerto" look alarmed on entering human territory: "There's a desperation of claws on wood" (ATW 16). Apart from the elements of choreographic movement, the raccoons in the examined text produce clattering and shuffling sounds, followed by the subsequent reverberations: "The night hiccups, then holds its breath" (ATW 16). Soon other creatures' voices join in:

But there is nothing so flagrant  
as the frogs in Virginia, detonating  
their desire in bawdy fat burps,  
  
an orchestra of eructation.  
They throw their voices over  
the bridge. A she-frog audience is agog.

(ATW 16)

In "Concerto," the shameless frogs, blatantly "**d**etonating their **d**esire in bawdy fat burps," make up "an orchestra of eructation." During their clamorous performance, they emit bodily gases and lustful noises to the enthralled reception of their potential sexual partners. The vein of ecstatic animal moaning is further underlined in the linguistic pun of "sexophones" (instead of saxophones), as well as "eructation," rhyming with "ejaculation." To render this melodious and polyphonic effect, O'Donoghue applies various onomatopoeic expressions (i.e. "burp," "hewling and mowling" or "ululating"). In "Concerto," alliterative expressions are also employed, though not excessively (e.g. "so **f**lagrant / as the **f**rogs"). Some words rhyme with each other unexpectedly, as "frog – agog." In the cited passage, the modifier "flagrant" seems to be a mocking pun on "fragrant," in its reference to the odour discharged by the boisterous amphibians. The persona in O'Donoghue's poem recalls:

Going back further, other summers,  
to cats on the hot slate roofs  
of Kilkeedy. They shredded our sleep

with their hewling and mowling,  
ululating worse than Huxley's  
sexophones.

(ATW 16)

Loudly expressive amorous voices in "Concerto" seem to amplify O'Donoghue's speaker's unsettled mood. The ear-piercing frogs' sounds remind the female voice of the noises produced by her mating cats in Ireland. The home country brought to mind strikes her with a note of nostalgic grief. The homesick speaker's longing comes to the surface of the discourse when she looks back:

... We opened the window

to reprimand them, and filled  
the room with their rallentandum,

the indignation of Jaffa, Felix, seated

on the capstone like a randy pillar saint.

(ATW 16)

It appears that in "Concerto," together with the homesickness of the persona's recollections, there comes a yearning for her absent partner and the life that they had together in Ireland. Listening to the cats' concerto in the company of her lover did not seem to upset O'Donoghue's speaker. Their cats (Jaffa and Felix) are compared to the "randy pillar saint," which makes a wittily oxymoronic expression, connoting religious discourse ("pillar saint"), sexual craving and nature's holiness – all in one phrase. Once abroad, the shared memories evoke in the persona in "Concerto" the need to employ the plural pronoun "we" and narrate the textual lover's presence back into her discourse. Remaining the sensuous concerto's a lone recipient, the female voice in the analysed poem feels painfully excluded from the orchestrations of the nature's cyclic renewal. Intertextually, the reference to Tennessee Williams' *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* seems to disclose O'Donoghue's speaker's discomfort arising from being a solitary listener to the natural world's vivacious symphony of life.

Ethically, focusing on the tree imagery, the poem "Snow-Bones" advocates an unthreatened existence for all living beings. "The ecofeminist's task is one of developing the ability to take the place of the other when considering the consequences of possible actions, and ensuring that we do not forget that we are all part of one another" (Plant, "Searching for Common" 156). In O'Donoghue's poem, the birches are represented through a personifying simile which constitutes a fusion of the Anglo-Saxon "prom queens" and the Celtic "triple-tied" Irish sovereign goddesses. Accordingly in the quoted fragment, the snow garment that the birches are clad with functions both as defensive "sheath frocks" and a protective embellishment (see the alliterated "gossamer / gloves"). In the text, the expression "to the tips / of their limbs" evokes the unity of both the human and the nonhuman realms. The speaker in "Snow-Bones" relates:

the birch trees presided  
 like triple-tied prom queens  
 at the snow ball.  
 Stitched into glistening  
 sheath frocks, gossamer  
 gloves to the tips  
 of their limbs.

(ATW 20)

In “Snow-Bones,” with its comparative ground, the temporal division into the “last night” and “today” appears to mark a shift into the human-centred perspective. One may wonder whether the expression “three lanky dowagers” refers to the birches or to the widows. It looks that in the studied poem the resolution does not need to be an “either / or” question. On the contrary, while showing the natural world as interconnected, the poet achieves an ethical effect of the shared ecosphere. Each phrase that O’Donoghue’s persona employs acts upon the double human – nonhuman meaning (see “stoop” or “rooted / to their spot”). In “Snow-Bones,” the adjectives of physical attributes (i.e. “lanky” and “raw boned,” rendering the agents’ slender composition) work in both of the above-referred to contexts:

three lanky dowagers  
 stoop towards each other,  
 tuttling their stories.  
 Raw boned, rooted  
 to their spot.

(ATW 20)

The cited here passage constitutes a daring linguistic experiment; each subsequent word is rich with the vivid visual connotations, pleasing to the ear with its alliterative rhythm [“Breeze / grazes the ganglions / of their shoulders, / leaves an afternoon’s arthritis” (ATW 20)]. O’Donoghue’s poem “Snow-Bones” ends with lyrical tones and epigrammatic phrases, condensing a day’s evanescent ambience into the tangibility of linguistic concreteness: “Evening, / a softening / of snow-bones” (ATW 20). Despite its title, the poem “Go-Summer” contemplates September imagery and the melancholy of “Just Autumn” days. O’Donoghue’s narrative commences with a disconsolate representation of the wounded meadows, sore with burns that need to be covered with “gauze” (mist?) dressing. The whole natural world in “Go-Summer” looks maimed and sore; its inhabitants suffer because of the unethical activities of humans. “In short, a land ethic changes the role of *Homo sapiens* from conqueror of the land-community to plain member and citizen of it. It implies respect for his fellow-members” (Leopold, “The Land Ethic” 204), emphasis original. In addition, the soothing “glycerine” sounds ambiguous in that context, as it is not clear whether it refers to the previous expression “gauze / and the glycerine,” or whether it designates the modifying adjective for trees. In the quoted fragment, the expression “wear

moulting periwigs” seems to capture well the transient autumnal foliage to be shed soon. The persona in O’Donoghue’s poem admits:

Just Autumn. Burnt lawns  
are patched with gauze  
and the glycerine trees  
wear moulting periwigs.

(ATW 19)

In “Go-Summer,” by suggesting the fur shed by animals or post-summer dried vegetation, the surreal image of “air is draped / with hairs” stirs the imagination, encouraging one to ponder its derivative origin. Appropriately, the verb “noose” implies both safeguarding measures and entrapment (especially with regard to the animal world) but combined with the attributive haphazard (see the sound similarity to “hazard”), it points more to the latter meaning:

September air is draped  
with hairs that noose  
the flies from their  
haphazard trails.

(ATW 19)

Signifying preposterous jabber, O’Donoghue’s poem’s last noun appears to hint at the non-linear dream logic that may govern the narrative’s structure. It is only on closer examination that one can appreciate how in “Go-Summer” all these textual images smoothly evolve into one another. Namely, the entanglement of the “hairs” in the last stanza turns into a neat cobweb (see “a mesh of cable / for small spiders”) evincing the ethical and secure coexistence of all the world’s beings. What is more, the sound of “mesh” reminds one of the interrelated web’s fragile fabric, so easily dispatched and torn apart. It happens because the “world is an interconnected web of life that is better understood by reference to its complex relationships than by detailed descriptions of its isolated components” (Howell 8). As stressed by environmentalists, there can be no ethical relation to the natural world without acknowledging the “interconnected web of life” and its right to uninterrupted existence:

It’s a mesh of cable  
for small spiders’  
morning gossip.  
The blatherskites.

(ATW 19)

The persona in “Poem On Going Home” observes through the bus window how the natural world in twenty-first century Ireland is being changed and relegated by the contemporary cultural constructs. O’Donoghue’s narrative probes familiar travel routes and place names against the context of the recently altered Irish landscape and the different situation of the animals resulting from it. In the article “Standardizing Terminology for Landscape Categorization: an Irish

Agri-environment Perspective,” Jackie Whelan, John Fry and Stuart Green write:

The landscape of Ireland is multi-dimensional, reaching deep into the soil and rocks of the ground and embracing all of our heritage, the diversity of nature and the diversity of the marks and manifestations of humans (Aalen et al., 1997). It is experiential – experienced through all our senses (O’Regan, 2008). The landscape is . . . a resource book of incomparable richness, though we have been accustomed to consult only a few pages. It belongs to all and it cannot survive unless all care for it . . . . Everything in our landscape has historical roots and even the most recent examples of landscape features are part of a long chain of events that stretches back across centuries. The Irish landscape is a *palimpsest* containing differential traces of successive . . . modification. (201), emphasis original

“Poem On Going Home” construes the travelling narrative recorded during the poet’s journey to her parents from Ceannt Station through Oranmore, Clarinbridge, Kilcolgan to Ardrahan. As the bus moves, O’Donoghue’s persona passes the “bogs and marshes,” giving way to the rapidly expanding new densely populated areas. In the poem, the rural views formerly common in Ireland (such as the cattle on the grazing land) look more and more unfamiliar these days, and, thus, they are perceived with detachment (see “the speculum of a zoom lens”). The female voice in “Poem On Going Home” enumerates:

I am hard-pressed to believe  
 In a housing complex  
 On the reesky hem of her outer skirts.  
 I’d give them a decade  
 Before they subside into the fen  
 And their windows peek out  
 Between fronds at the blur  
 Of cars whizzing by.

(T 40)

Despite the country’s fast urbanization, the speaker in O’Donoghue’s poem seems to anticipate the decline of the building construction industry, its “subsiding into the fen,” with the vegetation overflowing the foundations of the new building areas.<sup>80</sup> In that ironic way, the nature’s cycle would be completed: the fens once were replaced by the houses and now human abodes are becoming overgrown by wetlands again. In this way, in “Poem On Going Home,” nature reclaims its unfairly appropriated territories. O’Donoghue’s persona plays with the meanings of words. “Reesky” connotes the displeasing quality of the clamouring sound, but it also alludes to the “reeking” stink and a verbal pun on “risky.” Apart from other meanings, “hem” denotes the sound of clearing one’s throat, implying the speaker’s nervousness and diffidence. Textually, “her outer

<sup>80</sup> Or the female speaking voice might be referring here to the gradual deterioration of the observed couple’s relation.

skirts" is a double entendre on the outskirts. The female voice in "Poem On Going Home" continues:

I nestle into a comfort  
 Stitched from swatches  
 Of well-rubbed conversation.  
 Curving past the border sign,  
 I don't need to be told this is home.  
 A scalloped range of limestone hills  
 Collaring our clachan.

(T 42)

For O'Donoghue's speaker, everything connoted with "home" evokes affirmative associations of safety, cosiness, warmth and care. To render these positive connotations, the persona in "Poem On Going Home" employs the imagery derived from the natural world. She visualises herself as a bird in a nest patched together from various fragments, each fitting perfectly in its place. The female voice in the examined passage conceives of her nearby surrounding "locality she grew up as the Gaelic-stemmed "our **clachan**"<sup>81</sup> (echoing alliteratively with "Curving past" and "Collaring"). Hence "the individual is a member of a community of interdependent parts. His instincts prompt him to compete for his place in that community, but his ethics prompt him also to co-operate" (Leopold, "Land Ethic" 203–204).<sup>82</sup> O'Donoghue's persona records:

A pastured cow  
 With bluebell anklets  
 Arcs her rusty tail in a question mark,  
 Heaves her back to release  
 A calf-loaded belly  
 Onto the levelled grass.  
 "Sheez, honey, you can see that?"  
 The speculum of a zoom lens  
 Homes in on her public anguish.

(T 41)

In the cited passage of "Poem On Going Home," the speaker takes note of the cow on the grazing land who is worn out with pregnancy. The female voice in O'Donoghue's poem looks embarrassed to be an accidental witness of the animal's "public anguish." On the whole, the animal in labour observed from a bus window becomes an unfamiliar sight that induces in the travellers mixed

<sup>81</sup> In the article "Language and Landscape of Ireland," James McCabe explains the root Gaelic meaning of the word (52). Whelan, Fry and Green in "Standardizing Terminology for Landscape Categorization: an Irish Agri-environment Perspective" remind us that "*clachans* developed where a lease on marginal land was taken out by a number of people who agreed to farm in common; basically a nucleated group of farmhouses resulting in people living in a small town land without the characteristic features of a village. This rundale system of communal farming bore a very striking resemblance to the open field farming of the Middle Ages" (203).

<sup>82</sup> Much in agreement, Leopold claims that "[e]cology is the science of communities, and the ecological conscience is therefore the ethics of community life" ("Ecological Conscience" 340).



emotions and reactions. Some passengers feel uncomfortable and bashful while being exposed to this view, which was previously not unusual, and yet now it seems shocking to them (vide “Sheez, honey, you can see that?”). Others observe the cow giving birth with sensationalism. Due to their cameras (see “The speculum of a zoom lens / Homes in on her”), the labouring animal’s pain is turned into a performative spectacle, digitally recorded for human entertainment. O’Donoghue’s persona feels compassion for the animal’s suffering put on display for people’s inspection. However in a broader sense, there is more to the connection between women and cows than this. Griffin explores this correspondence in *Women and Nature*:

[a] cow . . . stands in the midst of her own soft flesh, her thighs great wide arches, round columns, her hips wide enough for calving, sturdy, rounded, swaying, stupefied mass, a cradle, a waving field of nipples, her udder brushing the grass, a great cow, who thinks nothing, who waits to be milked, year after year, who delivers up calves, who stands ready for the bull, who is faithful, always there, yielding at the same hour, day after day, that warm substance, the milk white of her eye, staring, trusting, sluggish, bucolic, inert, bovine mind dozing and dreaming, who lays open her flesh, like a drone, for the use of the world. (67)

O’Donoghue’s poem “Cattle Cars” portrays a much less idealised vision of rural Ireland than the one depicted in “Poem On Going Home.” Instead of the countryside seen from a bus window, one gets an inside glimpse into the reality of the farm life: “The newspaper ad requests / Dead And Worn-Out Animals / And guarantees / Daily Collection” (T 9). What is more, the poem “Cattle Cars” contains international references examined with regard to human-animal correspondences. In O’Donoghue’s narrative, the bodies of the dead animals collected from the Irish farmers are compared to the Kosovars war casualties piled on the same vehicle types. “As war tears the Balkans apart, and nationalism and racism resurge all over Western and Eastern Europe, the connections and continuities in Western thinking about animals and about humans become apparent in new and startling form” (Kappeler 324). In “Cattle Cars,” the farm animals are perceived by humans through their utility. Hence when because of illness or old age, they become incapable of fulfilling their prescribed functions, the cattle are to be collected as redundant garbage. O’Donoghue’s poem depicts in full detail the conditions in which “the disposable” animals are kept: abandoned and neglected, crammed in their own faeces, manure and dirt (see “muck-crusted legs jut and splay / At brittle graceless angles,” “eyes / flash glassy,” “hoiked up by the legs,” “its matted breadth”) before their final “collection.” In the examined text, the bleak euphemism “collection,”<sup>83</sup> employed by the advertisement, attempts to conceal the animals’ transport to the slaughterhouse and their death:

<sup>83</sup> Compare the language in Kazuo Ishiguro’s *Never Let Me Go* where the clones’ death is referred to as the third or final “donation.”

Muck-crusted legs jut and splay  
 At brittle graceless angles and  
 Huge here and there eyes  
 Flash glassy as navy marbles  
 Between gaps in the wooden slats.  
 This one is hoiked up by the legs.  
 Her slack belly settles  
 And spreads its matted breadth  
 Across two other heads.

(T 9)

On the whole, the “collected” farm animals are portrayed in “Cattle Cars” as deprived of their individuality, distinctive species features and subjecthood. They are even denied their brutish and organic roots, as it is advised to regard them as machines. *Hog Farm Management* 1976 recommended to farmers that they should: “[f]orget the pig is an animal. Treat him just like a machine in a factory . . . . Breeding season like the first step in an assembly line. And marketing like the delivery of finished goods” (qtd. in Luke 308). And the collection of the animal bodies, as depicted by O’Donoghue, constitutes the last stage of the process. Comparing the situation of the “collected” cattle with that of the war casualties in Kosovo, one can observe clearly that

The language of international law, of the conventions on war crimes and the prevention of genocide, is the language of power and dominance. Be the aim the protection of endangered peoples or the protection of endangered species, the fundamental presupposition remains that a moderate, “lawful” amount of killing may take place . . . . The aim is not to put an end to the slaughtering, the aim is to moderate slaughtering, slaughtering “within limits”: permitted murder of individuals within a prohibition to exterminate the entire species. (Kappeler 326)

As shown in O’Donoghue’s poem, slaughtering of the livestock that are no longer considered as productive appears to have been relegated, to a large extent, beyond ethical borders or legal protection. It happens because “[i]n dominationist fantasies, animals are good or bad, depending on whether they function usefully as instruments to humans ends and /or property. Like women in sexist fantasies, animals are seen as having no individuality, no significant life-plan, no preferences, and ultimately, no real concerns . . . the core assumption [is] that animals are mere objects” (Vance 168). The female voice in “Cattle Cars” perceives the killing of both Kosovars and the Irish farm animals as the elimination of expendable creatures whose fate interests nobody:

Sky News pummels the room  
 With smuggled footage. A trailer  
 Of villagers fractioned into bits  
 Of gristle and dangling sandals.  
 A mess of shattered Kosovars  
 Gathered in heaps on the cattle cars.

(T 9)

Following this line of thinking, Plumwood explains the rationalised arguments that people provide to justify their instrumental approach towards nature:

Nature's agency and independence of ends are denied and are subsumed in, or remade to coincide with, those of the human . . . . Since it has no agency of its own and is empty of purpose, it is appropriate that the colonizer impose his own, and nature can only have purpose and value when it is made to serve the human colonizer as a means to his ends. Since there are no moral limits, expediency is the appropriate morality. ("Androcentrism" 341)

Purposefully, both the collection of the dead animals and the war in Kosovo are viewed by O'Donoghue's speaker as entering directly into her immediate surroundings. In other words, in "Cattle Cars," the persona does not wish to separate herself behind the glass of the TV screen or the newspaper's distance. Ethically, she voluntarily renounces any signs of comfortable isolationism. Inglis admits that "[p]ictures and personal stories do more than anything else to develop a sense of humankind. Pictures make identification with other members of humankind easier" (76). Nonetheless, the question arises as Inglis puts it: "Can we develop a common sense of humanity, a sense of belonging to humankind, through mediated messages?" (76).<sup>84</sup> Bearing this all in mind, King, drawing upon Cheney, advocates the "relocation of nonhuman nature into the ethical space of the moral community" (93). In other words,

Precisely what we learn about the world depends on how we, as individual organisms, engage with it . . . . This diversity of experience means that some people think of nature, or parts of nature, as composed of personal agents, while others see it as a complex of impersonal objects and mechanisms. It means that some people think of non-human animals as resources for human use, while others see them as non-human persons worthy of moral concern, or respect, or punishment. (Milton 148)

Broadly speaking,

Most ethical theories about animals reflect one of three ideological positions, each corresponding to one of these narratives: (1) humans have a right to exploit animals, and therefore either minimal or no obligations toward them; (2) humans have a right to exploit animals, but only to the extent that such exploitation will provide the greatest (human) benefit in the long run; and (3) humans have no right to exploit animals or to dominate nature, since we are merely a component part of nature, and to ignore that fact will lead us to our doom. (Vance 167)

---

<sup>84</sup> It seems questionable whether it is at all "possible to develop a sense of care and moral responsibility for someone without developing a social relationship" (Inglis 29). That is why Inglis reminds that "the world becoming one place . . . also involves an increasing awareness of humankind, of all of us belonging to the human family"(28), and one might add, to not only the human but to the whole natural milieu. Virginia Held argues that "[c]are ethics includes concern for transforming the structures within which the practices of care take place so that they are no longer oppressive, as well as recommendations for reflecting and enacting the values of care in political institutions and relations between cultures" (51).

O'Donoghue's poem "Hidden Lives: Hens" belongs to the first category of the human-animal relation: it portrays poultry bred solely for meat. As stressed by ecofeminists, farm animals are usually valued below wildlife and much lower than pets kept at home: "Human rights for chimpanzees? Yes. Human rights for chickens? Meaningless" (Davis 196). What is more, even some environmentalists do not always see any ethical wrong in the denying subjectivity to farm animals: "Not only men but women and animal protectionists exhibit a culturally conditioned indifference toward, and prejudice against, creatures whose lives appear too slavish, too boring, too stupidly female, too 'cowlike'" (Davis 196):<sup>85</sup>

According to Callicott, the treatment of hens on a factory farm has not been morally important in the development of environmental ethics. Ecologically, this hen, like other domesticated "farm" animals, is not on a moral par with the authentic and autonomous creatures of the world . . . . Wild animals are metaphysically autonomous. Even caged animals retain metaphysical autonomy as "captive, not indentured, beings." But cows, pigs, sheep, and chickens? Veal calves and domesticated turkeys? Callicott asserts, "They have been bred to docility, tractability, stupidity, and dependency. It is literally meaningless to suggest that they be liberated" (Callicott 1980, 330). (Davis 200–201)

With the above in mind, O'Donoghue's "Hidden Lives: Hens" constitutes a new poetic genre: an ethical, environmental narrative. As Vance describes it: "the power of *conscious* narrative" can change "our attitudes toward nature" (176), emphasis original. One can sum it up as follows:

Good narrative – that is, narrative that can form the basis of an ethic that recognizes both individual and general others – requires more . . . (1) they should be ecologically appropriate to a given time and place; (2) they should be ethically appropriate in that time and place; (3) they should give voice to those whose stories are being told; and (4) they should make us care. (Vance 178–179)

In *conscious* writing, the logic of domination needs to be replaced with an ecofeminist ethic, this genre comprises "a kind of narrative about humans, human-human relationships, and human-nonhuman animal and nature relationships" (Warren, *Ecofeminist Philosophy* 99). Taking it into account, "Hidden Lives: Hens" criticises the unethical relations in stock farming. O'Donoghue's "*conscious* narrative" presents (female) farm animals' existence in a pseudo-documentary way (see the infotainment or mock-documentary form). The examined poem zooms in on the livestock that, in the common understanding, are not conceived of as feeling creatures, with the rights of their own that should be legally or ethically preserved:

---

<sup>85</sup> All in all, Davis challenges the cited position of environmentalists ("farm animals . . . lack the behavioral repertoire and élan vital of wild animals" 204), arguing that because of that "[m]orally . . . the blame is not on them; it is on us" (204).

As usual, farm animals are relegated to the wasteland of foregone conclusions, in which they are considered to be not only ecologically out of tune but too denatured and devoid of autonomy for human morality to apply to them. The recognition that human beings are specifically and deliberately responsible for whatever aberrances farm animals may embody, that their discordances reflect our, not their, primary disruption of natural rhythms, and that owe them more than less for having stripped them of their birthright and earthrights has not entered into the environmentalist discussions. (Davis 198)

Hence almost per definition people refuse to acknowledge the farm animals' self-governance or dignity, perceiving their only value through the marketing price for which they can be traded, dead or alive. Consequently, Adams writes that:

As Peter Singer points out, television programs about animals focus on animals in the wild rather than animals in the 'factory farms'; frequently the only information on these 'animal machines' comes from paid advertising. 'The average viewer must know more about the lives of the cheetahs and sharks than he or she knows about the lives of chickens or veal calves' (Singer 1990, 216). The majority animals dominated by humans no longer appear to be a part of nature; they are domesticated, terminated animals who are maintained in intensive farming situations until slaughtered and consumed. Perhaps as a result, some ecofeminists and most meat eaters simply do not see farm animals at all and thus cannot see them as a part of nature. ("Ecofeminism and the Eating" 121)

To render the way people tend to think of the stock animals, the female speaker in "Hidden Lives: Hens" imposes a defamiliarising perspective upon the hens' *conscious* narrative. The chicken's beastly aspect is manifested in the clashing bodily descriptions (see alliterated "scaly shins"). The pretentious anthropocentric approach is rendered in a mockingly stilted idiom. The cited affected utterances strengthen the sense of irony, as in "*al fresco*" for the outdoors, "cubby" for spatial confinement (see also the similarity with the cub: young ones). The wryly used collocations: "privacy" (sic) together with the action verb "deciding," intensify the poet's sarcasm, as if the farm animals were allowed to make any independent pronouncements about their living conditions. Linguistically and symbolically, in O'Donoghue's poem, the vegetation surrounding the hens appears quite distinctive.<sup>86</sup> One might assume that these plants are selected by the poet for their textual pun qualities. For instance, let us examine "foxglove," with the cunning "fox" root, and "alyssum," reminding one in its sound of the word "asylum." In the quoted fragment, the designation "flouncey" connotes the brisk, strutting walk and the folded embellishment of the poultry's plumage. The persona in "Hidden Lives: Hens" relates the details of the poultry's daily routine:

---

<sup>86</sup> The foxglove has healing properties; it is believed to cure heart problems. Alyssum, on the other hand, was thought to be effective in the treatment of rabies.

Eschewing the privacy  
of her hay-lined cubby,  
deciding to lay *al fresco* today,  
the tawny hen squats on her scaly shins  
between the foxgloves and the alyssum.  
From out of her flouncey behind,  
an egg plops onto the lawn.

(T 19)

The opening sequence's last line in "Hidden Lives: Hens" culminates with an egg being laid. The loud plopping sound brings back to the discourse hens' functional usability for humans. "Moral actions must flow not only from the capacity to perceive our interconnections with others, but also from our ability to acknowledge – to morally attend to – the plight of other living beings as separate and distinct from our own needs and desires" (Kheel 111). This happens when one accepts that "[r]espect for others involves treating them as worthy of consideration for their own sake and not just as an instrument for the carer's satisfaction" (Plumwood, "Nature, Self" 157). The female voice in "Hidden Lives: Hens" relates:

She ruthlessly hauls up earth's worms  
and guzzles them down in one go  
like fat tongue-coloured spaghetti.  
She mustn't forget to balance her diet  
with chippings, gravel, rarebits of shingle  
borne back from the beach in sandals cleats.  
When she's dead and open at both ends,  
a gummy skin purse  
will be snatched from her guts,  
bulging with flitters of stone.

(T 19)

O'Donoghue's second section is narrated from a similar defamiliarising angle. What is mocked here is imposing moral judgments (see "ruthlessly") on the animals' eating conducts ("she ruthlessly hauls up earth's worms"). One cannot fail to notice that there is more than a hint of the absurd in that correspondence. In the cited passage, the parallelism's subversive derision becomes evident in applying the idiom of a women's lifestyle magazine's health column with regard to the hen's own peculiar nutrition attempts "to balance her diet / with chippings, gravel, rarebits of shingle / borne back from the beach in sandals cleats." In "Hidden Lives: Hens," the surreal image of the hen's balanced diet is abruptly interrupted with this harsh phrase: "she's dead and open at both ends," highlighting the animal's ultimate fate (compare Curtin's phrase "carved up"). The speaker in O'Donoghue's poem bitterly remarks that when hens are killed, the unwanted contents of the dead chicken's insides are to be removed. In meat processing, the precious "treasures" collected by hens are ripped from them as useless inedible rubbish. The association of farm animals with the feminine gender is no accident in Western culture; "for example sexist-

naturist language, images of women and animals as consumable objects, pornographic representations of women as meat, male-perpetrated violence against women and nonhuman animals . . . the unjustified dominations, objectification, and commodification of women and nonhuman animals occur in mutually reinforcing and conceptually inseparable ways” (Warren, *Ecofeminist Philosophy* 126).<sup>87</sup> In the same vein, Curtin draws attention to the “pornographic representations of women as ‘meat’ ready to be carved up, for example in ‘snuff’ films.”<sup>88</sup> The third part of “Hidden Lives: Hens” commences as follows:

Hens  
 have a taste for holly.  
 She is four  
 and Christmas is over.  
 She is told to take the wreath  
 to a corner of the haggard,  
 and bears it on her chubby palms  
 like a funerary tribute.

(T 19)

In the third section, the female voice in “Hidden Lives: Hens” consistently lays bare humanity’s objectifying attitude towards farm animals. The phrase about hens having “a taste for holly” reverses the truth about people eating poultry for holidays (“She is four / and Christmas is over”). For chicken, the Christmas garland becomes a funeral wreath. As argued in O’Donoghue’s poem, farm animals are killed on a daily basis with no warning or without protests from anybody. All in all, “to care about an individual chicken in context means more than caring that it is being humanely treated while it awaits death; the context, in this case, must be extended beyond the immediate material circumstances of its existence to the larger ecological and ethical circumstances. In other words, narratives about chickens should make us care enough to put an end to meat-eating” (Vance 185). The persona in “Hidden Lives: Hens” concludes:

There is no warning squawrk.  
 A visitation of Vandal hens  
 tear holes in her palms  
 and when the berries are gone,  
 they take globules of blood

(T 19)

---

<sup>87</sup> As demonstrated earlier, Adams rightly reminds us that “ecofeminism argues that there is an important connection between the domination of women and the domination of nature” (116). To illustrate her point, Adams quotes one of the interviews with women conducted during her research: “Look at the way women have been treated. We’ve been completely controlled, raped, not given any credibility, not taken seriously. It’s the same thing with animals. We’ve completely mutilated them, domesticated them. Their cycles, their entire beings are conformed to humans’ needs. That’s what men have done to women and the earth” (“Ecofeminism and the Eating” 116).

<sup>88</sup> see Curtin (“Toward an Ecological” 75).

In O'Donoghue's *conscious* narrative, farm animals are slaughtered out of the public's sight. The last series of images in "Hidden Lives: Hens" renders people's speculations on hens' understanding of their approaching death. The examined poem terminates with the blood-soaked vision of the Vandal (human) raid, which reveals the unnecessary brutality that accompanies killing animals for food. Accordingly, Curtin points out that "[o]ne becomes violent by taking part in violent food practices. The ontological implication of a feminist ethic of care is that nonhuman animals should no longer count as food" ("Toward an Ecological" 76). Further, she elaborates this thought, arguing that "[t]o *choose one's diet* in a patriarchal culture is one way of politicizing an ethic of care. It marks a daily, bodily commitment to resist ideological pressures to conform to patriarchal standards, and to establishing contexts in which caring for can be nonabusive" (Curtin, "Toward an Ecological" 76), emphasis original. After all,

By the time the argument from analogy with carnivorous animals is made, the individual making such an argument has probably consumed animals since before the time she or he could talk. Rationalizations for consuming animals were probably offered when this individual at age of four or five was discomfited upon discovering that meat came from dead animals. (Adams, "Ecofeminism and the Eating" 124)

To conclude, when analysing "Hidden Lives: Hens," one may object to O'Donoghue's narrative's artificially imposed anthropocentric standpoint, depicting farm animals according to the established human standards and in relation to human norms. However in O'Donoghue's text what makes the speaking position feasible is a clearly detectable element of mockery, undermining the validity of the human-centred outlook. Plumwood argues that "[t]he structure of human-centeredness not only constructs nature as subordinate and as denied self; it constructs dominant human identity and virtue in those cultures which endorse it as the identity and virtue of the master" ("Androcentrism" 348).<sup>89</sup> On the other hand, due to the aforementioned parallels, "we care for ourselves, and whatever is a part of ourselves, by inclination, without the need for moral exhortation. Anyone who identifies with natural things, who sees them as a part of themselves, is therefore likely to feel inclined to protect them" (Milton 75). In "Hidden Lives: Hens," the depicted animals are like an exemplary Babe pig:<sup>90</sup> equipped with their own "needs and desires" and opinions to convey. By employing this strategy, the act of killing

---

<sup>89</sup> "If human-centeredness similarly structures our beliefs and perceptions about the other which is nature, it is a framework for generating ecological denial and ecological blindness in just the same way that ethnocentrism is a framework for generating moral blindness" (Plumwood, "Androcentrism" 344).

<sup>90</sup> Warren claims that "*Babe* problematizes the concept of pigs as meat. Understood as a being with wants, needs, and an ability to communicate, Babe is not 'just a pig'; that is, babe is not a consumable object, meat. Babe is an active subject, whom we may care about. Babe captures why so many humans find it difficult, if not impossible, to conceive of killing and eating those animals who are their 'pets' or who are named" (*Ecofeminist Philosophy* 138).



hens for food becomes morally and ethically dubious. And furthermore, “[c]aring and our construction of nature as an object of care are starting points, therefore, of moral inquiry, not something given with which moral theory can come to terms uncritically” (King, “Caring About Nature” 87). Doubts arise however whether making the heroine of O’Donoghue’s narrative human will not result in making the hen appear different from other representatives of her own species. Warren challenges the principle of what she defines as “justice as sameness” (*Ecofeminist Philosophy* 188, 142).<sup>91</sup> Paradoxical as it seems, Warren argues that one does not have to defend animals from human abuse by making them look similar to people. Antonio rightly reminds us that “‘respect’ has been defined as attentiveness to both the mutual interests of and the differences between human and nonhuman animals” (215). Located in Boston, O’Donoghue’s poem “Spectacle” explores another case study of violating ethical relations with the natural world. Namely, the examined poem renders the seasonal shipment of horses to be slaughtered. At first it might seem that horses in O’Donoghue’s poem are portrayed as passengers on shore, waiting to board their cruise before an exciting voyage. The phrase “awaiting their boat” implies a degree of agency on their part. However as the narrative proceeds, it becomes clear that the depicted animals are thought of as nothing more than defunct cargo to be transported to their final destination. The persona in “Spectacle” relates:

Awaiting their boat on the dawn wharf,  
Boston’s horses in summer smirred  
with mist, a pointless sweat  
on their dark lax flesh. Flies walk  
the jet moons of their eyes,  
get lost in the thickets of lashes.

(ATW 32)

In the analysed poem, the-about-to-be shipped horses are observed by the female speaker in an attentive manner. “Many feminists have emphasized the importance of the act of attention in helping to determine proper ethical conduct and thought . . . ‘women’s relational culture of caring and attentive love’ ‘provides the basis for a feminist ethic for the treatment of animals ([Donovan] 375)” (Kheel 109).<sup>92</sup> In O’Donoghue’s text, flies, waiting for the future carrion, circulate around the animals’ not yet decomposed bodies. Since the horses shown in “Spectacle” appear nearly dead, the boundaries of their selves look indistinct. In the cited passage, their formless silhouettes merge with the

---

<sup>91</sup> Warren advocates that “[r]ather than focus moral discussion on the basic value of equality based on the sameness of humans and nonhuman animals, care focuses moral discussion on the basic value of care about others – others acknowledged as both similar and different. It affirms that human society should strive to enhance the quality of care in the world, including the nonhuman natural world, rather than the quality of equality through sameness” (*Ecofeminist Philosophy* 142).

<sup>92</sup> In other words, “[a]ttention lets difference emerge without searching for comforting commonalities, dwells upon the *other*, and lets otherness be (121–22)” (Ruddick qtd. in Vance 184), emphasis original.

surrounding background, “smirred / with mist.” The animals’ fatigue<sup>93</sup> and their exposure to the sweltering summer sun produce “a pointless sweat.” Even before their slaughter, the horses’ proud figures give the impression of being turned into pulp (see “their dark lax flesh”). In O’Donoghue’s poem, the image of “flies walk / the jet moons of their eyes, / get lost in the thickets of lashes” renders both the vulnerable beauty and the horror of the animals to be slain. In “Spectacle,” it appears that the horse transportation takes place all the year round, and that each season animals have to suffer from numerous inconveniences. This happens because they are denied their subjectivity, being objectified by people’s mercantile approach:

It is clear that one of the main sources of the continuing atrocious abuse of animals by humans is an attitude that allows their reification or objectification. That ontology conveniently allows their commodification for mass-produced slaughter and their mechanization for laboratory experimentation. In fact, the reduction of animals to “its” is at the root of most animal’s abuse. The attribution of deadness to what is alive, conscious, and sensitive involves a psychology of denial that conveniently facilitates the interests of the powerful. Such denial unquestionably has allowed the great human atrocities of the century to occur, and such denial continues to allow unspeakable animal suffering to proceed as a commonplace norm. (Adams, “Introduction” 7–8)

The free market supported by the advances of science “served capitalism very well by depersonalizing nature and thus removing the sense of moral responsibility which might have hindered its exploitation” (Milton 136). In accordance with the above, the shipped in winter horses depicted in O’Donoghue’s poem become nothing more than the “frozen weight.” The natural continuity of their lives is “frozen,” struck by the apprehension of their forthcoming death, and it is suspended in the air. To remember them, the speaker in “Spectacle” focuses meticulously on the horses’ smallest details: “whiskered lips drawn back / in snarls from tobacco smokers’ teeth.” She attentively records how the animals’ countenance has been altered by the inhumane conditions of transportation. Vance argues that the “[a]wareness of and the sensitivity to the needs of the individual requires what Ruddick calls ‘attentive love’ . . . . Like empathy, it requires us to experience the other’s feelings as though they were our own, but without projecting our own feelings onto that other . . . . Nonetheless, attentive love requires more than simply asking, waiting, and hearing: it has to imply a commitment to action, and in particular, to the action

---

<sup>93</sup> Griffin explains that horses’ lack of immunity to pain is used in their training:

It is the horse’s extreme sensitivity to pain, especially in the mouth but also all over her body, which allows the rider to control her with the pressure of his own weight, the movements of his legs, and with the aid of the bit, the bridle and the rein, the riding whip, the long whip and the spur. . . . In addition, the horse has a prodigious memory, is a social animal, has a desire to please and a need for security, and all these qualities are used in her training. (*Woman and Nature* 77)

that will help preserve the other and let her flourish” (184). The speaker in “Spectacle” describes:

In winter, they are frozen weight,  
whiskered lips drawn back  
in snarls from tobacco smokers’  
teeth, so many dancers’ legs  
in rictus, grubby frilled  
socks for their fetlocks

(ATW 32)

In O’Donoghue’s poem, the well-proportioned hind legs of the horses (see “so many dancers’ legs”) employed earlier in the entertainment business (horse racing, circuses, horse-riding?<sup>94</sup>) are juxtaposed with the bleak “in rictus,” followed by the grime, degradingly deposited on the animals’ poised bodies (“grubby frilled / socks for their fetlocks”). Rendering their fate’s dramatic irony, the island’s own proper name, “Spectacle,” becomes an unintentionally sarcastic death-signifier of the destination where horses are to be slaughtered. The phrase “they meet / a filthy alchemy” shows the animals’ unavoidable destiny (compare the sound-similarity between “meat” and “meet”). The speaker in “Spectacle” concludes:

On Spectacle Island, they meet  
a filthy alchemy, spelled into  
hide, into barrels of tallow  
with the belching gloop  
of soft suet. A swathe of velvet  
neck or swaggery rump  
is spat back from tin  
tongues, spuming vats.

(ATW 32)

Temporarily relieved after their exhausting journey, the horses in O’Donoghue’s poem are soon to be turned “into barrels of tallow.” In the cited passage, the alliterated expressions “soft suet” and the onomatopoeic “belching gloop” contrast with the horrifying knowledge that the manufactured fat is extracted from around the horses’ bodily organs. In the examined fragment, the textual process reveals how these stunningly graceful (see “A swathe of velvet / neck”) and meek animals stop being perceived as suffering beings, long before they are transformed into the canned meat utilised by humans.

---

<sup>94</sup> Griffin points out to the horses’ bodily construction not suitable for human imposed work:

The horse is not designed for carrying weight; she has a structure similar to rectangular box with a leg at each corner, and the rider places his weight on the weakest part, the unsupported center. Her legs and feet are not designed for trotting on hard roads or galloping. And jumping is entirely unnatural to the horse. (*Woman and Nature* 77–78)

## 2.2. Mechanical Power versus Women's Eco-empowering Criticism in the Poetry of Caitríona O'Reilly

a single crow makes broken circles.  
(Caitríona O'Reilly, "The Harbour in January")

In "New Ireland's Poetics: The Ecocritical Turn in Contemporary Irish Women's Poetry," Jody Allen Randolph rightly notices that:

The nineteenth-century nature poem was a clearly understood genre in which 'nature' meant a landscape unaltered by humans. By the twenty-first century the nature poem is an umbrella term under which the very word 'nature' has ceased to be generally understood in the way it once was. It is now a troubled concept, fragmenting into smaller ideas against a backdrop of problematic new landscapes. But for all its trouble, the nature poem is nevertheless a vehicle through which Irish poets are seeking to find a new language for the enormous changes that have taken place in Ireland. New challenges to the historic genre have recently been issued by Irish women poets in particular who are insisting that the new and fissured realities of contemporary Ireland find continuity in Irish poetry. (56)

On the whole, critics would agree that the recent years' revival of the ecocritical outlook in Irish literature has clear roots in the country's changing economic and political situation. As pointed out by Randolph, "it isn't just landscape that was in danger in Tiger Ireland, but all that landscape represents in the history of a people. By recognising that material wealth and forms of progress were overwriting the past in Tiger Ireland, these poems became a protest against the cultural and historical amnesia that accompanied the prosperity of the boom years" (68). In view of that, Wenzell reads the ecocritical tendency in Irish literature as an "act of defiance against the lamentable excesses of the Celtic Tiger. Hand in hand with the desire for wealth and a comfortable way of life that includes, unfortunately, the rise of urban sprawl, many in Ireland now express a rising concern over the rich natural history that is being lost, and a firm desire to recover it" (138). Along this vein, Gerry Cahill in "The Altered Edge: the Impact of the Construction Boom on the Landscape of the Urban Periphery" published in Mianowski's collection (2012) *Irish Contemporary Landscapes in Literature and the Arts* also subscribes to this view, reminding us that:

Until 2008 the Republic of Ireland had experienced for over ten years an unprecedented economic boom. The residual 'spiritual value' of land and landscape as representing the culture amenity of our state was replaced by an ever more one-dimensional economic assessment where land as a 'commodity' was emphasized presenting increased opportunities for profit to amateur and professional developers alike. (183)

In line with both Randolph and Cahill, Wenzell perceives the Celtic Tiger's rapid economic changes as a threat that could: "undermine both the rich natural history of Ireland and the legacy of Irish nature literature" (125). He claims that "ecocritical perspectives bring the subject matter of the natural world, particularly in a twenty-first century filled with environmental concerns, onto the political stage" (Wenzell 127). Michael Starrrett, the Chief Executive of the Heritage Council Ireland, sums up the discussion as follows:

It is a truth almost universally acknowledged that serious damage to landscape and environment has been fuelled in the last decade by the turbo-charged development of this country. There is still time to act and to make a difference but we need to find a new way of working. There is still sufficient quality remaining in our rural, urban, and peri-urban landscape for us to be optimistic that we can treat those landscapes, the heritage they contain and ourselves more appropriately in the future. (198)

To some extent, one could argue that the increasingly louder voices of Irish ecocritical criticism are the desired "new ways of working" with the problem. In the article "Wings Beating on Stone: Richard's Murphy's Ecology," included in the study *Out of the Earth: Ecocritical Readings of Irish Texts* (2010), Eamonn Wall argues that:

Given that Irish poets have been so occupied with place and community and the fact that language and literary form can be seen in the Irish context to have evolved as a collaboration between humans and the natural world, it would seem that ecocriticism is ideally suited as a mode for reading Irish literature. In fact, one could argue that Irish writers, and Irish poets in particular, have exhibited measures of a collective ecological consciousness from ancient times to the present, notwithstanding ongoing obsessions with religion, politics and history. (18)

However, instead of simply being "tied to history, politics, or human society," one would opt in Irish poetry for the "perspective that each thing was connected to everything else, and every tree and bird carried a special significance" (Wenzell 135). Accordingly, Code reminds us that "[e]cology . . . draws the conclusions of situated inquiries together and maps their interrelations, and their consonances and contrasts, and their impoverishing and mutually sustaining effects" (201). In other words, "[e]cofeminist theory aspires to an integrated and intersubjective view of human life and society in / as part of nature" (Lahar 7). As a logical extension of this fact, one might view ecosystems as "networks of interacting individuals, populations, and communities or of interacting energy and nutrient flows and cycles" (Warren and Cheney, "Ecological Feminism" 253). Likewise in his work published as early as 1949, Leopold advocates that we "enlarge the boundaries of the community to include soils, waters, plants, and animals, or collectively: the land" (*Sand County* 204). Furthermore, he appeals to us "to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community" (Leopold, *Sand County* 224–225). Consequently, the

environmentalist argues that the civilization is “a state of *mutual and interdependent coöperation* between human animals, other animals, plants, and soils, which may be disrupted at any moment of by the failure of any of them” (Leopold, “The Conservation Ethic” 183), emphasis original. Following this line of thinking, Leopold warns us that:

In all climates the plant succession determines what economic activities can be supported. Their nature and intensity in turn determine not only the domestic but also the wild plant and animal life, the scenery, and the whole face of nature. We inherit the earth, but within the limits of the soil and the plant succession we also *rebuild* the earth – without plan, without knowledge of its properties, and without understanding of the increasingly coarse and powerful tools which science has placed at our disposal. (“The Conservation Ethic” 185), emphasis original

In other words, Leopold phrases his thought directly: “Ecology tells us that no animal – not even man – can be regarded as independent of his environment. Plants, animals, men, and soil are a community of interdependent parts, an organism. No organism can survive the decadence of a member” (“The Arboretum” 209). He sums up this idea, maintaining that:

Philosophers have long since claimed that society is an organism, but with few exceptions they have failed to understand that the organism includes the land which is its medium. The properties of human population, which are the joint domain of sociologist, economist, and statesmen, are all conditioned by land . . . . Conservation is a process against the destructive land use. It seeks to preserve both the utility and beauty of the landscape. (Leopold, “Land Pathology” 212)

Elsewhere Leopold defines conservation as “a state of harmony between men and land” (*Sand County* 207). He develops this idea, advocating that “[c]onservation is a state of health in the land-organism. Health expresses the cooperation of the interdependent parts: soil, water, plants, animals, and people. It implies collective self-renewal and collective self-maintenance” (Leopold, “Land-Use” 300). Moreover, Leopold further elaborates this thought, arguing that “[I]and is soil, water, plants, and animals. Each of these ‘organs’ of land has meaning as a separate entity, just as fingers, toes, and teeth have. But each has a much larger meaning as the component parts of the organism. No one can understand an animal by learning only its parts, yet when we attempt to say that an animal is ‘useful,’ ‘ugly,’ or ‘cruel’ we are failing to see it as part of the land” (“Wherefore Wildlife” 336). In the essay partly included in *Sand County Almanac*, Leopold proposes to replace the concept of “the balance of nature” with a notion of “the biotic pyramid” (“A Biotic View” 268). Following this line of thinking, Carol P. Christ argues that

Through our technologies, human beings have gained an awesome power. At first this seemed to many to be the ability to “control” nature . . . they followed modern science and said that “nature” was “mere matter” that could

be shaped by the rational powers of the human mind . . . they sometimes spoke of “Nature” (often personified as feminine) to be a “power” separate from “man,” intent on thwarting the project of human life on earth by causing the “natural evils” . . . they hoped that rational men could “tame” or “subdue” her power. Process philosophers, ecologists, ecofeminists, system theorists, and others are beginning to take a more holistic view of the web of life . . . .human beings do not stand outside nature or the web of life but are part of it. (*She Who Changes* 174)

Hence, a mechanical view of power and nature can be located in opposition to the ecological and holistic approach. In her seminal book *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology and the Scientific Revolution*, Merchant explicates this outlook:

Both order and power are integral components of the mechanical view of nature. Both the need for a new social and intellectual order and new values of human and machine power, combined with older intellectual traditions, went into restructuring of reality around the metaphor of the machine. The new metaphor reintegrated the disparate elements of the self, society, and the cosmos torn asunder by the Protestant Reformation, the rise of commercial capitalism, and the early discoveries of the new science. (234)

With regard to power and order, Merchant highlights that “[i]n the mechanical world, order was redefined to mean the predictable behavior of each part within a rationally determined system of laws, while power derived from active and immediate intervention in a secularized world. Order and power together constituted control. Rational control over nature, society, and the self was achieved by redefining reality itself through the new machine metaphor” (193). Taking it into account, Merchant sums up as follows: “[t]he domination of nature depends equally on man as operator deriving from an emphasis on power and on man as manager deriving from the stress on order and rationality as criteria for progress and development” (235). It appears that the most balanced advice on how to reorganise one’s approach to the natural world and human technology is outlined by Carol P. Christ:

When we recognize that our technology exists, as we do, within nature and not outside of it, we can also understand that we need radically to transform our consciousness concerning the purposes and limits of technology. We must give up the idea that technology enables us to “control nature” and thereby escape finitude. We need to recognize that every technological intervention brings life for some persons or beings, death for others. We must weigh each of our technologies in a scale that includes all beings in the circle of life. (*Rebirth* 154–155)

The above leads to the conclusion that ecofeminist discourse is not against technology *per se*.

. . . technology is integral to the human condition. Indeed, the story of human culture is to a large extent the story of human technology. It is the story not only of the fashioning of material tools but also of the fashioning of our most

important and unique non-material tools: the mental tools of language and imagery, of human-made words, symbols, and pictures. Advanced technologies are the extension of human functions, of our hands' and brains' capacity to alter our environment, and ourselves. Indeed, technology is itself part of the evolutionary impulse, the striving for the expansion of our potential as human beings within both culture and nature. (Eisler, "The Gaia" 32)

What it does oppose is the abuse being done to the natural world in the name of the so-called progress, as was the case in Ireland, especially in the times of the Celtic Tiger's rapid economic growth and technological expansion. As Randolph explains in the below-cited passage, this particular historical and cultural context needs to be taken into account in order to understand the recent popularity in Irish poetry, of the eco-critical standpoint and theoretical approach. She argues that:

Ironically, the nature poem, which did not thrive in Ireland as a meditative or transcendental form, shows signs of thriving as an ecocritical perspective, that is, as a series of questions and imaginings built on the genre of the nature poem but going beyond it to encompass risks to the environment and its inhabitants. . . . it is worth noticing that an extraordinary, interlinked series of phenomena is occurring in these recent poems. If we miss that wider context, we are likely to miss the very things that forced the urgency of the ecocritical argument. Written partially in the response to the economic boom that lasted from the mid-nineties through 2007, these poems are critical of an aggressive capital prosperity that was driving a form of cultural and historical memory loss as the new prosperity turned its back on the powerlessness and humiliation of its former poverty. (Randolph 56)

O'Reilly's cycle "Six Landscapes" depicts the consequences of disrupting the ecological balance by "[t]he mechanical framework with its associated values of power and control [that] sanctioned the management of both nature and society" (Merchant 235). Probing the mechanised power and its adverse impact on the whole biotic community, the six poems ("The River," "Littoral," "Uggool," "The Avenues," "On Beverley Common" and "In Aragón") demonstrate that although the landscape settings might change, the mentality of people wanting to "improve" the natural surroundings according to their own standards of productivity, remains constant. In response to this, the female speaker in "Six Landscapes" meditates on the need for "[b]eing-in-the-world guided by ecological thinking" (Code 200). At this stage, a contemporary delineation of what is meant these days by landscape would be useful to avoid the one-dimensional reading of this concept:

The meaning of the term 'landscape' as defined in the European Landscape Convention is 'an area as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and / or human factors' (Europe, 2010b) . . . . It has both economic and spiritual value. It is at the same time mythical and real and is a vital resource . . . . It is shared and exploited by man, by plants and by animals. Landscape occupies a central place in our culture and in our nature, and it can be argued that it defines our natural and cultural identity. This



identity can be articulated in our own character and found in specific place names and town land names that persist through each new generation. In short, landscape provides us with a vital resource that we use to sustain ourselves physically and spiritually. (Starrett 190)

In line with the above, reviewing O'Reilly's second volume, Gamble stresses the "[p]rominent thematic concerns with environmental damage, travel and the fragile boundaries ordering the self and world" (26). Fiona Sampson in her *The Irish Times* review of O'Reilly's *The Sea Cabinet* notices that "*Six Landscapes* are peopled by observers, ghosts, the marks of human labour. Not for O'Reilly the attempt to empty oneself into observation. A *persona* is always in the foreground, raising both the stakes . . . and the register" ("Stacking Myths" 10), emphasis original. Hence the textual position of the speaker in *The Sea Cabinet* is entering the debate on the side effects of Irish technological progress:

Technical knowledge of itself is detached. It depends upon a subject-object split between the thinker and that which is perceived. It is calculative, stripping that which is perceived of subjectivity. Technical knowledge, cut off from ontological reason, degrades its object and dehumanizes the knowing subject. Because it reduces both to less than their true reality, at a certain point it even ceases to be knowledge in any authentic sense. When it is thus separated from ontological reason, the psychological and social sciences which it dominates become dogmatic, manipulative, and destructive. (Daly, *Beyond God* 40)

The first part of O'Reilly's cycle, "The River" introduces the fluvial, autumnal panorama at dusk, when "The coming night breathes an atmosphere." The phrase "childhood October" constitutes a temporally-remote perspective. Furthermore in "The River," the nostalgic tone appears to be reinforced by the scent of "wood-smoke," a quite rare source of fuel these days. The collocation "crisp light" combines the two effects of the stimulating enlightenment. The following expressions "and the guy ropes / sway in the harbour" refer to the anchoring lines, moving freely, as if being ready to keep the vessels motionless, but not just yet. O'Reilly's poem's permeating ambience is that of harmonising people's activities and that of the river. In the analysed poem, the personified river seems to enjoy rest, being busy with its own affairs, as indicated in the alliterated "**sh**aping itself in **sh**adow." O'Reilly's persona in "The River" argues:

The coming night breathes an atmosphere  
of childhood October in crisp light and wood-smoke.  
    and the guy ropes  
    sway in the harbour,  
while the black river pauses  
    between two tides,  
    shaping itself in shadow.

(TSC 30)

The subsequent riverbed landscape in O'Reilly's poem looks frozen between the two realities, the current industrial and the past, being beyond time: "It is never changing, never the same." Rendered to as "ancient trees," its permanence,

denoting the primeval birds' breeding colony, subsists with the quiet approval of the nearby flowing stream (see the alliterated "different darkness"). With the ancient druidic culture and Irish *ogham* alphabet in mind, one hardly needs to advocate the importance of trees in Irish lore and Celtic beliefs. "Here, the Celtic veneration of forests becomes tied to the aesthetics of landscape at a vantage point from which the worship of nature can begin" (Wenzell 130–131). The speaker in "The River" admits:

It is never changing, never the same –  
 the ancient trees of the rookery in silent commune  
     with the river's  
     different darkness  
 when we pass, and this time,  
     an egg-speckled kestrel  
     bullied by swallows.

(TSC 30)

Additionally, Wenzell clarifies that for Celts "trees came to symbolize wisdom and stability," but they might connote some affective signification (131). To make a point, one may note that "[o]ne of the early names for Ireland was *Inis-na-ffidbadh*, or "The Isle of Woods" (Wenzell 129). Following this vein, Wenzell explains that large numbers of Irish surnames and place names stem from tree denominations (129). As a logical extension of this, he applies the strong phrase "deforested perspective" to render the generations of the Irish deprived of their cultural and historical heritage, destroyed during deforestation. "For generations removed from the sight and memories of the original landscape, it is sometimes difficult to assess what exactly has been lost. With the loss of these forests, Irish history began to focus on the politics that ensued as a result of this changed land" (Wenzell 130). In O'Reilly's "The River," in their numb endurance, "deforested" Irish people are only the observing passers-by, seeing (or most frequently, ignoring), the natural world's animation in front their eyes. With regard to the above, borrowing Shiva's term "maldevelopment," Lahar addresses the way humans relate to nature "[w]hen landscapes and ecosystems are regarded as commodities, then members of an ecosystem, including human beings, are treated as 'isolated and extractable units' (Cronon, 1983, 21)" (7). Following this way of thinking,

A stable and clean river is not a productive resource in this view; it needs to be "developed" with dams to become productive. Women, sharing the river as a commons to satisfy the water needs of their families and society, are thus not involved in productive labor. When they are replaced by man's engineering, water management and water use become productive activities. Natural forests are unproductive to Western patriarchy. They need to be developed into monoculture plantations of commercial species. Such development becomes equivalent to maldevelopment – development deprived of the feminine, the conserving, the ecological principle. (Shiva 191)

With this in mind, Carol P. Christ maintains after Sanday that the “variables correlated with female power were a positive view of nature, connection to the land (a settled rather than migratory lifestyle), lack of environmental stress such as prolonged drought, and the absence of external threat such as warfare. Societies characterized by female power were usually focused around gathering, fishing, and the early stages of agriculture” (*Rebirth* 58). She contrasts this model with men’s hierarchical and domineering power realised in hunting and livestock farming. Consequently, one can trace back the associations that connote the earth with the woman’s body to the times of matriarchal power:

Images of the earth as body of the Goddess challenge the traditional view that God transcends the earth, the body, and nature. The image of the Goddess as earth also calls into question traditional images of the female. We have been taught that female body is soft, delicate, and vulnerable. But solidity and strength are portrayed in the earliest images of the Goddesses . . . . In the language of the Goddess, the female body is an important metaphor for the creative powers of the earth body. (Christ, *Rebirth* 89–91)

In “The River,” the metaphor of the earth as mother is like all other linguistic constructs shaped by cultural stereotypes and social beliefs:

The image of the earth as a living organism and nurturing mother had served as a cultural constraint restricting the actions of human beings. One does not readily slay a mother, dig into her entrails for gold or mutilate her body, although commercial mining would soon require that . . . minerals and metals ripened in the uterus of the Earth Mother, mines were compared to her vagina . . . (Merchant 3–4)

Justified as it might be, the parallelism between the earth and the mother raises a substantial degree controversy within contemporary ecofeminism.<sup>95</sup> What is more, some of the critical objections against the referred to metaphor cannot be so easily refuted:

. . . the psychological effect of understanding the earth as a fundamentally feminine parent is to reduce our sense of the vast and varied subjectivities of the planet and all its life to our projections of human consciousness and to blur the diversified forms of the natural world with our associations to human bodies, or even the particular human body of our own mother . . . the anthropomorphization diminishes more than expands our awareness, evoking good and bad psychological associations with parenting that we have received and given rather than a sense of wonder that comes from stretching our consciousness to relate to something much bigger than human existence. (Lahar 11)

---

<sup>95</sup> For more on the usage of the mother metaphor in environmental discourse, see Catherine Roach’s article “Loving Your Mother: On the Woman-Nature Relation” in *Ecological Feminist Philosophies* (ed. Karen J. Warren).

In O'Reilly's expression "a manhole like / a navel at its middle," the navel cavity signifies the human separation from the motherly earth, connoted not only metaphorically but also corporeally. The female voice in "The River" argues:

A field that was mysteriously full of nothing  
 once but poisoned sparrows, a convulsive rain,  
     is brown earth now,  
     would not disturb  
 the bubble in a spirit level,  
     with a manhole like  
     a navel at its middle.

(TSC 30)

In O'Reilly's poem, the related separation from nature is manifested by the hollow pit in the land, symbolising the empty place where the umbilical cord joining a rebellious child with a nurturing mother has been cut off. The cited fragment refers to the riverside land territories, affected by the visible signs of industrialised power ("poisoned sparrows, a convulsive rain"). The syntactically twisted and chopped stanza-long sentence meanders like the river, changing its rhythm and meaning several times. The zigzagging stanza renders the commodity transformation of the living land into the farmer's field ("brown earth") that "would not disturb" people with its unproductivity. In "The River," the advent of both the plural voice and the collective consciousness assumes the kinship tribal perspective. The raised issue of whether and how in O'Reilly's poem "will the river change, escape / development" remains a rhetorical question. On the whole, the realistic possibility of "escaping development" seems unlikely, since the "organic communal model" and the "integrative bonds of the organic analogy" as the result of "social transformations" are to be replaced with the "magnification of . . . power" (Merchant 75–76). The multiple voices in "The River" ponder:

We wonder how will the river change, escape  
 development, or work its careless necromancy  
     on the next ones  
     to come here –  
 and who will watch its black dreams  
     shatter into figments  
     skulled and crossboned in light?

(TSC 30)

As a side-effect of the technological changes of the period from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries, "[l]ike the Mother Earth . . . wild and uncontrollable nature was associated with female . . . Disorderly women, like chaotic nature, needed to be controlled" (Merchant 127). However despite the attempts to control nature, the river in O'Reilly's narrative appears to have a textual power of its own. The line: "work its careless necromancy" indicates that the river invokes the forces of the dead practised in black magic ("black dreams"). The seemingly pejorative phrase might, however, subversively denote the sorcery

rituals that are not approved of by the new industrial order, and, hence, perceived as posing a threat to its rational endurance. Similarly in “The River,” previously employed as the signification of piracy, the “skull and crossbones” now appear to designate the natural world’s impending destruction. Furthermore, the cultural signifiers of death imply “[giving] way to a mechanistic view in which nature was reconstructed as dead and passive, to be dominated and controlled by humans” (Merchant xvi). The phrase “shatter into figments / skulled and crossboned in light” looks inconclusive in its meaning. It suggests that in “The River,” the arriving humans are capable of both putting a stop to the avian annihilation, or quite to the contrary, crushing the skulls and the bones of the birds nesting there. Following this line of thinking, Gaard writes about the need to regard “the relationship between ecosystem health and animal lives, including . . . [ones] own” (23). She encourages “[thinking] about connections, [thinking] like water” (23). Finally, she sums up her elaborated metaphor: “What we know is that all bodies of water in an ecosystem share the same flow” (Gaard 22).

“Littoral,” the second poem of O’Reilly’s cycle, is located in the contemporary Irish framework. The landscape though is not the riverside but coastal. The following references to the travellers’ community and the IRA make the current historical context clearly identifiable. The capitalised words of the self-contradictory political meaning stand out like a loud scream from the rest of O’Reilly’s narrative. As a result in “Littoral,” the immediate succession of the competing, mutually exclusive textual messages intentionally produces a bitterly ironic effect, signifying the inability to reconcile the opposing sides’ conflicting expectations. With regard to the graffiti’s interpretations, Villar-Argáís argues that “[t]he painting in the wall recalls the difficulties attendant on the peace process in Northern Ireland and sets an ironic context between Ireland’s status as Other, in postcolonial terms, and a reality of these ‘internal’ Others within Irish society” (122). By Others, Villar-Argáís identifies people in the phrase “travellers’ greyhounds” as Travellers, a “nomadic minority within Irish society,” which leads her to the conclusion about “an increasingly racist society which does not accept difference” (122). The persona in “Littoral” records:

By the campsite, travellers’  
greyhounds lick the junk they find  
and sniff along a wall sprayed

RELEASE IRA PRISONERS  
and further on, HANG THEM ALL.

(TSC 31)

Nonetheless, outside the ideological framework, admitting that in O’Reilly’s poem “the theme is blue,” the female voice in “Littoral” leaves much space for possible textual interpretations. For example, the sea’s immense blueness is connoted with the colour of the washed-ashore stones in which the water is

reflected. In addition, the colour-expression designates the pensive, edgy mood (“pins on a pin-cushion”) in which O’Reilly’s speaker contemplates the surrounding reality. The persona in “Littoral” argues that:

The theme is blue, or slate-grey

maybe, like the tame sea is –  
its stones seem banded with blue  
like pillows, mollified by

the sucked-in breath of the sea.  
Its creamy exhalations  
leave them quite unmoved, just bruised

darker by the toppling tide.

(TSC 31)

Although in “Littoral,” the sea, allegedly controlled by people, appears calm [“I pass a line of bollards / stuck with blue stones off the beach / like pins on a pin cushion” (TSC 31)], but its rhythmical ebbs and flows fail to placate either humans or inanimate nature. Almost anatomically linked with the marine body, the stones in O’Reilly’s poem (“banded with blue”) give the impression of being physically maimed (“just bruised”), abandoned (alliterative “toppling tide”) and close to death (“quite unmoved”). With its unhealthy “creamy exhalations,” the sea in the cited passage looks poisoned. Turning her eyes away from that disturbing view, the speaker in “Littoral” tries, in vain, to focus on the meditative blueness to transcend the depressing image of the environmental abuse done to the sea by the discourse of the mechanised world:

I stare, in a slate-grey mood,  
pretending nothing’s realer

than the colour of the beach-  
stones’ blueness. Which is less like  
blue the further down you go.

(TSC 31)

Unable to clear her head of it, the persona in “Littoral” decides on the ancient healing ritual: collecting seven singled out stones to bring her closer to “home” [“I select seven of them / seven stones totalling home” (TSC 31)]. The first one “dark . . . scored with crazy / yellow strokes like fossil grass / or hopscotch on a pavement” (TSC 31) appears to be found nearest to her living place. Its colours remind the speaker of the sun-dried yellowish non-verdant lawns. Because of its whitish shade and smooth surface, the second stone [“flat one like a mountain- / ridge in outline, capped with snow” (TSC 31)] looks as if belonging to the high peaks or summits. The third “one like a Mesolithic / axe-head, but more beautiful” (TSC 31) introduces a historical duration. The fourth rock, “smooth basalt flecked with sequins” (TSC 32) glitters and pleases the eye. The fifth “one

crossed with mineral lines” (TSC 32) seems to have a solid structure. Whereas alliterated “**rock ringed** like a planet” (TSC 32) as the sixth pebble represents the universe itself. However in “Littoral,” it is the last, seventh stone where nature’s true wonder is best captured. The rock is spotted, both fragile and firm, resembling a live egg from which a baby ostrich is to come out at any moment: “one riddled with reddish specks / the texture of crayon wax. / An ostrich-egg of granite” (TSC 32). The cited passage provides a melodious gratification with the repeated sounds in “**riddled with reddish**” and “**texture of crayon wax.**” O’Reilly’s “Littoral” proliferates with the expressive imagery, manifested in the sentence equivalents and the comma-divided, kaleidoscopic-changing tropes. In conclusion, the second part of “Six Landscapes” cycle is structurally and syntactically elaborate, abundant with enjambment and unexpected line endings.

The series’ third part, “Uggool” is dedicated to *Seán and Jessica Lysaght*. The adopted perspective in O’Reilly’s poem is the viewpoint of the car passengers who from their fast-moving vehicle fail to take deeper notice of the surrounding environment. With an average of 240,000 kilometres driven each year, “Ireland is now one of the most car-dependent countries in the world” (Wenzell 125). As a result, the Irish landscape has changed irrevocably, now the whole country is covered with “a new topography of . . . a congested network of roads, and the amount of urbanized land” (Wenzell 125). O’Reilly’s “Uggool” skilfully renders the harmony prevailing in the natural world that cannot be appreciated in the quickly altering car windowpane images. Writing about the category of the Motor Tourist, Leopold notices that “[w]e hand him our wild life and our wild flowers, and humbly continue the gesture after there are none left to hand. . . . in this headlong stampede for speech and ciphers we are crushing the last remnants of something that ought to be preserved for the spiritual and physical welfare” (“The River of the Mother” 126–127). Travelling in her car, the female voice of “Uggool” concedes, as if with disbelief:

It was only when the road ended  
and the engine stopped ticking  
that we noticed the silence  
that was of space unfolding  
and ourselves absorbed by it,  
unburdened by the light’s extension.

(TSC 33)

The fragment above delineates silence unravelling itself and spreading out in front of the Motor Tourists’ eyes as a physically palpable phenomenon with a capacity for agency. Consequently, the car passengers in “Uggool” look as if they were almost wrapped by the surrounding nature’s totality. This tightly shielding voiceless cover relieves their eyes from relying on their sense of sight, all they have to do is listen to the sounding calm. In the motorists’ perception, appended between the air and the water, Clare Island seems to be founded on nothing else but the soothing stillness:

Seen from the hill, Clare Island  
 hung between identical elements,  
 neither air nor ocean, and a list  
 of islands ran to the curve of the world.

(TSC 33)

Declaring that “I recognised the feeling: / we brought the weight of us to leave” (TSC 33), the female voice in “Uggool” realises that what drives her to the “islands [that] ran to the curve of the world” is the need to discharge the tonnage of the personal load that prevents her from moving on, hampering her personal growth. In O’Reilly’s poem, the natural-world vocabulary (“peat,” “thorn tree,” “kelp,” “shell”) contrasts sharply with the human-made “furnace-boom:”

Whereas the medieval economy had been based on organic and renewable energy sources – wood, water, and wind – the emerging capitalist economy taking shape over most of western Europe was based not only on nonrenewable energy sources – coal – but on an inorganic economic core – metals: iron, copper, silver, gold, tin and mercury – the refining process of which ultimately depended on and further depleted the forests. (Merchant 63)

The concluding line in “Uggool” (“the country’s vanquished edge”) designates the historical colonisation of Ireland, accompanied by the natural habitat’s destruction. Apart from the political undertones, it signifies the industrialised devastation of the pristine places such as Clare Island (see “the rim of a perfect water”). The seaweed straps in O’Reilly’s poem come to connote the tourists’ car shoulder straps, implying punitively their impaired mobility and restrained textual flexibility. In “Uggool,” the referred to image testifies to the human entanglement (belonging to) in a web of natural beings:

at the rim of a perfect water,  
 or our idea of it, not the peat stream  
 underneath the senile thorn tree,  
 but this strand with its kelp straps  
 and shell-scourings, that furnace-boom  
 along the country’s vanquished edge.

(TSC 33)

Located in England at the riverbed of the Humber, O’Reilly’s cycle’s fourth part “The Avenues” is juxtaposed with the reminiscences of the Irish land [“Any other year I would have watched / across the bay and seen the fold of a horizon, / the weather move south” (TSC 34)]. Unlike in the Irish panorama, the distinguishing mark of the English landscape is its uniformity, commented upon ironically by O’Reilly’s speaker: “strange that in a place / of so much sky there is just one view, / but it is England” (TSC 34). In the Humber landscape, the human-transformed English surrounding looks as if being disconnected from its organic roots. Hence in “The Avenues,” the interference with the natural scenery [“fog-bound **H**umber” alliterated with “**h**orn” (TSC 34)], resulting from the



mechanical view that takes no notice of the long-term consequences of human actions becomes poignantly conspicuous in the environment:

between the cracks on my neighbour's frozen pond  
and the saffron throats in my crocus garden  
there is no relation. Daily, the brownish stain  
from the tannery chimney smudges the sky

to which the black bare trees are lungs.

(TSC 34)

In “The Avenues,” the modifying alliterated phrases (“**black bare**,” followed by the “trees are lungs”) painfully insinuate that the sickly organs of the wilting plants cannot perform their life-sustaining function any more. As if addressing that issue, Leopold argues that “when soil loses fertility, or washes away faster than it forms, and when water systems exhibit abnormal floods and shortages, the land is sick . . . . Thus when a soil loses fertility we pour on fertilizer, or at best alter its tame flora and fauna, without considering the fact that its wild flora and fauna, which built the soil to begin with, may likewise be important to its maintenance” (*Sand County* 194–195). As proved in “The Avenues,” gardening as a pastime turns out to be a poor substitute for a more direct contact with nature. “Nature, tamed and subdued, could be transformed into a garden to . . . enhance the comfort and sooth the anxieties of men distraught by the demands of the urban world and the stresses of the marketplace” (Merchant 8–9).<sup>96</sup> In O’Reilly’s poem, the employed verbs (i.e. “tamping down,” “uprooting,” the qualifying noun-expression “my walled half-acre”) imply the human-imposed activities that clash with the idea of harmonious biotic communities. Since “[l]andscaping,” for ages dissociated from economic land-use, has suffered that dwarfing and distortion which always attends the relegation of esthetic or spiritual functions to parks and parlors” (Leopold, “Conservation Ethic” 191). That is why O’Reilly’s speaker admits:

I keep my side of the bargain, tamping  
down the tulip bulbs, uprooting the weeds  
in my walled half-acre, letting the cat in

as the kitchen windows glow at five o’clock,  
and human noises seep between the hedges.  
Down the darkening cinder-path, fenced at both ends  
their children’s voices cry to me like owls

(TSC 34)

As shown, the poem “The Avenues” records people’s social (“the kitchen windows glow at five o’clock”) and economic rituals, acknowledging the commercial need for farming enclosure (“fenced at both ends” and the earlier “to

<sup>96</sup> In other words garden culture, “by conceiving of nature as passive . . . allowed for the possibility of its use and manipulation” (Merchant 9).

each his own portion”) that has its roots in the historical processes of seventeenth century England. At that time, English “landlords were strong and could increase their holdings by consolidating smaller plots, enclosure, cutting down forests for pasture and cultivation, and draining fens. They then rented the lands to tenant farmers” (Merchant 54). On the other hand, in O’Reilly’s poem, the line: “their children’s voices cry to me like owls” advocates the reclaiming of the forgotten connection between the human and the nonhuman world. As the poem “The Avenues” culminates, one realises the extent to which the “neatly developed” landscape constrains the land’s natural openness, endangering nature’s own balanced existence.

Bearing that in mind one does not feel astonished by the choice of a motto for the cycle’s fifth part “On Beverley Common,” namely, Larkin’s passage: “Here is unfenced existence.” Abandoning England, in this sequence, the female voice in O’Reilly’s poem returns to the Clare region. The whole text is structured as a single long, uninterrupted by commas, stream-of-consciousness stanza-sentence. (In the following analysis, divisions and cuts into fragments will be applied for the sake of critical argument; however no pauses exist in the original text). The poem “On Beverley Common” opens with a town’s pastoral image:

The minister’s gold stones  
tell of a settled polity  
and the minstrels on the walls  
sing and fiddle  
fiddle and sing  
to the yeomanry  
their mouths agape

(TSC 35)

In the quoted fragment of “On Beverley Common,” the archaic expression “yeomanry” matches the folk collocation of “sing and fiddle / fiddle and sing.” The two phrases echo each other in sound: the bolted noun in “the **minister**’s gold stones” reverberates with “the **minstrels** on the walls.” The open-mouthed commoners listen to the music “reaching / those nearer stars” (TSC 35). The archaic idiom in O’Reilly’s poem stems from the tone of wistfulness with regard to the natural world, explained in Frawley’s book *Irish Pastoral: Nostalgia and Twentieth-Century Irish Literature* (2005). She argues that:

Irish literature demonstrates impulses to preserve both general nature and specific place; both strains consist of the commemoration of the physical landscape. Frequently such commemoration also memorializes loss – whether loss of the person for whom a place is named, or of the social system that witnessed the landscape described – and invokes nostalgia. Nature and nostalgia are thus intimately connected in Irish literature over many centuries, in that nature becomes a frequent site for nostalgia, a site from which to express the longing for lost culture. (Frawley 2–3)

Following a similar vein, Donna L. Potts in *Contemporary Irish Poetry and the Pastoral Tradition* explains that:

The pastoral tradition has long had a unique place in Ireland. As Nicholas Greene explains, “Ireland in its otherness on the edge of Europe, in its greenness and difference, has provided for the modern western world an equivalent of the ancient world’s rural Arcadia.” Pastoral constructions of Ireland provided the means for justifying its colonization but also a critique by the Irish themselves not only of British colonialism but also its inevitable companions: modernization and industrialization. (3)

In “On Beverley Common,” when the town’s pastoral sequence subsides, O’Reilly’s persona is transferred to the field: “this draped landscape” (TSC 35), “pasture rising to meet / the sky and someone’s / herd wandering where / Clare might have sat / and not wept at fences” (TSC 35). Pastures are mainly created in the process of fen-draining. As shown in the analysed poem, during the bog or wetland’s drainage, to enlarge human agrarian territories, birds and other marshland creatures are deprived of their natural habitat,<sup>97</sup> which causes the irrevocable destruction of the indigenous species of fauna and flora:

Ireland’s relatively late industrialization meant that until quite recently it was primarily rural and, specifically, a pastoral economy, with 69 percent of its land permanent pasture – in part because landlords found grazing a much cheaper alternative than tillage . . . . the pastoral vision remained a viable means of establishing a national identity apart from England and of addressing the consequences of English colonization. (Potts 7)

Greg Winston subscribes to the view that in Ireland, despite the Famine, the mass scale depopulation, and the changes it caused to the Irish landscape,<sup>98</sup> “[t]hroughout the second half of the nineteenth century, the national consciousness remained to a large extent rural or agricultural, even as thousands sought economic opportunities in towns, cities and overseas” (75). Consequently in “On Beverley Common,” the vein of (the natural world’s) dispossession is manifested in a detailed catalogue of on-the-verge-of-extinction residents of the meadows and the nearby grass land. “The waiting silence” amplifies in O’Reilly’s poem the on-going disappearance of many plant and animal species, highlighting the human disregard towards these dying beings:

elephant limbs of the elm  
 flowers whose names  
 we have forgotten  
 and the thorn tree’s  
 mezzotint trunk  
 plates in a closed storybook  
 the chestnut drops a lime  
 spatulate leaf where  
 the silence waits

(TSC 35)

<sup>97</sup> see Christ (*Rebirth* 154) and Merchant (56–57).

<sup>98</sup> See the exact figures that Winston cites quoting the vast transformations in the Irish landscape (75).

In O'Reilly's "On Beverley Common," the fading, transient images of the sound-similar "elephant" and "elm," the alliterated simile of "the thorn tree's," and the engraved calligraphy of "mezzotint trunk / plates in a closed storybook" – all constitute the disconsolate atmosphere of the Irish natural world's passing into oblivion. In "New Ireland's Poetics: The Ecocritical Turn in Contemporary Irish Women's Poetry," Jody Allen Randolph claims that

Local knowledge of the field – its sounds, colours, plants, animals – is embodied, known through the soles of one's feet and possessed in memory . . . not embodied knowledge or human memory . . . The dominant culture here is not postcolonial, but neo-colonial – a virulent global economic culture . . . the local field's fragility in the face of these forces is the nation's fragility, and by extension, the planet's. (62)

In the article "Language and Landscapes of Ireland," James McCabe in a manner comparable to Randolph, links the loss of the natural world's species and their linguistic denominations with the disappearance of the Irish language. Broadly speaking, he equates the damage done to the Irish culture with that done to the Irish landscape. McCabe argues:

Indeed, the dialectic of language and landscapes constitutes a rich problematic, one that is defined fundamentally by colonial history . . . in Ireland . . . Simply put, the destruction of the traditional Gaelic landscapes coincides with the construction abroad of cultural and mythical Irish landscapes. The dialectic language / landscapes clearly offers a rich and vibrant problematic; one that is marked by a series of natural interactions between language and landscapes of Ireland at home and abroad, but also . . . by a phenomenon of cultural compensation . . . (51)

The profit-induced mechanical-view destruction of plant and animal species related by O'Reilly in "On Beverley Common" is conceived of as the "symptoms of sickness in the land organism" (Leopold, *Sand County* 194), causing "biotic pain" (Leopold, *Sand County* 196) in nature, and damaging permanently the whole ecological environment. Leopold explains that many species are left to die because of being perceived by humans as of little "economic value" (*Sand County* 212).<sup>99</sup> He elaborates this thought arguing that "[s]ome species of trees have been 'read out of the party' be economics-minded foresters because they grow too slowly, or have too low a sale value to pay as timber crops: white cedar, tamarack, cypress, beech, and hemlock are examples . . . Lack of economic value is sometimes a character not only of species or groups, but of entire biotic communities such as marshes, bogs, dunes, and 'deserts' are examples" (Leopold, *Sand County* 212). Leopold warns that "[n]ature's balance is a thing not to be meddled with. It has taken from the

<sup>99</sup> Stressing the importance of conservation, Leopold maintains: "a system of conservation . . . tends to ignore, and thus eventually to eliminate, many elements in the land community that lack commercial value, but that are (as far as we know) essential to its healthy functioning" (*Sand County* 214).

Creation to establish it, yet man can undo it only too quickly and too easily” (“Maintenance of Forests” 39). Accordingly in “On Beverley Common,” the expression “green cathedral” renders the holiness of the natural world, respecting the ecological “presences” of others around us: animals, plants, land, soil, rivers, etc. The syntactical layout of O’Reilly’s poem’s ending allows for open space, letting the air into the mournful narrative of extinction:

*O presences*  
and in the green cathedral  
birds pipe from the eaves  
the fox’s topaz eye  
hesitates.

(TSC 35)

O’Reilly’s cycle’s final part entitled “In Aragón” meditates on the Spanish historical region, which existed autonomously until the fifteenth century. Along with the historical connotations, the examined poem comprises several geographical references (i.e. Caspe or the Ebro). The fifth part begins with an image of the sun-scorched (“the sun’s reign”) soil, dying of thirst (“a parched sigh / the earth emits”), contrasted with a protruding agave plant (“harsh enough / to have and keep its liquid core”). The sentence “this earth quenched itself / to some forgotten end” implies that the self-destructive drying process is still in progress. In O’Reilly’s poem, the physical proximity in the surrounding territory of the second longest Spanish river appears to indicate that the land might be dying because of the lack of human intervention. The female speaker in “In Aragón” admits:

Caspe – a parched sigh  
the earth emits at midday

when the sun’s reign heightens  
over hills of yellow or pale orange dirt,  
studded with agave harsh enough  
to have and keep its liquid core.

Seventy years since,  
this earth quenched itself

to some forgotten end  
(any arid cone could be another);

(TSC 36)

In the cycle’s fifth part, in contrast to human passivity, the river and the trees nearby seem to be depicted as animated agents. “The Ebro holds itself still inside” (TSC 36), the suffocating plants “twist with effort of rising” (TSC 36), the sweltering heat looks liquidated [“In Caspe, light pours through the gap” (TSC 36)] when the sky blazes with sultriness. Unlike the related dynamic account, the mountains are portrayed in O’Reilly’s poem as unaffected by any

outer atmospheric elements or climactic factors. However “In Aragón,” the sinister payback of the “fractured hearts for their fractured bones” appears to imply the need for revenge on humans for spoiling the biotic harmony in the surrounding world:

the hills create in being at odds  
with each other against the flaming sky,  
  
and shows their horizontal faces  
grooved and inscrutable in the Spanish way  
  
and as indifferent to the force that shapes them,  
giving them fractured hearts for their fractured bones.  
(TSC 36)

Although not belonging to the analysed series, the poem “Benton Cliffs” constitutes a logical closure of O’Reilly’s “Six Landscapes.” It begins with the apocalyptic, post-war scenery of “The blank-faced gun emplacements / stare out to sea” (TSC 49). Commenting upon it: “Nothing’s changed since the war” (TSC 49), the persona in “Benton Cliffs” can remember well, or, at least, is able to envisage clearly, the pre-war panorama:

the wind carried  
away their voices, that football-roar  
from the terraces.  
Then an updraft like a wave’s explosion  
brought guano-stink,  
and with it rumours of a high-rise civilisation:  
so garrulous, so peeping-busy.  
(TSC 49)

Despite the fact that now “It is land for the grasshopper / and lark” (TSC 49), the reminiscences of violence seem to be deeply encoded in the land’s memory [“then suddenly air / and the sea’s sharp glance” (TSC 49)]. Hence in “Benton Cliffs,” the whole territory is permeated with loud, echoed human voices, “football-roar / from the terraces” and “a wave’s explosion.” Accordingly, these reverberations entail the boisterous sounds of the noise-founded “high-rise civilisation.” Ironic as it may seem, the human glamorous / clamorous civilisation has risen on the post-animal “guano-stink.” On the other hand, as argued in O’Reilly’s poem, the “high-rise civilisation” has been built on the suppression, denial and domination of nature.

The assumptions of modernity, the faith in technological “progress” and rapacious industrialism, along with the militarism necessary to support it, have left us very lost indeed. The quintessential malady of the modern era is free-floating anxiety, and it is clear to ecofeminists that the whole culture is free floating – from the lack of grounding in the natural world, . . . from the lack of a healthy relationship between the males and females of the species. We are entangled in the hubris of the patriarchal goal of dominating nature and the

female . . . the orientation of the civilization is to advance itself *in opposition* to nature. (Spretnak, "Ecofeminism: Our Roots" 9), emphasis original

Overwhelmed by the "high-rise civilisation," the worn-out sea moves and breathes with difficulty. In the analysed passage, the straightforward utterance: "industry will not cease" leaves little doubt as to the future direction of the mechanical progress. Thus, in "Benton Cliffs," the phrases "the heating seas" and "the sand-eels' migration – / but fewer each year" disclose the price for the alleged technological advancement. Appropriately in the vein of these textual correlations, the word "feeders" denotes the cattle bred for food and a system of connecting roads (*CED*). The uncanny image of "their chalky sockets / those swart eyes stare" points to the responsibility of humans for the exterminated beings. The female voice in "Benton Cliffs" claims:

Down where the sea heaves  
     like the quilt of a restless sleeper,  
 the feeders are. Industry will not cease  
     for questioning – the heating seas,  
 the sand-eels' migration –  
     but fewer each year  
 from their chalky sockets  
     those swart eyes stare.

(TSC 49)

Formally, "Benton Cliffs" has a "mechanical" structure of lines alternating in length: respectively, indented and non-indented sentences. The effect of the increasing menace is achieved in O'Reilly's poem by means of the phrases' syntactical cuts, disrupting the sentences' "natural" word-order, comparable to debasing the natural order in the biotic communities. With this in mind, Boran notices that:

Many readers, like myself, sense deep links between poetry and the natural world, as if the former were a kind of song of the latter. The subject of poetry can move far indoors, far inside the constant low drone of the self, but its energy derives from its links to what is beyond it. The very language of our interior conversations formed itself in the living world. The nature poets take to the hills of Donegal, the rivers and boglands of Mayo, the shoreline of the Howth estuary – or simply stand and gaze into the field beyond the fence, the grass before the fence, the bulbs and weeds already firing themselves into action underfoot: the term 'nature poetry', like 'life experience', may in fact be just another oxymoron. (160)

In line with that, Villar-Argáis admits that "there is a strong ecological strand in O'Reilly's work, as it is deeply concerned with environmental damage and the world of heavy industry" (123). For that reason, she praises *The Sea Cabinet* for being "remarkable in its meticulous scrutiny of the natural world and how this is haunted by history" (Villar-Argáis 121). Following the interrelations between the human and the nonhuman world, the poem "Autobiography" draws heavily upon Sale's ecofeminist concept of the "dweller in the land" (Warren,

*Ecofeminist Philosophy* 85). O'Reilly's "Autobiography" constitutes the speaker's first-person "dweller in the land" statement. Hence the female voice's standpoint is defined by and through a particular location and in relation to other members of the natural world of which she considers herself a part. The way that O'Reilly's persona describes the landscape's subsequent elements shows that she conceives of the entire environment as one living organism. What is more, in "Autobiography," "[w]hen we speak of the earth as the body . . . particular images are called to mind. The earth is not an abstraction, but the place where we live" (Christ, *Rebirth* 90).

The idea of nature as a living organism had philosophical antecedents in ancient systems of thought . . . . The organismic metaphor, however, was immensely flexible and adaptable to varying contexts, depending on which of its presuppositions was emphasized. A spectrum of philosophical and political possibilities existed, all of which could be subsumed under the general rubric of *organic*. (Merchant 1–2), emphasis original.

As if referring to O'Reilly's poem, drawing upon Ouspensky, Leopold advocates the following: "to regard the earth's parts – soil, mountains, rivers, atmosphere, etc. – as organs, of a coordinated whole, each part with a definite function. And, if we could see this whole, as a whole, through a great period of time, we might perceive not only organs with coordinated functions, but possibly also that process of consumption and replacement which in biology we call the metabolism, or growth" ("Conservation in the Southwest" 95). In O'Reilly's "Autobiography," the carefully selected modifiers persuasively render the ecological perspective. They outline a pun with the common-root words ("Bray **Head**'s" and "ponderous mossy fore**head**") and a multifarious catalogue of the alliterative though contradictory in meaning adjectives (vide "swollen, smooth, stippled, snow-capped"). In the speaker's meditation "the weather has its own spectrum," and none of the referred to biotic entities appears to be given any priority over another. Consequently, all these organic elements in "Autobiography" make up "a seemingly limitless palette." The metaphor of painting re-occurs in the expression "stippled with heather" (with its main verb referring to painting technique) and "snow-cap" (with the connotations of crowning used while painting). The persona in "Autobiography" argues:

Here the weather has its own spectrum,  
a seemingly limitless palette. To the north  
a chain of swollen, dark green mountains.  
Mostly they are smooth and stippled with heather,  
then too I've seen them snow-capped, gleaming.  
The run of mountains ends with the seaward  
drop of Bray Head's ponderous mossy forehead.

(TNB 26)

In "Autobiography," the animal dwellers in the land are given thoughtful consideration by O'Reilly's speaker. With attention, the female voice in the



quoted passage records “the miserable cattle islanded,” “an intermittent shot to scare the birds,” “the odd vertical string of bonfire smoke” that endanger the natural world’s survival. In her poem, O’Reilly creates an onomatopoeic effect of the cattle movement in “Clattering by on the littoral track after a flood,” with the phrase suddenly descending and unexpectedly changing its rhythm in its final chord. In this fragment, even the soil is contemplated by the persona with focused respect (see “uneven fields” and “all that disturbs the gelatinous air”). The latter phrase evinces the sultry (textual) atmosphere where breathing becomes difficult, the smoke cannot spread horizontally in the oxygen-free air. The persona in “Autobiography” states:

Clattering by on the littoral track after a flood  
 I’ve seen the miserable cattle islanded  
 on the high ground of their uneven fields.  
 In summer those meadows burn with gorse.  
 An intermittent shot to scare the birds  
 is all that disturbs the gelatinous air –  
 that, and the odd vertical string of bonfire smoke.  
 The distant hill on which my town is built quivers.  
 (TNB 26)

In O’Reilly’s poem, the environmentally-conscious voice is capable of articulating her unwanted post-colonial inheritance with precision: “I live between three Victorian piers on the bay’s industrial side” (TNB 26). To put it simply, the sense of place enables O’Reilly’s speaker to delineate her identity. Consequently, Oona Frawley in *Irish Pastoral: Nostalgia and Twentieth-Century Irish Literature* (2005) reminds one that “nature and landscape become signifiers, lenses through which it is possible to examine cultural and historical developments” (1). She elaborates this thought claiming that “The Irish pastoral mode continues, in other words, to function as a way of expressing cultural upheaval and the longing for lost or threatened culture” (Frawley 157), and threatened nature, one could add. In view of that, the natural landscape is contrasted in “Autobiography” with the industrial panorama of the speaker’s home town. The enlivened bay is personified as mother to the surrounding water [“The bay smiles, it is full of flattened shiny water / sucking quietly at the shore and piers” (TNB 26)]. O’Reilly’s female voice finds comfort in the natural cycles’ repeated regularity, claiming that: “All night / I adjust my own breath to its eternally regular breaking” (TNB 26). The speaker in “Autobiography” observes:

Less frequently now, a cargo ship sets up  
 a prehistoric rumble in the waters of the bay  
 and docks, raising its hatches with a metal groan.  
 Two synchronised forklift trucks neatly stack  
 the planks of timber, balletic and mechanical.  
 When the ships brought raw cement, plumes of dust  
 would sweep across the bay, coating our windows and doors.  
 (TNB 26)

In "Autobiography," the reason for the bay's contentment might result from the fact that nowadays the harbour's machinery is used on rare occasions in comparison to the period of heavy industrialisation. Nonetheless, as argued by the poet, the era of mechanisation has left its trace in "a metal groan" noise and "a prehistoric rumble." The female voice in O'Reilly's poem imagines that the air pollution and water contamination spread by means of the bay-moored ships. Despite the rhythmical cadence of the mechanical vehicles (see the modifiers "synchronised" and "balletic"), the machine-oriented outlook signifies reducing the organic world to the passive mechanism. "The resultant corpse was a mechanical system of dead corpuscles, set in motion by the Creator . . . . The nonautonomous machines (windmills, cranes, pumps, and so on) multiplied power through external operation by human or animal muscle or by natural forces such as wind or water" (Merchant 195, 217). In opposition to this view, recalling her own household, O'Reilly's speaker in "Autobiography" admits that it overlooks "an ancient castle keep," compared to "a fin / from the back of the sea." The historical dwelling's prior grandeur now belongs to the past, it is only a shadow of its former self and a playground cherished by children. Overgrown with grass and dilapidated, the castle hardly bears any traces of its bygone glory. In "Autobiography," the grown-up persona conceives of her own childhood as taking place "in the shadow / of the shadow of the castle's walls." She recalls:

On the east side of my house is an ancient castle keep  
of blackest rock, that leans like a fin  
from the back of the sea. I live in the shadow  
of the shadow of a castle's walls.  
They have fallen to hummocks of bright grass  
that we played in as children,

(TNB 26)

To dramatize her "autobiographical" narrative, the female voice in the examined text draws upon the coastline's legendary location where "Saint Patrick put ashore." What O'Reilly's poem presents, however, is a mocking travesty of the well-known tale. Instead of the island's Christianisation, it depicts a violent assault upon one of the missionaries and, then, their hasty departure. As demonstrated, the speaker's wry account sounds much less idealised than its official version. The persona in "Autobiography" records:

The dark beach in the lee of the castle  
is where Saint Patrick put ashore. He soon left,  
shocked at the natives' epic unfriendliness:  
They knocked Saint Manntan's front teeth down his neck.  
Among the shells and shingles of the beach  
are opalescent nuggets of glass, rounded and stone-smooth

(TNB 26–27)

Viewed in this light, the speaker in "Autobiography" regards her own personal history as a lasting continuum that renews itself in the natural world's

interdependent ecological existence rather than in conventional written chronicles. That is why the female voice in O'Reilly's poem is looking for the traces of Saint Patrick's presence in "the **sh**ells and **sh**ingles of the beach / . . . opalescent nuggets of glass, rounded and stone-smooth" brought ashore. Asking a rhetorical question about the narrative's authority, O'Reilly's persona is aware that the story's credibility does not depend upon its historical "authenticity." The speaker in "Autobiography" maintains:

But still there is the bay's omega, its theatre of weather,  
a glass bowl for the sky to play in. I've watched the sky and sea  
go up in flames at dusk, though mostly they're an angry grey.  
Now any horizon of mine must be nine-tenths sky.  
(TNB 27)

In conclusion, as shown by O'Reilly, the only meaningful and truly reliable narratives are those recorded in the natural world, in the "theatre of weather." Therefore, the speaker in "Autobiography" opts for the field of vision unmediated by the mechanical worldview. Writing about the poems from O'Reilly's debut volume, critics praise the "technical variety of the verse . . . as in the seemingly effortless control of the speaking voice along the iambic line in 'Autobiography' and 'Thunder over the Humber'" (Donnelly 112). As in the previously analysed "Autobiography," the poem "Sunday" elaborates further the empowering female eco-perspective. Similarly it is approached with the awareness that:

Landscape can be used to sustain us, but we have learned some very painful lessons in the last decade that to use it without understanding, without respect for the non-renewable form of its resources, leads to our own impoverishment socially, environmentally and economically. Whether through the recent experiences we have had in Ireland with an unsustainable form of economic growth, the accelerating natural and manmade impacts of climate change or the demands of an increasingly urbanized society on our natural and cultural resources, there are major issues to be resolved and changes made in how we legislate for, plan, manage and conserve our landscapes today and in the future. (Starrett 190–191)

Consequently in "Sunday," violated in its natural expansion river ["The Liffey twists inside its stone confines / heedless" (TNB 33)] is treated as a picturesque decoration ("saving images of nothing"). The ecological biosphere in O'Reilly's poem seems to endure the intervention of mechanical power with quiet resignation ["it has long since abjured protest" (TNB 33)]. To convey it, the tentatively qualifying "perhaps" before "but" weakens the argument's strength. Deplorable as it is, the reconciliation with its fate looks like being the only option available to the river. In "Sunday," the natural world is referred to as "stopped," as if interrupted by the "noise of tearing metal." "Yet human beings and our technologies are part of nature. Everything we do and everything we create has a consequence within a web of life. If we divert the course of a river

to build our houses where the river once flowed, we can expect that one day the river will return to flood our houses" (Christ, *Rebirth* 154). The speaker in "Sunday" argues about the Liffey:

saving images of nothing  
but the rains and whimsy of a city sky.

It gains a wider heaven at the bay perhaps,  
but at its own expense.

We walk among the parts of a stopped world  
in the meantime, hearing it go by.

(TNB 33)

O'Reilly's persona measuring the scale of the destruction with "an architecture vacant-faced and angular" (TNB 33) sums up the human presence by the riverbed as "catastrophe." Additionally, the female voice in "Sunday" records other signs of ruin "with windows smashed or empty." Considering its scale and the adverse consequences, one might find it difficult to believe that this wreckage could have been done by humans. That is why, sarcastically, the speaker in O'Reilly's poem conjures up the imaginary, antagonistic mechanical agents ("the iron giants") as if being responsible for the barbaric devastation of the natural environment. In "Sunday," the image of the prehistoric "iron" barbarians sounds ironically strengthened in the referred to context:

The noise of tearing metal  
in the quayside wrecker's yard has ceased,

just the one car, wind-rocked and upended,  
groaning slowly. Its wheels still spin.

As though we'd stumbled on catastrophe  
without a clue to where the iron giants went

that lived here once. . . .

(TNB 33)

Taking all into account, the persona in "Sunday" feels poignantly alienated from the "human improved" landscape. In consequence, she notices bitterly that "our contact seems / transgressive here." Faced up with the discarded machines, reminding the female voice of a metal rubbish dump junkyard, she and her partner feel threatened by this unsettling view ("and our joined hands falter"). In O'Reilly's poem, symbolically, the swinging crane parts appear to resemble a sinister pendulum measuring the time remaining till the natural world's end. As argued by the poet, the survival of nature as a whole seems to be put into doubt by this bleak apocalyptic image. Furthermore "an abandoned crane," once essential during the peak of the industrial boom, now looks redundant and

obsolete. Operating on the post-mechanistic discourse, the speaker in “Sunday” records:

. . . . windows smashed or empty,  
 refusing reflection. Our contact seems  
  
 transgressive here, and our joined hands falter  
 nearing that squat god menacing skywards:  
  
 an abandoned crane, dangling its black clamp  
 like a pendulum halted over our heads.

(TNB 33)

Subsequently, the poem “The Harbour in January” ponders the impact that humanity’s mechanical philosophy has exerted upon the natural world. In the fragments below, the numerous pejorative verbal expressions (“frowned,” “spoiled,” “broken circles,” “displace,” “shivering bodies,” “splintered faces,” “boiling voices” and “lapsing”) evince O’Reilly’s persona’s disapproval of the state of the things observed by her:

Maybe this landscape never frowned  
 and spoiled its early blue face.  
 Above, like an arched eyebrow,  
  
 a single crow makes broken circles.

(TNB 28)

What is more, the critical verb “**frown**” is further reiterated in the phrases “like an **arched eyebrow**, / a single **crow** makes broken **circles**.” In line with that, the fragile bird selves are depicted by the speaking voice in “The Harbour in January” as poisoned “mercury-heavy rolls” and “displaced” by the human grand plan (“a large design”). O’Reilly’s speaker observes:

Birds in the hedge confer in boiling voices.  
 It takes a large design to displace  
  
 mercury-heavy rolls like these –  
 water relaxing its folds of fabric.  
 It sees us bend from cockpit or quayside  
  
 and gives us shivering bodies, splintered  
 faces and hands. We aren’t ourselves in it.

(TNB 28)

As a result of urban industrialisation, many bird species (see “a single crow makes **broken circles**”) have irrevocably lost their natural habitat. In their concern about the dispossessed animals, the on-lookers in “The Harbour in January” experience discomfort (“shivering bodies”) when looking at the environmental destruction. In doing so, the couple face up to the broken

connection with their natural habitat and their own corporeal selves (“splintered / faces and hands”), which, in consequence, leads to a conflict with their sense of rightness (“we aren’t ourselves in it”). It happens because “transformations taking place in the farm, fen and forest ecosystems not only affected the lives of those persons displaced, but brought with them new everyday experience. . . . large, geared machines . . . as necessary parts of the new industries, were foci around which new forms of daily life became organized and institutionalized” (Merchant 217). The persona in “The Harbour in January” finishes her argument:

Like a glamorous uncrossed desert,  
 the sea’s of mobile feature. Any ship’s legacy  
 is a smile that widens and complicates  
 and gapes to take in all the bay and me –

not of the sea, not in it, just looking on  
 at how the purple undertow reveals itself  
 in surfacing, in lapsing platinum.

(TNB 28)

At first, the sea in “The Harbour in January” appears to be holding on, which is suggested in the alliterative phrase “water relaxing its **fol**ds of **fab**ric,” and in “the sea’s of mobile feature.” On the other hand, the oxymoronic simile compares the sea to the desert (see “like a glamorous uncrossed desert”). In the cited passage, the sea is becoming a barren area and uninhabitable territory, since technological advancement has conceived of it as the home for the mechanical vessels and not animals (see “gapes to take in all the bay and me – / not of the sea”). As proved by the poet, in the industrialised discourse, the sea itself gets reduced to the “mechanism of inert matter in motion” and “a mechanical system of dead corpuscles, set in motion” (Merchant 195). In the organic view, the maimed ocean in O’Reilly’s poem appears to be bleeding (see “the purple undertow reveals itself / in surfacing”). In “The Harbour in January,” the phrase “lapsing platinum” looks especially disturbing. The uncommon adjectival combination disrupts the smoothly designed “mastering of nature” order, revealing the moral flaws in its standards. In this context, the preceding image of ships, nearly consuming the aquatic immensity (“gapes to take in all the bay and me”) is closer to the verb “complicate” rather than “widen.”

Viewed as a meditative haven for O’Reilly’s speaker’s solitary walks, the bay territory is further explored in “Hide.” The harmonising dimension of the natural world enables O’Reilly’s persona to recover her own personal and ecological empowerment. Nearly stagnant ambience of the autumnal landscape matches the female voice’s own relaxed pace. Since the speaker in “Hide” feels that the natural world’s apparent quiescence may be misinterpreted by people, she makes her point in a succinct but firm declaration: “this is not unconsciousness.” To prove her argument, she cites the animals’ intentional activities, such as the “gulls’ primeval shrieks” and the “birds safely crawl between the bushes” (vide

the ironic use of the modifier “safe”). The speaking voice in “Hide” communicates:

Because it tells me most when it is most alone,  
 I hold myself at bay to watch the world  
 regain its level-headedness, as harbours do  
 when keels are lifted out of them in autumn.  
 This is not unconsciousness. Seen from above,  
 the trees are guanoed sea-stacks in a greeny cove  
 full of gulls’ primeval shrieks and waves’ extinctions.  
 Here birds safely crawl between the bushes,  
 wearing their wings like macs with fretted hems.  
 The air’s a room they fill to bursting with their songs.  
 (TNB 60)

Provocatively, the persona in “Hide” sums up the birds’ allegedly non-productive bustling as “The air’s a room they fill to bursting with their songs.” In other words, the speaker in O’Reilly’s poem seems to argue that nature’s role is to not be useful to people’s plans. Quite to the contrary, as argued by the poet, the natural world ought to be accepted on its own terms if it is to be treated as an integral part of the biotic whole. The tenets of deep ecology remind people of the interdependence of the human and non-human realities. The co-existence of both these worlds has always been intertwined:

- 1) The well-being and flourishing of human and non-human Life on Earth have value in themselves. These values are independent of the usefulness of the non-human world for human purposes.
- 2) Richness and diversity of life forms contribute to the realization of these values and are also values in themselves.
- 3) Humans have no right to reduce this richness and diversity except to satisfy vital needs. (Naess qtd. in Sessions, “Deep Ecology” 138)

In O’Reilly’s “Hide,” the alliterated phrases referring to birds (see “wearing their wings” and “between the bushes”) are in an anthropomorphised way collocated with the human-centred “macs” (short for mackintosh) and “fretted hems.” In the analysed passage, the machine din replaces the after-hours silence (“All day the common warblers wing it up / and down the scale, see-saw, hammer-and-tongs”). The female voice in “Hide” sums up the harbour’s industrialisation with an ironic commentary, structurally echoing the conclusion from the previous part (compare: “This is not unconsciousness” and “This is not aimlessness. It is something industrial”). It happens because

Society needed these new images as it continued the processes of commercialism and industrialization, which depended on activities altering the earth – mining, drainage, deforestation, and assarting (grubbing up stumps to clear fields). The new activities utilized new technologies – lift and force pumps, cranes, windmills, geared wheels, flap valves, chains, pistons, treadmills, under-and overshot watermills, fulling mills, flywheels, bellows, excavators, bucket chains, rollers, geared and wheeled bridges, cranks,

elaborate block and tackle systems, worm, spur, crown, and lantern gears, cams and eccentrics, ratchets, wrenches, presses, and screws in magnificent variation and combination. (Merchant 2–3)

However the speaker in “Hide” does not intend to put industrial discourse into the narrative's centre. She returns to the language employed earlier, making the natural world her point of reference. In her hiding around the bay, the persona in O'Reilly's poem appears to distance herself from the technological idiolect. Detached as she is, the female voice strives for sensory transcendence. In the quoted below fragment, the expression “a blackbird's coppery top notes” is followed by the “the body must displace itself for music, / as my body has, inside six-inch slot of light.” In the analysed poem, the rhythm comes from the melodious rhyming sounds of nature (“**thrust's throat, burnished, tarnished**”) and the similar phonemes echoed in “converges” and “endures.” In the concluding part of “Hide,” the Keats-like philosophical question (see “Ode to a Nightingale”), aimed at the permanence of the sensory experiences [“its news endures no longer than the day does” (TNB 60)], allows for a synthesising effect:

All day the common warblers wing it up  
and down the scale, see-saw, hammer-and-tongs.  
This is not aimlessness. It is something industrial.  
A starling cocks its head at a blackbird's coppery top notes.  
All I hear of them in the hide reminds me  
that the body must displace itself for music,  
as my body has, inside this six-inch slot of light.  
What converges in a thrust's throat, burnished, tarnished?  
(TNB 60)

Extending the deep ecology's empowering viewpoint, O'Reilly's poem “Flames and Leaves” transfers the changing seashore landscape onto the burnt-down meadows and the animals dying in “the fires we deliberately set.” The imagery of death prevails in O'Reilly's narrative both in a literal sense (“Dying wasps stagger,” “the last of the fuchsia”) and by means of the colour red symbolism (“autumn gardens discard their red wings”). The plural pronoun “we” indicates the collective responsibility of humans for allowing the natural world's annihilation to take place. Although the speaker in “Flames and Leaves” herself disapproves strongly of using burnt plants and animals' ashes as the fertiliser for the soil, she feels morally accountable for its occurrence:

Dying wasps stagger wide of the mark  
though the last of the fuchsia is clotted with pollen.  
So autumn gardens discard their red wings.  
This late light would char everything  
were it not for the fires we deliberately set  
(TNB 55)



Like the persona in “Flames and Leaves,” Leopold always strongly opposed the idea of light-burning. All his life he gathered the arguments against this procedure. He attempted to convince farmers how inefficient it was, not just that it was damaging to the whole biotic community. Tragically, he lost his life in flames trying to put an end to light-burning. In Leopold’s own words:

- 1) Light-burning destroys most of the seedling trees necessary to replace the old stand as it is removed for human use.
- 2) Light-burning gradually reduces the vitality and productiveness of the forage.
- 3) Light-burning destroys the humus in the soil necessary for rapid tree growth . . .
- 4) Light-burning, by inflicting scars, abnormally increases the rots which destroy the lumber, and increases the resin which depreciates lumber grades and intensifies subsequent fires.
- 5) Light-burning, in most cases at least, increases the destructive effects of wood-boring insects. (“Piute Forestry” 69)

In agreement with Leopold, far from romanticising nature and being perfectly aware that death is an integral part of the organic world, the female voice in “Flames and Leaves” cannot accept the pointlessly interrupted lives of animals who instead of reaching their own end, die in fires incited by humans. Thus, O’Reilly’s poem’s beginning abounds with the imagery of discontinued existence, breaking the natural chain of life (“the last of the fuchsia is clotted with pollen,” “the hacked shreds of the fuchsia bush,” “gardens discard their red wings”). Although autumn is the time of slow decay, approaching hibernation and sometimes death, in “Flames and Leaves” the nature’s cycle is disrupted by people’s intervention (as indicated in the phrase “This late light would char everything / were it not for the fires”). O’Reilly’s persona ponders:

*The thing which I greatly feared is come upon me,  
and that which I was afraid of is come unto me.  
Does the dark have designs on us?  
Night rises in its carbon, its nimbus of charcoal stars.*  
(TNB 55)

Bearing the above in mind, after Bentham, one might renounce as irrelevant the question whether animals fear their extinction, rephrasing it that regardless of their awareness or its lack thereof, they do have the undeniable right to live. The italicised, archaic-idiom fragments in “Flames and Leaves” resemble the apocalyptic verses about the impending end-of-the-world. Similarly, the imagery of fire and flames (“night rises in its carbon, its nimbus of charcoal stars”) echoes the doomsday ambience. In the passage, the linking noun “nimbus” refers to the rainy cloud and, according to *The Collins English Dictionary*, “an emanation of light surrounding a saint and deity.” Following this line of thinking, the fires (see “charcoal stars”) could, thus, constitute the purgatory flames for those who disrespect other living organisms. As O’Reilly’s poem

proceeds, the sinister end-of-the-world sequence changes into a pretentiously picturesque dream-work, depicting a pastoral picnic with the children by the riverside. Addressing her partner, the female speaker in "Flames and Leaves" visualises:

We picnic in the green light from the trees.  
I sit cross-legged in your shadow on the grass  
hearing the children's laughter drift upstream.  
(TNB 55)

The same ironically bucolic mood prevails in O'Reilly's narrative's final part. Hence in "Flames and Leaves," sitting in the man's shadow, the cross-legged woman becomes a travesty of "the virgin in conjunction with the earth mother," "a mother and bride whose primary function was to comfort and nurture, and provide for the well-being of the male" (Merchant 8–9). The Arcadian scenario is, then, interrupted by the blood-soaked vision of the painter birds "dyed with the blood from their blood-red breasts." The cited below italicised sentence in O'Reilly's "Flames and Leaves" reiterates the question of life's value, advocating that animals ought be allowed to live out their *years* till their end, until they die naturally like the fallen leaves:

The painter birds you show me through the hedge  
weave banners of down and vetch,  
dyed with the blood from their blood-red breasts.  
*What are you losing now but years  
that fall away like leaves?*  
(TNB 55)

Similarly, the poem "A. equals B. B. equals C." depicts the human, linear mechanistic evolution. "Mathematical formalism provides the criterion for rationality and certainty," "objective, value-free, and context-free knowledge of the external world," assuming that "nature can be divided into parts and that the parts can be rearranged" "through mathematical function" (Merchant 290–291). Thus, in O'Reilly's poem, with clearly set goals and objectives to be fulfilled at the smallest possible cost, regardless of how detrimental the human actions might turn out to be to other members of the ecosphere, people realise their ideals of industrial advancement.

Yet the formalism of the calculus of probabilities excludes the possibilities of mathematizing the gestalt – that is, the ways in which each part at any given instant take their meaning from the whole. The more open, adaptive, organic, and complex the system, the less successful is the formalism. Mechanistic assumptions about nature push us increasingly in the direction of artificial environments, mechanized control over more and more aspects of human life, and a loss of the quality of life itself. (Merchant 291)

In other words, the poem "A. equals B. B. equals C." explores the human race's civilizational crisis where bored and fatigued people, isolated from other

living creatures and the world around them, travel in their noisy, claustrophobic car “capsules.” The androcentric linear equation “A. equals B. B equals C.” means that “mathematical” progression “arises by destroying wholeness in the mind, seeing separation where it should see unity. Woman is alienated from and dominated by man, nature is separated from and exploited by man, and society is torn apart by fragmented thought and action, by projecting duality, divisions, and dichotomies where they do not exist” (Shiva 193). Considering the above, the speaker in “A. equals B. B. equals C.” comments:

We are getting from A  
to B in our shellacked  
capsule, accompanied  
by this arterial hum,

(TSC 47)

In the examined poem, solitary, physically and psychologically worn-out passengers in their metal, overheated containers move aimlessly from point A. to B., unable to articulate their sadness. This is how O'Reilly's speaker relates the aforementioned process: “this song of tedium. / Heat of grief – / the kind that tears / purport to cool / but never do – / hot as the place” (TSC 47). As people's emotionality is considered an impediment to their productivity, those who manage to suppress their sentiments are valued as the most efficient workers. In “A. equals B. B equals C.,” the free market philosophy has linked detachment from one's emotive needs and nature with the highly valued quality of rationality. Therefore, people who defy a disconnected approach to life are regarded as unreasonable:

With the development of the market as a dominant institution, emotion became a residual category in capitalist culture, applied to attachments which do not serve market interests. So attachments to family and friends, to places and objects of beauty, to anything valued in terms other than its market utility – for instance, for its role in constituting personal identity or providing spiritual fulfilment – could remain unashamedly and explicitly emotional. Their exclusion from the rationality of the market made them, at the same time, non-rational or, when they conflict with the pursuit of market interests, irrational. The rise of the market thus brought about a cultural shift in the meaning or scope of emotion, confining it to attachments which lie outside market rationality (Barbalet 1998: 57–8). (Milton 134–135)

While focused on driving along in their linear progression, the car passengers in “A. equals B. B equals C.,” do not seem to remember any more why and where they are going [“from which they come, / and come. There is no / space left between / the broken white lines / for anything now / but outbreaks” (TSC 47)]. On the whole, “[t]he linear reductionist view superimposes the roles and forms of power of the Western male on women, all non-Westerner peoples, and even on nature . . . Diversity – and the unity and harmony in diversity – become

epistemologically unattainable in this linear reductionist context” (Shiva 192–193). The persona in O’Reilly’s poem meditates on

the fox’s out-of-nature  
stillness by the road,  
our imagination of its

ruined eye, its famous  
white snout. Also  
these cousin-casualties –

hare dead in the dust,  
keeping the secrets  
of its broken oval head.

(TSC 47)

While travelling from A. to B., whatever comes into O’Reilly’s persona’s way is regarded as an obstacle to be eliminated. Hence other creatures passed by during the journey are not companions in the process but constitute a hindrance that needs to be removed and usually destroyed. While driving headlong, the travellers’ journey is marked with dead animal bodies, killed either on purpose or by sheer carelessness. “The violence to nature, as symptomized by the ecological crisis, and the violence to women, as symptomized by women’s subjugation and exploitation” leads them being “transformed into passive objects to be used and exploited” (Shiva 193–194). In other words, “[a]ctivity, productivity and creativity” (Shiva 194) are denied to both women and nature. The collective voice of “A. equals B. B. equals C.” relates:

We are getting from A  
to B. Reflected trees  
flow over the windscreen

and from the eyes inside  
water tries to fall  
like something natural.

(TSC 47–48)

Hence threatened by expansive and irresponsible human mechanical progression, the natural world’s survival seems only possible by concealing its organic roots, and assuming the mask of the cultural world’s simulacrum. Plumwood rightly argues that “[t]he view of humans as outside of and alien to nature seems to be especially strongly a Western one” (“Nature, Self” 162). She elaborates this thought by claiming that “[a]ttempts to reject this view often speak alternatively of humans as ‘part of nature’ but rarely distinguish this position from the obvious claim that human fate is interconnected with that of the biosphere, that humans are subject to natural laws” (Plumwood, “Nature, Self” 162). In agreement with O’Reilly’s critical vision depicted in “A equals B. B equals C.,” Merchant claims that:

The vision of the ecology movement has been to restore the balance of nature disrupted by industrialization and overpopulation. It has emphasized the need to live within the cycles of nature, as opposed to the exploitative, linear mentality of forward progress. It focuses on the costs of progress, the limits to growth, the deficiencies of technological decision making, and the urgency of the conservation and recycling of natural resources. (xx–xxi)

Portrayed in O'Reilly's "Lag," the natural world's biotic existence seems to draw upon Leopold's philosophy that "Land-health is the capacity for self-renewal in the soils, waters, plants, and animals that collectively comprise the land" ("Conservation; In Whole" 318). In the poem "Lag," animate and non-animate beings are considered as interrelated elements ("clouds / are hauling their sackcloth bellies over volcanoes, / leaving silvery animal / or mineral trace behind"). In addition, Leopold warns that "the power to injure land-health grew faster than the consciousness it can be injured. Land, to the average citizen, is something to be tamed, rather than something to be understood, loved, and lived with. Resources are still regarded as separate entities, indeed, as commodities, rather than as our cohabitants in the land-community" ("Conservation; In Whole" 311). The persona in "Lag" admits:

Although it is the hottest day of the heatwave, clouds  
are hauling their sackcloth bellies over volcanoes,  
leaving silvery animal  
or mineral trace behind.

(TSC 12)

Set in "the hottest day of the heatwave," O'Reilly's poem depicts how human actions can affect the earth's unified organism both its animal and non-animal entities, such as minerals and clouds. That is why objectified by the mechanistic power as passive and dead (Merchant xvi), the land in O'Reilly's narrative turns against humans as hinted in "angry flicker in the earth's throat" or "live fire." It happens because as a living biotic organism, the land in the examined poem, needs to be acknowledged as being able to experience sense-perceptions ("seams of live fire / like snakes or veins are feeling"). "In other words, the relationship of the self to the land is also an internal relationship. You cannot take the self out of the environment it knows and expect it to be the same" (Christ, *She Who Changes* 82). The speaker in "Lag" continues her narrative:

The liquid will never seep far enough down  
to kill that angry flicker in the earth's throat.  
Seams of live fire  
like snakes or veins are feeling  
the surface. . . .

(TSC 12)

In "Lag," the adjectival modifier "angry" (linked with "kill," "fire," and "snakes") in the quoted passage denotes violence, but the verb "feeling"



huggers.” Raising the issue of deforestation, Western ecofeminists like Warren, Curtin or King frequently draw upon the Indian movement “*Chipko Andolan* (the hugging movement)” (King, “Healing the Wounds” 118) (emphasis original), “wrapping their bodies around trees as bulldozers arrive” (King, “Healing the Wounds” 118).<sup>100</sup> According to Curtin, “[t]he circling of trees can be understood as representing the broad circle of concerns that women understand. Trees mean safety from flooding. Forests, not simply plant monoculture, mean food, fodder, building materials and medicines. Hugging trees is as much a defense of culture and future generations as it is a defense of nature” (“Women’s Knowledge” 86).<sup>101</sup> With regard to Irish history and culture,

Ireland’s national heritage includes its sheer natural beauty, implicit in its early literature from poets who wrote of the forests and who have produced a literature that testifies to the importance of maintaining a respect and reverence for the natural world. Remembering the forests, from an ecocritical perspective, is an important way to examine the heritage of a natural world that has been forever changed by human events. (Wenzell 139)

As reminded by Potts, when “Gaelic poets decried the felling of the woods . . . what they truly lamented was the fall of a native aristocracy” (7). In other words, deforestation in Ireland clearly has a colonial and political context comparable to that in India.<sup>102</sup> The English exploitation of other countries’ forest resources stemmed from their own wasteful practices.<sup>103</sup> After “Ireland’s Lost

---

<sup>100</sup> As shown, the “[n]atural forests are unproductive according to Western patriarchy. They need to be developed into monoculture plantations of commercial species” (Shiva 191).

<sup>101</sup> Following *Chipko Andolan*, Warren reminds one about “the ecological significance of forests” (*Ecofeminist Philosophy* 3). What is more, King reminds that “the campaign . . . originated . . . and . . . led by women . . . is not a sentimental movement – lives depend on the survival of the forest. For most of the women of the world, interest in preservation of the land, water, air, and energy is no abstraction but a clear part of the effort to simply survive” (“Healing the Wounds” 118).

<sup>102</sup> Explaining its mechanism, Warren argues rightly that “[t]he commercialization of forestry under British rule, however, restricted the access of local Indians to forests, and management practices that aimed at maximizing timber output for a cash economy were introduced” (*Ecofeminist Philosophy* 3).

<sup>103</sup> Merchant claims that “By the early 1660s, the British navy had become distressed over the lack of tall timber to repair the masts and hulls of its ships, reducing its ability to defend the nation” (236). Since “the cost of transporting timber from Ireland to naval dockyards in England was considered prohibitive” (Beckett 29), building ships was carried out in the Irish docks. Along with the massive sending off of pipe-staves for export and the quickly growing iron industry (Beckett 28–29), the port and shipyard’s needs for timber are claimed to be the main cause of the mass deforestation of Ireland. As demonstrated, with regard to Ireland’s woodlands, its gradual destruction was for a long time associated with the country’s political dependence:

During the Tudor period the destruction of the woods had already begun, though mainly for military reasons: they blocked passages of the royal armies, and afforded secure fastness into which the more lightly-equipped Irish troops could easily retreat. It was therefore a constant policy of the government to open up passes; and during the later Elizabethan wars this was extended to a general clearance of large areas. (Beckett 28)

Glory,” Wenzell estimates “the loss of 45,000 acres of forest from 1841 to 1881” (129). Similarly, he believes that “[t]he loss of this forested existence in Ireland is a consequence of colonialism and imperialism, done chiefly to increase the amount of arable land” (Wenzell 129).<sup>104</sup> Moreover,

In Ireland, the despoliation of the forests in the early modern era was not just to clear the land for crops, and to make way for settlers and colonizers, but also to provide timber for buildings, for ships and for cooperage, as well for the processes of iron smelting and of tanning, until woodland – once representing over 80 per cent of the surface – was no longer recognized as characteristic of Irish landscape (Allen et al., 1997, Neeson, 1997, pp.133–56; O’Brien, 1919, p.153–6). (Scott 241)

“As Harrison contends, ‘Western civilization literally cleared its space in the midst of forests’” (Wenzell 130).<sup>105</sup> On the whole, “[t]he heavy and uncontrolled demand for industrial and commercial wood, however, exceeds the regenerative capacity of the forest ecosystems and over time destroys them” (Shiva 195). People tend to forget that “protecting biodiversity, storing floodwaters, and providing a natural filter for cleaning polluting water, this action benefits human life, not only wildlife. This ecological praxis of remediation must be feminist to ensure the incorporation of the very perspectives and actions upon which such remediation is predicated, for example, the recognition that while we are different from wildlife, we are not separate” (Wells and Wirth 309). Michael Starrett, the Chief Executive of the Heritage Council Ireland reminds us that:

The connection between unsustainable economic developments and the health and well being of our society and the landscapes in which live are all too starkly illustrated by examples such as . . . the general decline in our water quality (including drinking water) . . . the invasion of abandoned land farm by scrub, the general deterioration in biodiversity . . . the flooding in urban and rural environments [-] . . . the economic, social and environmental difficulties that we have created for ourselves. (191)

Following the vein of human – plant connotations, O’Reilly’s “Heliotrope” meditates on the common garden-cultivated plant whose name in Greek means “turning towards the sun” (*CED*). Neglected and in its “past beautiful” phase, the examined plant vegetates “stuck in the dust.” Comparing the discarded shrub to the abandoned woman, the speaker in “Heliotrope” addresses the bush as “she” (see “her thin,” “her / padlocked,” “and she”). One may wonder why the

---

<sup>104</sup> Moreover, according to Wenzell, “the forests were felled in part to remove havens for outlaws, and in part to obtain profits from the sale of timber” (136). Among other reasons, one may enumerate industrialisation, and the church’s land politics as well: “As the Christian presence in Ireland moved with the times, land acquisition became more important to the church than a reverence for the components of nature” (Wenzell 136).

<sup>105</sup> Before these changes, “At the beginning of the seventeenth century there were still extensive woodlands in Munster; the great wood of Glenconkeyne in Ulster was reckoned by Sir John Davis to be as big as the New Forest in Hampshire” (Beckett 28).



withering “Heliotrope” is personified as female. Could it be because of its “anthropomorphised” shape or due to the fact of being silenced? Whichever is the case, the plant watches dutifully the busy routes of the sun, herself remaining motionless “with her / padlocked gaze.” Rooted in the soil, “Heliotrope” is doomed to stay the “eternal follower” of her unapproachably distant hero. O’Reilly’s persona argues:

Past beautiful,  
stuck in the dust

of a road, her thin  
branched head

with its baby hair  
and dozen white eyes

so anthropomorphised  
and mute . . .

(TSC 56)

Since in the examined poem the shrub’s (“female”) existence is determined by the (“male”) solar presence, O’Reilly’s speaker organises her narrative around the heliotrope’s textual perspective. She wishes to present the she-plant as something more than the sun’s devoted satellite. Rethinking female empowerment’s ecofeminist dimension, Howell draws attention to a frequently overlooked aspect, arguing that “[m]any feminists see women in a positive relationship with nature, a kinship involving interdependence and mutual caretaking . . . the historical, patriarchal, association of women and nature has been negative, because women and nature are connected by virtue of their inferiority. This patriarchal view results in the oppression of women and the destruction of nature” (39–40). With this in mind, the persona in “Heliotrope” follows:

. . . – her lover

going down the sky  
daily in his flaming steps

and she with her  
padlocked gaze –  
eternal follower!  
Yet the circle’s story

fixes her  
at its centre –

(TSC 56)

In O’Reilly’s poem, the she-heliotrope is not solitary but accompanied by the seeds about to sprout and comforted by other plants with equally complicated

life stories: immortalised lover hyacinth, self-loving narcissus and the sacred flower of oblivion, lotus. The referred to flowery presences appear to be punitive rather than voluntary, resulting from “a god’s grief.” The female voice in “Heliotrope” describes:

her greenish rooted  
limbs keep company

with all the buried  
girls and boys

whose lost tests  
and ovules stir to life

(TSC 56)

In “Heliotrope,” the noun “test” (see the “lost tests / and ovules stir to life”) seems to denote a shortened version of the “testicles.” Botanically in reference to vegetation, the words “test” or “testa,” relate the seed’s external, sheltering layer. Apart from the obvious “ovum” connotations, the “ovules” in O’Reilly’s poem signify that part of the plant which when pollinated turns into the seed. The specialised biological vocabulary employed by the speaker in “Heliotrope” draws upon not only the semantic or the physical resemblance between the human and non-human world, but also upon the correspondence in the life-generating mechanisms. Sometimes this discursive parallel in O’Reilly’s poem is manifested not entirely seriously, as in the alliterative phrase “sex-struck stem,” textually connoted with the verb “come,” and the generic name “narcissus.” The persona in “Heliotrope” argues:

again this month –  
under the soft rain

of a god’s grief  
the hyacinth and lotus

come, with narcissus  
on his sex-struck stem.

(TSC 56)

Structurally, composed of the couplet lines with no full rhymes, O’Reilly’s “Heliotrope” reminds one of a vine plant or a tree shape; its sentences meander from one line to the other, hardly ever being separated with punctuation marks. Following the botanical vein, the poem “Daffodils” by the very title,<sup>106</sup> evokes self-evident associations with Wordsworth’s masterpiece. In doing so, O’Reilly’s narrative enters the debate with English Romanticism. In “Making it New,” Donnelly emphasises that the “flowers in ‘Daffodils’ have a strange, preternatural presence that Wordsworth would scarcely recognise” (111).

<sup>106</sup> Wordsworth’s poem’s title is “I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud.”

Writing about O'Reilly's debut collection, he elaborates this thought claiming that "[a]t their best her poems have the clarity and quirkiness that achieves the ideal of the author of the *Lyrical Ballads*, whose verses aimed to clear the lenses of perception and to make us see the everyday with a new clarity of vision" (Donnelly 112). Nonetheless, O'Reilly's poem "Daffodils" strikes one as much a bleaker and eerier text than her famous literary predecessor's work. Crudely, what differs these two poems is the thematic context in which the daffodils are set. Wordsworthian flowers are depicted as cheerful beings, joyfully moving with the wind on the meadow, whereas the Irish poet portrays her early spring daffodils as "startling," "violent," "extreme," fierce ("vehemence") and "dumb." Unlike Wordsworth's open field daffodils, O'Reilly's imagery of vases renders the dead, cut plants, quickly losing the last appearances of life. Randolph points to one more aspect in which English Romanticism is problematic in the context of contemporary Irish women's poetry:

Despite their wary relationship with the nature poem, and nineteenth century British Romanticism and the pastoral tradition . . . present twenty-first century nature poems with troubling new landscapes break up the former idealistic views of nature, and of the relation of poet and the community to place. (68)

Similarly, Frawley draws attention to the differences between the English and Irish understanding and representing of the natural world:

One result of both the practice and ideology of colonialism in Ireland after the era of the planters is the increasing difficulty in separating 'English' and 'Irish' conceptions of nature and landscape in Irish literature. This already complex interaction is made more so by the widely felt influence of European Romanticism, itself, it would seem, a product of colonial attitudes towards 'primitive' cultures. For Irish literature from the late-sixteenth to late-nineteenth centuries, the result of this mingling of ideas would be a new strain of pastoralism. (35)

In her dialogue with (English / American) literary world, O'Reilly's poem "Daffodils" seems to be paying intertextual tribute to T.S. Eliot's opening of *The Waste Land*, especially in the lines cited below: "the dreadful earliness of their petals / against dead earth." The persona in "Daffodils" observes:

They bring this hint of something startled in them –  
the dreadful earliness of their petals  
against dead earth, the extremity of their faces  
suggesting a violent start –  
dumb skulls opening, over night, to vehemence.

(TNB 53)

As demonstrated, the female voice in O'Reilly's poem appears to perceive the daffodils as alarming ("this hint of something startled in them"), as if their appearance was incongruously premature ("the dreadful earliness of their petals"). The early spring plants astound O'Reilly's speaker, reminding her that

winter's hibernating stupor is over, and a new cycle of nature has abruptly begun. The analysed poem's textual apprehensiveness is rendered linguistically by the defamiliarising collocations, disquietingly removing the words from their well-known context. In "Daffodils," the fierce force with which the flowers defy the winter inertia, pushing blindly to light, resembles the delivery of a baby. In the cited passage, the expression: "dumb skulls opening, over night, to vehemence" shows that nature's instinctive life energy is stronger than the death drive. The speaker in "Daffodils" comments:

Their lives are quicker than vision,  
 their voices evade us. And as  
 water tightens its surface in vases  
 and sharpens its glass, slicing their sticks  
 in half, these funnels clatter on their bent necks,  
 like bells for the already dead.

(TNB 53)

As "their lives are quicker than vision," with their voices fading away quickly, the daffodils' biological existence does not last as long as their poetic representations. In O'Reilly's text, the plants' organic life has been shortened by the people's intervention. Once cut, the dead "Daffodils" are artificially reanimated in water to please the human eye. The morbid, vase-prolonged flowery artefacts seem to be sadly contrasted with the soil-ground live plants. As shown by the poet, the cut daffodils appear to experience the container's artificial aquatic milieu as abusive to them ("water tightens its surface" "sharpens its glass" "slicing their sticks / in half," "bent necks"). O'Reilly's poem's elegiac mood is aptly conveyed by the alliteration in "surface" and "sharpens its glass, slicing their sticks." The textual bereavement in "Daffodils" is manifested in the sorrowful "bells for the already dead." To some extent, the poem's lament might be interpreted as uncanny. This is because the expression: "already dead" looks as if it referred not only to the cut daffodils but also to the human inhabitants of *The Waste Land* who are dead inside.

Alongside the tree and plant textual presences, one has to note that in O'Reilly's writing, it is bird poems that constitute a separate literary genre. However as Boran observes, this statement could be extended to Irish poetry in general:

Birds, in particular, seem called to this role as messengers between the immediate known and greater, even mysterious, dimensions of our existence. Mirrors perhaps of some aspect of the troubled or hidden self, they are in no shortage of poetry anywhere, and certainly not in Irish poetry . . . . These days, Irish poets might be said to be "for the birds" in other common meaning of that phrase, *for* them as one might be for a football team, the underdog or victim. If the blackbirds of medieval manuscripts seemed once to sing for Irish poets, one might argue that Irish poets have now been drafted to sing for the blackbird and its endangered kind. (149–153), emphasis original

Together with the poems “Augury,” “Seagulls and Ravens, O’Reilly’s “On a Dropped Feather” makes up a fine example of that genre. “On a Dropped Feather” is arranged in an elaborate graphical pattern of a strict fourteen-lined sonnet. The poem consists of three quatrains (the first line of each quatrain indented) and a couplet (both lines indented) but the rhyme pattern is more complicated, with a few “predictable” exceptions (i.e. “strife” and “knife”). As is usual with the sonnet, each quatrain meditates on one aspect of the narrative’s main theme. The first sequence in O’Reilly’s poem cherishes the bird feather’s flexible properties that account for its durability and, in consequence, for the animal’s safety in the air:

Until the feather tapers like an arrow  
it’s a stem of hollow smoky glass  
unsnappable from root to subtle tip.  
A grounded starling could survive the loss.  
    This ferny plumage where the shaft begins  
is made of down too delicate for flight,  
unlike the finny structure of the outer wing,  
fashioned for soaring. . . .

(TNB 58)

Appearing at first fragile and brittle, the hollow shafts (“stem of hollow smoky glass”) last to endure (“unsnappable from root to subtle tip”). In the poem “On a Dropped Feather,” the juxtaposition of the frail glass with the contrasting verb “snap” indicates the essential qualities that make up the avian reality. The quatrain’s last line (“a grounded starling could survive the loss”) leaves the question open whether “the loss” relates to the fall of the feather, the death of the bird’s feeders, or the animal’s falling down from the nest. Implying an affinity between the plant and animal worlds, in O’Reilly’s poem, the collocation “ferny plumage” outlines that feathers are not employed only as mobile organs. Being organic, they also provide the bird’s warm protective body coating. “The finny structure of the outer wing” renders the airy and aquatic unity of all beings. As the poem “On a Dropped Feather” proceeds, its imagery becomes equivocal. Collocated with the phrase “intrinsic music of a bird,” the enjambed “taut” appears to relate to the sound produced by wings in flight. Additionally, together with “intrinsic,” a multifariously connoted “taut” (i.e. “extended,” “firm,” “edgy,” “stressed,” and “well-arranged”) acquires an anatomical dimension:

. . . Perhaps the taut  
intrinsic music of a bird comes  
from the staves on its small fledged limbs.  
The feather’s utmost fibres have all the colour  
and congruency of shot silk. From the loud strife  
and beating of wings in the sky somewhere  
it fell like the notched blade of a knife

(TNB 58)

In O'Reilly's "On a Dropped Feather," the denomination "staves" evokes associations of poetic structure ("stanza") and music (as *The Collins English Dictionary* states: "an individual group of five lines and four spaces used in staff notation"). With regard to the "limbs," the term amounts to a corporeal signification. The word-exact avian "fledge" denotes in O'Reilly's poem the bird's nurture until fully developed and feathered. In doing so, the verb renders also the bird's two-fold developmental path: being aided by older animals and autonomously instinctual. In "On a Dropped Feather," the new-born birds' vulnerability, manifested in their problems with keeping their body weight on shaky legs, is captured in the tender "small fledged limbs." With its melodious dimension, the alliterated expressions ("the feather's utmost fibres" and "colour / and congruency," and later "sky somewhere") match the previous lines' musical discourse. The disquieting collocation "shot silk," which could hint at the bird's death, turns out to mean colour-glittering fabric. In conclusion, the final couplet of "On a Dropped Feather" conveys the image of the bird feather as an armament fallen out of the sky, which renders the clash between the birds' wings' strength ("and beating of wings in the sky somewhere") and their seeming fragility. Reviewing the poem, Holdridge observes:

In the two sonnets, 'On a Dropped Feather' and 'Augury' (the latter closing the volume), O'Reilly works with assurance, avoiding the colloquial, insisting that the powers of poetry must do their work, until, as the former poem shows, language like a feather is let fly and finally becomes something else, unveiling the origins of the form itself: (379)

The bird genre's most accomplished specimen is O'Reilly's poetic cycle "A Quartet for the Falcon," consisting of "The Mews," "Opus Contra Naturam," "The Lure" and "The Curée." Four narratives make up a story of the human-animal relations where the falcon is turned into a passive instrument of deadly entertainment, becoming for its owner another type of the possessed weapon. The predatory bird in "A Quartet for the Falcon" appears to be a perfect embodiment of "the natural machine," that is, a wild creature subdued by the power of the mechanical discourse. Hence the falcon in O'Reilly's poem can be regarded as a man-owned apparatus whose "operator" pursues the mechanical view of the reality.

In turn, the mechanical structure of reality (1) is made of atomic parts, (2) consists of discrete information bits extracted from the world, (3) is assumed to operate according to laws and rules, (4) is based on context-free abstraction from the changing complex world of appearance, and (5) is defined so as to give us maximum capability for manipulation and control over nature. (Merchant 234)

With its possessive construction ("My falcon is snatched from the air"), the opening of "The Mews" establishes beyond doubt the hierarchy whose roles are rigidly divided into a human owner and the animal belonging to its master. The profuse first-person pronouns ("I have cast," "I keep," "I have banished," "I

have hidden,” “I waked her,” “I have seeled her eyes,” “I, witnessing,” etc.) and possessive pronouns (“my lady,” “my flittered dreams”) disclose O’Reilly’s speaker’s wish to yield the absolute control over the falcon’s life and death (see “she cannot see” and “she is blind to her own change”). The narrative’s setting and its archaic idiom might suggest that the cycle’s first part “The Mews” is distanced through the perspective of the past. It cannot be ruled out, however, that it is the persona’s intentional strategy (the link with traditional falconry) to create a time-honoured pretentious textual ambience:

My falcon is snatched from the air,  
It is the dark time. I have cast  
sweet-smelling rushes on the floor  
and the walls are unlimited.

I keep a lamp burning in here.  
Outside, England dreams under  
a mantle of legendary snow,  
her trees stood bare, aghast,

her spine stiffened against winter.

(TSC 50)

To make the human surveillance complete, the male falcon in “The Mews” is separated from the female [“History is yet to happen / I have banished the tercel-gentle / beyond hearing” (TSC 50)]. The enthralled speaker in O’Reilly’s poem addresses the female bird as “my lady / waits her change” (TSC 50). However in the long run, his need to dominate prevails over the admiration for the animal’s perfection [“I have hidden her creance and bells / sounding their chord of freedom” (TSC 50)]. Although the falconer appears to worship the female bird, his idolatry is realised through sadistic chastisement, inducing the animal’s obedience to his will and its submission to his hunting goals. In “The Mews,” the vocabulary connected with falconry betrays unnecessary cruelty exercised by humans over another living organism. The verb “seel” signifies stitching the bird’s eyelids to make it more docile (*CED*) [“She cannot see the spider twitch / on the rafter, nor the lamp’s slow flicker. / She is blind to her own change / as all men are” (TSC 50)]. The training to respond to the falconer’s stimuli involves in “The Mews” the bird’s sleep deprivation and putting it under enforced strain:

Twenty nights I waked her, haggard,  
till she flew to the lure and stooped in air  
to dive into my flittered dreams,  
fixing them with her stares and ways.

Now I have seeled her eyes again,  
hiding their black beams  
with a stitch to each golden underlid,

(TSC 50)

The claim that “history is yet to happen” betrays O’Reilly’s persona’s excitement with the changes in the female’s plumage. Although in nature the moulting process happens without human intervention, the speaker in “The Mews” deludes himself to control the bird’s feather transformation. In the falconer’s narrative, the seasonal plumage change is believed to require the man-made interference. Thus, in O’Reilly’s poem, according to falconry rituals, the moulting bird is deprived of vision (as related in the part two) and it is poisoned with toxic substances. It appears that the falcon’s flawless beauty is regarded by its owner as an indication of the man’s status. Ironically, since the bird is conceived of as a trophy object, any blemishes in its appearance (even because of temporary and natural causes) have to be eliminated. That is why the persona in “The Mews” cannot hide his irritation (“the mineral glint of her back / go shabby as the waned moon”) at the sight of the bird’s imperfect feathers:

The colours drop from her breast,  
the mineral glint of her back  
go shabby as the waned moon  
under a tonneweight of shed feathers.

(TSC 50)

The cycle’s second part “Opus Contra Naturam” relates in detail the bird’s alleged “curing” methods i.e. poisoning it with the snake’s venom and feeding it with the toxic chemical substances (“Red sulphur, argent vive, even / 1,1,1 trichloro-2, 2bis (parachlorophenyl) ethane”). Although the speaker in O’Reilly’s poem attempts to provide the seemingly “logical” explanations of his callous behaviour (“I feed her decoction of diamond-skinned adder, / hawker’s prophylaxis, proof against taint in the wing”), inducing the animal’s suffering to the point of death is meant to break the bird’s resistance and overcome its independent spirit. As such, it functions as a demonstration of human superiority over the animal world. Accordingly in “Opus Contra Naturam,” the falconer feels empowered by the fact that he can do whatever he desires to the creature at his mercy. Due to it, he conceives of himself as an omnipotent figure (see “makes me her alchemist”). As shown, O’Reilly’s persona feels proud of his abilities to evoke changes in the natural world (“Behold the work of my hands”). The detrimental effect that his actions have upon the animal’s health (“my poor bird sickens / and will not rise until warmed by a flame to the limbeck”) does not prevent his tortures. The speaking voice argues:

I feed her decoction of diamond-skinned adder,  
hawker’s prophylaxis, proof against taint in the wing.  
That she should absorb the snake’s cunning  
makes me her alchemist, rattling the atoms  
in a vitreous well. Red sulphur, argent vive, even  
1,1,1 trichloro-2, 2bis (parachlorophenyl) ethane:  
*solve at coagula*. Behold the work of my hands –  
dead metals litter the ground, my poor bird sickens

(TSC 51)



As demonstrated in “Opus Contra Naturam,” intentionally poisoned with heavy metals, the falcon is believed to change its feathers in the most time-consuming way. In other words, making the bird experience pointless (from a biological viewpoint) anguish serves to prepare it more quickly for hunting. Nonetheless, it becomes clear that apart from these functional reasons, the speaker in O’Reilly’s poem draws perverse pleasure from exerting pain upon the creature he admires (“**hatch heavenly birds**”). In doing so, the falconer in “Opus Contra Naturam” deludes himself that he can be viewed as the falcon’s Creator:

I have made a sealed world to hatch heavenly birds.  
 Their flight a cloud-burst, a rain of mercurial feathers,  
 while outside the peregrine atom wanders  
 through field, seed and leaf, and through the egg’s  
 chamber: thin-shelled and toxic on the eyrie’s edge.  
 (TSC 51)

The third part “The Lure” outlines the strict conditions for the falcon’s staying alive, i.e. executing precisely the commands of its master: “Snared in a mode of seeing, / the raptor’s eyes unseal again. / Not an outline scarfing the blue wind / but several worlds unscrolling: / the chemical plant’s logical conduits / glitter like the keys of a flute / while brown earth casts up / bones of its lost alluvial people” (TSC 52). Hence to demonstrate his power, the falconer restores the bird’s eyesight. He allows for a certain degree of controllable movement as long as the falcon returns on demand to his owner. One might wonder why the released bird does not escape its oppressor while being in the air. But the depicted in “A Quartet for the Falcon” training procedures, step by step, condition the wild animal into human dependence. Destroying its survival instinct, they finally transform the falcon into a man-governed, docile killing machine. In O’Reilly’s cycle, the falconer’s rituals are employed to break the bird’s free spirit and make it its aggressor’s obedient slave. The language in “The Lure” changes, becoming less scientific and more metaphorical. Moreover, the poem’s structural layout is altered. Instead of stanzaic divisions, the third section is composed in couplets. The speaker in “The Lure” ponders:

Abandoned churches ride the horizon  
 like high ships. She is caught in the rigging –  
 such details as flowers in dark grass,  
 calligraphic wings impeded by a scribe  
 to *fiat lux*, or mantling their Marian prey.  
 (TSC 52)

The cited passage’s idiom best renders the bird’s exploitation by people. The phrase “she is caught in the rigging” has a double meaning. On one hand, it denotes the voyage with full sails, on the other, it signifies a deceitful manipulation and gaining advantage at the expense of others. In “The Lure,” the



During the hunting, the smaller creatures (like birds or rabbits) are frightened out of their hiding places with the pounding noise so that the falcon might seize them: “They go ringing up the air, / each in its separate spiral stair / to the indigo rim of the skies / then descend” (TSC 53). The male speaker in “The Curée” appears to be fascinated with the falcon’s killing abilities [see “swift as a murderer’s hand / with a knife” (TSC 53)]. The hunter’s satisfaction is derived from observing the death inflicted on other creatures (“death’s gesture liquefies”). As the reward for her obedience, the falcon in O’Reilly’s poem is granted with “her prize, the marrow from a wing-bone.” In “The Curée,” the bitter irony of this pathetic performance lies in the fact that the falcon hunts for food whereas humans do it for entertainment. Pleased with his trained toy, the falconer gives vent to his admiration for the bird’s deadly skills. Comparing the female bird to a “little angel,” he praises the bird’s outer beauty. The concluding words of “The Curée” leave no doubt about the macabre nature of the hunter’s affection. The falcon must remain the falconer’s property for ever. Thus, the captured bird can do only what its master allows and it will live as long as its owner permits. Accordingly, in O’Reilly’s poem, the alliterated phrase “her hangman’s hood” depicts well this sick dependence:

... Death’s gesture liquefies

in bringing the priestly heron down.  
Her prize, the marrow from a wing-bone  
in which she delights, her spurred  
fleur-de-lys tongue  
stained *gold-vermillion* –  
little angel in her hangman’s hood.

(TSC 53)

As argued by Tillinghast, O’Reilly’s “A Quartet for the Falcon” operates between truth and imagination, fantasy and reality. He sums it up: “Perhaps she has just made it all up and made it sounds plausible” (Tillinghast 183). A similar strategy is put forward in “A Lecture Upon the Bat,” where the reader is also left with the uncertainty about the narrator’s credibility. O’Reilly’s poem “A Lecture Upon the Bat” highlights another aspect of people’s approach towards the animal world, the utility of living creatures for human-made cultural signification. Gamble locates “A Lecture Upon the Bat” in line with the poet’s “engagement with the more peculiar elements of history,” close to the second volume’s “interest in the elusive oddity of both animal and human past, hinging on the violent, frequently grotesque, relation between them” (26). O’Reilly’s speaker begins her speech with a proper title:

“A Lecture Upon the Bat”

of the species *Pipistrellus pipistrellus*  
Matchstick-sized, from the stumps of their tails

to the tips of their noses. On reversible toes,  
dangling from the gables like folded umbrellas.  
(TNB 43)

O'Reilly's poem operates on the double-voiced panorama of the present and past beliefs about the bat "species *Pipistrellus pipistrellus*." Linguistically, "A Lecture Upon the Bat" comprises a mixture of systematic jargon and poetic metaphors. The sentence: "some of them live for thirty years" represents a dry, scientific-like outlook, whereas the complementary clause's idiom changes into the literary discourse (see "die dangling," repeated after "dangling from the gables"). The text's subsequent part ("like the leaves they pretended to be, / then like dying leaves turn dry") elaborates the poetic symbolism, drawing upon the semblance between the foliage and the bats. In O'Reilly's "A Lecture Upon the Bat," the italicised fragments convey the bygone beliefs about the titular species, attributed to the famous philosophers and writers. Some of them, like the quoted statement of Bacon, are full of metaphysical overtones. Even corrected by the modern matter-of-fact attitude, the anachronistic inexactness does not seem to lessen the accuracy of Bacon's observation:

Some of them live for thirty years  
and die dangling. They hang on  
like the leaves they pretended to be,  
then like dying leaves turn dry.

*Suspicious amongst thoughts are like bats  
among birds*, Francis Bacon writes,  
*they fly ever by twilight*. But commonsense,  
not sixth sense, makes them forage at night.  
(TNB 43)

Recalled in the lecture "[t]he art of bat-pressing" signifies the barbaric habit of using the dead animals' bodies as bookmarks. Put in-between the sheets of volumes, the shrunk bat corpses are appropriately compared in the analysed poem to dried plants. What makes the quoted passage of "A Lecture Upon the Bat" less credible is the misused phrase "bat-fowl," employed outside its original context, as this phrase has nothing to do with bats but it is a method of hunting. Moreover, completing O'Reilly's narrative with a dismissive "or so it's said" additionally weakens its argumentative and textual plausibility. The speaker in "A Lecture Upon the Bat" announces:

For the art of bat-pressing is not dead.  
Inside numberless books, like tiny black flowers,  
lie flattened bats. Even Shakespeare  
was a keen bat-fowler, or so it's said.  
(TNB 43)

As "A Lecture Upon the Bat" proceeds, the poem becomes increasingly bizarre in finding surreal usages for the dead bats' bodies. In doing so,

O'Reilly's speaker stigmatises the human objectification of the natural world and its perception as a "natural resource" for unproblematic exploitation. The orator continues the speech:

In medieval beast books  
 extract of bat was a much-prized  
 depilator. *Reremice be blind as moles,*  
*and lick powder and suck*

*oil out of lamps, and be most cold*  
*of kind, therefore the blood*  
*of a reremouse, noited upon the legs,*  
*suffereth not the hair to grow again.*

(TNB 43)

As demonstrated in O'Reilly's poem, self-indulging humans are constantly on the lookout for exotic tastes and new flavours. Therefore the bats' potential range of uses is completed with the animal becoming a rare culinary delicacy. In "A Lecture Upon the Bat," it is not hunger but overconsumption that incites the related abominable cooking experiments: "And how toothsome is fruit-bat soup / when boiled in the pot for an hour!" (TNB 43). The bitter line: "Small wonder then that the Mandarin / for both 'happiness' and 'bat' is 'fu'" (TNB 43) indicates O'Reilly's speaker's own detachment from the presented views:

Bats have had a bad press.  
 Yet they snaffle bugs by the thousand  
 and carefully clean their babies' faces.  
 They lives are quieter than this  
 bat lore would have us believe.  
 Bats overhead on frangible wings,  
 piping ultrasonic vespers. Bats  
 utterly wrapped up in themselves.

(TNB 43–44)

Beginning the clause with the contrastive "Yet," the persona in "A Lecture Upon the Bat" voices her objections against the aforementioned abusive procedures. In contrast to the myths and legends about bats, contemporary scientific research into the life of bats portrays these animals as caring about their offspring, as being gentle and industrious creatures, wanting to live their lives undisturbed by humans. O'Reilly's poem's concluding line ("Bats / utterly wrapped up in themselves") renders the isolation of the unfairly misjudged bat world. The critics praise the poem: "wittily ending" (Holdridge 379) though they complain about the narrative's length (Holdridge 379). Arguing that one tends to base their likes or dislikes towards animals upon culturally determined, preconceived notions and established opinions prevailing at a given period, the persona in "A Lecture Upon the Bat" aptly captures the essence of human prejudice towards the natural world. On the whole, O'Reilly's speaker sums up people's attitude towards bats succinctly as "Bats have a bad press." Drawing upon the example of the UK, Kay Milton argues:

Legislation introduced in 1981 had given bats stronger legal protection than most other animals, but their numbers continued to decline. This was partly because they often roost in the roofs of buildings, and so are vulnerable to deliberate eviction and to poisoning by chemicals used in timber treatment. Bats had a bad reputation. Their presence in the margins of people's homes gave them, like rats and mice, the status of vermin. They were also feared as creatures of night, associated in folk-tales and classical literature with witches and vampires. Persuading people to identify and sympathize with bats would mean overturning these traditional views. A national campaign was launched in 1987 (designated 'National Bat Year') with the slogan 'Bats need friends.' (Milton 120)

As shown in O'Reilly's poetry, the mechanical view of the natural world encourages seeing non-human organisms through stereotypical and commonly harmful prejudiced judgements. People are likely to disregard animals and deny them any rights so that they can utilise their bodies, skins, furs, limbs, feathers etc. in a legal and limitless way. The mechanical world is based on the logic of supply and demand, and whenever there is a market requirement, there will always be somebody wanting to profit from it. Frequently, the social and cultural clichés connoted with animals that linger in common knowledge and folk beliefs maintain the subjugation of certain species, while idealising others. As proved in O'Reilly's poems, unlike the organic view of nature, mechanical power rules by distributing "favours" and privileges to its voluntary or forced accomplices, punishing those who disobey:

The same technological base can produce very different types of tools: tools to kill and oppress other humans or tools to free our hands and minds from dehumanizing drudgery. The problem is that in dominator societies, where "masculinity" is identified with conquest and domination, every new technological breakthrough is basically seen as a tool for more effective oppression and domination. That is, what led to the nineteenth century's exploitation of women, children, and men in sweat shops and mines and the twentieth century factories of dehumanizing assembly lines where workers became cogs in industrial machines was *not* the invention of machines. Rather, it was the use to which that mechanization was put in a dominator system. (Eisler, "The Gaia" 32–33), emphasis original

### 2.3. “Lay it down there on the newspaper; / let it settle, unearth itself.” Gendering Nature in the Poetry of Vona Groarke

*A robin, cocksure of himself,  
frittered away all morning in the shrub.*

*If I knew how to fix in even one language  
the noise of his wings in flight*

*I wouldn't need another word.*  
(Vona Groarke “An Teach Tui”)

Analysing the relations between gender and nature, Zabinsky argues that “[e]cofeminists are working to create a consciousness that goes beyond nature / culture and male / female dualisms toward a consciousness of peoples living with the earth, valuing both biological and cultural diversity (Diamond and Orenstein 1990)” [“Scientific Ecology” 315]. Following this line of thinking, Griffin advocates “a meeting with nature, the dissolution of the binary division and culture, and the fall of *logos* from its pose of transcendence” (“Ecofeminism” 222), emphasis original. Consequently, she makes a crucial observation concerning the reasons against upholding binary gender divisions:

Nature in fact is a hidden partner in the binary. This dyad is not possible, even in the discourse of *logos*, without the invocation of nature. Nature is used to justify the social construction of gender. And that it is a social construction of nature, an idea of nature that is used to justify an idea of gender and sexuality . . . The fictions made of nature cannot be understood apart from the fictions of gender. (Griffin, “Ecofeminism” 219), emphasis original

Furthermore, Griffin elaborates this thought, arguing that “[i]f and when ecofeminism suggests that some women may at times be closer to nature than men, this closeness is understood as a result of the social construction of gender and of the socialization and division of labor which precede from those constructions” (“Ecofeminism” 215). Elsewhere she restates this idea, claiming powerfully that “[b]iologically women are no closer to nature than men. And moreover both men and women live in a system that produces dissociation from natural processes, and from the body, or bodies” (Griffin, “Ecofeminism” 222). Bearing this in mind, Groarke’s gendering of nature seems to be reminiscent of Murphy’s claim that: “the point is not to speak for nature but to work to render the signification presented us by nature into a verbal depiction by means of speaking subjects, whether this is through characterization in the arts or through discursive prose” (qtd. in Gruen 369). Hence in Groarke’s poetry, nature becomes a contextual background upon which relations between *women* and *men* can be explored and re-modelled. In other words,

Just as poststructural feminism has criticized the dominant culture use of the words *woman* and *nature*, so ecofeminism criticizes . . . both words as belonging to a system of thought in which hidden significance makes the meaning of the word *woman* dependent on a certain idea of nature. Like poststructuralists, ecofeminist argue that neither the word *woman*, nor the word *nature* can be read apart from each other and both are shaped by, and contain traces of a larger system, (Griffin, "Ecofeminism" 215–216), emphasis original

Throughout her poetic works, Groarke examines meticulously the social construction of gender and nature alike. This examination proceeds along the line according to which "[b]oth the word *woman* and the social construction of gender have meaning as they are perceived to be connected to a web of other meanings. The solution then is not to erase the words but to see how they change when concealed connections and differences are made evident" (Griffin, "Ecofeminism" 224), emphasis original. Therefore

. . . what counts as a tree, river or animal, how natural "objects" are conceived, described, and treated must be understood in the context of broader social and intuitional practices. Centralizing women's voices is important methodologically and epistemologically to the overall critique and revisioning the concept of nature and the moral dimension of human-nature relationships. (Warren and Cheney, "Ecological Feminism" 251)

Groarke's cycle "The Bower" puts into textual practice "revisioning the concept of nature and the moral dimension of human-nature relationships." The series explores the multi-levelled intersection of gender's social construction and nature's cultural textualisations. With regard to its "natural" function, the word "bower" refers to a verdant and sheltered retreat, located either in a forest or in a garden. In its culturally signified version, it denotes a woman's bedchamber or a pastoral hut (*CED*):

From this literary perspective, nature and man become a meshed subject matter, interlocked in a text that needs to be interpreted, and literature that needs to be reinterpreted to unlock the value that attention to the natural world holds. Under an ecocritical lens, nature becomes the stage upon which the humanity resides and acts out its political agenda. (Wenzell 128)

In its subsequent sections, Groarke's "The Bower" shifts the personas' standpoints and alters genders several times. Appropriately, the speaking voice may belong to the woman-tree (shrub) or to the man-plant. The poet does not discriminate between genders; she does not attribute solely positive features to one of them and only pejorative features to the other. All in all, "The Bower" operates on the assumption that

. . . reimagining what nature is and what kinds of relationships can exist between humans and the nonhuman world is part of the elimination of institutionalized oppression on the basis of gender, race, class, and sexual preference and part of what may aid in changing abusive environmental practices. Combining these two fields of knowledge – ecological literary



criticism and ecofeminist criticism – allows us to ask important questions about literary texts. (Legler 228)

Structurally, “The Bower” consists of nine parts, each of them designating a different tree species: poplar, willow, box, elm, yew, cooper-beech, plane, ebony and whitethorn. Johnston in “Fashion and Profit” admits that a “sequence of poems carrying the titles of various trees provides a remarkable achievement wherein Groarke transmutes the great plants into emotions, human figures, situations. They become emblems and at the same time, characteristics. The poems are funny, sad, scary” (248). To some extent, Groarke’s cycle appears to resemble the subchapters “Timber” and “Forest” from Susan Griffin’s canonical *Woman and Nature: The Roaring Inside Her*. In “Timber,” Griffin presents “the male” view of trees, highlighting men’s satisfaction in arboreal utility and their perception of trees as “green gold” (56). Griffin writes: “Fir, Cedar, Hemlock, Sequoia, ripe for cutting. Gradually, what this greenery can be becomes clear to them. They are astonished. Breathless. Wherever they turn, they see timber, timber, timber. They call this green gold” (*Woman and Nature* 56). The collective pronoun here is that of the masculine gender. The complementary fragment which is delivered from the woman’s standpoint is included in the part “Forest.” When comparing these the two passages, what strikes one immediately is the female speaker’s lack of a commercial perspective applied to the heterogeneous genera of trees. Instead, they are cherished affirmatively for their own sake. In other words, the trees in “Forest” are not reduced to “green gold,” and they do not have to be utilised to increase one’s wealth. The female voice in “Forest” declares:

*. . . wherever we grow there are many of us; Monterey pine, sugar pine, white-bark pine, four-leaf pine, single-leaf pine, bristle-cone pine, foxtail pine, Torrey pine, Western red pine, Western red pine, Jeffry pine, bishop pine. And we are various, and amazing in our variety, and our difference multiply . . . . You know we have grown this way for years. And to no purpose you can understand . . . .not all straight to your purpose, but to ours . . . .all exquisite as we stand, each moment heeded in this cycle, no detail unlovely.* (Griffin, *Woman and Nature* 220–221), emphasis original

Like Groarke, Griffin equips various species of trees with men’s / women’s characteristics, and the two gendered approaches seem to exist side by side:

Birch (needs repeated instructions,  
dull). For baskets, Beech, Elm, hard  
and soft Maple, Black and Yellow  
Birch (How does she control  
her emotions?) For railway ties,  
White Oak, Douglas Fir, Tamarack, Southern  
Pine, Gum, Beech, Maple (Too easily moved to anger or  
Depression. (Griffin, *Woman and Nature* 60–61)

Analysing Groarke's cycle, Zwiep observes that "[i]n an imaginative sequence of short poems called 'The Bower,' she devotes one poem to each of various species of trees (willow, box, el, copper beach, etc.), as they interact with human lives, sometimes anthropomorphizing the trees as speakers" (468). As with the subchapters in Griffin's book, the tree narratives in Groarke's "The Bower" are preceded with two mottoes. The first is the dictionary entry cited below that gives the anatomical definition of the concept of *arbor vitae*. In addition to this, the *CED* provides its two other denotations: a generically semantic Latin root (i.e. "the tree of life") and the botanical classification (encompassing the plants of *Thuja* and *Thujopsis* and related species). "The Bower" begins as follows:

*Arbor vitae* – a tree-like appearance seen when  
the human cerebellum is cut vertically.  
– *Chambers Concise Dictionary*  
(FAEP 87)

Groarke's second precept is taken from a specialist botanic book. Surprisingly as for its academic source, the latter motto seems to operate on a symbolic rather than scholarly idiom.

When it does grow up one has no hesitation in  
calling it a tree but it is not so easy to define what  
is meant. – Ray Proctor, *Trees of the World*  
(FAEP 87)

The poem "POPLAR," opening "The Bower" cycle, examines the *Populus* tree genus. The catkin-bearing tree thrives mostly in a moderate climate (*CAE*). In Groarke's narrative, the POPLAR is personified as being of the masculine gender, whereas the silent (silenced) woman to whom he addresses is confined to her listening function. Domineering towards his female partner, the POPLAR-man takes every opportunity to boost his exaggerated ego and belittle the woman's accomplishments. The phrase: "His statements have the ring of consequence" implies the abuse of his authority over the wedded spouse (if the "ring" signifies the wedding ring). The "ring" may also denote staging a violent contest, as the POPLAR-man tends to enforce his physical or economic advantage over his weaker female partner. His strategy of intimidation seems to be effective as the woman "listens and is sparing in response." The POPLAR's quiet wife looks as if she was completely dependent upon her evergreen and self-important husband ("He could say anything to her"). Like his tree counterpart, the sleek POPLAR-man flourishes only in the inclement relational conditions. The speaker in Groarke's poem announces:

POPLAR

He's a gossip and he brings it home to her  
how big the world is, how small her doings are.

His statements have the ring of consequence,  
 so she listens and is sparing in response.  
 He could say anything to her, even her name, and still  
 sound like small leaves tossed in a summer squall.  
 (FAEP 87)

The poem's concluding lines account for the resemblance between the male's voice and the sound of the POPLAR's triangular leaves. It appears that the man's monotonous speech, devoid of any deeper meaning (vide the sound similarity of the Latin derivational genus *Populus* and populist) matches perfectly the ubiquitous rustling sound that the POPLAR foliage generates. In Groarke's poem, the aforementioned onomatopoeic effect is aptly rendered in an alliterated, irritatingly hissing sequence ("the **still / sound** like **small leaves** tossed in a **summer squall**"). The POPLAR's polished timber is silky and smooth in touch, like the sound of the POPLAR-man's speech. The second part of "The Bower" cycle operates around the tree which belongs to the same family as POPLARS, namely "WILLOW." One may assume that the particular genus depicted in the poem is *Salix Babylonia* (the weeping willow) (*CED*). Unlike "POPLAR's" unambiguous narrative structure, the poem "WILLOW" entails multiple speaking positions. In Groarke's text, the kaleidoscopic mosaic of the quickly altering images problematizes the complicated relational network in which the human and non-human characters are involved. On top of that, the sinister "impending doom" prophesies some unavoidable tragedy that is about to take place. The persona in "WILLOW" declares:

WILLOW

We are told the day is promised poor,  
 but still the weather holds and not even the lake  
 is bothered by so much impending doom.  
 (FAEP 88)

Relating the personified menace (see the male-gendered predatory fish: "he soon sets astir" and "he smudges the surface"), the cited below fragment of "WILLOW" strikes one with its dexterity of sound. In the examined passage, the bolted and underlined letters highlight their intricately woven textual pattern, captured in an apt expression "neat symmetry." Groarke's persona argues:

The one disturbing factor is the pike  
 which likes things sour, and so takes on the shore  
 and its neat symmetry, which he soon sets astir  
 as he smudges the surface, and ruffles the sand,  
 and lifts the moored rowboat a fraction higher.  
 (FAEP 88)

Although in Groarke's poem the approaching catastrophe remains unspecified, its signs can be sensed in the natural world. Compared to

“twittering and jiggling . . . nervous horse,” the WILLOW-woman looks apprehensive about what is about to happen. She seems to act like a sensitive seismograph that records “the lightest of tremors.” The speaking voice in “WILLOW” admits:

One branch of a weeping-willow skims the surface  
and is moved with the lightest of tremors  
by the wave. Then the whole tree is suddenly at it,  
twittering and jiggling like a nervous horse.

(FAEP 88)

Not only does the natural world appear restless but also the WILLOW-woman betrays the visible symptoms of anxiety. Like the pike, she “shivers slightly,” overwrought with the anticipation of danger, rationalising that “it can do no harm.”

Someone looking from the window pulls her cardigan  
tight around her chest and shivers slightly,  
as though lifted too, then shrugs to say:  
‘Well, let it happen, it can do no harm to me.’

(FAEP 88)

As the narrative proceeds, the disquieting din of the hooved animals resonates in the darkness. The words “proof” and “hoof” rhyme to amplify the alarming sound reverberation:

Rufus, standing on a flex so the light  
dims for a second, offers added proof.  
Someone setting down a bucket in the yard  
is an echo of more thunder on the hoof.

(FAEP 88)

The poem's last stanza resumes but does not resolve the ambience of suspense. The WILLOW-woman defines it as “the worst / of what's to come.” On an apocalyptic scale, one might interpret the “impending doom” as a Biblical Flood or Doomsday, or assume that the whole imagined danger is exaggerated with no rational reason. The persona in “WILLOW” relates:

One of the men decides to light a fire  
which will warm them through the worst  
of what's to come. ‘Best be prepared,’  
he tells his woodpile, ‘get in first.’

(FAEP 88)

In Groarke's poem, the discursive ground for the textual comparison is the weeping WILLOW's leaves trembling in the wind, culturally signifying restiveness and disquietude. Culturally, apprehension and nervousness are

stereotypically associated with femininity. Griffin elaborates this idea as follows:

And the strength and courage supposed to be male, related to the requirements of armies and of men as participants in the growth of empire, are accompanied by a dissociation from emotions and from sensual knowledge . . . the making of boys into men belongs to the same habit of mind that uses the conquering of nature as a central metaphor . . . . The system requires women to be more connected with the body than are men, for whom this connection represents a threat. But first the realm of body and emotions must be designfied, made meaningless. And dissociation is required of women too, as a way to survive many kinds of abuse. (“Ecofeminism” 219)

The third poem “BOX” (genus *Buxus*) refers to the thick, enduring plant grown mostly for decorative purposes (a maze) or to mark borders (a hedge) (*CED*). In the context of Groarke’s text, the information provided by *The Collins English Dictionary* about the shrub’s petite leaves and temporally extended growing process looks to be of a special significance. This is because in “BOX” it is the outward appearance and its measured exactness that constitute the organising principle for Groarke’s third narrative. To begin with, the female speaker in “BOX” expresses her irritation towards other people’s reaction to her tiny figure (“I am tired / of being asked to sit on laps”). With this in mind, the speaker argues that “I want a man / who can look me in the eye while standing up.” As early as in the opening sentence, the persona admits that it was her partner’s short height (the man is about 1.60 metre tall) that determined her marital choice. The accuracy of the measurements of herself (“four foot nine”) and her beloved (“five feet four”) indicates height as the speaker’s key priority in her relationship. At this stage, one may suspect that the speaking voice objectifies her BOX-partner by defining him through one physical determinant. And the first stanza seems to confirm this line of thinking, as apart from the information about the BOX-man’s outward appearance (“a chest like Hercules and hands / like trowels), there is no mention of any features of his character or personality. The persona in “BOX” confesses:

BOX

What I liked about him first off was his height –  
five feet four – with a chest like Hercules and hands  
like trowels. I’m four foot nine myself and I am tired  
of being asked to sit on laps. I want a man  
who can look me in the eye while standing up.

(FAEP 89)

Groarke’s poem’s second stanza elaborates the moulding influence that the speaking woman wishes to exert upon the BOX-man’s actions and behaviour. The BOX-man himself acknowledges the formative impact of the female persona upon his life, ascribing his own achievements solely to her incentive. Accordingly, he speaks highly of his wife’s inducement motivating him to

undertake daring ventures. He believes that his spouse's stimulus has "made a man of him" and "put shape on him." The speaker in "BOX" acknowledges:

He says that I made a man of him with my busy hands,  
that I put shape on him, egging him on towards  
moves he'd not have made, left to himself. I don't know.  
Sometimes I see him when he's perched at his desk.  
He looks to me like a bigger man, trimmed back.

(FAEP 89)

It is the carefully designed topiary shapes (paralleled with the BOX-man's pruning by his female partner) that constitute the comparative ground between the evergreen plant and Groarke's textual male character. The horticultural idiom of "trimming" and "putting the shape" indicates to what extent the BOX-man is shaped by his wife's constant interference. Cutting the man down according to the prepared in advance soigné mould aims to nip in the bud the features undesired by the female landscape gardener. However in-between the lines, the speaker's language betrays uncertainty about the aftermath of her "trimming" strategy. As a result of the woman's systematic "pruning," her well-groomed BOX-husband seems to be crippled in his self-development (see "he looks to me like a bigger man, trimmed back"). Hence in her manipulation, the controlling female persona may resemble the POPLAR-man. In the fourth section, grown mostly for its embellishing qualities, "ELM" (*Ulmus*) tends to be utilised as a source of solid timber (*CED*). In Groarke's fourth narrative, the ELM-woman's self-worth seems to depend upon how she is perceived by (male) others. After a life-saving surgical operation, the ELM-woman is worried not about her health but about still being considered attractive and, thus, desirable. Although the type of the operation is not revealed, nonetheless, one can speculate with a degree of likelihood that it was a mastectomy. The aforementioned deduction results from the premise that the ELM-woman is anxious mostly about her erotic appeal, stereotypically located in the sexually-connoted body parts. What upsets the female voice is her partner's discursively denied revulsion at the sight of the ELM-woman's mutilated physicality. The female voice in Groarke's poem complains:

ELM

He says that he hardly notices, that I don't look all that different  
and, now that the redness is gone and the stitches are out,  
you'd think everything was the way it always was. I'm glad  
to hear it, but I know it's crap. . . .

(FAEP 89)

Despite his declarations, the husband's disclaimed aversion towards the operated on spouse is overtly manifested in the body language whose signification is difficult to conceal. Noticing how her partner tries in vain to textually abjure his instinctual reactions, the ELM-woman feels patronised by

his insincere assurance (“he says that he hardly notices,” “I don’t look all that different,” “you’d think everything was the way it always was”). In other words, the speaker’s reaction (“but I know it’s crap”) reveals the ELM-woman’s need to be treated with respect and candidness. The chopped, as if surgically cut, enjambed lines (“His tongue says it one way, / but his hands have it another”) aptly render the discrepancy between the husband’s declarative assertion and his discernible physical disgust at the sight of his surgically-maimed wife (“he turns his head”). As a consequence of the man’s insincerity, the scarred ELM-woman feels alienated in her emotional and bodily anguish. She confesses:

. . . His tongue says it one way,

but his hands have it another. He hasn’t touched me on that side  
since the op. Oh, he’ll work away at the other right enough,  
but he turns his head (who’d blame him) towards the wall. I do  
rest myself, running my finger, for company, round the stump.

(FAEP 89)

On seeing the spouse’s physical repugnance towards her, the mutilated woman assumes the blame on herself, excusing her partner with a digressed phrase “(who’d blame him).” It looks that the ELM-woman’s former role in her marriage focused on the husband’s satisfaction rather than her own needs or wants. On the whole, Groarke’s poem petrifies one with the sterility and solitariness that the ELM-speaker experiences in the company of a seemingly close person. It sketches an image of the relationship based not on emotional intimacy and mutual commitment but on the ELM-woman’s sexual appeal. Symbolically, the ELM-woman’s loneliness is manifested by her in hugging the remains of the cut ELM trunk / the removed breast. The empty spot on her body / forest remaining after the cuts looks bleakly desolate. The ELM-woman’s gesture is textually transfigured into an alliterated, elegiac wailing after her surgically-removed corporeal part (“rest myself, **running** my **finger**, for **company**, **round the stump**”). This part of the cycle brings to the mind one more fragment from Griffin’s book:

In the well-managed forest poor and surplus trees have been thinned to make room for good trees. In such a forest there is no room for overripe trees, past their best growing years, for diseased trees or damaged trees, branchy or badly shaped trees. (*Woman and Nature* 58)

Drawing upon its flexible and resilient timber that is employed in archery, Groarke’s fifth poem in the cycle, entitled “YEW” (genus *Taxus*) comes to signify the dangerous weapon (*CED*). In a succinct subject-verb-object phrase, the female voice admits her fatal misunderstanding of the YEW-man’s intentions. Based on an economy of words, and without unnecessary textual embellishments, the poem’s austere idiom captures well the narrative’s uncanny mood. The evasive persona in “YEW” shuns naming directly the source of her misapprehension, acknowledging vaguely that it “was hard and dark.” The

morbid ambience (see “graveyards at dusk,” “rooks and bats and a full but foggy moon”) is amplified by the mention of death, though in the negated context (“never thought of death”). The speaker in “YEW” admits:

YEW

I misunderstood. He was talking about  
what went on forever and was hard and dark  
and never thought of death, and it so near.

I was seeing graveyards at dusk  
with rooks and bats and a full but foggy moon,  
while all the time he was talking about me.

(FAEP 90)

Complementing “death” with “so near” increases the textual suspense, reaching its climactic point with the concluding statement (about me”). The sombre account of the female voice implies the YEW-man’s pernicious (most likely murderous) intents towards her. Unlike the Australian, Asian or American variants of the beech family, “COPPER-BEECH” (*Fagus sylvatica*) owing its generic name to its red-brownish foliage, grows only in Europe (CED). Along with the uniqueness of its colour, what distinguishes the beech family is the grey velvet of its outer woody texture. Groarke’s “COPPER-BEECH” depicts a dramatic (female victim’s) account of domestic violence’s daily reality. Threatened in his notion of dominant masculinity, the unemployed husband vents his aggression upon his COPPER-BEECH working wife. On the whole,

Battering may be done intentionally to inflict suffering. For example, the man may physically punish a victim for thinking / behaving in a way that is contrary to the perpetrator’s views . . . . Regardless of the intent, the violence has the same impact on the victim and on the relationship. It establishes a system of coercive control. (Gangley qtd. in Adams, “Women-Battering” 57)

Since the out-of-work man turns his outrage against his active spouse, the COPPER-BEECH woman intimidated by her husband’s aggression, tends to stay outside her home as often as she can. The persona in Groarke’s poem narrates:

COPPER-BEECH

He has taken to pottering and has planted a tree.  
He takes long walks. He says no one listens to him  
anyway. It’s getting so I hate my days off work  
and the way that he sours the house with his moods,  
so I go into town with Grace, who never asks.

(FAEP 90)

The poem’s second stanza depicts the wife shopping with a female friend who appears to suspect that the speaker’s family situation might be more



threatening than she is willing to admit. The compassionate presence of the female workmate (see the name Grace) releases in the COPPER-BEECH-woman long suppressed emotions. When left alone, she loses control, bursting into tears. The stanza terminates with a toneless declaration of the husband's violence ("he did it again"). The persona confesses:

Last Monday, she held up a v-necked blouse  
and said it would suit me – I should try it on.  
She was looking me hard in the eye and I knew  
what she was waiting for, and what it meant.  
I came home to cry in my room. He did it again.  
(FAEP 90)

However it is not until the narrative's final passage that one is allowed a full picture of the COPPER-BEECH-woman's tragic situation. The COPPER-colour bruises that the BEECH-woman tries to cover up with her make-up testify to her victimisation. Donner notices that "[a]busive relations are horrifyingly sustainable and horrifying in their power to construct, define, and maintain a self's identity and undermine the well-being of that self through the power of the defining abusive relations" ("Self and Community" 384). The female voice in "COPPER-BEECH" tries to rationalise:

I might not need the scarf tomorrow. They're fading,  
looking less like the liver-spots on my mother's wrists  
and more like the leaves on the sapling  
that I see him tending now with his gloves on,  
to keep his hands and fingernails from harm.  
(FAEP 90)

The battered woman's reddish-brown bruises remind one of the foliage of the COPPER-BEECH plant cultivated by her husband. Employed in reference to his gardening activities, the verb "tend" renders the spouse's care devoted to trees but not to his wife. It appears that he is capable of considerate behaviour but only in relation to the surrounding vegetation. During his garden work, the oppressor protects his own body from the smallest injuries. At the same time, he shows no respect for his wife's bodily integrity, violating his COPPER-BEECH-spouse with his fists. However the fact that BEECH timber is durable and tough (it is used widely in the furniture industry) might indicate that the COPPER-BEECH woman will not give in easily to her husband's abusive treatment.

The seventh poem from "The Bower" cycle "PLANE" (other name is platan, genus *Platanus*) is considered to be a common tree encountered mostly in urban parks and squares. The tree genus's derivation stems from the Greek word "platos," meaning "wide" (*CED*). The central character in Groarke's narrative, Greek Xerxes, is seen during the pre-Christmas shopping along O'Connell Street in Dublin city centre. The PLANE-man is (ironically) named after the ruler Xerxes I whose Persian army, triumphant at Thermopylae, was later conquered by Greeks in Plataea (*nota bene* the similarity in sound to the word platan).

Hence Xerxes's paradigm involves at first a spectacular success and, then, an equally dramatic debacle. The narrated character in Groarke's "PLANE" appears to be following a similar pattern in his fortunate gain and the tragic loss of the beloved woman. Unlike his famous predecessor, Xerxes wins only the commercial battle of the December shopping haze. The text abounds wryly with the military vocabulary (i.e. "lit with crossfire," "left the battlefield," and subsequently "the no-man's"). The derisive context in which the warlike idiom is employed is mockingly collocated with its mercantile designation (i.e. "the battlefield / of Clery's"). Nonetheless in Groarke's poem, apart from travesty, one might detect a nostalgic note of Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*, with the otherworldly "fairy lights." It is when Xerxes is just about to celebrate his "Xmas" purchasing power victory that he experiences his failure:

PLANE

December, and the stand of planes in O'Connell Street  
 might just as well be lit with crossfire as with these fairy lights.  
 Xerxes has finished shopping and has left the battlefield  
 of Clery's with his list ticked off, when he sees it, straddling  
 the no-man's land between Abbey Street and Lydia.

(FAEP 91)

Seemingly, the sight of the once loved but then abandoned Lydia does not make much impression upon the PLANE-man. What is more, Xerxes tries to manoeuvre himself out of the awkward situation "but he can't take cover or advance." However as the poem proceeds, one finds out that he has never forgotten the love of his life. The elegant expression, "another age on the bedecked face / of his beloved and its glow" contains a grim note of the ancient tragedy with its calamitous fate awaiting the Greek literary heroes. Accordingly, missing the last chance for a lucky (bus) escape, the broken-hearted Xerxes faces his unavoidable destiny. The PLANE-man becomes painfully aware that he has lost his last chance for reciprocated happiness. The speaker relates:

Crowds mill round him, but he can't take cover or advance.  
 Which leaves him gazing for another age on the bedecked face  
 of his beloved and its glow. While to his left, just out  
 of sight, goes the last bus to Thermopylae, heading south.

(FAEP 91)

"EBONY" (genus *Diospyros*) has a carbon to yellow-green hue and it is grown in torrid climates. It is used mainly in expensive *escritoire* furniture and professional study décor (*CED*). The eighth narrative of Groarke's cycle that is named after this tree plays on its connotations of exquisiteness and refined quality. This strategy is textually rendered in the sophisticated vocabulary ["Madrigal-smooth," (FAEP 91) "lustre," or "unfathomable" for instance], the elaborate, but not overdone, syntactical constructions, as well as the elegance of the reserved style ["with lines that hold their distances / like voices from another

room” (FAEP 91)]. The concise phrasing conveys precisely what is meant, not a word less or more, as in the ingenious last two lines of the first stanza, announcing that “The broader strains / are breath held against itself for just too long, / while the lighter ones are given to lustre and to sway” (FAEP 91). The hint that Groarke’s poem is a melodious verbal symphony of language is further enhanced in the opening lines of the second and concluding stanza. The EBONY persona strives for the unsounded final notes, whereas the narrated partner provides a counterpoint with the plain lines. The speaker permits vocal heteroglossia, advising her partner to “use my name against your own.” The closing and terminal tone is grimmer, resembling the colour of ebony, “allowing their vowels to darken, to spread out.” The female voice in “EBONY” declares:

I am holding out for a note to be sounded from  
 unfathomable ends, when you have something simple  
 to bestow. Your voice will not give.  
 Let it use my name against your own,  
 allow their vowels to darken, to spread out.  
 (FAEP 91)

The final part of “The Bower” cycle is entitled “WHITETHORN, AND THEN.” The related plant (genus *Crataegus*) is the red-berried shrub or a tree whose other common names are hawthorn and mayflower (*CED*). In the examined poem, Groarke’s persona mentions the white blossom on the hedge that she has picked up as a lucky charm. The subtle hue of the hawthorn flowers signifies purity though not absolutely, as their brief existence will soon be tainted with the blemish of the deadly decay. The speaker in “WHITETHORN, AND THEN” describes:

#### WHITETHORN, AND THEN

Plucked like a leaf from a whitethorn hedge  
 and put down almost at once before the flowers tarnish  
 or the promise of worse luck can come my way.  
 Of this, the house and its bright door are innocent  
 as Sunday evenings or a whitethorn hedge  
 with all the light flocked into it. Any hour of late.  
 (FAEP 92)

The white flowered shrubs encircling the speaker’s house are connoted with the following expressions: “its bright door . . . innocent,” “all the light flocked into it,” “table’s even gleam,” “a white-handed home” and “small buds to a square of warmth.” The quoted metaphors indicate that the comforting presence of the WHITETHORN organises the life of the inhabitants of the abode that it encircles. Inside the house, the cosy atmosphere appears to resemble that of the past century, with the serene smell of home cooking, the smooth routine of the domestic chores, and the old-fashioned pride of doing things with “my hands.” One cannot but envy the idealised domestic hearth and its female

WHITETHORN guardian who makes sure “the table’s even gleam is done away.” The persona in “WHITETHORN, AND THEN” relates:

A kitchen table with plain flour sieved unfairly  
 so the table’s even gleam is done away,  
 with nothing to show for it but my hands  
 and their business to do with a white-handed home  
 (FAEP 92)

The calm time at home is measured with “waiting on for the first slice to be dressed / with cream.” Nonetheless despite its calculated effect, the subsequent comparisons appear to overwhelm with their over-romanticised ambience (i.e. “cream that will gather itself against the heat, / and turn like small buds to a square of warmth”). The female voice in “WHITETHORN, AND THEN” cherishes:

. . . the waiting on for the first slice to be dressed  
 with cream that will gather itself against the heat,  
 and turn like small buds to a square of warmth  
 that comes lately when there’s nowhere else to go.  
 (FAEP 92)

Luckily the last line “that comes lately when there’s nowhere else to go” challenges the honeyed tone with a refreshing hint of the ordinarily mundane boredom. Accordingly, a note of absurdity creeps into Groarke’s narrative to relieve the pastoral paradise from the heaviness of tiring perfection. The perfect WHITETHORN-housewife builds a well (*sic*) where she disposes of the baking leftovers instead of emptying them into a prosaic sink. Watching them go down with the water, Groarke’s persona compares the remaining speckles to the “flecks of whitethorn.” As in the fragment above, the passage’s concluding words bring the uncanny imagery back to the discourse. Its designations are manifested in the verb “strew,” dispersed all over the place with no order, and the expression “there is little else / to see from inside and, anyway,” implying the claustrophobia of the suburban enclosures. The speaker narrates:

I make a well and count the seconds until  
 the water fills and the crumbs begin to topple  
 in the small deep like flecks of whitethorn  
 strewn on a hedge when there is little else  
 to see from inside and, anyway,  
 (FAEP 92)

In her yearning for changes, the WHITETHORN-female voice appreciates the sweltering heat as it signifies altering the ambience and her perception of it [“the heat has / blanched the view into something so seemingly / close” (FAEP 92)]. The final simile astonishes one with a defamiliarising tone and an estranging ground of comparison [“Like the twin lambs that will probably buck /

my broken playpen in the back of the garage / for what is left of light over Auburn Hill” (FAEP 92)]. Howell advocates that:

Alienation of men and women and nature is based on the dualism of culture and nature and on the dualism of spirit and matter. These two dualistic pairs are repeatedly cited in feminist literature as the source of human and environmental injustice. . . . the nature / culture dichotomy and the spirit / matter dichotomy substantially support the valuation of men over women and nature and ultimately endorse the exploitation of women and nature. (41)

On the whole, the arbitrary relation between gender and nature is best probed in those of Groarke’s poems that challenge the clichéd representations of both femininity and the natural world. Frequently, their conventional character is additionally emphasised by the choice of the traditional poetic genre, such as ballad, parable, erotic tale etc. In this vein, among the seven policies recommended to re-define gendering nature and women’s and men’s links with the natural world, one might enumerate at least three that are repeatedly employed by Groarke in her works:

1. “Re-mythmaking” nature as a speaking, “bodied” subject.
2. Erasing or blurring of boundaries between inner (emotional, psychological, personal) and outer (geographic) landscapes, or the erasing or blurring of self-other (human / nonhuman, I / Thou) distinctions
3. Re-eroticizing human relationships with a “bodied” landscape. (Legler 230)

In line with the above, Groarke’s poem “Islands” assumes a folk, lyrical ballad form. The speaker addresses her speech to some undefined “you” in an inviting manner (“I waited for you. I will sing for you”). The female voice in “Islands” seems to belong to the woman who spends her days biding her time to see her lover again. Her dwelling place (“house at the edge of the lake”) appears to suggest that she may not be a human being but a water nymph. What confirms such assumptions is the fact that the persona appears to be evasive and unwilling to express herself except in gnomic riddles (i.e. “what does not end will not return”). The speaker in “Islands” declares:

In my house at the edge of the lake  
what does not end will not return.  
A storm may gather in the stance of trees.  
I waited for you. I will sing for you.

(FAEP 17)

Since the persona’s addressee comes from the mainland, she keeps the fire burning to make her beloved’s return to her easier. However the eerie site for the lovers’ meeting looks far from having a romantic setting (compare “I had gathered the leaves of the dark”). In addition, the woman’s unnerving preparations resemble cleaning a graveyard tomb more than the mundane household chores [“When you came to my house for the second time / I had

gathered the leaves of the dark in our room. / I lit a fire and a candle to burn / in every window that faced towards your shore" (FAEP 17)]. The final part of "Islands" pronounces the distressing rhetorical questions to which the female voice appears to know the answer in advance. To be reunited with her lover, the speaker in "Islands" implores for help from the forces of nature. Among the invoked plant species, Groarke's persona enumerates the "wych elm," a generic name for the Latin *ulmus glabra* (CED). The tree's "witch" name explains subversively the female speaker's invocation to the natural world's spirits ("Won't you call for me at my house by the lake? / Cedar of Lebanon. Silver birch. / Won't you take me in your boat to the centre of the lake? / Wych elm. Wych elm" (FAEP 17). Culturally, the wych / witch correspondence has its roots in the so called "wild" nature of femininity, conceived of as disorder and paralleled with women's allegedly excessive sexual and "animal" instincts: "The witch, symbol of the violence of nature, raised storms, caused illness, destroyed crops, obstructed generation, and killed infants. Disorderly woman, like chaotic nature, needed to be controlled" (Merchant 127). This cliché dualism challenged in this chapter can be traced back to the fact that:

At the root of the identification of women and animality with a lower form of human life lies the distinction between nature and culture fundamental to humanistic disciplines such as history, literature, and anthropology, which accept the distinction as an unquestioned assumption. Nature-culture dualism is a key factor in Western civilization's advance at the expense of nature . . . .European culture increasingly set itself above and apart from all that was symbolized by nature. (Merchant 143)

Included in Groarke's *Shale* "The Riverbed" explores another version of the nature-gender-supernatural narrative. The poem in question has a ballad form, with the frequent structural and verbal repetitions that are typical for that genre. Likewise, it includes rhetorical questions and elements of folk mystery and bleak suspense. Brian Phillips rightly notices that "Groarke's poems often have an air of simplicity, as though they were no more involved than the Irish songs from which many of them are partly descended. But their grounded, private acuteness, their silent insistence on discovering their own methods, makes them subtler and more complex than the poems of most of Groarke's more extravagantly ambitious contemporaries" (237). In "The Riverbed," the female voice belongs to the drowned girl, "lying face up on the riverbed," who committed suicide or was murdered. The other person mentioned in Groarke's narrative is the speaker's lover who is "swimming above" her dead body:

There is sun in the mirror, my head in the trees.  
There is sun in the mirror without me.  
I am lying face up on the riverbed.  
My lover is swimming above me.

(FAEP 16)

In “The Riverbed,” one cannot be certain why and whether at all the persona took her own life. The girl’s lover is evoked affectionately by her throughout the narrative (i.e. the mention of “the ribbons he tied in my hair,” “I had his hands to lie on” and “I had his arms beneath me”). As already hinted at, the phrase “his body may come as his body has gone” could indicate that the girl killed herself to follow the man she loved. The last stanza of Groarke’s poem appears to confirm these assumptions (“I would lie on the bed of the river with you”). The female voice in “The Riverbed” recalls:

The ribbons he tied in my hair are gone,  
gone back to their net in the water.  
Instead I have silverweed, speedwell and rue,  
where once I had his hands to lie on.

(FAEP 16)

Culturally, a floating, suicidal heroine has been too frequently connoted with the tragic female characters who have been textually victimised in the literary tradition, such as Ophelia (compare “I have silverweed, speedwell and rue”) or The Lady of Shallot (see the poem’s opening reference to the mirror). In any case, the persona in “The Riverbed” does invite pity when confused and uncertain of what is happening to her, articulates her sorrow: “Instead I have silverweed, speedwell and rue, / where once I had his arms beneath me. / His body may come as his body has gone – / and the marl will close over again” (FAEP 16). The sequence of rhetorical questions intensifies the ambience of the speaker’s textual entrapment:

Where are your silverweed, your speedwell now?  
They have all gone under the water.  
Where is your face in the river now?  
Drifting upstream to the moon.

(FAEP 16)

Groarke’s poem’s last stanza resonates like a fading echo with the tragic events transmitted and multiplied endlessly like the water circles. The dead girl in “The Riverbed” seems to be unwilling to depart the living (and discursive) world, compulsively attempting to highlight her textual presence with the repeated first-person utterances (“I have walked,” “I have walked,” “I would lie” and “I will lie”). Temporally and chronologically, the future tense (“I will lie”) renders the persisting female presence, reminiscent of the continuous form in the line: “I am lying face up on the riverbed.” Morbid as it may seem, once dead, the speaking voice in Groarke’s poem looks as if she was even more connected to the world of the living than to that of the departed. The persona in “The Riverbed” keeps repeating: “I have walked on the floor of the river with you. / I have walked on the floor of the river. / I would lie on the bed of the river with you. / I will lie on the bed of the river” (FAEP 16).

In his review, having quoted the fragment from “The Riverbed,” Brian Phillips concludes: “Even when they risk quaintness, Groarke’s poems never

feel quaint, because they never seem to follow a received pattern; each line appears to have been discovered slowly, after the problem of the last was solved" (237). In reference to "The Riverbed," Phillips appreciates that "lines seem separated by a great deal of space, as though they were written weeks apart" (236). The idiom in Groarke's poem in question is accessible with uncomplicated syntax and colloquial language. As in "Islands," the natural setting of "The Riverbed" does not appear textually significant in the light of the speaker's personal reminiscences. In the examined narrative, the natural elements (i.e. "silverweed, speedwell and rue") give the impression of being employed predominantly for their melodious and alliterative qualities. So is the "marl," which is a distant echo of "may." Nonetheless on closer examination, one notices the parallel between the girl's subdued passivity and the nature's objectified, contextual background. Both of them look rendered mainly in their circumstantial function, with their agency being questioned and taken in parentheses. Stereotypically, the female voice's main textual function is to wait and yearn for the absent male lover. Hence Groarke's re-writing of these wistful narratives questions (voices) the woman's culturally and traditionally enhanced textual muteness. In that context, nature's cooperative assistance appears to be beneficial to the persona. What is more, due to the connections with the natural world and despite the allegorical mechanism of the parable, the female body's materiality is not lost in the examined poems. Griffin subscribes to the idea of maintaining the bodily "unconstructed nature." She argues subsequently:

. . . even though both view and experience are socially constrained, and distorted, still, like the bodies of other animals, and plants, like air or soil, the human body has a nature, even if unnamed and unnameable, one that can be violated, by pollution, by starvation, by chemical, nuclear or genetic manipulation, and by more subtle acts through which physical existence itself becomes invisible. (Griffin, "Ecofeminism" 219)

Although it is permeated with nostalgia as much as "Islands" and "The Riverbed," Groarke's poem "The Tree House" belongs to a more realistic poetic genre. Unlike in the previously analysed works, in "The Tree House," waiting for her absent lover, Groarke's persona actively shapes her longing as projected onto the natural world. For instance, the "piles of branches" recall in the female voice the loved man's hands. Worried about her partner's security, Groarke's speaker contemplates "a shelter with a roof and walls of twigs." The alliterated expression "warp and weft will" betrays the female voice's anxiety, regardless of whether it is exaggerated or well-grounded. With the imagined perils that could prevent her lover from coming back to her, the female voice in "The Tree House" seems to be masking her own uncertainty about the man's feelings towards her ["Because someone has been building piles of branches / in the wood, I have been remembering your hands. / I propose to make a shelter with a roof and walls of twigs / so the close-knit warp and weft will keep us safe" (FAEP 18)]. The persona in "The Tree House" admits:



I am saying that I want you to return  
 and will show you how by laying down  
 a bed of leaves and soft pine cones  
 where I will kiss you so your body feels the sway.  
 (FAEP 18)

In her expressed wish for her partner's return, the female voice in "The Tree House" reveals her apprehension that it may never happen. Regardless of those fears, preparing for her lover's arrival, the waiting woman promises him a sensuous welcoming ritual in the woods. Thus, it is nature that in "The Tree House" becomes the lovers' "bed of leaves and soft pine cones" where their erotic reunion is to take place ("I will kiss you so your body feels the sway"). The passage addressed to the beloved one constitutes Groarke's speaker's decisive statement of intention ("I want you home"). Additionally, conjuring up a sexually alluring vision of seeds and cones spread all over her naked body, the persona in "The Tree House" seems to warn her partner not to take her fidelity for granted. The alliterated sensuous melody of "buckles and bears" and "splay my body with needles / and sweet-scented cones" creates a textual, erotic ambience of potential fulfilment that may bear fruit. In the light of these words, summoning her lover back home turns out to be not just wishful thinking but a threat, notifying him about what might happen if he disregards the plea and the woman who expresses it. In "The Tree House," the symmetrical, carefully arranged graphical layout in the form of the descending staircase seems to imply a decline in the couple's affection rather than a relational ascension. The female voice in Groarke's poem implores:

I want you home. I worry when the wind  
 is getting up. I'm sure it's only a matter of time  
 before the ragged pine behind the house  
 buckles and bears down upon the roof  
 to splay my body with needles  
 and sweet-scented cones.

(FAEP 18)

In "Chinese Lacquer," the departed partner is contemplated by means of the natural world signifiers that are related to him and that are discernible in the speaker's nearby surrounding (i.e., the mandarin fruit). The question raised by Groarke's persona ("was it you who left the mandarins here") and, to some extent, answered ("I think I see the mark of your hand") is subsequently elaborated in the qualifying possessive pronoun ("not even your mandarins perplex it"). It appears that via the natural world's imprints of the absent partner's tactile traces, the speaker in "Chinese Lacquer" tries to enter an indirect but still emotionally intense, dialogue with the missed spouse:

Was it you who left the mandarins here  
 on a table laced with mynah birds  
 and lotus blossom and, behind them,  
 the kind of night I could scoop

with an open hand and set down  
 on a lake so full of itself  
 it tucks a hem of shadow  
 into layer on layer of an obvious gloss  
 and its opacity?

(JS 41)

Linguistically, Groarke in “Chinese Lacquer” plays upon the Oriental-rooted natural world idiom. One may begin with Chinese-derivative mandarins whose linguistic root is the Sanskrit word *mantrin* (meaning, as *The Collins English Dictionary* explains, a “guide” and “advisor”<sup>107</sup>) to end with tropical family starlings and lotus flowers. Much more powerful in the past, the Oriental empires are now shadows of their former glory. The atmosphere of passing, fading away, disappearing shades and organic decay (see the mandarins’ decomposition) is manifested in the “layer on layer of an obvious gloss / and its opacity,” and further in “it tucks a hem of shadow,” “behind them.” In Groarke’s poem, the expressive vision of emptiness (“night I could scoop / with an open hand”) is skilfully counterpointed with its exact opposite (“a lake so full of itself”) as much as “an obvious gloss” is juxtaposed with “its opacity.” The speaker in “Chinese Lacquer” wonders:

I think I see the mark of your hand  
 in how the scald of orange upbraids  
 its pitch and how the sun rebuts it,  
 hones it to a pointed gold that rims,

(JS 41)

Not quite assured, the persona in “Chinese Lacquer” evokes natural imagery to decode her lover’s textual traces. The highly pleasing to the ear echoed combination “**could scoop**” and the regular one-syllable rhythm and metre (see the fragment starting from “the kind,” etc. to complete with “it tucks a hem”) excel with this extended metaphor’s meticulous details. Although the sun denies its responsibility for the damage done to the fruit peel’s outer layer, it keeps shining on the maimed mandarin until the scar solidifies, acquiring a lustrous texture. The final rapturous “oh-so-ravenous depth” exclamation reveals Groarke’s persona’s erotic fantasy to plunge into her lover’s body:

Not even your mandarins perplex it,  
 nor the fuss of those cankerous, dim birds  
 or, least of all, that lotus blossom kindling  
 the warning it had so usefully rehearsed.

It forgets itself: it gives nothing away.

(JS 41)

<sup>107</sup> The word signifies as well an influential and powerful person, originally an administrator.

On the whole, the cited passage's interpretation depends upon establishing the referent for the pronoun "it:" whether the speaker has in mind the aforementioned "depth," one can only guess. However one might then speculate about why the decaying fruit and the painted sickly birds enhance the menacing effect upon the female voice's psyche ("kindling / the warning it had so usefully rehearsed"). Viewed in this light, it appears that even the fruit "lacquer" coating is decoded by the persona as a bad omen signifying her relationship's end. Nonetheless, the final line in "Chinese Lacquer" ("it forgets itself: it gives nothing away") would contradict this argument, implying that no hidden agenda is disclosed to the speaker. The mandarin is a mandarin is a mandarin . . . yet<sup>108</sup> in Groarke's poetry nature is always appreciated or contemplated in relation to something else, usually to a human connotation, so this statement's validity does not seem feasible after all.

Apart from the comparative metaphorical framework, nature in Groarke's poetry frequently becomes the textual location where the female speaker's erotic fantasies might be depicted. In the cited fragment of "Slow Set," the bougainvillea's sensuous fragrance evokes in Groarke's persona associations with an enticing young man who approaches a girl that he fancies at a party. The poem's ambience of suspenseful erotic expectation that might, or might not, lead to a sexual fulfilment looks exciting to be entertained, even in its inconclusive potentiality. The female voice in "Slow Set" ponders:

It might as well be the orange scent of bougainvillea  
in a basement flat. It comes so wistfully and so blatantly  
unsure of why it does, like the most beautiful boy  
in the room who is walking towards you even now  
with your name just about to dive from his tongue  
into the sky-blue lagoon of your hands settling on his waist.  
(JS 28)

Similarly in "Inside Out," the background of nature constitutes the erotic *the mise en scène* for the poem's staged scenery. At first, the moonlight is transformed into a blanket upon which the lovers lie ["Put down the moonlight on the tablecloth. / I want to kiss your mouth" (S 46)]. There then follows a literary simile of rain as the pillow in the couple's shared pallet. Searching for the common ground, the persona in Groarke's poem goes even further than that: she questions any sense of "all this nightly rain" apart from its contextual function as a cultural-construct. She articulates this thought in a form of the rhetorical question: "What good is all this nightly rain / if not to be made a pillow of / to slip beneath your head?" (S 46). Following the vein of correspondences, in "Inside Out" the surrounding evergreen trees, with their cones and branches, seem to exist only to become the lovers' quilt, under which they can rest, being tired from their love-making:

---

<sup>108</sup> Gertrude Stein's famous dictum "Rose is a rose is a rose is a rose" comes from her poem (1913) *Sacred Emily*.

Take a brace of conifers  
 as though it were a bolt of cloth  
 of black and olive green and cutwork stars  
 with sky-blue beads between the tips  
 of branches, overall.

Pull it close around us.  
 We'll sleep underneath.

(S 46–47)

As shown here, one might get the impression that for Groarke's speaker, nature, with its unstudied beauty and organic existence, makes sense solely in reference to the human-world and its discursive signification. However apart from the natural world's reductive textualisation according to human cultural codes, the persona in Groarke's poetry expresses a longing to be a part of nature as well, inviting it to witness and participate in her momentous experiences. On the whole, it is only due to "viewing people as integral components of the larger ecosystem," that one can facilitate the process whereby one can "break down the dualism between humans and nature" (Merchant 95). Milton rightly notices the dangers of this approach in relation to natural world:

In the constructionist perspective, the environment can *only* be understood through cultural constructs, and these constructs are acquired from others, . . . in the course of social interaction . . . And because what people communicate is their own constructed knowledge, constructs are only ever derived from other constructs or, as Steward put it 'culture comes from culture' (Steward 1995: 36). This means that the role of environment itself (independent of cultural construction) in the production of knowledge is not merely restricted . . . but denied altogether. It cannot even contribute information, for information is meaningful and the unconstructed environment is assumed to be meaningless chaos. (41), emphasis original

In another poem by Groarke, entitled "Rain Songs," the referred to tendency to parallel the natural world to human-made constructs prevails even more than in "Inside Out." And although one can easily explain it with emotive arguments (textually overbearing as it may seem), such a strategy appears to be representative of the instrumental way of relating to nature. This happens "[b]ecause language contains a culture within itself, when language changes, a culture is also changing in important ways. By examining changes in descriptions of nature, we can then perceive something of the changes in cultural values" (Merchant 4). The female voice in "Rain Songs" argues:

The rain makes the world creak, unfold  
 like a ball of cellophane  
 released from the hand of one  
 who is miles away.

(S 34)

In “Rain Songs,” the poem’s ending captures the essence of what the introductory remarks characterised as nature being the third, latent party in gender relations. As argued earlier, “Nature in fact is a hidden partner in the binary . . . used to justify the social construction of gender” (Griffin, “Ecofeminism” 219), emphasis original. In other words, “the fictions of gender,” as Griffin defines them, are rendered via the “fictions of nature” (“all grimace and sequins,” “drags its tired metaphors,” “glossy stilts,” “contradicts our every word, corners us,” “silting so much of what there is to say”). Analysing “Rain Songs,” Grennan praises “[t]his habit of revelatory metaphor – letting, as Ezra Pound says, the fact be the sufficient symbol – is the one of the driving energies of Groarke’s intense yet quiet, lyrical imagination, so even a small riff on rain can bear the burden of emotional disturbance” (“Coaxing a World” 13). The speaker in “Rain Songs” meditates on

Ancient rain, all grimace and sequins:  
it drags its tired metaphors through the yard  
and does not know how to climb down  
from glossy stilts that stake these waking hours.  
It contradicts our every word, corners us  
as if we were listening to different CDs,  
calling to each other from separate rooms

(S 34)

The nature constructionist approach is also conspicuous in “Some Weather” where the gender war is transferred onto the “natural” battleground, assuming the symbolic representation of a violent storm. In Groarke’s poem, the atmospheric explosion caused by the mixing of different air temperatures corresponds to the outburst of the couple’s suppressed and conflicted emotions. The dynamic verbs of action (“upturn, stow, **disconnect**, / **shut** down, **shutter**, **shut**”) indicate that the attempt to avoid the elemental confrontation which could clear up the atmosphere leads to disastrous effects in gender relations. The persona in “Some Weather” announces: “Among the things / (though these are not things) / I did to pre-empt the storm were: / upturn, stow, disconnect, / shut down, shutter, shut” (S 11). Groarke’s “Some Weather” proves that unlike the grim predictions, facing up to the source of one’s apprehensiveness may turn out to be more cathartic than trying to ignore reality. As in “Rain Songs,” in “Some Weather,” gender and nature’s ex/im (plosion) results in the deconstruction of the constricting clichéd stereotypes (“the house sulked,” “the sky scolded”). The speaker in Groarke’s poem admits:

But, while the house sulked,  
the sky scolded  
and I observed an hour’s breadth,  
the storm tossed out its tinsmith verbs  
somewhat to the west.

(S 11)

As a result, in "Some Weather" the direct gender warfare implied in the couple's conflict is deferred out of the epicentre ("the storm tossed out its **tinsmith verbs** / somewhat to the west"). Exploring the "connections between social change and changing construction of nature" (xvi), Merchant argues that

concepts of nature and women are historical and social constructions. There are no unchanging "essential" characteristics of sex, gender, or nature. Individuals form concepts about nature and their own relationships to it that draw on the ideas and norms of the society into which they are born, socialized, and educated. People living in a given period construct nature in ways that give meaning to their own lives as elites or ordinary people, men or women, Westerners or Easterners. (xvi)

Similarly, the poem "Cities and Flowers" probes further the stereotypically constructed nature of the gender grounded (bi) polarities. Consisting of the two dichotomous perspectives, Groarke's narrative sets in opposition "your city" (masculine) to "my garden" (feminine). "The garden associated with Eden, and thereby with humanity prelapsarian state . . . symbolizes humanity in its innocent state, movement away from the garden to the city is associated with humanity's fall from grace" (Potts 3). Groarke's persona begins her statement with a contrastive accent: "**S**o your city . . . **stiff** with . . . **spill**." The cited passage operates on paradoxical and oxymoronic phrases such as "stiff with outlandish vibrancy." As in the previously analysed poem, in "Cities and Flowers," Groarke astonishes one with unusual correlations: on one hand, "petals" and "blossom," on the other, "your rustling skin." The uncommon grounds of comparison are not confined to the verbal level. They extend into synaesthetic sensations where the "wisps of music" are "more fragrant even than blossoms / with their careless overtures." In the speaker's vision ("buildings are laying / **slabs** of **shadow** out, workmanlike"), the discursive shadows are chopped into pieces, denying the textual construction's material solidity. Pointing to the natural world's integrated dimension, the female voice in "Cities and Flowers" completes her extensively negated analogy ("the way a tree / could never be"). The image's final component remains inconclusive whether the phrase "all that giddy lineage, those airs" defines the reality of the city or the aforementioned trees:

So your city is a garden with its heat in flower,  
stiff with outlandish vibrancy and spill.  
And your skin rustles like petals on the turn  
to wisps of music more fragrant even than blossoms  
with their careless overtures. So buildings are laying  
slabs of shadow out, workmanlike, the way a tree  
could never be, with all that giddy lineage, those airs.  
(FAEP 94)

In contrast, in the poem's second part relating to "her garden," Groarke's persona provides an insight into the mysteries of textual horticulture. The concessively tentative statement "Well, my garden works its allusions to the death" seems puzzling at first. On closer examination, one might read it through

its connotations with the flowers in a cemetery, or on a more ecological level, as the place where the on-going processes of decay and vegetation coexist side-by-side. Either way, one appreciates Groarke's speaker's affirmative way out of the morbid textual path with the contrastive denial ("but the poppies remind me"). The persona's return into the textual imagery of the living is marked with the poppy-tinged make up and the cheerful clattering of the elegant shoes. One believes her declaration ("high heels [that] will stake / me to my place") which is rationalised wittily and logically ("There are pavements to be set tinkling"). The female voice in "Cities and Flowers" continues:

Well, my garden works its allusions to the death  
 but the poppies remind me of lipstick, the hydrangeas  
 of noise. I'm wearing high heels that will stake  
 me to my place. There are pavements to be set tinkling;  
 streets that need only breath for them to swell.

(FAEP 94)

The poem "If There is a City" sets the three natural-world contextual locations: the city, the field and the river. Each of these designations marks a different phase in Groarke's speaker's life and it is connoted with her altering expectations and changing outcomes. Accordingly, "the city" signifies the "generations of imperatives." The musical pattern for this urban composition is mellowed by the softness of "s" in "she stands," "set," "she sees the evening stretch," and "stars to streets," "roofs of stone," and intensified by the strong metropolis-like "r" in "lower tendril stars to streets." The same syllable consonantal-based echoes appear in "tendril" and "tangent." Surrounded as she is by the claustrophobic "roofs of stone," the city persona in Groarke's poem misses the open space around her:

If she stands before the walls  
 set with generations of imperatives,  
 she sees the evening stretch into a city,  
 lower tendril stars to streets  
 that are tangent to the roofs of stone.

(FAEP 26)

Therefore in "If There is a City," "a cornflower field" functions textually as the speaker's second flight of fancy about a return to the natural environment. Other settings of the natural milieu that are missed by her are itemised as "one remembered sea," "the frozen orchards" and the "winter set." The third person voice recalls:

She must imagine a cornflower field  
 that will fall to the side  
 of one remembered sea.  
 And winter set in the frozen orchards

(FAEP 26)

Accordingly in "If There is a City," the discursive female potential is expressed "in mosaic light" and "the amber or cinnamon bracelets of her mother." Traditionally associated with femininity, water belongs to the river's (third) domain. Deficiency in the fluvial flow is connoted with arid deprivation (see "empty," "The absence of a life," "a naked burial") and, in consequence, Groarke's persona's own emotional barrenness. In the discourse, the impediment ("snag") to the fluvial stream has both the bodily foundation ("skin") and the textual dimension ("empty passages"), as in "the river skin / has snagged on empty passages of clay." The speaker in "If There is a City" admits:

If there is a river, she will count  
the amber or cinnamon bracelets of her mother  
in mosaic light. If there is no river,  
she will know the place where the river skin  
has snagged on empty passages of clay.

(FAEP 26)

In "If There is a City," the narrative's textual and corporeal vein is resumed when the river's "skin . . . has spilled." Indicative of the diluvial excess, the spillage amounts to the signifying act in the discourse. Joining in the "flow of signifiers," Groarke's persona singles out from the textual current ("her name, an amulet, / a sacred jewel worn from the moment of source"). The post-signification moment in "If There is a City" marks the obliteration of the textual meaning, and that is why it is approached as "the journey's designated end:"

And because of the skin that has spilled  
a naked burial on the earth she names it  
for a time that had her name, an amulet,  
a sacred jewel worn from the moment of source  
to the journey's designated end.

(FAEP 26)

In the final passage of "If There is a City," the speaker's fears about the life's potential finale come to the discourse's surface. Unwilling to confront the unwanted reality, Groarke's persona asks herself "is this the end?" Defining her way as "the journey from chaos to the burning star," the female voice in "If There is a City" identifies herself as an integral element of the universe's natural framework. This comforting thought is captured in the soothing, regular line: "centuries contained against an arc." However perfectly aware that there is more to be "breathed in" than the "dust or glaze the scorched," the persona in Groarke's poem resorts to urban desert imagery. Her bleak concluding vision, which is reminiscent of the municipal graveyard, is summed up with the two succinct sentence equivalents ("The absence of a life. The city walls"). Fading away slowly, the voice in "If There is a City" subsides behind the dwindling civic enclosure:



Is this the end? The thing that is told  
 is the journey from chaos to the burning star.  
 Centuries contained against an arc  
 of dust or glaze the scorched and jasper  
 ornaments she breathes into a life.

The absence of a life. The city walls.

(FAEP 26)

The aforementioned “The absence of a life” reappears in the poem “What Becomes the River?,” in its repeated refrain: “Breathe the clean air of death.” Commencing her narrative with an imperative mood, Groarke’s speaker enters her imaginary dialogue with a listener. In addition, in “What Becomes the River?,” this interaction is intensified by a series of rhetorical questions which though not answered, have to be voiced. The female voice in “What Becomes the River?” advises:

Breathe the clean air of death. The river  
 has no more strength than a stone.  
 Is this the same sea or a different sea  
 that comes a little further on the shore?

(FAEP 15)

Notably, Groarke’s poem opens with suspenseful expressions. Preceded by the action verb “breathe,” the startling oxymoronic phrase (“the clean air of death”) is followed by its referent “the river.” Apart from the river, the narrative has two other potential subjects of enunciation: a stone and the sea. The three agents seem to be intertwined with one another. In “What Becomes the River,?” the sea appears to be the most durable and dynamic of the whole triad. Nonetheless, all the more in relation to the resilient sea, the female persona in Groarke’s poem wishes to test the limits of oceanic endurance. Wondering how “each wave breaks / and is broken like a stone,” and contemplating the river’s volatility, the speaking voice in “What Becomes the River?” tries to figure out where to locate the changing variables. The final result discloses the common denominator for the three examined natural forces. The speaker argues: “Which wave has more potential, greater force / when each wave breaks,” and then follows “and is broken like a stone? / The sound of this is no more / than the river makes when it is still” (FAEP 15). It turns out that the puzzle’s solution leads to the water’s fluidity, since “Everything becomes the river.” Consequently, Gaard argues that:

In the beginning there was only water, and you were a part of it . . . . This was your first relationship, your connection to water. And the quality of this relationship, the character of your beliefs about water, shapes all relationships in your life. The way you do one thing is the way you do everything. You cannot separate one relationship from another, this water with reverence, that water with waste. Because water returns. Water knows there are no separations. (133)

In Groarke's poem, the river seems to be the extension of the sea ("The sea held close in the river"), the moving fluvial stream fluctuates constantly and it "is never still." What does not alter is the "the clean air of death" that the three elements are contaminated with. Faced with this, the river's ever-changing existence looks threatened. The persona in "What Becomes the River?" concludes:

Everything becomes the river.  
The sea held close in the river. The aftermath

of stone is nothing but a proof that this is always  
something else. That everything becomes itself  
to breathe the clean air of death. The river.

(FAEP 15)

The poem "What Becomes the River?" brings back to the surface the question of narrating nature as an androcentric and anthropocentric contextual background upon which human-constructed ideas and values can be projected. It seems that "[t]he way in which the constructionist model denies the unconstructed environment a role in the production of knowledge is by assuming that the only experience relevant to this process is *social* experience" (Milton 41), emphasis original. To challenge the aforementioned view, one may claim to "consider a human being's relationship with their total environment, not just their social environment" (Milton 41). Consequently, Gaard recalls the experience of the unity with nature when contemplating the river: "I lie down to watch the river . . . . The water holds me instead, flowing around and through me. Immersed in this river, I no longer need to be a container, no longer need to hold on to my separate little vase full of energy. The energy surrounds me" (194–195). Wheatley in "Irish Poetry into the Twenty-First Century" notices that "In 'What Becomes the River?' a few key terms (river, stone, and sea) are repeated with incantatory force, as Groarke's syntax creates a musical balance between movement and pause, transformation and sameness. Even something as solid as rock has its origins in another element, but as the final line reminds us, what underlies all these transformations is the 'clean air of death'. Yet by isolating 'the river' beyond its finality, Groarke suggests that flux wins out after all" (261).

Accordingly, the speaker in "Quill" conceives of creativity as coming directly from the (flux) body of bustling linguistic designations ("feather is plucked out from that flurry on the board"). Hence Groarke's narrative resumes the "plucked feather" as a signifier of writing borne out of corporeal and lived experience. Stemming from the animated being's source ("dipped for no good reason in the dead bird's blood"), writing is purified through a system of the arbitrary, abstract and lifeless textual referents ("let drop on something clean to hand") that create a storyline:

Say one feather is plucked out from that flurry on the board,  
 dipped for no good reason in the dead bird's blood,  
 and let drop on something clean to hand, by way of plot –  
 (FAEP 54)

Although the process of writing in “Quill” aspires to become a discursive substitute for the absent activity (“it fixes on a shadow that is not to do with height”), it cannot *per se* induce any action. The dropped feather’s construction will always sadly remind one of its (deficient) avian functions. Comparable to “an open book with pages still uncut,” the textual representation of the fallen bird’s feather will never instigate a flight in the air. Paradoxically, what “moves” the written story is the absence of real flight. Therefore if not taken out of the bird’s body, the feather could perform its “natural” mobile but not discursive role. In asking “might even that one feather have an inkling of the fate / that will make all of this possible, because flight is not?” (FAEP 54), the persona in “Quill” wittily plays with the seeming dual nature / culture binarism. One could risk applying to Groarke’s poem the commentary that Jefferson Holdridge devoted to another poet whose work is analysed in this book, Caitríona O’Reilly: “language like a feather is let fly and finally becomes something else, unveiling the origins of the form itself” (379). Structurally, “Quill” is composed of two triplets and a couplet, with a regular rhyming pattern of an **abc dcb ca** design.

so that it fixes on a shadow that is not to do with height  
 because the spine’s unbroken and the vane is stiff and squat,  
 unruffled, like an open book with pages still uncut –  
 (FAEP 54)

Groarke’s poem “Intimacy” probes further the textualisation of nature within women’s discourse. As if addressing that issue, Griffin explains that “[e]ven if nature cannot be entirely nor accurately contained in language, ecofeminism aims toward the visibility of nature as a reality. With this approach one can begin to understand that the social construction (exploitation, destruction) of nature is implicit in and inseparable from the social construction of gender” (“Ecofeminism” 219–220). “Intimacy” meditates on a signifier of nature heavily connoted within human discourse. The peacock feather is burdened with both “natural” and “cultural” significations. To begin with the natural world, peafowl do not live in Ireland. The male birds are especially bred for their precious plumage or kept as pets. On the cultural signification level, the peacock is connoted with masculine vanity and pride [compare Sean O’Casey *Juno and the Paycock* (1924)]. Groarke’s poem embraces most of the aforementioned social and / or cultural meanings of the peacock’s feather. “Intimacy” begins with the speaker’s astonishment on finding the feather outside the house:

How did the peacock feather come to be  
 found out in the yard, trampled, half-broken,  
 its wild eye tamed with dirt?

(S 32)

One might wonder what causes the persona's surprise; after all, the fallen feather in its "natural" context looks exactly the way she relates it. Once dropped, it becomes redundant and organically decaying, overlaid with mud, grime or whatever it gets covered with. The course of action that appals Groarke's speaker so much ("wild eye tamed with dirt") is the most "natural" process to the part of the plumage no longer used by the bird. What seems much less "natural" is the previous location of the feather: inside the speaker's house, performing as a decorative prop of the interior décor. The persona in "Intimacy" assures us that the mantelpiece setting is supposed to be "so full of itself / the whole room bent into its good grace." In her account, unlike the formerly repellent dirt and deterioration ("trampled, half-broken," "tamed with dirt"), reducing the bird's plumage to an ornamental element of furnishing style looks much more distinguished. Tim Robinson in an interview with Christine Cusick makes an apt observation which seems to be the best commentary to the context related above: "Indeed ecocriticism should come into the academy with mud on its boots; otherwise it would be false to its axioms of personal and participatory openness to the natural world" (210). The female voice in "Intimacy" recalls:

The last I saw, it was in the pewter jug  
on the mantelpiece, so full of itself  
the whole room bent into its good grace.

(S 32)

In Groarke's "Intimacy," the strong emotional attachment that the house inhabitants appear to display towards their favourite eye-pleasing object might partially explain the above-cited presumptions. All in all, keeping the peacock's feather at home is only slightly less abhorrent than hanging antlers on the wall. In both cases, the likelihood that the animals parted with these trophies in a "natural" way is comparably low. Once animals possess something that people consider "beautiful" or "desirable," be it plumage, horns, fur etc., their uninterrupted existence becomes endangered. No matter how "tenderly" one might handle these (natural? cultural?) objects, their precious social-coding is lethal to their original natural roots. The persona in "Intimacy" brings to mind:

You carried it in so tenderly  
across your open palms  
as if it were a missive or a veil.

(S 32)

Groarke's poem's final stanza captures the referred to paradox really well. On the aesthetic level, people will view a peacock's feather found outside their house as a spoiled part of an interior design. Ironically, nature becomes culturally coded and appreciated mostly in its dead form, as with the so-called oxymoronic still life. Paradoxical as it may seem, to take delight in "nature," people have to first remove its "natural" and "organic" traces, such as soil, dirt etc. (see "let it settle, unearth itself"). In "Intimacy," once textually "purified,"

the feather can, then, become as “adorning” as a taxidermal animal. The female voice advises:

Lay it down there on newspaper;  
let it settle, unearth itself.  
Then we will get to work.

(S 32)

Analysing “Intimacy,” Grennan praises Groarke’s poem as “[o]ne of the most striking of her successes . . . marked by one of the qualities I most admire in her work: the refined subtlety with which she can load an image –sharply and concretely seen – with metaphorical implication” (“Coaxing a World” 13). The critic comments upon “Intimacy” in these words:

Here it is an image of the peacock feather that carries in itself, as she describes it, the burden of an unsettled relationship, of a loss acutely felt, exactly delineated. As in any strong lyricism, the poem lodges itself firmly in a world of fact while reverberating with unspoken feeling. In this case it’s the simple, understated title that alters the reader to a way of reading the poem’s particulars, preparing our minds to respond to its delicately but exactly weighted language. (Grennan, “Coaxing a World” 13)

With regard to the speaker’s relation to the natural world, almost the same can be said about another poem by Groarke, “Glaze.” In “Glaze,” its graphical layout, with its alternating indented and non-indented lines, is as intricate as the sound pattern. Instead of becoming a contemplative pretext for a comparison between the persona’s feelings and nature’s condition, the titular ice-covered river retains its tangible physical properties. Noticing a frozen bird ensnared in the river’s “glaze,” the female voice in Groarke’s poem looks astonished at the ice-preserved animal’s solitariness. To depict this poignant image, the female voice employs the adjective modifying the bird’s lustrous plumage. Its texture, paralleled with the speaker’s own bone framework, reminds her of the iced lake’s smooth surface. Furthermore in “Glaze,” a rare adverb (“indelibly alone”) renders the metonymic proximity, textually connoted with ink associations. On the whole, in Groarke’s narrative, transforming the dead bird into a discursive signifier might only reflect but not express its singular agonising experience:

A frozen river after a night of rain:  
    a skim of ice no bigger than your breath  
has a single bird on it that is stalled,  
    sleek as my breastbone, indelibly alone.  
Do you know it yet, who rustled songbirds  
    out of winter and once sparked a hummingbird?  
What now of the cold on your wingtip,  
    the ice on your tongue? With your eye setting  
on where I still you, I all but turn away.

(JS 54)

Step by step, the restless mood in “Glaze” increases. Consequently, Groarke’s persona keeps asking seemingly absurd questions, phrased in a kenning-like, periphrastic manner. While leaving open the question of whether the speaker’s addressee is the beloved man or the bird trapped in the ice, Groarke’s poem appears to indicate the latter. In “Glaze,” this assumption is supported by the expressions of the ice-thin coating, measured as being “no bigger than **your** breath” and “cold on **your** wingtip, / the ice on **your** tongue.” It concurs as well with the poem’s ending when the empathetic eye-contact between the immobilised bird and the female voice is established. The speaker in the cited passage feels that with her gaze (mind the sound similarity with the tiled “Glaze”) she participates in “freezing” the bird in the discourse. But despite her objections, Groarke’s persona decides to uphold her look and not to turn her eyes away from the animal’s real and not narrated tragedy. By returning the reciprocated (discursive) gaze, she acknowledges the bird’s right to be remembered, even if that means being textually “frozen” in the analysed poem. Grennan’s appraisal of “Intimacy,” cited earlier, might also be extended to the method applied by Groarke in “Glaze,” according to which

. . . the beautiful image is introduced with such casual colloquialism; how the “I” of the poem is at once intensely personal, not at all egoistical but dissolved into a tone of calm interrogation and simple observation; and how the small plain facts are released suddenly in that last line into a play of words that animates everything with a feeling both extravagant and discreet, the poet composing a perfect verbal vehicle for the way a consciousness can be at the same time fiercely aware of what is outside and of what is inside the observing self. (Grennan, *Coaxing a World* 13)

Consequently, the speaker in “An Teach Tuí” expresses a wish to “fix in even one language” the rich idiom of the natural world: its noises, sounds, colours, textures [“**Thistledown**, **fuchsia**, **flagstone floor**: this noon house,” “straw-coloured months of childhood” (S 50)]. Being fully aware that such a yearning can never be fully satisfied, the female voice in Groarke’s poem renders it in the unreal conditional mood (“If I knew,” “I wouldn’t need”). Nonetheless in “An Teach Tuí,” it looks as if the poet’s phrases were as close as possible to a textual substitute for a word-perfect transcription of the natural world in human discourse:

Tea roses bluster the half-door.  
Rain from eaves footfalls the gravel.

A robin, cocksure of himself,  
frittered away all morning in the shrub.  
If I knew how to fix in even one language  
the noise of his wings in flight

I wouldn’t need another word.

(S 50)

Following this line of thinking, in “The Jetty” Groarke’s persona also traces back her writing’s roots to the natural world [“The way I scribble / is like the way a squirrel or a cardinal / is fumbling in the thicket to my left” (S 12)]. In doing so, she appears to envy animals the certainty of their choices [“at least he knows what he’s looking for” (S 12)]. The speaker in “The Jetty” does not seem to have such an assured confidence, having to make do with constant conjectures and suppositions. She has to face up to the fact that she can only arrive at “another version of itself,” never reaching an absolute conviction. Hence as in other poems by Groarke, the female voice in “The Jetty” “borrows” the language of nature to express her own thoughts and uncertainties. She plunges into the flowery fragrance, consistency and colour “inside a fuchsia bud / of wine,” “spindle tips of light from a porch,” and she “uses” temporarily the echoed voice of the lake:

I think I have found it when the opposite hill  
throws down another version of itself  
on the lake’s gloss. Soon the evening  
will soak boat and jetty; eventually, this page.  
By then I’ll have slipped inside a fuchsia bud  
of wine and spindle tips of light from a porch  
over the lake that answers, very nicely, to our own.  
(S 12)

As much as the female voice in “An Teach Tuí” wishes to “fix in language” the robin’s “the noise of . . . wings in flight,” Groarke’s persona in “Song” declares: “I know now / who stirs / that blackbird / into song” (JS 25). Dedicated to her husband Conor, the poem “Song” operates on the assumption of the superiority of the narrated, textual world over the natural one. The *modus operandi* of the nature’s movement is the (discursively articulated) speaker’s longing. In “Song,” it is as if her love for her husband sets the whole natural world in motion. Sampson comments upon the poem in question with admiration: “Nothing is clumsy here; nothing is under-achieved, nor is there any of that surplus of the unintended, in language or idea, which can be one of the surprises of poetry. The poem’s dedicatee ‘stirs’ – a verb with satisfying various levels of meaning – her highly symbolic blackbird into song” (“A Light Still Burns” 12). Indeed, robins, blackbirds etc. are “highly symbolic” textual creations in Groarke’s writing. On the whole, Sampson characterises Groarke’s work as “a fine-tuned diction, a poetry of poise and perfectly contrived effect” (“A Light Still Burns” 12). In this vein, the persona in “Purism” defines her artistic credo as to “listen to sense,” renouncing all unnecessary linguistic embellishments and textual ornaments with “glitter in it.” She strives for pure signification without any redundant words, “the wrong ones” that are “too much.” In consequence, the speaker in “Purism” refuses to follow narcissistic self-pitying creative indulgence: “loneliness” (with its gliding sounds) resonates dangerously close to “glitter” and then “listen.” The female voice in Groarke’s poem argues:

The wind orchestrates  
its theme of loneliness  
and the rain  
has too much glitter in it, yes.

They are like words, the wrong ones,  
insisting I listen to sense.  
But I too am obstinate.

(S 59)

Asking rhetorically about the purpose of the natural world's inspiration, the female voice in "Purism" contrasts the brooding night's darkness with the whiteness / blankness of her own writing environment. As if addressing that issue, Griffin probes it further: "Because when one keeps erasing the terms *woman* and, of course, *man* and, especially, *human*, where do we land? Is the ground we now stand on a *tabula rasa*? A white page, a spread sheet empty of lines, a field with no electromagnetic forces, no rules, no gravity?" ("Ecofeminism" 216), emphasis original. Therefore in "Purism," reading in-between the lines, the similarity of the colour of night to Groarke's persona's writing ink is not accidental:

I have white walls,  
white curtained windows.  
What need have I  
of the night's jet-black,  
outlandish ornament?

(S 59)

In line with that, the speaker in "Purism" defines her textual objectives in the discourse: "What I am after / is silence / in proportion / to desire" (S 59). In other words, the female voice in Groarke's poem appears to opt for wordlessness and sensuous fulfilment. However these two states seem to be mutually contradictory because craving implies lack and neediness, whereas noiselessness denotes stillness and withdrawal. One can refer to Grennan's words again that it is "[b]etween such sensed loss and such deliberate silence, Vona Groarke coaxes her world – with its sensuous physical details, its wryly observed oddities of character and action, its depths of compassion and understanding – into plain view, beyond any hint of self-regard or rhetorical affectation" ("Coaxing a World" 13). Consequently the female voice in "Purism" elaborates her credo as "the way music plumbs / its surfaces / as straight words do / the air between them" (S 59). Groarke's speaker sums up her artistic doctrine and life's stand as follows:

I begin to learn  
the simple thing  
  
burning through  
to an impulse at once lovely



and given to love

that will not be refused

(S 59)

Groarke's artistic credo is best realised in the quoted "refined subtlety with which she can load an image – sharply and concretely seen – with metaphorical implication" (Grennan, "Coaxing a World 13). As in "Purism," the speaker in the five-lined "Drama" decides on an economy of language and restraint in the means of artistic expression. A word-cautious imagist "Drama" evokes the two tropes superimposed on each other, namely, of the sun-dried plant and the lover's uneasy reaction to this ultimate signifier of mortality. With each subsequent term making a difference, the maximum visual content is condensed within the minimum of words. The verb "backed into" renders the plant's enforced solar over-exposure, while "gilded" implies its being "ordained" in the yellow-gold blossom. With the reference to bacchanalia, "spree" connotes "a Roman abundance." The sole rhymed pair (**tree** – **spree**) seems to organise the text's audio-visual stem. In "Drama," the laburnum flowers resemble the colour of the sun, and like the aforementioned star, this poisonous plant is best admired from a safe distance. The female voice in Groarke's poem declares:

Even the drama of the laburnum tree  
backed into the evening sun –  
a Roman abundance, a gilded spree –  
is as nothing compared to the look  
on your face when I directed you to it.

(FAEP 93)

Apart from its lexical root, the poem "Sunflowers" does not stem from the imagist technique highlighted in "Drama." To illustrate the point, Groarke's text is composed of three triplets, each containing one personified simile, operating upon a titular plant. The first triplet revolves around the "foot soldiers" metaphor. The second is organised around the flowers' likeness to the "passengers herded on a platform." The final part loosely refers to the sunflowers' resemblance to the speaker's children sleeping during the car journey. The opening triplet works on an analogy between the sunflowers and a lined-up army, carrying out a military action from the camp base. Comparing them to the army contingent, the simile in "Sunflowers" draws upon the plants' magnified assemblage in one place. Like the front line infantry, the bent down flowers look overcome in their combat. In "Sunflowers," oblivious to the war's gambled outcome, the fatigued soldiers do not yet fully realise their defeat's consequences. Groarke's persona contemplates the sunflowers' weariness conspicuous in their "slumped" appearance. The expression "news of broken ranks" refers to the plants' crushed stems from which the sap is "dripping through." Like the defeated soldiers, the fractured sunflowers in Groarke's poem die slowly, "bleeding" themselves to death. The speaker comments:

Foot soldiers in a long-drawn-out campaign, slumped  
 under orders, heedless of the stakes,  
 when news of broken ranks comes dripping through.  
 (FAEP 62)

Drawing upon the flowers' organically tangled presence, the persona in "Sunflowers" perceives them as empathetic travellers, crammed in the limited space of an overcrowded railway platform. Furthermore, the female voice in Groarke's poem looks equally impressed with the way the confined sunflowers appear to support one another, instead of competing for their own life space to expand. What inspires the speaker is the sunflowers' consistent but selfless striving towards the fresh air, "towards what unsoiled air there is beyond their grasp." The persona observes:

Come another way: passengers herded on a platform.  
 See how they shoulder each other, bearing up, streaming  
 towards what unsoiled air there is beyond their grasp.  
 (FAEP 62)

The concluding triplet of "Sunflowers" resumes the text's organising metaphor of being located / squeezed among other beings. In Groarke's poem, overfilled to the brim with the luggage, the fully packed car additionally intensifies the claustrophobic enclosure. Worn-out and sun-dried like the titular sunflowers, the speaker's offspring feel overwhelmed with the scorching weather. The prolonged travel fatigue is exacerbated by the high temperature inside the car. Because of their hair colour or the sun's reflection in their hair, the peacefully sleeping children resemble the yellow flowers from the field, only "a half-inch taller." The persona in "Sunflowers" completes: "In the height of the here and now, summer presses on us / spoils of chocolate, coffee, wine. The boot is crammed, / the children are a half-inch taller, gilded, sound asleep" (FAEP 62). With regard to another plant addressed in Groarke's poetry, for the female voice there are exactly four encounters with "Cowslips" which have become momentous. The inceptive three occurrences take place in the speaker's past. The first-hand experience of the persona's early years ("the ditches of childhood") is paralleled with the flowers' second-hand graphic representation ("in a book of Dürer prints"). In "Cowslips," astonishing as it may seem, the third encounter in an art gallery is qualified by the female voice as real ("in a Washington gallery, for real"). Even more startling is the fact that the persona in Groarke's poem does not claim much difference ("no more vivid, or less") between the live plants ("growing beside me now in a pot / on my patio") and the cowslips' (textual or visual) depicted images. The fourth encounter entails the garden cultivated plants. The speaker in "Cowslips" recalls:

Four times I have thrust my writing hand  
 into a tuft of cowslips:  
 once, for starters, in the ditches of childhood,  
 years later, in a book of Dürer prints,

and then in a Washington gallery, for real,  
 where I found it proved no more vivid, or less,  
 than what is growing beside me now in a pot  
 on my patio. . . .

(S 60)

As argued in Groarke's "Cowslips," the live flowers are not given any prevalence over their textual equivalents. That is why the fifth, "symbolic," encounter seems to be happening right now in the poem, in front of the readers' eyes. On the whole, the narrated plants look uprooted from their organic setting ("dislodged from clay") and they are dislocated from their natural context ("wash of earth"). The signifier "vellum" renders the previously hinted at (compare "dislodge") violence of the textualisation process. Conceived of as a writing surface, "vellum" is traditionally produced from skinned animals. In "Cowslips," the "wash of earth" might denote the remaining traces of the cowslips' organic origin. The persona in Groarke's poem refers to this natural world link as the "framing device as definite / as these straight and straightforward lines." However from a different perspective, Groarke's speaker might be talking about the potted patio plants, scarcely framed with the earth around their artificial and limited containers:

. . . To my left, cowslips  
 to my right, a print of cowslips  
 dislodged from clay and context  
 except for the vellum's wash of earth  
 that is a kind of framing device as definite  
 as these straight and straightforward lines.

(S 60)

Considering the above, what the poem "Cowslips" skilfully achieves is fusing of the live vegetation with their discursive representation, blurring the boundaries between them. That is why one can assume that the cited passages can refer both to the thriving pot flowers ("an ardour of leaves / pushing east and west") and their textual signifiers (see the "brown ink"). The persona in "Cowslips" maintains:

Drawn, as it were, on both a horizontal  
 and a vertical scale, an ardour of leaves  
 pushing east and west, even out to the margin  
 of brown ink that squares up to the limits of art.

(S 60)

In "Cowslips," the extended temporal expressions ("decades, centuries") seem to render the endurance of art contrasted with the finite and transient natural existence ("every day" "waking hours"). Ironically, for people, nature's cycles should be seen as at least as meaningful as literature's permanence ["The flowers are emergence, the flare / of dim brilliance by which we mark our time" (S 60)]. To some extent, the phrase: "delineation / that matters not a whit" may

undermine the assumed superiority of art over life. So do the earlier-cited boundaries of the written word: “to the margin / of brown ink that squares up to the limits of art.” In contrast to these qualifications, nature’s vitality in Groarke’s poem can neither be entirely contained or restricted (“pushing east and west”). The female voice in “Cowslips” claims:

The leaves are decades, centuries,  
each with its own delineation  
that matters not a whit. The leaves  
are how we live every day, how we spread  
a green, embroidered cloth over waking hours.

(S 60)

Bearing it in mind, in “Cowslips” the speaker’s declaration concerning the reasons for her appreciation of the phenomenological world looks quite unconvincing. It seems that for Groarke the art’s textual world preserves the plants’ unfading charm, their imaginary longings and the beauty of all nature’s tints and hues. In the cited passage, the collocation: “besmirched air” seems to imply the previously hinted at dirt (violence?) of the figurative representations (compare “vellum’s wash of earth”). The evoked painting techniques (stippling and gouache) disclose the painter’s careful balancing between the image and its representation. In “Cowslips,” the artist’s evasion of embellishments proves that the imperfect truth (“to interrupt accomplishment / with **creases** and the finest **cracks**”) is preferred by Groarke’s persona over artificial excellence. The bolted fragment abounds with the melodic alliterated sound patterns: “**b**arely **b**eautiful,” “the **b**ackground of golden, **b**esmirched air,” “**s**tippling the **s**eal.” The speaker in “Cowslips” advocates:

The flowers love the world, have reason to:  
they are aspirant, barely beautiful, almost soaked  
into the background of golden, besmirched air  
that is, always, a morning in 1526  
stippling the seal of gouache  
to interrupt accomplishment  
with creases and the finest cracks  
that might be said to breathe;

(S 60)

The cited passage of “Cowslips” is qualified with a subsequent clause of contrast (“and are yet discernible as slight rebuke / to years lived in between / as if there were no such cowslips / to be given to such light” (S 60–61)], additionally circumscribed by the “as if” weakening phrase. By applying the tentative mood, the poet seems to question the art’s unparalleled supremacy over the natural world. Groarke’s persona’s confession (“I know it now”) stresses that she has come to this realisation relatively lately. The speaker’s discovery’s recent context is emphasised by the present perfect tense constructions (“I have asked,” “it has been”), contrasted with the completed past tense (“I always lacked,” “I thought it would,” “it was”). In Groarke’s poem, such a contrastive

juxtaposition indicates a change in the persona's mentality. In "Cowslips," the newly gained empowerment then means the courage to voice the questions that were previously too intimidating (see "lacked the guts / to ask of life") or simply at that time irrelevant ("I thought it would be cowslips always"). On the whole, it may seem that the poet constantly oscillates within the arbitrary dichotomy of life versus art. However "Cowslips" endnote's past framework ("I mean, it was") appears to suggest the abandonment of this reductive binary scheme. The female voice admits:

I know it now. I have asked the question  
of a flower or print I always lacked the guts  
to ask of life. I thought it would be cowslips always,  
tufts of them seedling all over my time.

And it has been.

I mean, it was.

(S 61)

Drawing upon autobiographical elements, the poem "Thistle" offers a retrospective insight into the persona's childhood recollections. Although the motto from Marvell's poem indicates love as its theme, Groarke's narrative's true subject is memory (signified as the "ropes of hay") and not romantic reflections. As rightly proved by Randolph, recent Irish "cultural and historical memory" decline stems from the fact that "the new prosperity turned its back on the powerlessness and humiliation of its former poverty. Within that context, the recovery of ecocritical perspectives is the recovery of history . . . and even memory itself" (56). Away from Ireland, Groarke's persona in "Thistle" is reminded about her family home with the scent of summer hay. The fragrant, fresh-cut grass ("the smell is such . . . I'm driving with all the windows down") becomes the sensuous link between here and there, activating the reminiscences of the speaker's youth. The homesick female voice in "Thistle" declares:

It's hard to get away from hay these days,  
what with the warm weather and the news  
from home. Last year the price was high,  
but this year they'll be giving it away.  
The fields are stitched and cross-stitched  
with its high-wire bales: the smell is such  
I find I'm driving with all the windows down  
past rows of unstooped and bare-chested men

(FAEP 58)

As demonstrated in Groarke's poem, while being abroad, the hay gathering season (alliterated "what with the warm weather) and the Irish relatives' reports ("the news / from home") all fuse in one experiential reality. In "Thistle," the "fields . . . stitched and cross-stitched" imply that the speaker's memory's wound is not entirely healed. The expression "high-wire" suggests balancing on

a tight-rope over the abyss. Referring to the “unstooped and bare-chest men,” Groarke’s speaker in “Thistle” distances herself derisively from what may “pass for a vision of the pastoral round here” (FAEP 58). Identifying herself as simply “another driver crossing our farm-gate once / when July was in heat” (FAEP 58), she feels safely detached from the wistful, rural experience:

. . . the landscapes we now find the most attractive are those which contain the kinds of features that would have provided what our ancestors needed to survive (see Heerwagen and Orians 1993, Ulrich 1993). . . . A sense of wonder at the complexity and diversity of nature might have encouraged the kind of explorations that enabled our ancestors to gain control over natural processes. (Milton 61)

The poem’s body comprises Groarke’s speaker’s textually processed recollections of helping with the field work together with her brother [“My father paid fifty pence / to the two of us for a full day’s work – / me to the weeding, my brother to his fork” (FAEP 58)]. The persona in “Thistle” recalls the gendered farm labour division that was imposed at the time of her childhood. Girls were responsible for removing weeds, while boys lifted the hay and loaded it on trailers. Admitting: “but the men had their serious labour” (FAEP 58) and “I was the only girl / in a field bristling with hands, a stray in the herd” (FAEP 58), the female voice in Groarke’s poem regresses into her childhood phase. In line with that, the speaker’s language alters, becoming simplified in its vocabulary and imitating a child’s idiom in its syntax. A detailed account of the gender-assigned fieldwork duties involved:

My brother worked with them from the middle out  
and I picked the edges clean of thistles and ragwort.  
I was for hedges, he for height,  
already eyeing up the stacks he’d make of it  
in the barn, thinking taller with each trailer  
from the fields, until he was pressed against the rafters  
and had to stoop as I did, row on row,  
in my small, careful and remunerated way.  
(FAEP 58)

Accordingly in “Thistle,” a youthful viewpoint is merged with an adult’s perspective. This fusion becomes noticeable in the shifting narrative voices where the “grown-up” words (i.e. “remunerated”) and a catalogue of the weeds’ names (“thistle and ragwort”) accompany the “infantile” stylised passages (i.e. “I was for **h**edges, **h**e for **h**eight”). The female voice in “Thistle” recalls how her brother, empowered with the adults’ trust, started “thinking taller with each trailer / from the fields.” The boy’s boosted ego was cut down to its normal child’s size when “pressed against the rafters / and had to stoop.” Groarke’s speaker remembers a sense of pride in performing the adult’s work and being paid for it. Moreover she recalls that farming in those days relied upon what one would define nowadays as sustainable agriculture, based on equitable exchange: “That meadow gave good hay year in, year out” (FAEP 59) that is why “We’d

use what was needed, sell what was not” (FAEP 59). In agreement with custom, farmers who had better crops shared with those who were less fortunate “with too little grass, too many weeds” (FAEP 59). In other words, nothing was wasted and people cared about one another. The female voice in “Thistle” recalls this affirmative experience as follows:

Long after my hands healed over the thistle barbs  
and the summer was closeted in cardigans and scarves,  
that hay was holding out awhile over those lean  
weeks while the weather righted and the year filled in.  
(FAEP 59)

In “Thistle,” the harmony in people’s rural lives corresponded to the balanced compatibility in the natural world’s cyclic order. The country life’s regular rhythm has given Groarke’s persona a sense of connectedness with nature and other people and arising from the above the security of belonging. In the concluding lines, the female voice in the examined poem sums up tenderly her “gains” from her childhood years:

Until I found myself head-high to the heat of a day,  
singing again to the frogs and the stiffening hay,  
small words in a small tune to kill the hours  
that skirted their rough talk and fine acres.  
What we saved there was unpoisonous and sweet  
and it came again as the same meadow, the same weeds,  
the same hay I last made when I was twelve,  
the same ragwort I discarded, that still thrives.  
(FAEP 59)

Linguistically, the poem “Thistle” contains a collection of gendered idiom, connoted with clothing metaphors (“the hours / that skirted,” “the summer was closeted in cardigans and scarves”). Some words seem to reverberate as in nursery rhymes ( i.e. sweet and weeds, hay and day, etc.). A more serious note is implied by the comparison of the thistle to the barbed wire (“the thistle barbs,” “high-wire bale”). It is as if this electric border reminded Groarke’s persona that her access to past reality is restrained, regardless of the fact that “thistle” resonates optimistically with “thrive.” In “Thistle,” the speaker’s selection of words (“unpoisonous and sweet”) renders her positive attitude towards nature, perceiving it as uncorrupted, soothing and providing her with a sense of continuity and satisfaction in life. The adjective “unpoisonous” comes close to the word “unpoisoned,” meaning nature’s uncontaminated character, which was undamaged by people during those past times. With regard to gender discourse, Kelly proves that “[i]ndustrial development and urbanization have worsened an already unjust division of labor between women and men” (“Women and Power” 116). Moreover Bradley explains that “[t]he displacement of women from the field, along with their transformation into low-paid wage workers, coincides with the denuding of the soil, the destruction of wildflowers, and the

pollution of the surrounding area with chemicals" ("Keeping the Soil" 290). With this in mind, the metaphor of the disappearing weeds ("thistle") in Groarke's poem matches the aforementioned process. This happens because "[w]eeds are commonly defined as 'plants out of place' (Martin 1987)" (Bradley, "Keeping the Soil" 292). Hence the thistle-women analogy renders "the relationship between the undervaluation of the wildflowers we call weeds and the undervaluation of the roles of women weeders in most of the world's farming societies" (Bradley, "Keeping the Soil" 292). Furthermore:

The destruction of weeds for purely human, utilitarian purposes reflects a lack of perception of the interconnectedness of nature that ecological feminism calls attention to (Warren 1991, Warren and Cheney 1991). . . . Ecofeminism calls attention to the rift between the self and the environment, as well the connection between the domination of the environment and the domination of women. Weeds, so small and insignificant, are a poignant metaphor for that domination. To define weeds as wildflowers is to begin to "heal the wounds" (Plant 1984, 4). (Bradley, "Keeping the Soil" 290, 298)

Fred Johnston situates Groarke's collection *Flight* in a "'new-world order' Irish-style" of "the new Ireland, or Ireland After the Fall, if you like it. We've got the money but we can't quite manage the style. We're a rural country, even if we choose to forget it" ("Fashion and Profit" 248). In line with that, he calls the new Irish reality the "appallingly soulless rural entity" (Johnston, "Fashion and Profit" 248). However Johnston's criticising Groarke's alleged assumption that "Dublin is the centre of the world" ("Fashion and Profit" 248) tends to dismiss too easily the poet's rootedness in the Irish countryside, even though it is filtered via retrospective and wistful meditations like those in "Thistle." In Groarke's poetry, the natural and social discourses constitute overlapping territories: "With their brilliant mix of grace, good humour and a kind of compassionate common sense, her poems provide both pleasure and revelation, being at once alert on the lyrical post-romantic possibilities of landscape or seascape and to the social forces that underlie or operate upon them" (Grennan, "Coaxing a World" 13).

Included in *Juniper Street* (2006), the self-ironic "Why I Am Not A Nature Poet," "points to the title of Frank O'Hara's famous 'Why I Am Not a Painter', in which O'Hara explores the relation between poetry and painting, charting the dynamics of the creative process" (Johnston, "Hauntings and Returns" 99). In *The Irish Times* review, Fiona Sampson observes that "in *Juniper Street* there are scenes from family life, wry observations of neighbours and of the life being lived in parks, boats and *The British Museum Gift Shop*. Groarke writes touchingly about her children, as in *Why I Am Not A Nature Poet*, a story of infection and cannibalism in the goldfish bowl" ("A Light" 12). And here a problem arises, because Sampson lightly sums up the poem as being "very funny," adding that "We don't need to know more than this opening couplet; we're already laughing" ("A Light" 12). Similarly the poem in question is referred to by another reviewer as "comical" (Johnston, "Hauntings and



Returns” 99). However although “Why I Am Not A Nature Poet” self-derisively captures Groarke’s attitude to the natural world, the poem’s subject matter is anything but trifle and “funny.”

In western societies . . . information about non-human animals comes from our pets and other domestic animals, from birds, mammals and insects in our streets, gardens, fields and wild areas, from visits to zoos, all of which provide opportunities for direct perception of the animals themselves. But it also comes from what people tell us, from what we read, from films, television, the internet, in other words from cultural discourse and its material apparatus. Perception takes place in these cultural contexts in exactly the same way as it does in real-life encounters with animals, but the quality of the information received varies a great deal. Much of it comes from representations created in the process of communication. (Milton 48–49)

“Why I Am Not A Nature Poet” probes people’s not only culture-mediated but also their objectified relation to animals, namely, treating living beings as children’s toys that can be purchased and sold in shops. According to the same logic, the animals’ “owners” might try to claim financial compensation when the creature falls ill or dies before its “expiry date” guaranteed by the sales person. Animals kept at home are rarely respected in their individuality or animal nature. Instead, they are cherished as entertainment and as an exciting novelty until their owners get bored with them. The “fish” bowl in which the animals are usually located is widely known not to provide enough oxygen. Hence animals kept in such a decorative cage suffer and are frequently deformed and sick. Hypocritical as it may seem, in Groarke’s poem, the pet fish “Nemo” is treated as a family member, given a human name,<sup>109</sup> granted a card and is sung to. In other words, “it is assumed that we identify more easily with animals familiar to us, those which are part of our lives and part of our personal identity” (Milton 118). On the whole, one cannot overlook “an overall absence of legal protection for nonhuman animals [that] permits their massive institutionalized exploitation and abuse (see Francione 1994; Galvin 1985). They are bred for show, for sale, for servitude. They are imprisoned in aquariums and zoos, forced to perform in nightclubs and circuses, terrorized and injured at rodeos and fairs” (Dunayer 16). With regard to the fish’s limited responsiveness to contact, Groarke’s persona in “Why I Am Not A Nature Poet” betrays irritation that her “scarcely out of a plastic bag three weeks ago / and into our new fishbowl” gimmick has already broken down. Infirm Nemo is depicted in a mocking way, compared to “a drunk in a gutter / lipping some foul-mouthed shanty to the moon.” Appropriately its physical disability is portrayed equally dispassionately (“started swelling up, /

<sup>109</sup> In the light of the above, giving names to wildlife animals remains a dubious strategy as stressed by Milton: “Wildlife documentaries often emphasize (some would say ‘exaggerate’) the personhood of their subjects by giving them names or by following the lives of particular animals to create what is often called a ‘wildlife soap opera’. . . our sensitivity to the personhood of non-human animals depends upon the intensity with which they engage our attention and respond to what we do” (50).

spiking pineapple fins and lying sideways”). The female voice in the analysed poem explains:

“Why I Am Not A Nature Poet”

has to do with Max and Nemo  
scarcely out of a plastic bag three weeks ago  
and into our new fishbowl  
when Nemo started swelling up,  
spiking pineapple fins and lying sideways  
like a drunk in a gutter  
lipping some foul-mouthed shanty to the moon.

(JS 47)

Instead of taking the ill fish to the vet, the speaker in “Why I Am Not A Nature Poet” goes back to the pet shop to make a complaint about the faulty good sold to her. In doing so, she admits feeling deceived as “the product” was supposed to last for fifteen years and not three weeks. Outraged, she complains about buying expensive drops that “cost / what three new goldfish would.” The advised “quick solution” proposed by the sales person (immediate death in the freezer) is rejected in fear of unwanted remorse. The consultant recommends removing the ill fish from the bowl, since the rotten corpse will attract other fish to consume it. The persona in “Why I Am Not A Nature Poet” continues:

‘Dropsy,’ Ed in the Pet Centre said, who,  
three weeks ago, swore they could live fifteen years.  
‘Put him in the freezer. Kill him quick.  
Don’t leave him in the bowl to rot  
or the other one will eat him and die too.’  
I buy drops instead that cost  
what three new goldfish would.

(JS 47)

Apart from Groarke’s speaker’s non-empathetic perspective and a mercantile approach of the shop sales person, the third emotional angle belongs to the persona’s daughter. “Eve makes a *Get Well Nemo* card / and talks to him when she passes, / calling him ‘little guy’ and ‘goldilocks’, / playing ‘Für Nemo’ on her keyboard” (JS 47). From an adult’s perspective, Eve’s attempts might look silly or pointless, but at least the girl is truly concerned about Nemo’s health and she sincerely wishes to help the suffering animal. To a child, “happiness that has been lost and a bond that has been severed. Harmony is suddenly missing, and a wonderful source of happiness is no more. The resulting feeling of loneliness may feel overwhelming and almost unbearable” (Gustafson qtd. in Adams, “Women-Battering” 64). In Groarke’s poem, what upsets the mother is the wasted money and facing the inconvenient fact that animals, like other live beings, fall ill, die or even eat other animals. In the speaker’s eyes, the information that some species may feed on carrion seems difficult to communicate to a small child, and, thus, she appears to be upset facing such a

necessity. Suspecting Max of being anxious to eat Nemo, Groarke's persona fantasises about Max's "hunger and . . . a bloodless, sly look." For that reason, the female voice in "Why I Am Not A Nature Poet" decides to guard not Nemo's life but her daughter's blissful unawareness.<sup>110</sup> She admits:

I don't know. Max, I think, fine-tunes  
 his hunger and has a bloodless, sly look  
 to him now. He knows I'm on to him.  
 I tap the glass, shoo him away  
 whenever I see him closing in  
 on Nemo's wide-eyed slump  
 but I can't stand sentinel all night.

(JS 47)

Groarke's narrative's climactic point approaches when Eve dramatically summons her mother to the fish bowl:

I take the stairs two at a time,  
 ordering the right words in my head:  
*Choice . . . Fault . . . Nature . . . Destiny.*  
 Eve's face is level with the fish  
 and behind the bowl so it's magnified,  
 amazed, like an open moon.

(JS 47)

Equipped with "*Choice . . . Fault . . . Nature . . . Destiny*," the speaker in "Why I Am Not A Nature Poet" hurries headlong to explain the troubling sight in what she believes is "the right way." On the spot, nonetheless, she sees the amazed but delighted daughter who decodes an unfamiliar view in her own innocent way, suspecting that "Max is nudging Nemo" . . . 'he's helping him turn round'" (JS 47). In other words,

It is easy enough to see why many non-human animals are often perceived as persons. The 'mutuality of behaviour' which, Neisser pointed out (1988:41), characterizes human interaction and helps to specify the interpersonal self is routinely observed in the interactions between non-human animals of the same species, where it appears just as interpersonal, just as self-specifying. (Milton 49)

At first reading, the reception of the bleakly self-ironic "Why I Am Not A Nature Poet" might cause moral as well as textual problems. Groarke is being provocatively candid in the whole sphere of human attitudes towards pet

---

<sup>110</sup> Gustafson claims that "In the wake of an animal's death, the mother must model how to handle grief for her children, but recall the constricted environment in which she can express herself. Children need to vent their worries and be greeted with honesty in response to their feelings of despair. Instead they may find an atmosphere of silence" (qtd. in Adams, "Women-Battering" 76). What is more, children might start wondering "[i]f the parents appear – in the eyes of the child – not to mourn a much loved animal, how would they then mourn the child if the child were to die?" (Gustafson qtd. in Adams, "Women-Battering" 76–77).

animals. Sometimes as pointed out in the poem's analysis, her speaker's standpoint may look insensitive or even non-empathetic. Because the poet uses in the narrative the real name and the age of her daughter Eve, one may be tempted to decode the text as semi-confessional or autobiographical, which, to my mind, is not entirely the case. Furthermore, the poet does not sentimentalise the natural world let alone humans' approach to it. Her persona openly admits various, frequently perplexing, contradictory and not always positive feelings that the pet fish's arrival at home has laid bare. As stressed by ecofeminists, people in their daily isolation from the natural world pursue the companionship of non-human beings. Those needs and beliefs are referred to as relational epistemology. More precisely, "relational epistemology forms the basis of all cultural perspectives in which objects and entities are understood in personal terms. We use it whenever we think of each other, non-human animals, plants, spirits, gods, ecosystems, the Earth, nature in general" (Milton 48). This happens because "[h]uman beings cannot survive without engaging with their environment, and relational epistemology is an inevitable consequence of this fact. Nature does not just do things, it does things to *us*" (Milton 50), emphasis original. Summing up:

What each individual becomes during their lifetime is a product of their engagement with that environment, a process in which they learn about the world and about themselves (Neisser 1976, Ingold 2000a). . . . The environment of most human beings may be predominantly social, but to say that it is *essentially* social is to assume that human beings can only pick up information from other human beings or in contexts of human creation, and not from the non-human things from their environment . . . . Throughout our lives we learn from our whole environment, not just from other human beings and their products (culture). (Milton 148), emphasis original

Hence as shown above, one can hardly deny or fully dismiss the need for the "engagement with . . . [natural] environment." The problem remains that the majority of people would like to carry out such relations on their own terms, making animals not an equal party, but an instrumental tool employed to meet human emotional demands. Looked at from that angle, Groarke's bitter statement in "Why I Am Not A Nature Poet" comments upon the speaker's failure to establish a fair link with the natural world, with respect to the animals' own habits and the dignity of the non-human being that although purchased at the shop, is not our "property," let alone a "thing." Whether she wants to admit it herself or not, Groarke *is* indeed an accomplished "nature poet." This gets brilliantly manifested in poems such as "Pastoral." Here the female voice addresses her daughter in a "future-directed fantasy" (Mackenzie, "Imagining Oneself" 132). Mackenzie explains the process as visualising: "a life that is still recognizably mine but one that diverges at some point in the future from the life that I am likely to lead or believe that I will lead or believe that I will lead" ("Imagining Oneself" 132). In agreement with that, the speaker in "Pastoral" imagines herself as a ghost recalled by her grown-up daughter, haunting her

offspring with the missed opportunity to listen to the bird's concert ("and it won't be just / a clarinet cuckoo / in a thicket of strings"). She confesses:

I've ruined it.  
 Thirty, forty years from now,  
 she'll hear it again  
 and it won't be just  
 a clarinet cuckoo  
 in a thicket of strings  
 but her long-dead mother  
 in an apron with French cheeses on it,  
 turning from the sink to say,  
 'Listen, here it comes'.

(S 25)

In "Pastoral," the declaration, "I've ruined it," might refer to the interrupted and unheard birdsong. On the other hand, such a confession, on a personal level, could render the mother's monotonous nagging as comparable to the culturally connoted "silly" bird's repetitive sound. Instead of allowing her daughter to listen to the birdsong, the mother would sing her own "kitchen" duties song. One might wonder why the speaker insists upon conjuring up her own pastoral image of a housewife in the kitchen in her work outfit ("in an apron with French cheeses on it, / turning from the sink to say"). Ironically, she appears to be suggesting that the modern "Pastoral" takes place not in a rural or rustic area but inside the female kitchen. According to such a view, for a woman, cooking a dinner will always be more important than listening to bird song. It may happen regardless of the fact that "women's liberation is contextualized in human liberation and a more ecological way of living on the earth" (Lahar 2). The persona in "Pastoral" records:

The streetlamp  
 of my laptop flicks back on  
 and the automatic light upstairs  
 flutters two goldfish  
 that are the only living things  
 inside these walls,  
 not counting me.

(S 25)

Furthermore in the future, the speaker's daughter may not be able to hear the cuckoo's song even if she wants to because there may not be any more birds of that species left. The subsequent passage in "Pastoral" indicates clearly that one becomes more and more alienated from nature and that one's sole miserable companions remain the pet animals imprisoned in cages or bowls ("two goldfish / that are the only living things / inside these walls, / not counting me"), frequently ending up like the earlier depicted Nemo. Examining human-nonhuman relations, Warren notices that:

Ecofeminist philosophy denies the “nature / culture” split and the claim that humans are totally separate and different from nonhuman nature; it recognizes that humans, as ecological selves, are *both* members of an ecological community (in some respects) and different from other members of that community (in other respects). Accordingly, the attention . . . is not an erasure of difference but respectful acknowledgment of it. (*Ecofeminist Philosophy* 99–100), emphasis original

The final sequence in “Pastoral” entails the sensuous male gendered presence (“his black sleeve,” “his pollen”). Despite the erotic context, the female voice in Groarke’s poem appears to be pressurised by the man’s expectations (“requires me / to become”). Equally, she seems reluctant to be transformed into the starry night sky, regardless of the endnote’s affirmative “called upon / to bloom.” In full, this is how the speaker in “Pastoral” comments upon the related experience: “Lilac buds / on his black sleeve / is how his pollen / requires me / to become / a clear night sky / in which new stars, / thousands of them, / are called upon / to bloom” (S 25). As argued earlier, “[i]n patriarchal societies, culture and reason are perceived as male attributes, in opposition to the female attributes of nature and emotion. Traits associated with male are valued over those associated with female” (Zabinsky, “Scientific Ecology” 315). However change is always possible. The persona in “Wind in Trees” prophesises this change:

. . . an ivory cane

is summoning my name.  
I ask will anything ever change.

First the trees say ‘No’ to me.  
Then the wind says ‘Yes’.

(S 42)

Indeed change is not only possible but very desirable. In conclusion, Griffin rightly reminds us that “neither the word *woman* nor the word *nature* can be read apart from each other and both are shaped by, marked by, and contain traces of a larger system, a philosophy that is also a submerged psychology” (“Ecofeminism” 216), emphasis original. Groarke’s poetry clearly proves that “[i]n order to *reveal* the social construction of gender as a fiction, to understand its goals of mastery and dominance, one must include the social construction of nature in this revelation” (Griffin, “Ecofeminism” 219), emphasis original.

## 2.4. The Empowered Female Environmental Consciousness as the Source of the Spiritual in the Poetry of Sinéad Morrissey

*To affirm my sky as beautifully as a blackbird.*

(Sinéad Morrissey, "Twenty-One")

Carol P. Christ, who has a doctoral degree in Religious Studies from Yale University, claims that "a feminist process paradigm can help us to recognize the importance of the alternatives to classical theism . . . many feminist theologians and theologians, myself including, have been moving in the direction of affirming the process values of change, embodiment, relationship, sympathy (understanding, love, or compassion), creative freedom, enjoyment, and power with rather than power over" (*She Who Changes* 202). Accordingly in "Ecofeminism Through an Anticolonial Framework," Smith rightly notices that "spirituality is not something one reads about or something one gets at a certain place at a certain day of the week. It is living one's life with the understanding that one is intimately connected to all creation, all forces seen and unseen" (31). What is more,

Consciousness is an integral part of nature. But we fail to understand this. . . . In our world view, we imagine that only human beings have souls, not other natural creatures, not nature as a whole . . . .When we take the soul from nature, what we are really doing is fragmenting human wholeness. Most mystics will tell you that whatever you do to others you are doing to yourself in some sense. We lose the natural wholeness of vision that is given to us. Then we go to great lengths to regain what, in fact, we were born with and afterward rejected . . . (Griffin, "Curves" 88)

Smith further elaborates this thought claiming that "[o]ur individualist, capitalist, society tends to destroy our sense of meaningful connectedness with nature, with all creatures, and all people, and to replace these relations with commodities" (31). Very much in the same vein, Howell advances the idea of God "who is life-giving Spirit" (109) and who "advocates mutuality, interdependence, harmony, and growth and empowers women to their rights and responsibilities in community by displacing an image of God as solitary, hierarchical, dominating power" (109). Nonetheless as Carol P. Christ declares, an "unrelated, untouchable God became a model for humanity" (*She Who Changes* 72). She explains that

In classical theologies and philosophies, the divine power is understood as omnipotence. Hartshorne correctly understood this to be a common theological mistake. "Omni-potence" literally means "all-power" . . . . In other words, omnipotence is a form of "power over" that leaves no room for any power other than that of God. Omnipotence has been associated with God's dominion or rule over the world. It is more rarely noted that dominion is domination. Hartshorne made this connection clear when he said that to imagine the divine

power as omnipotence is to imagine it on the model of a tyrant, a bully, a strong man, a king, or a feudal lord. (Christ, *She Who Changes* 94)

Bearing the above in mind, female spiritual empowerment relies upon the persuasive power that:

. . . is a form of power that addresses that power and the freedom of the other, not to diminish adversarially that power and freedom but to maximize the power and, therefore, the freedom of the other. When this alternative understanding of power is attributed to God, divine "omnipotence" is transformed to mean that God exercises an optimum of power in relation to other centers of power. God urges creatures toward the good rather than coercing adherence to the divine will. (Howell 112)

Asking the question: "What does the power of God mean in light of God's creative love?" Howell provides an answer: "First of all, God's power is not coercive, irresistible, controlling power over others but the alternative of persuasive or relational power" (121). Elsewhere she explains that "coercion is power directed toward others in proportion to their powerlessness, persuasion is power exercised in relation to the powerful. Persuasive power is not efficacious by appeal to self-interest alone" (Howell 112). Carol P. Christ elucidates the notion that:

. . . the power of Goddess / God is not power over, but power with. The world is supported and sustained by Goddess / God and all other individuals. Everything that happens in the world is not caused by Goddess / God. Chance and choice play a role . . . . The power of Goddess / God is not power over, the power of dominator, but power with, the power of cooperation and co-creation. (*She Who Changes* 112, 97)

In line with that Daly warns that "[p]ower split off from love makes an obscenity out of what we call love, forcing us unwillingly to destroy ourselves and each other" (*Beyond God* 127). Carol P. Christ explains that "[w]hile human sympathy and love may never be unconditional, divine sympathy and love are" (*She Who Changes* 134). Consequently, Howell elaborates the argument as follows: "the concept of God's power is tempered with the loving appreciation of a deity who influences creatures and cherishes their contributions to the enrichment of divine being" (113). As a logical extension of that, she reminds us:

Power is not control; it is the capacity to affect others and to be affected by others . . . . Mutual respect, concern and love are the proper environment for expressing power and empowerment. Finally, we may remember in our relationships that God's power is liberating. God envisages that each man and woman is a creature with unique potential, and God's aim is that each person may actualize his or her potential . . . . In God's justice and judgement that suffers with the oppressed, we are all liberated by God's divine lure toward full humanity. (Howell 125)



In process theology, there are three main dogmas relating to God: “divine relativity, divine sympathy, and divine love” (Christ, *She Who Changes* 91). In Morrissey’s poem “Love Song,” it is the final principle that becomes foregrounded. Carol P. Christ elucidates her understanding of divine love as “the intelligent embodied love that is the ground for all being. This intelligent embodied love undergirds every individual being, including plants, animals, and humans, as we participate in the physical and spiritual processes of birth, death, renewal. If intelligent embodied love is the ground of all being, then intelligence, love, embodiment, relationship, and interdependence are . . . ‘in nature of things’” (*Rebirth* 107). In Morrissey’s “Love Song,” the speaker’s loving perceptive and her epistemological and relational responsiveness enable the female voice to have a discerning insight into things as they are. She relates the experience of spiritual epiphany as follows: “I see light everywhere / . . . I see dusk.” In consequence, due to looking at things affirmatively, Morrissey’s persona acquires a dimension of feeling spiritually connected to animate and non-animate reality. Carol P. Christ claims that for most people it is easier to “affirm that God’s power is unlimited than that God loves the world with unfailing love” (*She Who Changes* 33). Because of that she proposes to “affirm much of the spiritual understanding of the natural world” and “affirming the divine presence within the evolutionary cycles of the natural world” (Christ, *She Who Changes* 52). The speaker in “Love Song” declares:

I see light everywhere  
 Over the bus the driver woman  
 With her trolley in the street  
 I see dusk

(TWFIV 27)

The persona in “Love Song” celebrates every single detail of the surrounding world: silence and sound, the flow of water and that of passing time. After exploring her visual perceptions in depth, the female voice in Morrissey’s poem goes on to probe the sense of hearing. In doing so, she discovers an equal delight in the world’s auditory diversity and multifariousness. Carol P. Christ reminds us that “life is meant to be enjoyed . . . To enjoy life is to cherish the beauty of each living thing, to be interested in diversity and difference in the web of life . . . To enjoy life is not to have power over, not have it all, but to share” (*She Who Changes* 115). In “Love Song,” the persona’s acceptance of the world around her is captured in the affirmative sensuous practice:

I hear the clock at four  
 I hear silence in cupboards  
 Birdsong  
 Backwater dawn

I taste drier than flour

(TWFIV 27)

Before cherishing the sense of smell, the female voice in "Love Song" indulges in examining tactile cognition (the self-ironically melodic: "I taste drier than flour"), giving it priority over sight and hearing. Carol P. Christ asks:

What does it mean to enjoy life? What does it mean to enjoy a life that ends in death? To enjoy life is to participate fully in it. To experience each moment to the fullest. In our bodies. To see, to touch, to taste, to smell, to hear. To delight in the existence of others. To delight in our own life. To appreciate beauty and diversity. To feel joy and sadness. (*She Who Changes* 122)

In "Love Song," the sensuous perceptions are mingled with one another in a synaesthetic way in the speaker's mind. The phrase: "I see their arms / shrieking" renders the consolidated aspect of this synaesthetic fusion. Overtly, the aforementioned passage evokes associations with Louis MacNeice's "Snow."<sup>111</sup>

I smell the roots of trees  
Before I see their arms  
Shrieking  
On the skyline

(TWFIV 27)

In the cited passage, the "self-generated" gems in the stream of life become an outcome of the speaker's own perception and the "gift" of the world. The verbs "pushed into" and "thrust into" imply that, to some extent, these sensations seem to be forcibly inserted into the female voice's consciousness. On the other hand, they signify the motive power that propels the persona's mind into the centre of sensory reality. Hence in the examined poem, an outward stimulus betrays an element of compulsion and it is yet deprived of any intentional arrogance. Nonetheless, one can hardly fail to notice that the female voice in the cited passage has problems with recognising the boundaries of her self and those of others. Still Morrissey's speaker's confusion does appear to result from her identification being too close. Indeed, her identification is so close that it almost constitutes assimilation. The female voice in "Love Song" admits:

I feel diamonds pushed into  
The bloodstream  
Self-generated, a gift,  
Making for the head I feel my head

(TWFIV 27)

---

<sup>111</sup> Compare the following passage from Louis MacNeice's "Snow:"

And the fire flames with a bubbling sound for world  
Is more spiteful and gay than one supposes –  
On the tongue on the eyes on the ears in the palms of one's hands.  
There is more than glass between the snow and the huge roses.

(*Staying Alive* 74)

Morrissey's poem's final image, which is of the persona's head ending up in a starry basket, is both affirming and disquieting at the same time. It could denote a partial understanding, lacking the completeness of one's integrated conceptual and cognitive apparatus. The referred-to mental picture operates on the latent violence of the personal decapitation's symbolism, which might stand for Morrissey's speaker's renunciation of her analytical and intellectual powers in favour of sensuous and aesthetic cognition. "Those who say that the meaning of life is enjoyment are often said to have an 'aesthetic' rather than a 'moral' approach of life. An aesthetic standpoint calls attention to beauty and enjoyment, while the moral standpoint to which it is contrasted focuses on following the rules, often out of a sense of duty" (Christ, *She Who Changes* 128). In other words, the female voice in "Love Song" seems to give prior credibility to her "senses / singing" at the expense of the "beheaded" and detached mind, locked and turned off in her self. Morrissey's speaker argues: "Thrust into / A bucketful of stars / And all my senses / Singing" (TWFIV 27).

Summing up, Morrissey's "Love Song" affirms "intelligent embodied" love rooted in "all senses." Such divine love is "related to every being in the world . . . The great matrix of love that supports life is 'embodied,' 'intelligent,' and 'power of all being . . . .' The term 'embodied' means that the concrete relation is the ground of all being. Embodied love is grounded in all the senses; it is grounded in seeing, hearing, tasting, touching, and smelling, and in the emotions and passions that arise from the senses. Embodied love is not the dispassionate moralistic concern sometimes identified as Christian love or the love of God. Embodied love is rooted in deep feeling" (Christ, *Rebirth* 108). In this vein, Morrissey's speaker of "Glaciers" employs a juxtaposition of the frozen, solidified textual discourse with the ocean's continuously flowing narrative. Beginning her argument with the statement that "There is no sea in my blood. / There is nothing that cannot be stopped," Morrissey's persona expresses her wish for the perception of the world which is unmediated by language. She conceives of freezing things into signs as a spiritual, god-like process. "Looking at glaciers" is then elaborated into the enjambed, complementary phrases (see "Jinxed into stillness – / I miss oceans in my head"). The absence of the sea indicates the spiritual interconnected dimension which is missing in Morrissey's persona's displaced self (soul). Thus the female voice in "Glaciers" argues:

There is no sea in my blood.  
There is nothing that cannot be stopped.

God's wand is absolute.  
Looking at glaciers

Jinxed into stillness –  
I miss oceans in my head.

(TWFIV 40)

As shown, Morrissey's speaker feels fused with the natural world; the river flow becomes merged with her "bloodstream" whose pebbles are turned into precious diamonds. For the Stoic philosophers (Seneca), "[j]ust as the human body contained blood, marrow, mucus, saliva, tears and lubricating fluids, so in the earth there were various fluids. Liquids that turned hard became metals, such as gold and silver; other fluids turned into stones" (Merchant 24). What is more, the river network is frequently compared to the human organism's vascular system (see Merchant 24). While affirming in "Glaciers" the ice's substantial firmness, Morrissey's persona chooses the melted, looser and more unbound connection between the signifier and signified, which allows for the space in-between. Stating that "God's wand is absolute," the female voice in "Glaciers" seems to enter a dialogue with the notion of the Supreme Being's omnipotence. Howell argues that "[o]mnipotence suggests that there is one center of power, which is God. Creatures are powerless. The immense power of God is measured against the impotence of the world. Cobb's argument is that this understanding of divine power leads us to question the moral character of God (because God must be fully responsible for sin) and that, in fact, attributes very little power to God, because there is no competing power" (111). Omnipotence is related to the dilemma of (omni) presence which "is in reality an omniabsence" (Daly, *Pure Lust* 146), emphasis original:

. . . power of Presence is individual, original, creative. It is participation in Powers of Be-ing. In contrast to this, patriarchal power of presence is institutional power. This power requires absence of genuine individuality . . . both *presence of absence* and *absence of presence* . . . This double-edged absence has power insofar as it prevents woman from being Really Present. (Daly, *Pure Lust* 147), emphasis original

Similarly to "Love Song" and "Glaciers," "September Light" pursues the female spiritual empowerment through the natural world's affirmative manifestations. However when the earlier poems drew attention to the sublimity of God's gift to people, "September Light" puts an emphasis on the world's unparalleled uniqueness. Hence Morrissey's persona appreciates the "rareness making gold" of all the sense-perceptions whose duration is limited and inimitable. In consequence, she opens her argument with a persuasive declaration: "There won't be," extending it into the supporting clause: "It's value is." The speaker in "September Light" declares:

There won't be light like this for another year.  
It's value is the four weeks it exists in, rareness making gold.  
The skies of the city hold it well, jutting out chimneys  
Like broad thumbs to the sun to bear witness before it falls.  
I thank God that days like this are numbered.

(TWFIV 49)

In other words, living beings "bear witness before it falls" and acknowledge the singularity of the titular September light. Meditating upon this unique view,

the speaker in Morrissey's poem does not bewail the brevity of human existence, let alone plunge into the *vanitas vanitatum* lament. Instead, she sees God's wisdom in making the moments of exceptional epiphany scarce and uncommon so that one can treasure them even more. In view of that, the persona in "September Light" expresses her gratitude in words: "I thank God that days like this are numbered." In doing so, the female voice extends her understanding of Creation to the human-made civilisation, e.g. architectural constructions, giving testimony to the all-connected reality. In her assertions, the speaker in "September Light" maintains a clear hierarchy of "the artificial" paying homage to "the natural" whose perfection it can only imitate or respect ("the skies of the city hold it well, jutting out chimneys / like broad thumbs to the sun to bear witness before it falls"). Accordingly, the second poem from the "Restoration" cycle, entitled "Juist, 1991" affirms the pursuit of the essence of things, defined here as the "essences of light," which can be also re-defined as divine love: "the ground of being, the power that sustains and motivates people, the flowers and the tress, and even God" (Christ, *Rebirth* 108). The female voice in "Juist, 1991" records:

The sea is revealing itself  
By its own light light revealing  
Essences of light:  
*Meeresleuchten*, lights of the sea

(TWFIV 59)

Assuring us that "the North Sea booms tonight / And there are no lights the length / Of the fifteen mile beach, / And no stars" (TWFIV 59), Morrissey's persona argues that the light comes from the sea itself, and it is not reflected from the stars or any artificial source. In "Juist, 1991," the sea shines with its own inner energy that appears to be organic and self-originating. The persona argues that "One touch and the water explodes / In phosphorescence / No one knows if it lives" (TWFIV 59). As in the earlier examined cases, the female voice in Morrissey's poem employs God's figure to render a paradoxical or impossible natural phenomenon. In her interpretation, God is the creator and the source of all the equivocal contradictions, and the natural world becomes its perfect manifestation and the most conspicuous representation, "known in rock, flower and in the human heart, just as in theologies of immanence. As the organism uniting the cells of the earth . . . . As the mind, soul, or enlivening power of the world body" (Christ, *Rebirth* 106). The poem "Juist, 1991" concludes:

It is as though God said  
  
*Let there be light in this world  
Of nothing let it come from  
Nothing let it speak nothing  
Let it go everywhere*

(TWFIV 59–60)

In "Juist, 1991," while the passages dealing with the human-made constructions (constrictions) depict Godless and solitary places, the natural world abounds with the spiritual presence and the palpable proofs of God's activities. Accordingly, the poem "Guardians" meditates on the guiding function of angels who are leading people into enlightenment (see "Light is their element"). The speaker in "Guardians" ponders:

Light is their element, they make waves  
 In the world with the force of their rays.  
 They are close by in this valley,  
 Swept in with the rain and snows of winter.

(TWFIV 51)

In Morrissey's "Guardians," despite their educative role, the angelic protective spirits stem from elemental nature. "It is clear that these angels are seen as spirits of the elements . . . . The connections of angels with elements in the canonical books of the Old Testament is significant . . . . there [are] references to 'the angel who has power over fire' (14:18), 'the angel of the water' (16:5), and to 'an angel standing in the sun' (19:17)" (Daly, *Pure Lust* 182–183). Thus, their teaching is not intellectual or based on bookish knowledge, since angels in "Guardians" derive their wisdom from being in the natural and experiential world, "close by in this valley, / swept in with the rain and snows of winter." Morrissey's angels

. . . exist  
 In the sudden illumination of our days and bear love,  
 Making sure the earth holds as we climb the last mountain  
 And come out at the plateau before cities grew tall  
 And where minerals dazzle.

(TWFIV 51)

In Morrissey's poem, the guardians' wingless representation is manifested in the passage: "They hover but have no wings. / They cast shadows in their brightness, / Letting us know they are here" (TWFIV 51). Additionally, the angelic presence endures "in the sudden illumination of our days," in the daily epiphanies whose essence is love. Angels "do not have the attribute of eternity, which implies absolute immutability, or unchangeableness . . . . the angels' changeableness is in the realm of . . . intellect and will" (Daly, *Pure Lust* 310). Appropriately, attempting to preserve the harmony in the realms that they protect, the benevolent spirits in "Guardians" take care of both the animate and inanimate world. Hence the angels' light seems to signify their disinterested goodness and the vision of a caring universe where no living being is left alone to their own devices. Drawing upon Robert Fludd's philosophy ("Neoplatonist, naturalist, and vitalist"), Merchant argues that:

In his Neoplatonic hierarchical cosmos, founded on the microcosm-macrocosm analogy, God infused the world with his eternal spirit, which was housed in the sun and transmitted through the angels in the four corners of the world to the winds. The winds, in turn, representing the contrary principles of hot and cold, acted through a dialectical process of contradiction and expansion, conveying activity to the clouds and air. The two contrary active principles, heat and cold, produced the opposites observed in nature. The hot winds caused dilation, mollification, rarefaction, volatility, and transparency; cold winds produced contraction, hardening, condensation, fixation, and opacity . . . . The angelic winds were “endued with the most essential internal agents” and had “an essential and inward act, form, and principle.” The clouds likewise moved through the internal agency of the spirit and represented its vehicle. God’s activity in the world was the ultimate source of these dialectical tensions between the contraries and the basis of cosmic unity and animate life. (125)

However apart the aforementioned angelic functions,<sup>112</sup> they are first and foremost God’s messengers, the spirits who bring the word / Word: “This Elemental Verbal power is angelic. The word *angel* originally means emissary, messenger. An angel is a spiritual being of great intelligence. Claiming that speaking Radiant Words has Angelic power is naming / re-claiming primal force” (Daly, *Pure Lust* 19), emphasis original. Following this line of thinking, Morrissey’s poem “My New Angels” resumes the meditations outlined in “Guardians.” The narrative is sharply divided into the two juxtaposed entities, each consisting of the five lined stanzas. The first part is devoted to probing the calming vision of the angels (referred to as “God’s old angels”) reminiscent of “Guardians.” “God’s old angels” instil in humans the most desirable features: peace, love and understanding. By following them, human existence might be decoded as purposeful and meaningful: “Defining the sacred in terms of what matters most to people brings us back to Goodin’s point that, to be valuable to those living them, individual lives need sense and pattern, or . . . meaning. It makes sense to expect that what matters most to people, in other words, what they hold sacred, will be precisely those things that give their live sense, pattern and meaning” (Milton 105). Having an insight into the human soul, “There was no bewildering” of these merciful spirits who are well-disposed towards humanity. In consequence, in Morrissey’s poem, mortals can neither trick or surprise angels with their deeds. The persona in “My New Angels” declares:

God’s old angels made us peaceful.  
 They had wings of love and explanation.  
 They brought us our destiny to lower our eyes  
 And let everything be for a reason.  
 There was no bewildering them.

(TWFIV 52)

<sup>112</sup> Commenting upon “Guardians,” Parker argues that the poem “resonates with a psalm-like, lyric authority” (“Neither Here Nor There” 183). He elaborates on this thought claiming that “[t]he immanent, Blakean spirits of the title are guarantors of stability (‘Making sure the earth holds’), guides overseeing our ascent into a better state, a plateau ‘where minerals dazzle’, a place of transfiguration” (Parker, “Neither Here Nor There” 183).

The poem's second section contrasts "God's old angels" with the speaker's "new angels." The latter are viewed in Morrissey's poem as lacking the compassion or forgiveness displayed by their predecessors. As a result, they act upon vengeance and anger, there is no absolution from their punishment as they pardon nobody. The modifiers that describe them ("howling, hard") would seem more appropriate to fierce demons rather than gracious spirits. Since the new angels' nature does not change, no cultivation or refinement can improve their roughness. Antithetical to the peaceful "God's old angels," the new inflamed spirits appear to represent the uncontrollable, instinctual, fiery and merciless side of the universe. Looked at from this perspective, the complementary aspects of both Morrissey's old and new angels yield adequately the dichotomous sides of the natural world: its unparalleled beauty and its wild ferocity. The spiritual dimension stems from a dialectic aspect of their co-existence.<sup>113</sup> The female voice in "My New Angels" relates:

My new angels are howling, hard,  
 And there are masses in heaven  
 For every snuffed out light on a back road.  
 Their rage is assured, ragged, unforgiving.  
 There is no perfecting them.

(TWFIV 52)

Daly stresses that "Elemental philosophy *is* of the world. It is for those who love and belong to this world, who refuse the horror of Self-loss implied in dying 'with Christ' to the Elemental spirits of the universe" (*Pure Lust* 8), emphasis original. Following this line of thinking, Morrissey's poem "Belfast Storm" commences with a dramatic (atmospheric) tension: "With a rain like that lashing into the city / And a wind that blew streets dark before you could blink." What is more, the malevolent climactic changes are claimed to stem from the angels' irritation. Howell warns us about what she defines as a "monarchical model of God" (105) who "controls the world though domination and benevolence. The implication of the model is that God acts hierarchically *upon* the world rather than *in* it" (106), emphasis original. As if forgetting this, the female voice in "Belfast Storm" sums the hostile weather conditions as the angels' indignation: "It's as though the angels are angry, sitting in the sky / with heads in hands and howling it out all over us." Structurally, the aforementioned phrase operates on the alliterative sound similarities ("angels are angry," "sitting in the sky," "heads in hands and howling"). The speaker in "Belfast Storm" recalls:

With a rain like that lashing into the city  
 And a wind that blew streets dark before you could blink –

<sup>113</sup> However, "the pronouns used to represent the angels, whether 'good' or 'bad,' despite the fact that they were / are considered to be sexless, are always masculine. Since they are believed to be naturally far superior to human beings, the patriarchal mind would find it most unfitting to designate them by the pronouns reserved for the 'inferior' sex" (Daly, *Pure Lust* 190).



It's as though the angels are angry, sitting in the sky  
 With heads in hands and howling it out all over us.  
 (TWFIV 17)

Thus, the persona in “Belfast Storm” looks astonished at the violent reaction of the God’s messengers, and she comments irritably on it (“I can’t think what they haven’t got used to by now”). The concluding image introduces the male character (A Christ-like figure) who falls down, overwhelmed by the encountered hindrance (“The great gap in the street where his knees hit the wall”). Morrissey’s poem completes with a perplexing phrase, “meant wheelchairs, rather than coffins,” which might suggest that the crisis will not lead to the loss of one’s life but it may result in physical disability. The “Belfast Storm” concludes:

I can’t think what they haven’t got used to by now.  
 The great gap in the street where his knees hit the wall  
 Meant wheelchairs, rather than coffins.  
 (TWFIV 17)

The character whom the speaker in Morrissey’s “After the Hurricane” addresses believes that it is in the natural world that one can find the only feasible traces of the spiritual transcendence that relies upon immanence: “What that means is that spirit, sacred. . . – whatever you want to call it – is not found outside the world somewhere – it’s in the world: it *is* the world, and it is us” (Starhawk 73),<sup>114</sup> emphasis original. However the female voice in “After the Hurricane” is distanced from the idea of transcendence. She appears to agree that people tend to “forget this materiality of spirit, believe instead that culture has a transcendental power over nature” (Griffin, “Curves” 93). Consequently, the persona in “After the Hurricane” sums up her listener’s “transcendental” attitude as a compulsive habit beyond his rational control (“You saw the wind as the breath of God. / You couldn’t help it”). Carol P. Christ explains that “[i]n Hebrew the word ‘breath’ is resonant, recalling the ‘breath of God’ that hovered over the waters in the Genesis creation story” (*She Who Changes*). The speaking voice in “After the Hurricane” recalls:

You saw the wind as the breath of God.  
 You couldn’t help it. Your refusal of the ether  
 That would mist over death got smashed to splinters  
 Like the Florida coastline, up-ended in rain.  
 There was too much rage in the sky for it not to be God’s  
 (TWFIV 48)

It appears that the speaker in the analysed poem attributes her partner’s perception of the divine providence and the afterlife to the natural disaster they

<sup>114</sup> What is more, “the spirit is immanent . . . [with] . . . an inalienable right to be here and to be alive” (Starhawk 76).

have witnessed. Referring to the hurricane that nearly swept over the coast in Florida, Morrissey's persona admits bitterly: "There was too much rage in the sky for it not to be God's." Similarly Daly reminds us that "air is associated with the creative breath of life, hence with speech . . . air is the stormy wind, connected with the idea of creation" (*Pure Lust* 17). And she adds: "We should understand the term *violent* here in a way totally other than patriarchal violence that intentionally violates. A tornado's violence is simply natural, Wild force. Elemental creativity is utterly Other than the acontextual and anti-contextual meddling with nature that characterizes phallic technocracy" (Daly, *Pure Lust* 17), emphasis original. As visible in "After the Hurricane," Morrissey's speaker's own attitude to the experienced catastrophe is quite contradictory. She considers the tornado as an expression of God's wrath and His disappointment with Creation and not of His transcendence. Accordingly, "[t]he most obvious inconsistencies arise when this view of omnipotence must be reconciled with natural catastrophes and human moral evil" (Howell 112–113). What is more, "natural phenomena are perceived as evil only because human beings have been taught to believe that we should be able to control all the conditions of life" (Christ, *Rebirth* 129). Carol P. Christ indicates the concepts of chance and choice as the source of evil and suffering (*She Who Changes* 99). She argues that

Some theologians therefore invented the category of "natural evil" which is said to include death, disease, and natural phenomena such as hurricanes, floods, and earthquakes. The degree to which human being have altered nature with modern technologies has blurred the distinction between human and natural evil. Are devastating tornadoes now being experienced a result of natural processes or the result of global warming? (Christ, *She Who Changes* 99)

It seems that the narrated listener in Morrissey's poem becomes involuntarily confronted with the human existence's vulnerability when exposed to a power which almost blindly determines whether one shall live or die, a power that is very much beyond one's control or logical understanding. In "After the Hurricane," the statement "You couldn't help it" captures the essence of the listener's helplessness. Natural phenomena such as earthquakes or hurricanes only "shattered her illusion that she was in control of her life . . . In fact, like all of us, she never had been in control of her life. She lived, as we all do, in interconnection and interdependence with other human beings and all beings in the web of life" (Christ, *Rebirth* 129).<sup>115</sup> Moreover, natural disasters are believed to contradict the widespread view that "nature is subject to lawlike behavior and therefore that the domain of science includes those phenomena that can be reduced to orderly predictable rules, regulations, and laws. Events that can be so described can be controlled because of the simple identity of mathematical relationships" (Merchant 229). Therefore in "After the Hurricane," having enumerated the whirling catalogue of "a tree, a house, a woman," Morrissey's

<sup>115</sup> By attributing the omnipotent power to God, it becomes clear that the experiencer disclaims the "human responsibility for the fate of the planet earth" (Christ, *She Who Changes* 174).

speaker evokes an apt sound-repeated simile (“you **saw** a **shower** of cars / **spat** out like **sycamore seeds**”). The alliterated “hissing” comparison refers here to the objects and persons lifted up into the air and discarded later as mindlessly and as emotionlessly as redundant fruit pips. The female voice in the examined poem wonders:

Perhaps it was your position under the window,  
 At the mercy of whatever startled missile  
 Made its appearance next –  
 A tree, a house, a woman –  
 Over your head. . . .

(TWFIV 48)

Nonetheless the speaker in “After the Hurricane” perceives the natural world’s spiritual (regenerative) potential to recover from the evident disasters which disrupt its regular arrangement (vide “a landscape that trailed wires / in its rush to be pure”). The final two lines of Morrissey’s poem bring one back to the opening argument, namely, how the experience of the natural disaster has affected the persona’s addressee. On the whole, the speaker’s account seems to repudiate her partner’s behaviour. In view of that, her report draws upon the implicitly pejorative stylistic devices (such as the derogatory modifier “too temporary”), the explicit syntactic negation (“not to be answerable”), the implied powerlessness (“to the power in”) and the phrasal verb of dissolution (“the break up of hills”). The implicitly inferred textual negativity is further intensified by the account of the listener’s “elemental” denial suggested in “Your refusal of the ether.” In Morrissey’s poem, the morbid veil of the blurred vision is collocated with the end of life (“That would mist over death”). The image of destruction and disintegration (“got smashed to splinters / Like the Florida coastline”) terminates with a colloquially dismissive verb, denoting a finale that is somewhat undesirable (“up-ended in rain”). Morrissey’s “After the Hurricane” ends with a recollection:

. . . You saw a shower of cars

Spat out like sycamore seeds.  
 And a landscape that trailed wires  
 In its rush to be pure.  
 You felt too temporary not to be answerable  
 To the power in the break up of hills.

(TWFIV 48)

In “Sufficient unto Our Day: Recent Irish Poetry” Zwiép draws attention to Morrissey’s poetry’s spirituality, which is frequently overlooked by critics. She praises this aspect along with Morrissey’s command of form [“she tries sonnets, rhyming quatrains, even a villanelle (‘Genesis’)” (Zwiép 470–471)]. In conclusion, Zwiép notices in an opinionated way that: “Despite being the child of unbelievers (‘Among Communists’), Sinead Morrissey cares about spiritual

truths. In 'After Hurricane,' she admits, 'You saw the wind as the breath of God. / You couldn't help it.' . . . In another poem she alludes to the Sermon on the Mount, but changes the tone: 'Inheriting Meek' of the title turn out to be the 'soft algal stretch' that is ominously encompassing a lake" (470).

Bearing in mind that "[t]hat which is diverted, divided, suppressed always returns with greater force, and when it returns, no one can control it" (Gaard 134), Morrissey's Darwin Man" refers to the reconstructed Australian city that was almost entirely wiped out by the hurricane in 1974. The title "Darwin Man" is subversively double-edged. As is evident from its factual and historical reference, it plainly draws upon Charles Darwin's evolutionist theory of species.<sup>116</sup> The poem begins with an ironic, prose-like fragment: "In the morning the Darwin man stepped out of his bath and went outside. / The sun dished up the shock of a flat world" (BHAT 26). The cited passage might as well constitute a novel's opening, with the main character's introductory sketch and the plot. The idiom that Morrissey's speaker employs, nonetheless, betrays an element of the absurd and textual incongruity behind the surface verisimilitude. In "Darwin Man," taken literally, the sun's display of one-dimensional reality is in sharp contrast with our modern scientific understanding. Taken metaphorically, it implies the consternation at seeing horizontally levelled landscape. Hence anything that might disrupt this planar view causes bewilderment. So does the sight of a singular tree whose existence Morrissey's persona records as "a tree glistened. The tree was taller than / everything" (BHAT 26). In the examined poem, the Darwin man's reaction to the disturbing sight is stupefaction. However the historical references to Nagasaki's man-made annihilation seem to be too far-reaching with regard to the destruction of the Australian city by the tornado. The speaker in "Darwin Man" provides a word-exact, italicised account of his response to the cataclysm:

As tall as a tree in a Nagasaki photograph.

*This known to those who have seen war*, thought the man,  
who had never seen war.

All night he had knelt in his bathroom because the spinning of the world  
had come.

It had the force of a cyclone and the voice of Mars. It was entire.  
(BHAT 26)

In Morrissey's poem, the Darwin man's shell-shock is subsequently transferred onto a corporeal level with its specific bodily symptoms: vertigo, dizziness, collapse and unconsciousness. These sensations' strength is best captured in the plain sentence: "it was entire." In other words, in facing up to the powerful natural forces, the Darwin man cannot recover from the civilizational trauma. His subsequent visions, reminiscent of hallucinogenic delusions, make

<sup>116</sup> See Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* (1859).

him aware of the outer environmental agency (“Weather became a creature”). Appropriately, the natural forces enter the Darwin man’s inner, enclosed realm: “he saw the heart, high over him in the bath, / where there should have been no sky.” To the frightened man, the cyclone’s power looks ultimate, being identified with the life-governing force (“he thought the storm was over. / Or that everything was over”). The speaking voice in the analysed text records:

Weather became a creature, with hands of tides and eyelids of cedar.  
Its heart was a windless square of stars.

When he managed to look up, he saw the heart, high over him in the bath,  
where there should have been no sky.

So suddenly crystal he thought the storm was over.  
Or that everything was over.

(BHAT 26)

Paradoxically, in Morrissey’s poem the near-death experience enables the Darwin man to integrate his alienated body and spirit: “A moment as outwitting as when the soul stands up over the body, / and enters silence” (BHAT 26). Ironic as it may seem, apart from dramatic, epiphanic moments as the ones described by Morrissey, the modern man seems to be blind to nature’s power. Confronted with the scale of the city’s destruction, he can only experience the awesome recognition for the supreme elemental forces defined by him as *governance* (see “*This is governance*”). As shown, the Darwin man’s recognition of the natural world results not from identification but from his fearful homage to its overpowering potency. Kept in check by “grief and fear,” the defensive mechanisms that the Darwin man obeys are in tune with the survival of the fittest: “When consciousness of the dependency upon nature cannot quite be banished, it remains a source of anxiety and threat” (Plumwood, “Androcetrism and” 341). That is why “He was sick with reverence / for the speed of all bodily loss, and the toil of the build.” The persona in “Darwin Man” comments:

*This is governance*  
ran a thought in part of the man’s head left over from grief and fear.

He was sick with reverence  
for the speed of all bodily loss, and the toil of the build.

But it was only the eye of the storm passing over –  
a glance into abeyance  
that shattered sense,  
and the creature kept singing.

(BHAT 26)

Nonetheless, Morrissey’s poem’s ending brings about an astonishing textual turnabout. One finds out that once overcoming his “shattered sense,” the Darwin

man regains what earlier appeared to be unavailable to him, the spiritual appreciation of being alive: "Once we realize, as our ancestors did, that life does not exist only for us, we can begin to see that hurricanes, floods, earthquakes, and volcanic eruptions are not evil" (Christ, *Rebirth* 129). The examined poem's sarcastic ending ("And the creature kept singing") makes one wonder whether it is only on the rubble of the hi-tech contemporary civilisation that people may learn to affirm life as it is. The question arises whether without liminal, nearly fateful experiences (such as being in the cyclone's eye), the Darwin man is capable of affirming, on a spiritual level, the natural world "as beautifully as a blackbird." After all "we often think of aesthetic experiences as the appreciation of beauty, Whitehead and Hartshorne understood the aesthetic experience to include appreciation of all the complexities of life, including tragedy" (Christ, *She Who Changes* 129). The cited expression to "affirm my sky as beautifully as a blackbird" is taken from Morrissey's poem "Twenty-One." The narrative in question provides one with a personal statement of faith in which the speaker outlines her spiritual credo. In no more than four sentences, Morrissey's persona declares her belief in God and disbelief in the Creator's interest in humankind, giving her reasons for the above. Howell explains where these apparent contradictions are coming from:

Attributes projected onto God by patriarchy reflect the values of a patriarchal worldview: transcendence (dualistic separation); hierarchical power; possession of maximum freedom, knowledge, territory (omnipresence-infinity), and stability (all of which are masculine values) . . . when we say "God is the Father" long enough, we begin to believe that the father / man / male is God. Consequently, we believe that the petty all controlling power idealized in patriarchal religion is just, good, and divine. A God described by these man-made attributes is irrelevant to women and women's experience. More tragically, this theism institutionalizes the diminishment of women and women's experience. (107)

In line with that, Daly reminds us that "[m]ales have tried to rid themselves of their impurities by subliming themselves into 'God,' who is 'sublime,' and who is so lofty that he really is nowhere and thus can be said to be everywhere. The earthly / unearthly males have vaporized and then condensed / reified their self-images into the sublime product, god, and they use this condensed and purified product as a mask to engender *awe*" (*Pure Lust* 73). Further on, she argues that "the male myth-makers have been able to manufacture and promote their sublimed products only at the expense of female transcendence" (Daly, *Pure Lust* 74). Accordingly, subscribing to the view that there exists a higher force that seems to permeate life on earth, the female voice in "Twenty-One" openly acknowledges having neither understanding nor trust in it. Hence the opening sentence ("I don't know why God **gave** the world") seems to be close to the meaning that God made the world come into existence but then "gave it up." Nonetheless, the statement "But I am in it" is strongly affirmative, and it is in agreement with the view that the human "goal in life is not to escape the world but to participate fully in it" (Christ, *She Who Changes* 133). The lack of

comprehension of God's intentional plan does not prevent Morrissey's speaker from affirming the beauty of the surrounding reality, just as it exists:

An aesthetic view of the world is one that takes its cue from our experiences of the appreciation of beauty. The word "aesthetic" stems from a Greek word meaning "feeling" . . . . The aesthetic attitude to the world is the ability to feel deeply about life, to be moved by it. Appreciating the colors of a sunset, the grace of a child climbing a tree, or the warmth of a lover's smile are all aesthetic experiences. . . . For those with the ability to feel deeply, such experiences reveal the life's most profound significance . . . . An aesthetic approach to life is in the first instance interested and appreciative rather than judgemental. (Christ, *She Who Changes* 129–130)

For the persona in "Twenty-One," the natural world becomes the most perfect (and the only truly feasible) rendering of the spiritual. All the more, then, Morrissey's speaker intends to cherish being alive in order to capture in words the fleeting experiential magnificence. Learning reality's sensuous averment from the natural world, the female voice in the probed poem promises to "affirm my sky as a **beautifully** as a **blackbird**" (compare with the earlier alliterated "**blown blossom**"). She acknowledges openly:

I don't know why God gave the world,  
But I am in it. Looking up, I want to photograph  
The blown blossom and the receding colours of the day –  
To affirm my sky as beautifully as a blackbird.

(TWFIV 50)

What is worth noticing in "Twenty-One" is the reversed perspective: Morrissey's speaker is learning joy and affirmation from the natural, non-human world, but until quite recently the very concept of animals experiencing joy was contested. For some, it is still difficult to accept that:

. . . human beings are not the only ones with the capacity for joy. When Hartshorne asked if birds enjoyed singing, he was also asking if individuals other than human beings enjoy life. Hartshorne had no quarrel with those who say that birds sing in order to claim territory and attract mates. But he felt birds must enjoy singing; otherwise they would have no need to continue doing it so frequently and so beautifully when territory is secure and mates are found. Nor would some birds develop such intricate songs. (Christ, *She Who Changes* 119)

As shown in "Twenty-One," the blackbird teaches Morrissey's speaker to affirm and enjoy life.<sup>117</sup> "This means joy is never an individual experience . . . . Joy occurs in relationship with others, both human and non-human . . . . If we truly enjoy life, we enjoy our relationships and sympathize with the experiences of a wide variety of individuals, both human and nonhuman" (Christ, *She Who*

<sup>117</sup> The blackbird is classified as a common bird by "what Fox (1995) referred to as 'personally based identification' . . . most people in the UK will identify with a robin or a blackbird more easily than with a white-necked picathartes" (Milton 118).

*Changes* 126). “An enspirited landscape will still be a sacred landscape as long as spirit is what makes things most meaningful to people, what induces their strongest emotional responses. Similarly, wholeness, beauty and mystery will form the basis of sacredness wherever these are the most valued, the most emotionally powerful qualities” (Milton 104–105). In other words, one can enjoy

*This bird with the scarlet shoulders. This bird with the yellow throat. And the beautiful song. The song like flutes. Like violoncellos in an orchestra. The orchestra in our mind. The symphony we imagine. . . . this creature is free of our hands, we cannot control her, and for the creature we have tamed, the creature we keep in our house, we must make a new word. For we did not invent the blackbird, we say, we only invented her name.* (Griffin, *Woman and Nature* 223–226), emphasis original.

It appears that in “Twenty-One” even if the patriarchal God’s role terminates with the Creation, people ought to sustain spiritually the natural world affirmed by the embodied, sensuous, divine love that is described by process theology: “*The red-winged blackbird flies in us, in our inner sight. We see the arc of her flight . . . ink this paper, our bones, the flesh of our tongues with which we make the sound ‘blackbird,’ the ears with which we hear, the eye which travels the arc of her flight*” (Griffin, *Woman and Nature* 226), emphasis original. In Morrissey’s poem, the moment of awareness comes when the speaker / writer realises the difference between the textually narrated signifier and the real bird that flies in the natural world. As argued by Griffin, the discursive world, unlike that of the spirit, has its clearly delineated confinements:

And she wrote: when I let this bird fly to her own purpose, when this bird flies in the path of his own will, the light from this bird enters my body . . . because I know I am made from this earth . . . all that I know, I know in this earth, the body of the bird, this pen, this paper, these hands, this tongue speaking, all that I know speaks to me through this earth . . . (*Woman and Nature* 226–227), emphasis original

In Morrissey’s poetry, the interrelation between the natural and spiritual world, once textually mediated via language and culture, becomes more complicated than it may seem at first.

Because the disjunction of divinity, humanity, and nature is deeply embedded in the words *God*, *humanity*, and *nature* – it is difficult to articulate new conceptions. The three terms in the triad “God, man, and nature” must be rethought together. It will not do, for example, simply to say that the divine is nature because concepts of nature have already been defined as excluding teleology and the kind of power commonly associated with divinity. Nor, on the other hand, will it do simply to say that nature is teleological since teleology has been defined as residing in the divine and human moral will that stand over and against nature. Similarly, it cannot be asserted that humanity is nature since to most people that would imply that humans are irrational, immoral, and inarticulate. What is required is a revolution in thought, a deconstruction and



reconstruction of both theology and language. (Christ, "Rethinking Theology" 61–62), emphasis original

Following the "revolution in thought, a deconstruction and reconstruction of both theology and language," the poem "Storm on Jupiter" explores an unbridgeable gap between words and the natural reality that the text refers to. In her contemplations of Jupiter, Morrissey's persona becomes aware of the distance between the observing subject and the viewed object. Although the discerned target may look within reach "It is the colour of sands set liquid by wind / and the size of all we can touch" (BHAT 16), the space between the two cannot be crossed in real time. Since the remote temporal framework disrupts the textual stability, a third party is introduced. Namely, a perspective questioning the obviousness of the previous divisions is availed of only in retrospection. The speaker in "Storm on Jupiter" envisages:

At the distance from which we photograph  
Jupiter's storm is oiling the cloud-flow  
over its single eye –  
elegance and extremity are shaking hands.

(BHAT 16)

Claiming: "We have caught it / four hundred million miles from where we spin, / and stored it" (BHAT 16), Morrissey's speaker becomes detached from the illusion of the unified phenomenological reality. What the female voice in "Storm on Jupiter" defines as an "in-between dance" takes place amid our representations of what can be and the realisation of these conjectures. To express this gap, Morrissey's persona abandons familiar collocations and conventional syntax, remaining, at the same time, down-to-earth due to the colloquial idiom. Comparable to the so-called Martian poetry, the speaker's estrangement from language "travels" far beyond the routine of congruous clichés. Morrissey's experimental idiom intensifies "the distance from which we photograph," between the artistic medium and the outlying object, remote from the well-known means of expression and grounds of comparison. The persona in "Storm on Jupiter" observes:

. . . There is a dance here

between the confounding of knowledge  
and the building of roads  
from the numbers of our imagination  
that prove concrete when we walked on.

(BHAT 16)

Textually, one cannot fail to appreciate how aptly "Storm on Jupiter" renders the titular phenomenon into a dynamic verbal image of "oiling the cloud-flow." It is how Morrissey builds the linguistic creations (both alien and common) that constitutes the strength of her poetic talent and enables her to revive the stilted

linguistic reserves, translating “the photographic” images into words and textual representations into spiritual enlightenment. In this vein, the poem “Goldfish” draws upon Morrissey’s spiritual recollections from the time when she lived and worked in Japan. To some extent, the poet’s “words suggest a Power to speak / write Words that evoke deep memories . . . these Words connect[s] the speaker and the hearer . . . with the elements” (Daly, *Pure Lust* 119). What strikes the reader in this linguistically and structurally innovative poem is the ostentatious lack of punctuation marks, reminiscent of the stream of consciousness technique. To put it another way, “Goldfish” is a twenty-six lined sentence. It imitates the transient, unselected impressions of the mind’s work, smoothly passing from one to the other. As in modernist fiction, Morrissey’s poetry carefully follows the stream of consciousness’s literary convention, all of whose elements have an intended purpose. In “Goldfish,” no room is allowed for random associations since even the seemingly indiscriminate impressions compose a precise, artistic message. Let one have a closer look at the opening image (derived from the element of water) which meditates upon the misrecognised sense-experience being juxtaposed with extra-sensory cognition “where closing eyes is too see:”

The black fish under the bridge was so long I mistook it  
for a goldfish in a Japanese garden the kind the philosophers  
wanted about them so much gold underwater to tell them what waited  
in another element like breathing water they wanted to go  
to the place where closing eyes is too see

(BHAT 43)

The persona in Morrissey’s poem reflects upon her memories’ spiritual dimension, which can be “seen” with her eyes closed. In other words, she argues that reality can be experienced not only with one’s senses but also with one’s spirit. The conclusion reached by her is articulated in a seemingly paradoxical statement (“I / held out my hands to touch it and felt changed air it wasn’t / there but I walked into it continually”). The speaker in “Goldfish” recalls:

I understood the day I closed my eyes in Gifu City I saw Japan  
for the first time saw what I had seen the gate to the Nangu  
Shrine by the Shinkansen stood straddled before my head and I  
held out my hands to touch it and felt changed air it wasn’t  
there but I walked into it continually and over the gardens full  
of pumpkin seeds in the ground and wild flowers over them they  
told me

(BHAT 43)

As the narrative progresses, the female voice in “Goldfish” appears to mentally travel to the places the recollections of which she preserves intact in her memory, evoking the remembered sights, smells and sounds. In doing so, the textually processed sense-perceptions do not lose their vivid “natural world” tangibility. It seems that without having these images in front of her eyes, the

speaker in Morrissey's poem manages to grasp a deeper understanding of the once-observed things. In doing so, she remarks:

they brought autumn and they were about my head also in Gifu City all  
pearled
in mist and happy as Japanese brides. I saw the JR crates on the night  
trains that passed through stations and seemed endless and running  
on purpose on time's heels on sheer will to cross Honshu one end  
(BHAT 43)

Disconnected from the sense of sight, Morrissey's persona brings back to the discourse's surface the images whose existence she has either suppressed or taken no notice of at first. In the studied poem, the textual world re-created in this way looks as multifarious as the sensory reality. The speaker in "Goldfish" continues her inward exploration: "Gifu one end to the other eyes closed I saw what I would never / have seen sighted a transvestite taxi driver set apart on the street / a lost person flowers by the pavement pavements for the blind I saw / music as pulled elastic bands drums as the footprints of exacting gods" (BHAT 43). The text's organising phrase ("closing / eyes is to see") is repeated cyclically at the beginning and at the end of the narrative. It appears that the best way to see is to do it "with closed eyes," synaesthetically ("blind I saw / music"). Morrissey's poem's musical flowing overwhelms one with alliterated imagery, such as "Shrine by the Shinkansen stood straddled." The poem "Goldfish" completes with the realisation that:

I mistook the black fish for an oriental goldfish the flash of gold  
on its belly meant it carried its message for the element below it  
always one storey down Zen masters attaining one storey down and I,  
falling into you, story by story, coming to rest in the place where closing  
eyes is to see.
(BHAT 43)

Having terminated her senti / mental journey, the speaker in "Goldfish" returns to her initial sensory misrecognition. The poem discloses a Chinese box narrative-within-narrative structure of experience, with one level leading to the other, and so on. Morrissey's speaker admits to "falling into you, story by story, coming to rest in the place where closing / eyes is to see." Once she has uttered these words, the female voice decides to put a full stop in her dramatic monologue. Affirming the world in its heterogeneous forms, affirming the moment beyond sensuous perception, the speaker in "Goldfish" affirms the world spiritually in its purest sense:

When I use the word *experience*, I assume that it is embodied, relational, communal, social, and historical. My experience includes everything I have ever tasted, touched, heard, seen, or smelled. It encompasses everything I have thought, felt, or intuited, as well as everyone I have ever met, everything I have ever read or heard about, and everything I have ever done or suffered. It is shaped by the history of my times . . . (Christ, *Rebirth* 37), emphasis original

Consequently, the sixth part of the *Mercury* cycle, entitled self-ironically “No Need to Travel” meditates on the natural's world's spirituality being transferred into the discursive affirmation. In this aesthetic dimension, the tulips' ordinariness can even match the foreign country's excitement. In other words, the common flowers' plain beauty is equated with the memories of the exotic trip. In the bleak weather, the plants' dazzling colours, their swaying stems and the petals' movements are as astounding as the “stories of Africa” and “the time, the plains, the colours the rains bring.” The female voice in “No Need to Travel” records:

The tulips are nodding their heads in the garden,  
Six bright faces in a grey spring rain,  
Holding court to your stories of Africa –  
The time, the plains, the colours the rains bring  
(TWFIV 38)

As argued above, the narrated tulips in Morrissey's poem merge on a textual level with the African tales, both of these discourses being intertwined with each other. Their spiritual interconnectedness is “thrust [ing] colour skywards, / Flaunting the unlikely, shocking through bloom.” The persona states:

And I think how something of the nobility  
Of the wilderness broke ground here also  
In that knack of knowing how to thrust colour skywards,  
Flaunting the unlikely, shocking through bloom.  
(TWFIV 38)

Additionally, in “No Need to Travel,” this vivid synthesis of words, sensations and images enables the breaking of the petrified linguistic similes and clichéd connotations. Thus “the natural” fused with “the artificial” can renew the resources of language, be “a deconstruction and reconstruction of both theology and language” (Christ, “Rethinking Theology” 62) “[i]n that knack of knowing how to thrust colour skywards” (see the passage above). The depicted fusion happens because

. . . human beings do not stand outside nature . . . . “We are nature. We are nature seeing nature. We are nature with a concept of nature” . . . . Human beings who are part of nature, will never be able to control nature. Yet, tragically, human beings now may have the power to destroy . . . (Christ, *She Who Changes* 174)

Like “No Need to Travel,” the poem “Zero Visibility” probes the natural world's spiritual dimension experienced by the astonished speaker. During the tedious journey, Morrissey's persona admits to being worn out after exhaustive conflict. She is hence susceptible to any excessive sensations that might upset the fragile balance she is striving for. Feeling over-exposed, Morrissey's speaker resists any audible or visual signs of human and non-human stimuli alike. She perceives the light source as piercing and pernicious, commenting upon it that

“stars hurt like showering flint.” The opening part of “Zero Visibility” operates on the adjective-doubles (“shell-shocked and vulnerable,” “flickered and buzzed,” “seen and scripted,” “raw and flawless”). In the explored poem, putting these duplicated modifiers in the meaning-related pairs might indicate the speaker’s textual inability to reach any final cognitive or emotive resolution. As demonstrated earlier, the inconclusive state (which is typical of a stressful condition) affects the female voice’s openness to nature’s beauty. Thus, the persona in “Zero Visibility” declares:

That high up, stars hurt like showering flint.  
 We drove into Flagstaff shell-shocked and vulnerable.  
 All night the motel light flickered and buzzed,  
 as in the movie I’d already seen and scripted –  
 raw and flawless, shot through with falling stars.  
 (BHAT 24)

Morrissey’s poem’s second part introduces a natural world metaphor for the disoriented state. Accordingly, the female voice in “Zero Visibility” blames the misty weather for the lack of a clear future vision and her increasing emotional distance from her partner. The passages about: “Our hands held at arm’s length were stolen by fog – / trees, highways and hills were swallowed by distance” disclose her perception of reality as threatening (see “stolen by fog,” and “swallowed by distance”). Regardless of all this, Morrissey’s speaker seems to compare the environmental “zero visibility state” to her own (textual and emotional) vulnerability. In the misty weather, both conflicted sides might hide behind the fog to conceal their resentment. Referring to the colours that could break through the fog’s thickness, Morrissey’s persona admits that “exposure was over and we held our breath for them.” To render the textual entrapment, the parallel structures are maintained in “slow colour by slow colour.” The adjectival constructions are replaced by the verb-based idiom and a noun-list. The speaker in “Zero Visibility” recalls:

The next day was opposite.  
 Our hands held at arm’s length were stolen by fog –  
 trees, highways and hills were swallowed by distance  
 and then released again, tantalisingly, slow colour by slow colour.  
 Exposure was over and we held our breath for them.  
 (BHAT 24)

Furthermore in Morrissey’s text, the adjectival pairs reappear for a moment in the third sequence (see “its urgent, insisting clouds”) but without their compulsive reiteration. This part operates more on auditory effects than lexicon. The repeated sound combinations are vowels (mostly i/u/e/o/) and the consonant “r,” as in “breathlessness,” “urgent,” “earth,” enormous,” “vaporised tears,” “bridal dexterity,” “preferred.” The female voice in “Zero Visibility” admits:

By the time we touched the tipped lip of the Canyon  
 there was nothing to see but breathlessness itself,  
 its urgent, insisting clouds. You said the earth  
 was veiling her enormous sex with vaporised tears  
 and bridal dexterity. If so, I preferred it that way.

(BHAT 24)

The image of the earth personified as a veiled bride is elaborated in the concluding part of the cited passage. The persona in “Zero Visibility” is astounded with the earth’s active refusal to reveal to the “unworthy,” quarrelsome couple the Canyon’s breath-taking panoramic view. Confronted with the nature’s justified denial, Morrissey’s speaker feels ashamed for her presumptuous demands to inspect the natural wonders unconditionally. Therefore she decodes the mist as a punishment for her own and her partner’s earlier negligence of the environment and taking it for granted. She confesses:

I loved the white unrolling river  
 of her refusal as it stunned us on the banks,  
 stupid as hit fish, with our cameras and stares.

(BHAT 24)

As shown above, the nature’s spiritual practice can restore the balance between people blind to its power by the means of retributive actions (see the hiding of the spectacular view by mist from the undeserving onlookers). Likewise, “[u]nderstanding human nature as part of nature inspires greater respect for the diversity of human experience than defining human nature primarily through our rational capacities . . . . Our lives are dependent in more ways that we can begin to imagine on support and nurture from the web of life, from the earth body . . . . Embodied intelligent love *really* is the ground of our being” (Christ, *Rebirth* 136), emphasis original.

Similarly Morrissey’s “The Inheriting Meek” exercises an ecological lesson of humility for people. On a narrative level, the poem depicts the environmentalist’s intervention to prevent the lake from being completely overgrown with algae. Plumwood stresses that “[a]ctivists can aim to counter homogenization by bringing about an ecological understanding of nature’s diversity and of its own complex order, and they can counter incorporation by creating an understanding of the developmental story of nature. They can try to counter instrumentalism and human claims to control by establishing some humility, by stressing uncertainty, the extent of what we don’t know, alternatively caring models of relationship to the land . . . in a different, less instrumental framework” (“Androcentrism” 342). Textually, “The Inheriting Meek” relies on the information provided by an environmentalist involved in the ecological rescue action. The lake overgrown with algae could lead to the death of its living organisms and it might become useless as a source of drinking water for the local community. As Vance points out: “A healthy ecosystem . . . is not only a model of how the natural world is, but also of how it ought to be:

interdependent, sustainable, and diverse, a web of beings-in-relationship that emerges as a whole far greater than the sum of its parts, and which cannot be reduced to its parts without destroying its integrity” (180). In Morrissey’s poem, acting upon environmental assumptions, the speaker’s correspondent appears to be determined to save the lake from the ecological disaster. The irony results from the fact that the algae, like any cancerous cells or any other metastatic cellular multiplication, constitute an enemy to one’s own (eco) system. In other words, the “carcinogenic” algae turn against the lake-organism which they are themselves a part of. As in chemo- or radiotherapy to counteract malignancy, one has to weaken the whole organism that supports it. It is not that the algae themselves are destructive, it is their irrepressibly “manic” spread that causes the problem, since deprived of oxygen, the lake will die. The female voice in “The Inheriting Meek” recalls:

Your letter comes with the news that the lake blooms  
 earlier each year. As yet September is free of it,  
 but then as though *October* were carcinogenic,  
 and days could split degrees between them evenly,  
 the oncogene of the lake turns manic

(BHAT 27)

The persona in “The Inheriting Meek” gives a detailed account of the algae expansion (“a soft algal stretch is beginning its reach / from the shadow of your cabin to the stone-stacked beach”). It looks as if the passage’s melody spills over the edges of the lines, sprawling and expanding like the overgrown algae. The fragment’s wittily and intentionally “dramatic” suspense reminds one of the “It Came from Beneath the Sea”<sup>118</sup> type of B movie horror where a nature that is outside the control of humans constitutes the source of terror. Drawing upon the Biblical discourse, the speaker in Morrissey’s poem conceives of the process ironically as “the time-consuming ambition of the inheriting meek.” The cited statement has clear religious connotations, though, as argued above, it is not devoid of bitter undertones. Accordingly, Bateson’s “understanding of sacredness, and one which reflects how the concept is used in several religious traditions, is in terms of ‘wholeness’ or ‘unity’, which is recognized by perceiving the relationships among things (Bateson 1991: 267). He used the example of the hand to illustrate this point, suggesting that a hand is not composed of five digits, but of four relationships between digits. The sacredness or beauty of the land . . . is only recognized when it is seen as a totality of relationships (ibid.:302, 310)” (Milton 102). The speaker in Morrissey’s poem ponders:

and a soft algal stretch is beginning its reach  
 from the shadow of your cabin to the stone-stacked beach.  
 It shows the time-consuming ambition of the inheriting meek.

<sup>118</sup> An American horror “It Came from Beneath the Sea” was directed by Robert Gordon in 1955.

You say you lost millennial Christmas in a week  
spent injecting the lake with oxygen,

(BHAT 27)

As the poem "The Inheriting Meek" proceeds, Morrissey's persona provides a detailed insight into the activist's struggle to save the lake, appreciating his dedication ("Christmas in a week / spent injecting the lake with oxygen") and highlighting his other ecological interventions ("a list of the wars you've fought with the dam"). Among the catalogued Biblical Job-like trials that the ecologist was confronted with, one can find the parasitic infection (*Giardia Lamblia*), the human purposeful destruction, draught, the noisy water sports, his car's damage, the dying lake creatures, the indigenous habitants' hostility, etc. Nonetheless Morrissey's speaker is fully aware that if the environmentalist was to give up and let go "this could mean a green, undrinkable eye in the face / of the forest, the irreversible failure of the water supply." In tune with that, the female voice in "The Inheriting Meek" enumerates the ecologist's encountered obstacles:

giardia, sabotage, evaporation,  
the year of no rain when the lake drained to wrecks,  
water skis, exhausted eels, a hub cap off your station wagon,  
and Aucklanders brought their children  
to stare at the reason for rationing.

(BHAT 27)

Hence the natural ecosystem is rendered in Morrissey's poem as one living organism whose ailing eye (the lake) requires treatment so that the face (forest) could function properly. Consequently, Gaard shows the connection between the human well-being and that of nature: "The lake gathers rainfall, gathers snow melt and the plenitude of creeks. The lake overflows, spills, falls, exuberance of fullness, joy in motion, streaming downhill now, swelling the creek bed where it has made this journey so many times before" (133). The persona in "The Inheriting Meek" continues her vision:

This could mean a green, undrinkable eye in the face  
of the forest, the irreversible failure of the water supply,  
whilst the language of the luminous algae  
is murmurous, like intestines, and quaintly victorious.  
Stars miss themselves in the eye, but keep their trajectory.

(BHAT 27)

Structurally, Morrissey's poem's most accomplished part is the fragment where the speaker interprets the algae's distending activities as a linguistic and corporeal code. To render its dexterity, the persona employs alliteration ("face / of the forest," "language of the luminous algae"), the onomatopoeic devices ("murmurous") and the defamiliarising similes ("murmurous, like intestines"). The italicised concluding fragment of "The Inheriting Meek" depicts the biologist as a rational-minded person who understands perfectly that the natural



world's current disastrous situation results from the lasting human negligence. Additionally, the dynamically altering ecosystem cannot be comprehended or aided by maintaining the *status quo*, as it continuously undergoes constant changes. Using philosophical arguments, Wilson argues that “[t]he living organism’s organization . . . cannot be sufficiently explained in mechanistic casual terms, since the parts are reciprocally means and ends to one another” (“Kant” 402). The apocalyptic tone of Morrissey’s poem’s final words (“The algae gather”) makes one aware that the human kind may be swept away from the earth not because of military conflict but by being destroyed by a tiny unicellular plant. “The Inheriting Meek” ends on a grim note:

*How neat, you say, and mean it, abhorring stasis,  
All change is good. We are piling into a future  
we will not escape from easily, if ever,  
for we have eaten time. The algae gather.*

(BHAT 27)

In conclusion, Morrissey’s poem’s Biblical title in the context of the spread of the algae might look derisive. On one hand, the algae’s expansion seems to be the nature’s revenge upon humans (compare Heaney’s “Death of a Naturalist”). On the other hand, it could show that nature is reclaiming the territory that once belonged to it before it was taken over by people and destroyed. From a broader perspective, “The Inheriting Meek” reminds people about the interconnectedness of all beings in the natural world: human kind being just one part in this long chain: “Consciously or not we are related to the constellations of minerals and cells and animals that make up the environment we live. Landscapes and places as well as people color and shape our experiences of the world . . . the divine sympathy is not limited to human beings . . . [It] appreciates other animals, plants or the cells in them, cells, and even atoms and their particles with a degree of interest appropriate to them” (Christ, *She Who Changes* 69–70, 87). Comparable to “The Inheriting Meek,” the poem “On Waitakere Dam” probes the empowering ecological consciousness that leads to spiritual conclusions. The titular dam, however, could be viewed as ecologically controversial since “the clearing of the forests and the damming and poisoning of rivers” are regarded as illustrations of people’s “controlling and dominating: having power over nature” (Plant 157). Commenting upon people’s need to control water, Gaard points out that:

You see the power of water and want power. Power will give you control. You build dams and concrete channels and ditches, believing that by doing it you will control the power of water, the fertility of water, the fear of your separation . . . You believe blocking the flow of water gives you power. You believe blocking the flow of feeling gives you power. You believe harnessing the animals, fencing off the land gives you power. And for a while these strategies work. But there are consequences. (134)

As in the case of the previous poem, the female voice in “On Waitakere Dam” relates the consequences of people’s interfering with the natural environment. Dedicated to the poet’s stepfather *Charles Brown*, Morrissey’s narrative highlights the respect for the whole ecosystem of which people living nearby are only a small constituent. Apart from the identifiable speaker and her relative, the addressee of the persona’s opening words remains undisclosed. Nonetheless, the claim that “no one would know” implies the character’s malevolent intentions. Hence it might appear that both an enigmatic man and the lake have something that they want to hide from others. Although the subsequent passage of “On Waitakere Dam” reveals more details about the lake’s nature, the narrated man’s motives remain obscure. The speaker in Morrissey’s poem speculates about them:

You wanted to up-end the boat  
and set it on the lake we lived by  
because no one would know.  
It was lavish with silverfish and looked  
defeated, humped on its secret  
like a hand. There was nowhere to go  
(BHAT 38)

The persona in “On Waitakere Dam” enumerates the lake’s distinctive features in detail (“sovereign, separate, intimate, ignorant”). Although abundant with living creatures, the lake looks disempowered. The female voice sums it up: “defeated, humped on its secret / like a hand.” The aforementioned modifiers depict the lake as vulnerable but proud and as being sadly defenceless against people’s abuse. Plumwood points out that “[n]ature is massively denied as the unconsidered background to technological society . . . . Since it is seen as an inessential constituent of the universe, its needs are systematically omitted from account and consideration in distributive decision making. Dependency on nature is denied systematically, so that nature’s resistance and needs are not perceived as imposing a limit on human goals or enterprises” (“Androcentrism” 341). In “On Waitakere Dam,” people give the impression of losing their distinct silhouettes in the reflected lake’s lustrous glow, which implies that they have given up their humanity. Morrissey’s speaker meditates on:

. . . the magnet of the middle lake  
where a vapour sat wide as Australia –  
as sovereign, as separate, as intimate  
with daylight, as ignorant  
of clocks and raincoats and boats.  
It threw a soft, unwatchable shimmer  
  
we would not be human in.  
(BHAT 38)

In the poem’s climactic fragment, the mysterious man’s (poacher’s?) textual appearance brings ruin to the lake and its inhabitants. The animals’ homes are

destroyed and the fragile natural balance is upset, the whole ecosystem's existence is turned upside down like the intruder's boat. With reference to the trespasser, the persona in "On Waitakere Dam" comments upon it: "You dismantled a sky" and "you inverted the universe." Although it remains unclear what precisely happened, the consequences of this detrimental ecological violation are clearly conspicuous. The female voice in Morrissey's poem addresses her reproach to "you / malefactor:"

You dismantled a sky  
 as you tipped the boat over,  
 the nest of a possum was robbed.  
 The hull settled outside-in  
 as you inverted the universe.

(BHAT 38)

Furthermore in "On Waitakere Dam," the poetic elusiveness evokes the menace of the post-war silence more accurately than the narrated events' meticulousness. In this vein, the female voice in Morrissey's poem avoids the poem's thematisation. Instead, readers obtain a series of subtly sketched, understated and disconsolate visions (i.e. "an underwater canvas / of spectacular women" or "the crowds of their branches were cold"). The speaker in "On Waitakere Dam" recalls:

We bobbed in the reeds.  
 The trees lay down their crowns  
 beneath us, an underwater canvas  
 of spectacular women. Above us  
 the crowds of their branches were cold.  
 Black swans were nesting in the nesting place,  
  
 trees reared to the rim of vision –  
 we slid on to the centre. . . .

(BHAT 38)

At this stage one might speculate about the fish being killed by the explosives set up by the poacher, and many more lifeless creatures that come to the lake's surface, floating and shining in the darkness ["At night, / with no lights for miles, the lake / would glitter with the Southern Cross" (BHAT 38)]. The line: "smiled at us / with a million silver teeth" (BHAT 38) implies the annihilation of the living beings residing in the lake waters. The semantic signs of catastrophe ("roar with rain," "coughing eels," "too water-sore," "flinching themselves") denote the lake creatures' anguish. One cannot help feeling that in Morrissey's poem the maimed lake suffers together with its injured and dying inhabitants. The personified expressions (see "roar" and "coughing") in "On Waitakere Dam" depict the lake as the animate organism not much different from that of a human being. One can apply again the vein-metaphor to render the "analogy between the waters of the earth and the ebb and flow of human blood through the veins and heart" (Merchant 24). Accordingly, Morrissey's persona argues:

We'd heard it roar with rain  
 and watched it coughing eels  
 over the dam's brim,  
 too water-sore to keep them any longer.  
 They fell flinching themselves  
 into s's' or n's.

(BHAT 39)

Likewise the poem's expression "lake's shroud" signifies the destruction of the aquatic life-forms. This phrase sharply contrasts with the concluding image of the carefree lake's warden, oblivious of the tragedy that has occurred or simply indifferent to it. Absorbed with the classical music in his car, little does he know (or care) about the dead animals and plants whose life he was supposed to protect. On a spiritual level, the female voice in "On Waitakere Dam" acknowledges the lake animals' sacrifice as completely unjustified violence because it entails the suffering of the innocent. "Human beings have caused a great deal of suffering for ourselves and other life forms through the exercise of creative freedom or choice. God is not to blame for the suffering that human beings have created, we are. Human choice is real and it has its consequences" (Christ, *She Who Changes* 100). Morrissey's speaker concludes:

And now we sat stilled in a boat  
 in the centre, under the lake's shroud,  
 and the listening  
 was for the car of the caretaker –  
 weaving down from the Nihitipu Dam  
 with Handel or Bach on the radio.

(BHAT 39)

Preceded with an excerpt from Robert Frost, the poem "The Reversal" contemplates the lake's human-induced transubstantiation from a liquid to a solid state. For the time being, the lake's mobile watery form (it "sloshes and jerks") remains in tranquillity ("a cat-lapped equilibrium"). Its vitality is stressed by aquatic beings that live on it or close to the lake ("its surface is alive with flies"). The poem's opening states:

The lake, laid flat again, sloshes and jerks  
 to a cat-lapped equilibrium.  
 At sunset, its surface is alive with flies.

(TTSW 16)

In "The Reversal," a meticulous enumeration aims to put a mathematical order on the living in the lake creatures. The itemised account is delivered in the repetitive structures: "There are more otters than wide-mouthed bass. / There are more lightning-struck trees / than otters" (TTSW 16). The purpose of designing this catalogue might be its melodiousness and the regularity of specified phrases. With regard to the idiomatic dexterity, one cannot but appreciate the cadence of the forthcoming expressions: "singed palisades / of the backwaters, where a

small stream / pierces the interior and the bones / of the bulrushes have set down their bells” (TTSW 16). Despite Morrissey’s speaker’s initial assertion, the low water level puts some of lake inhabitants at risk from humans (“tally their tiny catches”). It appears that the fish (too conspicuous in the shallow water) can only be secure from people in the approaching dark. The moon personified as the water creature’s saviour comes to rescue them (“drives them inside”). The female voice in “The Reversal” observes:

Paucity in the rainy season –  
children people the floating piers  
and tally their tiny catches

until a flush moon afloat out of nowhere  
drives them inside. . . .

(TTSW 16)

Subsequently, the persona in Morrissey’s poem once again composes a startling animal list: “They and the hornet moths / and the skinny Apache crows / and the after-supper men leaning over / on their porches by the furred lamps / smoking their cigarettes” (TTSW 16). The beings included in this register look unagitated by the lake’s disappearance, oblivious that its water will turn into ice. The alliterated “reversal’s return” might imply a phenomenon’s cyclic rhythm. The signifier “meniscus” refers not only to the lake’s upper layer but also to the sickle-shape moon (*CAE*). Putting people’s indifference alongside the animals’ unawareness appears to be ironically grim, as the humans’ carelessness will be inconsequential, whereas the unsuspecting lake inhabitants might suffocate as a result of the environmental changes. They

are unperturbed at the prospect  
of reversal’s return: that the lake  
will be breathed on, its meniscus frozen,

(TTSW 16)

What is more in “The Reversal,” the water turning solid constitutes a barrier for the lake’s natural expansion. This process in Morrissey’s poem is compared to the parting of the waters in Egypt, which testifies to the speaker’s perceiving of it as being of the national importance (see “rain and fire and the sea broke laws in Egypt”). In other words, “sympathy – the ability to share the feelings of others – is fundamental and runs through the web of life . . . . As surrelative or supremely related, Goddess / God is intimately and perfectly related to all individuals in the universe . . . rejoice in our joy and suffer with our suffering” (Christ, *She Who Changes* 86–87). Looking at the lake, Morrissey’s persona observes

. . . its whole top skimmed off  
and lifted high –  
the way a man might peer into a barrel

and glimpse in its icecap  
 a monocle; the way  
 rain and fire and the sea broke laws in Egypt.  
 (TTSW 16)

In the vein of sympathy, dedicated to *John McManus* "Monteverdi Vespers" constitutes an appeal to acknowledge the need for a life space for non-human beings and to respect the natural world's right to an uninterrupted existence. In claiming this, Morrissey's poem draws upon at least two meanings of "vespers," as a modifier of the evening star (also Venus) and the religious service taking place at that time (*CED*). As in "Love Song," the persona in "Monteverdi Vespers" meditates upon various auditory sensations that become noticeable especially at dusk when the light is subsiding, and the sense of sight is becoming less reliable than the sense of hearing. In the blurred late afternoon surroundings, things in Morrissey's text tend to lose their sharp edges against "a grey sky." In its location and a mournful tone, the poem "Monteverdi Vespers" seems to be reminiscent of Gray's "Elegy Written in a Country Church-Yard." Accordingly, the speaker in Morrissey's poem admits that "the voices sing me to a dark room, with a wall / three parts window and a grey sky," which constitutes an unusual grammatical construction. The voices might be coming not only from the inside but also, and mostly, from the natural world's surrounding ("gulls have stalled / on the eggbox chimney-pots. I hear them cry"). Thus, the gulls' cries seem to summon the persona to listen to them, and their tactics appears to be successful. The persona in "Monteverdi Vespers" admits:

The voices sing me to a dark room, with a wall  
 Three parts window and a grey sky. Outside  
 There's a terrace where gulls have stalled  
 On the eggbox chimney-pots. I hear them cry.  
 (TWFIV 57)

Consequently, the female speaker in "Monteverdi Vespers" appreciates the birds' adaptive propensity which enables them to live in the hostile human-transformed environment. Because the trees have been cut down, the gulls have to nestle in the industrial chimneys, feeding not in the forest but on the suburban lawns. Hence while expressing her admiration for the natural's world survival instinct, the persona in Morrissey's poem criticises the fact that animals are denied their natural territories and that they are cornered into constantly shrinking habitats ("fought **shell** to be here, **stern** / as the **shark** and its off-**shore** wreckage"). In Morrissey's poem, the final address to Jerusalem looks meaningful in its historical, cultural and religious connotations. Devastated in the past by numerous invaders, Jerusalem nowadays aspires to embody a symbol of harmonious coexistence. With regard to the natural world,

Process theology speak of God's power to affect the world as a power of persuasion, rather than coercion. In process theology's understanding, God is "in" every being in the world. As the ground of being and life, God attempts to

“persuade” or inspire all beings to respect being and life and to seek the greatest harmony of the whole. God as the ground of being is also “in” those who violate the web of life . . . this happens, God’s body is diminished. God suffers. (Christ, *Rebirth* 105)

In “Monteverdi Vespers,” the persona’s appeal (“The voices sing. City compacted in faith and damage, / The cry of gulls accompanies you with knowledge”) amounts to an evening hymn asking people to show consideration for animate beings and not to “violate the web of life.” As argued, the expansion of the human species cannot be realised at the expense of the defenceless non-human creatures. Carol P. Christ maintains that “the reason for hope is the creative process of life itself. If human beings have created many of the problems that limit and threaten the possibilities of life on this earth, then we have the capacity to solve them as well. The way human beings use our creative freedom may determine the fate of life on earth” (*She Who Changes* 178). The speaker in “Monteverdi Vespers” concludes:

I know the knacks of gulls: after rain how  
They stamp the lawns to fool the worms.  
I know they fly to chimneys to be warm, cower  
Nowhere, fought shell to be here, stern

As the shark and its off-shore wreckage,  
Where I’ve heard they hover. *Jerusalem*,  
The voices sing. City compacted in faith and damage,  
The cry of gulls accompanies you with knowledge  
(TWFIV 57)

The third part of the cycle “Mercury,” “Gull Song” allows an empowered speaking position for the birds to relate their own story. This time the perspective in Morrissey’s narrative is reversed: it is not the standpoint of people who observe and speak on the behalf of animals (as in “Monteverdi Vespers”) but animals who hover over the city and comment upon people. As a result, the speaking voice challenges the way in which humans usually perceive the non-human world i.e. the belief that it is hostile climactic conditions that contribute to the extinction of animal species. The speaker in “Gull Song” contradicts this erroneous view claiming that: “thunderstorms do nothing” and later “I have nothing to fear in weather or distance.” What really seems to trouble the winged persona is being separated from once abundant and spacious natural habitats, defined as “the open altars of the land,” contrasted with the human-made cultural constructs (see the “torn monastery”). In Morrissey’s “Gull Song,” the nature / culture dichotomy is rendered by the juxtaposition of the two modifiers: “open” and “torn.” Its spiritual dimension is communicated by the denominations belonging to the religious discourse: “altar” and “monastery.” The first one evokes associations with sacrifice, the latter with the clergy’s institutionalised power. The non-human voice confesses:

Thunderstorms do nothing I shelter  
 In my own wings fly over the torn monastery  
 And the open altars of the land and come clear.  
 I have nothing to fear in weather or distance –  
     It is my heart pumping out  
     Its own crumpled urges –  
     The music of my loneliness  
     That I cannot flee free from.

(TWFIV 35)

Furthermore, in “Gull Song” disconnecting animals from their own habitats results in human alienation and, in consequence, in the whole natural world’s uprootedness. On one hand, animals in Morrissey’s poem do their best to adapt to the human-made living conditions. On the other, cut off from their dwelling forestal areas, they suffer and decline. The poetic rendering of this solitary and estranging state is manifested by Morrissey’s persona in the concluding lines of “Gull Song.” As Carol P. Christ points out: “Our enjoyment of the world is expanded by having sympathy with others, while feeling sympathy with others makes us want to help them to enjoy life more. Relationship, enjoyment, sympathy and other values occur in bodies” (*She Who Changes* 180–181). The “Gull Song’s” closing lines relating the confession (“it is my heart pumping out / its own crumpled urges”) constitute the most moving and, at the same time, the most stylistically accomplished part of the poem. Captured in the phrase: “music of my loneliness / that I cannot **flee free from**,” the animals’ discursive confinement amounts to imprisonment in a cage from which the bird cannot get out, like the starling from Sterne’s *A Sentimental Journey through France and Italy*. Only this time the gull in Morrissey’s poem is not restricted by iron bars but by the equally limiting side-effects of the so called human technological progress. Gruen reminds rightly that

few people from the industrialized world have experienced the barrenness of a clear-cut forest and thus are not compelled to think about the vast destructives that accompanies the consumption of large quantities of paper, overpacked products, redwood decks, and the like. Direct experiences of the nonhuman world will create better knowledge and can only help us make more informed judgements about our relation to it. In addition, direct experiences of the nonhuman world can provide us with challenges that provide significant opportunities for the reconstruction of our selves. (“Revaluing Nature” 363)

As if oblivious to the above-quoted arguments, the character depicted in Morrissey’s poem “The Fort-Maker” appears to be determined to adjust the natural world to his own vision. The whole surrounding is viewed by him as in need of his transformation. In the alliterative phrase: “**he’d** set **his** hungry eye on the **hill**,” his eyes are described by the persona as “hungry.” The female voice defines the fort-maker’s obsessive urge to re-shape the environment ironically as “sheer love,” as if ignoring its military discourse (see the poem’s titular “fort,” “invasion” or an expression “War was”). She comments:



It was too late for invasion  
 By the time he'd set his hungry eye on the hill  
 Above the town, and thought of the view.  
 War was not the reason  
 For the three years' haulage –  
 It was sheer love.

(TWFIV 30)

In the light of the above, in “The Fort-Maker”

Nature is judged as lacking in relation to the human colonizer, as negativity, devalued as an absence of qualities appropriated for the human (‘rationality’). . . . The intricate order of nature is perceived as disorder, as unreason, to be replaced where possible by human order in development, an assimilating project of colonization. The preservation of the order of nature is not perceived as representing a limit, so once again nature is available for use without restriction. (Plumwood, “Androcetrism” 341)

In tune with this, Morrissey’s poem defines the disastrous aftermath of the constructor’s decision (“his need / Was a beginning and an end to all things”). It turns out that the fort-maker’s wish to alter the natural world around him means enclosure and, as a result, the rigid spatial limitation to all animate and inanimate beings. The fort he designs separates him from the sea, animals and the whole natural world, which, in consequence, leads to the man’s spiritual estrangement. “The Fort-Maker” concludes:

And because his need  
 Was a beginning and an end to all things,  
 His house became a circle of windows.  
 Catching ruins and birds  
 And the blank faces of the sea  
 In a stilled frame, everywhere he looked.

(TWFIV 30)

With regard to the consequences of the mechanical approach to the natural world, “A Device for Monitoring Brain Activity by Shining Light Into the Pupil,” after *Peter Borkovec*, probes the effects of an ocean liner’s visit near the Lough. In Morrissey’s poem, the designed-to-impress, human-made ship’s immaculate whiteness (“white as a tent in Plantagenet France”) does not seem to be appreciated by the non-human viewers. The natural environment appears to be doing well without the presence of the shining vessel. The poem’s opening renders the balance in nature that existed before the liner’s visit. Nature’s unifying harmony is expressed in the image of “the steep road to the shore, which tips / the earth into ocean, / levers ocean up to heaven,” which has been spoilt by the ship’s unexpected arrival (“as though broken in the middle by a hand”). The female voice in the analysed text relates:

A liner in the foreground of the Lough  
 –dead-centre but already passing on–

white as a tent in Plantagenet France. I walked  
 the steep road to the shore, which tips  
 the earth into ocean,  
 levers ocean up to heaven,  
 as though broken in the middle by a hand.  
 I watched for gulls where the Threemilewater  
 empties and spills. The liner shone.

(TTSW 11)

Betraying the limited interest in the vessel's glory, the speaker in "A Device for Monitoring Brain Activity by Shining Light Into the Pupil" focuses on how the ship's visit is going to affect the indigenous flora and fauna ("I watched for gulls where the Threemilewater / empties and spills"). Following this line of thinking, the female voice in Morrissey's poem observes that some of the sea residents perceive the liner as a huge marine animal and play around it ["Ducks were tugging each other out to sea. / They rode each wave the liner sent / percussively. They wobbled and re-gathered / in the succeeding calm" (TTSW 11)]. On the whole, absorbed in their own affairs, the natural world looks rather disinterested in the harbour's unusual occurrence. Nonetheless, the poem's defamiliarised idiom indicates the defiance of the linguistic routine in their uncommon grammatical functions or lexical meanings. Hence "snide" does not conventionally occur in a verbal form, and similarly "straggle" is not usually used in a noun role. Morrissey's speaker in "A Device for Monitoring Brain Activity by Shining Light Into the Pupil" continues:

–if only for a moment–hillsides  
 snided in gorse bushes crackled and sang.  
 A straggle of crows, back to the enemy,  
 were guarding the bars fencing the cenotaph  
 while cormorants out on the platform–

huddled and avuncular and jet-dark  
 as obsidian– were as standing stones

(TTSW 11)

To pay justice to the poem's innovative language, one ought to take into account the modifiers referring to the cormorants (see "huddled," "avuncular," "jet-dark," "obsidian"). The first qualifier renders a mass of birds, the latter signifies their congeniality with a startling hint of kindred qualities. What follows is an expression from a completely different discourse, unusually collocated as "jet-dark" and not "jet-black." Finally the phrase is completed with an adjective, relating both the volcanic rock tinge and the lustrous glitter that the cormorants' plumage emits. Additionally, the birds' ancient genealogy is compared to the prehistoric dolmens that preceded human civilisation. Furthermore, in Morrissey's poem, the sea's natural mobility of ebbs and flows is juxtaposed with the ship's mechanically induced waves, gradually dwindling and becoming less spectacular: "still repeated along the bulwark, decreasing / in intensity" (TTSW 11). Admitting the sea's openness towards its inhabitants, the

speaker in “A Device for Monitoring Brain Activity by Shining Light Into the Pupil” indicates the ecological consequences of this hospitality. The phrase: “a trolley / taking several hundred years to disappear” implies that the human-made waste will pollute its water for centuries to come. “The garbage . . . represents man’s refusal to own up to his own wastes, the disposal of which he has usually consigned to women. Organic wastes in particular remind man of his mortality, his connection to the Earth, and to women” (Zimmerman 145). As if spotting the environmental damage, the natural light seems to disregard the glimmering steel container, zooming in on the sunset. The watching eye records:

. . . the door to the sea floor stood open  
 in between: sand, weeds, a trolley  
 taking several hundred years to disappear.  
 Light fell unequally at the horizon’s vanishing-  
 point as though the edge of the world glared upwards.  
 (TTSW 11)

Thus in “A Device for Monitoring Brain Activity by Shining Light Into the Pupil,” the light’s natural source comes from “the water glistening.” In Morrissey’s poem, even the crushed sea shells seem to radiate from the inside, asserting their right to be where they belong. Being the home for the sea creatures, the nature’s glowing aura in which the harbour is wrapped is not denied entirely to the liner. The sentence: “The liner shone all the while” indicates that the majestic liner does not emit the natural light itself, and it reflects the sun’s illumination: “absorbing the sunlight, throwing it out again.” The ironic commentary, “that shimmering, regal tent, I thought, / is almost like a ship” challenges the glory of the huge commercial vessel. To assert its authority in the harbour, the liner dazzles with the deck’s electric light luminosity. The sudden blinding blaze in “A Device for Monitoring Brain Activity by Shining Light Into the Pupil” alters the harbour creatures’ day rhythm, as implied in the alliterated “**b**rightness **bl**urred the skin of everything.” The sadly ironic seagulls’ reaction to the unexpected flash (see “answer **black**” as a sarcastic pun on “answer back”) reminds one that animals cannot verbally protest against the human-made destruction of the natural environment. Morrissey’s poem ends with the bleak commentary:

The liner shone all the while.  
 Absorbing the sunlight, throwing it out again.  
 That shimmering, regal tent, I thought,  
 is almost like a ship: complete with passengers  
 and a captain’s banquet. It could be that.  
 Brightness blurred the skin of everything.  
 I watched the gulls flare white  
 above the river mouth and saw, in hours,  
 how their wings, to a still-blue sky, would answer black.  
 (TTSW 12)

Following this line of thinking, the poem "Cycling at Sea Level" relates an experience of looking at the natural world from a mobile, cyclist's perspective. In "Beyond Belfast," Johnston argues that:

. . . Morrissey is, on one level, a poet of Belfast and its environs and these stark landscapes are rendered in crisp, unsettling detail as if never before seen, as for instance in the Elizabeth-Bishop toned 'Cycling at Sea Level' where the area around Belfast Lough becomes representative of an endlessly-deceptive, fluctuating world . . . . Morrissey in transit opts for the safer mode of bicycle transportation and so avoids putting her foot to the floor, preferring a more protracted pace. (107)

In "Cycling at Sea Level," the fast-changing images of the environmental destruction are registered with the speaker's "flickering telegraph." On her way back home, Morrissey's persona passes the marine rubbish floating into the lake, recording other post-industrial images: "The Gasworks. The Chinese Bridge. Our Squares of Hope." The female cyclist relates:

Because weather's variation plays differently each day  
(forgetfulness being a condition of peace)  
I'm cycling home along the Lagan as it empties into the Lough

with only the wind to slow my flickering telegraph.  
My wheels make a noise like ticker tape.  
The Gasworks. The Chinese Bridge. Our Squares of Hope. The Fish-

to Duncrue Industrial Estate whose meat-  
plant and meal-factory have threaded the air with dust-  
to Belfast Dump's Shore Park: pure scooped brown earth and salt,  
(TTSW 22)

During her journey, the speaker in "Cycling at Sea Level" comments on the reality she sees, providing a contextual framework to the places she is passing. For instance, she puts the dash after the collective noun "the fish" to emphasise them being depicted merely as human nourishment and the material for the nearby factory ("The Fish - / to Duncrue Industrial Estate whose meat- / plant and meal-factory"). The meat factory is the major pollutant of the local community, which the speaker aptly renders as "treading the air with dust." In Morrissey's poem, the apocalyptic images of the environmental destruction are complemented with a grim vision of Belfast Dump's Shore Park: desolate, barren and lifeless waste land ("pure scooped brown earth and salt . . . as though some meteor hit and killed off half the planet"). In other words,

the town's economic base is founded on destroying the very place where you live, destroying the place you have come to love, the place you call home . . . . Pretending the forest and the lake aren't connected, your town cuts the forest to build the houses and roads, to build docks for motorboats and jet skis, and then drinks from the lake. Pretending the town and the land are separate, your residents excavate coal mines beneath entire neighbourhoods, extracting the

dark minerals and taking away the concrete and wooden supports when the mines are exhausted, leaving only air to fill the darkness, only water. (Gaard 135–136)

In “Cycling at Sea Level,” it is only the sunshine whose light allows *post-mortem* dignity into the dreary but illuminated landscape. The sun’s merciful luminescence adds glamour to the meandering river. The speaker remarks:

looking for all the world  
as though some meteor hit and killed off half the planet . . .  
The sun’s an unimpeded circuitry that lights such trees along the  
cycle path

they shine like saints, like knives,  
where the river opens, one artery to another, to multiplying water.  
How many possibilities in a deck of cards?

(TTSW 22)

In Morrissey’s poem, the textual evocation of glittering, open knives sounds sinister in the context of the dwindling vegetation. So does the rhetorical question with a gambling reference. The following passage resumes the theme of the natural world’s potential variables: “The same, but changed . . . arranged themselves this afternoon.” Furthermore, the speaker in “Cycling at Sea Level” looks impressed with a number of potentialities in the sensory colours’ design (see the alliterated “**changed, the corrugated colours**”), depending upon the time of day, season, and year:

The same, but changed, the corrugated colours of the mudflats  
have so arranged themselves this afternoon  
I forgot every previous journey home and reconfigure

history: a white yacht leans on the breeze;  
a solitary bait-digger, booted to the thigh, is casting a shadow  
(TTSW 22)

In other words, Morrissey’s persona attempts to “reconfigure / history” in her cycling diaries. Her records of the changing reality seem to be motivated by the need to impose a pattern upon the momentary experience. In “Cycling at Sea Level,” the minute details that she remembers and the specialised marine idiom make the female voice’s account appear mathematically exact. For instance, the fisherman who is elevated and tackled by his own stretched shadow (“a solitary bait-digger, booted to the thigh”) is textually rendered with an expressive verbal dynamic. The related description widens from the circumstantial zooming-in-on to a nearly cosmic perspective: “Something is unravelling from the bolted-down telescopes / that line the Whitehouse wall, that offer a view of the moon / or a stranded whale” (TTSW 22). Such as, political references, optical instruments, the lunar landscape and the huge mammal brought ashore are all inserted and condensed in one sentence to create an indiscriminate effect, as shown below:



applies both to cutting down plants and shaving the fleece of sheep. In the passage cited below, the possessive case of Frost's capitalised denomination seems to make a pun on the poet's surname. Nonetheless in the quoted fragment, it is the word's atmospheric designation that is foregrounded. Morrissey's "Ice" evokes the natural world's fracture (alliterated "a **shattering** / in the sunlight"), the sensation of being pierced ("the million crystal **filaments** / that **fell & hung** / on everything"), the psychological block ("as though absence of / breath has caused / the general lock-in"), the impression of the time being stopped ("simple breath / was all we ever / needed to un-sleeve the present"), and the sense of things happening as if in a dream ("make it real again"). The speaker in Morrissey's poem explains that:

... Sometimes Frost's broken  
                   dome of heaven  
 is how storms end, just that, a shattering  
                   in the sunlight  
 of the million crystal filaments  
                   that fell & hung  
 on everything, as though absence of  
                   breath had caused  
 the general lock-in & simple breath  
                   was all we ever  
 needed to un-sleeve the present  
                   & make it real again.

(TTSW 24)

The second part of "Ice" begins with an exact temporal location preceding the daily journal's record. As argued earlier, the depicted in Morrissey's poem landscape appears to be affected by the post-traumatic stress disorder. It is permeated with the visions of chilliness ["a **bluish light**" (TTSW 25)]. Similarly, the poet plays with the echoed sounds in "the **window, a wiped**" and with frostiness inside the home ["The house / is cold" (TTSW 25)]. The surrounding auditory sensations are much less pleasing: the radio din, "racket of gunshot," the crackle of the shattered trees whose voices resemble the rattle snake ["First the crack / at the branches rattle" (TTSW 25)]. The ice-covered trees are not rescued by people but only, additionally, bombarded with gunshot to break down the icecap. The firearm flares constitute the replacement of "the cacophony of the week-long storm." In other words, the loud explosions do not allow one to forget about the tempest which has just ended [see "When the whole / tree hits, a volley of shots goes up / & its burden of glass / explodes. This ten, twenty, fifty times / until we lose each crash / to the cacophony of the week-long storm" (TTSW 25)]. The middle part of cycle "Ice" is devoted to the impact that the ice-storm has had on animals. It opens with a direct statement: "The sheep were dead" (TTSW 26). What follows is the "The summary / execution / of **every** maple within earshot" (TTSW 26): instant killing of everything around, as if people wanted to take revenge on the surviving parts of the natural world for the hardships during the natural disaster. Morrissey's speaker's partner is concerned

about the sheep, although he is perfectly aware that they stood no chance of survival during the lasting ice-storm. His insistence upon verifying his fatal predictions indicates the man's concern about the farm animals. In "Ice," as if in post-combat silence, the overwhelming stillness contributes to the overall mourning tone. When the persona in "Ice" finds the dead sheep, they look like frozen statues. The expression "petrified sheep" renders both their ice-frozen immobility and their fear before their death. "Kneeling" seems close to "keening," signifying a lament for the dead. Moreover the elegiac mood in the analysed text is conveyed in the abundant alliterative devices ("the **silence** . . . as star-silence. / So . . . **as I slipped & slithered**"). The speaker in "Ice" recollects the event:

The silence  
was ubiquitous & pure as star-silence.  
So all I had  
to offer as I slipped & slithered home-  
wards was an out-  
building of kneeling, petrified sheep,  
locked to their  
spots like pieces in a Snow Queen's  
games of chess.

(TTSW 26)

The cycle's final part commences with the alliterative repetition: "**frost flowers**," and "**some sudden**," then "**ballooning out / of the brushwood**." The conclusive passage of "Ice" presents life attempting to revive itself after the natural catastrophe: "Frost flowers. Bearded tress. Ghosts / of some sudden / deleterious fungus **ballooning out / of the brushwood / one spectacular rose-bowl morning / the previous / fall**" (TTSW 27). Nonetheless with the poisonous mushroom coming out in-between the shrubs, the atmosphere of menace in Morrissey's poem persists. Notwithstanding this, the renewed vital energy is coming gradually to the text's surface in a "spectacular rose-bowl morning." The female voice in "Ice" meditates on: "The lavish, sexual freeze / of the long-stemmed / plants whose ensuing ersatz petals / splinter when / touched" (TTSW 27). Morrissey's series' concluding part begins with a diary entry: "Midnight, January 9th: / the jettisoned / excess / of the Mississippi Delta / had punished / us enough. **Rain reverted to gas**" (TTSW 27). The persona in "Ice" argues: "**Before / the burials, before / the muddy thaw, before the gathering / mass of melted ice / flooded the south, before the army / & the extraction / of what was felled from what was / left**" (TTSW 27). With its lofty tone, the similarity to Biblical prophecy and with its repeated line beginnings, the cited passage of "Ice" restores the natural world's spiritual dimension. In doing so, the female voice creates her own spiritual discourse in which both the narrative of the ice-storm survivors and the Genesis story of Adam and Eve acquire a similar



symbolic meaning.<sup>119</sup> Morrissey's poem's ending abandons the exalted idiom, replacing it with realistic and concrete language, not without a healthy dose of ironic understatement (e.g. the tender love scene is bathed in the romantic fragrance of antiseptic). The final phrase refers to the end of the frost and snow era, whether physical or emotional, concluding that the ice broke "everything between us / flew apart." The plural "we" completes the vision:

. . . we stood  
at our living-room window & watched  
a tiny moon  
& a tatter of stars high up in the  
atmosphere  
& kissed as two will kiss through sheets  
dipped in dis-  
infectant, & everything between us  
flew apart.

(TTSW 27)

Commenting upon "Ice," Johnston praises the poem's textual virtuosity and its accurate idiom:

Inhabiting the view from Frost's 'Birches', the visual immediacy of this poem is stunning, as when the 'petrified sheep' are captured in their deathly pose; 'locked to their / spots like pieces in Snow Queen's / games of chess.' Moreover, the precarious patterning of the lines augments the sensation of slippery indeterminacy as a transfigured world is meticulously etched in one of Morrissey's most successful pieces. ("Beyond Belfast"108)

Dedicated to Kerry Hardie, "Found Architecture" seeks the reiterated patterns in the human-made and the natural world spiritual correspondences. Morrissey's poem undermines the human race's alleged superiority over other non-human animate and non-animate beings. It happens because one "can learn from plants and animals, sea and stones, not only by observation, but also through sensing our connection to them . . . Human intelligence and our capacity to love do not separate us from nature. Instead, everything we are arises from the nature of being, from our grounding in the earth" (Christ, *Rebirth* 118,123). In "Found Architecture," the wildlife and the natural environment are compared to "an Italian kaleidoscope," the civilizational cradle of classical architectural art, with its insistence on harmony, perfection, symmetry and balance. In her activities, the persona in Morrissey's poem is looking for connecting and overlapping accents: "symmetrical splicing / of everything" (TTSW 18). However the light, referred to by the speaker ironically as "instantly mystical," spoils the designed perfection, constituting "a crack in the pattern's / typography." Its fading

---

<sup>119</sup> What is more, "the residue of apparently female qualities in the figure of Jesus (the 'androgynous' product of the pseudo-parthenogenesis) plays /preys upon subliminal perception of the desires for female images of divinity" (Daly, *Pure Lust* 76).

brightness is perceived by the woman as “shedding radiance.” The female voice in “Found Architecture” explains that

. . . Any light that there was  
was instantly mystical—a crack in the pattern’s  
typography, like the door at the end of the corridor

shedding radiance. Yesterday evening, by the sea,  
a strangled sealed-off swamp by a walkway  
(TTSW 18)

Moreover in “Found Architecture,” the text transforms the natural world’s narrative into the cultural artefacts of the domesticated discourse. For instance, the disquieting image of “a **strangled sealed-off swamp**” is changed into a perfectly civilised “walkway.” On the whole, Morrissey’s speaker perceives the human-altered environment as crippled and deformed. In her eyes, the transformed natural world putrefies (“rotted glands of a pond”) and the trees shed their foliage into the contaminated water (“and a white tree undoing itself”). In “Found Architecture,” nature seems to be overpowered (“The tree looked like a crocodile’s ribcage”) and dying (“the wide-propped / jawbone of a whale”). The imagery of the natural world’s enslavement is completed with an immobilised canoe “fettered / with algae.” In other words, “one of the major consequences of our understanding of the effects of human agency on the non-human world is the death of this belief in wild, independent nature. Because we now know that we are changing the Earth’s climate through our actions, we can no longer believe there is anywhere on the planet that is beyond human influence” (Milton 97). Drawing upon McKibben, it can be argued that “this as a change, [is] not in nature itself, but in what nature and natural things mean to us” (Milton 97). That is why the speaker in “Found Architecture” does not wish to turn away her eyes from

rotted glands of a pond between knee-high grasses  
and a white tree undoing itself in its ink-stained  
surfaces. The tree looked like a crocodile’s ribcage

as I passed along the perimeter, or the wide-propped  
jawbone of a whale. Until it became, the further  
I walked, a canoe, asleep on the water and fettered

with algae . . .

(TTSW 18–19)

The subsequent fragment of “Found Architecture” abounds with the visions of the natural world’s annihilation. In Morrissey’s poem, the fallen branch is referred to as “another dead” and compared to a severed fish head. To compensate for life’s interrupted existence, the speaker empowers it with speech and comments upon her discoveries: “this, too, was found architecture.” What is more, she embraces other lifeless representatives of the natural world into her

extended catalogue. The items belong though to dissimilar categories: the domestic interior group (“skeletons of geranium leaves on windowsills / long afterwards”), the wildlife traces (“snakeskins”) and the atmospheric conditions (“clouds”). This is how Morrissey’s persona explains the poem’s titular concept:

. . . Another dead branch sat up  
in the grass like the head of an otter and talked.  
This, too, was found architecture. And all the usual,

of course: skeletons of geranium leaves on windowsills  
long afterwards; snakeskins, clouds.  
Beaches are full of it: found architecture being  
the very business of beaches. . . .

(TTSW 19)

To illustrate her point, the female voice in “Found Architecture” recalls a macabre gift that she has received from somebody who was oblivious to the fact that they had presented her with the carcass of a dead animal and not a human-produced object: “most recently / (and most disarmingly) this: handed to me in roll / of four like mug-shot photographs from a machine” (TTSW 19). Morrissey’s speaker evokes the details of her uncanny present as follows: “his geahorse spine, his open-shut anemone / of a heart, and the row of unbelievable teeth / shining high in the crook of his skull as though backstitched / into place” (TTSW 19). The persona’s contemplation of the dried animal body is not free of a sullen fascination with the particulars of the seahorse’s anatomy or rather its “found architecture.” In the poem’s concluding fragment, the female voice openly declares her reasons for the research into the “found architecture” [“From blood and the body’s / inconsolable hunger” (TTSW 19)]. In Morrissey’s poem, one might add solitariness to that list, especially in the context of the speaker being her own point of reference, magnifying and splitting the experiential reality into movable images [“I have been my own kaleidoscope – / five winter-bleached girls on a diving board, ready to jump” (TTSW 19)]. As Milton declares, “Like the sight of a beautiful landscape, or a child or animal in distress, they motivate by inducing emotions which generate feelings” (100). In conclusion, as argued in this chapter, the natural world’s spiritual dimension is more than

simply to say that the divine is nature because concepts of nature have already been defined as excluding teleology and the kind of power commonly associated with divinity. Nor, on the other hand, will it do simply to say that nature is teleological since teleology has been defined as residing in the divine and human moral will that stand over and against nature. Similarly, it cannot be asserted that humanity is nature since to most people that would imply that humans are irrational, immoral, and inarticulate. (Christ, “Rethinking Theology” 61–62)

The natural world’s spiritual feature means being able to “love and understand, to live for a time, to contribute as much as we can to the

---

continuation of life, to the enhancement of beauty, joy, and diversity, while recognizing inevitable death, loss, and suffering. To understand and value the lives of all other beings, human and nonhuman. And to understand that we are limited by the values inherent in other beings" (Christ, "Rethinking Theology" 66). However in the light of the poems analysed here, one needs to repeat the bitter question articulated by Leopold

Yes, but just what and whom we love? Certainly not the soil, which we are sending helter-skelter downriver. Certainly not the waters, which we assume have no function except to turn turbines, float barges, and carry off sewage. Certainly not the plants, of which we exterminate whole communities without batting an eye. Certainly not the animals, of which we extirpated many of the largest and the most beautiful species. ("The Conservation Ethic" 204)



## CHAPTER THREE

### AGAINST POWER-OVER: IRISH WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT THROUGH RESISTANCE

#### 3.1. Resisting the Confinement of *Other People's Houses*: Female Empowerment and Political Emancipation in the Poetry of Vona Groarke

*Freedom, according to ancient philosophy, was altogether bound with the I-can; "free" meant being capable of going what one wanted to do.*  
(Arendt, *Responsibility*)

While examining the relational aspect of Groarke's poetry in the first chapter, one could not fail to notice that for the female speaker, home / the house is viewed as a much glorified place. Being a location that is out of harm's way "where darkness could not reach" (FAOP 27), "Home" protects the family from the evils of the outside world. This happens because "[f]amilies are founded as shelters and mighty fortresses in an inhospitable, alien world, into which we want to introduce kinship" (Arendt, *The Promise* 94). Consequently, remaining to a large extent the voice of the author, the persona in "Home" articulates her inflated hopes that "this house would hold us; / what we left would stay here, undisturbed" (FAOP 27) and "this house could keep us safe" (FAOP 27). However such expectancy constitutes only one dimension of the possible connotations of "home." It can probably be argued that in Groarke's personal

narratives, the poet / speaker comes dangerously close to Plant's definition of "idealising home."

As women, of course, we must be very careful with a movement that idealizes home. For home has been anything but a place of liberation for us. To be different, home needs to be newly understood, revalued, and redefined. We have to put our own house in order. Without healthy relations with each other, we will not have the understanding or capability to have healthy relations with the natural world. ("Learning" 132–133)

Regardless of the objections cited above, the link between female empowerment and a woman's sense of her own territory cannot be overlooked because "[a]n individual's ability to press or to waive territorial claims . . . is deeply empowering" (Post qtd. in Boling 29). In tune with this, while employing the term "territories of the self" (27), Boling draws attention to "the spatial sense of private places" (27). Female territorial empowerment, though, cannot be realised without impediments. In the discourse of space and power, women tend to occupy an inferior position, which is best captured in the notion of female "space invaders" (Scott 41). It is derived from the fact that

. . . the subordinate emotional labour (Hochschild 1983) of women in intermediate and less salient positions becomes an important support for male power in those areas, while the top positions themselves are organised around strongly masculine norms of sociability . . . Women are regarded by the men – and many women take this same view of themselves – as 'space invaders'. They are, literally, out of place in the elite social space that is run by and for men. (Scott 41)

Hence what might be insightful with regard to the discourse of home is seeing it not only as the location of a woman's personal and familial subjectivity but also as her social and political space. Accordingly, "we see that the closer we get to where we live . . . the more real power women . . . have . . . at home people really have a measure of control over the creation of new values and the consequences of political decisions are actually felt, our homes, in this broader sense, have the potential to be the centres of real change" (Plant, "Learning" 133). As with Boling and Plant's appeals for women's political emancipation, Surrey asserts that female "empowerment occurs through the creation of multiple and varied, although often overlapping, relational structures for personal, educational, work, social, and political development" ("Relationship and Empowerment" 175). In this vein, Miller elucidates her understanding of female empowerment, reiterating the key concept outlined by Plant, namely that of "change:"

My own working definition of power is *the capacity to produce a change* – that is, to move anything from point A or state A to point B or state B. This can even include moving one's own thoughts or emotions, sometimes a very powerful act. It can include acting to create movement in an interpersonal field,

as well as acting in larger realms such as economic, social, or political arenas. ("Women and Power" 198), emphasis original

Considering that the desirable social, political and cultural changes take place not in a vacuum but also in the altering discourse of space and power, Hook tells us that:

The notion that space plays a vital role in informing practices of subjectivity and power has received much theoretical substantiation of late. Soja's (1989, 1996) notion of 'spatiality' is perhaps the foremost example here, although, in differing ways, Bourdieu's (1988) notion of the habitus, Fanon's (1986) 'Manichean divisions of colonial space' and Foucault's (1997) conceptualization of heterotopia all interestingly lend themselves to further explorations of the intersections between space, power and discourse. (178)

In line with the above, Arendt explains how political space is, at the same time, the space of freedom. Bearing this in mind, women cannot achieve empowerment outside the political realm and cannot realise their freedom without it. This happens because "[p]olitical space as such realizes and guarantees both the freedom of all citizens and the reality discussed and attested to by the many" (Arendt, *The Promise* 130). What is more, "'politics,' in the Greek sense of the word, is therefore centred around freedom, whereby freedom is understood negatively as not being ruled or ruling, and positively as a space which can be created" (Arendt, *The Promise* 117) by one's "equals," as she defines them. Arendt adds that "If we equate these spaces of freedom . . . with the political realm itself, we shall be inclined to think of them as islands in a sea or as oases in a desert" (*On Revolution* 267).<sup>120</sup> In view of that, she elaborates how freedom is intertwined with the discourse of politics: "The *raison d'être* of politics is freedom, and its field of experience is action" (Arendt, *Between Past* 144–145), emphasis original.<sup>121</sup> In feminist discourse, freedom of thought, expression and movement [compare "Freedom, wherever it existed as a tangible reality, has always been spatially limited" (Arendt, *On Revolution* 267)] remains quintessential. Female empowerment has been denied to women for too long and their freedom so restricted that women simply cannot afford to ignore the only area that guarantees them and protects their undeniable rights, namely, the realm of politics.

Strictly speaking, politics is not so much about human beings as it about the world that comes into being between them and endures beyond them . . . . To put it another way, the more peoples there are in the world who stand in some

<sup>120</sup> Arendt claims that "equality itself is applicable by no means a universally valid principle but, again, applicable only with limitations and even within spatial limits. If we equate these spaces of freedom . . . with the political realm itself, we shall be inclined to think of them as islands in a sea or as oases in a desert" (*On Revolution* 267).

<sup>121</sup> Consequently, Arendt argues that "The field where freedom has always been known . . . is the political realm . . . Freedom . . . – becomes the direct aim of the political action . . . . The *raison d'être* of politics is freedom, and its field of experience is action" (*Between Past* 144–145), emphasis original.



particular relationship with one another, the more world there is to form between them, and the larger and richer that world will be. The more standpoints there are within any given nation from which to view the same world that shelters and presents itself equally to all, the more significant and open to the world that nation will be. (*The Promise* 176)

That is why drawing upon Benhabib's commentary on Arendt's work, Boiling emphasises the importance of the political dimension of women's empowering territorial space. Hence as demonstrated, female empowerment can be derived from the ability of women to "translate the perspective of private sufferers into that of citizens, and transform personal griefs or problems into politically negotiable claims" (Boiling 77–78). Consequently, Boiling suggests a synthesising approach that fuses the belief, previously expressed by Groarke in "a space where the relationships based on intimacy and trust might develop" (78) and the need for women's public and the political space. In other words,

. . . Arendt's notion of home, the four walls of one's private property, provides a crucial shelter in which to unfold capacities, dreams, and memories, to nurse the wounds of the ego, and to lend depth of feeling, something like Virginia Woolf's "room of one's own." . . . the privateness of the "home," conceived of a space where relationships based on intimacy and trust might develop . . . should not be an impermeable shield: . . . we have to find ways to talk about them politically. (Boiling 77–78)

Likewise, Daly subscribes to the view that in the case of women the "[d]enial of physical space is accompanied by overt and subtle levels of denial of mental and emotional space . . . women struggling under such conditions often feel 'spacy,' or dis-oriented. This effect is increased by the fact that women are spatially separated from each other on many levels – forced into conditions of isolation and alienation . . . Women desperately *need* our own space / medium for Self-centering movement and emergence of life processes" (*Pure Lust* 18), emphasis original. Hence meditating on the relation between the private and the public sphere, women "interact as citizens, remaining content in our roles as intimates, consumers and producers . . . transform[s]ing private issues into political ones, thus engaging us in debates and drawing us into deciding as citizens" (Boiling 79–80). In other words,

There is no longer any question about whether private-life issues should enter our public life; they have done and will continue to do so wholesale. The problem is not how to wall off the concerns and preoccupations of private life from politics but, as Hanna Pitkin has argued, how to *connect* them. We need to get the connection right between private and public life because our many commitments and activities, frustrations and sufferings, insights and injustices, can provide an impetus for involvement in democratic politics. (Boiling 80), emphasis original

As shown earlier, "redefining . . . this idea of 'home'" activates the "real power women . . . have on a day-to-day basis" (Plant, "Learning" 133). In other

words, female empowerment can be realised only within women's own politically and socially created space. Considering the above, this chapter focuses on Groarke's poems analysing the discourse of "home / house" from a wider perspective, entailing the body politic and her works on spatial discourse where "our homes, in this broader sense, have the potential to be the centres of real change" (Plant, "Learning" 133). In line with that, writing about Groarke's second collection *Other People's Houses*, Kelly remarks that "there is a sense too that our house belongs to other people" ("The Sinew of Memory" 64). Similarly, Young rightly reminds us "that *home* can have political meaning as a site of dignity and resistance" ("House and Home" 68), emphasis original. Following this vein, in her article "Architectural Metaphors: Representations of the House in the Poetry of Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin and Vona Groarke," Lucy Collins argues that

Feminist criticism frequently employs metaphors of space to interrogate the position of women within society and their ability to articulate that position to a wider world . . . . Space, both public and private, is closely related to the construction of identity . . . [and] any consideration of the dynamic between individual and national identity, both culturally and politically. (142)

In her above-cited review "The Sinew of Memory," Kelly rightly observes that "Groarke deals with the reality of modern, quasi-urban living as we replicate ourselves in the façades of our neighbours" (64). In the "Open House," Groarke's speaker's desire for an abode tailored to her own specific demands is juxtaposed with the mass-manufactured infrastructure. The almost indistinguishable buildings ("at first glance every house looks much the same") shatter immediately the persona's naïve illusion of the location's unique distinctness. The pretentious name of the residential area (Sycamore Court) appeals to the English political re-sentiments that are connoted with imperial power (despite the speaker's ironic remark that "there's certainly no royalty" there). What is more, the suburban and residential gated areas with the "upper-income divisions . . . serve the objectives of exclusivity" (Hook 190). Kelly sums up ironically: "'Open House' indeed. Much tongue in cheek. The send up of all that is sacred in the way we choose to live with and jibe at each other on and off the brochure" (64). Hook refers to the estates such as Groarke's Sycamore Court as "a zone of spatiality, a place where intensive regulations of space and parallel productions of discourse intersect in forceful ways, combining to create warrants of exclusion and privilege" (190). The speaker in "Open House" describes:

At first glance every house looks much the same  
as the others adjoining and sharing the name  
of Sycamore Court (though there's barely a tree  
to be seen and there's certainly no royalty).  
Instead we have seventy-six ideal homes  
laid out with the stature of so many tombs  
in seven straight lines that all run parallel

concluding in debris that doesn't bode well  
for the 'intimate setting' or 'rural surrounds'  
suggestive to buyers of huge estate grounds.

(OPH 16)

Reviewing Groarke's *Other People's Houses* Denman adds that her "poems interrogate contemporary Ireland through the new housing estates spawned by the building boom" (383). This statement well might be applied to "Open House." Arranged with a mathematical regularity and designed to impress with its overwhelming uniformity, the symmetrical line-up of the "seventy-six ideal homes" rules out any possibility of a personalised dwelling. The duplicate, dehumanised constructions "laid out with the stature of so many tombs / in seven straight lines that all run parallel" evoke in Groarke's speaker morbid associations of homogeneous cemetery burial chambers, intended to economise on the costs of the land and design. Instead of the advertised vegetation or greenery ("for the 'intimate setting' or 'rural surrounds'"), the viewed location is surrounded with rubble and postproduction waste ("there's barely a tree / to be seen"). Nonetheless it is the initially unappealing scenery that the persona in "Open House" suddenly cognises as "something more than just mortar and bricks." Following this line of thinking, she envisages herself "permanent, rooted at last." Described as "prestige and security zones" (Hook 191), estates like this are all "about creating class distinctions, about exuding signs of exclusivity . . . their object is to secure for residents a secure place on the higher rungs of the social ladder. The motivation . . . is predominantly the fear of crime and outsiders" (Hook 191). The speaker in "Open House" admits:

At least when I viewed the plans for Number 6  
I saw something more than just mortar and bricks:  
I saw myself, permanent, rooted at last,  
with all the aplomb of the propertied class;  
I saw myself sacrosanct, safe and secure  
inside the enclosure of my own front door,

(OPH 16)

To her own surprise, Groarke's persona acknowledges in herself a hint of the middle-class yearning for stability and steadfastness. She admits: "I saw myself **sacrosanct, safe and secure.**" The alliterated line is a prophetic expression of her neophyte faith in the emotional and financial benefits that the property ownership status can (and cannot) buy. Nonetheless as argued earlier, the need for security ("the **aplomb of the propertied class**") leads directly to "segregation, distance and separation between classes" (Hook 191). In addition, the word: "sacrosanct" seems to be dangerously close to "sepulchre" or "mausoleum." In "Open House," the enshrined Number 6 appears to lure Groarke's speaker with the promise of eternal rest from earthly worries and worldly disturbances. However only dead people and the rightful owners of the property seem to be able to get access to that sort of enraptured residential serenity. In other words, such estates "promote themselves as the closest

possible realization of certain social, political and moral ideals. This is not only the case in terms of how they promise an orderly and serene inner space” but “also ensuring ‘the good life’ and providing a special ‘like-mindedness’, that is, the opportunity of membership in an exclusive status” (Hook 199, 193). What is more,

There the boundary between town and country is blurred by building beyond the defining boundaries between urban and rural. This ‘altered edge’ is represented by estates of suburban type housing, defined by roads, set backs and driveways where much of the natural topography has been removed and the connection to, and resonance of, the original town is even more difficult to find . . . . During the years of Ireland’s huge economic boom the towns particularly within commuting distance of the capital were most affected; towns such as Cavan (100km north of Dublin) which like Kenmare, has a planned and recognizable pattern but which has experienced the construction of large suburban housing estates on its outskirts. (Cahill 185)

Nonetheless in “Open House” the shared space does not mean that the residents feel closer to each other. On the contrary, they remain detached from other neighbours even more than in outer localities: in a broader sense, they experience “secession from the public realm” (Hook 200). As a result, “we see a withering of mutual social responsibility” (Hook 192). Imagining herself to be locked “inside the enclosure of my own front door,” Groarke’s speaker continues her suppositious journey into suburban reality which is not-so-perfect any more. In the analysed poem, the suburban estates “function to reproduce an established order . . . . Many maintain their own internal bylaws . . . similar to those of local governments” (Hook 191). They can be referred to, after Lagerfeld, as “privatized governance” (Hook 192), being their own “micro ‘government’ of space” (Hook 201). The female voice in “Open House” articulates her fears:

. . . cars in your drive and complaints about noise,  
to cameras and telescopes trained on your house,  
to asides about guests who have clearly slept over,  
suggestions about how to deal with your lover,  
and comments about how your clothes really sit  
so neatly now that you’ve been getting fit.

(OPH 16)

Minute by minute, Groarke’s persona’s previously tranquil dream vision is interrupted with the increasingly sinister (at parts nearly paranoid) projections of the potential misfortunes that might await her on purchasing the house and moving to settle there. Among the most disquieting, the female voice lists the agitating lack of privacy amounting to the institutionalised surveillance (“cameras and telescopes trained on your house”) and the next door’s neighbours’ intrusions into her life. As the poem proceeds, the speaker’s calamitous predictions are becoming more and more frenzied [“Moreover, I’d swear that I’ve recently seen my neighbour from two at my Wheelie Bin” (OPH

16)]. For that reason, she seems to be having menacing premonitions about invasive people meddling in her garbage bins “**looking** like somebody **looking** for clues / to my personal hygiene or liking for booze” (OPH 16). The bolted repeated verb might suggest the compulsive obsessive fixation that the speaker in “Open House” begins to exhibit. She cannot stop thinking about how her neighbours may pry in her social life and:

jot down all the numbers of visiting cars  
and bring the lists weekly on up to the guards  
to ascertain if that jeep parked at my fence  
might harbour a convict of evil intent.  
Or my new boyfriend whom he called a *pup*  
(OPH 17)

In the persona’s imagination, the suburbia turns into a perilous spatial gathering whose inhabitants have nothing else to do but poke their noses into other people’s affairs. As in the Foucauldian Panopticon, the residents in the created by Groarke estate tend to spy on one another and conduct their own self-scrutinising practices. In the examined text, the members of the locality, who are construed by the female voice as living the lives of others, keep records of their neighbours’ business (“an onerous duty / that needs dedication”). In “Open House,” the suburban residents seem to have no interests or activities of their own, at least not ones that occupy their time or energy as much as spying on others. Hence their effort is invested into futile and repetitive proceedings that fill up their daily schedule, such as the constant improvement of the landscape architecture (see “the woman who’s out / adjusting her garden from morning to night”). In her phantasmal visions, Groarke’s speaker wants to remain at a distance within the “four straight walls / that keeps me safely in and them safely out.” She admits:

This neighbourly interface is all forestalled  
by the containing gesture of four straight walls  
that keeps me safely in and them safely out  
save for a rousing, occasional shout  
that I won’t really mind if it won’t really last,  
that I’ll probably eavesdrop with my drinking glass  
pressed up to the wall and my casual ear,  
only listening to what they don’t mind if I hear.  
(OPH 17)

In “Open House” what saves her line of reasoning from too much pathos and hypocrisy is Groarke’s persona’s derisive self-criticism. The witty self-mocking phrases (such as “my casual ear,” or “I’ll probably eavesdrop with my drinking glass”) and playfully defensive assertions (“only listening to what they don’t mind if I hear”) lead her to the rhetorical position where she has to, willy-nilly, concede to her own involvement in the suburban narratives of others. In the examined poem, the speaker’s self-awareness is followed by a deeper meditation on the rules of the estate that doom to failure “each individual claim / to

freedom,” sacrificing self-governance for the price of illusory safety, social prestige and class privileges “one lofty aim / all for one,” and private property law [see “(unless it applies / to my ride-on mower, my new set of pliers)”. She ponders:

. . . we're joined in a nexus  
that overrides each individual claim  
to freedom, uniting in one lofty aim  
all for one, one for all (unless it applies  
to my ride-on mower, my new set of pliers).  
And, in theory, I'm perfectly keen to subscribe  
to the notion of residents being a tribe  
.....  
But must the subscription be two hundred pounds?  
(OPH 17)

As shown, the female voice in “Open House” seems to be sceptical about the “one for all” ideology, viewing it as some dystopian principle that works “in theory” but seldom in real life. Moreover, Groarke’s speaker ridicules (“I’m perfectly keen to subscribe”) the idea that belonging to the “residents being a tribe” is determined by a person’s financial viability. “The subscription two hundred pounds” is a must if one wants to be considered a member of the exclusive club of property owners. The fact that one’s material resources regulate, or impair, one’s life options appears to be inducing envy in people, making them “calculating and mean.” What is more, even the persona’s own prospective joy with her property is tainted with the visions of others’ greater prosperity and their potentially better life opportunities:

All of which keeps me up, calculating and mean,  
imagining bedrooms which I've never seen  
with layouts that probably look just like mine  
with too little space, too much country pine.  
(OPH 17)

Considering the above, the derisive title of “Open House” mocks the idea that the real estate paradise examined by Groarke’s speaker may be “open” to everybody. On the contrary, the title operates on the place’s exclusiveness and its separation from everybody else who cannot meet the required economic, financial or class criteria. As a matter of fact, “Open House” suburban areas seem to be a travesty of an open society. In a political dimension, in Groarke’s poem, they are claimed to “be . . . *inscribing historical structures into privilege of space*” (Hook 202), emphasis original, “instituting a new and selective order of ‘rights’, a ‘rights’ of exclusion, of violent self-protection and of self-governance” (Hook 203). In this way, they contribute to maintaining the political and the “historical asymmetries of power” (Hook 203). All in all,

Edward Soja (1989) has consistently warned against analyses that understand space in a depoliticized way, that treat it as an arbitrary or unimportant

dimension of power. Foucault (1993) likewise stresses that space is an instrumental means of transporting certain rationalities of power into the forms of material practice. The upshot of this is that we need 'read' arrangements of space, to study the alternative social orderings produced by differential, 'other' places to see how they parallel or support particular regimes of truth. (Hook 204–205)

Following this line of thinking, Groarke's "House Plan" elaborates the house-located woman's political and "spatial existence." Lysaght points out in "At Home and Abroad" that the poem in question is "a fluid sonnet which contrasts the sterile form of the house-plan with the actuality of life in and around houses" (34). Furthermore, "House Plan" juxtaposes the Palladian style and Victorian imperial architecture ("some client's notion of the ideal place to live") with the speaker's own disbelief in its appropriateness with regard to a contemporary Irish context. In view of that, the female voice in Groarke's poem seems to be sceptical whether "a landscape garden, a façade and a drive" may truly be an apt manifestation of the Irish real estate heaven, mocking it in the catch-phrase "the ideal place to live." She relates:

A landscaped garden, a façade and a drive,  
 some client's notion of the ideal place to live,  
 have been composed into a scheme of rooms  
 and set off with unnecessary trims,  
 prompting words like 'classical' or 'fine'  
 as delicate responses to such adequate design.  
 (OPH 15)

In this vein, pointing to the excessive nature of the "unnecessary trims" and pretentiously strained ornamentations, Groarke's persona expresses her ironic distance from the neo-classical architectural modes. In the cited passage, the euphemistic expressions (i.e. "delicate responses to such adequate design") betray the speaker's derision at the idea of replacing the absent lawn with its capitalised linguistic signifier, graphically distinct within the text. What makes "House Plan" even more surreal is the silhouette of a person superimposed on the displayed model. The amused speaking voice speculates sarcastically about the identity of that figure: be it "a proud owner, or an occasional guest," or "a country passer-by." In Groarke's poem, the phrase "overflowing rose" brilliantly renders the nostalgia for the English-style garden foliage, disclosing the clients' preference for the spacious residences.<sup>122</sup> The speaker in "House Plan" declares:

For purposes of scale, a figure has been drawn  
 on the blackened square at the back marked LAWN.  
 With this casual shading, it's difficult to see  
 if the face above the stick-arms seems to be

<sup>122</sup> Hook reminds that: "these arrangements of space operate beneath a powerfully legitimising rationale . . . a predominantly spatial, that is, apparently, *pragmatic* existence does not make them innocent in the perpetuation of historical asymmetries of power" (202–203), emphasis original.

that of a proud owner, or an occasional guest  
 taking the air between sundown and breakfast.  
 Or a villager who, on passing the empty house,  
 has slipped in to choose an overflowing rose.

(OPH 15)

As in the previous poem, the depicted here house (House) vision seems to be relying on a mixture of satirical effect and grim overtones. On the whole, in "House Plan" the ironic self-detachment enables Groarke's persona to realise her empowered textual position. No longer imprisoned inside the textual house's limits, she becomes a (socially and spatially) emancipated female subject. On the other hand, if it was taken out of its (earlier) temporal context, the depicted "House Plan" could be one of the so called Irish "ghost estates" (Cahill 186), "unfinished residential developments, frequently in places where they are not, or would never be needed" (Cahill 186).<sup>123</sup> Cahill defines such estates as "unplaces" (186). As clearly visible, a variety of factors needs to be taken into account when exploring spatial arrangements. Following this vein, Groarke's poem "The Courthouse," with its jurisdictional function, captures a contextualised dimension of the architectural style. The titular edifice is designed to signify the authority of governmental administration and the legal power it represents. "In this sense . . . it demonstrates how the logics and practices of given places transpose the rationality of power into material practice" (Hook 181). Thus, taking into account the official function, the building's spectacular structure is supposed to induce respect and obedience in potential visitors. Because of its judicial purpose, the elevated construction in Groarke's poem resembles a defensive stronghold: "a kind of fortress / besieged by lads with haircuts."<sup>124</sup> The persona in "The Courthouse" relates:

One day a month, it becomes a kind of fortress  
 besieged by lads with haircuts and new ties  
 shifting between their cigarettes and briefs –  
 men of letters sprawled on granite walls  
 wherein a flurry of vowels and balding wigs  
 is thick around the pillars and closed doors.

(OPH 41)

In "The Courthouse," due to its "system of opening and closing" (Hook 183), the "access is accompanied by a form of submission or a variety of a rite of exchange" (Hook 183). Entry to the building is restricted and kept within rare and strict temporal bounds ("One day a month," "On other days, the silence is upheld"). These temporal limits are called after Soja, the "slices of time" (Hook 183). They "enable[s] visitors enter 'a total breach of traditional time'" (Hook

<sup>123</sup> For the post-Celtic Tiger unpopulated housing estates, see Cahill (186).

<sup>124</sup> The function of the building seems to resemble close "fortress developments" as argued by Hook (1992) on the example of Blakey and Snyder (1999). "Hence an aesthetic of security has come to impose a new logic of surveillance and distanciation" (Hook 191).



183, Foucault qtd. in Hook 183).<sup>125</sup> Bearing in mind that “heterotopias are those ‘other’ spaces which arise around points of crises (and particularly around crises of living space)” (Hook 193), one might begin to see “The Courthouse” as “a spatial answer to a social problem” (Hook 193), namely, that of crime and the state enforced punishment. But apart from that role, Groarke’s “The Courthouse” functions as a signifier of gender and political privilege. It is not justice but the “new ties,” “cigarettes and briefs,” worn by the “men of letters” that are of prime significance here. The foreign-sounding vowel-based idiom (see “a flurry of vowels”) seems to be alienating for a female speaker and so do the self-important “men of letters sprawled on granite walls,” with their “balding wigs.” At this stage, one needs to remind oneself that according to “the literal translation of the original Latin term” (Hook 184), heterotopia means “places of Otherness.”<sup>126</sup> Hence examining the building, Groarke’s persona projects her own textual uneasiness upon the courthouse’s space, presuming it must be restrained with the self-legitimising rituals and, hence, should welcome the silence with relief. The female voice in the examined poem acknowledges:

On other days, the silence is upheld:  
no one breathes a word; new light is thrown,  
unnoticed; a damp patch slurs;  
the windows, in their cases, rattle on.

(OPH 41)

Following the trace of heterotopic places in Groarke’s poetry, women’s political emancipation finds its empowering realisation in the speaker’s spatial meditations upon the “House Rules” and “Domestic Arrangements.” In these “architectural” poems, Groarke’s speakers blend political and historical innuendoes, the language of house construction and the metaphorical discourse of the poetic narratives. In doing so, they seem to remind that

Edifices enclose areas with walls and link areas by planes, thus creating locations. Walls, roofs, columns, stairs, fences, bridges, towers, roads, and squares found the human world by making place. Through building, man establishes a world and, according to Heidegger, establishes himself as somebody, with an identity and history. People inhabit the world by erecting material supports for their routines and rituals and then see the specificity of their lives reflected in the environment, the materiality of things gathered together with historical meaning. (Young, “House and Home” 51)

---

<sup>125</sup> As a consequence, “[i]t is this ‘embodied discontinuity’ that gives heterotopia ‘the ability to transgress, undermine, and question the alleged coherence or totality of self-contained orders and systems’ (Genocchi, 1995)” (Hook 188).

<sup>126</sup> Hook argues that “the analysis of ‘heterotopia’, that is ‘other’ spaces – ‘spaces’ here understood in both a literal and a metaphoric sense – spaces of alternate social ordering. More precisely, by heterotopia one has in mind a particular ‘analytics of difference’, typically (but not exclusively) as applied to . . . – a stable ‘identity of purpose’ as we might put it – within a given society” (181).

As demonstrated in Irish history, the spatial arrangement of architecture is also the direct cause-and-effect of the country's political situation.<sup>127</sup> In addition, the aura of (colonial) exclusiveness was carefully pre-designed as a distinctive feature of the Big House country houses:

Standing at the heart of its demesne, each Big House dominated its locality, though for many humbler folk the demesne wall would have been all that they ever saw . . . . Perhaps surrounded by elaborate and well-tended gardens, or filled with works of art, it was at the same time both separate and different . . . . The Big Houses of Ascendancy were like artificial islands . . . shut off from the rest of Ireland behind high walls . . . (Purcell 6)

That fact that Big House buildings were separated from Irish locality with "the demesne wall" can be explained as follows:

The question of accessibility is central here and Foucault is particularly concerned with how a place is open or closed to public entrance, with how it maintains boundaries, barriers, gateways, and *disallows* thoroughfare, loitering or anonymous entrance. It is at this dimension of space that power becomes, arguably, most palpable, and Foucault is adamant that all heterotopia involve a system of opening and closing that simultaneously isolates them and makes them penetrable. (Hook 183), emphasis original

To emphasise its distinctness, in "House Rules" Groarke's speaker's textual exploration is conducted from a defamiliarising perspective of an uninformed observer who approaches (the Big House) building as if seeing it for the first time. In "House Rules," the function of each domestic module is analysed item by item with scientific scrutiny, and the narrative's poetic language remains firmly grounded in the architectural idiom. Fadden in his review of *Other People's Houses* observes that "In 'House Rules' we have a series of pointed architectural ponderings in which the material components are invested with human characteristics" (32). Unlike Fadden, the following study interprets this dichotomy as heterotopic palimpsest into which the post-colonial code is written into together with women's political standpoint. Operating on the six triplets with half-rhymed lines' endings, the cycle "House Rules" thoroughly examines each part of the house unit. Groarke's persona commences her narrative in a solemn tone:

---

<sup>127</sup> Purcell observes

The relationship between the Irish Big House and the estate which supported it was of course quite different from the English model. In Ireland the term 'demesne' was traditionally used to refer to a great house, its gardens, parklands and woods, deer-park and farm buildings, the whole surrounded by a demesne wall and kept for the landowner's private use . . . . The social and legal position of landowners was also very different from England. Despite the parade of legislative independence in Dublin Parliament, seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Ireland functioned in many respects like a colony. (16)

The foundation is the opening gambit;  
 what's added are storeys or rooms. But  
 its premise is the open ground, unbuilt.



(OPH 12)

As shown in the cited passage, the female voice in Groarke's poem informs us dispassionately that the building's solid groundwork is supposed to guarantee the spectacular entrance and convey an impression of security. In the nearby surroundings, its grandeur is not masked with any other objects that compete for attention. The unobstructed space around it focuses the viewer's eyes on "the opening gambit." In Groarke's series, the juxtaposition of the semi-formal discourse (see "what's added are storeys or rooms") and the academic-style rigorous logic (compare "its premise is the open ground, unbuilt") with the message's gossip-like private content produces a disorientating effect in the reader. As a result, confused audience may be puzzled as to which mode of textual expression ought to be given credibility over others. Nonetheless, the aforementioned calculated effect constitutes a crucial part of the heterotopic textual style. Referring to heterotopias, the "eccentricities of arrangements work precisely to bypass existing codes of understanding, and by extension, existing orders of social arrangement" (Hook 188). Conceived of as a "*differential space*" (Hook 182–183), emphasis original, the heterotopic cycle "House Rules" is claimed to draw its seemingly self-contradictory character from the text's *differential* mode:<sup>128</sup>

The heterotopia then, by definition, is a *differential space* . . . [which] 'has the power of juxtaposing in a single real place different spaces that locations that are incompatible' (1997, p. 354). This is to say that the analysis of the heterotopia typically yields a variety of contradictions and paradoxes 'that are not necessarily overt, initially evident.' (Hook 182), emphasis original

In Groarke's cycle, the textual *differential space* is further elaborated in the subsequent triplets. In "House Rules," to illustrate the heterotopia's discursive "contradictions and paradoxes," one can examine three incongruous adjectives employed to describe the walls: "true, impregnable and straight." One cannot fail to acknowledge that the choice of the modifiers for a solely technical purpose or its functional designation might seem incoherent. To begin with, "true" seems to be out of context here, as it refers in most cases to an emotional state rather than the physical qualities of an object. Connoting the idea of not being false, imagined or unreal, it also signifies something right or sincere. Apart from its literal and spatial meaning, "straight" denotes the idea of honesty and directness

<sup>128</sup> Hook further explains this concept: "As Soja (1995) emphasizes, heterotopias, are always variable and culturally specific, changing in form, and meaning, according to the particular 'synchrony of culture' and moment in history . . . the changes take place in heterotopia – the 're-inventions', reproductions or transformations in the maintenance of particular sites – function as an index of historical change more generally" (182).

and, to some degree, conventionality. Hence it looks as if only “impregnable” may refer to its purely architectural role, that is, one that remains impenetrable and unassailable. On the other hand, the symbolic dimension of the modifier (firm and irrefutable) may also function within the discourse of argumentation as much as in the building construction idiom. Groarke's speaker continues:

The walls are true, impregnable and straight.  
They break the rain, contain the family fight,  
cleave what's outside in, and inside out.



(OPH 12)

In the analysed passage, the remaining two lines render the functions of walls which are more abstract than their literal properties, that is, sheltering (“They break the rain”) and safeguarding (“contain the **family fight**”). Additionally, “cleave” (“cleave what's outside in, and inside out”) simultaneously means linking, enduring, clinging – and dividing, cutting, splitting (see the “family fight”). In other words, it is Groarke's textual accomplishment to condense so much purportedly self-conflicting signification within just one expression. On the whole, the very nature of the walls' role could not be depicted in a more precise way, it both supports / protects and encloses / separates people. Comparably in “House Rules” the description of windows is conveyed in an equivocal heterotopic way:

Windows are transparent, yet what surfaces  
is not the beds, the books, or fireplace,  
but sunken eyes, the stranger's dour face.



(OPH 12)

Again as in the case of the walls, at first, windows in Groarke's poetic sequence are evoked in an apparent down to earth and laconic manner. It is not until the unexpected ending of the last line that a menacing vision of “sunken eyes, the stranger's dour face” emerges on the discourse's surface. The same strategy is applied in another triplet which relates to the door: “The doors are point of entry and deliverance. / They are obliged to look both ways at once / and to admit, or to refuse, the difference” (OPH 12). The supposedly uncomplicated welcoming purpose of the door is then elaborated with the intricate linguistic significations of “deliverance,” pointing to moral redemption and a ceremonial utterance of judgements. This argument is further qualified by the part's concluding line about the intrinsic and fundamental responsibility of the door: “to admit, or to refuse, the difference,” which transfers the whole argument back into the sphere of metaphysics rather than the architectural idiom. Likewise in “House Rules,” the floors' supportive role turns out to be deceptively misleading because, according to Groarke's speaker, it contains an

alarming trait: bringing a person down to the level where their hopes are ruined. The persona in the examined poem comments:

The floors uphold the building of the house  
and, while supportive, may also raze  
its aspirations. Subversively, of course.



(OPH 12)

Finally in “House Rules,” the roof upholds the whole house’s construction but even this duty is performed in an idiosyncratic way. It keeps its strict foundations with one leg (see the verb “straddle”) on closure and captivity (see “confinement”) and the other on balance and composure (see “poise”). In addition, the roof seems to be cut out for a higher purpose being “preoccupied with skies” and is almost disinterested in its earth-bounding role [“The roof straddles the house. / Yet for all its confinement and poise, / it is, in turn, preoccupied with skies” (OPH 12)]. As demonstrated, Groarke’s sequence draws upon the dichotomy of the double-idiolect, rendering the two political and cultural discourses that existed in Ireland. Thus, the double-voice of “House Rules” is best realised as an “alternative ordering” or a “counter-arrangement” (Hook 187) of heterotopia: “in which all the real arrangements that can be found within society, are at one and the same represented, challenged and overturned” (Foucault qtd. in Hook 187).<sup>129</sup> In referred to Groarke’s cycle, the “representational ‘alternative ordering’ of the heterotopia . . . occurs through *similitude*” (Hook 187), emphasis original. It is possible because

Quite in contrast to an order of resemblance, which relies on conventionalised associations of similarity, *similitude* works on the basis of . . . unusual associations . . . Rather than solidifying a stable relation of reference, *similitude* is thus about the effects of juxtaposition, of bricolage, which confound the attempts to read a regular or stable code of meaning. (Hook 187–188)

As proved in “House Rules,” “[h]eterotopias are able to unsettle spatial and social relations directly, through material forms of ‘alternative ordering’, or less directly through representational means” (Hook 187). Due to their alternative potential, “Heterotopias are the potentially transformative spaces of society from which meaningful forms of resistance can be mounted. These are the places capable of certain kind of social commentary, those sites where commentary may, in a sense, be *written into* the arrangements and relations of space” (Hook 185), emphasis original. Bearing that in mind, when analysing Groarke’s “House Rules,” one has to take into account “the necessity of engaging the spatial

<sup>129</sup> Accordingly, “Lees (1997) defines the heterotopia as a ‘heterogeneous field of potentially contestatory countersites for political praxis and resistance’ (p. 322). Similarly, Genocchi (1995) speaks of heterotopias as ‘socially-constructed counter sites embodying . . . form[s] of ‘resistance’ (p. 36)” (Hook 184).

element of discourse, the importance of identifying those relays of meaning and practice that link everyday social values to the procedures and identities of particular places. In this way, we may grasp how meaning, materiality and space come together to implement relations of power and provide a 'grounds of identity' that is, a set of resources for subjectivity" (Hook 205).<sup>130</sup>

Consequently, to probe the inner house compartments of "Domestic Arrangements," Groarke employs a method already tried out when exploring the outer household units of "House Rules," that is similitude. The sequence "Domestic Arrangements" is composed of fourteen sections, each of them consisting of two quartets whose regularity gives the whole poem a neat arrangement of the structures kept in order. Commenting upon the cycle's regular form, Denman praises "a series of double quatrains touring the various rooms of a (notional?) house from hall to attic" (383). In line with the above, Fadden admits approvingly that "'Domestic Arrangements' is a sequence of fourteen short poems which work well" (32). Furthermore, Groarke's cycle is critically acclaimed for "a formal conservatism working tandem with a modern idiom in familiar settings" (Lysaght, "At Home and Abroad" 34). Similarly, O'Rawe in "Habitations and Odysseys" admires Groarke's technical achievement and the command of form, which is complemented by her poetry's psychological depth: "While technical ingenuity rarely achieves much by itself, the quality of Groarke's insights resists the mere foregrounding of form; an achievement particularly evident in the pared poems that comprise 'Domestic Arrangement'" (161). On the whole, writing about *Other People's Houses*, critics emphasise that:

At the centre of the collection, there's a very accomplished sequence called 'Domestic Arrangements' where each space in a house is explored through two quatrains. Emily Dickinson, who provides the epitaph to *Other People's Houses*, also provides, I would imagine, the technical precedent for these taut, crafted, regularly rhymed stanzas. In a number of these short poems, the poet uses a final detail to subvert the serenity and poise of the earlier lines, as in 'The Conservatory.' (Lysaght, "At Home and Abroad" 33)

Moreover, meditating on the role of the architect in designing and representing power structures, Foucault explains that "one must take *him* – his mentality, his attitude, – into account as well as his projects, in order to understand a certain number of the techniques of power that are invested in architecture" ("Space, Knowledge" 357), emphasis original. Bearing the above in mind, therefore, one may draw a justified parallel between an architect and a poet. In his review of Groarke's *Other People's Houses* Denman stresses that "'stanza' is Italian for 'room', a reminder of the architectonic features of both

---

<sup>130</sup> Hook reminds us that "the practised politics of the heterotopia would not be merely *analogies* or *figurative comparisons* of resistance, as in the case of the imagined space of the utopia, but would instead constitute *real-world interventions* within the political fabric of society, *acted upon* rather than simply *spoken* forms of criticism *commensurate with the realized and actual field of political action and power*" (185), emphasis original.

houses and poetry” (383). What is more, one may notice as well that Groarke’s series “Domestic Arrangements” delineates what is defined as a “place-identity” concept:

Their approach shifts a focus on mental (and specifically cognitive) processes from *within* the individual to an *interpersonal* level of social practice and interaction. This conceptualization is explicitly *discursively orientated*, that is, it engages both space and identity (and the relays which connect them) as thoroughly invested with social knowledge, meaning, power. (Hook 180), emphasis original

To some extent, the sequence “Domestic Arrangements” constitutes what Foucault defines as the “spatialization of knowledge” (“Space, Knowledge” 362): “the principles of classification [that] had to be found in the very structure . . . the number of elements, how they were arranged, their size, and so on” (“Space, Knowledge” 363). The first section of Groarke’s “Domestic Arrangements” entitled “THE HALL” sets a contemplative tone for the rest of the argument. It entails flamboyant meditations “on the nature of one’s place in the universe” within an interrelated space of other beings, “Where the world is introduced / as a play of light.” As shown in Groarke’s poem, the conscious existence in the surrounding reality is rendered by the female speaker as enlightenment “which scans / an abstract strategy from which / the house derives its plans” (OPH 27). The examined passage of “THE HALL” is conveyed in an intentionally pretentious and derisively stilted mode. The speaker relates:

Here a door admits the presence  
of undistinguished air  
to a set of rooms established as  
a various elsewhere.

(OPH 27)

As demonstrated in “THE HALL,” the source of this assumed illumination is derived from the “abstract strategy,” a founding hypothesis or perhaps a received notion upon which the female agent’s conceptual apparatus is focused. The preliminary supposition to this system of thinking “admits the presence / of undistinguished air.” The expression “admits the presence” explains that the terms of the place’s availability are restricted and regulated. Similarly, Groarke’s “THE SITTING ROOM” becomes a personal signifier of the intentional statement in which the owners’ codes might be alluded to or more often manifested on the display. As a result, visitors on arrival can, consciously or not, convert this implied visual message into their own spatial discourse. In “THE SITTING ROOM,” with regard to the observed décor, the innuendoes refer to the pre-arranged “natural” ease and ardour. The room’s carefully studied “sincerity” and the aura of artistic ambience is meticulously contrived by the house’s inhabitants. The slightly equivocal unclosure of the room stresses the aspired to openness of its designers’ plan. The exit door marks the clear textual boundaries that must not be disregarded, as defying those rules might bring

concealed facts into the daylight. At this stage, Groarke's cycle seems to take a turn in the direction of a bleaker hole-and-corner reality, hidden behind the outer façade. The female voice of the second section describes:

## 2 THE SITTING ROOM

Where the best intentions  
are displaced and settled  
in the fittings and décor.  
Fire and an easy chair,

paintings, rows of books,  
cultivate an earnestness  
confounded by the overlooked  
omission of a door.

(OPH 27)

The house inhabitants' aspired to erudition as well as the noble descent they claim can find its best manifestation in "THE LIBRARY." As demonstrated below, the third section permits more irony into the argument than the previously examined passages. Accordingly, the derisive verbs emphasising the effortful and showy "Big" décor ("the best intentions / are displaced and settled," "cultivate an earnestness") are intensified by the mocking mention of other deliberately pre-arranged effects (books "trimmed to fit," "accumulated wisdom," "the contents of two bookshops, / antiquarian"). The ridiculing expression: "books by the yard, leather-bound" discloses the impression of "intellect and wit" to be calculatedly manifested to potential guests. In Groarke's "THE LIBRARY," curtailing books so that they should fit the interior design indicates the superficiality of the house tenants' intentions, according to which books are conceived of as decorative pieces of furniture rather than a source of emotional or intellectual gratification. After all, as Purcell reminds us after Elizabeth Bowen, "books were . . . among 'proper fittings of a gentleman's house', almost every Big House would once have contained a library" (6). In tune with the above, the persona in Groarke's cycle depicts:

## 3 THE LIBRARY

The accumulated wisdom of  
someone's ancient family line  
and the contents of two bookshops,  
antiquarian, since closed down.

Books by the yard, leather-bound,  
suggesting intellect and wit  
except around doors and windows  
where they've been trimmed to fit.

(OPH 28)



The fourth section “THE STUDY” aims to impress one with a professional ambience “where business is done” and “where bills and accounts are juggled.” The solemn atmosphere is evinced in the meticulously selected expert idiom (see “embossed with the name of the house,” or “on deckle”). In the examined part of Groarke’s cycle, “The respect the room commands” finds its best expression in the conspicuous signifiers of power (“the Chesterfield, the mahogany desk,” “excess is indicated,” and “a wealth of final demands”). In “THE STUDY,” the business idiom of “a balance of profit and loss” is earlier qualified by the verb “juggle” in reference to “bills and accounts,” implying a degree of manipulation or speculation employed to “fix” the desired financial viability. “THE BREAKFAST ROOM” reintroduces a motif of control and intended outcome in the phrase: “a carefully managed view,” composed of the romanticised, English landscape gardening “parterres and a lily pond / replete with morning dew” (OPH 29). The sentimentalised pristine idyll serves to “detract from the vision incarnate / that packs into a flashy yawn / wrinkles, bald spot, bloodshot eyes / and gaping dressing gown” (OPH 29).

The part six, entitled “THE DINING ROOM,” proceeds in the Big House school of English manners, decorum and art, with its elegant figurative representations in the mode of Sir Joshua Reynolds. Describing Killadoon’s interior, Peill explains that “the dining room, which is hung with traditional manner with family portraits . . . boasts a splendid eighteenth-century white and green marble mantelpiece and carved overdoors” (142). In Groarke’s poem, one can observe the “selected features” of the low relief that protrude from the background and a Keatsean urn encouraging “high talk,” a wry neologism for small talk. In this special place, every “mouthful” is cherished and even the dinner’s background music sounds cultivated. The phrase “then come and go” is indebted to T.S. Eliot’s “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock,” with its tea parties and empty, celebratory dining rituals. Lysaght rightly claims that “Groarke is leading us deliberately closely to Eliot’s rooms where women talk of Michelangelo, with the same modernist sense of irony” (“At Home and Abroad” 33). The speaker in “THE DINING ROOM” portrays

#### 6 THE DINING ROOM

A conversation piece  
 where selected features like  
 a bas relief or urn inspire  
 and accommodate high talk.  
 Where appreciated mouthfuls  
 are served, then come and go  
 to tasteful strains of Satchmo

(OPH 29)

The seventh sector, “THE KITCHEN,” marks the transition between a publicly available space and the privately secluded areas of the house. In Groarke’s poem, referring to the “dreams of concealment,” the part’s opening

implies the need for secrecy and for keeping the matters hidden in the dark. The line's finale elaborates on what the speaker wants to keep in obscurity: "functionary details / as the everyday." The kitchen preparations which entail cleaning and food processing are carried out in fear of disclosing "a kind of chaos" that "ferments" in the neatly arranged and carefully marked containers. The female voice in *THE KITCHEN* comments:

#### 7 THE KITCHEN

Dreams of concealment,  
of explaining clean away  
such functionary details  
as the everyday.

Provisioned must be made for  
polished surfaces and glass.  
Amongst the labelled storage jars  
ferments a kind of chaos.

(OPH 30)

The eighth unit, "THE PANTRY," continues the inspection of the private rooms. Not subject to guests' eyes, the cupboard is the location where the supplies and secrets are stored. What might cause surprise is the impressive décor of this auxiliary compartment, "lined with alabaster / and white marble tiles." In Groarke's poem, the function of this storage is to "withstand / calamity or what-may-come." Stressed by the "imperishable material," the pantry's durability ought to be the best expression of the house tenants' prudence. Being "a quiet rebuke / to the instinctive," the well-maintained pantry testifies to the house owners' "illustrative foresight." *THE PANTRY* is described as follows:

#### 8 THE PANTRY

Ought to be lined with alabaster  
and white marble tiles, or some  
imperishable material withstand  
calamity or what-may-come.

Its illustrative foresight  
should a quiet rebuke  
to the instinctive, as in the eponymous  
painting by Pieter de Hooch.

(OPH 30)

The greenhouse attached to the house known as "THE CONSERVATORY" is a place prescribed ironically to the "future daughters of the house." In Groarke's poem, it is wryly referred to as the territory of potential lovesickness where young women "will languish and endure" their real or imagined affective torments. The two seemingly self-contradictory adjectives modify the female adolescent passion: "cultivated, but impure." In view of that, "the promise of

orchids” labels the girlish desire as sensuous. The artificial presence of “rubber plants” makes the whole scene tawdry and somewhat phantasmagorical. In “THE CONSERVATORY,” euphemistically, the greenhouse lust might bear fruit after the girls’ defloration: “ideal conditions / to graft, or to deflower.” In line with that, the theme of sexuality is continued in the three bedroom sequences (sections ten, twelve and thirteen) and a bathroom (section eleven) part. The ninth part depicts:

#### 9 THE CONSERVATORY

Where future daughters of the house  
will languish and endure  
the promise of orchids:  
cultivated, but impure.

The glass obscured by rubber plants,  
the heat at any hour  
supply ideal conditions  
to graft, or to deflower.

(OPH 31)

Unit ten is dedicated to the charms of “THE MASTER BEDROOM.” The organising expression here is to “conceive” but the place’s intimacy is undermined by the verbs “staked out” and “subsequently bargained.” With this in mind, with regard to pro-creation, the lustful bedroom scenario becomes only a “secondary plot.” On the whole, in Groarke’s poem, “THE MASTER BEDROOM”’s purpose is to give “an ideal physical form / and the consummation of desire.” It is described as the place

Where architecture can’t conceive  
of territories staked out  
and subsequently bargained  
in some secondary plot.  
Where plans don’t always focus  
on an ideal physical form  
and the consummation of desire  
is not, perhaps, a room.

(OPH 31)

By the same token, Groarke’s “THE BATHROOM” section seems to be located in the context of “the consummation of desire.” “Allud[ing] to the natural world,” the room’s intimate function reminds people about their bodily needs. However the cultured inhabitants of the Big House prefer to associate this space with pretentious mythological and classical motifs rather than their own instinctual nature. Apart from the physiological aspects, “THE BATHROOM” allows for “dismiss [ing] / the theory of mortality.” Being the place where most of the anti-aging rituals take place, “THE BATHROOM,” with its beautifying procedures aims to defy the passage of time. It allows one the blissful illusion that the moment of one’s death might be, if not stopped, then, at least put off to

some distant, indefinite future. The alleged control over life and death enables inhabitants to placate their fears of random “deathly hit and miss.” The persona in the eleventh part remarks:

#### 11 THE BATHROOM

Alludes to the natural world  
as a sylvan spree  
of tiled peacocks, willows  
as classical statuary

elevating baser moments  
and positioned to dismiss  
the theory of mortality,  
the deathly hit and miss.

(OPH 32)

The sections twelve and thirteen abandon the private space in favour of the parts of the house more open to visitors (see “THE GUEST BEDROOM” part). “THE SECOND BEDROOM” is the realm of children’s games and fantasy and is furnished with their hopes and dreams (“ghosts, hobgoblins and . . . the Invisible Man”). Nonetheless in Groarke’s poem even here there lurks an element of apprehension (“all come tumbling down,” and later “with darkness strewn around”). However in the long run, the seeming safety of the well-known reality appears to prevail (“safe as houses”). The speaker in “THE SECOND BEDROOM” ponders:

#### 12 THE SECOND BEDROOM

Built with the stuff of dreams  
and required to withstand  
ghosts, hobgoblins and (hardest of all)  
the Invisible Man.

Child’s play. Brick upon brick:  
all come tumbling down,  
but safe as houses later  
with darkness strewn around.

(OPH 32)

Finally, “Domestic Arrangements” goes to see a place where a visitor should be most welcome – “THE GUEST BEDROOM.” Its design reveals the practical genius of the house owners: it balances between ostensibly contradictory functions and achieves a fragile harmony of the purpose and self-promotion. In Groarke’s poem, “THE GUEST BEDROOM” is both inviting and off-putting, crammed and spacious, adequate and affected. The last lines’ mockery saves this description from the performative pathos in which the previous sections wryly abound. A perfect example of the above is leaving the book with the addresses

of nearby paid accommodation, as if suggesting that the guests should move out soon. The female voice in “THE GUEST BEDROOM” states:

### 13 THE GUEST BEDROOM

Packed under the overhead tank  
but not lavish with its space,  
adequate, but not designed  
to encourage lengthy stays.

Exhibits an ostensible taste,  
soft towels and subtleties.  
On the bedside table  
a *Guide to Local B&Bs*.

(OPH 33)

Groarke’s cycle’s concluding section brings the metaphysical theme back into the spatial Big House discourse. Preceded with the artefacts shamefully hidden from view, “THE ATTIC” makes up “a strange assemblage” of the “portraits and mad relatives.” The well-formed phrase, implying the family skeletons hidden in the cupboard, appears to indicate the domestic secrets packed side by side with utensils that are out of order. Wittily in the cited passage, the “vacuum” (in the phrase “nature abhors a vacuum”) seems to be reminiscent of the vacuum cleaner rather than the existential void. Additionally, “THE ATTIC” is a storage space where unwanted desire is locked away from sight. The closing line (“suppressed desire / should accumulate, as heat”) blends both the material and metaphysical realms, depicting the house as a living organism made up of the same organic cells, dreams and desires as its tenants. The persona in the final part of “Domestic Arrangements” concludes:

### 14 THE ATTIC

Between tea-chests and boxes  
a strange assemblage lurks  
of portraits and mad relatives  
and gadgets that don’t work.  
As nature abhors a vacuum,  
it follows that beneath  
the roof, suppressed desire  
should accumulate, as heat.

(OPH 33)

On a political level, as rightly observed by Wheatley, “‘Domestic Arrangements’ takes a tour of a large house, but with an eye to the ‘Big House’ past” (“Irish Poetry” 262). As shown here, both “House Rules” and “Domestic Arrangements” work through the palimpsest of architecture and poetic discourses where the superimposed postcolonial and historical “Big” text asserts its explicit claims and implicit preferences, together with its supposed stylistic superiority. Accordingly, one is led into believing that the accumulation of the

Big “House” inner and outer rules and provisions is designed to cover the unwanted reality that the aspired to prestige of the residences is meant to make up for the lack of the true legitimisation of power. In Groarke’s series, reading the architectural mode as a political text, one may clearly notice that the Big Houses in Ireland “were separated from their neighbours not just by walls, but by wealth, cultural standing, political power (and of course in most parts of Ireland apart from north-east Ulster, by religion as well), ‘making a world of their own, with Ireland outside the gates’” (Purcell 6).

In other words, like the earlier-examined “House Rules,” the sequence “Domestic Arrangements” operates by revealing the discrepancy between the double-coded discourse of appearances and prescriptivism (asserting how things ought to be), which is manifested by the “Big” idiom of manners, customs, class and nobility, and the wry travesty of this lifestyle, bringing to light its unwanted truth (how things really are). Based on the above examples, one might venture the statement that it is only after reading those series “against the grain” that one can fully appreciate Groarke’s stylistic mock-architectural, ironic textual mastery which is displayed in both “House Rules” and “Domestic Arrangements.” Likewise Fadden, in his review of *Other People’s Houses* draws attention to the “contradictions of a lifestyle which seeks to contain and express . . . For all its seeming assurance this comfortable world is simmering; . . . The measured poems themselves flicker between seemliness of form and idealised subject matter, and the sordid, unsavoury reality” (32). Summing up with the words of another critic: “*Other People’s Houses* accommodates a diverse gathering of poems on all manner of architectural, social and discursive constructions. As in *Shale* (1994), this collection is characterised by poems that, through quirky observation or adroit trope, gain access to more metaphysical concerns: the inter-personal, the spatio-temporal and the spectral. That this is made possible within such a relatively slim and sequential schema evinces the subtle sophistication and impressive formal range of Groarke’s poetic practice” (O’Rawe, “Habitations and Odysseys” 160–161).

Hence in Groarke’s poetry, the female voice’s textual and political empowerment stems from the speaker’s resisting the confinement of the “house rules,” sharply complementing them with the pseudo “domestic arrangements.” For a woman, it is truly empowering to relate to her country’s history not via a sacrificial and militant discourse, let alone symbolic ideological objectification (Mother Ireland), but through the domestic architectural narratives of daily lives, past and present. The critical persona of Groarke’s poems is not easily taken in by the apparent glamour of false impressions. Inspecting the “domestic arrangements,” she discerns their artificial rules with an open, analytical mind, being able to perceptively see through the game of deceptive make-believe to the less elegant reality that is kept from the visitors’ eyes. In doing so, Groarke’s speaker’s resistance to the dominant “Big” discourse is textually rendered via the spatial idiom. It happens because

Resistance then might be grasped at those points where power stumbles, at those moments of inefficacy where its conceptions break down into disarray, at those lapses and gaps in its regime of control. Not simply another form of power then, resistance is power's failure to assert its complete jurisdiction. Such a view allows us to maintain the argument that resistance is an internal property of power – a condition of operation that remains inherent to power itself – whilst still keeping the space open for resistance as something other than simply *another category of power*. (Hook 89), emphasis original

As shown, Groarke's poems' heterotopic historical and political dimension is written into the architectural narratives of the (post)colonial Big Houses, contrasted with the Irish local architecture. In doing so, the cycle's *differential space* probes the power-over realised spatially, designed as the outer / inner manifestation of the dominant political position and as the material (architectural) representations of the colonisers' philosophy.<sup>131</sup> Foucault<sup>132</sup> articulates this thought directly in blunt words: "Yes . . . space is fundamental in any exercise of power" ("Space, Knowledge" 361). He notices that from the end of the eighteenth century onwards "architecture becomes political" (Foucault, "Space, Knowledge" 349). Foucault elaborates this claim, explaining that as early as "in the eighteenth century one sees the development of reflection upon architecture as a function of the aims and techniques of the government and societies" ("Space, Knowledge" 349).<sup>133</sup> In *The Big House Library in Ireland: Books in Ulster Country Houses* (2011), Mark Purcell states that "In 1850 there were perhaps 2000 country houses in Ireland" (6), showing the differences in the lifestyle of their owners<sup>134</sup> and the nearby Irish neighbours. The Big House architecture connoted best what the name of its finest representative spells out in one's face: *PowersCourt*: the Court of Power. It highlights the demonstrative exhibition of prosperity and the assumed superiority of the Anglo-Norman lifestyle over that of the local people and their preference for functional one-storey dwellings. Purcell explains that

Whether an elegant Palladian box or a vast Gothic Revival castle, the Big House was far larger than any of its neighbours, built to inspire awe and deference, conceivably to intimidate, and certainly to serve as a political power-base, a place for hunting and shooting, for politics, and for the polite rituals of grand balls and parties . . . . The very term 'Big House', more likely to be used by the tenants rather than the owners, carried with it a certain undertow of resentment, because of course so many Big Houses belonged to the descendants of Protestant families who had settled in Ireland in the

<sup>131</sup> See how Hook elaborates Foucault's theory (197).

<sup>132</sup> Foucault clarifies that "[w]ith the birth of these new technologies, one sees a birth of a sort of thinking about space that is no longer modeled on the police state of the urbanization of the territory but extends far beyond the limits of urbanism and architecture" ("Space, Knowledge" 353).

<sup>133</sup> Historically, with regard to Irish Big Houses' political power period, "Toward the end of the of the seventeenth century the need for defence diminished, and classical architecture began to flourish" (Peill 9).

<sup>134</sup> See how Purcell indicates these distinctions (6).

seventeenth and eighteenth century, and whose houses were built on land confiscated from its original Catholic owners in Penal Times. (6)

Described in Groarke's "Patronage," the Edgeworth family may be safely included in the above-mentioned class. In this sense, "Patronage" can be read as a meditation upon the Big House's literary and historical legacy in modern Ireland. Included in Groarke's debut collection *Shale* (1994), "Patronage" operates around the family narrative of Anglo-Irish fiction's eminent representative, Maria Edgeworth (1767–1849). Transformed later into a maternity hospital, Maria's house is claimed to have been the persona's birth place. No wonder that literary critics frequently comment upon this significant and highly symbolic correspondence:

Vona Groarke. . . . was born in Edgeworthstown, County Longford, a rare bibliographical detail that figures in a poem about Maria Edgeworth, 'Patronage'. There, the poet has tried to imagine what life was like for this transplanted family, and traces a line of connection with herself, as woman, writer, through having been 'born in the ballroom of Maria Edgeworth's house', now converted into a maternity ward run by nuns: (Roche 106)

To illustrate the connections of the Big House locations and female Anglo-Irish writing, one should refer to what Joanna Tapp Pierce wrote in "Nothing Can Happen Nowhere": Elizabeth Bowen's Figures in Landscape:"

The recurring image of the Irish big house and the themes of dislocation, isolation and alienation have been popular in criticism . . . . As Jacqueline Genet notes, 'the big houses of Ireland contain the myth of the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy. They offer an explanation of that class, its style and manners; they set out its relation with its environment and culture, and they plot its eventual disintegration and decomposition.' (51–52)

In a feminist understanding, Groarke's poem "Patronage" can refer as much to the unwanted English "patronage" in Ireland as (in a multifaceted but still inclusive way) to the women's literary tradition which continued to develop regardless of patriarchal constraints. Nonetheless most critics, like the below cited Wheatley, appear to be convinced about Groarke's distancing herself from too hastily drawn affinities with Anglo-Irish fiction. In "Irish Poetry into the Twenty-First Century," Wheatley makes his point:

History is an important theme for Groarke, and in one of the finest poems in *Shale*, 'Patronage', she considers her relationship to the Anglo-Irish novelist Maria Edgeworth. Born in the former Edgeworth family home, now converted to a hospital, Groarke overlays the novelist's family history with hers, but in a way that disclaims any direct parallels. 'I have never returned to Maria Edgeworth's house', she writes in the final stanza; instead she passes by in a train from whose window the faces of the people sitting out on the lawn 'are lost in the shadow of the house.' (262)



The first stanza of “Patronage” highlights the complicated relations in the Edgeworth family, disclosing the reasons for their decision to move to Ireland. The female voice in the analysed text depicts the Edgeworths’ arrival to Ireland not as a voluntary choice but rather as an economic (“a father’s debts”) and social necessity (“a strange ménage”). Plainly speaking, English families like the Edgeworths viewed living in Ireland at the end of the eighteenth century, as shown by Groarke, as a punitive and societal exile (“having nowhere else to go”). The female voice in “Patronage” recounts:

Arriving from Bath, they were a strange ménage –  
a family thrown together by four marriages,  
and having nowhere else to go. Four daughters  
older than their new mother, and single still:  
their chances harried by a father’s debts.

(FAEP 20)

In “Patronage,” the image of an extravagant father who has ruined his daughters’ marital prospects is further extended into other aspects of the Englishman’s megalomania (“a town to bear his family name”). Superficially implementing Protestant principles (“oversee a world of prudence, tact, reserve”), Maria’s parent seems to be a living travesty of religious dogmas. What is more, Edgeworth can neither respect the natural environment nor appreciate the distinctiveness of the regional landscape. He tries cutting Irish trees for timber (“He tinkered with prospects and arrangements of trees”) and shaping plants into the geometrical topiaries which were popular at that time in England. On the top of that, in “Patronage” the man’s ideas to “devise[d] a railway to cut across the bog” disclose his lack of understanding of the Irish land. The above-cited examples of Edgeworth’s authoritarian temper present him as a man attempting to impose his own vision on animate and inanimate reality so as to “perfect” the surrounding world in his image:

He tinkered with prospects and arrangements of trees,  
laid out a town to bear his family name,  
devised a railway to cut across the bog,  
and so made an impression, and settled down  
to oversee a world of prudence, tact, reserve,

and writing books. . . .

(FAEP 20)

The Edgeworth daughters do not share their father’s “transformatory” ambitions, satisfying themselves with decorative and household work which was recommended at the time to women of their class: “sisters stitched bright patterns / in a lace-work plot of pleasantries and chat.” In the 1869 publication *The Subjection of Women*, Mill compares upper-class women’s upbringing to cultivating “hot-house plants” (198). He criticises raising

. . . women of the higher classes (though less so in our own country than in any other) as kind of hot-house plants, shielded from the wholesome vicissitudes of air and temperature, and untrained in any of the occupations and exercises which give stimulus and development to the circulatory and muscular system, while their nervous system, especially in its emotional department is kept in unnaturally active play; (Mill 198).

In *The Subjection of Women*, Mill rightly distinguishes between the biological and the cultural (gender) characteristics prescribed to women in the patriarchal society. He explains that “in the case of women, a hot-house and stove cultivation has been carried . . . for the benefit and pleasure of their masters” (Mill 155). As demonstrated by Mill, the whole process of educating women was subject to the men's purposes and convenience:

The masters of women wanted more than simple obedience, and they turned the whole force of education to effect their purpose. All women are brought up from the earliest years in the belief that their ideal of character is the very opposite of men; not self-will, and government by self-control, but submission, and yielding to the control of others. All the moralities tell them that it is the duty of women, and all the current sentimentalities that it is their nature, to live for others; to make complete abnegation of themselves, and to have no life but in their affections. (148)

With the above in mind, referring to Maria, the speaker of “Patronage” juxtaposes her literary accomplishments with those of her three other siblings: “One daughter worked / at a table made of wood from the estate” (FAEP 20). The metaphorical stemming of Maria's fiction from the local “wood from the estate” underlines the fact that the novelist was inspired by the Irish countryside. The persona in Groarke's poem stresses the difference between the embellishing activities of other Edgeworth sisters (mocking their imitative work in an alliterative “**plot of pleasantries**”) and the inventive approach of Maria who created “a landscape / of her own.” She argues that:

While her sisters stitched bright patterns  
in a lace-work plot of pleasantries and chat,  
she took a clutch of unstrung characters

and muddy syllables, and set them in a landscape  
of her own. . . .

(FAEP 20)

In “Patronage,” the cited passage, one of the most accomplished in the prevailingly descriptive narrative, amazes one with the innovative language use (“muddy syllables”) and with Groarke's elegant style (“set them in a landscape / of her own”). Maria's father's disapproval of what he considers as his daughter's unsuitable subject matter and inappropriate writing perspective is highlighted in the fragment below:

... In which her father recognised a flaw  
 and had her slightly shift the view from where  
 she stood, to take in the symmetry of poplar trees  
 that secured them from the wilderness beyond  
 (FAEP 20)

As demonstrated in Groarke's poem, Edgeworth fails to appreciate Maria's literary talent, her imaginative selection of themes and a modern attitude in finding beauty in nearby reality, without adorning it with a pretentious "plot of pleasantries." Instead, he advises his daughter to "improve" the wild, local scenery (see the "wilderness beyond") with the colonial "symmetry of poplar trees." Considering the above, Maria's father's censorious influence has a pejorative impact upon her writing style, crippling her progressive and artistic development ("had her slightly shift the view from where / she stood," "but could not distinguish them, after all, / from a future placed elsewhere" (FAE 20)]. Groarke's speaker talks about the future of the Edgeworth's house:

a time beyond him when their house  
 becomes a final home for the old,  
 its rooms converted by nuns to maternity wards.  
 (FAEP 20)

Thus in "Patronage," the symbolic transformation of Edgeworth's Anglicised manor into the Irish maternity hospital signifies the grim poetic justice of history. Bearing it in mind, the female voice in Groarke's poem conceives of her place of birth ("the ballroom of Maria Edgeworth's house") as a clashing irony of the artificial mode ("**muslin and moonlight**") and the signifiers of the real-life ("my mother's screams"). However by echoing with regard to herself the adjective ("**unstrung** child"), previously related to Maria's fiction ("a clutch of **unstrung** characters"), Groarke's persona alludes to the empowering bond between literary women. All the same, she does not wish to comprehend or judge the lifestyle of Maria Edgeworth's family, claiming that "a room will always cover more than it reveals." The speaker in "Patronage" declares:

I was born in the ballroom of Maria Edgeworth's house.  
 I have tried to imagine the line that takes you  
 from muslin and moonlight to my mother's screams  
 and then to me, her last, her unstrung child.  
 But a room will always cover more than it reveals.  
 (FAEP 20)

On the whole, the colonial superimposition of the Big "houses" and Ireland's past political dependence is demonstrated in a bitter phrase: "a house is one place trapped in another." The terminated character of the Big House domination is stressed by "the windows shut and the doors locked up" and "their way to a separate life." In the examined passage, the verb "leave," which is repeated twice, organises this fragment textually. The stylistically cunning "a place no one would choose to leave" sounds like a pun on "a place no one would choose

to live.” The expression “something of what they could not leave remained” appears to be a reversed variant of “something of what they could not take remained.” The female speaker in “Patronage” comments:

A house is one place trapped in another.  
 With the windows shut and the doors locked up,  
 it passed for a place no one would choose to leave.  
 And when they found their way to a separate life,  
 something of what they could not leave remained.  
 (FAEP 21)

As shown in “Patronage,” the spatially defined colonial attitude is by and large extended into the realm of gender relations. The Edgeworth patriarch’s urge to make everything and everyone submit to his will appears to be equally detrimental to the Irish countryside as it is to his own daughters. Three of them become conditioned into complying with their father’s despotic approach, and as a result, obtain no useful education. Luckily, despite the efforts put into destroying the originality of Maria’s prose, she manages to defy the debilitating influence of her parent. Her writing talent (“her father recognised a flaw”) survives to be appreciated today. The persona in “Patronage” concludes:

I have never returned to Maria Edgeworth’s house,  
 but I’ve passed behind it on the Longford train  
 and seen them sitting out in the garden.  
 I’ve noticed how they turn towards us as we pass,  
 how their faces are lost in the shadow of the house.  
 (FAEP 21)

In Groarke’s poetry, women’s power is inseparably linked with the female political emancipation. In “Patronage,” the speaker’s empowering declaration: “I have never returned to Maria Edgeworth’s house” implies cutting herself off from the colonial ghosts “sitting out in the garden” of their former House. Edgeworth’s imperial aspirations entail not only the privileged position in the Irish land but also his aspired-to colonisation of the minds of the female relatives dependant on him. The fact that Groarke’s persona leaves Edgeworth’s house behind her, constitutes a statement of her own artistic, poetic and political freedom. She does not want to be locked (like “the shadow of the house”) inside a tradition that stifles female creativity, preventing women’s empowerment and their full political emancipation. Very much in this vein, the poem “Enclosure” follows “the view / from the train” reminiscences that still bear the traces of the former years of colonisation (“a familiar world has been undone / and worked again into an unknown home”). The female voice in “Enclosure” captures it:

From Tullamore to Woodland, the view  
 from the train is smeared with recent snow.  
 In muted fields, a river undermined,  
 walls and ditches all closed in,

a familiar world has been undone  
and worked again into an unknown home.

(FAEP 28)

As demonstrated in “Enclosure,” the visible signifiers of the English “patronage” are still inscribed into the Irish landscape, adversely and permanently altering its open character “in muted fields, a river undermined, / walls and ditches all closed in.” Passing by on the train the Anglo-Norman house (the one belonging to Maria Edgeworth?), the female voice in Groarke’s poem comments on “the same enclosure there / beneath which your fields and fences, / two ring-forts, the silver birch.” During the seventeenth century, the English landowners began “to enclose arable lands from the commons for sheep pasture. This reduced the proportion of common fields available to the peasant for subsistence farming” (Merchant 55). As a result, the “Enclosure of millions of hectares created the ‘patchwork quilt’ appearance of the present Irish rural landscape . . . . Hedgerows<sup>135</sup> are now significant landscape feature covering approximately 1.5 per cent of the land area of the country (Kildare Co. Co., 2006)” (Whelan, Fry & Green 204).<sup>136</sup> As proved in “Enclosure,” “For Ireland, this became the divided and redivided farmland that came to embody a political landscape instead of a more natural one” (Wenzell 130). What is more, in Groarke’s poem enclosures appear to signify, especially in the earlier discussed context of Edgeworth’s writing, the limits and constraints put upon women’s artistic expression. If one examines carefully the modifiers in “**muted** fields, a river **undermined**, / walls and ditches **all closed in**,” it becomes clear that the related process comprises female silencing (“**muted**”), women’s incapacitation (“**undermined**”) and their imprisoning confinement (“**closed in**”). As in the previously examined poem, the residence’s self-contained character appears to resemble the Big House defensive fortifications (“two ring-forts”). For the female voice in “Enclosure,” this view constitutes: “a blemish, broaching a more perfect view,” tainting the local character of the countryside with a foreign mismatched mode.<sup>137</sup> She maintains that:

Your house too will be a part of this.  
Not far from where this train will pass  
I would find the same enclosure there  
beneath which your fields and fences,  
two ring-forts, the silver birch,

<sup>135</sup> Whelan, Fry and Green in “Standardizing Terminology for Landscape Categorization: an Irish Agri-environment Perspective” argue that the “hedgerow model was imported from England (Feehan, 2003, DEFRA, 2006), but elsewhere in Europe, hedged landscapes are found in Brittany, Normandy, northern Italy, and Greece (Hickie, 2004)” (204).

<sup>136</sup> “Enclosure, the most dominant feature of the current Irish lowland landscape (Hickie, 2004) was also inspired by the agrarian revolution and laid out in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when landlords forced tenants to enclose common land by establishing earth banks, stone walls and hedgerows (Boyle, 2009)” (Whelan, Fry & Green 204).

<sup>137</sup> The question: “How easily I find in this a meaning / that will take in both our lives” (FAEP 28) raised by the speaker indicates clearly her frustration with this hurtful view.

would still be visible to my accustomed eye  
 as a blemish, broaching a more perfect view.  
 (FAEP 28)

The final words uttered by the persona in “Enclosure” reveal her resentment towards the Big House architecture, interpreted by her as the declarative “refusal of this simple world” of the Irish landscape. In doing so, the female voice in the analysed text challenges the imperial idea that whatever does not fit the established colonial pattern needs to be changed or otherwise be rejected as an imperfection. In Groarke’s poetry, the aforementioned assumption refers both to free-thinking women and other dimensions of the colonial standpoint.

Your house, even now, marooned in darkness,  
 I would see as a refusal of this simple world  
 where nothing cannot be overcome,  
 where difference exists to be a kind of flaw,  
 (FAEP 28)

Following the vein of the places / narratives where history “is written into,” Groarke’s poem “The Big House” focuses upon the dilapidated colonial past reminder, being indicative of more than just “another ancient ruin / with gaping windows and the roof all in.” The female voice in the examined text admits that she was surprised to discover the building’s hay construction with “its façade high / and monumental, latticed to the sky.”<sup>138</sup> The persona in “The Big House” acknowledges:

I took it for another ancient ruin  
 with gaping windows and the roof all in.  
 But as we drove up underneath its bulk  
 I saw that what was darkening our truck  
 was not the shadow of a burnt-out pile  
 but a stack of tightly-packed hay-bales  
 built up like bricks, its façade high  
 and monumental, latticed to the sky.  
 (OPH 39)

As argued in those of Groarke’s poems analysed in this chapter, her speakers go outside their own secure dwelling places, visiting *Other People’s Houses*. Accordingly, “Around the Houses” appears to record on the face of it trivial discussion on the local building material, concerning whether the constructors employed indigenous small bushes, trees or ferns to build Irish houses. The speaker in “Around the Houses” wonders:

‘Oh no,’ she said, ‘you’re wrong. Underwood  
 never came here. And if someone did

<sup>138</sup> Bearing the above in mind, Purcell comments that “families . . . resident in Ireland for many hundreds years, . . . [and] Protestant . . . *nouveaux riches* settlers, [were] . . . likely regarded by their tenants as aliens and interlopers” (16).

write about the ratio of internal  
to external air around the vernacular

houses of Irishtown, Ballinadrum,  
I'm sure it could not have been him.

For everyone knows he turned off in Clogher  
and never made it this far.'

(OPH 40)

However having examined it closely, in “Around the Houses” one can read in-between the lines the implicit subject of this historical debate; it is that of whether the local style of building construction originated in Ireland as opposed to being brought into the country by colonisers and settlers. In “Notes” accompanying her collected *Flight and Earlier Poems*, Groarke explains that Underwood character in her poem “Around the Houses” is “a fictional English writer, based on those who visited Ireland during the nineteenth-century and who recorded their impressions of Ireland in the throes of depression and political unrest. Although these visitors penned many of the first-hand accounts of the famine that survive, their writings tended to focus more on social manners of diction, dress, house styles, and drinking rituals than on the historical tragedy unfolding before them” (FAOP 111). The gist of the poem’s argument is captured in the line: “the ratio of internal / to external air around the vernacular.” Taking into account the wry stylistic tone and a political “Big” theme, “Around the Houses” seems to be reminiscent of both “House Rules” and “Domestic Arrangements.” Structurally, following the architectural vein, critics tend to link Groarke’s “meticulous attention to detail” and her “formal arrangement in her well-wrought poems” with the dimension of “the visual and typographical” (Johnston, “Hauntings and Returns” 99). Writing about *Juniper Street* (2006) from which the poems analysed below are taken, the reviewer admits:

The cover of her new collection, featuring the striking painting *On a Skaker Theme* by the American painter and photographer Charles Sheeler, also foregrounds Groarke’s aesthetic. Philadelphia-born Sheeler was a major exponent of Precisionism in the mid-Twentieth century, a style which grew out of the influence of architectonic and cubist painting, characterised by its clear-focus, realistic representations. (Johnston, “Hauntings and Returns” 99)

On the whole, the architectural constructions in Groarke’s poems trigger in the female voice the thoughts and emotions whose surfacing might be otherwise problematic. Evoking self-defining beliefs about women’s emancipation, the probed buildings become the projective screen of the speaker’s own latent political and personal sentiments. Metaphorically, the relation between the sense of place and female empowerment is elucidated by Young as follows:

If building establishes a world, if building is the means by which a person emerges as a subject who dwells in that world, then not to build is a deprivation. Those excluded from building, who do not think of themselves as

builders, perhaps have a more limited relation to the world, which they do not think of themselves as founding. Those who build dwell in the world in a different way from those who occupy the structures already built, and from those who preserve what is constructed. ("House and Home" 52)

As demonstrated in Groarke's poems, political emancipation enables Irishwomen to achieve empowerment resulting from a broader socio-historical context of their standpoints. The fact that a woman's reality is not confined to her immediate surroundings allows her to experience that she is taking part in the creating / changing of social relations and that she can follow her own political sympathies. In contrast to the above aspirations, Groarke's poem "The Game of Tennis in Irish History" depicts an antithetical model of a woman's personal narrative. The speaker claims to base the text upon the (real or imagined) diary entries of Lady Alice Howard. The aristocrat from whose perspective the poem is narrated lacks any deeper interest in the world in which she lives. Engaged entirely in petty entertainment, the dame seems to be totally oblivious to historical or political events going on around her in Ireland. In Groarke's poem, Lady Alice bemoans the difficulties of carrying on her favourite upper-middle class leisure pastime in the windy Irish climate. In her single-mindedness, determined to implement against all odds foreign "Big House" modes on the "hostile native" ground Lady Howard appears to resemble a colonial occupant "patrolling the white line around the one green space." The female voice in "The Game of Tennis in Irish History" argues:

Blame Lady Alice Howard and her diary of 1873  
patrolling the white line around the one green space  
at Shelton Abbey where the Parnells, Charlie and Fanny,

banter in and back, skirting the net, filling the hours  
between politics and tea. . . .

(JS 34)

In Groarke's narrative, addressed familiarly with the diminutive "Charlie," young Charles Parnell, the future leader of the Irish nationalists and an advocate of Home Rule is depicted as manoeuvring "between politics and tea." The diary entry would suggest that the tennis tournament takes place approximately seventeen years before the peak of Parnell's political career.<sup>139</sup> The carefree ambience of the players ("their laughter scatters in choked aspen trees") is juxtaposed with the abusive modifier "choked," implying the plants' and people's (political) suffocation. In "The Game of Tennis in Irish History," the phrase "she has pinned the afternoon" seems to imply immobilisation, whereas the "Indian ink" carries with itself blatant post-colonial connotations. The changing, gusty weather interrupts the tennis game as if on purpose and prevents Lady Alice Howard from keeping a record of the score in her journal: "and the

<sup>139</sup> One might only call to mind the similar strategy used by Rushdie's narrator (and his slips of historical events and dates) in *Midnight's Children*.



ambitions of those plainly put-down words,” as remarked sarcastically by the persona:

. . . She looks up: a weak breeze ruffles  
the pages on which she has pinned the afternoon

in Indian ink, and their laughter scatters in choked aspen trees  
where sunlight, regardless, upends both the game  
and the ambitions of those plainly put-down words.

(JS 34)

The second diary entry comes from the *antebellum* period. As previously, no commentary regarding the current political situation in Ireland is included in Lady Alice Howard’s notebook: “Another volume: Spring 1921. The diary laments / They have had a blow: a permit for the motor was refused. / Not so in Ballyturin House, where the tennis party / has broken up in salvered tea and calls for a reprise” (JS 34). The female voice in “The Game of Tennis in Irish History” ironically betrays her criticism (i.e. “laments” or “blow”) of the narrow-minded perspective according to which Lady Howard’s personal affairs overshadow any broader historical panorama. In the social milieu of Lady Alice, the event of serving tea on the silver tray and an interrupted sports tournament deserve more attention than the Civil War (“the culminating flourish of bodies”) or the creation of the Irish Free State. Groarke’s speaker wonders:

Which might itself have been an entry from the diary,  
save for the culminating flourish of bodies, one slumped

over the bonnet like an umpire checking the chalk for dust  
or the volley of shots like a flurry of late calls, or the opening  
account of play stalled on the lodge gates oddly closed.

(JS 34)

Young notices that “[p]olitics is partly a struggle over the language people use to describe social and political experience” (“Five Faces” 174). All things considered, operating on the language pun **empire** / **umpire** (“an umpire checking the chalk for dust,”), the female voice in “The Game of Tennis in Irish History” employs the sports game metaphor to extend it to the entire nature of Anglo-Irish relations. Groarke’s persona seems to imply that Eire was treated as a playground for the English and it was supervised by the match officials. Symbolically, the tournament’s sudden interruption might be interpreted as a tribute to the emergence of the Irish Free State (“account of play stalled on the lodge gates oddly closed”). The persona in the examined poem admits:

After that, it’s a holding game, put down to delivery,  
service skills, to foot faults or to where advantage falls  
and how often the metaphor is required to work the line

between incident and outrage, between the ins and outs

of the intent or outcome, to the calling out or not in  
 or only just, to the over and eventual out, out, out.  
 (JS 34)

Groarke's poem's ending highlights the background in which Irish independence is fought: "between incident and outrage, between the ins and outs / of the intent or outcome, to the calling out or not in." The narrative's final words ("only just, to the over and eventual out, out, out") render the female voice's irritation with the English occupation of Ireland and the hope that this "tournament" will be terminated once and for all. On the whole, Groarke's speaker's empowerment is derived from her criticism of the depicted political predicaments. Locating herself in opposition to the privileged Lady Alices of this world, the persona in "The Game of Tennis in Irish History" stresses the importance for women of understanding their own political standpoint. Without it, even the possession of the class and privileged attributes of power cannot guarantee a woman's full empowerment. A more contextual reading of the poem is suggested by Johnston who puts forwards the bold interpretation according to which "a tennis party metamorphoses into an IRA ambush party" (101). She also traces back the IRA references in Groarke's "To Smithereens" ("Hauntings and Returns" 101).<sup>140</sup>

The subsequent poem "Parnell" is named after the nationalist leader, referred to as "Charlie" in "The Game of Tennis in Irish History." Himself of an Anglo-Irish background, Parnell was criticised as not being radical enough in his political demands for Ireland's complete independence. First adored and put on a pedestal, he was then thrown from it drastically. His fate was marked by striking contrasts; he ended up condemned by the church (due to having an affair with Mrs O' Shea) and abandoned by his followers. The female voice in "Parnell" claims:

On the mailboat carriage from the Royal Marine,  
 stones skeet against the window until it breaks.

<sup>140</sup> Writing about Groarke's poem "To Smithereens," Johnston argues that

History persists into the present and the present in turn colouring the past in 'To Smithereens'. Here, the murder of Lord Mountbatten by the IRA in 1979 off the Sligo coast is traversed through the speaker's personal memory of attending the screening of *Gandhi* at the Ritz Cinema in Athlone, the tragic colonial pasts of Ireland and India being brought together in this way, through the organising symbol of water, as the Shannon flows into the Ganges which in turn flows into the waters off the Irish Coast. Thus, the time circles back on itself. The poem ends with the speaker's companion defining the word 'smithereens', albeit incorrectly as 'I'm pretty sure it's Indian. It means to open (like an Albertine); to flower.' . . . The littoral, the edge of land – be it sea shore – as a locale of temporality and flux, is evoked here as elsewhere throughout Groarke's poetry, as the confluence between Indian and Irish histories, one flowing into another, is brought about through the returns and slippages of languages and memory. (101–102)

He sieves a handful of glass from glove to glove  
 so the shuffle is like money changing hands;  
 (JS 36)

Taking this into account, structurally and textually, Groarke's poem operates on the related split ("his name halved on the Irish sea") in Parnell's complicated life narrative (it also refers to Ireland's partition though Parnell himself died in 1891, long before it took place). Appropriately, even the muddy sedimentation remaining on the Irish Sea bed where Parnell's name is inscribed is divided into two parts. Each of them signifies two opposing approaches. The first is an active attitude that entails enterprise and energy, whereas the latter (passive and dormant) seems to be persistent in its enduring, quiescent expectancy ["who waits too long / to be narrowly, so tacitly turned back" (JS 36)]. The speaker in "Parnell" continues:

in its shift, he hears syllables silting up  
 like his name halved on the Irish sea:  
 one part thinking it will climb on stilts,  
 the other like the one who waits too long  
 (JS 36)

In "Parnell," the narrative's melodiousness draws upon the alliterative heroic epic tradition: "shift, he hears syllables silting up" is echoed in "stilts" and at that moment "tacitly turned." Consequently in the examined poem, the sound "s" reappears in the second passage in "stones skeet," "sieves" and "the shuffle and then in "glass from glove to glove." Parnell's sudden reversal of fortune is rendered as the fricative, hissing sound of "the shuffle is like money changing hands." The resonance of money going from hand to hand could imply some finalised deal. The image of the glass shattered by the thrown stones signifies the cracked mirror image of the fallen hero ("stones skeet against the window until it breaks"). What is more, Parnell is almost physically maimed by the splinters of his former glory ("He sieves a handful of glass"). The poem's textual level operates around the "the metaphor . . . required to work the line between" two disjoined categories. The speaker in "Parnell" seems to abstain from passing any value judgements on the politician, all that she wishes to do is pay justice to his complicated political and personal life narrative.

As shown in Groarke's poetry, female empowerment through political emancipation cannot be realised without women's own "ability to see the same thing from various standpoints" (Arendt, *The Promise* 168).<sup>141</sup> Irishwomen's political emancipation does not mean following slavishly one ideological option, idealising uncritically its representatives. Emancipation is empowering as long as a woman stays faithful to her own discerning judgement. Considering the

---

<sup>141</sup> According to Arendt, this happens because "[t]he ability to see the same thing from various standpoints stays in the human world; it is simply the exchange of the standpoint given us by nature for that of someone else, with whom we share the same world, resulting in a true freedom of movement in our mental world that parallels freedom of movement in the physical one" (*The Promise* 168).

above, included in *Flight* (2002), “Imperial Measure” juxtaposes two architectural and historical symbols: The General Post Office (the signifier of the Irish political resistance) and the Metropole and Imperial hotels (the reminders of the former English colonial power). Groarke’s narrative commences with an excerpt taken from a letter by P. H. Pearse, one of the participants in the Easter Rising, addressed to his mother:

We have plenty of the best food, all the meals being as good as  
if served in hotel. The dining-room here is very comfortable.’  
– P H Pearse, the GPO, Easter 1916, in a letter to his mother  
(FAEP 98)

The cited precept appears to locate the 1916 Irish Rising in the tradition of what Francis Bacon defines as “the rebellions of the belly” (Arendt, *On Revolution* 102). Referring to Marx, Arendt explains that “he interpreted the compelling needs of mass poverty in political terms as an uprising, not for the sake of bread or wealth, but for the sake of freedom as well” (*On Revolution* 52).<sup>142</sup> After Marx, she notices that “poverty itself is a political, not a natural phenomenon, the result of the violence and violation rather than of scarcity” (Arendt, *On Revolution* 53).<sup>143</sup> With this in mind,<sup>144</sup> the female persona in “Imperial Measure” perceives as emblematic the decision that the 1916 insurrectionists’ catering is to be provided by the luxurious hotels that were the landmarks of the English colonial power in Ireland. In Groarke’s poem, the opening statement: “the Metropole and Imperial hotels yielded up / to the Irish Republic” resonates in the manner of declarative political propaganda. Herself distanced from that rhetoric, Groarke’s speaker enumerates the refined ingredients of the colonial cuisine: “fillet, brisket, flank,” “brioche, / artichokes, tomatoes.” The phrase “their armory” echoes with the military “armour” or “army.” Tainted with the blasé “imperial measure,” the insurrectionists, the former farmers unused to the tastes of foreign cooking, play with the exotic food delivered to them like unruly children:

The kitchens of the Metropole and Imperial hotels yielded up  
to the Irish Republic  
their armory of fillet, brisket, flank. . . .  
.....

<sup>142</sup> Hence, Arendt stresses “it is not only our understanding of revolution but our conception of freedom, clearly revolutionary in origin, on which may hinge the extent to which we are prepared to accept or reject this coincidence” (*On Revolution* 19).

<sup>143</sup> Drawing upon the same source, it is assumed that “that poverty should help men to break the shackles of oppression, because the poor have nothing to lose but their chains” (Arendt, *On Revolution* 56).

<sup>144</sup> In this vein, Foucault classifies struggles according to a threefold division: “against forms of domination (ethnic, social and religious); against forms of exploitation that separate individuals from what they produce; or against that which ties the individual to himself and submits him to others in this way (struggles against subjection [*assujettissement*], against forms of subjectivity and submission)” (“The Subject” 331–332), emphasis original.

artichokes, tomatoes  
 tasted for the first time: staunch and swweet on Monday, but by  
 Thursday,  
 they had overstretched to spill their livid plenitude on the fires  
 (FAEP 98)

As marked in “Imperial Measure,” in her meticulous listing of the exquisite food served to the insurrectionists, Groarke takes overt auditory delight in this melodious, musically-lavish feast, ironically remarked to be “destined for more / palatable tongues, / it was pressed to service in an Irish stew and served on fine / bone china / with bread that turned to powder in their mouths” (FAEP 98). However in the examined poem the overindulgence in the daintiness comes to denote the rebels’ own fall from grace. Groarke’s speaker seems to imply that together with the distinguished imperial nourishment, the freedom fighters’ minds become “corrupted” with its arrogance and power’s disdainful cruelty. Elsewhere in the earlier quoted study, Arendt remarks: “And while it is true that freedom can only come to those whose needs have been fulfilled, it is equally true that it will escape those who are bent upon living upon for their desires” (*On Revolution* 130).<sup>145</sup> Hence in “Imperial Measure,” the rebels’ lack of moderation in their dietary habits finds its “overloaded” expression in “overstretched to spill their livid plenitude.” As earlier predicted, soon this self-indulging consumption becomes extended into unnecessary bloodshed: killing animals not because of hunger but for the intemperate violence: “A cow and her two calves were commandeered. One calf was / killed, / its harnessed blood clotting the morning like news that wasn’t / welcome / when, eventually, it came” (FAEP 98). Inordinate blood-spilling of the defenceless marks the definite end of the revolution’s innocent period. “Thus the role of the revolution was no longer to liberate men from the oppression of their fellow men, let alone to found freedom, but to liberate the life process of society from the fetters of scarcity so that it could swell into a stream of abundance. Not freedom but abundance became now the aim of revolution” (Arendt, *On Revolution* 54). Step-by-step, in “Imperial Measure” the unnecessary suffering of the uninvolved increases. Accordingly, before the cow is slaughtered, it is first made to witness the agony of its offspring:

. . . The women managed the blood into  
 black puddings  
 washed down with milk from the cow in the yard who smelt  
 smoke on the wind  
 and fire on the skin of her calf. Whose fear they took for loss  
 and fretted with her  
 until daylight crept between crossfire . . .  
 (FAEP 98)

<sup>145</sup> Arendt claims “affluence and wretchedness are only the two sides of the same coin; the bonds of necessity need not be of iron, they can be made of silk. Freedom and luxury have always been thought to be incompatible, . . . The hidden wish of poor men is not ‘To each according to his needs’, but ‘To each according to his desires’” (*On Revolution* 130).

In Groarke's poem, the animal suffering is then turned into food and consumed ("the blood into / black puddings / washed down with milk from the cow"). As the combat evolves, the calf's blood, the blood of the insurrectionists and their casualties all pour in buckets and mingle together. On the whole, the fighters eat, spill and lose blood and they appear to see nothing else but the on-going gore and terror around them. Arendt advocates in a disillusioned way:

the whole record of past revolutions demonstrates beyond doubt that every attempt to solve the social question with political means leads into terror, and that it is terror which sends revolutions to their doom, it can hardly be denied that to avoid this fatal mistake is almost impossible when a revolution breaks out under conditions of mass poverty. (*On Revolution* 102)

Before going to combat, Irish revolutionaries are fed like prehistoric human sacrifices. Interpreted in the light of the accompanying war atrocities, the elaborate cooking procedures in Groarke's poem sound surreal. The cited passage relates the details of the sumptuous imperial-style banquet brim-full with the English delicacies: "Brownies, Simnel cake, biscuits slumped under royal icing. / Éclairs with their cream / already turned. Crackers, tonnes of them: the floor of Jacobs' / studded with crumbs" (FAEP 99). Consequently, the Irish insurrectionists feel in their mouth the alliterated "cooking chocolate, stewed," "sweetener." The persona in "Imperial Measure" observes:

so every footfall was a recoil from a gunshot across town, and  
the flakes  
a constant needling in mouths already seared by the one drink  
— a gross  
or two of cooking chocolate, stewed and taken without  
sweetener or milk.  
Its skin was riven every time the ladle dipped but, just as  
quickly, it seized up again.

(FAEP 99)

Gradually as the expensive food supplies diminish, the 1916 fighters are provided with the less sophisticated meals: "Nellie Gifford magicked oatmeal and half-crowned loaf / to make porridge / in a grate in the College of Surgeons" (FAEP 99). The fragment below tends to fuse the discourse of war with the WWI struggle: "where drawings of field / surgery / had spilled from Ypres to drench in wounds the whitewashed / walls / of the lecture hall" (FAEP 99). On the whole, the female persona in "Imperial Measure" comments that no food could satiate the insurgents' unceasing hunger ("their undiminished appetites; their vast, / undaunted thirst"). In the analysed poem, the rebels' hunger becomes a signifier of their insatiable craving for freedom and their lust for blood. Nonetheless as soon as the quality and quantity of the served food dwindles, so does the revolutionary combat spirit. Groarke's speaker openly highlights the men's subsiding engagement in the national cause (see "their downy / protest under fire" and "deaden the aim"). She claims:

. . . When the porridge gave out, there was rice:  
 a biscuit-tin of it for fourteen men, a ladleful each that scarcely  
     knocked  
 the corners off their undiminished appetites; their vast,  
 undaunted thirst.

The sacks of flour ballasting the garrison gave up their downy  
     protest under fire.  
 It might have been a fall of Easter snow sent to muffle the rifles  
     or to deaden the aim.

(FAEP 99)

Following the symbolism of omnipresent death, in “Imperial Measure” the whiteness of the aerated flour particles transforms the 1916 insurrectionists into spectral ghosts, as if debating the fighters’ intentions’ purity [“Every blow was a flurry that thickened the air of Boland’s Mill, / so breath / was ghosted by its own white consequence” (FAEP 99)]. In contrast to this, there follows an emotive vision of grown-up men regressed into infants and tended by a considerate minder: “The men’s clothes / were talced with it, / as though they were newborns, palmed and swathed, their / foreheads kissed, / their grip unclenched, their fists and arms first blessed and, / then, made much of” (FAEP 99). The quoted concluding image in “Imperial Measure” likens the personified death to a caring parent, embracing with acceptance the Irish soldiers who died in 1916. Drawing upon the Greek tradition, Arendt notices that:

The notion that only he is free who is prepared to risk his life has never vanished entirely from our consciousness; and that also holds true in general for the connection of politics with danger and risk. Courage is the earliest of all political virtues, and even today it is still one of the few cardinal virtues of politics, because only by stepping out of our private existence and familial relationships to which our lives are tied can we make our way into the common public world that is our truly political space. (*The Promise* 122)

All in all, Groarke’s “Imperial Measure” terminates by resuming the theme of nourishment or more precisely beverages. The persona in the examined text stresses that the insurrectionists did not indulge in the wines or spirits’ available at the places where they camped. The sophisticated Rhine wines and champagne preserved “a leaden aftertaste” of the warfare terminated soon after. In Groarke’s “Imperial Measure,” the French-idiom reference might constitute an allusion to the French Revolution.<sup>146</sup> The speaker records:

---

<sup>146</sup> After all, as Foucault reminds “what makes the domination of a group, a caste, or a class, together with the resistance and revolts that domination comes up against, a central phenomenon in the history of societies is that they manifest in a massive and global form, at the level of the whole social body, the locking-together of power relations with relations of strategy and the results proceeding from their interaction” (“The Subject” 348).

The cellars of the Four Courts were intact at the surrender,  
 but the hock  
 had been agitated, the Riesling set astir. For years, the wines  
 were sullied  
 with a leaden aftertaste, although the champagne had as full  
 a throat as ever,

(FAEP 100)

In conclusion, one might raise a question if in “Imperial Measure” the stylistic juxtaposition of the culinary debauchery contrasted with an uncultivated taste plays its intended function. The ironic poetic justice of the Empire providing the catering for its own self-dismantling appears to be a bold poetic construct. Allowing the final words on Easter 1916 to the Imperial alcohol provisions seems to be consistent with regard to the poem’s interpretation. On one hand, it removes from Groarke’s narrative the lofty aura of male national martyrdom and nationalist ideology, on the other hand, it depicts the Uprising from a kitchen-sink perspective. The female voice concludes:

and the spirits kept their heady confidence, for all  
 the stockpiled bottles  
 had chimed with every hit, and the calculating scales above  
 it all  
 had had the measure of nothing, or nothing if not smoke,  
 and then wildfire.

(FAEP 100)

All things considered, no matter what one might think about Groarke’s rendering of one of the most formative events in Irish history, one cannot deny the poem’s originality and the much appreciated avoidance of the national pathos. Carney in “Poets and Makers” claims that the poems in *Flight*

entail a certain sacrifice – of grandiosity, of grand themes, of flight – and they put themselves forward inauspiciously, tentatively . . . . These poems are as hypothetical as dreams . . . . Historical fact is abandoned, as are the limitations of one’s actual past: ‘But a space exists where everything that might have been / can still be summoned up’ . . . . And when history is used as in . . . ‘Imperial Measure’, it is diminutive, rather than the grand narrative that is being written.  
 (147)

In agreement with this, Wheatley rightly observes that Groarke’s “commitment in her most recent poems to further revisionary looks at the Irish past marks her out as a poet of rare historical scope . . . . Groarke . . . keeps her interaction with her subject matter quizzical and unself-important . . . . History and experience are not mastered, but glance against each other in a spirit of curiosity and adventure” (“Irish Poetry” 262–263). In her textual resistance, Groarke’s speaker remains autonomous in perception, assessment and her commentaries on the events of 1916. Not slavishly blinded by the nationalist



rhetoric, in her determined refusal to idealise the insurrectionists, the persona in Groarke's poem does succeed in paying tribute to their revolutionary deed.<sup>147</sup> In her poetry, Groarke seems to act upon the assumption that "our conception of freedom, [is] clearly revolutionary in origin" (Arendt, *On Revolution* 19). Hence "Imperial Measure" is a homage to freedom, which empowering as a concept, frequently tends to be mistaken for the abuse of power, or treated as a justification for violence and the atrocities committed on its behalf. Groarke's female speaker's mature political emancipation enables her to distinguish the ideals of freedom from its abuses and violent contraventions. Drawing upon the political signification of flow / flux and common in Groarke's poetry "the organising symbol of water," one can evoke associations of the image of a river with freedom and revolution:

the crucial theoretical issue is that freedom is not localized in either human beings in their action and interaction or in the space that forms between men, but rather is assigned to a process that unfolds behind the backs of those who act and does its work in secret, beyond the visible arena of public affairs. The model for this concept of freedom is a river flowing freely, in which every attempt to block its flow is an arbitrary impediment. (Arendt, *The Promise* 120)

In agreement with that, "The Local Accent" from *Juniper Street* explores the language of revolution narrated as the watery, spilling out political discourse "pronounced by granite drag." As in the previous narrative, Groarke's persona perceives power as a phenomenon whose dynamic energy depends upon the shifting political accent. "In its most general sense, power is the production of casual effects . . . . The power of a river, for example, is manifest in its causal effects: it erodes a bed, transports rock material from one place to another, and produces a delta or a flood plain" (Scott 1). The speaker in "The Local Accent" declares:

This river is pronounced by granite drag.  
It is a matter of inflection, of knowing what  
to emphasize, and what to let drift away,  
just as a slipping aspen leaf makes barely a flicker,  
one gaffe in the conversation between the current  
and the flow; a stifled yawn, a darkness reimbursed  
(JS 18)

In view of that, Groarke's persona captures the ever-changing nature of political power as "a matter of inflection." The alteration in the speaking voice's modes can be realised as grammatical categories. Unobtrusive as such

---

<sup>147</sup> McLaren emphasises that "Even states of domination are subject to reversal, but this involves collective action. Relations of domination include the consolidated power of a nation-state over its people, the systemic gender imbalance of patriarchy, and the relations of colonizers over the colonized. Collective actions to change relations of domination include political action, social movements, and cultural revolution" (220).

modifications might seem (“just as a slipping aspen leaf makes barely a flicker”), in “The Local Accent” linguistic distinctions are essential to meaning, and any violation of these codes is always noticed. Therefore the female voice provides an example how “one gaffe in the conversation between the current / and the flow” might result in the breakdown of communication and, as a result, power (“a darkness reimbursed”). She ponders:

while, underneath, the thing that falls through shadow  
is full of its own occasion. Weighty and dull,  
it longs for water, the lacquer and slip of it,  
the way it won't allow for brightness on its back.  
but flips around to where its fall is a wet-wool,  
sodden thing about to break at any moment, and undo.  
(JS 18)

In this light, the persona in “The Local Accent” perceives the textual river drift as the undercurrent (revolution), residing below the surface of the “Big” discourse, “underneath, the thing that falls through shadow.” With the words being unfastened, linked only temporally and contextually, the fixity of the dominant language is challenged. Subsequently, the speaker in Groarke's poem evokes how she conceives of the “coming loose” process in language: “something is coming loose like aspen leaves, or froth. / Or maunder, letting itself down like rain into a river” (JS 18). The fluctuating images of the fallen leaves, the sound semblance to the roaming soldier who departed from his troops (see maunder), the rainfall flowing into the river – all of these indicate the split between words' fixed designations and the free flux of the gushing signifiers' stream. “Power relations are at all times in flux and subject to resistant strategies; within the discursive spaces that resistances create, disqualified knowledges can be made audible” (Faith 52). In “The Local Accent,” the textual resistance challenges the observed discursive tendency to breach the gap between words and their referents in reality. That is why in Groarke's poem the linguistic “revolutionary” energy is “immersed in getting on with what it separates:”

immersed in getting on with what it separates:  
the sulk of damp soil; the stiff articulation of the shore,  
the giddy vowels sprayed over the drag and ebb  
of voices leaking through the rain over the town.

Everything arrives at a standstill under the bridge.  
The town grips the river and all the words for elsewhere  
or for being there have had their edges worn off  
and their meanings powdered to a consonantal darkness  
where they dissolve, like happenings, into traffic  
and asphalt, or otherwise, in the river and its silt.

(JS 18)

When reviewing Groarke's *Juniper Street*, Johnston observes "a faint trace of something, or of a secondary image seen beneath the main one, and the idea of something existing beneath the surface, not immediately apprehendable or attainable . . . Here the mind's working with words, the shaping of experience into poetry, is as a river" ("Hauntings and Returns" 100). Accordingly, in Groarke's poetry, "it is the act of writing that fastens and formalises experience. The past is never far from the present" (Johnston, "Hauntings and Returns" 101). Noticing that "everything arrives at a standstill under the bridge," the speaker in "The Local Accent" aptly records the decline of the free flow of signifiers in favour of the social function and a political context:

Political events and political action are absorbed into the historical process, and history comes to mean, in a very literal sense, the flow of history. The distinction between such pervasive ideological thinking and totalitarian regimes lies in the fact that the latter have discovered the political means to integrate human beings into the flow of history in such a way that they are so totally caught up in its "freedom," its "free flow," that they can no longer obstruct it but instead become impulses for its acceleration. (Arendt, *The Promise* 121)

In the name of communicative and communal functions, the textual power in "The Local Accent" becomes a vehicle for "bringing about consequences" at the expense of "coming loose." In Groarke's poem, language becomes the hostage of political meaning ("the town grips the river and all the words for elsewhere"). Turned into the "consonantal darkness" (being the premonition of violence), Groarke's speaker's idiom loses the sharpness of "their edges worn off," "their meanings [get] powdered" into the deposited alluvial sediment. The persona in "The Local Accent" attributes the river's abuse to its distance from the source / The Big discourse (the sea) claiming that "this river is pitched so far from the sea / it announces itself in elision." Thus the vowel omission happens at the cost of "consonantal darkness." The female voice in the analysed poem maintains:

This river is pitched so far from the sea  
 it announces itself in elision, as though everything  
 unsaid could still bed down in depth and unison,  
 underwriting words for going on and every other way  
 in and out of this one place. Excepting the blood-red  
 trickle of sky, and what it overrides, what slips beneath.  
 (JS 18)

In the political discourse such an exclusion is claimed to pass for understatement, promising the words "coming loose" in the end. This blatant euphemism (or rather rhetorical manipulation) could happen as long as one agrees to edit out anything that does not "fit in" to "the blood-red / trickle of sky" and that might be superseded by "what slips beneath." In the referred to lines, the blatant reference to violence ("the blood-red" modifier) does not leave

much room for discursive evasion. Analysing Groarke's fourth collection, critics stress that:

Although these poems are mostly cast in stanzaic free verse there is a compelling rhythmic force throughout. This poetry is remarkable both for its use of metaphor and simile to create the striking images that gleam and build into a luminous tapestry as the collection progresses, but also for its attentiveness to words as sounds that powerfully reverberate. Words, as Virginia Woolf put in her essay 'Craftsmanship', are many-sided, they 'do not live in dictionaries; they live in the mind . . . full of echoes, of memories, of associations.' (Johnston, "Hauntings and Returns" 100)

For that reason in "Athlones," included in the collection *Juniper Street*, women's political emancipation allows the speaker to construe a textual, watery image of the split-in-two country by means of a river-marked political boundary. Hence the open-flow (feminine) discourse is turned into a regulated-for-political-reasons (masculine) "consonantal darkness." As a result, "taken in hand" river becomes also a metaphor of the confined Irish femininity and the country's restricted national freedom. It might result from the fact in the Irish tradition, water is collocated not only with wisdom but also with womanhood and frequently rivers are named after females. To render the political emancipation of Irish women, in "Athlones," the persona follows the river's own deliverance and its strenuous release from the man-made signification. She argues:

A two-faced river, holding the line between  
the Pale and Irishtown, the to-and-fro of siege  
or confiscation, dual strategies of granite and edict.

A river kept in check, though dampness  
slakes the rights and wrongs, the black  
and white of its unequal board

(JS 19)

Johnston claims that the "virtuosic 'Athlones' . . . unifies the whole collection in terms of technique, theme and imagery – summons the river as 'A two-faced river, holding the line between / the Pale and Irishtown', the landscape despite all of its fluidity imbued with layers of its past" ("Hauntings and Returns" 101). Politically, in Groarke's poem the "two-faced river" represents the country's "divided loyalties." In the name of politics, objectified by the human warfare river is referred to as "made to march along the fastness," holding the line between "to-and-fro of siege / or confiscation, dual strategies of granite and edict." Thus, "a river kept in check" is manipulated into becoming a surface screen – "its unequal board" – upon which a balance of warfare might be recorded which "slakes the rights and wrongs." Considering the above, the river in "Athlones" becomes a hostage of the man-made political conflicts and their never-ending confrontations: "all its words have been vouchsafed." The free flow of water is further regulated "in the low-slung building opposite the

church.” The personified abode in Groarke’s narrative is attributed with human features: it has a body (“puts its **toe** in the water”) and it is capable of assessing the situation critically. The observers, not active generators of history, are referred to as “readers,” as they neither create nor advance the historical narrative and only follow a potential “change of plot.” Conveniently, they docilely comply with the official interpretation, presenting the witnessed events “the way things ought to be.” The speaker in “Athlones” admits:

... All its words have been vouchsafed  
in the low-slung building opposite the church  
that put its toe in the water once and froze,  
eye to eye with upper decks and punters

waving in at readers picking past the watermark  
for a change of plot or a first edition  
of the way things ought to be.

(JS 20)

Further south, in the direction of Galway, the journey moves into the more neutral “middle ground” territory. Nonetheless in Groarke’s speaker’s idiom, the earlier-referred to split is still present in the double meanings of the verb “cleave,” decoded as the crack or breach, and its second sense “attach to” and “adhere.” In the cited passage, “an agitated squall” connotes the political commotion and the train tremors. The persona in “Athlones” observes:

The Galway train declaims  
the middle ground, cleaves the river  
to an agitated squall,

(JS 22)

The train journey in “Athlones” leads to “the point where more than accent / slips between *at one* and *alone*.” Its abstract destination is transfigured into the ontological desire “the urge to be” rather than a specifically territory-related location. In Groarke’s poem, the expression: “at last, *at home*,” italicises the expected conclusion, thus, reducing it to a simulacrum rather than a place one truly believes to exist. This happens because “Home is a concept and desire that expresses a bounded and secure identity . . . . The longing for home is just this longing for a settled, safe, affirmative, and bounded identity” (Young 68). The aforementioned yearning is frequently organised, as outlined by Young, on the binaries of sameness versus difference, and hence, it becomes an exclusionary notion. That is why in “Athlones,” “*at home*” becomes italicised with suspicion and distance. The female voice in Groarke’s poem maintains:

washing up against the urge to be,  
at last, *at home*, pacing over paths  
that cast off as I do, in a bed of words,

loose as years ago, and coursing still.  
That could, at any second, come

asunder in a darkening hour, or gather

as pleats of rain into a pleated river.

(JS 23)

In “Athlones,” the alliterated melody of “**p**acing over **p**aths,” (vide “**p**leats of **r**ain into a **p**leated **r**iver”) recedes “in a bed of words / loose as years ago.” The verbal pun on the “coursing still” echoing ironically “cursing still” implies that Groarke’s persona is perfectly aware that the conjured things, words and images might fall into pieces again at any time. In the examined poem, the journey’s finale seems to divert the woman’s attention “with gold and promises,” “the gunmetal sheen” and Yeatsian “people with one purpose / in their minds.” She asks:

What matter? Its end will still engage  
with gold and promises, and nothing

about the gunmetal sheen of the pavement  
or the flurry of people with one purpose  
in their minds can alter that. . . .

(JS 23)

In conclusion, the complex syntax of the examined long sentence (with its core statement “nothing can alter that”) reinstates the hopelessness of a vicious circle. In “Athlones,” the recurring entrapment stifles the female voice with a claustrophobic political and textual confinement. To some extent, “politics and freedom are identical, and wherever this kind of freedom does not exist, there is no political space in the true sense” (Arendt, *The Promise* 129). As a reaction, the persona’s liberating impulse to “Step out a while” (JS 24) is voiced. In Groarke’s text, the recovery idiom appears in “Those footfalls could be stitches in an overcoated dusk” (JS 24), not without the unpleasant dissonance of “rufflings for the night” (JS 24). The reverberation of the ticking clocks is fused with the crack of the broken glass splinters, rain pounding, and the startling synaesthetic effect of “the tinkle of light.” The familiar sights are known by repetition “by rote, if not by heart.” The speaker in “Athlones” declares:

. . . The final note  
of their cadenza could be the first in the waltz  
that plays over and over in the Royal Hotel

as the calendar clicks into place and all the clocks  
keep time. The sound of them is like smithereens  
of coloured glass; a smattering of rain on the ash trees

of Accommodation Road; like the tinkle of light  
on a river learned by rote, if not by heart. The sky  
concedes. Any minute will come release.

(JS 24)

In Groarke's poem, the narrative / journey terminates with the empowering declaration of hope for women's personal and political emancipation (see "Any minute will come release"). However its actuality is distanced by the indefinite future tense reference. In the finale, the imperial waltz, performed like the melodies on the *Titanic* "plays over and over in the Royal Hotel." All in all, "[t]he dream of home is dangerous, particularly in postcolonial setting, because it . . . endangers zealotry, the will to bring the dream of unitariness or home into being" (Honig qtd. in Young, 70). Resisting "the urge to be, / at last, *at home*," the speaker in "Athlones" decides to get out of the train ("step out a while") to be released from the confinement of the home / house discourse. In conclusion, writing about *Juniper Street*, Johnston rightly notices that Groarke's poetry depicts

. . . idea of home, the always shifting state of belonging in time and space, present and past, as she meditates on the various structures in which we live – physically, imaginatively, emotionally, historically, linguistically – and on how these also come to inhabit us. It is these moments between, these states of liminality, 'between the current / and the flow' as her poem 'The Local Accent' puts it, that are registered Janus-like from the threshold. Ghosts, those most liminal and shifting, most transient of figures, with their connotation of death but also of the limitless and unknowable nature of human existence, are there from the beginning. ("Hauntings and Returns" 99)

Even though Groarke's speakers may be sceptical about the possibility of "being at home," they can quite distinctly locate their position "Nearer Home." In the poem "Nearer Home," the persona's father is narrated into a grown up retrospective discourse. Spatially, the parent evolves into a signpost, indicating the female voice's way back home and out to the world. Safeguarded by her ancestors, vernacular tradition enhances the speaker's political emancipation. Preserved in this way, historical and cultural narratives become her sustaining heritage and not a restricting burden. In Groarke's poem, the impressive change of a broad macroscopic reference frame ("the Plough and North Star) is smoothly transferred into a micro / human perspective ("freckles join up on the back of his hand"). For the female voice in "Nearer Home," it was the small spots on her parent's hand that functioned as the guiding stars showing her the correct route in darkness. Once again due to abandoning the inflated rhetoric of the macro-politics, Groarke's persona opts for ordinary daily narratives. She sums it up:

My father is standing outside the front door,  
pointing out to me the Plough and North Star.  
He says, 'Look up, child, just as far as you can'.  
I see freckles join up on the back of his hand.  
(OPH 44)

In the past, even if they were allowed into the sphere of national debates or war discourse, the voices of women in Ireland used to be homogenously

incorporated into the locations allowed to them by Irish men. Such a gesture failed to acknowledge that “[f]eminisms produce a mosaic of resistances which address the family, language, courts, churches, media, welfare, educational and health institutions, violence against women, political economy, heterosexism, colonization, racism, imperialism and all other impositions of patriarchal truths” (Faith 53). Due to the poems like those written by Groarke and analysed in this chapter, the whole spectrum of possible political and social standpoints broadens and becomes more inclusive for Irish women of today.

### 3.2. Resisting Power Realised as Violence: “A Power Failure” and Female Empowerment in the Poetry of Sinéad Morrissey

*The practice of violence, like all action, changes the world, but the most probable change is to a more violent world*

(Arendt, *On Violence*)

Among the “elementary forms of power” (15), Scott enumerates “[f]orce, manipulation, signification, and legitimation.” As hinted at in the introductory remarks, the aforementioned concepts stem from their similar operative purpose: “[p]ower, strength, force, authority, violence – these are but words to indicate the means by which man rules over man; they are held to be synonymous because they have the same function” (Arendt, *On Violence* 43). However besides their comparable serviceable capacity, these notions differ in their scope and a point of reference. Hence “[p]ower is never the property of an individual; it belongs to a group and remains in existence only as long the group keeps together . . . we actually refer to . . . being empowered by a certain number of people to act in their name” (Arendt, *On Violence* 44). On the other hand, strength “unequivocally designates something in the singular, an individual entity; it is the property inherent in an object or person and belongs to its character” (Arendt, *On Violence* 44). Arendt subsequently declares that force should be used “in terminological language . . . to indicate the energy released by physical or social movements” (*On Violence* 44–45).<sup>148</sup> Whereas freedom<sup>149</sup> is seen by Foucault as marking a key difference between power and violence:

---

<sup>148</sup> Despite the differences pointed out in the scope of their usage, power and force tend be frequently mistaken for each other, especially in a political context, as argued by Arendt:

Since power arises wherever people act in concert, and since people's concerted actions occur essentially in the political arena, the potential power inherent in all human affairs has made itself felt in a space dominated by force. As a result, power and force appear to be identical, and under modern conditions, that is indeed largely the case. But in terms of their origins and



Power is exercised only over free subjects, and insofar as they are “free.” By this we mean individual or collective subjects who are faced with a field of possibilities in which several kinds of conduct, several ways of reacting and modes of behavior are available. (“The Subject” 342)<sup>150</sup>

Going further in this train of thought, Scott argues that “[f]orce can take both violent and non-violent forms. While violence consists of a direct force exercised on the body or mind of another person, non-violent force involves placing physical restraints on their freedom of action” (14). Maybe that is why both force and power, in its traditional sense, together with violence, are frequently viewed as parallel concepts, tantamount to each other. Foucault clarifies this issue by declaring that:

. . . violence acts upon a body or upon things; it forces, it bends, it breaks, it destroys, or it closes off all possibilities. Its opposite pole can only be passivity, and if it comes up against any resistance, it has no other option but to try to break it down. (“The Subject” 340)

As demonstrated, in Foucault’s view, what differentiates power from violence is the presence (violence) and absence (power) of force directly operating upon people and their bodies. Elaborating on the distinction between the relations of violence and power, Foucault distinguishes two essential and obligatory elements of what he calls “a power relationship.” Namely, “that ‘the other’ (the one over whom power is exercised) is recognized and maintained to the very end as an subject who acts; and that, faced with a relationship of power, a whole field of responses, reactions, results, and possible inventions may open up” (Foucault, “The Subject” 340). Considering the above, Foucault makes it clear that violence does “not constitute the principle or basic nature of power,” although “the establishing of power relations does not exclude the use of violence any more than it does the obtaining of consent; no doubt, the exercise of power can never do without one or the other, often both at the same time” (“The Subject” 340–341). He sums it up as follows:

In itself, the exercise of power is not a violence . . . . It is a set of actions on possible actions; it incites, it induces, it seduces, it makes easier or more difficult; it releases or contrives, makes more probable or less; in the extreme, it constrains or forbids absolutely, but it is always a way of acting upon one or

---

intrinsic meaning, power and force are not identical, but in a certain sense opposites. (*The Promise* 147)

<sup>149</sup> Morris proves that introducing the notion of freedom additionally complicates the discourse concerning power: “to be unfree is to be unable, where the constraint on the ability is considered to be particularly demeaning to the actor’s self-respect: to say that one is unfree as well unable is to imply that one is insulted as well injured” (119), emphasis original.

<sup>150</sup> Foucault elaborates this thought as follows: “there is not a face-to-face confrontation of power and freedom as mutually exclusive (freedom disappearing everywhere power is exercised) but a much more complicated interplay. In this game, freedom may well appear as the condition for the exercise of power (at the same time its precondition, since freedom must exist for power to be exerted)” (“The Subject” 342).

more acting subjects or being capable of action. A set of actions upon other actions. (Foucault, "The Subject" 341)

In agreement with this line of thought, Arendt claims that "[p]ower and violence, though they are distinct phenomena, usually appear together" (*On Violence* 52) and therefore "it is particularly tempting to think of power in terms of command and obedience, and hence to equate power with violence" (*On Violence* 47). Nonetheless, it is precisely in response to these misapprehensions that Arendt reminds us that violence and power are antithetical and, in practice, even if they come about together, they can never occur simultaneously, because the "[r]ule by sheer violence comes into play where power is being lost" (*On Violence* 53).<sup>151</sup> With the above in mind, Arendt lays bare the nature of violence, that is, its instrumentality and need for self-justification and legitimisation:

*Violence*. . . is distinguished by its instrumental character. Phenomenologically, it is close to strength, since the implements of violence, like all other tools, are designed and used for the purpose of multiplying natural strength until . . . they can substitute for it . . . . Violence is by nature instrumental; like all means, it always stands in need of guidance and justification through the end it pursues . . . . Violence can be justifiable, but it never will be legitimate. (*On Violence* 46, 51, 52)

Morrissey's debut collection *There Was Fire in Vancouver* (1996) relates from both an insider's and outsider's perspective the North's reality of violence during the Troubles. In *Irish Literature Since 1990: Diverse Voices*, Michael Parker notices that "[t]hreats of violence, images of dissolution recur in many of the North-based poems" ("Neither Here Nor There" 179). What is more, Morrissey's own textual standpoint seems to be vulnerable here. In "Fortnight Interview: Poet In Residence . . . Writing From a Deafening Silence," Jean Bleakney argues that "[s]ome of Sinéad's early poems hint at a very unconventional upbringing, in Northern Irish terms. Her parents were active members of the Irish Communist Party. She spent her first six years in Portadown before moving to Belfast where she attended Belfast High School" (12). Being designated as Protestant, though not Loyalist, and choosing to be communist, the poet's family appeared to have aspired to the impossible: they strove to be politically neutral in a state divided by war. Quoting the poet herself, the interview sheds an insightful light onto Morrissey's background:

"I think my family have given me a real sense of impartiality when it comes to Northern Ireland, because I wasn't brought up in either community. We were living in an obscure parallel reality in which there was going to be a worker's revolution in Ireland and capitalism, with its attendant evil of sectarianism, would be overthrown. I am not sure if I ever really believed this at the time, if

<sup>151</sup> Arendt claims: "Where violence is no longer backed and restrained by power, the well-known reversal in reckoning with means and ends has taken place. The means, the means of destruction, now determine the end – with the consequence that the end will be the destruction of all power" (*On Violence* 54).

anything I was terribly embarrassed that my parents were communists. Still, I have been given two legacies from my upbringing: open-mindedness, and an engagement with ideas.” (12)

Comprehending all too well the conflict’s political, historical and sociological context, the female voice in Morrissey’s poems is neither willing to justify let alone legitimise violence. Locating herself on the side of the nameless casualties (whom she does not identify as supporters of any the groups in conflict) Morrissey’s persona wishes to speak for the anonymous victims of violence. The question remains open whether such a speaking position can be viewed as credible in a situation where one side could be identified as oppressed and politically disadvantaged in many spheres of life. The answer comes from the poet herself in her review of the art exhibition “English in Northern Ireland” where Morrissey explains that “the statement ‘The English have played a major part in the modern history of Northern Ireland’ still strikes me as wilfully understated, given our legal, economic position within the United Kingdom, and the preponderance of England within that Kingdom” (17). In this vein, she highlights the risks of any generalising classifications:

The biggest problem which the opening statement quoted above sets up for itself is that it raises issues which the exhibition cannot hope to resolve. The entire people known collectively as The English, and their multitudinous and multi-facets instances of contact with ‘us’ of Northern Ireland, is too huge a topic for any exhibition to cope with adequately. (Morrissey, “English in Northern Ireland” 17)

Additionally, in “War on Iraq: Against All Rhyme and Reason,” Morrissey makes it clear what she thinks about poetry and poets taking a political stand:

If one is going to practise overtly political poetry . . . certain conditions have to be fulfilled to avoid the production of politically satisfying but aesthetically inferior work. The most obvious of these is that content cannot be superior to form . . . . There is something terribly seductive about seeing an issue distinctly, as either simply right or simply wrong. Does such a simplistic view make for good poetry? Should every good poem not have a contradiction in it somewhere? And if the poet’s role in the world is somehow glossed as positive in opposition to a negative, or in explicating a negative, are we not dangerously close to self-righteousness, and possibly even to moral bankruptcy? (17)

The answer to these rhetorical questions comes from a suggestion very close to what Arendt’s philosophy advocated: re-defining the realm of politics while being faithful to the standards set by MacNeice in *Autumn Journal*: “unfolding political events with courage, insight, flaying honesty and outstanding poetic skill” (Morrissey, “War on Iraq” 17). For that reason Morrissey highlights what she means by “politics” and its relation to literature:

And yet I would simultaneously defend any poet’s right to put politics at the epicentre of their art. A problem with the debate on the mixing of poetry and

politics is a failure to define 'politics'. Protest is political, and if we're going to ban political poetry, then vast swathes of the canon are going to have to be expunged. ("War on Iraq" 17)

As Arendt points out when "our sense of justice is offended," then rage is expressed and it is commonly accompanied by violence: "under certain circumstances violence – acting without argument or speech and without counting the consequences – is the only way to set the scales of justice right again" (*On Violence* 63, 64). She elaborates the complicated entanglement between violence and rage as follows:

That violence often springs from rage is a commonplace, and rage can indeed be irrational and pathological, so can every other human affect . . . . Only when our sense of justice is offended do we react with rage, and this reaction by no means necessarily reflects personal injury, as is demonstrated by the whole history of revolution, (Arendt, *On Violence* 63)

The title poem of Morrissey's volume, "There Was Fire in Vancouver" does not approach the theme of the Troubles in the North directly. Instead, it presents it metaphorically through a menacing Biblical discourse of impending doom ("we watched with Moses standing in our heads"). No explicit mention of the Northern Irish context is evoked in the poem. The defamiliarised and intentionally foreignised location (Vancouver) additionally distances the poem from the immediate political associations. In the article "Trellising the Girders: Poetry and the Imagining of Place in Northern Ireland," Bryonie Reid argues that "unsettling of conventionally unionist or nationalist imaginings of place is demonstrated in the poetry of Sinéad Morrissey" (527). In this vein, with a subsequent enumeration of overseas geographical denominations (i.e. the East End, Commercial Avenue, the Ginsberg Teahouse, Chinatown, Jericho Pier), Morrissey's poem "There Was Fire in Vancouver" acquires a dimension that is more universal without being less personal:

There was fire in Vancouver,  
And we leaned out into the night to watch it  
Set light to the East End.  
It had taken stand on Commercial Avenue.

(TWFIV 25)

As shown in "There Was Fire in Vancouver," the first stanza delineates a plural voice as an assembly of passive and unobtrusive observers ("we leaned out into the night to watch it") who consequently renounce to assume a central position in the poem. In so doing so, the inconspicuous group of speakers appear to leave the textual ground for the fire itself ("It had taken stand on"), making it the true agent in the narrative. Hence it is as if the element of fire sweeps the people's perspective into the background, spreading itself throughout the whole textual space, leaving no room for a human presence. Expanding, escalating, and sprawling in the eyes of the witnessing audience, the fire consumes all the

readers' and observers' attention. In the second stanza, the all-pervasive fire is conceived of as "the superior flame," its tongues are believed to "bestow its dance," being a self-generating and uncontrollable power that appears to possess its own life. In the speaker (s) words:

We marvelled at the darkness of the city,  
 All neon dulled by the superior flame,  
 And wondered would it bestow its dance  
 On the Ginsberg Teahouse in Chinatown, on Jericho Pier.  
 (TWFIV 25)

Shifting a plural perspective into the limelight, the second stanza of "There Was Fire in Vancouver" probes the gathering's inactive but still awe-struck reaction to the quickly spreading flames (i.e. "We marvelled," "And wondered"). On the whole, what astonishes Morrissey's persona is the lack of the crowd's alarm when faced with the blaze (see "There were no sirens, hoses, buckets even"). The female voice in the examined poem appears to be stunned that "we seemed the only ones conscious of the bright crusade." The promised land awaiting the Israelites who under the leadership of Moses will leave Egypt introduces another textual level to the discourse. The question of feuding over territory and land, with its modern echoes in the context of the Middle East conflict, sounds ironically familiar within the frame of reference of the Irish Troubles. In a subtle way, Morrissey's poem comments upon the human reaction to the demonstration of violence. Not yet fully aware of the horror behind the consuming flames, the onlookers / readers tend to follow the fire as if stupefied in a deadly trance:

There were no sirens, hoses, buckets even,  
 Scattering streets and 'Fire!' 'Fire!'  
 We seemed the only ones conscious of the bright crusade  
 And we watched with Moses standing in our heads.  
 (TWFIV 25)

In the conclusion of his analysis of "There Was Fire in Vancouver" and the whole volume, Parker argues that:

By conveying so strikingly the narrator's aestheticisation of violence, her translation of it into something sublime or epiphanic ('bright crusade', 'we watched with Moses') Morrissey displays the morally dubious position of the artist and citizen in the twentieth and twentieth-first centuries, the dangers of becoming desensitised to catastrophe, natural and man-made. ("Neither Here Nor There" 181)

Much as one cannot dismiss Parker's provocative "narrator's aestheticisation of violence," it seems that the presentation of violence in *There Was Fire in Vancouver* is anything but "sublime or epiphanic." It appears that enthralling to watch as the demonstration of violence may be, in Morrissey's poem it still remains self-referential and bleak, with no cathartic revelation (either promised

or expected) behind its performance. Besides, obtaining satisfaction from destructive displays is hardly a contemporary phenomenon. Accordingly, instead of being frightened, the persona in "Thoughts in a Black Taxi" looks astounded by what she witnesses. Elaborating the referred to fire imagery and being hypnotised with the flames' height, Morrissey's speaker watches the scene as if she were observing a fireworks show. The captivated observer ("I want the driver to drive ten times around the diamond") seems to be unable to avert her eyes from the compelling view. Nonetheless conscious of her dubious textual stand, the speaker makes a candid confession: "I've been gone too long." It is followed by a parallel phrase "I want to stare and stare," with the main verb performatively repeated twice. In Morrissey's poem, the first and the second long lines, complemented by the two consecutive short sentences, impose a regular, mirror-pattern of entrapment upon the recorded experience. The female voice in "Thoughts in a Black Taxi" recalls:

Four days to go until the twelfth, and the bonfire is fourteen feet high.  
I want the driver to drive ten times around the diamond.  
I've been gone too long –  
I want to stare and stare.

(TWFIV 19)

From inside the car, the speaker in "Thoughts in a Black Taxi" observes the male demonstrators setting fire to tyres in a blockade constructed from the discarded furniture. The paramilitaries who sit proudly on the rubble are mocked by Morrissey's persona because of their ostentatious gender virility ("swanking about on top") and overexposed peacockish masculinity ("the bare-chested men").<sup>152</sup> The female voice in "Thoughts in a Black Taxi" argues:

I imagine winding my way through the *Dump Wood Here* signs  
And the fallout of black tyres,  
Dismantled shelving and donated sofas  
To the bare-chested men swanking about on top.

(TWFIV 19)

As shown in the cited passage, Morrissey's persona's wryly down-to-earth ponderings about the demonstration's "organisational" arrangements reveal the performative absurdity of the witnessed situation. Nonetheless the seemingly surreal show quickly turns into a life-threatening menace. The female voice in "Thoughts in a Black Taxi" is summoned to reveal her surname so that her political affiliation will be disclosed. Yet such identifications are not as simple as they might appear:

<sup>152</sup> The twelfth of July anniversary commemorates the Battle of the Boyne. Parker explains the context of the poem's historical grounding: "Absorbed, watching loyalists preparing for the twelfth, she thinks about questioning 'bare-chested men swanking about' high up on the bonfire" ("Neither Here Nor There" 180).

A subject's particular sense of history, sense of identity, affinity, and separateness, even the person's mode of reasoning, evaluating, and expressing feeling are constituted at least partly by his or her group affinities. This does not mean that persons have no individual styles or are unable to transcend or reject a group-related identity, and it does not preclude persons having many aspects that are independent of these group identities. Since the form of group differentiation in modern societies implies that a single person usually belongs to several groups, it follows that individual subjects are not unified, but multiple, heterogenous, and sometimes perhaps incoherent. (Young "Five Faces" 178)

As the answer does not seem to satisfy the armed men, the scene which was previously watched from a safe distance turns into a personal drama. In "Thoughts in a Black Taxi," the speaker's account ("and it would all go black. / I'd have to run to stay whole") situates her in the middle of the violent warfare where the wrong replies are likely to cost one's life. She recalls:

Fascinated by the organisation,  
I want to ask them where they got their ladders from.  
One 'What are *You* called?' from them, and it would all go black.  
I'd have to run to stay whole.

(TWFIV 19)

In Morrissey's poem, the speaking voice's perfect rationality, her clear detachment from the potentially unsafe situation, and finally the persona's consistent refusal to recognise the danger – are all considered to be a provocative political manifestation. It also proves that regardless of the context "agents always have the ability to *choose* among the alternative courses of action, however constrained these choices might be" (Scott 3), emphasis original.<sup>153</sup> In other words, acknowledging the farcical side of the life and death game (repeated identifications, affiliations, interrogations), Morrissey's speaker's defiant attitude constitutes an overt face-to-face confrontation with the staged violence. The persona in "Thoughts in a Black Taxi" admits:

It's not as though I haven't blundered before –  
Asking what UYM means by the Rushpark estate,  
Or laughing at how the Germans think Paisley is mad  
In a taxi heading east of the city.

(TWFIV 19)

Morrissey's poem makes one realise that when faced with violence, every word is likely to be interpreted as having a hidden "subversive" agenda. Looked at in that light, one might decode the persona's "blunders" as her deliberate act

---

<sup>153</sup> Scott claims that "Elementary forms of counteraction may be purely individual responses to domination, as occurs in inchoate resentment, hostility, or withdrawal, or in isolated acts of disruption or sabotage" (25–26).

of resistance against being intimidated by the threatening surroundings.<sup>154</sup> Allen defines resistance: “as the ability of an individual actor to attain an end or series of ends that serve to challenge and / or subvert domination” (*The Power* 126). In “Thoughts in a Black Taxi,” the depicted scene of the speaker’s interrogation constitutes an exemplary case of “power as *potestas*” (Lukes 83), emphasis original. The speaker brings to mind:

I never registered thrown looks for hours afterwards.  
 My father sweated.  
 Even ordering I get it wrong these days –  
*This rank is UVF-run. Never say Morrissey again.*  
 (TWFIV 19)

Following the surreal logic of terror, the persona in “Thoughts in a Black Taxi” begins to realise that even her school affiliation (attendance to a state and not church school), or her medical history (the orthodontic treatment conducted at “the Royal Victoria”) may be decoded as a clear political declaration. In Morrissey’s poem, trying as one might to remain impartial and neutral, one cannot erase the historical animosities that have arisen over the generations in the North. Instead, one seems likely to end up adding up one’s own grudges to the already existing lengthy list. Resentfully opposing the enforced political binarism of the North, the female voice in “Thoughts in a Black Taxi” feels unjustly labelled. In line with this, she seems to experience the signifier “*Protestant*” directed at her as an act of physical violence (“slapped across your back”). She acknowledges:

My teeth were so crooked it took six months at the Royal Victoria  
 Before I could smile without denting my lower lip.  
 Six years of the Grosvenor Road in a state high school uniform  
 Was like having *Protestant* slapped across your back.  
 (TWFIV 20)

As demonstrated in “Thoughts in a Black Taxi,” “power as domination is the ability to constrain the choices of others, coercing them or securing their compliance, by impeding them from living as their own nature and judgement dictate” (Lukes 85). Regressively, Morrissey’s poem’s last stanza establishes the perspective of a schoolgirl drawn into the overwhelming situation. In the analysed text, the alliterated “sudden shards / of West Belfast sunshine” seem to

---

<sup>154</sup> As if believing in the sincerity of the speaker’s performative ignorance, Parker enumerates meticulously what he calls Morrissey’s “gaffes:”

This prompts part two’s recollections of earlier gaffes, such as demonstrating an unfamiliarity with loyalist paramilitary acronyms, or laughing at German visitors disparaging Ian Paisley while travelling in a black UVF-run taxi heading in East Belfast. Most tellingly, she remembers her father urging her to conceal her identity, lest she be taken for a Catholic: ‘Never say Morrissey again’. (“Neither Here Nor There” 180)



be linguistically apt to render the apprehensiveness of the forthcoming violent attack. “Coercion need not involve the constant use of actual force, so long as subaltern continue to believe in the possibility of force. Treats of force can be combined with the occasional use of actual force to reinforce their credibility” (Scott 18). In “Thoughts in a Black Taxi,” referring originally to the broken bottles, “shards” are collocated with “sunshine,” implying the fractured light (hope). The concluding “dance about my head” resumes the performative mood from the poem’s opening. However again, Morrissey’s narrative’s circular composition does not provide the much awaited catharsis. Instead, one is left with nothing more than a claustrophobic (textual) entrapment: an enduring, violent vicious circle from which one cannot escape. The speaker in “Thoughts in a Black Taxi” concludes:

I always walked with my heart constricting,  
Half-expecting bottles, in sudden shards  
Of West Belfast sunshine,  
To dance about my head.

(TWFIV 20)

“CDN” probes more direct forms of resistance than those examined so far [“inchoate resentment, hostility, or withdrawal, or in isolated acts of disruption or sabotage” (Scott 25–26)]. Accordingly, Morrissey’s poem concerns an organised pro-peace march in the North and the trade union activism. As Scott points out:

Protest is . . . resistance that is exercised as a counter-mobilisation to the existing structures of domination . . . protest involves entering into a contest or trial of strength that challenges an existing structure of domination and attempts to restore it in some way. This protest is expressed most effectively as the collective action of organisations and social movements. (28)

In Morrissey’s “CDN,” the gravity of the theme (the collective mobilisation against the violence of the Troubles) is juxtaposed with the speaker’s young age (nine) and the child’s limited political awareness. One could say that the real agents of the protest are the persona’s parents (“filled to the brim / With my parents’ demands for peace”) who have “packed” her head with their own political ideas. The potential threat from violence (“*I want to grow up, not blow up!*”) is clashed with the performative attributes of the open air festival (“slogan balloon,” “badge” “grin,” “tasted beer”). The speaker in “CDN” recalls:

*I want to grow up, not blow up!* –  
My slogan balloon and my CND badge  
And my grin on the front of the *Belfast Telegraph*.  
Nine years old and filled to the brim  
With my parents’ demands for peace.

(TWFIV 11)

In Morrissey's poem, "[p]rotest is counteraction that is organised into cohesive and solidaristic forms of collective action" (Scott 111).<sup>155</sup> Like other collective actions in which the persona in "CDN" has participated ("The Trade union Congress," "signed hate mail to Reagan, / Collected stickers"), the march against the violence of the paramilitary groups in the North is organised to challenge the daily reality of shooting and bombs. Consequently, in "CDN" the outdoor *fête champêtre* ambience is interrupted by the reminder of death: the two corpses of people most likely killed in a bomb explosion.

The Trade union Congress on Fallout  
 Stretched through Saturday.  
 Between a windowless Bangor and a melting city  
 I signed hate mail to Reagan,  
 Collected stickers, tasted beer.

(TWFIV 11)

In "CDN," the menacing death image ("I saw two skeletons") is rendered textually with the melodious alliterative mourning (see "Stretched through Saturday," "Between a windowless Bangor") and without the explicit details of bodily decomposition. Nonetheless for the shocked juvenile observer, the related vision marks the end of her infantile innocence. Seemingly naïve as the child's poetics may look, the alliterative expression "scared of the sky," whose subject remains ambiguous (be it a female voice or skeletons) appropriately conveys the potentiality of death and the fear of complete obliteration. Once an ideological and discursive signifier, the death in "CDN" is then turned into the tangible bloody mess of the torn apart human bodies. The persona admits:

It wasn't until I saw two skeletons,  
 Scared of the sky, of the hole in the high-rise,  
 That it began to mean tears.  
 The still fear of being nothing too soon and too suddenly  
 Silenced me for a day.

(TWFIV 11)

With its high probability of occurrence, violence in Morrissey's "CDN" comes closer to a real-life and not symbolic representation. However the young speaker does not seem to fully comprehend the finality of death. She does not yet understand that it puts an end to everything irrevocably, once and for all. The expression "Silenced me for a day" means that to go on living, the child has to repress the deadly image that she has witnessed, dismissing the disquieting thought that it could happen to her as much as to anybody else ("The still fear of being nothing too soon and too suddenly"). The bitter irony is that death, especially a sudden and violent one, always comes "too soon and too suddenly," not only to children but to all its victims. All in all, Morrissey keeps coming

<sup>155</sup> It entails "the noninstitutionalised contention of collective actors . . . 'challengers' . . . 'who lack the regular access to institutions, act in the name of new or unaccepted claims'" (Scott 114).

back to the entanglement of violence and resistance also in her more recent works (see for instance “Migraine” analysed later in this chapter). But the main problem remains still unanswered: the ethical rationale of the armed resistance against the establishment’s (direct or symbolic) violence. In the North of the 1980s and early 1990s, Morrissey’s speaker appears to be caught in the conflict’s daily absurdity. Even though she understands perfectly well the ideological and historical foundations of the Troubles, she will resist military actions directed against civilians.<sup>156</sup> Following the line of thinking advocated in “Thoughts in a Black Taxi,” the poem “English Lesson” defamiliarises the view of the North’s violence, juxtaposing the Irishwoman’s standpoint and that of the foreign nationals (German students of English). Along this dichotomy, violence’s linguistic and cultural estrangement intensifies:

Today I taught the Germans about Northern Ireland.  
High on their interest, I paraded as a gunman  
On the Falls Road. Death holds the attention –  
BANG! blew them off their seats and I got away scot free.  
(TWFIV 18)

In “English Lesson,” the baleful psychodrama of the dead-end situation is communicated in-between the lines via a dramatized performance in which Morrissey’s speaker (an Irish teacher of the English language) occupies the textual position of an “aggressor,” by acting out the role of an armed soldier during her classes. The improvised scene where the persona pretends to shoot her German students makes her realise that even when it is only impersonated, violence, by allowing one the corruptive power over somebody else’s fate, always induces terror and fear in the people who participate (actively or passively) in its manifestation. The female voice sums up this educational experiment in the following phrase: “Death holds the attention.” Morrissey’s poem’s concluding image operates on reversing the boundaries between the victim and the oppressor. By role-playing a weapon carrying soldier, the speaker herself, for a moment, gets transformed from a sufferer to the perpetrator of violence. Arendt reminds that “Those who oppose violence . . . are confronted not by men but by men’s artefacts, whose inhumanity and destructive effectiveness increase in proportion to the distance separating the opponents. Violence can always destroy power; out of the barrel of a gun grows the most

---

<sup>156</sup> This is how Arendt elaborates the paradox of equating violence with necessity too hastily:

Necessity and violence, violence justified and glorified because it acts in the cause of necessity, necessity no longer either rebelled against in a supreme effort of liberation or accepted in pious resignation, but, on the contrary, faithfully worshipped as the great all-coercing force which surely, in the words of Rousseau, will ‘force men to be free’ – we all know how these two and the interplay between them have become the hallmark of successful revolutions in the twentieth century, and this to such an extent that, for the learned and unlearned alike, they are now the outstanding characteristics of all revolutionary events. (*On Revolution* 106)

effective command, resulting in the most instant and perfect obedience. What never can grow out of it is power" (*On Violence* 53). Intentionally or not, as the "English Lesson" proceeds, the teacher's improvisation evokes further implicit historical associations<sup>157</sup> with the Nazis who (also) believed that they could "got away scot free" from historical responsibility or judicial accountability ["A fiddler in a death-camp' – / Beyond the lot of it. / The only honesty is silence" (TWFIV 18)]. As argued earlier, violence even when performed in a theatrical manner, has the power to alter the context in an uncontrollable way. In addition, the perpetrated forcefulness always leaves its irreversible trace on people's psyche. The silence mentioned in the poem's last line serves not to obliterate the memory of the atrocities but to respect the dead in a futile attempt to comprehend the war's rationale. In "Truth and Power," Foucault explains that:

The history that bears and determines us has the form of a war rather than that of a language – relations of power, not relations of meaning. History has no "meaning," though this is not to say that it is absurd or incoherent. On the contrary . . . – but this in accordance with the intelligibility of struggles, of strategies and tactics. Neither the dialectic, as the logic of contradictions, nor semiotics, as the structure of communication, can account for the intrinsic intelligibility of conflicts. "Dialectic" is a way of evading the always open and hazardous reality of conflict by reducing it to a Hegelian skeleton, and "semiology" is a way of avoiding its violent, bloody and lethal character by reducing it to the calm Platonic form of language and dialogue. (116)

The subsequent poems "Europa Hotel," "In the Valley of Lazarus," "Ciara," "That Summer" resume the theme of violence in an Irish historical context – they all revolve around casualties of the Troubles and their families. Tillinghast argues that Morrissey "bears witness to urban destruction brought on not by prosperity, corruption and 'progress' but by bombs. In a startling little poem she personifies Europa Hotel, a landmark in downtown Belfast which used regularly to be targeted by IRA bombers" (179). Accordingly, inspired by a bomb explosion in front of the titular building in Belfast, "Europa Hotel" is narrated from a viewpoint of an unassuming person who is taken aback by violence coming right into their daily life. In such a face-to face encounter (that one "takes in the face"), there is no possibility of performatively subverting the menacing *status quo* as in the "Thoughts in a Black Taxi" or in "There Was Fire in Vancouver." No matter how linguistically dexterous, the earlier cited line will remain a morbid pun evoking the victim's face crushed to smithereens. What is more, the "hard truth" appears to denote the power of the explosion that destroyed the building and the victim's body. In "Europa Hotel," the macabre befuddlement when "you wake up one morning with your windows / round your

<sup>157</sup> Arendt argues that "It is no doubt possible to create conditions under which men are dehumanized – such as concentration camps, torture, famine, – but this does not mean they become animal-like; and under such conditions, not rage and violence, but their conspicuous absence is the clearest sign of dehumanization . . . . Only where there is reason to suspect that conditions could be changed and are not does rage arise" (*On Violence* 63).

ankles” indicates a sense of safety being demolished alongside with one’s corporeal integrity. As a result of the explosion, one’s bodily parts lose their materiality, turning into the vaporised substanceless air (“your forehead billowing smoke”).<sup>158</sup> The Morrissey’s speaker acknowledges:

It’s a hard truth to have to take in the face –  
 You wake up one morning with your windows  
 Round your ankles and your forehead billowing smoke;  
 Your view impaired for another fortnight  
 Of the green hills they shatter you for.

(TWFIIV 16)

The closing two lines of “Europa Hotel,” which are linguistically the most rewarding, allow for multiple textual interpretations. Tillinghast claims that “The last lines briskly anatomise the ironies of the IRA campaign” (179). Nonetheless, there is more to it than that. The final sentence beginning with “Your view impaired for another fortnight” refers to the damage to the victim’s eyesight after the bomb blast. When read together with the complementing “Of the green hills they shatter you for,” it could also imply that the explosion has damaged the persona’s belief in Ireland’s peaceful future (“the green hills”) since people still keep dying being blown up (“they shatter you for”). The concluding words of “Europa Hotel” appear to be especially bitter. When they are reversed, they mean: “they shatter for you,” suggesting that the acts of violence are conducted with the presumed people’s social legitimisation. It happens because

the danger of violence, even if it moves consciously within a nonextremist framework of short-term goals, will always be that the means overwhelm the end. If goals are not achieved rapidly, the result will be not merely defeat but the introduction of the practice of violence into the whole body politic. Action is irreversible, and a return, to *the status quo* in case of defeat is always unlikely. The practice of violence, like all action, changes the world, but the most probable change is to a more violent world. (Arendt, *On Violence* 80), emphasis original

In this vein, the poem “In the Valley of Lazarus” further explores the theme of violence in the North. Morrissey’s persona enlists the combatants of the Troubles in a manner similar to Yeats’s “Easter 1916” (see “There are ten of them I know”). The men are referred to by the speaker as sombre (“sit sullen”) and as having no homes except for their own bodies (“their huts on the cheeks”). All they seem to be doing is conspiring “over coffee and schnapps” and recalling

---

<sup>158</sup> Parker suggests that the poet’s addressee, the maimed sufferer, could be the personalised hotel itself, as the work “generates empathy for a building targeted repeatedly by republican paramilitaries during the poet’s childhood and teenage years. She imagines the hotel waking up to find its windows around its ‘ankles’ and smoke ‘billowing’ from its head” (“Neither Here Nor There” 180). Much as one appreciates the originality of this reading, the poem’s impersonal “you” and “your” seems with a good reason located in its broader, inclusive and more universal sense rather than in its pinpointed meaning.

their past heroic deeds (“some fell as far as fifty metres,” “others aimed too suddenly at the sun . . . crashed like stars into darkness”). The persona in “In the Valley of Lazarus” portrays the combatants as engrossed in enumerating their (deadly?) injuries and being obsessed with recording the details of “their miracle.” Morrissey’s speaker relates:

There are ten of them I know, men who sit sullen  
 Over coffee and schnapps in their huts on the cheeks  
 Of the mountain. Some fell as far as fifty metres,  
 Limping back later with rods and tape  
 To gauge the distance of their miracle.  
 Others aimed too suddenly at the sun  
 On motorbikes, Toyota vans, a borrowed BMW or a forester’s tractor –  
 Then crashed like stars into darkness.

(TWFIV 21)

In “In the Valley of Lazarus,” the casualties of violence are depicted euphemistically with no direct mention of their demise (metaphorically conveyed in the phrase “crashed like stars into darkness”). Their abruptly interrupted lives are rendered by the female voice as “aimed too suddenly at the sun.” This happens because

As far as human experience is concerned, death indicates an extreme loneliness and impotence. But faced collectively and in action, death changes its countenance; now nothing seems more likely to intensify our vitality than its proximity. Something we are usually hardly aware of, namely, that our own death is accompanied by the potential immortality of the group we belong to and, in the final analysis, of the species, moves into the centre of our experience. It as though life itself, the immortal life of the species, nourished, as it were, by the sempiternal dying of its individual members, is “surging upward,” is actualized in the practice of violence. (Arendt, *On Violence* 68)

The citation’s final words and Morrissey’s poem’s ending seem to refer to Fanon’s statement: “the practice of violence binds men together as a whole, since each individual forms a violent link in the great chain, a part of the great organism of violence which has surged upward” (qtd. in Arendt, *On Violence* 67). Broadly speaking, the military men in “In the Valley of Lazarus” resemble eerie ghosts trapped in Dante’s textual inferno. They cannot aim towards any destination apart from the familiar, oppressive discursive reality to which they keep coming back and which they cannot transcend. The narrated ghosts cling to the past and re-live bygone combat moments with morbid intensity: “wearing their scars like medals.” Ironic as it may seem, in his final moment, the last phantom seems to have experienced an idiosyncratic spiritual epiphany: “heard voices, and built gnomes about his house / as big as tables.” The persona in “In the Valley of Lazarus” describes:

One lost his looks but wore his scars as medals.  
 Another swore, as the trees  
 Avalanched in his head,

He heard voices, and built gnomes about his house  
 As big as tables. Each of them came back.  
 All countries discovered,  
 There was no shocking them.

(TWFIV 21)

In conclusion, the poem “In the Valley of Lazarus” terminates with the uncanny return of the unconsolated dead who seem to have no scruples or remorse since “There was no shocking them.” This disquieting image of Ireland, populated and controlled by the zombie-like bloodthirsty creatures leaves little hope in this already bleak narrative. Morrissey’s poem’s ending appears to suggest that violence ought not to be too easily confused with revolution, because “only where change occurs in the sense of a new beginning, where violence is used to constitute an altogether different form of government, to bring about the formation of a new body politic, where the liberation from oppression aims at least at the constitution of freedom can we speak of revolution” (Arendt, *On Revolution* 25). In view of that, “That Summer” begins with a detached concise statement: “There were two deaths that summer.” In brief, Morrissey’s narrative meditates on the casualties of the Troubles, contemplating the victims of violence from the viewpoint of the survivors. For those who have to come to terms with the tragic loss, the sudden death of the beloved can hardly be accepted. They are left with their unvoiced longing, “now inarticulate forever.” The moving phrase “the grief that cried / out at her” indicates the anguish that permeates the body and soul of people in mourning:

There were two deaths that summer,  
 And they entered my world second-hand  
 From the realm of the stranger. One of them died  
 Without knowledge of the grief that cried  
 Out at her: her ultimate demand  
 To be understood, now inarticulate forever.

(TWFIV 22)

Bringing to mind the victims of violence in the North, the speaker in “That Summer” captures their premature deaths in an abrupt phrase: “There was little chance for bravery, / Perhaps no time for shame.” Unfair as it is, it turns out that even amongst the killed there exists an established hierarchy between those who die “in glory” and those whose demise is regarded as anonymous and “stranded.” According to this categorisation, the accidental death of an anonymous female victim of violence is classified as less important than the widely publicised sacrifice of the male fighter. Resisting such biased divisions, Morrissey’s persona records the circumstances of a young woman’s death:

There was little chance for bravery,  
 Perhaps no time for shame.  
 For she died shot down from her starting flight  
 Of life: the room of herself still empty of light,

(TWFIV 22)

As shown in "That Summer," because it is voluntarily chosen and consented to, the male revolutionary's death acquires a dimension of martyrdom, which is sublimated as "completed" and as the "union with God." Again, Morrissey's speaker objects to the differing comparative value that is applied to the depicted tragedy: "The other died in pain, / Searing and forewarned, yet he did so in glory / that she had not been granted" (TWFIV 22). She argues:

For, knowing the future, he opened like a flower  
 In the crude face of death. He strained to reach God,  
 Across the barriers stained with his blood,  
 And the face of death became that of lover.  
 He died completed, whilst she died stranded.

(TWFIV 22)

In opposition, Morrissey's speaker refuses to reduce the life of an accidentally killed female victim of the Troubles to the final moment of "her unheard crying." What is more, the persona's words: "For her death could sour forgiveness / With such an image of its own violence" depict bloodshed as a contagious disease. Whoever is affected by it becomes imperceptibly transformed from a sufferer to its perpetrator. The persona in "That Summer" pleads:

Let me not think only of her life clubbed  
 Out in backstreet, of her unheard crying.  
 For her death could sour forgiveness  
 With such an image of its own violence.  
 Instead, let me also remember my lost cousin dying,  
 Who left peace in my world, if not love.

(TWFIV 22)

As argued by Morrissey, to put an end to violence, its self-generating logic has to be mistrusted and questioned. Appropriately, Arendt doubts the claim that violence can be the remedy for violence. She elaborates this thought,<sup>159</sup> arguing that: "For violence can indeed be easily understood as a function or a surface phenomenon of an underlying necessity, but necessity, which we invariably carry with us in the very existence of our bodies and their needs, can never be simply reduced to and completely absorbed by violence and violation" (Arendt, *On Revolution* 54–55). All in all, although the alleged necessity of violence needs to be interrogated regardless of the circumstances, what should never be ignored is the pain of the survivors. Subsequently, in "Ciara" the keening mother spends her first Christmas after her son has been killed in the Troubles. To alleviate the bereaved woman's grief, other community members, including

<sup>159</sup> Arendt claims that: "Sartre with his great felicity with words has given expression to the new faith. 'Violence,' he now believes, on the strength of Fanon's book, 'like Achilles' lance, can heal the wounds it has inflicted.' If this were true, revenge would be the cure-all for most of our ills . . . . No history and no theory is needed to refute . . . these irresponsible grandiose statements" (*On Violence* 20).



Morrissey's speaker and her parents, visit the sufferer to comfort her in her distress ("my parents stayed with her till they took her away"). The opening stanza terminates from the textual perspective of a child whose safe routine and affectionate relations with Ciara are interrupted. "There would be no walk." This laconic expression which ends the vision in a clinically detached way best sums up the horror of the violence experienced as one's daily reality. The female voice in "Ciara" recalls:

We wandered in one Christmas afternoon  
 On our way to the lakes to ask for her company,  
 But she was crying over potatoes.  
 My parents stayed with her till they took her away.  
 There would be no walk.

(TWFIV 12)

Considering the above, apart from her dead son, it is Ciara and the supporting neighbours that also need to be viewed as the victims of violence. Violence has destroyed, or at best, disrupted their ordinary, everyday existence, it has damaged their future plans and their meaningful relations with people about whom they cared:

For what is destroyed in a war of annihilation is considerably more than the world of the vanquished foe; it is above all the in-between, the space that lies between the warring parties and their peoples, the territory that, taken as a whole, forms the world on earth . . . . But once this world of relationships is destroyed, then the laws of the political action, whose processes can indeed be reversed only with great difficulty, are replaced by the law of the desert, which, as a wasteland between men, unleashes devastating processes that bear within them the same lack of moderation inherent in those free human actions that establish relationships. (Arendt, *The Promise* 190)

In the aforementioned context, "[t]his world of relationships most certainly does not arise out of the strength or energy of the individual, but rather out of the many, and it is out of their being together that power arises, a power that renders even the greatest individual strength powerless" (Arendt, *The Promise* 162). Once overcome by her loss, Ciara is taken away to the mental hospital. The speaker records the empty setting with the *mise en scène* props: "a fishtank, her old blue slippers." Then in Morrissey's poem, the religious image of the *pietà* ("the bewildered mother and the silent child") assumes the shape of a heartbroken Irishwoman "crying over potatoes" after the violent death of her child ("boiling potatoes / and wondered about their powers of catastrophe"). The persona in "Ciara" observes:

I noticed a fishtank, her old blue slippers,  
 The bewildered mother and the silent child,  
 Formed an image in my head of boiling potatoes  
 And wondered about their powers of catastrophe.

(TWFIV 12)

The youthful speaker, nonetheless, cannot contemplate such distress for too long. Therefore she leaves the scene of Ciara's mourning, trying to rationalise what she has witnessed. As in the case of the first stanza, the same structural sentence pattern is repeated. The highly affective account is followed by the short, almost impersonal sentence equivalent, summing up a previous emotive image with nothing more than two succinct words: "ruined Christmas." The persona in "Ciara" continues:

Then, bored, I walked the outside wall,  
Under the beginnings of stars,  
Until a white van pulled in along the gutter.  
She was shuttered off from view.  
Ruined Christmas.

(TWFIV 12)

In other words, in "Ciara" the Irish Madonna who is "crying over potatoes" becomes a poetic living emblem of the grief-stricken Irish motherhood, bewailing her dead offspring who is one of the many anonymous victims of violence (see "the mess of love and various motherhood"). The bereaved woman attempts to stay sane by clinging to mundane activities ("Something easier for her to articulate"). However on a symbolic level, the potatoes peeled by Ciara come to denote not only food (the signifier of life) but also a historically painful reminder of the Irish past (Famine). The female voice recalls:

The potatoes stuck in my mind.  
Something easier for her to articulate  
Than the mess of love and various motherhood,  
Than the son who had his knees blown somewhere else.

(TWFIV 12)

On the whole, one of the most accomplished features of Morrissey's poem is its linguistically-exact phrasing. In "Ciara," the structuring imagery is derived predominantly from the discourse of revenge and warfare ("his knees blown somewhere else," "She was shuttered off from view," "One shattered woman"). The lamenting mother in "Ciara" is portrayed with precise idiom as being herself a victim of violence (see the repeated verb: "shattered," obviously connoting the bomb explosion). The final stanza shows Morrissey's textual panorama dissolved in the all-permeating watery grief ("A frightening rain, pouring out / Of the Armagh sky"). The dismantled household metaphor ("A fraying edge of the legacy") appears to imply the downfall of the disintegrated vision (Vision?). The speaker in "Ciara" concludes:

A frightening rain, pouring out  
Of the Armagh sky, had filled the lives  
Of Ciara's household. One shattered woman  
A fraying edge of the legacy.

(TWFIV 12)

The setting of “Double Vision” seems to be similar to the one depicted in “Ciara:” the rain soaked North (see “pissing rain”). This time the desolate city looks illuminated with the sudden source of light (see a mellowed “I” phrase: “a shallow bowl of light”) that the persona in “Double Vision” ironically defines as “a power failure / touching the sky.” The breakdown of power could imply the lack of the actual legitimisation of the people responsible for the flames that light up the overcast Belfast sky. The female voice in “Double Vision” does not appear either shocked or frightened by the radiant glow, as if she was perfectly accustomed to the view (“I’ve seen it all”). She records dispassionately:

Friday. Eight o’clock. Pissing rain.  
 Belfast a shallow bowl of light,  
 The Black Hill a power failure  
 Touching the sky.  
 I’ve seen it all. But the places in your head  
 Stay shut to me, and I’m grasping at why.  
 (TWFIV 9)

In the remaining two stanzas, the speaker in “Double Vision” addresses her speech to some undefined “you” who might be a specific person but it could be more likely meant in a more universal, generic sense. Finding a common ground with her interlocutor in the experience of living abroad [“You’ve travelled up as I have, / Shifted home for the odd weekend, / Same road, same car, same weather” (TWFIV 9)], Morrissey’s persona, nonetheless, denies understanding of her addressee’s other motives. Despite their lives’ apparent similarity, the female voice stresses the contrast: “But the world could be under water / with me none the wiser. / None of what I saw is in there” (TWFIV 9). The speaker in “Double Vision” argues:

You saw somewhere gone into, somewhere gone.  
 Elsewhere, you wish.  
 The REDUCE SPEED NOW sign  
 A red flag in your face  
 And every street lamp a chorus in neon; *You’re Back* –  
 Glimmering with victory.  
 (TWFIV 9)

In “Double Vision” as the very title appears to suggest, there seems to be an overt discrepancy between the related visions (Visions) that the persona and her listener hold. The message that the speaker conveys gives the impression of it being an explicit disapproval and a warning to her interlocutor: “The REDUCE SPEED NOW sign / A red flag in your face.” Considering the above, one might assume that Morrissey intends to give notice that the social climate has changed in the North and that there will be no more tolerance for violence, as people are not willing to put up with it any more. On the whole, *There Was Fire in Vancouver* (1996) probes the roots of violence not just from an Irish frame of reference but also from a wider international angle. “The World is Not Round”

and “Bosnia” (both included in Morrissey’s 1996 volume) examine the phenomenon of violence not revolving directly around the Northern Irish political context. As argued, “[t]he poet’s critique of Western indifference at atrocities committed in areas of little or minor strategic importance arises in part one suspects from her experience of media coverage of the North in the 1970s and 1980s” (Parker, “Neither Here Nor There” 181). The speaker in “The World is Not Round” claims:

Beyond the West Coast  
There is no Pacific, no Japan  
And no globe to suggest  
A continuous journey –

(TWFIV 24)

In “The World is Not Round,” the similar-looking poverty-stricken areas, with their economic deprivation and the lack of prospects are viewed as the locations where military conflict is most likely to emerge. In these destitute neighbourhoods, violence turns into a way of life and a way of attempting to solve one’s unsolvable problems. It also frequently becomes a way to end one’s life, a life whose “marketing value” is seen as very low. As argued by Morrissey in her poem, “bullets and drugs” are the daily global reality of the inhabitants of impoverished regions all over the world. The female voice admits:

There is only the precipice  
One hundred miles down  
Pilling up with apartment blocks,  
Bullets and drugs –

(TWFIV 24)

As demonstrated in Morrissey’s “The World is Not Round,” the fact that slum districts continue to exist testifies to the indifference of the developed and affluent parts of society. The alliterated phrase “the **F**all that the sailors / **F**ailed to **f**eel” echoes sadly the word “**f**aith,” or rather the lack thereof. The poem concludes:

The Fall that the sailors  
Failed to feel  
As Columbus set faith  
On the skyline

(TWFIV 24)

Whether one is willing to admit it or not, the cliché that violence breeds violence appears to be built on the solid ground. That is why even a protest against violence might assume the form of deadly self-annihilation, as depicted in the poem “Bosnia.” Morrissey’s narrative is inspired by the self-immolation carried out in front of Westminster palace in protest at the world’s indifference towards the Bosnian war. Referring to him in the third person, the persona in

“Bosnia” does not mention the protestor’s name, which makes the political declaration more universal. She recalls:

He went up like a Roman candle and shocked all the wrong people.  
The emotional ones, who thought it meant giving a damn,  
Cried into their breakfasts. And then whatever light  
His singed features sparked off in the world went out.  
(TWFIV 23)

In “Bosnia,” the poem’s first simile (“like a Roman candle”) appears to have clear political and religious undertones, criticising the passivity of the church and the world’s diplomatic leaders in failing to put an end to the violent massacre. The second part of the first line (“shocked all the wrong people”) undermines the very effectiveness of the man’s self-destructive act. Morrissey’s speaker seems to argue that his self-annihilating sacrifice will touch only those who care anyway and will leave the warmongers indifferent. The phrase about the people who “Cried into their breakfasts” depicts the violent suicidal death as a one-day breaking news item about which ordinary citizens read in the morning papers and, then, soon forget. One might further doubt whether the man’s literally fiery protest could ever illuminate the global human conscience and be a spark of hope for the civilians dying in Bosnia. It is true that the Western world is forced to take immediate notice of the Westminster protest, and it does succeed in reminding people of the bloodshed in Bosnia that they would rather not think about. However it is unlikely that there will be any long-term political changes triggered by the protestor’s desperate act. Even when confronted with the news coverage, one can still avert one’s eyes and pretend not to notice the casualties or atrocities, as did the watching crowd “on the Westminster lawn” (“They wouldn’t stop him, burning fingers and faces; that they’d allow”). The persona in “Bosnia” comments:

A short circuit overloading on murder reports and war,  
He ignited in open air, his own apotheosis. He knew  
They wouldn’t stop him, burning fingers and faces; that they’d allow  
His flame of protest to dance on the Westminster lawn.  
(TWFIV 23)

As with the whole volume *There Was Fire in Vancouver*, “Bosnia” draws upon multiple images of fire (“his singed features sparked off, a short circuit, he ignited in open air, burning fingers and faces, his flame of protest to dance”). The fact that nobody has stopped the protesting man from setting fire to himself (compare “He knew / They wouldn’t stop him”) becomes a bitter expression of human callousness to any violence and wars that do not threaten one’s own immediate homes and families. The female voice in “Bosnia” compares the martyr’s deed to “his own apotheosis,” which does not seem an overstatement as the man died to save the lives of others. Apart from its literal meaning, the phrase “burning fingers and faces” signifies the burning issue being ignored by

the people in power. Morrissey's second volume *Between Here and There* (2002) constitutes a temporal and textual caesura after her debut collection (1996). In "In Belfast," the 2002 volume's opening poem the persona declares:

I have returned after ten years to a corner  
and tell myself it is as real to sleep here  
as the twenty other corners I have slept in.

(BHAT 13)

With regard to the cited above text, in her review of "The New North: Contemporary Poetry from Northern Ireland by Chris Agee," Heather Clark argues that "Sinéad Morrissey also engages in a dialogue with Derek Mahon in her poem 'In Belfast,' which brings Mahon's 'Afterlives' to mind. Like Allen's response to Mahon, Morrissey's poem, though melancholy, suggests more optimism about the speaker's relationship to home . . . Morrissey's speaker is more hopeful. Belfast, after time away, seems 'more real' than the other places the speaker has lived in precisely because of its past, or 'history's dent fracture'" (233). What is more, in Morrissey's second collection, resulting from many years' absence, the persona's sharpened sense of observation makes her look at the familiar sights and issues afresh. It entails a new perspective on the problem of violence which is probed in *Between Here and There* (2002) from a world-traveller's perspective and which is elaborated further in Morrissey's third collection *The State of the Prisons* (2005). One cannot but agree with Eibhlín Evans who claims that "Morrissey's writing strays across continents, poetic styles, themes, and concerns and gives the lie to those familiar accusations of limitation and confinement in women's writing" (472). Similarly, Parker notices that Morrissey's "attention switches increasingly to wider political concerns. Continuing violence in her home province was what haunted much of her first book *There Was Fire in Vancouver*; now in *The State of Prisons* we witness the scope of her vision ranging far beyond Ireland and its history to embrace the current international crisis" (*Northern Irish Literature* 228).

Included in *The State of the Prisons*, "Migraine" probes the global political intersections between power / powerlessness (of the state and the rebels) and violence (of the state and the rebels). On a narrative level, Morrissey's poem relates a historical account of Chechen partisans taking hostages from the audience of a Russian musical theatre. On a textual level, the title "migraine" refers to the bodily symptoms caused by the speaker's medical condition: impaired and blurred vision and splitting headache "filled with blood." In the same diagnostic vein, it could be argued that Morrissey's persona's excruciating pain might be attributed to an imbalance in the hormonal cycle. In addition, medically and politically, "migraine" is a side-effect of the combat gases that the theatre hostages were exposed to during the Russian soldiers' armed action. After the special forces attack, the survivors might have died in hospital for the lack of an effective antidote since the Russian authorities kept the gases' chemical composition secret. Bearing this in mind, when approached

metaphorically, “migraine” is the painful after-effect of a failed attempt to realise power via violence. Since “[t]he extreme form of power is All against One, the extreme form of violence is One against All” (Arendt, *On Violence* 42). Morrissey’s “Migraine” is not about the facts and figures. The knowledge of the historical context does not seem to help much in the poem’s interpretation.<sup>160</sup> Hence not only does the poem’s title operate on the intended discursive ambiguity but the whole narrative disorients one with the frustrating instability of multiple, not entirely credible, textual positions. Thus at first, a female speaker in “Migraine” appears to deliver her account as if from inside the theatre. Its discourse commences with the succinct, one-syllable, gun-fired idiom. The second line’s expressions are further reduced to single-noun equivalents (bolted below). In Morrissey’s poem, step by step, the adjectiveless, dry, reporter-like jargon begins to evolve into the dream-like, densely symbolic imagery (the underlined passage). The surreal trope of the face that has abandoned its owner’s body, releasing itself from its tyranny in the undulating movement, implies that in the overwhelming chaos that ultimately leads to violence (“weeping gunshot”) things are getting out of control. Progressively, via the alliterated expressions (“**cheekbone cracked**”) menace establishes itself in the discourse for good. The speaker in “Migraine” begins her narrative:

It wasn’t long before my vision blurred.

**The shock. The chocolate. The thirst.**

**Eight hours in.** The leader’s face went slack  
from the left side, as though his cheekbone cracked  
and slithered free of him, weeping gunshot.

(TSOTP 44)

Over a period of time, the speaking voice appears to take shape as a migraine experiencer (see “my cross, my cleansing, / my monthly reckoning, / my migraine time rolled round”). Locked in her anguish, the woman suffers alone in darkness, perceiving her textual position as being even more deplorable than that of the Russian theatre hostages. What is more, Morrissey’s persona perceives her condition as unstoppable with no hope of recovery or aid from anybody else. Paradoxical as it may seem, the desolate speaker seems to envy the Russian hostages, regarding their critical situation as temporary and her own as chronic. In view of that, she comments on her own irredeemable state: “Not liberation – no special forces falling from the ceiling.” Studying the woman’s affective narrative, one cannot help pondering if the aforementioned analogy is truly appropriate and if her dramatic account may not be somewhat overstated.

<sup>160</sup> Elucidating the historical background for the events depicted in “Migraine” Parker tells us that:

The poem revisits the tragic events of 23–26 October 2002, when 900 Russians were taken hostage in a Moscow theatre by a group of 40 Chechen terrorists, half of them women. It is voiced by one of the female survivors of the siege, which ended when ‘special forces’ (44) released a deadly gas in the theatre killing 129 of the hostages. (*Northern Irish Literature* 229)

Nonetheless the repeated, parallel structures (“my cleansing, / my monthly reckoning, / my migraine time rolled round”) aptly render the ambience of the confining, vicious circle inside of which the female speaker feels trapped. The persona in “Migraine” recalls:

Then a tangle of darkness like a Rorschach blot  
 where his expression had been, opening inward . . .  
 I knew what it was once the starlight started.  
 Not liberation – no special forces falling from the ceiling.  
 This was my cross, my cleansing,  
 my monthly reckoning,  
 my migraine time rolled round  
 again, to take me overt and close me down.

(TSOTP 44)

As demonstrated, the standpoints of a migraine sufferer and an eye-witness Russian hostage are textually merged and deliberately (con)fuscated. However the composition of this blend varies throughout the narrative, depending on whose perspective appears to prevail in the passage. Any crude generalisations fail to grasp the minute shifts in the speaking positions in “Migraine” and arising from them the text’s own heteroglossia. For instance, Morrissey’s poem’s opening contains the painstaking details of an inner angle speaking position (the number of the aisle, arrangements of the explosive substances, etc.). The perspective then becomes blurred: a severe aversion to light (the bolted line) could indicate both migraine and/or the acute fear of the Russian hostages that they may be blown up. Following this line of thinking in “Migraine” both of these statements could have been uttered by either a Moscow theatre insider and / or an outsider. The female voice observes:

The piled explosives by the fifteenth aisle  
 looked eaten with flame, but shimmeringly so, while  
 dying fires pulsed off and on along the stage  
 as though the threads of things had frayed  
**to let the light through. My awful light. Light in the wrong place.**  
 Like the sun at midnight or blood on the moon’s face.

(TSOTP 44)

What is more in “Migraine” the details of the speaker’s personal agony (“eleven when it first descended”) are accompanied by the global features of political entropy. The passage about “planes hitting runways” evokes blatant associations with the September 11<sup>th</sup> terrorist attacks. On the whole, the disintegrating world and its afflicted inhabitants are united in an involuntary spasm (“to see the whole world punctured from behind? / Pain was payment afterwards”). The persona in “Migraine” confesses:

Eleven when it first descended. Had I gone blind  
 to see the whole world punctured from behind?  
 Pain was payment afterwards. It fell in blows –



planes hitting runways, slapstick pianos  
 crashing down stairs or hurtling out of windows.  
 (TSOTP 44)

As Morrissey's poem progresses, the speaking voice tends to sound more like a petrified (compare "ossify") panic-stricken hostage ("insular"), trying to disassociate herself from the overwhelming terror. The comparison with the animal implies that the place of the human dignity has been taken over by the instinctual need to survive.<sup>161</sup> Referring to totalitarian forms of rule, Arendt emphasises that "the totality of human life is claimed to be so totally politicized that under them there is no longer any freedom whatsoever" (*The Promise* 108).<sup>162</sup> The female voice in "Migraine" admits dramatically:

I learned to turn to the wall. To strain to be empty.  
 To be animal and insular in sickness. To ossify.  
 To reckon blessings on my fingers as I wept.  
 (TSOTP 44)

As argued in "Migraine," "[i]f freedom may well appear as the condition for the exercise of power" (Foucault, "The Subject" 342), then "to be unfree is to be unable, where the constraint on the ability is considered to be particularly demeaning to the actor's self-respect" (Morris 119). With this in mind, one has to realise that behind the violent performance, there usually lies a hidden truth of years of domination, humiliation and deprivation,<sup>163</sup> as was the case related in "Migraine." When juxtaposed with the military and political power of the Russian arsenal, territorially and diplomatically insignificant Chechnya does not stand much chance in a direct military confrontation. In other words, in Morrissey's narrative, the violent spectacle appears to act out the terror, helplessness and powerless that civilians in Chechnya experience daily. It happens because

. . . totalitarian rule . . . is not satisfied with intimidating individuals at home but also uses systematic terror to destroy all inter-human relationships. This terror finds its equivalent in total war, which is not satisfied with destroying strategically important targets, but sets out to destroy – because it now technologically can seek to destroy – the entire world that has arisen between human beings. (Arendt, *The Promise* 162)

---

<sup>161</sup> In Arendt's words, "[t]yrannical power is defined by tradition as arbitrary power, and this originally signified a rule for which no account need be given, a rule that owes no one any responsibility" (*The Promise of* 78).

<sup>162</sup> Arendt claims that "[t]he idea that politics and freedom are bound together, making tyranny the worst of political governments and indeed antipolitical" (*The Promise* 120).

<sup>163</sup> Arendt reminds that "terror as an institutional device, consciously employed to accelerate the momentum of revolution, was unknown prior to the Russian Revolution" (*On Revolution* 90). Nonetheless, since then it has been employed all too often.

Hence on a textual level, Morrissey's poem appears to depict the staged power play in the theatre of violence being performed as a spectacle rather than as a case of power actually being exercised. Consequently in "Migraine," power becomes replaced by the violent performance whose political goal is to attract the media's attention.

The theatrical imperatives that normally prevail in situations of domination produce a public transcript in close conformity with how the dominant group would wish to have things appear. The dominant never control the stage absolutely, but their wishes normally prevail. In the short run, it is in the interests of the subordinate to produce a more or less credible performance, speaking the lines and making the gestures he [*sic*] knows are expected of him. (James Scott qtd. in John Scott 21–22), emphasis original

As if referring to Morrissey's dilemmas, Arendt argues that although "[v]iolence does not promote causes, neither history nor revolution but; but it can serve to dramatize grievances and bring them to public attention" (*On Violence* 79). In "Migraine," by bringing their ordeal into the limelight with the forced participation of the Russian theatre audience, the Chechen rebels coerce the involuntary viewers in the performance to become active participants of the real-life tragedy. Ironically, through performing totalitarian intimidation, as proved in Morrissey's poem, the Chechen rebels are transformed as well, from victims into persecutors. In other words, violence alters all the agents that are involved in its performance. In their violent rebellion against totalitarianism, even the freedom fighters become the ardent followers of totalitarianism, since there is nothing as total and totalitarian as blind violence against the innocent.<sup>164</sup>

In contrast, the passage quoted below seems to be distant and uninvolved. To problematize the political matter further, the voice in "Migraine" is given to the Chechen war widows who remind the audience that "*there is a war, they said, somewhere off the map from where you are, / And we will bring it to you.*" In one key sentence, the Chechen women explain "in one's face" the reasons for their armed presence in the Russian theatre. However the rest of Morrissey's narrative is not delivered from their perspective. The wired with explosives Chechen war widows are rendered in the discourse without idealisation. In Morrissey's poem, the armed Chechen women themselves appear to be devoid of compassion ("their voices were slick with contempt for the hostages") and are eager at any cost to "splatter their message" in the media. The adjectives "padded and desperate" seem to reinforce (mock?) gender stereotypes, according to which goal-oriented women are always perceived as "desperate." In the utterance, the war widows are depicted as focused entirely on their political aim:

<sup>164</sup> "What makes totalitarianism truly new and terrifying is not its denial of freedom or the claim that freedom is neither good nor necessary for humankind, but rather the notion that human freedom must be sacrificed to historical development, a process that can be impeded only when human beings act and interact in freedom. This view is shared by all specifically ideological political movements" (Arendt, *The Promise* 120).

The half who were women were padded and desperate.  
 Their voices were slick with contempt for the hostages  
 and lust for an ending that would splatter their message  
 from newsstands of Moscow to the gun slums of Washington.  
 Their faces were veiled in black. Their hurt souls shone.  
*There is a war, they said, somewhere off the map from where you are,*  
*and we will bring it to you.* Horror poured out in a glittering theatre,  
 and held there. . . .

(TSOTP 44)

In “Migraine,” the Chechen women’s outfits make them resemble orthodox religious fanatics (“their faces were veiled in black”). They are wearing the colour of mourning because the female rebels are recruited from the women whose beloved ones have been killed by the Russians. In their (self) destructive mission, the suicidal widows seem to follow the ideology questioned by Arendt, according to which “human freedom must be sacrificed to historical development” (*The Promise* 120). In the name of that ideology, the Chechen war widows are willing to sacrifice their own lives. The fact that they are prepared to sacrifice as much (or have as little to lose) as their own lives becomes their own sole defiance. It is only in one laconic sentence (“Their hurt souls shone”) that Morrissey’s speaker pays tribute to the women’s loss and their suffering, questioning their failed (sacrificial) empowerment. The speaker in “Migraine” continues:

. . . The revolution glimpsed through fire and ash.  
 The love interest. Songs to sing in the bath,  
 afterwards. We were fed confectionary from the interval kiosk  
 which made my body bloom. Water was scarce.  
 Talk was policed.  
 Russia’s first musical had its throat sliced.

(TSOTP 44–45)

To demonstrate that this forgotten by the world, “*somewhere off the map*” war affects mostly civilians, filled with music fans Moscow theatre gets transformed into war-ridden Chechnya. As a result, the Russian audience is forced to feel what it is like to live in a state of constant warfare. In this violent war theatre, people’s actions are restrained and their life is in constant danger; one’s biological survival depends upon others’ will. The alarmed speaker in “Migraine” comments: “we were fed confectionary from the interval kiosk / which made my body bloom. Water was scarce. Talk was policed.” In “Migraine,” the binary opposition between victim and oppressor seems to be no longer valid. The modifier “hurt” defines all the agents in the narrative: the Chechen women wearing the belts of explosives, the male Chechen fighters, the hostages from the Russian musical audience and the speaker with the migraine. That is why in ACT II (after the attack), the persona tends to voluntarily assume the position of a hostage. The juxtaposition of the love musical staged in Russia and the real-life horror adds a meta-fictional drama to the related scene.

Additionally, Morrissey's speaker's personal details ("the bomber / from the war of my grandfather") become fused with the symptoms of the migraine ("my head was filling with blood like a black pudding") and with the suffering of both the agents and experiencers. The female voice in "Migraine" relates:

. . . Act II. They stormed the stage yelling  
*Allahu Akbar*. And now I was blinded by lighting  
 while my head was filling with blood like a black pudding.  
 I came for the stage effects: the bomber  
 from the war of my grandfather  
 falling out of the sky. . . .

(TSOTP 44)

All things considered, Morrissey's poem seems to suggest that the Chechens in the besieged Russian theatre might have had the armed resources of power but as Lukes (70) warns us when writing about the Americans in Iraq and Vietnam, "having the means of power is not the same as being powerful" (Lukes 70). It is not power but the lack of power that has brought Chechens to violence. Looked at from a different angle, and by referring to Arendt's writing, it could be argued that violence and power are mutually exclusive categories because violence can induce only obedience not empowerment.

Power and violence are opposites; where the one rules absolutely, the other is absent. Violence appears where power is in jeopardy, but left to its own course it ends in power's disappearance . . . . Violence can destroy power; it is utterly incapable of creating it . . . . By this, I do not mean to equate violence with evil; I only want to stress that violence cannot be derived from its opposite, which is power. (Arendt, *On Violence* 56)

Thus although "[c]onditions of resistance set in play by circumstances of power can certainly challenge relations of authority, subverting apparatuses of control and calling certain modes of knowledge and truth into question" (Hook 90),<sup>165</sup> one would like to believe there are other (non-violent) means of challenging the "fixity" of the Russian power in Chechnya. Nonetheless,

The possibility for resistance is thus an elementary condition, for Foucault, of every conceivable relation of power. He is categorical in this respect: power-relations remain ever fraught with resistance; there is always a strategic possibility for loosening the hold of a given relation of control. More than this, Foucault (1982) also maintains that resistance is a *necessary precondition* for the operation of power: there can be no power without resistance. In a strictly logical sense this must be so, he insists, resistance must be a precondition of power: without such forms of contestation and struggle there would be only complete domination, subservience and obedience. (Hook 84), emphasis original

<sup>165</sup> See Hook on his explanation of mutual co-relations between power and resistance (90).

In conclusion, the only empowerment in Morrissey's poem arises from destabilising the speaking positions of an insider / outsider / victim / oppressor and avoiding value judgments. Such a strategy shows that power relations themselves "are not inevitable, unchanging, unalterable" (Faith 45). Considering the above, the key textual question with regard to "Migraine's" interpretation remains establishing what determines Morrissey's persona's speaking standpoint. In other words, the confused reader seems to be intentionally misled as to whether the depicted events are narrated from the inner perspective of a theatre hostage, an empathic outsider who identifies herself with the captured hostages, a political observer who condemns the systemic and lasting oppression of Chechen civilians by the Russian armed occupation, a political observer who disapproves of Chechen's armed terrorist attack, a sufferer of chronic migraine pain who communicates the experience of her affliction to the world via analogies. As shown, in Morrissey's narrative, the speaking positions shift so many times that a textual merger of an inner and outer perspective cannot be ruled out. Politically, the double edge of totalitarianism "is accomplished by means of coercive terror applied from outside and coercive ideological thinking unleashed from within – a form of thinking that joins the current of history and becomes, as it were, an intrinsic part of it" (Arendt, *The Promise* 121). With regard to the aforementioned strategy, one cannot overlook the critics' differing reactions to the narrator's unspecified standpoint. Some, like Topping, are capable of appreciating Morrissey's textual intention, admitting with praise that:

What Morrissey has always excelled at is the blending of personal concerns with those in the public sphere, one never overwhelming the other. For example she deals with the horror of the Moscow theatre siege through her description of the searing and uncontrollable pain of a victim's migraine: (26)

Correspondingly, analysing Morrissey's works, Claire Connolly observes that the poem "Advice" "brings the political realities of severed states to bear upon the business of literary value" (116). As in "Migraine," "Advice" seems to fuse all in one: "Ugliness, lines, the body in pain" (Connolly 116). Similarly, Sampson in her *Irish Times* review of *The State of the Prisons* (2005) argues that "*Migraine* inhabits the horror of the Moscow theatre siege with a double-vividness:" ("Collections Connecting" 11). The reviewer extends this assumption to the whole collection which, according to her, "debunks the comfort of the Western liberal consensus. And this dangerous quietness works as an intensifier throughout the book" (Sampson, "Collections Connecting" 11). Consequently, she defines *The State of the Prisons* as "[f]ull of risks rendered invisible because fully achieved, this necessary book affords proof that a truer, more far-sighted poetics persists" (Sampson, "Collections Connecting" 11). Other critics tend to interpret Morrissey's work in terms of "tackling more recent history," elaborating it further: "In 'Migraine' she places the narrator inside the Moscow theatre siege and gives her a debilitating migraine through which to describe it. The fractured reality that results strongly conveys the shock of

experiencing events which were previously inconceivable” (Phillips 74). Nonetheless such a “literal” approach appears to overlook the blurred-voices complexity of Morrissey’s polyvocal text. What is more, it seems unfair to the poet to apply to her writing a reductive, gender-clichéd reading, as done by David Butler:

Indeed, quite often in this collection, the poet’s anxieties are laid bare. Although one would hesitate to label Morrissey a confessional poet, her occasional tendency to meld history, travel and politics with the corporeal and biographical is consistent with the practice of a number of contemporary women poets to whom the term has applied. In the poem ‘Migraine’, there is a curious fusion between this disabling condition and the bloody siege of Moscow theatre. (“Consolations of Observation” 105)

It appears that what might give more insight into “Migraine’s” interpretation is Faith’s reading of Foucault, namely: “a multiplicity of points of resistance” (45), reminding one that “resistance, like power, is not static, monolithic or chronological; there is no one resistance, but rather infinite multiplicities of strategic resistances” (Faith 57). Hence “[r]esistance to power is resistance to specific strategies by which power relations are patterned” (Faith 58). She claims that

Foucault emphasizes the ‘relational character’ of power, whose ‘existence depends on a multiplicity of points of resistance’ (Foucault, 1980b: 95) . . . . Like power, resistance is not a homogenous, fixed phenomenon: it is pluralized, ‘diverse in form, heterogeneous, mobile, transitory’ (Cousins and Hussain, 1984: 242). Power relations, thus, are not inevitable, unchanging, unaltered. (Faith 45)

To sum up: as demonstrated in “Migraine,” violence will never be able to replace power.<sup>166</sup> It happens because “Out of this general powerlessness, fear arises, and from this fear come both the will of the tyrant to subdue all others and the preparation of his subjects to endure domination” (Arendt, *The Promise* 69). Like “Migraine,” the poem “The Wound Man” renders the disorienting experience of being the audience in the theatre of **unimaginable** violence. The bolted adjective **unimaginable** employed in the poem in question (see “The **unimaginable** collapse”) aptly renders the aura accompanying the aforementioned terrorist attack. Dedicated to Federico Garcia Lorca and also included in *The State of the Prisons* “The Wound Man” is inspired by the September 11<sup>th</sup> terrorist attacks. Topping claims that “In ‘Wound Man’, Morrissey’s 9/11 poem, America is figured as a wounded giant stalking angrily through the streets” (26). In “The Wound Man,” Morrissey “alludes to Lorca’s *Poet in New York*, looking back at the poet in the city at the time of the Wall Street crash and then fast-forwarding to the collapse of the twin-towers” (Phillips 74).

<sup>166</sup> On the whole, “[t]yrannies are doomed because they destroy the togetherness of men: by isolating men from one another they seek to destroy human plurality” (Arendt, *The Promise* 69).

Even watching the images of destruction on their television screens, viewers all over the world found it difficult to believe that it was actually taking place in real life. The poem's very first sentence implies that the broadcast of the September 11<sup>th</sup> was perceived by people as a media simulacrum, repeated on television so many times that it had almost become a surreal performance "a kind of action replay, / only worse." The expression "collapse, crashed and unleashed, the world went down" shows the end of the world as most people knew it up to that point. The symbolic phrase "white handkerchiefs" evokes overt associations with the signifiers of surrender and defeat. The persona in "The Wound Man" declares:

It would have been a kind of action replay,  
only worse. The white handkerchiefs.  
The unimaginable collapse. The day  
the markets crashed and unleashed  
unknowing through the New York streets  
(TSOTP 37)

In Morrissey's "The Wound Man," the outburst of emotions that followed the dramatic event is appropriately captured as frenzied (see "hysterical laughter") and uncontrollable. In the poem, disorientation (see "saw you transfixed") left people immobilised with shock and fear. The expression "thudded over" might refer to the agitation calming down but it might also refer to the sound of the Twin Towers collapsing. To avoid looking at the burning buildings and people dying, the persona in "The Wound Man" distances herself from the witnessed horror by zooming in on "the reflections of clouds in the skyscrapers." From this perspective ("All hope in the gutter, blooded and lost"), the blazing light has come to denote not the enlightened life but death in flames ("the glittering rings of the suicides"). The female voice in "The Wound Man" recalls:

saw you transfixed, a witness in Times Square,  
as the world went down in hysterical laughter  
and diminishing shrieks. Then thudded over.  
All hope in the gutter, blooded and lost. How you loathed  
the reflections of clouds in the skyscrapers  
  
and the glittering rings of the suicides.  
It was all one in New York: manacled roses, oil on the Hudson,  
financial devastation. . . .  
(TSOTP 37)

Trying to find an objective correlative corresponding to the **unimaginable** situation, the female voice in "The Wound Man" draws upon the shackled flowers and the contaminated river. Having abandoned the terrorist-stricken reality, Morrissey's speaker directs her speech to Lorca, as if asking him to explain what seems beyond any human logic. In the article "Consolations of Observation" Butler notices that:

In this disturbing poem, Morrissey addresses the ghost of Lorca whose *Poeta en Nueva York* was written during an unhappy sojourn in the city at the time of the Wall Street crash. She parallels 'The white handkerchiefs. / The unimaginable collapse. The day / the markets crashed and unleashed / unknowing through the New York streets' and wonders what Lorca would make of the 2001 'action replay'. The poem finishes with her own Goya-like foreboding of the wound giant of the title 'Strong. / Loose in the world. And out of proportion.' (105–106)

In "The Wound Man," a series of the rhetorical questions uttered to Lorca bears testimony to the speaker's state of mind. The female voice in the examined text cannot overcome the acute sense of powerlessness that stems from the observed events. She inquires:

... Had you survived,  
Federico, say, Franco's henchmen,  
or the war that was to open like a demon from his person,

or the later war, all the intervening years  
between the fall of faith and this, what would you think?  
Would you know what has happened here,  
the way we do not know what has happened? Where  
would your fury go? We shiver on the brink

(TSOTP 37)

Finally, the poetic affinity with Lorca induces in Morrissey's speaker a symbolic vision encompassing the previously inarticulate, disorienting sensations. The tragedy's visual signifier assumes the figure of the mythical Wound Man, despotic ("imperious") and arrogant ("surlly"), seriously injured yet still built to last ("sturdy and impossible. Strong"). On account of his disrespectful insolence, he evokes no pity. On the other hand, if he does have any awe inspiring quality, it is due to his virile destructive energy rather than his cultured character. The speaker in "The Wound Man" talks

of an ending, and a war stretches in front of us,  
we stand where you stood. As for me,  
I see the Wound Man walking, tall and imperious,  
Through the streets of America, surly  
and muscular, from the textbook of Paracelsus.

(TSOTP 37)

In Morrissey's poem what makes the post-September 11<sup>th</sup> picture less clear-cut is the ambiguous representation of the Wound Man's enemies. Unlike the noble protectors of the innocent, they do not evoke any sympathy either. Being intentionally cruel and causing the Wound Man unnecessary pain, his opponents do not want to simply conquer him; they want to make him suffer. Due to their excessive viciousness, the Wound Man is transformed from an authoritarian and pompous bully into a helpless victim. Paradoxically, by becoming powerless and representing a lost cause, he is viewed as being more human. In other words,



through his suffering, the Wound Man is attributed with the human features that he seems to have been devoid of previously. Unexpectedly, the merciless attack upon him reveals his best side: persistence and the will to fight back in a no-win situation. In her review of Morrissey's *The State of the Prisons* entitled "Criminal Records," Janet Philips argues that "envisioning the Wound Man (an early medical diagram of a man studded with a variety of weapons and the wounds they inflict) stalking the streets of America . . . is . . . a nightmarish image that powerfully evokes the sense of something huge and bleak having been unleashed" (74). The speaker in "The Wound Man" comments:

He's been badly hit. There are weapons through every part of him.  
 A knife in the cheek; an arrow in the thigh;  
 someone has severed his wrist bone, on a whim,  
 and thrust a sword into his eye.  
 They've flung razors at his flesh to pass the time.

(TSOTP 37)

Ironic as it may seem, "The Wound Man" ends with the implied admiration for the invincible warrior who fights to the end. However there is also a hint of warning that the Wound Man will rise from his ashes even more powerful than before, having no limits and being "And out of proportion" (TSOTP 37). "And yet he rears. Sturdy and impossible. Strong. / Loose in the world" (TSOTP 37). Symbolically, Morrissey's poem skilfully captures the dangerous mechanism of creating fanatical martyrs who are admired because of their sacrificial deaths. The violence that terrorists or tyrants employ unscrupulously when turned against them, transforms them from oppressors into victims. Seeing them overcome with a more potent power, people tend to feel compassion for them that they may not deserve. As demonstrated, the manipulation is frequently a part of the calculations made in the whole theatre of violence, as its perpetrators are fully aware that in controlling and influencing people's sympathy or rage, violence will never cease. What is worth noticing is the fact that the abuse of political power tends to be frequently intertwined with gender violence against women. In Morrissey's poem "Flight" (taken from the same 2005 collection), for her political (Royalist) views, the female speaker is made to wear branks and dragged through the English streets. Philips stresses that the persona's dramatic monologue is "the urgent voice of a woman who has been publicly gagged" (73). In "Justice Marries Humanity," Nick Topping writes about Morrissey's poem:

'Flight' describes the plight of a woman living in the midst of the English Civil War, she has been forced to wear a brank (or scold's bridle) by her husband. It was a shocking instrument, a sort of iron cage, which covered the entire head, with a spiked or flat tongue of iron that was placed in the mouth over the tongue. Hence if the offender spoke she was cruelly hurt. They were employed to on women who talked too much. (26)

Reviewing the collection, Topping argues that *The State of the Prisons* “opens with a poem about one of the cruellest and most demeaning examples of justice without humanity one is ever likely to come across” (26). As argued by other critics, “Flight” puts forward the collection’s own theme, “dealing with forms of imprisonment” (Butler, “Consolations of Observation” 105), together with a full spectrum of physical, emotional and political violence implied in it, since “common themes such as imprisonment, absence and violence give the collection a degree of unity,” with “heterogeneity in style and tone . . . [and] experimenting with voices” (Butler 106). Very much along these lines, Topping argues that in her 2005 volume, “Morrissey explores various states of confinement and silence here . . . the prison of the human body itself, the pervasive shackles of memory and childhood, the constraints of simply being in the world” (26), not mentioning the more direct constraint of incarceration. Morrissey’s “Flight” and the title poem “The State of the Prisons” stress that “[p]rison continues, on those who are entrusted to it, a work begun elsewhere, which the whole society pursues on each individual through innumerable mechanisms of discipline” (Foucault qtd. in Hook 41). At the outset, “Flight” commences with a passage taken from the seventeenth century publication *England’s Grievances Discovered*:

*There he saw one Anne Bridlestone drove through the streets by an officer of the same corporation, holding a rope in his hand, the other end fastened to an engine called the branks, which is like a crown, being of iron with a great gag or tongue of iron; and that is the punishment which magistrates do inflict upon chiding and scolding women; and he hath often seen like done to others.*

*England’s Grievance Discovered* (1655)

(TSOTP 9)

As shown, Anne Bridlestone, the female voice of “Flight” is disciplined with an iron crown which was in those times an established punitive procedure imposed by the representatives of power upon free-thinking and disobedient women. Hook explains that “This is a highly violent and demonstrative form of power . . . the body of the criminal had to be attacked, tortured, often dismembered or mutilated in a symbolic display of the sovereign’s power” (9). In other words,

The concept of asymmetric power, or power as *potestas*, or ‘power over’, is, therefore, a sub-concept or version of the concept of power as *potentia*: it is the ability to have another or others *in your power* . . . to effect . . . subordination, subjugation, control, conformism, acquiescence and docility. (Lukes 74), emphasis original

Unlike in the cited passage from *England’s Grievances*, in Morrissey’s poem, the disciplinary violence is not executed only by a state officer. In “Flight,” Anne Bridlestone’s punishment entails two kinds of patriarchal power over women: the public, politically state-justified coercion and the private, family-sanctioned force of a brutal husband. In *The Subjection of Women* (1869), Mill

highlights that “the wife is the actual bondservant of her husband: no less so, as far as legal obligation goes, than slaves commonly so called. She vows a lifelong obedience to him at the altar, and is held to it through her life by law . . . however brutal a tyrant she may unfortunately be chained to” (165–166). In line with this, Merchant explains how political and economic changes in England in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries affected the situation of women:

Women were subject to the authority of the father and were unfit for public affairs. Female rulers like Mary, Queen of Scots, and Elizabeth I of England had overturned the natural order. Succession to the throne should descend through the male line, since nature had deprived women of “strength, foresight, pugnacity, [and] authority.” (75)

As argued in Morrissey’s “Flight,” it is the woman’s husband who chastised her in public. The usage of the word **bridle** would re-emerge in John Knox’s work in *The First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women* (1558).

Knox held that, since flesh is subordinate to spirit, a woman’s place is beneath man’s. The laws of nature ordain that men should command women: “The order of God’s creation” and “the light of nature” dictate against women’s rule, for it subverts “good order.” Women’s role, according to Knox, was that of obedient servant. Since a woman was physically weaker than a man, her place was below his. Women were given to “natural weakness” and “inordinate appetites.” If a woman was presumptuous enough to rise above a man, she must be “repressed and **bridled**.” (Merchant 145), emphasis added

Morrissey’s poem does not give much insight into the bridling spouse’s motivation. Apart from the short passage: “my husband desires a sign,” there is a hint about his reading of *Revelation*. Moreover it remains unclear whether Anne’s husband wishes to punish her on account of her political (religious?) beliefs, assuming the role of a censor because her Royalist and Catholic sympathies were forbidden at that time. In either case, what remains clear is that he does everything to silence the woman he married. At first Anne’s husband seems to have succeeded in his aim. The subjugated woman admits: “1651: / The Year of Our Lord that my husband bridled me / And I have learned to hold my tongue in company.” However the third stanza proves that despite the violence exerted on her, Morrissey’s persona refuses to comply even when the intensity of the torture applied to her increases (“the jaw-straps tighten”). The physical pain is then intensified by public humiliation and social stigma. The poem ends with the behavioural passage: “My husband leads me through the marketplace / As the village women gape.”

As argued, the speaking voice in “Flight” belongs to a woman declaring her Royalist sympathies during Cromwell’s Protectorate. This is how Topping elucidates the historical context for the poem: “Morrissey writes in the voice of one such woman who has dared to speak out in support of Charles II after his defeat in and ‘miraculous’ flight from the battle of Worcester. Her (presumably

Parliamentarian) husband leads her bridled through the local marketplace as punishment” (26). However despite the sincerity of her political beliefs, Morrissey's speaker's own standpoint seems to be problematic for at least three reasons. Historically, the period roughly comprising the reign of James I till James II remains a time of political despotism. Extending his absolute power, James I “enlarged the patriarchal authority of the head of the kingdom” (Merchant 75) and successive monarchs did everything they could to strengthen Royal authority at the expense of citizens' rights.<sup>167</sup> The second reason concerns gender issues: during the time of James I and his successors, women's rights were severely restricted. It is James I who actively “supported antifeminist and antiwitchcraft legislation” (Merchant 165).<sup>168</sup>

The third reason why the persona's standpoint might be viewed as controversial concerns the speaker's slavish commitment to the king in exile. The three stanzas in which Morrissey's persona relates her Royalist allegiance are full of naïve, idealised projections where the regal family is portrayed as the embodiment of beauty, truth, goodness and virtue. In this vein, the female voice in “Flight” always addresses the monarch in capital letters (“our blessed Martyr,” “natural unto Him, But how He was loved!,” “His skin,” “His face,” “heaven admits . . . Him,” “my love of Him,” “against Him,” “it is Him” etc.). Drawing upon the works of Aristotle, St. Thomas Aquinas, John of Salisbury, and Plutarch, the established view of that time was that “monarchy . . . derived its authority by divine right from God and distributed that authority to the various social estates through civil law. The medieval sovereign represented God in the temporal realm; the church his will in the spiritual realm” (Merchant 72). Consequently, the speaker in “Flight” delivers her first person narrative in the same staunch mode:

He could not remain unrecognised for long,  
Majesty being so natural unto Him,  
It soon shone forth. But how He was loved!  
He walked upon the bones of England,  
Sought solace at farms and hid in the crowns of trees  
And all of nature shadowed Him. His enemies  
Sifted the land and still His face was not revealed.  
It is my love of Him bleeds when I speak out loud.

(TSOTP 9)

The roots of Morrissey's persona's nearly amorous devotion to the exiled monarch are highlighted in *Subjection of Women* (1869): “Men do not want

<sup>167</sup> Before being executed, Charles's I argument with and his reign without Parliament (for eleven years) resulted in the Civil War. James II's rule led to the Glorious Revolution which placed William III of Orange on the throne.

<sup>168</sup> “In 1603, the first year of his English reign, James I replaced the milder witch laws of Elizabeth I, which evoked the death penalty only for killing by witchcraft, with a law that condemned to death all practitioners” (Merchant 168). According to Merchant “Combined modern statistics for several European countries indicate that of the total tried (some 100, 000), women comprised approximately eighty-three percent” (138).

solely the obedience of women, they want their sentiments . . . not a forced slave but a willing one, not a slave merely, but a favourite. They have therefore put everything in practice to enslave their minds. The masters of all other slaves rely for maintaining obedience, on fear: either fear of themselves or religious fears” (Mill 148). Hence in the light of the discourse of power, in Morrissey’s poem, Anne Bridlestone’s idealisation of the ruler might be interpreted as “false consciousness” [“*the power to mislead*” (Lukes 149), emphasis original], viewed as the “shaping of beliefs and desires” (Lukes 146) of women that are in conflict with their true interests (Lukes 136, 143–149). Morris defines false consciousness as “failing to utilize the power one has and failing to acquire powers that one can acquire” (94).<sup>169</sup> On the other hand, in Morrissey’s poem there is no apparent conflict of interests (Lukes 144, 123) between Anne Bridlestone’s principles and that of the worshipped Royalty, either in the case of the social class (the upper class milieu) or that of the religious doctrine (Catholicism).<sup>170</sup> The speaker in “Flight” recalls the king in exile as follows:

He has stood in a fall of rain  
 While Cromwell’s men sang psalms against Him  
 And did not venture in. He has seen women  
 Sink to their knees and then raise their hand in blessing.  
 My husband desires a sign.  
 But for all his reading of *Revelation*  
 I say heaven admits its own  
 And it is Him. The jaw-straps tighten.

(TSOTP 9)

The way the female voice in Morrissey’s poem narrates the king’s escape entails an element of magic and unshaken belief in the ruler’s almost supernatural abilities (“all of the nature shadowed Him / His enemies / His face was not revealed”). In the persona’s eyes, the king’s flight and his subsequent successful concealment become an evidence of divine miracles, acknowledged as such by his female followers. However the context of the narrative might become bitterly ironic if one realises that King Charles II’s only heroic deeds mean hiding in farms in servant’s or woodcutter’s clothes and running away to France. The persona in “Flight” declares:

After the murder of our blessèd Martyr,  
 After the slaughter of the rout at Worcester,  
 His son the rightful king went into hiding –

<sup>169</sup> Morris explains that it is “similar to false beliefs which prevent somebody realizing all her non-epistemic powers, in that both sorts of lack of knowledge lead her to choose inappropriate means to obtain the given end” (94).

<sup>170</sup> In agreement with the binding teaching, Merchant claims “[t]he man should function as the ruling intellectual head, while the woman is the body that assists him. Calvin’s ‘Commentary on the Book of Genesis’ stated: ‘The order of nature implies that the woman should be the helper of the man,’ and ‘She should study to keep this divinely appointed order.’ Eve’s punishment for her sin was to be cast into servitude and subjected to her husband’s authority and will” (146).

Here as a woodcutter, there as a serving-man –  
By the dye of the rotten walnuts. . . .

(TSOTP 9)

On the other hand, when examining closely the poem's structure, one can see that each Royal-centred passage culminates as an endnote with Anne Bridlestone's own suffering ["The jaw-straps tighten." "1651: / The Year of Our Lord that my husband bridled me / And I have learned to hold my tongue in company" (TSOTP 9) and "It is my love of Him bleeds when I speak out loud"]. Taking this into account, one might assume that Morrissey's persona could worship the king in exile as an emblem of powerlessness rather than power. This happens because "When a tyrant goes into exile, he goes with his abilities intact, but powerless. It is this arbitrary nature of power – arbitrary in the sense that it is not given in nature but it is created by us, and could be created differently – which gives it its importance" (Morris 46). If that is the case, the female voice in "Flight" could identify her oppression with that of the banned king. After all, idealised as her political sympathies may be, Morrissey's persona like everybody else has the right to hold her own beliefs. In the text's concluding part, the speaker in "Flight" assumes a different voice. In the previous stanzas, her idiom, grammatically and linguistically correct, could be characterised by the plain imagery and the exalted speech's higher registers. In contrast, the poem's final stanza astonishes one with the mature poetic language, much more restrained and abounding in alliteration and elaborate metaphoric expressions. The female voice in "Flight" concludes:

The changeling Prince vanished to France.  
Deadwinter dismembers us. Christmas consumes its own bright fire  
And blazes by its absence. There is too much law  
To live by, and I have torn my face  
In two by swallowing silence.  
My husband leads me through the marketplace  
As the village women gape.

(TSOTP 10)

The poem's ending is no longer organised around the narrated male (Royal) presence that structures Anne Bridlestone's speech. In other words, the female voice in "Flight" does not derive any more her empowerment from the imagined presence of the male authority. Therefore the king's absence leaves a space for Morrissey's speaker's own judgments. After the sovereign's escape to France, abandoned by her Monarch / Father / God, the persona in the examined poem frees herself from the illusion that her power has to be legitimised by a man. As a result, the representations of the king are no longer dominant in Anne Bridlestone's discourse. The ruler in exile appears to be an almost fairy-like ghost that has vanished into the thin air. The sentiments for him are no longer the sole motivations for the persona's own actions and beliefs. What is more, the female voice in "Flight" for the first time uses the plural pronoun to refer to her situation. Namely, she draws strength from the power-with other people of the

similar political views. Thus Morrissey's persona identifies herself with some larger political community that was also "dismembered." Consequently, Anne Bridlestone's observations, based on realistic grounds, contain a political critique of the official system rather than projected naïve idealisations. The persona in Morrissey's poem observes rightly: "there is too much law/ to live by." The phrase "**Deadwinter** **dismembers** us" renders the decreasing number of the Royalist supporters. Morrissey's speaker's attempt to "swallow silence" results in her identity being split ("tearing her face into two"). Leading a life according to double standards evokes in her frustration and finally disobedience ("My husband leads me through the marketplace / as the village women gape"). The corporal punishment and the normalising gaze of the villagers (as Foucault would say) were both meant to subjugate disobedient woman. Commenting upon women's general situation in marriage, Mill argues that brutal husbands may:

. . . indulge the utmost habitual excesses of bodily violence towards the unhappy wife, who alone, at least of grown persons, can neither repel nor escape from their brutality; and towards whom the excess of dependence inspires their mean and savage natures, not with a generous forbearance, and a point of honour to behave well to one whose lot in life is trusted entirely to their kindness, but on the contrary with a notion that the law has delivered her to them as their thing, to be used at their pleasure, and that they are not expected to practise the consideration towards her which is required from them towards everybody else. (170)

Following this line of thinking, as if with regard to the analysed poem, Faith claims that it is through the female body that power (and violence) seems to be most exercised: "[t]his act of resisting incursions into the body may be conscious, thoughtful, deliberate and /or ideologically situated, or it may be a primitive act of survival. Whether or not a response of counterforce to power abuse is planned and intentional, it is within this realm of the body that the personal becomes political and the individual becomes the collectivity" (39). Once again with reference to the canonical *The Subjection of Women* (1869), one may gain an invaluable insight into the historical dimension of women's oppression:

. . . who desires power, desires it most over those who are nearest to him, with whom his life is passed, with whom he has most concerns in common, and in whom any independence of his authority is oftenest likely to interfere with his individual preferences . . . with no means of combining against him, no power of even locally overmastering him, and, on the other hand, with the strongest motives for seeking his favour and avoiding to give him offence. (143–144)

Taking all into consideration, "Flight's" subversive ending can signify Anne Bridlestone's resistance and not her compliance. Resistance manifests itself in the Royalist woman's conscious refusal to succumb to the imposed upon her rules with which she does not identify either as a person or as a citizen. Thus in Morrissey's poem, dragged through the streets and bridled woman may be

overcome by violence but she is not powerless. In "Flight," it is not being subjugated that constitutes Anne Bridlestone's identity but her resistance to the subduing conditions: "Foucault (1982) also maintains that resistance is a *necessary precondition* for the operation of relations of power: there can be no power without resistance" (Hook 84), emphasis original. In line with this Faith stresses that "[r]esistance is itself an exercise of power, as a projection of alternative truths" (53).

To use another metaphor, it consists in using this resistance as a chemical catalyst so as to bring to light power relations, locate their position, find out their point of view of application, and the methods used. Rather than analyzing power from the point of view of its internal rationality, it consists of analyzing power relations through the antagonism of strategies. (Foucault, "The Subject" 329)

As shown in Morrissey's poem, power ought not to be mistaken for violence, although they may happen to coincide. Foucault clarifies this as follows:

Obviously the establishing of power relations does not exclude the use of violence any more that it does the obtaining of consent; no doubt, the exercise of power can never do without one or the other, often both at the same time. But even though consent and violence are instruments or results, they do not constitute the principle or basic nature of power. ("The Subject" 340–341)

As argued at the beginning of this chapter, Foucault<sup>171</sup> makes a clear distinction between violence that "acts upon a body or upon things; it forces, it bends, it breaks, it destroys, or it closes off all possibilities" and power that "does not act directly and immediately upon others" ("The Subject" 340) and "operates on the field of possibilities in which the behavior of active subjects is able to inscribe itself" ("The Subject" 341). In other words,

Power is exercised only over free subjects, and only insofar as they are "free." By this we mean individual or collective subjects who are faced with a field of possibilities in which several kinds of conduct, several ways of reacting and modes of behavior are available . . . only when [one] has some possible mobility, even a chance of escape. (Foucault, "The Subject" 342)

In other words, Foucault seems to equate resistance with the inherent features of power. McLaren subscribes to this view in her claim that "For Foucault, resistance and power are co-implicated: 'in power relations there is necessarily the possibility of resistance, because if there were no possibility of resistance (of violent resistance, flight, deception, strategies capable of reversing the situation),

---

<sup>171</sup> In "Interview with Michel Foucault" conducted at the end of 1978, the philosopher admits: "When I study power relations . . . I'm very careful to get a grip on the actual mechanisms of the exercise of power; I do this cause those who are enmeshed, involved, in these power relations, in their actions, their resistance, their rebellion, escape them, transform them, in a word, cease being submissive" (294).



there would be no power relations at all' (Foucault 1997 c, 292). So long as there is power, there is freedom" (217–218). Taylor emphasises in the same vein that "[f]rom a Foucauldian perspective, power is not opposed to but in fact a condition for the possibility of freedom" (265). Likewise Hoy reminds us that: "the exercise of power will invariably meet with resistance, which is the manifestation of freedom" (qtd. in Spivak 156). Following Foucault, Faith advocates that "[p]ower relations, thus, are not inevitable, unchanging, unalterable" (45).

For, if it is true that at the heart of power relations and as a permanent condition of their existence there is an insubordination and a certain obstinacy on the part of the principles of freedom, then there is no relationship of power without **the means of escape or possible flight**. (Foucault, "The Subject" 346), emphasis added

The cited expressions "**means of escape**" or "**possible flight**" appear to be a non-accidental play upon Morrissey's poem's title. After all, Morrissey's text does seem to narrate the speaker's own "Flight" into the female political empowerment despite the failed attempt to constrain her (bridle) with the state power reinforced by domestic violence. In other words, in Morrissey's poetry, the narratives of violence remain as always more complicated than it might seem. To conclude, in "Flight" Anne Bridlestone's oppression represents a fusion of domestic, political, religious, gender violence against women.<sup>172</sup> If "power as domination is the ability to constrain the choices of others, coercing them or securing their compliance, by impeding them from living as their own nature and judgment dictate" (Lukes 85). Therefore although the element of coercion is conspicuous in "Flight," Morrissey's speaker's compliance remains superficial and temporary. What does not seem to change in the analysed poem is the persona's resistance against the oppressive forces. That is why the victory of the ruling governance, exerted by violence and supported by patriarchy is never fully realised. Politically, the contextual background in "Flight" encourages interesting divagations on the historical and cultural derivation of the term "revolution." "the word 'revolution' meant originally restoration, hence something which to us is its very opposite" (Arendt, *On Revolution* 33).<sup>173</sup>

---

<sup>172</sup> Critics usually tend to see the different kinds of oppression that Anne Bridlestone experiences as overlapping: "[h]er punishment is political, however, a consequence of her devotion to the fugitive's prince's cause, and rejection of her husband's authority" (Parker, *Northern Irish Literature* 229).

<sup>173</sup> Arendt reminds:

Thus, the word was first used not when what we call a revolution broke out in England and Cromwell rose to the first revolutionary dictatorship, but on the contrary, in 1660, after the overthrow of the Rump Parliament and at the occasion of the restoration of the monarchy. In precisely the same sense, the word was used in 1688, when the Stuarts were expelled and the kingly power was transferred to William and Mary. The 'Glorious Revolution', the event through which very paradoxically the term found its definite place in political

The titular and closing poem from the collection *The State of Prisons* probes the intersections between power, violence and ethics. In her reading of Foucault, O'Grady reminds us that "in his account of ancient ethics proper care of the self ensured the nonabuse of others, care for others nonetheless remained within the constraints of strict hierarchical relations" (105). Morrissey's volume *The State of Prisons* seems to show the evolution from the instances of domination, violence and resistance towards female political and personal empowerment and ethical care for others. The collection *The State of the Prisons* as highlighted by the author is named after the publication of John Howard's work (1777) under the same title. Topping comments upon the titular poem "The State of the Prisons:" "Another historical monologue, it is an astonishingly compressed and perfectly conceived life of Howard. One feels that everything pertinent has been included, all within the absurdly small confines of six pages. Howard is a prodigious traveller. He journeys through much of Europe comparing practices in different prisons. He is appalled by what he sees" (26). In addition, Bleakney affords an illuminating insight into the context of the poem in question. According to her, Morrissey spent "four weeks, at Hawthornden Castle – a monastic writer's retreat in Scotland. There, she wrote 'State of the Prisons', a long poem about the personal agonies of the eighteenth-century prison reformer, John Howard" ("Fortnight Interview: Poet In Residence" 13). Parker in *Northern Irish Literature: 1975–2006* distinguishes "State of the Prisons" as "the book's most ambitious piece" (229), praising the fact that "Morrissey replicates convincingly the vocabulary and cadences of eighteenth-century public discourse" (229). Other critics praise the poem's refined form: "'The State of the Prisons' is written in six-line stanzas with a strict rhyme scheme which Morrissey sustains over six pages. The form propels the narrative and her fluent recreation of the eighteenth-century voice of John Howard" (Philips 73). In "The State of the Prisons," Morrissey's narrative is delivered by an approaching death persona who is looking retrospectively upon his life. Nonetheless, Morrissey's choice of the poetic form is somehow double-edged and ironic:

The confessional, in short, must be seen as a crucial disciplinary instrument. As Butchart advances, this is a technique of intimate surveillance, 'through which the most confidential ideas and private secrets . . . are amplified to audibility and lifted into socio-medical spaces as devices of disciplinary subjectification' (1997, p. 107). (Hook 35)

The poem's past-oriented perspective abounds with the *post-factum* interpretations of the depicted events, enjoying fully the benefit of hindsight that the "here and now" agent could never have. As argued, the story of Morrissey's speaker's life assumes the function of the death-bed confession and the last will handed down "to posterity." The reformer of the English penitentiary system,

---

and historical language, was not thought of as a revolution at all, but as a restoration of monarchical power to its former righteousness and glory. (*On Revolution* 33)

John Howard (the persona in the examined poem) indicates that his ill son is his most eminent life achievement.<sup>174</sup> By this belated act of paternal recognition, the speaker in “The State of the Prisons” endeavours to compensate his offspring for the brutal methods of the boy’s upbringing and for the negligence of the son’s vital needs in his childhood. The emotional and physical violence exercised upon his young son, legitimised by the parental authority and the ethos for discipline, constitutes the most moving aspect of Morrissey’s narrative. In “The State of the Prisons,” the parent’s violence towards his own son is juxtaposed with Howard’s moral objections against keeping prisoners in inhumane conditions, which, according to him, constitutes an extension of the state power structures. Thus, Morrissey’s persona is deeply critical of the British judiciary system, allowing no justification for the state-sanctioned violence towards the convicted offenders. In retrospect, John Howard recounts the prisoners and their “long chains,” and “the stench of sweat and excrement” that followed them. One can notice the speaker’s abhorrence to the unethical treatment of prisoners even on the level of body language (“A muscle jerked,” “I was reeling back”).<sup>175</sup> As observed by Howard, the state executed viciousness begins with the indifference of the law to the prisons’ management. The speaker in “The State of the Prisons” records the judge’s callous reaction (“eminent, / Bored, ecclesiastical, inured to the stench,” “a nasaloid drone”) and his complete lack of interest in the convicts. According to the judge, the prisoners are not to be viewed as human beings, instead, they are more like cattle doomed to slaughter. In Morrissey’s poem, the metaphor of “darkness interminable” renders aptly Themis’s blindness to human misery. The subsequent passage sums it up as follows: “Justice sat asleep / In a rolled wig” (TSOTP 54). The speaker in “The State of the Prisons” records:

The prisoners entered, pulling on long chains  
 A muscle jerked in my thumb. The judge was eminent,  
 Bored, ecclesiastical, inured to the stench of sweat and excrement  
 That flowered where they stood. I was reeling back to a stone hole  
 A darkness interminable, as the felons’ crimes  
 Were pronounced against them in a nasaloid drone.  
 (TSOTP 54)

As argued in Morrissey’s poem, Howard seems to be appalled at the ill-treatment of the incarcerated criminals. Their wretched state evokes in the persona in “The State of the Prisons” not just pity but also outrage against the wrong being done to people in the name of the judicial system. The seemingly

---

<sup>174</sup> As observed by Hook with regard to “the humanist reformers, an era that begins at the end of the eighteenth century, with a series of protests against the inhumane excesses of the scaffold. Challenging the sovereign’s absolute prerogative in matters of punishment, the humanist reformers advocated an art of manipulating representations, a ‘curative’ or restorative economy of punishment” (11).

<sup>175</sup> For the reasons for humanistic reforms at the end of the eighteenth century see Hook’s polemic with Foucault (13).

naïve inquires issued by Howard aptly illustrate the violence administered to felons in those times. “‘The State of the Prisons’ works as a self-contained narrative – there is no overt attempt to link it with contemporary events, although the description of ‘shackles’ and the conditions in which prisoners were held inevitably brings them to mind” (Philips 73–74). The persona inquires:

When it was over, I barked six questions at the Crown officials.  
 Why are not they clean? Why so thin?  
 Why ill? Why are felons and debtors, women and men  
 Chained and tried together? Why, when chosen for release,  
 (TSOTP 54)

On the whole, Morrissey's poem provides the numerous informative details concerning how Howard becomes “metamorphosed into an enthusiast” of the prison reforms. To establish the scope of the problem, the persona sits at the County Trials and visits penal institutions all over England. In Newgate, the speaker encounters “Gaul fever, the pox, the flux, the pestilence,” “grime, lice” (TSOTP 55). “In Durham six prisoners / Were chained to the floor of a dungeon under the courtyard, / Up to their ankles in sewer water” (TSOTP 55). On the basis of these observations, Howard comes up with a revolutionary plan to reform the whole English penitentiary system. The speaker in “The State of the Prisons” highlights the details of his project in full length as follows:

My plan was simple, practical, and above all, cheap.  
 Salary the turnkeys. **No profits** to be gleaned from pimping,  
 Turning barman, extortion, or doctoring  
 In ignorance and at extravagant expense. **No fees**  
 For removing leg irons, access to the fireplace, or supplying cheese and meat.  
**No garnish** to be sought off new arrivals. **No hierarchies.**  
 (TSOTP 57), emphasis added

Describing the “humanising power” (Hook 11) by the means of the humanist reforms of the eighteenth century in legal and prison area, Hook explains that:

. . . humanist reformers maintained that punishment could be justified only insofar as it plays a role in preventing the repetition of crimes; deterrence must be its paramount objective. Punishment, furthermore, must obey the maxims of moderation and the humane; calculated and measured punishments must be devised; analogical penalties must be adopted; crimes must come to be matched to didactic modes of punishment that undo the logic of the criminal act. (11)

Considering the above, in the eighteenth century the state-legitimised violence meant the absolute reign (power) of the legal representatives over the convicts left at their mercy. With this in mind, Morrissey's speaker advocates locating prisoners in cells according to the seriousness of their crimes, their previous criminal record, age, gender etc. In terms of corporal punishment, Howard criticises the usage of torture instruments comparable to those applied by the Holy Inquisition.

Crime is not to be understood as an assault on the person of the king, but as an attack on society *as a whole*. Justice, furthermore, is no longer an issue of revenge and the singular prerogative of the sovereign; the responsibility to punish consequently came to lie with the most appropriate representatives of the social body. (Hook 11–12), emphasis original

The reformer in “The State of the Prisons” proposes to introduce the salaries for prison guards to prevent them from drawing income from prostitution, bribery and payments for medical services. Additionally, Howard’s innovation is the rehabilitation of prisoners through work:

If idleness breeds vice, industry brings a smiling account balance  
 And the promise of self-sufficiency. Attach a factory,  
 A cloth works or a smelting house, to every penitentiary.  
 Let every inmate be supervised there. Out of such labour,  
 And income for provisions, heating, clothing and medicine, in accordance  
 (TSOTP 57)

The speaker in “The State of the Prisons” understands long before Foucault that workhouses, hospitals and asylums operate as well on the principles of the state-legitimised violence and he extends his reform plans to these institutions. Rather than being motivated by compassion, the speaker claims to act upon the “righteousness in the God’s name” and the need to eradicate injustice.<sup>176</sup> What is more, the rehabilitation of prisoners to society through work is viewed by Morrissey’s speaker as a source of profit for the whole country (“my plan was simple, practical, and above all, cheap”). To achieve his goal, Howard draws upon calculated, economic discourse fused with religious didacticism (“if idleness breeds vice, industry brings a smiling account balance”). Hence according to him, employing convicts in the prison factories would be economically viable. The division of profits should take into account the prisoners’ needs and their wealth: “and income provisions, heating, clothing and medicine, in accordance / with daily needs.” “Each rehabilitative measure needs result in a proportional increase of obedience and productivity; docility *and* aptitude are always generated together” (Hook 22), emphasis original. To his own surprise, Howard’s programme of prison reforms ends with an unexpected success. He admits that: “I came home famous. *The State of the Prisons* such a manifest success.” Obsessed with his vision of righteous justice, Howard applies to his son’s upbringing the abusive methods that seem even more cruel than those employed in prisons. The speaker’s understanding of the family seems to stem from the ancient tradition: “the Romans . . . translated the word *familia* as meaning “servitude” (Arendt, *The Promise* 170), emphasis original.<sup>177</sup> On

<sup>176</sup> Hook argues that “[In] the era of humanist reform, it is no longer primarily the body, but souls or minds that increasingly come to be seen as the primary targets of correction, targets treated not through the means of pain, but through sings and representations. The scene is thus set for disciplinarity: emphases on humanization, individualization, objectification . . . and perhaps most vital of all, the quasi-psychological focus” (13).

<sup>177</sup> Arendt explains that

delivering his deathbed account, the persona of "The State of the Prisons" invites no sympathy from the readers. In the employment of his callous parental methods, Howard does not plead for absolution but to be heard. Therefore in Morrissey's poem, he provides a full-length account of his abusive methods of child raising, sparing neither himself nor others the shocking details of how violently he executed his son's "education:"

*Lord, keep me solitary to do Thy will.*  
 My second wife, delivered of our only son.  
 In 1765, afterwards died of a womb infection.  
 I was not designed for intimacy. The boy bothered me,  
 Mooning in my shadow like a criminal,  
 And sickly. I tried Lockean discipline: cold baths, daily;  
 (TSOTP 55)

One might speculate whether Howard's excessive cruelty towards his child resulted from blaming the boy for his mother's death the during his delivery. Being a living reminder of the tragic loss, the infant, then, becomes the scapegoat for his parent's unarticulated grief. What appears telling in "The State of the Prisons" is the father's comparison of his offspring to a criminal. However unlike the prisoners whom Howard defended against injustice, his own child evokes in him only irritation (see "The boy bothered me") and no understanding.

Wet socks; no sweetmeats. He promised to obey me,  
 Even irrationally. I sat him in the root house once in February  
 And didn't lock the door, to see if he would stay  
 Despite the cold. (He stayed.) He was sent away to school, and manhood,  
 When he was four years old. Unshackled, free  
 (TSOTP 55)

Instead of care, the persona in "The State of the Prisons" applies to a young child disciplinary methods so drastic that they can only be described as domestic violence. In Morrissey's poem, the ruthless procedures range from corporeal oppression ("cold baths, daily, / Wet socks" "sat him in the root house once in February") through emotional manipulation under pressure ("He promised to obey me, / even irrationally") and finally neglect. One can hardly believe that this ill-treatment could be performed in the name of some higher cause, as Morrissey's speaker seems to claim. It is not until Howard's son leaves for the

---

. . . the Romans . . . translated the word *familia* as meaning "servitude." There were, however, two reasons for that servitude. The first was that the *pater familias* ruled over his household – where his wife, children, and slaves constituted the *familia* – as a veritable monarch or despot, . . . a household ruled by one man made no allowance for struggle or rivalry because it had to form a unity that could only be disrupted by conflicting interests, standpoints, and viewpoints. (*The Promise* 170–171), emphasis original

boarding school at the age of four that the parental violence stops. In agreement with that

. . . Foucault treats the family as a relay between disciplinary sites; it is a point of transfer that connects the school and the military, the military and the workforce, an intersection between educational and clinical locations. When individuals are not adequately bettered by a given disciplinary system, they need to be redirected, the family is non-disciplinary switch-point that makes such redirection of interventions possible. (Hook 40)

Deprived of parental love, the reformer's son grows up to be a resentful and depraved adult. Engrossed in his reformist work, Howard abandons his son's upbringing entirely. After many years, he finds his grown-up son "destined for asylum" and suffering from advanced syphilis. It is only then that Morrissey's persona begins to realise the consequences of his tyrannical upbringing and his abandonment of the son. He begins to feel responsible for devoting to his offspring neither attention nor concern. In "The State of the Prisons," it seems unsettling for Howard to confront the grudge that his mature son bears against him. Morrissey's speaker admits: "demented with hatred. Pretence was useless, sophistry over." He has to face up to the fact that his syphilitic son blames him for his current state ["As he raved he had known neither father nor mother, / That I had twisted him with neglect" (TSOTP 57)]. Not disclaiming personal accountability, Howard nonetheless regards his son's disease as God's punishment and as a result of depravity induced by others ["My absence gave license to the deviant Thomasson"(TSOP 57)].

Howard was a devout man, a teetotaler and non-conformist. But running parallel to the account of his social reform work is the tragedy of his personal history: the death of his wife and the slow corruption of his son (sent away to school by Howard at the age of four and neglected thereafter). The two stories throw up arresting questions about faith, and the sacrifice required for public life, even the nebulous reasons by which someone might embark on this path. (Philips 73)

Although he has turned out to be capable of reforming the entire English penitentiary system, Howard perceives no remedy for his own child ("the boy was irrecoverable") as he admits dismissively. On the whole, his son's venereal disease is conceived of by his father as an extended metaphor for the whole country's political corruption and the decline of social and moral norms. Making his ill son an emblem of England's degeneration, he comments: "Sickness was festering in my only son like sedition in a nation. / With a missing king. The French Revolution unfurled across the Channel / As a desperate hints of scandalised servants converged into flesh / And betrayal" (TSOTP 57). As visible in "The State of the Prisons," the speaker's own standpoint remains problematic in the discourse. On one hand, seeing his son's deplorable condition, Howard gives vent to his tender feelings ("I wept") and does not deny his guilt ("My conscience sears me"). But then in a rhetorical question: "Must

reform cost exponentially?" he appears to justify his violent behaviour and rationalise the neglect of his child. The Biblical reference to David's rebellious son Absalom, killed by the commander of his father's forces, could imply that in Howard's eyes, it is his son's disobedience and his stubborn refusal to follow the paternal rules that have brought upon him moral downfall and terminal disease. Topping remarks that "[t]hroughout the book the voice is that of one all too aware of the limitations of personal engagement in the face of seemingly immovable justice. For example Howard's reforms are achieved at a considerable personal and not entirely justifiable cost. Also he is driven by religious guilt as much as anything else" (26).

Dedicated to his son, Howard's last words in "The State of the Prisons" render the mixed feelings that he exhibits at the end of his life: "I wept. He was destined for an asylum. / Must reform cost exponentially? My conscience sears me, as with David I say: *O my son Absalom, my son, my son*" (TSOTP 57). Acknowledging the ill-treatment of his child, Howard admits that he used to discipline his into acquiescence. Despite the declarative affection ("His frozen, painful hands," "I kiss them well"), Morrissey's speaker still appears to believe in his right to bludgeon his son into docility (defined by him as correction). This inconsistency of his standpoint could be explained as follows:

Enlightenment Man, like Twenty-First Century Humanity, comes across as a doubled, riven figure, a product of his era and its contradictory ideology. A morally energetic, sometimes liberal, Morrissey's Howard opposes hierarchies (57), is appalled by vice and corruption in the system (55), and, once comfortably off, gives generous to the poor (58). Yet pat of him remains archly conservative, committed to 'Making order stronger.' (Parker, *Northern Irish Literature* 58)

Hence, in "The State of the Prisons," it seems also that instead of regretting his violent parental methods, Howard's greatest remorse is failing to continue them until the boy's adolescence. Following the line of the familial relation, Arendt explains that: "the term 'father and despot' was not uncommon, but also because the law sired the citizen . . . much as the father sired the son" (*The Promise* 182). The speaker in Morrissey's poem confesses:

*My son to have whatever remains.*  
So much that I have left undone. And so much harm.  
I shut out his invective, and instead return  
To the obedient child, who stayed on until four, when darkness fell.  
His frozen, painful hands were raw for days  
I kiss them well.

(TSOTP 58)

All in all, Morrissey's narrative's mastery allows for multiple interpretations. In the cited passage, the retrospective sentences: "So much that I have left undone. And so much harm" might refer to the reforms that needed to be carried out. Thus in such a case, the "harm" renders the lingering social injustice. On an



effective level, “harm” alludes to the normalising violence that the persona in “The State of the Prisons” exerted on his offspring. On his deathbed, Morrissey’s speaker finally seems to exhibit some doubts about his conditioning of the powerless child into perfect obedience. Such upbringing has impaired his as yet unformed assertive skills. To deny any connection with his father, young Howard located himself in opposition to what the famous reformer represented, even if that meant choosing depravity as his own life path. His juvenile questioning of the moral values that his parent epitomised drove the adolescent into the hands of vile people.

Despite the ambiguous stand, Morrissey’s poem’s concluding words: “teach them forgiveness / so they can emerge from solitude like butterflies from a chrysalis” appear to imply that at the end of his life, Howard inclines towards the virtue of forgiveness over the previously praised righteousness. Retrospectively, it is not justice or discipline but compassion that is viewed by the speaker in “The State of the Prisons” as the most essential human and social virtue. In “Forgiveness” by Morrissey, “the symbolically gap-lined” poem (Sampson, “Collections Connecting” 11), the female persona praises the value of that practice, arguing that “Forgiveness:”

Comes afterwards. Like a nurse with a tea tray and a sleeping pill.

Relies on two. No more, no less. Is indivisible.

It cannot be willed, just welcomed. Immune to duty.

Is desired and disbelieved in equally, like a menopausal pregnancy.  
(TSOTP 42)

Analysing Arendt’s writing, Kristeva notices that “forgiveness is aimed at the person, and not the act. One cannot forgive the murder or the theft, but only the murderer or the thief. By being aimed at *someone* and not at *something*, forgiveness becomes an act of love. With or without love, however, one always forgives by taking the person into account” (*Hanna Arendt* 232–233), emphasis original. Arendt herself believes that:

. . . forgiving attempts the seemingly impossible, to undo what has been done, . . . it succeeds in making a new beginning where beginnings seemed to have become no longer possible . . . forgiving is an action that guarantees the continuity of the capacity for action, for beginning anew, in every single human being who, without forgiving and being forgiven, would resemble the man in the fairy tale who is granted one wish and then forever punished with that wish’s fulfillment. (*The Promise* 57–59)

As demonstrated by Arendt, forgiveness does not claim to nullify or cancel out violence disguised as power (either represented by parental or governmental authority). It does something even more difficult: it breaks the vicious circle of violence that earlier seemed ceaseless. As Arendt emphasises, it gives another

chance to re-interpret one's life narrative afresh, even if it happens on the deathbed as in the case of "The State of the Prisons." Only forgiveness has the power to discharge people from being violence's perennial hostages: either as its perpetrators or as its victims. The conclusion of the section seems especially uplifting when one recalls Morrissey's debut volume – analysed at the beginning of this chapter – which was composed in the shadow of the Troubles. Indeed, there is a progression in the poet's writing and it does advance in a desirable direction, namely that of hope. Topping sums up *The State of the Prisons* accurately: "At the heart of Morrissey's endeavour in this collection lies a passionate belief that it must be possible to somehow marry justice with humanity" (26).

### 3.3. Resisting the Victimisation of Women in the Poetry of Mary O'Donoghue

*This above all, to refuse to be a victim. Unless I can do that I can do nothing.*  
(*Surfacing*, Margaret Atwood)

As shown in this study, female empowerment cannot be realised without resisting the pejoratively conceptualised power-over women. Allen describes "power-over as the ability of an actor or set of actors to constrain the choices available to another actor or set of actors in a nontrivial way . . . . Domination entails the ability of an actor or set of actors to constrain the choices of another actor or set of actors in an a nontrivial way and in a way that works to the others' disadvantage" (*The Power* 123, 125). Furthermore, Allen admits that male domination over women constitutes a significant part of gendered power relations. In *Masculine Domination* (first published in English in 2001, three years after its French edition), sociologist Pierre Bourdieu comes to conclusion that the "the masculine sociodicy . . . legitimises a relationship of domination by embedding it in a biological nature that is itself a naturalized social construction" (23), emphasis original. Its punitive mechanisms are frequently supported by the state which functions as the political apparatus of the establishment. Taking the social dimension into account, Bourdieu refers to the symbolic violence that operates upon "the established order, with its relations of domination, its rights and prerogatives, privileges and injustices, ultimately perpetuates itself so easily, apart from a few historical accidents, and that the most intolerably conditions of existence can so often be perceived as acceptable and even natural" (*Masculine Domination* 1). He sums it up as follows:

masculine domination, and the way it is imposed and suffered . . . [is] an effect of what I call symbolic violence, a gentle violence, imperceptible and invisible even to its victims, exerted for the most part of through the purely symbolic channels of communication and cognition (more precisely, misrecognition),

recognition, or even feeling . . . a language (or a pronunciation), a lifestyle (a way of thinking, speaking, and acting) – and, more generally, a distinctive property, whether emblem or stigma, (Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination* 1–2)

In his sociological works, Bourdieu objects to interpreting “‘symbolic’ as the opposite of ‘real, actual’” (*Masculine Domination* 34). Explaining the notion of symbolic violence (and its exemplification as masculine domination), he warns that “people assume that to emphasize symbolic violence is to minimize the role of physical violence, to forget (and make people forget) that there are battered, raped and exploited women, or worse to seek to exculpate men from that form of violence – which is obviously not the case” (Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination* 34). Accordingly, turning women into victims of real (or symbolic, violence) is viewed as a life-threatening form of female disempowerment. To some extent, Bourdieu’s concept of symbolic power seems to parallel Daly’s notion of the Biggest Lie according to which “women are tracked and trained by male mediation of experience – a mediation that fixes the flow of female thought and passion” (*Pure Lust* 50).<sup>178</sup> As argued earlier, since women have been located beyond the structures of power, they are more susceptible to being victimised as a result of not only symbolic but also actual violence applied against them. Women as victims of violence are doubly-hurt by the patriarchal society: firstly by falling prey to aggressive assaults and secondly, by being conditioned into believing that they themselves either deserved them or are to blame for their occurrence. What is more, “[f]emale victims of male violence, a frequently studied example of gendered injustice, have traditionally been revictimized by the criminal justice system, which has discouraged women from reporting offences. The focus of the rape trial has not been on the offence or the offender but on the sexual history or reputation of the victim – who, by the harm done to her, is transformed into a defendant, an accused” (Faith 50). In “Rhetoric of Domination,” Airaksinen explains that “[t]he powerless can hardly advertise their own position without acquiring power first” (117). She elaborates this thought as follows:

The victim’s position is difficult . . . The victim’s self-surveillance and fear are connected to the greater freedom of operations of those who have power. The victims are stricken by a fatal conflict, the tension between the need to publicize the threat and undeniable shamefulness of their helplessness. If they conquer the shame and make their condition public, they are able to force the power-wielder to threaten them explicitly . . . instead of leaving it to the inner gaze of the victim, (Airaksinen 115–116)

---

<sup>178</sup> Daly explains that “Within the sadosociety women are tracked and trained by male mediation of experience – a mediation that fixes the flow of female thought and passion. Women are held back from remembering consciousness which is thus dismembered by phalocrats, who fashion and promote the Biggest Lies, the cruellest degradations, deadening deep intuitive powers” (*Pure Lust* 50–55).

As a final outcome of the female victimisation process, women are forced to assume their allegedly “natural” role – that of Victim.<sup>179</sup> In the light of the above,

Violence against females was (and is) endemic and a perpetual emergency, and public outcry increased the perception of women as powerless. That is, women's actual, material subordination was exposed, and although no longer objectified as male property, Woman was re-objectified as Victim. The victim characterization conflicts with demands of equality: How can those who need special protections, because they are unable to defend themselves in the ‘real’ world, be equal? Feminists were derided for attacking the status quo, but feminists understood that disempowerment accrues from the absence of resistance, the succumbing to conditions as they are or appear to be. (Faith 56)

Consequently, Wolf stresses that the difficulty with resisting female victimisation lies in avoiding the trap of acquiring the self-defining identity of the Victim (135) while not denying that the woman is a victim of real-life violence. She explains that: “there is nothing wrong with identifying one's victimization. That act is critical. There is lot wrong with molding it into an identity” (Wolf 136). Likewise Wolf appeals “for recognition of female victimization that does not leave out autonomy and sexual freedom” (140). Following this line of thinking, she claims that “the problem . . . that I object is *not* the act of protesting harm. There is no way around it: Women are not natural victims but sure they *are* victimized . . . . But grieving for the real victimization that women suffer must be a feminism that also teaches women how to see and use their enormous power so as never to be helpless victims again”(Wolf 141–142), emphasis original.<sup>180</sup> Bearing this in mind, Wolf reminds us how important it is “not . . . to delude ourselves with the thought that we can move out of victimization into confidence by some sort of individualistic positive thinking. We can only do so by uniting toward more power” (53). Considering the above, this chapter examines the necessity of resisting female victimisation because “[f]eminist resistance is the antithesis of female-victim identity” (Faith 55).<sup>181</sup> In

---

<sup>179</sup> Like other scholars cited here, Airaksinen sums up these observations in a not-very-optimistic manner: “In terms of the strategies of domination, a subordinate group has a choice between (1) the visibility and stigma of objects of coercion and (2) invisibility and self-surveillance along with a subject's status. It is difficult to know which is the better alternative” (118).

<sup>180</sup> Wolf reminds that:

Domestic violence is the number-one reason women seek medical attention; one third of all female murder victims are killed by husbands or boyfriends; up 45 percent of abused women are battered during pregnancy, 60 percent of battered women are beaten when pregnant; half of all homeless women and children are fleeing domestic violence. Women are victims of violent intimates at a rate three times that of men. These are raw facts. And facing them is the first step toward changing them. (141–142), emphasis original

<sup>181</sup> The following dissertation is not concerned with the history of the feminist movement. For the author's account of that problem see my article “From Kitchen Into the Bathroom: Feminist (Post) Theory in Crisis.”

this vein, Faith interprets this two-sided relation: “acquiescence and resistance are inherent, to, not outside of, power relations” (38). In Faith’s reading:

Resistance cannot simply defeat, overturn or suddenly transform disciplinary power . . . Resistance can, however, resituate the problematic of power abuse. That is, resistance weakens processes of victimization, and generates personal and political empowerment through the acts of naming violations and refusing to collaborate with oppressors. (39)

Furthermore, she stresses that “[f]eminist resistance is articulated through women’s movements and through individual actions, including refusals and separations” (Faith 37). That is why she warns against the victimisation of women on account of their seeming acquiescence. In other words, Faith argues that women’s resistance can be detected even where it is not explicit:

Resistance may take the explicit form of a counter-force doing the political battle, a strategic play of forces: . . . Resistance may also be a choreographed demonstration of cooperation. The ‘willing victim’ may be operating from the vantage of strategic resistance, watching for openings and coalescing the fragmentary forms of resistance, which, in combination, articulate a potential challenge to the status quo. The subject may know the experience of being in charge even as she is liable to the disciplines which claim her subjection. Foucault likens this process to the martial art of judo, proposing that sometimes ‘the best answer to an adversary, manoeuvre is not to retreat, but to go along with it, turning it to one’s own advantage, as a resting point for the next phase’ (Baudrillard, 1987: 65). (39)

One of the traditional patriarchal methods of implementing female victimisation is to deny the strength that women do possess: the strength of the female mind, body and spirit. As Faith points out: “As resistance, feminism is the power of women disrupting patriarchal truths” (47). Bearing this in mind, O’Donoghue’s poems probe a wide gallery of female characters, derived from historical, mythological, literary and religious discourses, whose textual empowerment stems from the fact of challenging and resisting their patriarchally inscribed roles, including that of Victim. Faith rightly argues that “most Western societies have specifically facilitated and created rationales for female victimization. By enshrining male dominance in law, economy, medicine, religion, social policy and in the family, females are reduced to their sex and to a class-based gender standard which tyrannizes most females” (59–60). Oppressed in the reinforced status of Victim in which patriarchy attempts to imprison them, O’Donoghue’s female speakers defy their victimisation, being overpowered but not powerless. After all “[r]esistance is itself an exercise of power” (Faith 53). On the whole,

If the interest in empowerment corresponds to the concern with the power that women exercise in spite of male domination, then the interest in resistance corresponds to feminists’ concern with the power that women can wield to oppose male domination. In other words, whereas the feminist interest in empowerment arises out of the need to theorize power that women have *in*

*spite of the power that men exercise over us, the interest in resistance emerges out of the need to understand power that women exercise specifically as a response to such domination.* (Allen, *The Power* 122), emphasis original.

In O'Donoghue's poetry, the acts of aggression manifested as direct violence against women or less explicit kinds of female disempowerment, disclose the abusive workings of the patriarchal system that legitimises its force by persecuting the vulnerable. As Fox-Genovese argues: "Male unease with female power, or potential power, nonetheless laces each individualist discourses that represent women as nurturing and passive. An implicit evocation of female power refrains from naming female attributes that might not flatter male self-esteem, but it mobilizes male fear and anger . . . about womanhood" (237). As shown in O'Donoghue's poem "Jezebel's Palms," women's victimisation frequently stems from their cultural association with corporeality. Hartstock points out that "The body, constituting a reminder of loathsome mortality, must be denied and repressed" (273). Hence, "Virility [that] requires the denial of the body" is inseparably tied with domination (Hartstock 273). The poem "Jezebel's Palms" draws upon a Biblical source, relating an account of the woman punished with a violent death for her alleged "depravity." The motto explains the context for the narrative: "*In the Bible, Jezebel was thrown to the dogs for her immorality. / They ate everything but for the palms of her hands*" (T 24). The speaking subject in O'Donoghue's poem is an eye witness to Jezebel's murder and a female inhabitant of the town in which it took place. The persona in the examined text commences her dramatic monologue in a collective, plural voice ("we all saw," "an example to us / townswomen," "The last thing we saw"), reminiscent of the Greek chorus in ancient tragedies. O'Donoghue's speaker recalls the bloodshed from a perspective of the day after. In "Jezebel's Palms," the plural female voice not only gives testimony to what has happened but also comments upon its real and publicly pronounced reasons:

Oh, we all saw what happened  
To Jezebel. Her come-uppance  
Was partly an example to us  
Townswomen.  
A gorey alert to the hazards  
Of torrid bedrooms  
And snake-tangled limbs.

(T 24)

Although in "Jezebel's Palms" the local people knew what was going on, nobody stood up for the tormented woman when dogs were tearing her body into pieces. Impossible as it is to establish the true intentions for each individual inhabitant, the motive for the townsmen's passivity remains undisclosed: is it their silent approval for Jezebel's punishment or the intimidation of the whole local community? The female speaker in O'Donoghue's poem herself does not condone the bloody chastening of Jezebel though she does not express her opinion directly. She provides in-between-the-lines innuendoes, employing a

disapproving idiom to relate Jezebel's violent murder. Though literally meaning revengeful punishment (usually claimed to be legitimised), "come-uppance" is an informal expression, which weakens considerably its intended contemptuous sense. In addition, the qualifier "partly" questions the official reasons given to justify the townsmen's bloodthirstiness. It seems to indicate that Jezebel has become a scapegoat of exercising power over local women's bodies. The word "gorey," derived from the root "gore," signifies bloody carnage. However according to *The Collins English Dictionary*, in the Old English and Old Norse, ironically given the poem's context, it also connotes "dirt" and "half-digested food." In other words, the implied message directed to the townswomen is that any expressions of female sexual activity (not only extramarital intercourse) are "hazards" to their lives. In general, female desire is conceived of as sinful (reference to "snake-tangled limbs") and abominable (see "torrid bedrooms" which sounds like "horrid bedrooms"). The speaker in "Jezebel's Palms" confesses:

The last thing we saw  
 From inside the wall  
 Were her long-nailed toes  
 Dragging furrows in the red clay.  
 Eight dogs lolloped into the trees  
 With their unexpected bait.  
 Her face was already skinned  
 Off, chipped on the edges of steps  
 And peeled in pink strips  
 Against the rocks' uneven teeth.  
 (The dogs came back to snuffle up  
 These traces of face, their lips  
 And whiskers enamelled hard  
 With dark-dried blood).

(T 24)

The drastic itemised report of Jezebel's agony is difficult to follow to the reader. The quoted account is rendered in a short-phrased, reporter-like idiom, with the vividly precise vocabulary ("their lips / And whiskers enamelled hard / With dark-dried blood"). One might wonder, however, why the female voice in "Jezebel's Palms" wants to relate in such a detail Jezebel's painful death ("the red clay," "Her face . . . skinned / Off, chipped . . . peeled in pink strips," "These traces of face"). The question arises whether the speaker's meticulousness in dwelling upon it is motivated by her macabre indulgence in horror or whether she has some hidden agenda. Subscribing to the latter, one might assume that the female voice in O'Donoghue's poem takes over the function of the communal memory's guardian. She records the dramatic event to save it from oblivion, wanting it to be remembered by others. Nonetheless, there could be another reason for her doing so. In the act of Jezebel's martyr's death being chronicled, the murdered woman is transfigured from a disempowered woman and a condemned sinner to an empowered religious icon. Regardless of

the fact that she did not die for the faith, one still has to acknowledge the ritualised aspect of this human sacrifice. Hard to believe as it is, the local community wanted Jezebel to die in unimaginable pain, with her being conscious during the inflicted tortures. Looked at from that angle, even though the persona's *post factum* testimony cannot undo what has happened, re-telling of Jezebel's story by O'Donoghue's speaker becomes an act of resistance against the victimisation of women. It functions like a declaration or "a methodological cautioning: don't treat power as *complete control*, as *absolute subservience* . . . . it is only through the articulation of points of resistance that power can spread through the social field, then it follows that the identification of such resistances will provide the analyst with an alternative channel of access to the workings of power and the gaps in its efficacy" (Hook 86), emphasis original. Accordingly the female voice in "Jezebel's Palms" records:

None of our eyes met  
 After that morning, I forced  
 Myself to go there a week later  
 To gather some roots for a  
 Poultice, and diced round  
 Red-dyed plots on the forest ground.  
 I doubled over to haul up a brown  
 Knobbed root. . . .

(T 24–25)

O'Donoghue's speaker disapproval of the townsmen-run bloodshed might be detected in the lines rendering her bodily reaction to Jezebel's death (see "None of our eyes met"). The cited statement reveals the female voice's shame that she did nothing to prevent the murder, and her guilty conscience about Jezebel's prolonged suffering. The referred to lines in O'Donoghue's poem mark also a transition from the collective responsibility to personal agency and accountability, signifying the persona's release from victimisation's vicious circle. On the pretext of searching for medicinal herbs, the speaker in "Jezebel's Palms" is looking for the torn into pieces Jezebel's body to bury her so that she could rest in peace. Hence the symbolic act of reclaiming Jezebel's dead body and paying homage to it becomes an act of political resistance. This happens because "[t]he female body, as a central, socially invested site of male domination, renders virtually all women vulnerable to the fear if not the actuality of violation" (Faith 39). Doing what she does, the persona in O'Donoghue's poem seems to be perfectly aware that her defiant Antigone-like enactment as an overt manifestation of women's resistance may put her own life in danger. Thus the idiom she employs appears to be somewhat cautious, expressing the speaking voice's tentative mood ("diced round" and "I doubled over to haul up"). The repeated phrases ("and doubled over again to vomit") show that she has to play with the double meanings of words ["to dice" as to "risk" and "cut in parts," "to double" as "bent over," but also "restate word for word" or "play two roles" (CED)]. As a matter of fact, O'Donoghue's speaker has to "play two



roles,” her own and that of the silenced Jezebel, not because the persona feels especially eager to do so (see “I forced / Myself to go there a week later”) but because she knows that this is the right thing to do. The speaker in “Jezebel’s Palms” recalls:

. . . A soggy leaf  
Clung to my palm and I unpeeled  
It and doubled over again to vomit  
Yellow, green peas and cabbage shreds  
Into the undergrowth. The leaf,  
A red palm on mine, curling up  
In the breeze. I found its match  
And pocketed them both  
And smoothed out the paper-thin  
Fingers all the way home.

(T 25)

In the cited fragment, the female voice’s physical revulsion, which is disclosed when she vomits on coming across Jezebel’s bodily remnants (her palms), indicates beyond doubt that the task she has undertaken seems almost too much to bear. Nonetheless regardless of this, O’Donoghue’s persona continues her mission (“I found its match / And pocketed them both”). Her respect for the dead woman is manifested in a tender imagist haiku (“smoothed out the paper-thin / Fingers all the way home”). The image of “The leaf, / a red palm on mine, curling up / In the breeze” appears to be textually the most rewarding part of the poem. Comparing the severed hand to the red leaf curled up in the wind conveys its fragility but also organic beauty even in its lifeless form. Caressing Jezebel’s palms and taking them home with her, the female voice sets about sewing the lacerated bodily limbs into one piece:

In front of my candle’s light,  
A pair of palms shoulder  
See-through red. Lines divide  
On and out, as thin  
And infinite as cobweb threads.  
I lick some cat’s gut  
For my needle. . .

(T 25)

As demonstrated above, sewing together the fragments of the tormented woman’s hands signifies a bold gesture in the face of the repressive dismembering of Jezebel’s body and self alike. According to Faith, “Feminist resistance, in particular, begins with the body’s refusal to be subordinated, an instinctual withdrawal from the patriarchal forces to which it is often violently subjected” (39). Joining the torn pieces of Jezebel’s palms together re-connects the dead woman and the speaker in “Jezebel’s Palms” in an act of an artistic and personal disobedience against the laws of patriarchy that endanger women’s lives, wanting to turn them into disempowered Victims:

. . . and press  
 Palm to palm. I puncture them  
 Near where the wrist used to be  
 And start to stitch  
 The way round, looping up  
 And down thumb and each  
 Finger, and finish with a knot  
 Of gut and a snip.

(T 25)

Thus, the speaker's sewing the murdered woman's palms amounts to a tangible signifier of her resistance to Jezebel's victimisation. The female voice in "Jezebel's Palms" depicts her own hand that "lies fastened / Between the palms / Of Jezebel." What appears touching in this image is the self-instigated movement of the speaker's hand ("My hand crawls") towards the dead palm, as if it wanted to transfer life onto it. In the eyes of the persona, the palms of the tortured Jezebel resemble a precious relic of the saint or "Translucent / Top-stitched wafers," which renders their frail holiness. Nonetheless, one has to still remember that

The qualities that Christianity *idealizes*, especially for women, are also those of a victim: sacrificial love, passive acceptance of suffering, humility, meekness, etc . . . . Given the victimized situation of the female in sexist society, these "virtues" are hardly the qualities that women should be encouraged to have. Moreover, since women cannot be "good" enough to measure up to this ideal, and since all are by sexual definition alien from the male savior, this is an impossible model. Thus doomed to failure even in emulating the Victim, women are plunged more deeply into victimization . . . . In fact, the blame is never lifted from the female sex. (Daly, *Beyond God* 77), emphasis original

That is why in resisting female victimisation, O'Donoghue's poem ends with the two deliberately rough adjectives: "Meaty, / Indigestible." These modifiers bring back the perspective of human corporeality and the carnage that put an end to Jezebel's life: yet not entirely. Not everything of us shall die, it seems to remind us. The speaker in "Jezebel's Palms" concludes:

My hand crawls  
 Into this slippery flesh glove  
 And lies fastened  
 Between the palms  
 Of Jezebel. Translucent  
 Top-stitched wafers,  
 Meaty,  
 Indigestible.

(T 25)

The motif of the female hands being chopped off punitively reappears in another poem by O'Donoghue "Lavoisin and Lavigoreux." As the poet states in "Notes" following her second volume *Among These Winters*, Lavoisin and Lavigoreux were "*French midwives, fortune-tellers and poisoners of the late*

17th century” (ATW 70), emphasis original. The combination of the life and death tropes accounts for the prominent position that Lavoisin and Lavigoreux enjoyed in their locality. On one hand, they helped children to come into this world, on the other hand, with the specially prepared deadly potions, they “aided” some unfortunate adults to depart “the valley of sorrow and tears.” Additionally, the two female herbalists were credited with the gift of clairvoyance. Their profession explains Lavoisin and Lavigoreux’s “radical status”<sup>182</sup> of being female “social deviants . . . threatening because powerful” (Daly, *Beyond God* 64). Moreover, the fact that the two titular names are almost entirely fused together signifies the women’s close-knit relation in their work and personal life. Their allied identities seem plural and symbiotic, nowhere in O’Donoghue’s poem are Lavoisin and Lavigoreux mentioned separately. It appears that the women’s shared existence constitutes a form of their resistance to the patriarchal rules. Accordingly in the analysed poem, the persona emphasises an empowering parallel in these women’s life and death narratives, from the opening lines: “rattle their hands,” till their end when “their hands were lopped off,” and “they kindled like twin torches.” As demonstrated, one of the goals of patriarchy is weakening the bonds between women, turning them against one another in competition for men’s recognition. By staying supportive and loyal to each other, Lavoisin and Lavigoreux defied this key patriarchal rule.

O’Donoghue’s poem commences with an enumeration of the death and life rituals actively practised by Lavoisin and Lavigoreux, such as preparing poisonous mushrooms (alliterative “**p**estled the **p**oison”), herbal potions, casting magical spells and assisting in labour. The implied idea that magic and delivery happen on different discursive (house) levels is denoted by the characters’ ascension to assist births (“up the stairs”) in contrast to the downstairs realm of death which is more grounded to earth. The image of the interwoven women’s hands while helping in deliveries symbolises female empowerment. The persona in “Lavoisin and Lavigoreux” declares:

They tickled the gills  
of death-cups and stinkhorns  
and pestled the poison  
from hemlock and bracken,

then up the stairs  
to gab incantations  
and rattle their hands  
in raw labour rooms,

(ATW 25)

Regardless of the poem’s controversial subject, the speaker in O’Donoghue’s narrative refrains from passing moral judgments on Lavoisin and Lavigoreux’s poisoning activities. The persona attempts to distance herself from a

---

<sup>182</sup> Compare Daly *Beyond God the Father* (62–65).

contemptuous tone by resorting to black humour and surreal imagery. That is why the female voice depicts preparing toxic potions as an ordinary and rather tedious chore: “back to the roking stewpot / to brew some little heartblock” (ATW 25). What is more, she seems to be derisively impressed with a wide range of the lethal services offered by them, from a sudden death (heartblock) through mental illness symptoms to physical disability:

Apothecaries bleeding wild cherries,  
to cripple him more: false hellebore,  
finish the deed with broiled jimsonweed.

(ATW 25)

The fact that the poisoning business was marked with the high punitive risk and additionally required much specialised knowledge, elucidates why this profitable profession was available to female gender. To some extent, one may argue that the two women's services amount to subversive resistance to the patriarchal society whose compliant representatives constituted Lavoisin and Lavigoreux's most ardent clientele.<sup>183</sup>

Thus, whatever they do, women are condemned to furnish the proof of their malign nature and to justify the taboos and prejudice that they incur by virtue of their essential maleficence – in accordance with the logic, which can be described as tragic, whereby the social reality that produces domination often confirms the representations that domination invokes in order to justify itself. (Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination* 32)

In other words, although Lavoisin and Lavigoreux's murderous services were much in demand, the women traded in the poison but they did not themselves use it to murder people. One might speculate that it was their customers who later performed deadly “justice” on their suppliers. It could have been done either to eliminate the witnesses of the crime or in fear of herbalists' vengeance, or even to get rid of the competition. What adds to the victimisation of Lavoisin and Lavigoreux is the fact that their regular customers (mostly spouses ordering their partners painful deaths) were exempt from any legal responsibility. The note of biting sarcasm in the line: “with a soupçon of hallucination / for husbands of wives with patience” (ATW 25) mocks the hypocrisy of Lavoisin and Lavigoreux's powerful clientele. The act of burning two women alive at the stake might denote the accusation of witchcraft: “There are clues in the fact that the Witchcraze in Western Europe was fostered and fuelled by the rising professional power [of] priests and ministers, . . . the legal and medical

---

<sup>183</sup> According to Bourdieu, “women are condemned to furnish the proof of their malign nature and to justify the taboos and prejudice that they incur by virtue of their essential maleficence – in accordance with the logic, which can be described as tragic, whereby the social reality that produces domination often confirms the representations that domination invokes in order to justify itself” (*Masculine Domination* 32).

professions” (Daly, *Pure Lust* 108). The female voice in “Lavoisin and Lavigoreux” brings to mind:

Their hands were still fragranced  
with cocklebur mulch  
when the molten poker  
put holes through the palms,

and their hands were lopped off  
and dropped to the cobbles.

(ATW 25)

Before their sacrificial death in flames, Lavoisin and Lavigoreux were tortured. Their palms were branded with hot metal and their hands were chopped off and discarded in the streets. In other words, like in “Jezebel’s Palms,” the amputated women’s hands have become the synecdoche upon which misogynistic violence of the patriarchal society was focalised. As in the previous poem, they signify the victimisation of the murdered female scapegoats. While distancing oneself from romanticising Lavoisin and Lavigoreux’s poisonous activities, one needs to admit that the women were most likely punished not because of their deadly services, but on the account of their vast knowledge, which constituted a threat to the patriarchal society. Their prosperous business could be compared to other instances of women’s resistance. “Even though options are more limited in states of domination, resistance is still possible . . . [even] in the eighteenth and nineteenth” century when women were “short of reversing the gendered power relations” (McLaren 221). Unlike Foucault, Bourdieu remains much more sceptical about the possibilities of the defiant strategies enumerated above:

The symbolic strategies that women use against men, such as those of magic, remain dominated, because the apparatus of symbols and mythic operators that they implement and the ends they pursue (such as the love of a loved man or the impotence of a hated man) are rooted in the androcentric view in the name of which they are dominated. These strategies, which are not strong enough to really to subvert the relation of domination, at least have the effect of confirming the dominant representation of women as maleficent beings, whose purely negative identity is made up essentially of taboos each of which presents a possibility of transgression. This is true in particular of all the forms of soft violence, sometimes almost invisible, that women use against physical or symbolic violence of men, from magic, cunning, lies or passivity (particularly in sexual relations) . . . (*Masculine Domination* 32)

As successful businesswomen providing services in high demand and independent women, Lavoisin and Lavigoreux do not fit into the patriarchal mould. Furthermore, what prevents the female characters in O’Donoghue’s poem from being victimised is the referred to black humour and their loyalty to each other, contrasted with the unscrupulous treachery of their oppressors. Lavoisin and Lavigoreux’s double deaths echo their mirrored lives: “They

kindled like twin torches / in the nightshaded Place de Grève" (ATW 25). As usually in O'Donoghue's works, the poem "Lavoisin and Lavigoreux" relies heavily on sound. The melodious arrangement of the selected toxins astonishes one with the varied musical patterns. For example, in "bleeding wild cherries," there is a long vowel, followed by its short equivalent and complemented with a strong consonantal "r" presence, echoed in "cripple him more: false hellebore." The words **more** and **hellebore** seem to rhyme as much as **deed** and **jimsonweed**, reiterating a sound composition similar to the related one (compare "bleeding wild cherries" and "deed with broiled jimsonweed"). The partial rhyming can be detected in **stewpot / heartblock**, and to some extent, in **stinkhorns / poison**.

Following the vein of institutionalised violence against women, O'Donoghue's poem "Tuccia Clears Her Name" meditates upon the female victimisation sanctified by the ancient Roman tradition of religious women. Turned into live emblems of chastity, vestals had to remain cut off from the corporeal foundations of female subjectivity, renouncing their sexuality for as long as they lived. The precept explains the consequences for those followers of the goddess Vesta who did not comply with the patriarchal cult of virginity. Nonetheless as Daly reminds, "[e]ven celibate women who have dedicated their lives to the male god and / or to careers in male-identified professions, however sexually "pure" they may be, are touchable and touched both mentally and emotionally. Such women can be touched physically as well" (*Pure Lust* 243). This is how O'Donoghue elucidates the context for her poem:

*Those vestals who broke their vows were whipped and walled up alive in a sealed tomb. The male accomplice of the guilty vestal was flogged to death in the Forum. Vestals accused of impurity sometimes managed to clear their name. Tuccia proved her purity by bringing back water from the Tiber in a sacred sieve.*

(T13)

Unlike in "Jezebel's Palms," the narration in "Tuccia Clears Her Name" is conducted in the first-person direct agency mode (see "**my** fingers," then followed by "**my** knees," "**my** backbone," "**My** shoulder blades," "**my** naked / Neck with weals"). It is only in line 44–45 that the identity of the persona is revealed. The female voice admits "**my** name / Tuccia." The line 47 ("Bleeds away **my** heat") ends the possessive pronoun enumeration. What emerges from this catalogue is the fact that O'Donoghue's speaker seems to be deprived of the completeness of her bodily image, perceiving herself as a disjointed sum of corporeal entities. The opening triplet operates on the sound "r" resonance in the words: "**B**rown-green **Tiber** **r**iver / **T**ravelling . . . **U**rned within my **fingers**." The poem commences with the mention of the dead's ashes, connoted with the location "within my fingers," which implies "the sacred sieve" device by the means of which the patriarchal and the religious legitimisation is conducted in the analysed narrative. The poem "Tuccia Clears Her Name" begins with the following account:

1. Brown-green Tiber river
2. Travelling to the city
3. Urned within my fingers

(T13)

Apart from the pressure of performing an impossible task, the female speaker in “Tuccia Clears Her Name” suffers physically from the sweltering sun, as she relates in the subsequent passages. In O’Donoghue’s poem, what draws one’s attention is the vulnerable woman’s body operated on by the active agent, the sun whose pursuit is rendered with the action verbs (“the climbing sun, the hovering sun, the seething sun, the glowering sun, dissolving sun”). As demonstrated, the female body is objectified as the screen upon which the sun’s ventures are projected. Lines 4–7 denote in detail the injured female corporeal surface maimed by the ascending sunshine:

4. The climbing sun
5. Rests awhile
6. In blue crooks
7. Behind my knees

(T13)

Lines 12–15 focus on the sunburn blisters on Tuccia’s back. The scars and scorched wounds (“hollowed out spaces”) violate the woman’s bodily integrity. The persona in “Tuccia Clears Her Name” confesses:

12. The hovering sun
13. Hollows out a space
14. At the root
15. Of my backbone

(T13)

Consequently as the day progresses, the sun’s intervention becomes more and more invasive and painful to the speaker. Lines 25–28 depict the woman’s suffering when the burnt tissue flakes off from Tuccia’s skin. The speaker in O’Donoghue’s poem admits:

25. The seething sun
26. Flicks straps
27. Of heat between
28. My shoulder blades

(T 14)

In lines 35–37 Tuccia’s sunburnt body seems to be branded in the way farm animals are marked to show ownership, or in the way women used to be penalised for their alleged social transgressions. Not only the religious or social but as shown here the legal discourse “criminalized female sexuality and sexualized female criminality” (Faith 58). Faith argues that “the female body can be classified, confined and turned into capital” (58). No wonder that the noun

“weal” in the cited passage can refer to the swollen bodily contusion or in its archaic sense to good financial fortune (*CED*). The female voice in “Tuccia Clears Her Name” relates:

- 35. The glowering sun
- 36. Brands my naked
- 37. Neck with weals

(T 14)

Lines 46–47 record the on-going disintegration of Tuccia's body into a bleeding and shapeless pulp: “Dissolving sun / Bleeds away my heat” (T 14). The remaining part of O'Donoghue's poem provides a missing background for the narrative, giving an insight into the reasons why the religious woman had to be tested so that she could emerge as “pure.” None of the modifiers referring to the river's reek (“stinking”), its grimy consistence (“A greasy broth”), or the alluvial sewage contamination (“Brown-green”) can evoke the slightest associations with chastity. On the contrary, forcing a pious woman to plunge into the filthy waters of the Tiber bears additional traces of misogynist, punitive retribution. The expected supernatural miracle of the liquid not leaking through “the sacred sieve” appears to be explained by the natural, environmental causes: “Mud bobbing / To the edge / Crusting the rim / Of this sacred sieve” (T 13). Namely, the mesh could be clogged with the sedimentation and the deposit residing at the bottom of the Tiber. The speaker in “Tuccia Clears Her Name” records:

- 15. An island
- 16. Of stinking algae
- 17. Beetles' wings
- 18. Veinless leaves
- 19. Slipping round in circles
- 20. Feet of midges
- 21. Pricking
- 22. A greasy broth
- 23. Of river

(T13)

With the course of O'Donoghue's narrative, the mutilated woman seems to have difficulty in moving forward (“planting sandals / squarely on the journey”), yet she does manage to plug the outlets in the sieve to prevent the water from leaking. Barely alive because of sunburn and apprehension, Tuccia carries out her plan: “Fingernails clacking / Pewter, tiny sieveholes / Stoppered in the circlet / Of clammy hands” (T 14). She declares:

- 38. A bowl of roaring
- 39. Inside the Forum
- 40. The crack of a lash
- 41. Bites a man's
- 42. Back, over, again



- 43. Tattered and gutted
- 44. For knowing my name
- 45. Tuccia

(T 14)

As argued above, the only ground for the charge against Tuccia is a man's familiarity with the vestal's name. On this sole premise, the religious woman has to run for her life whereas her alleged lover is to be whipped in front of the Forum Romanum's audience. The shape of the building resembles that of the sacred sieve. The tortures inflicted upon the accused man involve the public violating of his bodily integrity but not the threat of death as in Tuccia's case. O'Donoghue's poem's final fragment shifts the perspective back onto Tuccia's task. Carrying the water in the sieve, the vestal feels that with its every drop leaked out, the life goes out of her. For that reason, the water drops are compared to the spilt female blood:

- 48. Dribbles of the Tiber
- 49. Worm across the earth
- 50. Sucking up sweaty
- 51. Dust, red pearls
- 52. Of blood.

(T 14)

O'Donoghue's poem's precept has already highlighted the outcome of the trial, explaining that Tuccia has completed her task successfully and managed to carry the Tiber water in the sieve. Nonetheless it is not only by the heroic saving of her life that Tuccia succeeded in resisting the female victimisation. Being forced to play by the unfair, patriarchal rules in the contest where she stood virtually no chance of clearing herself of a false accusation, she twisted the oppressive custom to her own advantage, overcoming physical and emotional weakness. "Out of this 'No' to the morality of victimization, which women share with all the oppressed, comes a 'Yes' to an ethic which transcends the most basic stereotypes, those of masculine / feminine" (Daly, *Beyond God* 105). However not always women's attempts to resist victimisation end up as successfully as the case related here. Inspired by the suicide of the eight-month pregnant Modigliani's partner, the poem "Jeanne Hébuterne"<sup>184</sup> introduces the controversial theme of woman's self-destruction as the ultimate way of avoid being the victim. O'Donoghue commences her narrative, like the two previously examined, by providing a textual and factual framework for it:

*The Italian artist Amedeo Modigliani died in January 1920 of tubercular meningitis, caused by alcoholic excess. The day after, his lover Jeanne*

---

<sup>184</sup> Jeanne Hébuterne (1898–1920) was a talented artist who studied at the Art Academy and painted. She lived with Modigliani from 1917 till his death in 1920. They had a daughter Jeanne. A day after Modigliani's demise, pregnant with their second child, Jeanne Hébuterne jumped out of her parents' house.

*Hébuterne killed herself, and the baby she was carrying, by jumping from a fifth floor window in Paris.*

(T 22)

The female voice in Jeanne Hébuterne recalls her life with the renowned painter as arduous (“cuffs and dull thumps”) and whimsical (“the mornings / of gruff loving”). As the poem proceeds, O’Donoghue’s persona’s soliloquy underlines that the relationship depended much on the woman’s emotional involvement and commitment, with the famous artist being mostly the passive recipient. However conceiving of her life as composed of felicitous and distressing moments indicates that the speaker in “Jeanne Hébuterne” does not seek pity for her (self) destructive decision. She recalls:

If I had never met him  
That day at the Académie,  
I would not have withstood  
Cuffs and dull thumps  
In the night. The mornings  
Of gruff loving.

(T 22)

In the quoted below passage, the speaker’s dissatisfaction with her partner comes to the discourse’s surface in a conspicuous way. The voice in “Jeanne Hébuterne” implies that the celebrated painter’s “enormous palette for women” is not confined to the artistic field solely. In her eyes, Modigliani uses women posing for him not only as aesthetic but also as sexual objects. The carnal expressions “the arses,” “Pairs of breasts,” the sense verbs “touch” and the phrase “he stroked soft and deft” imply the artist’s sexual arousal with the painted models. His desire for the portrayed women seems to be tainted with dominative brutality (“the arses / He touched with bruise”). The cited account depicts Modigliani, fairly or not, as an abusive person, fusing his lust with aggression. The persona’s portrayal of an accomplished painter includes the picturesque spots of “mops on swamps / Of vomit marbled with absinthe,” mixed with the “sunburn colours” (urine?) and the purple of the (menstruation?) “blood from the belly.” The persona in “Jeanne Hébuterne” continues her narrative:

All the arses  
He touched with bruise  
And sunburn colours,  
Pairs of breasts  
He stroked soft and deft.  
His enormous palette for women.  
The mops on swamps  
Of vomit marbled with absinthe  
And blood from the belly.

(T 22)

Starting Jeanne's monologue with a hypothetical, past-oriented conditional clause introduces a retrospective distance and a tentative mood of the past reflections. In O'Donoghue's poem, the narration is conducted in the third conditional mood combined with the second, which highlights that although the reported events already happened, the reference point is present. The beginning of the third conditional clause "If I had never met him" is completed with the second conditional sentence "I would not be here." Such a construction discloses beyond doubt that the speaking voice in "Jeanne Hébuterne" perceives her life as a chain of causally determined events, leading to the tragic finale. She admits:

I would not be here,  
 The day after he choked  
 And fell still,  
 Five floors between me  
 And the street,  
 With our baby romping inside me,  
 Not knowing her next kick  
 Will topple me into the air.  
 Her eight-month-three-week  
 Weight will suck me quicker  
 To the ground.

(T 22)

One might wonder, though, if by assuming such a determinist perspective, the speaker in "Jeanne Hébuterne" does not try to release herself from the responsibility for her own actions, thus denying her own agency. It does not seem to be the case, as the persona in O'Donoghue's poem does not disclaim her accountability or even regret her actions. Nonetheless, if one pursues this thought further, Jeanne's standpoint does not seem to be so unambiguous, since "persons are responsible when their actions are properly attributable to their 'real selves,' this being the case when persons are able to govern their wills on the basis of their valuational systems and to govern their actions on the basis of their wills" (Benson 77). In the overpowering context in which O'Donoghue's speaker functioned for a long time, Jeanne Hébuterne could hardly be held responsible for the things that she viewed as clearly beyond her control. In the relation with the textually narrated Modigliani, Jeanne Hébuterne looks to be controlled by the symbolic violence.<sup>185</sup> Hébuterne's suicide, a day after her lover's death, could indicate either the pregnant woman's complete emotional dependence upon her partner (not imagining her life without him), or her social subordination (not imagining herself being able to manage unmarried alone with two children). The killing of her unborn child might also be a way of avoiding the painful memories connected with its late father. Ironic as it is, few people would be tempted to reproach the famous painter (or his narrated character in O'Donoghue's poem) for his mistreatment of women, his self-centred lifestyle, negligence of his family, infidelity or finally disregard for his own life,

<sup>185</sup> See Bourdieu (*Masculine Domination* 35).

manifested in the alcoholic addiction that led to his death. Drawing on the example of Paul Gauguin's biography, Friedman points out rightly that:

Gauguin abandoned his family and middle-class life as banker in Denmark to travel to Mediterranean France, Tahiti and Martinique in search of artistic subjects and inspiration. He deserted his wife and five children, one might say to paint pictures in sunny locales . . . . He once wrote: 'One man's faculties can't cope with two things at once, and I for one can do *one thing only*: paint. Everything else leaves me stupefied.' . . . How has Western culture assessed Gauguin's life and work? Gauguin was *canonized* by Western art history . . . . his fame is certainly based on his paintings and not on his familial desertion, nevertheless, the fact of his having left behind a wife and five children for sunnier prospects has done nothing to tarnish his stature. If anything, it has added a romantic allure to his biography. ("Autonomy, Social" 35–36), emphasis original

What appears to stir most controversy in O'Donoghue's poem is not the narrated Modigliani's abusive conduct but the speaker's moral standpoint. It is the disquieting image of the expectant woman dragged down by her enormous belly to the ground and then shattered into pieces that induces people's dismay. Bearing this in mind, the voice in the poem belongs to Jeanne Hébuterne so that the woman could recount the narrative from her own viewpoint. All in all, understanding what has brought a pregnant woman to such a tragic step ("With our baby romping inside me") is not an undemanding act. The female speaker who commits suicide and infanticide, killing not only herself but also her just-about-to-be born baby ("Her eight-month-three-week / Weight will suck me quicker / To the ground") is more likely to be condemned than comprehended. In her ultimate self-destructive transgression, the persona in "Jeanne Hébuterne" has broken at least two taboos, taking her own life and the life of her unborn child. Nonetheless, even if disapproved of, Hébuterne's choice should at least be depicted. Elaborating into more detail the previously discussed theme of women's victimisation, the poem "If You See Kay" illustrates the detrimental consequences of a woman's oppression in her own home. Although O'Donoghue's poem engages different poetic devices, one cannot fail to notice the analogy with Eavan Boland's "In His Own Image." Both of them deal with the male "artists" who want to mould women's victim identities with their own fists, as Boland phrases it, "to summon them from void." Friedman<sup>186</sup> notices that:

Intimate relationships affect us in our very homes, our "havens in a heartless world" (to recycle a contemporary cliché), the places where we are supposed to be safe, nurtured, and protected. In intimate relationships, we expose our

---

<sup>186</sup> Friedman enumerates three main ways in which violence is being exercised on women: when "it threatens an abused woman's survival and safety" (*Autonomy, Gender* 142), when "[t]his threat focuses an abused woman's attention on the desires and demands of her abuser" (*Autonomy, Gender* 142) and finally with "exercise[ing] inordinate control over their intimate partners" (*Autonomy, Gender* 142).

bodies and bare our souls, making ourselves vulnerable at the very core of our beings. When one's heaven *is* a heartless world, there is no further place of refuge, no sanctuary in which one can rest secure from the violence that threatens one's exposed and vulnerable core itself. (*Autonomy, Gender* 141), emphasis original

With its theme of domestic violence, "If You See Kay" reminds that woman-battering entails an "assaultive . . . *pattern* of behaviour, not isolated individual events. One form of battering builds on another and sets the stage for the next battering episode" (Ganglely qtd. in Adams, "Woman-Battering" 57). In other words,

Abuse by an intimate partner can include: (1) physical battering, ranging from shoving and hitting to attacks with lethal weapons; (2) emotional and psychological abuse, such as humiliation, isolation, threats to take the children away, or the killing of the beloved pets; (3) financial control, such as withholding support money or stealing the abused person's own money; and (4) sexual abuse, such as rape. . . . (*Autonomy, Gender* 141), emphasis original

In O'Donoghue's poem, to empower the abused woman, the male textual perspective is made irrelevant. In "If You See Kay" what matters is how women react to domestic violence, how they try to cope with it and how, and why, they keep its occurrence secret. Consequently Adams stresses that

In response to battering, the victim changes something about herself in an effort to accommodate the perpetrator. Frequently, this involves restricting her free will, ending relationships with friends or family to whom he has objected (which is usually all of her friends and family, since they all pose a threat to his control), or even quitting work. Often his behavior limits her access to a car or her ability to even leave the house. ("Woman-Battering" 57–58)

That is why in the analysed poem it is the female acquaintance who lays bare the unmentionable fact of Kay being the victim of her husband's brutality. To begin with, O'Donoghue's persona appears to be sincerely concerned about Kay's safety. The conditional clause beginning with "if" and not with "when" could imply that the female voice fears, with good reason, that Kay's life might be in danger. Even when she is around, the contact with Kay is restrained and problematic. The poem's tentative title seems to suggest that Kay's persecutor aims to "*isolate her from a network of support and relationship*" (Adams, "Woman-Battering" 72), emphasis original.<sup>187</sup> Adams explains that "Battering erects an invisible cage: 'Two aspects of violence are threat and control . . . fear of being hurt is used to manipulate and control a woman via threats' (Carlin, n.d.,1)" ("Woman-Battering" 57). The speaker in "If You See Kay" articulates her request:

---

<sup>187</sup> "Isolation: - Deprives victim of all social support for the ability to resist. - Develops an intense concern with self. - Makes victim dependent upon interrogator" (Jones qtd. in Adams, "Woman-Battering" 70).

If you see Kay,  
 Her eye will be swelled  
 Brown and red  
 As a rotten crab apple  
 With a slit in its side  
 Through which she sees  
 Strips of the world.

(T 26)

Accordingly, the persona in "If You See Kay" asks her other friends to pay attention to the battered woman's changed appearance that bears the visible signs of aggression. As demonstrated, Kay's face and her sight are impaired in both senses. Firstly as a result of physical assault, her vision is limited: she "sees / Strips of the world" through the "a slit in its side." Secondly, metaphorically, what is diminished is the abused woman's ability to properly assess the danger of the situation in which she has been trapped. Kay herself seems to be able to grasp only the fractions of the total harm that she is exposed to. The female voice continues:

If you see Kay,  
 She'll gabble expertly  
 About the secret life  
 Of hot-press doors  
 And their sneaky swings  
 Out from nowhere to crack  
 Her one along the cheekbone.

(T 26)

From being a previously self-determining person, Kay has turned into a disempowered woman united with her oppressor in a vicious circle of victimisation. In O'Donoghue's poem, as her tormentor's skilful enabler, Kay does her best to hide her husband's brutality. "Her secret life" evolves into a series of larger and smaller lies as if she was her aggressor's most dutiful accomplice. The mutilated woman denies the fact that "[w]hen a man hits a woman, he has not lost control – he achieves and maintains control: *It is not so much what is done but what is accomplished.* Not only is he achieving and maintaining control, but he is reminding the woman of her subordinate status" (Adams, "Woman-Battering" 57), emphasis original. In her illusions to manage the overbearing situation, a battered woman, like Kay

attempts to soothe and please the controlling man, complying with his demands, agreeing with his opinions, denouncing his enemies. She accepts blame when things are not her fault and squelches any anger for fear of igniting his. All to no avail. "When a woman tries to keep a partner calm by pleasing him, he gains exactly what he wants. He exercises his power over her and gets his way on a daily basis. It is ironic that she thinks that she is 'managing' best when in fact she is most under his control" (Jones and Schecter 1992, 36). (Adams, "Woman-Battering" 58)

Kay seems to get accustomed to functioning in a life-threatening context, not seeing a way out of her anguish. Friedman advocates rightly that “the old question, ‘can this marriage be saved?’ should be revised to, ‘can this marriage be saved from *oppressiveness*?’ Some relationships should be preserved and others should be abolished” (“Autonomy, Social” 46), emphasis original. Drawing upon Lorde’s canonical metaphor, Friedman encourages women to appreciate the empowering potential of breaking free of abusive patriarchal patterns. Consequently, she refers to the process of activating women’s empowerment as applying the “master’s tools” to “dismantle the master’s house” (“Autonomy, Social” 47). It is precisely the inability to perceive herself as an empowered and a distinct person outside the repressive (marital) framework that prevents Kay from taking steps to terminate her harmful relationship. That is why instead of leaving her husband, Kay has become an expert in covering up her spouse’s violent acts and making up excuses to explicate the injurious marks on her mutilated body (see “She’ll talk about”). The persona in “If You See Kay” warns that:

She’ll talk about anaemia  
 And how the littlest touch  
 Beckons up her hibernating  
 Blood to flood arms  
 And legs with autumn-colour  
 Blotches. That’s why  
 You can’t recall her features  
 From before. They’re never  
 Fully in the clear.

(T 26)

The lines “You can’t recall her features / From before. They’re never / Fully in the clear” indicate that the bodily integrity of a battered woman has changed, so has her personality. She is terrorised into a new identity: that of Victim. Having examined the studies (conducted by psychiatrist Alfred D. Biderman) on coercion, carried out on American soldiers, Russell proves the striking correspondences between military methods and those enforced upon battered women by their male oppressors. Among the analogous techniques, Jones enumerates “*Isolation, Monopolization of Perception, Induced Debility and Exhaustion, Threats, Occasional Indulgencies, Demonstrating ‘Omnipotence,’ Degradation, Enforcing Trivial Demands*” (qtd. in Adams, “Woman-Battering” 70–71), emphasis original.<sup>188</sup> The female voice in “If You See Kay” continues her narrative:

---

<sup>188</sup> Consequently, Jones explains how these coercive methods affect the behaviour and life of battered women: “*Monopolization of Perception* -Fixes attention upon immediate predicament; -Fosters introspection, -Eliminates stimuli competing with those controlled by captor . . . *Induced debility and Exhaustion* -Weakens mental and physical ability to resist. *Threats* -Cause her to live in terror. *Occasional Indulgencies* -Insure compliance . . . *Demonstrating “Omnipotence”* -Suggests futility of resistance. *Degradation* -Makes cost of resistance appear more damaging to

If you see Kay,  
 You won't know about  
 Her head on the triangle  
 Of floor between the fridge  
 And its door, checking  
 For broken fingers  
 Under the art light. Oily  
 Blood lapped her hair-do  
 As it seeped from the  
 Overturned joint  
 Of tomorrow's beef.

(T 26)

In O'Donoghue's poem, becoming separated from her oppressor is the only way for Kay to save her dignity, physical and mental health and, above all, her life. Apart from beating, Kay's husband's assaultive behaviour entails the "induced debility and exhaustion, threats and demonstrating 'omnipotence.'" Kay's battered body has become nearly defenceless in its subdued lack of self-preservation instinct. She is no longer depicted of as a human being but an object / a painting on "her perfect canvas / Of skin" or a piece of meat ("Overturned joint / Of tomorrow's beef"). As proved by Jones, bullying methods are a means of exercising women's degradation and are used by Kay's husband to control her. Their operational aim is to "make[s] cost of resistance appear more damaging to self-esteem than capitulation" and "reduce[s] prisoner to 'animal level' concerns" (Adams, "Woman-Battering" 70–71). The speaker in "If You See Kay" keeps asking:

If you see Kay,  
 Herself and her perfect canvas  
 Of skin, meant to be mottled  
 By all thumbs and knuckles,  
 Well. If you see Kay,  
 We'll both know  
 What it is  
 I'm trying to say.

(T 27)

Grieving for Kay's situation, the analysed poem focuses on the textual aspect, rendered in the subtle poetic imagery ("Oily / Blood lapped her hair-do / As it seeped from the / Overturned joint / Of tomorrow's beef"). Unlike most of O'Donoghue's works, "If You See Kay" is composed without linguistic puns or sophisticated vocabulary. Structurally, it has a simple ballad-like form with a repeated refrain that sounds like an alarming premonition of Kay's deadly fate. The abundance of colour shades to depict various injuries inflicted on Kay's body ("mottled / By all thumbs and knuckles," "hibernating / Blood to flood arms / And legs with autumn-colour / Blotches," "brown and red / as a rotten

---

self-esteem than capitulation . . . . *Enforcing Trivial Demands* -Develops a forced habit of compliance in the prisoner" (qtd. in Adams "Woman-Battering" 70–71), emphasis original.



crab apple”) appears to reveal the drama of her existence without victimising her any further. For Kay, getting tuned into her female empowerment seems the only way to survive and put an end to her on-going oppression. Women’s power comprises the resources that seem to be missing in Kay’s life such as “a sense of self-trust” (Stoljar 95), “internal coherence” of the integrated self (Stoljar 103), being uninhibited by external or internal determinants (Stoljar 106), perceiving herself as “self-originating sources of claims” (Stoljar 107), and having “regard [herself] as authorized to act on their own interests and ordering of preferences” (Stoljar 97). All these components are essential for women’s agency and they might in the longer run lead to a meaningful life change, such as leaving repressive conditions and, hence, resisting one’s victimisation. As shown, O’Donoghue in her poem handles the theme of domestic violence with tact and concern, one could easily sense her consideration about battered Kay. Devoid of moral verdicts upon the narrated heroine, O’Donoghue’s speaker refrains from the “blaming the victim” tactic and hastily condemning Kay’s docile behaviour. Friedman explains that:

The question[s] “Why do women stay?” . . . is reasonable to be perplexed when a competent adult seems to take no action to protect herself against attack and even knowingly remains in a situation that exposes herself to further danger. . . . It seems furthermore that there is indeed *something* wrong with the choice to stay in an abusive relationship. Exactly what kind of wrong is involved, however, must be specified precisely. Staying in an abusive relationship is not a moral wrong – unless it is morally wrong to endure mistreatment. (*Autonomy, Gender* 143), emphasis original

The question of why battered women remain in oppressive relationships seems to have monopolised the debate on domestic violence. Unlike O’Donoghue’s non-judgemental attitude towards women who cannot leave abusive conditions (depicted in “If You See Kay”), sometimes the polemic concerning this subject can be far from the current state of knowledge or even common sense. Friedman discards the out-dated pseudo-scientific arguments for women’s maintenance of abusive relationships, starting from the most absurd (i.e. women’s innate masochism [*Autonomy, Gender* 144]) and ending with the recently contested “learned helplessness” phenomenon (*Autonomy, Gender* 145). Instead, she explains that:

Empirical research in the past few decades has revealed that many women stay in abusive relationships because leaving the relationships would impose even greater hardships on them. Many abused women, for example, are financially dependent on their abusers; leaving the relationship would risk the loss of financial support. Some women stay with their abusers in order to protect their children. A woman may feel that her children are simply better off for having a father in the home; perhaps the man is not abusive towards the children. Or the abuser may frighten a woman into staying with him by warning that he will get the custody of the children in case she leaves. Finally, some abusers threaten to retaliate violence against their female partners for leaving . . . . Abused women may also undermine their abilities to survive on their own. Women may also be

motivated to stay in abusive relationships by questionable normative commitments . . . “higher loyalties” to religious or moral norms that require, for instance, that a woman keep marriage together despite high personal costs to herself. (Friedman, *Autonomy, Gender* 145–146)

O'Donoghue's poem's most shocking element is implied in-between the lines, namely, Kay's lack of protest against the harm done to her. According to Adams, “anger is one of those emotions that battered women are not supposed to express, constantly monitoring their emotions so that they will be flat in relationship to the controlling man. This is both a survival strategy and a coping mechanism” (“Women-Battering” 65). Nonetheless, in oppressive situations, women's outrage might be a life-saving factor and a source of female empowerment. Accordingly, Fox-Genovese<sup>189</sup> argues that:

Anger lies at the heart of the matter, for without anger there is no feminist consciousness at all. But the unloosing of anger continues to threaten many women, especially young women, who assume that to acknowledge anger is to be doomed to act it out and thereby jeopardize relations with boyfriends, husbands, lovers, and possibly fathers and mothers as well . . . . That anger remains difficult, especially because it is so often accompanied by fear. (226)

With regard to women's suppressed emotions, O'Donoghue's volume *Among These Winters* (2007) includes three poems whose themes operate around women's victimisation in psychiatry. The aforementioned narratives draw upon the institutionalised abuse of female patients enforced by the pseudo-science, state and patriarchal legislation alike:

Gendered power relations are specifically organized according to interplay among the traditional discourses which have controlled women's bodies. Consider religious, economic and familiar ideologies through which women have been physically and sexually subservient; legal, medical and welfare discourses which pathologize the female body, and exercise state-sanctioned (expert, professional, primarily male) authority over its reproductive functions; psychiatry and other ‘psy’ professions, which similarly issue policy and treatment which sexualize the female, who is viewed as an unfortunate product or victim of her biology in the ways that it affects her psyche; (Faith 58)

The so called “experimental” therapeutic methods (i.e. chemically-induced sleep as a form of women's mental treatment) had insufficient or no medically researched grounds. In the name of advancement, doctors experimented on disempowered female sufferers, turning them into docile guinea pigs. Daly highlights that

In modern times psychiatric ideology has to a large extent replaced theology as custodian of society's values. Clearly, the semantics of “good” and “evil” have

<sup>189</sup> Fox-Genovese argues that “The refusal to acknowledge anger reinforces the message that “good girls” do not get raped because they do not invite it and thus reinforces the message that men's violence is, at bottom, a woman's problem. It is not: it is primarily a man's problem” (226).

been replaced partially by “health” and “mental illness.” . . . Szasz’s analysis is a development of an analogy between institutional psychiatry and the Inquisition . . . Women, particularly, although of course not exclusively, are victimized by the barbarities of modern psychiatry, especially psychosurgery . . . This includes operations in which healthy brain tissue is mutilated in order to change a person’s emotions and conduct. (*Beyond God* 64–65)

In the notes following her second collection (2007), O’Donoghue explains the obscure title of the poem analysed here: “‘Dauernarkose’, p.36: *From the German. An experimental treatment for schizophrenics, it involved prolonged drugged sleep, and was also called ‘the continuous sleep cure’*” (AMW). The poem “Dauernarkose” opens with the third-person account relating the case of a female psychiatric patient medically induced into sleep. The extended hibernation period is depicted by O’Donoghue’s persona in the rhythmic passage which flows smoothly from one line to another: “**been asleep** for three days, / a **liquid length** . . . **like a sheet** / of **lake-water**.” The melodious alliteration resonates peacefully, as if the protracted unconscious time might not ever come to an end. Nonetheless, beyond the appearances of the tranquil, chemically instigated serenity, there lies the truth of violating of the woman’s emotional and physical integrity. In O’Donoghue’s poem, the simile comparing the female patient’s drugged sleep to the “sheet (of lake-water)” that “closes over her head” implies her bodily constraint or even suffocation. The doctors’ perspective is introduced in the subsequent fragment:

She has been asleep for three days,  
a liquid length of time

closed over her head like a sheet  
of lake-water. They think they have

her dreams cached away  
in their clutterbook of explanans,

and see no flicker hint from behind  
eyelids fern-stitched with blue veins.

(ATW 36)

Not only do the doctors in “Dauernarkose” attempt to control the hospitalised women’s daily and sentient reality, they also insist on looking into their patients’ subconscious. In the quoted passage, the medical researchers wish to compartmentalise even women’s dreams. The verb “cache away,” apart from its literal sense (put in storage or keep in secret) also connotes with “being caught,” meaning to be kept captive. In either case, the masculine desire to supervise women’s reality becomes the axiom underlying the established medical procedure. Ironic as it might seem, the supposedly learned medical records are composed of disarrayed notes compiled at random. Instead of breeding respect and asserting medical authority, the sophisticated Latinised “explanan” reminds one bitterly of the derivative root “explanare” that is to “flatten” (*CED*). In

O'Donoghue's poem, psychiatrists' incapacity to cure mental problems (real or imagined) is rendered in the last two lines. The image of the "eyelids fern-stitched with blue veins" points to a realm that is beyond the jurisdiction of normalising medicine. In "Dauernarkose," the passage below opens with a contrastive adverbial clause, as if intended to question the doctors' line of argumentation:

But she is navigating equations,  
pointed fir jungles of isosceles  
  
triangles, the screams of chalk  
and nails like seagull voice, dust  
  
of chalk a scurf on her cuffs.

(ATW 36)

The cited fragment from "Dauernarkose" aims at resisting the drug-maintained passivity so as to release the hospitalised woman from victimisation. To defy patient's medicalised docility, O'Donoghue employs verbs of movement relating the woman's active and mobile textual standpoint (i.e. "she is navigating," "she walks," "she leaves / infinity"). Although the behaviour of the sleeping patient appears to be incomprehensible at first, soon one begins to realise that her discourse is narrated in a non-linear surreal dream logic with the displacement and condensation techniques. Despite its alleged obscurity, the woman's hallucinated visions appear to be derived from the idiom of science, based on the precise mathematical metaphors (i.e. "equations, isosceles / triangles") and complemented with the uncanny "screams of chalk / and nails like seagull voice." The female voice in "Dauernarkose" argues that:

She walks past the bossy sign-posts  
  
of sine and tan, and her map begins  
to make sense, when the two-legged  
  
travel stool of pi is pulled from under  
her and she is splashed awake. . . .

(ATW 36)

The twice repeated chalk signs (see "the screams of chalk," "dust / of chalk") left on the female body might imply that it is used as psychiatrists' textual screen or the *tabula rasa* for their "experimental" therapy. The doctors' written marks leave scars on the patient's corporeal and emotional identity. Finding her way out of the drugged fantasy, the sleeping woman attempts to resist her victimisation. By the means of a lucid dream, she tries designing her own graphic representation of the subconscious. Until the moment the female patient is brutally woken up, she keeps away from the "bossy sign-posts," and follows "her map." In "Dauernarkose," the woman's medically upheld compliance resembles the tortures used during the present-day interrogations of terrorists or

prisoners of war: the “waterboarded” patient’s face being “splashed awake,” and “the two-legged / travel stool of pi is pulled from under / her.” Following the mathematical textual trope (vide the earlier number pi), the awoken patient resumes her journey into her own world. The persona in “Dauernarkose” records: “She leaves / infinity, her last mark, a slender eight / sleeping with its face to the wall” (ATW 36). O’Donoghue’s poem’s concluding symbolism of the infinity sign (“infinity, her last mark, a slender eight”) can mark the duration of the woman’s medically controlled inaction. Abandoning her transcendental visions, the patient in “Dauernarkose” returns to her bed-ridden confinement. “Sleeping with . . . face to the wall,” completes the woman’s institutionalised victimisation. Claiming that “Women, particularly, although of course not exclusively, are victimized by the barbarities of modern psychiatry, especially psychosurgery” (*Beyond God* 64), Daly emphasises the fact that

In our times, a woman who is defined as unhealthy because she wants power over her life can’t win according to the rules of the psychiatrists’ games . . . . Dr. Breggin explains that it is more socially acceptable to lobotomize women because creativity, which the operation totally destroys, is in this society “an expendable quality in women” . . . . [Moreover] lobotomized women make good housekeepers. (64–65)

As stated earlier, the two subsequent poems: “Catalepsy. Provoked by the Sound of a Tuning Fork” and “Lethargy. Resulting from the Sudden Extinction of Light” are inspired by the late nineteenth century photographs taken in a Parisian mental hospital by Jean-Martin Charcot. O’Donoghue explains in her “Notes” that “‘Catalepsy. Provoked by the Sound of Tuning a Fork’ and ‘Lethargy. Resulting from the Sudden Extinction of Light’, p. 47–50: *Based on Jean-Martin Charcot’s 1880’s Iconographie: photographs of patients with hysteria, Salpêtrière Hospital, Paris*” (AWT 70), emphasis original. The referred to photos depict female patients diagnosed to be suffering from hysteria, the gendered-related mental condition (the derivative root stemming from the uterus) from time immemorial attributed to women. O’Donoghue’s “Catalepsy. Provoked by the Sound of a Tuning Fork” draws upon the medical state of the long-term motionlessness. The speaking voice in the examined text brings into the limelight a sharp contrast between the drugged female patients and the decision of the photographer to portray these women without their consent. Opening the poem with the adverbial of concession “No matter that she smells” indicates that Jean-Martin Charcot’s actions are to be carried out regardless of the dehumanised circumstances in which the “hysterical” women find themselves in. In O’Donoghue’s poem, the selected female patient is not prepared for the startling sense-perceptions accompanying the camera work, such as the explosion (“the white / gunpowder”), the emotive reaction (“small subdued”) and the sudden blaze (“camera’s flash”). Overwhelmed by its shocking intensity, the disoriented woman appears to be frightened like a tracked down and light-blinded animal (“catches her unaware”). The persona in “Catalepsy. Provoked by the Sound of a Tuning Fork” observes:

No matter that she smells,  
crushed diamonds, the white  
gunpowder before it bursts

in small subdued claps,  
the camera's flash still  
catches her unaware.

(ATW 47)

In "Catalepsy. Provoked by the Sound of a Tuning Fork" what draws the speaker's attention is the peculiar object in the background whose function in the medical institution one cannot imagine. The musical device for sound tuning gives the impression of being out of context in the mental hospital. Enlarged out of proportion by the optical lens, the enormous tuning fork almost overwhelms the foregrounded woman. Ironically it is claimed to "stand[s] guard behind her," as if protecting the female patient against the gazing eye of camera. O'Donoghue's speaker argues that "A tuning-fork, big as a hay / pike, stands guard behind her. / Its long low thrum / has stunned her spine" (ATW 47). The rhythmic cadence of the tuning instrument seems to be paralleled with the social conditioning and "perfecting" of the female patients. In Salpêtrière Hospital, the women's methodological victimisation involves breaking their free will in tune with the normalising institution's requirements. In agreement with the sarcastic assurance of the tuning fork's safeguarding function, the persona in "Catalepsy. Provoked by the Sound of a Tuning Fork" does not place much faith in its healing properties. Instead of its assumed harmonising effect, the regulating device evokes disciplinary connotations: "The echo remains, mantra / of a church bell, one peal, / faraway; a tinny taste at her / backmost teeth" (ATW 47). The metal aftertaste on the patient's palate could indicate the side effects of her electric shock treatment. The fragment below appears to confirm the corrective dimension of "the sound therapy:"

. . . The sound  
presses thumbs against

the lintels of bone  
over her eyes. She sits,  
a frumpy mannequin,

in studied confusion.

(ATW 47)

In "Catalepsy. Provoked by the Sound of a Tuning Fork," the all-pervasive sound assaults the woman's bodily integrity with its high pitch. The petrified patient is overcome by the unfamiliar and irritating auditory sensations. Her unnatural lifeless pose is compared to the anatomical model: shabby and motionless. Even the woman's betrayed emotions ("studied confusion") are put into doubt. The depicted image renders the immobilised female patient as if turned into stone between one meaningless gesture and another: "She seems to

have dropped / something – crockery, a doll / with a porcelain head – and / her hands wring the air” (ATW 47). The juxtaposition of the gendered social context (the porcelain doll) and the suffering of the victimised woman becomes foregrounded here. The female voice argues that:

. . . Words  
whistle wetly through the pin-hole

made by her lips, as the sound  
and resound of one note smote  
from a wooden bench grinds

at her tail-bone. . . .

(ATW 47–48)

In “Catalepsy. Provoked by the Sound of a Tuning Fork,” the monotonous droning of the constantly repeated tone induces in the female patient a trance-like state. In consequence, she withdraws into her own world, losing contact with the oppressive reality. In O’Donoghue’s poem, the tuning-fork’s metre triggers in the hospitalised woman a defensive reaction against the conditioned homogeneity. The narrative’s final chords resonate with the perspective of doctors responsible for inducing in her the catatonic state. As a result, the medical discourse is inscribed onto the female body: “His nib scoots / across pages, scratching notes / on the woman he struck into stone” (ATW 47). Although “Catalepsy. Provoked by the Sound of a Tuning Fork” does not provide enough grounds to decide whether the female patient’s insentient state “was provoked” for some “experimental” purpose or happened as a side effect of the failed therapy, one may suspect with good reason that the victimising practice was instigated deliberately.

O’Donoghue’s poem “Lethargy. Resulting from the Sudden Extinction of Light” resumes the theme of women’s mental and physical victimisation in Salpêtrière Hospital (1880). This time the narrated standpoint in the discourse is neither the patients’ or the doctors’ but that of a nurse assisting in the treatment. The introduction of the in-between third party mediating between the decision-taking psychiatrists and the female sufferers brings a new perspective to the problem of women’s victimisation. Having to put the doctors’ resolutions into practice, the auxiliary medical staff seem to distrust their immediate superior’s methods. The line “The nurse looks away from the patient” (ATW 49) discloses the uneasiness of the nurse and her lack of identification with hospital procedures. The female patient’s body “whose back is arced in a swoon, / a skin-and-bone parabola” (ATW 49) renders her malnutrition and induced dependence (unconscious). Due to assuming the foetal position, the hospitalised woman may regress to a safer, infantile stage. What is more, the nurse’s own bodily language reveals dissatisfaction or even irritation with the context in which she finds herself in. The persona in “Lethargy. Resulting from the Sudden Extinction of Light” records:

She rolls her eyes to their corners  
 as if to say: I'm fed up with this  
 light-dark, fall-catch charade,  
 I'm sick of bracing my knees  
 in wait for the sudden drop  
 of their weight, . . .

(ATW 49)

At first it appears that the nurse's annoyance is directed against her defenceless female patients. This impression is further supported by the fact that it is upon the vulnerable female bodies that the carer projects her indignation: "I'm **sick** / of the **smell** of their black-outs, / sweat on serge or wool, sour / as ammonia" (ATW 49). On closer examination, one realises that the repeated several times expressions indicate the nurse's own resistance to being victimised by being forced to witness the victimisation of the hospitalised women. The treatment recommended by the doctors is perceived by O'Donoghue's speaker as abusive and medically inadequate. The nurse perceives it as performatively intended to evoke the visually spectacular effect of the "fall-catch charade." Hence, the medical woman equates the psychiatric treatment in Salpêtrière Hospital with a pitiful spectacle that she does not approve of. The patients' bodily sensations are catalogued in a form of the melodious alliteration, which stresses the staged aspect of the women's affliction. The nurse in "Lethargy. Resulting from the Sudden Extinction of Light" declares:

. . . Their impromptu

urine, warmly worming down  
 my own skirt and over my shoes,  
 and I don't believe them anyhow.

(ATW 49)

When the nurse's irritation intensifies, her monologue becomes confusing with regard to the employment of pronouns and reference points. Claiming: "Their **impromptu** / **urine**, **warmly worming** down / my own **skirt** and over my shoes," the persona most likely has her female patients in mind. However the line that follows the cited account ("and I don't believe them") does not seem to refer to the medically subdued women. It would be implausible to doubt the psychiatric patients' uncontrollable reflexes. It remains feasible, nonetheless, to question the intentions of the doctors who exert upon the incapacitated women unnecessary suffering. Considering the above, the nurse's reaction in "Lethargy. Resulting from the Sudden Extinction of Light" constitutes a classic case of the transfer of negative feelings from an inaccessible object (signifying the coercive power of male doctors) onto the more reachable platform (directing her anger against the vulnerable female patients). The expression "clasped against the patient's" embodies the nurse's own helplessness. To implement obediently the harmful treatment recommended by the professionals who are higher in the medical hierarchy, the nurses have to view their patients not as human beings



(“the sudden drop / of the weight,” “a skin-and-bone parabola”) but as dehumanised artefacts. However even trying as they might, the nurses cannot suppress their compassion for the victimised women and they do their best to protect their “skin-and-bone basketwork.” The persona in “Lethargy. Resulting from the Sudden Extinction of Light” claims:

Her hands are clasped against the patient’s  
ribs, thick washer-woman’s fingers,  
latticed like skin-and-bone basketwork.

She does not understand his *modus*  
*operandi*, and why these women  
faint away when the light is quenched

like a match disappeared into  
a mouth. . . .

(ATW 49)

Thus, within the course of O’Donoghue’s narrative, the nurse’s reaction to the hospitalised women’s victimisation changes. It entails a broad spectrum of defensive mechanisms: from, at first, the implicit critical body language signs, through the projection of their irritation upon the patients, the transfer and displacement of discomfort, to the denial of reality when negating her patients’ humanity. In the concluding part of “Lethargy. Resulting from the Sudden Extinction of Light,” the speaker finally manages to articulate her anger openly, admitting that “[s]he does not understand his *modus / operandi*, and why these women / faint away.” As demonstrated here, the lower-ranking female medical personnel can see through their superiors’ empty Latinised phrases and their operating methods’ cruelty and inefficiency. Despite having no direct authority to openly question the doctors’ harmful procedures, the nurse in “Lethargy. Resulting from the Sudden Extinction of Light” refuses to identify with the medically legitimised victimisation of female patients. Institutionally overpowered as she may be, O’Donoghue’s speaker challenges her own and the hospitalised women’s disempowerment. To do so, the persona assumes the role of the caring mother who although not being able to protect her infants can still alleviate their suffering. Consequently, the female voice in “Lethargy. Resulting from the Sudden Extinction of Light” objects to taking photos of the unconscious female patients, perceiving it as unfair and detrimental to their health (“she hears the glass of photo / plates slide like swords”). She relates:

. . . She lets their heads  
loll back, inept new mother.

She holds her pose, a tedious pietà,  
in the dark. She hears the glass of photo  
plates slide like swords into a magician’s box.

(ATW 49–50)

The poem "The She-Machines," included in O'Donoghue's collection *Tule*, follows the vein of resisting women's systemic victimisation and drawing female empowerment from ridiculing the phallogocentric discourse that objectifies women. The poem's title appears to refer to e.e. cummings's famous poem "she being Brand" where the eroticised female body gets fused with that of the vehicle, revealing the fetishist sexual fascination of the male persona with both "she-machines." On the other hand, the female speaker in "The She-Machines" attempts to reverse this tendency, rescuing the objectified and, hence, victimised femininity from its culturally and historically sanctioned status, an artefact designed for male pleasure and utility. Structurally, O'Donoghue's poem is divided into three separate parts, each of them devoted to a different, feminine gender machine: the ship, the car, and the motorcycle. Its opening part commences with a straightforward declaration: "A Ship is a She. / Is this because she / Makes a fine vessel, / Wombing Lilliputian people / In her iron crannies?" (T 36). The female voice in "The She-Machines" meditates upon the reasons of the long-established tradition in the English language which ascribes the feminine gender to ships. In her ponderings, O'Donoghue's persona comes up with the explanation that the ship's womb-like shape and its function of carrying people inside might be one of the reasons for this correspondence. The vocabulary employed by the speaker draws upon the life-giving / protecting connotations: "Wombing Lilliputian people." Even the seemingly neutral denotation "vessel" operates on the ancient belief according to which woman was perceived as an empty receptacle (form) for the semen (matter). Without the male matter inside, woman was regarded as hollow and as useless as an unmanned ship. The persona in "The She-Machines" continues:

As a young one  
Her sails are a multiple bosom,  
Wobbling and ballooning nobly  
Until she is smashed in the planes  
Of her angular face  
With a bottle,  
And made to sever the water.  
Maiden's voyage.

(T 36)

Locating the female sexual initiation within the male-controlled conventions, O'Donoghue's poem clearly draws upon the practice of the ship's "Maiden's voyage" with her "being brand new." The cited fragment discloses the male aggression latent in the ritual of the "maiden's voyage's" virginal defloration ("she is smashed in the planes / Of her angular face / with a bottle"). It also reveals the enforced female complicity "made to sever the water." The main function of the dehumanised female vessel is to incite phallic desire "wobbling and ballooning nobly" (compare the references to female breasts) and arouse unfading admiration for her young body ("As a young one, / Her sails are a multiple bosom"). The subsequent part of "The She-Machines" operates on e. e.

cummings's very theme, namely that of the car. Unlike the American poet, O'Donoghue does not resume the vein of sexual / textual innuendoes any more. Her mocking approach towards the vehicle / woman analogy is structured around a dissimilar concept: the object being fallible, hence, prone to unpredictable mishaps.

In other words, O'Donoghue's narrative draws upon the conceptual victimisation of women, connoting the feminine gender with irrationality, unreliability and "irascible moods." These ungrounded clichés are claimed to result from women's allegedly "cantankerous nature." The comprehension of women's behaviour is argued to be beyond the sensible man's conceptual apparatus and that is why to understand it "you'd need / some class of manual." In O'Donoghue's poem, the verbal pun results from two senses of the noun "caboose," meaning a camper, van, a part of ship but in American jargon also "prison" (*CED*). In-between-the-lines, the speaker in "The She-Machines" implies that a set of stereotypical patriarchal gender clichés constitutes the cage inside of which a real life woman is locked up and victimised. She argues:

The Car.  
Her auto-biography has not been  
Written. But you'd need  
Some class of a manual  
To diagnose the irascible moods  
Of this caboose.

(T 36)

In "The She-Machines," other aspects of women's seemingly flawed character can be traced back to their not only temperamental but cyclically low spirits: "Sometimes in the winter / She has a minor breakdown / (Seasonal Affective Disorder) / And stubbornly refuses to churr" (T 36). Women's psychosomatic or depression-related conditions, to a large extent resulting from the somatised female victimisation, do not invite men's understanding. They are viewed as the symptoms of the fallible mechanism: an impediment to its utility that needs to be fixed. The inability to produce the ear-pleasing sound: churr (pun on chirr) classifies the she-machine as malfunctioning. The final passage of the second part maintains men's disregard for women's health problems, treating them both (women and their illnesses) in an equally dismissive and condescending way. The occasional kindness of its user is believed to immediately remove the underlying causes of the ignited problem ("spark-plug nerves"). The persona in "The She-Machines" argues:

But nothing that can't be remedied  
By tipping back her bonnet  
And smoothing out the vexed nubs  
Along her spark-plug nerves.

(T 36)

The third section of "The She-Machines" examines the common kitchen utensil. Unlike the earlier parts, the poem's third segment does not involve the explicit male perspective. Here we have a "domestic goddess"<sup>190</sup> in her traditional realm, surrounded by modern technological gimmicks, due to which her work should be quicker and more efficient than ever before. To relieve the burden of household chores, the female consumer in O'Donoghue's poem has to simply keep purchasing newer and more expensive machines that will "do" the work for her. The up-to-date equipped kitchen resembles a scientist's laboratory where a housewife is transformatively promoted into a skilled operator of other she-machines. And all this is provided to her by the absent but benevolent, male god of the technological progress. The speaker in "The She-Machines" relates:

The six-hundred pound  
Mincing Machine squats  
Fat and in a pock-marked suit  
Of Hammerite. She volleys  
Out sossies like a chain  
Of limbless babies.

(T 36–37)

Similar to the domestic paradise, the overpriced and oversized mincing machine appears to promise more than it can ever deliver. Instead of saving time and space, it signifies self-important pretence ("squats / fat and in a . . . suit"). The expression "a pock-marked suit" implies the scars and bodily marks left after a contagious disease. The phrase "A chain / Of limbless babies" that the she-machine is supposed to manufacture on her assembly line renders the brutality of the patriarchy's socialisation process in which one woman-machine operates other she-machines to manufacture "limbless babies." This way both the female operator and the man-made she-machine are maimed in their victimised status. Daly explains this process as transforming:

women who have been hooked by the sadomasochistic society into hookers of other women. In this deceptive chain of psychic vampirism, the Master Vampire – the sadistic fixer / framer – is lost sight of, and the masosadistic hookers / drainers are rendered more and more visible, and less and less comprehensible. (*Pure Lust* 62)

Like the described mincing machine she-machine, the meat gets turned into the abstract "Pink mess" to conceal its relation with the killed animal, as argued in the second chapter with reference to Adams. Making women the supervisors and the home goddesses managing the sacred transformation of the dead carcass into the "delicious" food constitutes one of the most cruel jokes of patriarchy where the oppressed are further victimised to oppress others. The elements of violence are implied in-between the lines ("sheathed / From her churning belly-

<sup>190</sup> The book "How to be a Domestic Goddess" by Nigella Lawson was published in 2001. Apart from cooking recipes, it advocated a new lifestyle for women.

bag,” “cold shanks,” “forced / Pink mess”). The desire to comply with consumer demands seems to be a regulating wish of every she-machine: “She feels the buyer ogling.” The imagined applause from her user (“and slapping / Her cold shanks with a price”) seems to be the highest reward for her compliant participation in the victimisation process. The persona in “The She-Machines” argues:

Hourly gorging on the forced  
 Pink mess, butting it out sheathed  
 From her churning belly-bag.  
 She feels the buyer ogling  
 Her brawny fork and slapping  
 Her cold shanks with a price.

(T 37)

Rendered in the sexist slang of the bike gang, O’Donoghue’s poem’s final part is devoted to the motorcycle worship. The (female) vehicles in “The She-Machines” are offensively addressed as “**H**aughty bitches. / **H**ellbent **H**itachis” implying the alleged arrogance of the snobbish class. The speaker remarks:

Haughty bitches.  
 Hellbent Hitachis skirt  
 Their amber armour in  
 Mucky brown kerfuffles  
 By cavorting through flash-floods.

(T 37)

In the vein of the woman / machine analogies, the bike’s embellishments resemble a Sunday best female outfit but the alliterated “amber armour” evokes associations with sovereign goddesses going to war. The verb “cavort” implies the parade on show, although the image of perfection is tainted with the performers’ “mucky” body. The dirt is collocated with the colour brown and joined as the modifier with the informal, and rarely used noun, signifying turmoil. The phrase “flash-floods” seems to indicate the intense but rather short-lived impression that the she-machine exerts on the audience. The following fragment: “They need a certain vanity. / To make up for the birth defect. / One-armed, but protracted use / Has steeled a ruthless clasp” (T 37) reveals the projected male fantasies about the feminised motorcycle. In O’Donoghue’s poem, collocating womanhood with “vanity” highlights the cyclists’ clichéd ideas about the feminine gender. Taking pride on being with the exceptional “female” partners, as the cyclists perceive their she-machines, boosts men’s narcissistic egos. Although perceived as unique, the she-machine will never satisfy its owner’s drive for perfection due to its innate gender deficiency. That is why the vehicle with its impressive appearance has “[t]o make up for the birth defect.” The poem “The She-Machines” ends as follows:

Sometimes, dangling a Port-A-Loo  
 Aloft from her finger-prong,

She strikes an attitude  
 Of half-come-hither worship  
 To the crane –  
 Her yellow crucifix menacing  
 The crop of sprouting houses.

(T 37)

All in all, no matter how much the she-machine would like to impress its user with distinctively individual traits (“She strikes an attitude”), even when manifesting her idiosyncratic features, she will always be perceived as a man-made object. The concluding lines of O’Donoghue’s poem reinstate the imagery of sacrificial violence (“Her yellow crucifix”). However the newly emerged element of vengeance (“menacing / The crop of sprouting houses”) might suggest that she-machines apart from sexual arousal and performative functionality, in their resistance against women’s victimisation, might also induce a sense of threat in their operators. The final warning note reminds one that she-machines who are aware of their strength and empowerment can successfully defy their users.

### 3.4. “Death, desirelessness: such kinless things:” Resisting female powerlessness in the Poetry of Caitríona O’Reilly

*Who can say  
 if a loved face will lie*

*at the end of it?*

(Caitríona O’Reilly, “Envoi”)

Obvious as it may seem, powerlessness is not such an easy concept to define. Philosophers (e.g. Morris) and sociologists (e.g. Lukes) cannot agree upon its meaning and scope. In his book *Power: A Philosophical Analysis* (2002), Morris challenges the views that:

. . . you are powerless is that you are thereby in someone else’s power, and that that somebody else must be responsible for your powerlessness if you are to have a valid complaint. Both of these assumptions are wrong, as I have argued. What is wrong with being powerless is that you *are* powerless – that is, lacking in power. (41), emphasis original

This is how in *Power: A Radical View* (2005) Lukes refutes the above-cited objections:

. . . power should not be conceived narrowly as requiring intention, actual foresight, and positive actions (as opposed to failing to act): the power of the powerful consists in their being capable of and responsible for affecting (negatively or positively) the (subjective and/or objective) interests of others.

On this broader view of power, the issues of powerlessness and of domination will no longer seem so obviously separate and locked into distinct perspectives. (68), emphasis original

As seen, powerlessness cannot and ought not to be analysed outside the contextual framework, because it is historically and culturally implicated in that grounding. Hence, one should consider it from a broader, social and gender-oriented angle. Therefore, women's powerlessness can have manifold manifestations which at first sight may not even seem correlated or intertwined. In "Five Faces of Oppression," Young locates female powerlessness in the same category as "exploitation, marginalization, cultural imperialism, and violence" (Wartenberg xxiii). Allen warns that:<sup>191</sup>

According to this view of power as domination, what it means to be a woman is to be powerless, and what it means to be a man is to be powerful. If men are powerful and women are powerless as such, then the domination relation between men and women will, of necessity, be pervasive; that is to say, it will exist wherever there are people who are socially defined (i.e., gendered) as men and women. (*The Power* 12)

Accordingly, Airaksinen clarifies the paradox of powerlessness by referring to coercive behaviour:

If the subordinated group is powerless, it may not be effective to bring the conflict into broad daylight, simply because this will make them even more powerless. This is part of what it means to be powerless . . . . Moreover, the uneven distribution, or the emergence of the powerful and the powerless, entails that the rhetoric of power flow unidirectionally. The powerful, in order to be powerful, must induce an ideology to the society. (116–117)

Furthermore, Hilary M. Lips's study<sup>192</sup> entitled "Female Powerlessness: a Case of 'Cultural Preparedness,?'" scrutinises the cultural patterns that instil powerlessness in young women:

An examination of the research on social interactions reveals a theme that I have labelled 'cultural preparedness for powerlessness' . . . . A generally accepted definition of power, in psychology, is the capacity to have an impact or produce an effect. Research has accumulated showing that girls receive

---

<sup>191</sup> Allen writes about MacKinnon's understanding of gender difference as "a domination relation" in which "women are powerless and men are powerful as such" (*The Power* 12). She elaborates it in detail: "This is evinced by MacKinnon's claim that 'women / men is a distinction not just of difference, but of power and powerlessness . . . . Power / powerlessness is the sex difference'" (Allen, *The Power* 12), emphasis original.

<sup>192</sup> Lips sums up her research's results as follows: "Female adolescents underrate their competence in a number of ways life skill areas . . . . Female high schools students rate themselves as significantly more powerless than do their male counterparts . . . . At the age of 9 years, 60–70 per cent of girls and boys responded positively to questions designed to measure their confidence and self-esteem" (101–102).

strong and consistent indications of their powerlessness in two major areas of power: mastery over tasks and influence over other people. (90)

As demonstrated, Lips advocates the gender-grounded character of powerlessness, warning that its far-reaching consequences might be disastrous in the future, especially its:

abiding path of acquiescence, of relative silence in the face of uncertainty, conflict or the throes of daily testing. What is absorbed is a habit of self-doubt in the face of confusion or competition, a hesitancy that can affect a young woman's later decisions in situations ranging from speaking up with a good answer, to entering a male-dominated contest, to choosing career options, to asserting her rights strongly and publicly when faced with discrimination, sexual harassment, or abuse. (102)

Taking this into account, one might perceive the conditioning of women into dominative power-over as one of major causes (and effects) of female powerlessness. This symbolic process happens on many levels, both conscious and unconscious, because it "is exerted on bodies, directly and as if by magic, without physical constraint . . . because it is for the most part exerted invisibly and insidiously through insensible familiarization with a symbolically structured physical world and early, prolonged experience of interactions informed by the structures of domination" (Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination* 38). In order to operate, power-over requires "the belief in the legitimacy of words and of those who utter them" (Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic* 170). What is more,

far from being the conscious, free, deliberate act of an isolated 'subject', this practical construction is itself the effect of power, durably embedded in the bodies of the dominated in the form of schemes of perception and dispositions (to admire, respect, love etc.) which *sensitize* them to certain symbolic manifestations of power. (Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination* 40), emphasis original

A question arises at this point: how to resist female powerlessness? Or more specifically, how is that done in O'Reilly's poetry? In the earlier-cited research, it is not argued that gender power asymmetries are permanent or unavoidable. Quite to the contrary, the study proves that "different patterns may be envisioned, modelled and implemented" (Lips 102). Bearing this in mind, one has to remember that "[t]he changes . . . are far-reaching and demanding, but they begin and continue whenever women, using their own strength and the support of others, refuse, in small or large ways, to accept, for themselves or for their daughters, a silent or powerless stance" (Lips 102). In O'Reilly's poetry, unlike in cases of overt discrimination and physical violence (analysed in O'Donoghue's and Morrissey's subchapters), latent power-over forces prevail. They are executed "through the schemes of perception, appreciation and action" (Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination* 37) that operate predominantly on an implicit and symbolic level. Considering the above, the strategy of female resistance



against powerlessness must also be different. In the following dissertation's methodology, this approach seems to be close to Bourdieu's notion of (self) reflexivity:

Reflexivity is not, for Bourdieu, the product of one privileged field, but rather can characterise any field, which allows for, or disposes its agents towards, 'the systemic exploration of the unthought categories of thought which delimit the thinkable and predetermine the thought' (1992d: 40). (Webb at al. 52)

When interpreting her poetry, critics make comparisons between O'Reilly's first and second volume, noting the progression and change that have taken place in the poet's artistic, formal and thematic development. Hence in "Shaping Itself In Shadow," referring to *The Nowhere Birds* (2001), Gamble comes to the conclusion that "the first collection did dance near the borders of the unknown, suggesting that one can come no closer to putting one's finger on evasive truths or experiences than to evoke something else and say that 'It was like that', or pointing up the difficulty of locating intuition and perception . . . . These were poems that were walking in the dark, certainly, but they knew where they were going, if only in the domain of words" (26). Furthermore in her review of *The Sea Cabinet* (2006), Gamble draws attention to the recurrent themes of O'Reilly's second volume, stating that the "opening poems proliferate with images of suffocation, confusion, illness, loss and conflicting urges of something trying to 'break through', and something dropping or being repressed" ("Shaping Itself" 26). Following this vein of comparisons, in O'Reilly's earlier poetry, the speaker's powerlessness appears to be of a personal, dramatized and solipsistic nature, almost hopelessly zoomed in on the female self, with very few glimpses of the suggested way out of this self-contained impasse. With regard to *The Nowhere Birds* (2001), the poems included in collection *The Sea Cabinet*, published five years later, explore more decisively the path of resisting the pervasive ambience of powerlessness, alienation, despair and other "unthought categories of thought." Hence resisting the overpowering discourses of "death, desirelessness: such kinless things," O'Reilly's persona opts for female empowerment rendered as "'[p]ower-from-within' . . . the power of ability, of choice and engagement. It is creative; and hence it is an affecting and transforming power but not a controlling power" (Hoagland qtd. in Allen 20).

The analysed in this chapter poems from *The Nowhere Birds* indicate how the persona in O'Reilly's debut volume little by little begins to face up to self-destructive thoughts, depression, acute angst and the fear of mortality that all affect her daily functioning. The poem "Anxiety" renders the speaker's powerlessness as bearing resemblance to a state of non-being. As a matter of fact, the atmosphere of life coming to an end permeates the examined narrative's form and its content. In a morbid tone, the female voice meditates on an encounter with the remains of a dead animal. The indefinite opening line ("Something had made a killing") implies that O'Reilly's poem might be an excerpt of a longer whole. Continuing the *post-mortem* examination of the

animal's carcass, the persona in "Anxiety" records meticulously the details of the textual autopsy:

Something had made a killing.  
A few small bones by the wall  
were sticky with dark blood  
but no parts of wing or skull

survived to tell me what it was.

(TNB 51)

As the poem proceeds, O'Reilly's speaker repeats as if compulsively "What was it?" (TNB 51). Jefferson Holdridge in his review of *The Nowhere Birds* praises "Anxiety" for "language and rhythm well suited to its theme" (379). To some extent, "Anxiety's" unsettling ambience reminds one of the menace permeating the film noir convention. In the gloomy, rain-washed and dark settings, evil appears to be looming out from every corner. In this bleak vein, the female voice in "Anxiety" (in the manner of a private eye) records the inconclusive results of her investigation: "By afternoon / the petrol-coloured rain had come / and washed it down the drain" (TNB 51). As in the film noir, the polluted rainfall does not cleanse or heal the world with a cathartic absolution. On the contrary, as a salient accomplice, the water removes the circumstantial evidence of the crime (the dead matter literally disappears, carried away by the rainfall into the gutter). The agitated persona in "Anxiety" admits:

So I wondered if a bird  
had ever been killed in a corner  
by a wall, and moved off slow  
like those pompous burghers

of Oslo do, in *Anxiety*.

(TNB 51)

At this stage, because of the lack of any direct evidence, the speaker in "Anxiety" should terminate her fact-finding enquiry. Nonetheless, the female voice cannot stop thinking about what she has witnessed. This haunting speculation regarding how and why the killing took place preoccupies her thoughts, inducing O'Reilly's persona to visualise various possible (or rather impossible) scenarios that might explain the animal's death. Opening the next stanza with a contrastive "But something had made a killing" indicates the speaker's almost compulsive objection to letting go. In other words, in some inexplicable way, she feels drawn to the spotted dead animal. It seems that the animal carcass's terminal state might induce in the female voice a death-wish for a final end to her own powerlessness. She ponders:

But something had made a killing  
and the corner worried me  
with everything I had, not noticing,

killed. Like those sickish faces  
 underneath their stovepipe hats,  
 a yellow shriek of sky behind them  
 and beyond. It was like that.

(TNB 51)

Alarmed as she is, the female voice in “Anxiety” acknowledges straightforwardly “the corner worried me.” Having done so, O’Reilly’s dramatic monologue assumes an almost absolutory character. The aforementioned phrase is completed with the two astonishing disclosures which are separated with commas and then enjambed. The verb “worried” is complemented with “everything I had,” digressed by a striking insertion “not noticing,” and further qualified by “killed.” The morbid verb “kill” seems to be deferred in O’Reilly’s narrative as much as possible. It occurs at the end of a long, twisted sentence, almost imperceptibly, as if it was placed there accidentally. After the speaker’s confession, the textual suspense does not subside. On the contrary, it intensifies with the unnerving imagery of “those sickish faces / underneath their stovepipe hats,” preceded by the conjunction “like.” One wonders whether “like” collocates with “killed,” and whether the evoked “sickish faces” are the ghastly apparitions of murder victims or the persona’s own phantasmagorical reminiscences. The concluding imagery in “Anxiety” does not provide any revealing insight into that mystery. Apart from its poetic accomplishment, it does not clarify the earlier doubts. In addition, in O’Reilly’s poem, the alliterated “yellow **sh**riek of **sky** behind them / and **b**eyond” (also echoing with “sickish” and “stovepipe”) might constitute a verbal pun on the cowardice of a “yellow streak.” Taking this into account, it might be that none of the above will ever lead one to the right track, as O’Reilly’s crime narrative seems to abound with false clues which intentionally misdirect the textual investigation. This happens because the titular “Anxiety” cannot be resolved at a textual level, as it has already permeated the speaker’s corporeal and emotional reality. It has taken the form of the acute social and personal dysfunction that makes the speaker’s daily life problematic. Transferring her apprehension to the level of the discourse, the persona in “Anxiety” attempts to visualise her fears as concrete images in order to confront the terror they induce in her. Hence, the visualisation (textualisation) strategy amounts to probing for a way out of her incapacity. All in all,

Producing awareness of the mechanisms that make life painful, even unliveable, does not neutralize them; bringing contradictions to light does not resolve them. But . . . it can have in allowing those who suffer to find out that their suffering can be imputed to social causes and thus feel exonerated; and in making generally known the social origin, collectively hidden, of unhappiness in all its forms, including the most intimate, the most secret. (Bourdieu qtd. in Webb at al. 56)

Following the vein of the empowering visualisation of the speaker’s most haunting fears, O’Reilly’s “Thunder over Humber” continues staging the detailed circumstances of her powerlessness. This time the disquieting

sensations are claimed to have a physiological ground, they are believed to be caused by the persona's migraine. The female voice in "Thunder over Humber" begins:

All night the headache has been growing,  
the blood gathering to bang in both temples  
and with it unease, as though we sensed  
(TNB 52)

With the migraine pain becoming increasingly acute ["before like snakebite" (TNB 52)], O'Reilly's speaker can barely put up with the surrounding (atmospheric) tension ["the lightning comes / unbearably white and silent (its distance / from thunder just an apostrophe between / the echo's voice, the mirror's face)" (TNB 52)]. Thus the outer world petrifies the female voice with the imagined danger, luring "from outside a terrified **slow shrill** / seeps from the trees." Furthermore, the speaker's externalised fears are projected onto her dwelling place. In view of that, her own house turns into a visible manifestation of her daunting phobia: "the spiders scuttling to their nerve-centres." The anxious persona in "Thunder over Humber" confesses:

and inevitably settles on the house  
sending the spiders scuttling to their nerve-centres,  
while from outside a terrified slow shrill  
seeps from the trees, in spite of darkness and rain,  
as I overheat, feeling the bedclothes heavier  
(TNB 52)

Despite claiming to possess the clarity of the mind, the female voice in "Thunder over Humber" evokes the morbid "sheeting mirrors and shrouding knives" and unsettling "dark space under the stairs." What is more, she fantasises about self-mutilation to "avoid being struck deaf and blind." On the whole, the impending menace that is supposed to put the speaker's health or life in danger permeates O'Reilly's narrative until the very last words. The poem's finale amounts to the suicidal fantasies which the persona in "Thunder over Humber" brings to the discourse's surface by means of the self-annihilating visions. Once again, O'Reilly's speaker's deepest insecurities may be, if not resolved, then, at least addressed on a textual level. This discursive strategy seems to be the first step in the direction of pursuing her own empowerment. The female voice in "Thunder over Humber" concludes:

and, though rational and unafraid,  
think of sheeting mirrors and shrouding knives  
and of the dark space under the stairs where  
(if I didn't know better) I'd willingly blind  
and deafen myself, to avoid being struck deaf and blind.  
(TNB 52)

Included in *The Sea Cabinet*, O'Reilly's poem "Stalker" resumes the disquieting framework of the preceding narratives. As in the previous poems, the female voice in "Stalker" transfers (projects) her powerlessness onto the chilling visions of the natural world. Imagining to be monitored by the "spider-stalker," the speaker's self-image gets multiplied endlessly in the cracked mirror. There does not appear to be a limit to the female voice's on-going corporeal self-inspection. O'Reilly's persona admits to "eyeing [her] . . . own nakedness," as if in a blood-soaked dream, tormented by unforgettable events that stain her conscience. Additionally, the speaker's attention seems to be absorbed excessively in her spider-like "changed hands," "brittle fingernails" and "prickling palms" that she appears to perceive as torn from the rest of her body. The persona in "Stalker" acknowledges:

Eyeing my own nakedness in a broken mirror  
as the red-coloured money changed hands,  
I woke to a sound lighter than wind in dry grass  
and listened again, marooned on the near side of sleep  
with prickling palms. I turned on the light.  
A spider on the wooden beam over my bed  
(TSC 46)

Being woken up by what she envisages to be a staring at her spider, the female voice in "Stalker" meticulously records the details of the insect's body: "the rasp / of legs like brittle, "bunched torso hung from its knuckles," and "legs curled in reflex." Composed of the loosely tied limbs and joints, the animal's corpus appears to be as "dissolved" as the speaker's own organism. Despite this similarity, or maybe precisely because of it, O'Reilly's persona deliberately knocks the creature off and then observes its agonising fall. In other words, the roles of the stalker and its victim have been reversed, the female voice turns into the spider's persecutor and the animal falls prey to her imagined peril. As argued above, it looks as if the spider's immobilised body reminded O'Reilly's speaker of her own inertia, becoming in this way a substitute target for the release of her own suppressed fears. The persona in "Stalker" admits:

resumed its wavering walk. I'd sensed the rasp  
of legs like brittle fingernails in sleep,  
that bunched torso hung from its knuckles,  
so I hit it once and watched it drop,  
legs curled in reflex to the shape of a net,  
as if snaring in its own quick death.  
(TSC 46)

Following this line of thinking, the second poem of the sequence "Two Night Time Pieces" is alliteratively entitled "Sleep and Spiders." O'Reilly's narrative is composed of the two-lined stanzas. Beginning with a subversive statement "It is too strange to kill," "Sleep and Spiders" advocates the position that the taking of another creature's life, regardless of whether it is human or nonhuman, is

unfair. The persona's statement implies that killing has not taken place, being "too – to," it remains in the sphere of imagination. From that perspective (unlike in "Stalker"), the spider that could have been dispatched is contemplated by O'Reilly's speaker with curiosity. Not wanting to have its beauty wasted, the female voice in "Sleep and Spiders" feels drawn to its stunning, symmetrical corporeal construction. She confesses:

It is too strange to kill.  
The symmetry of its eyes,

its eight paired legs askew  
on the lintel, exoskeletal

(TNB 19)

On one hand, in the cited passage, the phrase "looks sudden but is still / for hours" may render the spider's own hunting habits. On the other hand, it could refer to the moment of its potential murder, quick in its duration but then returning in the persona's nightmares again and again. In O'Reilly's poem, the question arises as to whether "eyes on stalks" belong to the speaker or to the spider. Hunting in a manner where any limb movement of the prey activates the web connections and informs the predator seems to indicate the nonhuman killing methods. Realising the difference between the human and nonhuman killing, O'Reilly's speaker appears to be haunted ("black shadows seep") by the guilty conscience, which results from the very contemplating the potential fatal act. Admitting that "the whole thing a claw" "come [s] to touch me in sleep," the female voice in "Sleep and Spiders" assumes empoweringly responsibility for her (self) destructive drives. She records:

It looks sudden but is still  
  
for hours, eyes on stalks,  
awaiting news from hair-triggers

that might be legs or fingers  
(the whole thing a claw)

come to touch me in sleep –  
hammock from which

black shadows seep.

(TNB 19)

O'Reilly's poem's final imagery entails a whole catalogue of the symptoms of depression. It involves the persona's waking up at the crack of dawn, having sinister and synaesthetic visions ("a cold blue glow"), experiencing the constricting sensation of the forcibly enslaved female self ("a self / trussed"), being petrified in a panic attack ("paralytic with dreams"), suffocating and gasping for breath (alliterated "barely **b**reathing"). As if addressing this case,

psychologists have enumerated the four most typical symptoms that depressed women experience as: “*the experience of loss, the inhibition of anger and aggression, inhibition of action or assertiveness, and low self-esteem*” (Kaplan, “The ‘Self-in-Relation’” 209–210), emphasis original. Bearing that in mind, the poem “Sleep and Spiders” appears to imply that in the speaker’s mind, the prolonged disempowerment (see “paralytic with dreams”) has reached the stage where it has already become habitual and sensitised. O’Reilly’s speaker visualises:

I wake at five to what five is –  
a cold blue glow and a self  
trussed, barely breathing,  
paralytic with dreams.

(TNB 19)

Paradoxically, a way out of the female individual powerlessness might be approached, as argued earlier, when analysing it from a broader cultural or social dimension. Such a strategy would alleviate the weight of the imaginary personal burden (guilt, phobia, etc.) that a sufferer experiences when perceiving her own condition as exceptionally dramatic or unique and when blaming herself for her negatively connoted emotions. In view of that, Lips describes the social phenomenon of women’s “cultural preparedness for powerlessness” (90) that is upheld on a gender level:

It is as if girls are taught from the start that they can exert control over a situation only in certain limited circumstances – and the message is so consistent that girls and women become increasingly *ready* to learn the lesson of powerlessness in any new situation. The effect is analogous to what psychologists have labelled ‘biological preparedness’ . . . the research on social interaction suggests, early and continuing socialization ‘primes’ girls and women to accept powerlessness. (Lips 90), emphasis original

On the whole, analysing the female voices of *The Nowhere Birds* volume, one is struck by how frequently O’Reilly’s personas distrust their own judgements, discredit their own assessment of the situation or are wary of their own feelings. Considering the above, one may agree with Lips’s conclusion that female powerlessness begins with assuming “an abiding path of acquiescence, of relative silence in the face of uncertainty, conflict . . . a habit of self-doubt in the face of confusion or competition, a hesitancy” (102). The first of the two parts of “Seagulls and Ravens” manifests O’Reilly’s speaker’s powerlessness as an increasing, nearly psychotic tension in a perceptive attitude. Emotionally subdued, the female voice in “Seagulls and Ravens” feels claustrophobic and unable to breathe (“Air thickens in the streets, the lungs”). The referred to symptoms might indicate a phobic attack, however, the obsessive thoughts that follow them imply additional psychological problems. Step by step, in O’Reilly’s poem the park scene changes into an unsettling nightmarish vision, summed up as “the birds are watching us.” Not being able to verbalise her

emotional state, the incapacitated speaker projects her own numbness onto the textually narrated birds. Due to this strategy, the persona's inertia (defined by her as "torpor") might be brought to the discourse's surface. Since the ravens are believed to be the only ones realising the persona's powerless condition, the birds' mobile and unrestrained presence appears to upset the speaker's fragile emotional balance, reminding her about her own immobilised entrapment ("the ravens come / to stalk the park"). The female voice in "Seagulls and Ravens" imagines herself to be threatened by the gathering ravens, as if they could disclose her well-hidden secret. She relates:

Air thickens in the streets, the lungs.  
From sagging cloud-bellies the ravens come  
to stalk the park like laryngitic pensioners.

In an effort to calm me, you lick the salt  
from my skin. My fingertips have grown eyes.  
There is an art to seeing in the dark.

At 3 a.m. a door bangs. I wake calling.  
And tomorrow will be heavier, the glass says.  
The birds are watching us. They sense our torpor.

(TNB 59)

As suggested in "Seagulls and Ravens," the subsequent delusions turn out to be more disquieting than the opening imagery. Overpowered by the surrounding (intimidating as she perceives it) reality, the speaker in the examined poem visualises the night monsters as "walking out of the night / like giants, out of the dawn" (TNB 59). To render her vulnerable condition, O'Reilly's persona conjures up the image of an attack of the zombie-like, indestructible creatures ["Their eyes are unkillable embers / over their chests' ashen gourds" (TNB 59)]. The female voice in "Seagulls and Ravens" feels as if she was disappearing "under erasure." For she fails to identify with her own self, the internalised powerlessness becomes somatised onto the bodily level ("We have effaced ourselves again, / and are nowhere / except in the body's grief"). O'Reilly's speaker's declaration proves that she has lost a clear sense of her identity and her own bodily boundaries. "The boundary concept is about safety, clarity, and privacy. It potentially includes the capacity to authentically represent one's needs and feelings in a context that holds some promise of mutuality" (Jordan, "Therapists' Authenticity" 69). Since the boundary "connotes a spatial metaphor of 'self' experience" (Jordan, "Therapists' Authenticity" 69) as such it can become a source of female empowerment. Furthermore, in "Seagulls and Ravens," the statement "I turn the colour of ash repeatedly" brings Plath's "Lady Lazarus" symbolism into the discourse, especially that "again" and "repeatedly" would suggest the recurrent character of the self-destructive process. The persona in "Seagulls and Ravens" confesses:



We have effaced ourselves again,  
and are nowhere  
except in the body's grief.  
It falls, what once lay in me.  
I turn the colour of ash repeatedly.

(TNB 59)

As demonstrated in *The Nowhere Birds* O'Reilly's speakers' attempts to resist or at least voice their vulnerability are frequently evinced via empowering avian imagery.<sup>193</sup> The avian symbolism, on one hand, renders the fragility of the persona's self and body as in "X Ray" (2006) ["brightly and fragile as a bird's / shine my long blue bones" (TSC 16)]. On the other hand, birds with their migrant mobility constitute an incapacitating embodiment of the aspired-to female freedom and leaving behind oppressive conditions. Consequently, "Augury" reflects on a premonition of the consequential occurrence about to happen. In O'Reilly's poem, the restless aura reveals the signs of the forthcoming revelation: "Magnetic winds from the sun pour in / and send our instruments akimbo" (TNB 63). The pronoun "our," relating to the "exposure," denotes an element of vulnerability experienced in the face of peril, especially in the context of "wreathe," with its morbid semantic associations. The atmosphere of dismay is conveyed in the adjectival "panicky citizens," and, additionally, in "the world's fat face is in the shadow." The persona in "Augury" relates:

Nothing runs like clockwork now.  
As skeletal clouds unwreathe our exposure,  
panicky citizens climb ladders to hammer  
their roofs on harder. A crackle of static,  
and the world's fat face is in shadow.

(TNB 63)

Nonetheless despite the experienced suspense, nothing unusually startling occurs in O'Reilly's poem. Instead of the possible scenarios, the narrative's (and the speaker's own) tension is released in the imagery of swallows and their offspring preparing for their independent life. In "Augury," the whole sky is overcast with migrating birds who follow their unchangeable itinerary, according to which "they practise flying, then they fly." Recorded in the persona's memory, the image of the mobile birds getting ready for their journey seems to be both expected in its repeated routine and, at the same time, astonishing as if happening for the first time. The speaker in "Augury" appears to envy the birds their ability to break free and fly away to new places. O'Reilly's poem is narrated from the birds' perspective; for them the whole process is of a crucial importance, as their species' survival depends upon it:

---

<sup>193</sup> For more, see Boran's article "Ninety-and-Fifty Swans: Glimpses of Nature in Recent Irish Poetry" (146–161).

There are swallow nests under the eaves,  
 each with a staring cargo: six bronze bibs,  
 six black-masked, African birds. They dip  
 and snap the last bees up. A millions Ms  
 foregather with a million others on the sky.  
 This is the shape that memory takes.  
 For days they practise flying, then they fly.  
 (TNB 63)

As proved in “Augury,” the avian creatures (“a staring cargo: six **bronze bibs**” and “six **black-masked African birds**”) are depicted simultaneously as prone to attack and yet defenceless, being both prey and predators that “dip / and snap the last bees up.” The earlier-cited Holdridge’s review of *The Nowhere Birds* praises “Augury” for “assurance, avoiding the colloquial, insisting that the powers of poetry most do their work” (379). O’Reilly’s poem’s conclusion (“For days they practise flying, then they fly”) contains the promise of the future female empowerment that needs to be practised for days, and, then, put into effect. For the speaker in “Augury,” flying away from what confines her is an act of power, as it requires the strength to redefine critically what was left behind and the courage to start anew. In most cases, O’Reilly’s volume *The Nowhere Birds* succeeds in finding an appropriate verbal equivalent of the speaker’s powerlessness. Although the bleak aura of the debut volume is rarely broken, the persona’s disempowering state remains addressed, articulated, and sometimes challenged. O’Reilly’s poem “Transition” constitutes an intermediate stage between the persona’s earlier defenceless self (“Shocked, I remove all trace of myself”) and the newly emerging, empowering “need for permanence.” The poem’s opening still appears to indicate incapacity as the speaker’s overriding condition (“The earth has torn itself like tissue overnight”), with all its distinctive features (“the stricken zone,” “the walls have fallen in,” “the dull pre-dawn dark”). The anxious persona in “Transition” confesses:

In the dull pre-dawn dark  
 I wake to reports from the stricken zone.  
 The earth has torn itself like tissue overnight,  
 the walls have fallen in.  
 (TNB 31)

Consequently, the female voice in “Transition” keeps emphasising her vulnerable frailty [“I don’t feel as ineffaceable as stone – / blond stones of Paris” (TNB 31)], drawing upon the oxymoronic nature of the petrified living matter in her present location [“the veined city, / Napoleon in porphyry at the heart of it” (TNB 31)]. The initial stupefaction of the speaker’s own endurance leads to the empowering recognition of her standing out from the destination’s acquiescence. What is more, the speaker in “Transition” seems to be positively surprised at not being affected by the place’s inertia (“No casualty. / Shocked”). She declares almost in disbelief:

No casualty.  
 Shocked, I remove all trace of myself  
 from somewhere not my own, the lent flat.  
 . . . as long as the mirrors are quiet,

(TNB 31)

As if self-destructively pre-programmed, O'Reilly's speaker's mind races to conjure up the potential loss that she might incur ("All I can see is the list / of what my eyes will lose"). Immune to the surrounding negative stimuli ("numb streets," "already absent"), the persona in "Transition" still seems to be astonished by the nonchalance with which she is leaving behind the city's constricting circulatory network. She registers:

I extract the city from myself as easily.  
 The numb streets fade as I walk through them.  
 I'm already absent on the Métro  
   in the thickening dawn  
 .....  
 All I can see is the list  
   of what my eyes will lose.  
 The dead wait under architraves for days.

(TNB 31)

Refusing to be influenced by the supposedly logical but still self-effacing argumentation, the female voice in "Transition" decides to trust her perception of the city as a lifeless cemetery ("The dead wait," "detained in stone is history"). Due to this move, O'Reilly's speaker's journey commences with her abandoning the textual signification of death and progressing in the empowering direction of life. In the studied poem, the persona's departure from Paris resembles leaving the Otherworld to emerge into the sphere of daylight. Even the speaker's phobia of flying cannot prevent her from taking self-empowered actions. After the Parisian inertia, hearing about the plane's turbulence is accepted by the speaking voice as a desired change in her numbness. For O'Reilly's speaker, the movement towards women's empowerment results from facing up to emotional and sense-perceptive responsiveness. The female voice in "Transition" confesses:

What gets detained in stone is history.  
 And for once I'm glad to leave the ground  
   despite my fear of heights,  
 my need for permanence. I swallow my tea.  
*This turbulence we're now experiencing*  
*was forecast, says the captain, smoothly.*

(TNB 31)

O'Reilly's poems from *The Sea Cabinet* (such as "Floater," "Gravitations" or "Maze") continue the previously analysed course of progression towards female empowerment. In "Gravitations," O'Reilly's speaker applies the metaphor of "the grey atom" to render her transitional state between the aspired-to potency

and the incapacitation that she still experiences. The female voice in the examined text perceives her corporeality as a “gravitational” weight that drags her down and keeps her close to the earth. With this in mind, in O’Reilly’s poem the persona’s bodily gravity could be perceived by her as the unwanted burden or as a much appreciated secure attachment to the well-grounded point of reference. The female voice in “Gravitations” ponders:

March: the grey atom  
I’ve swallowed drops,  
element-heavy plumb line

to this year’s mood –  
as mercury might smash  
its instrument –

(TSC 13)

What seems to be problematic is the fact that O’Reilly’s speaker in “Gravitations” lacks a sense of bodily wholeness (see “the grey atom,” “swallowed drops,” “element-heavy,” ridden with “mercury”). In the cited passage, one cannot get hold of the well-defined female personhood and the enumerated bodily parts do not make up a consistent whole. In consequence, the persona’s corporeal picture remains elusively blurred and, thus, powerless. In the review “Into Dazzle,” Carpenter comments: “In the collection’s third poem, ‘Gravitations’, a personal sense of dislocation (a leading idea throughout the collection) is rendered, the macro and micro given a fusing ‘symbol’ in the mercury of a barometer” (105). The female voice in “Gravitations” continues:

drops through vapours,  
humours, that acrid  
snarl of the gut that

stretched, would circle  
the house, the city,  
the planet on which

my feet stood,  
when last I looked.

(TSC 13)

Instead of the speaker’s clear-cut bodily image, the following triplets of “Gravitations” bring about a “fluid” female subjectivity, namely, “drops through vapours, / humours, that acrid / snarl of the gut.” Furthermore in the analysed fragment, the impression evoked is that of hostility emanating through every corporeal orifice, discernible even in the scent manifestation that the woman’s body leaves behind. As a result, O’Reilly’s speaker’s skin becomes “stretched, would circle / the house, the city, / the planet.” The incapacitated persona in “Gravitations” senses her organism as extended *ad infinitum*, encompassing the world around her. On the whole,

The experience of personal identity . . . does not require an immutable or a monotonously consistent core self. Decentred, processual subjectivity is compatible with a sense of personal identity. Indeed, to lose all sense of personal identity (or to find oneself split into multiple identity fragments) is not to advance to the postmodernist condition with winning nerve. Nor is experiencing oneself as a tight identity knot cleansed of social taint to regress to the modernist condition in pitiable trepidation. (Meyers 163)

Deprived of the gravitational force, the weightless speaker in “Gravitations” seems to be wandering in outer space, alone. Nonetheless in O’Reilly’s poem, it is precisely in her isolation that the female voice acquires the time to return to her self before she manages to overcome her inert condition (see “I have barely moved / all winter”). She admits:

I am six months  
 nearer the earth.  
 I have barely moved  
 all winter.

Faces pass  
 as though their owners  
 went on wheels.

(TSC 13)

In “Gravitations,” the poem’s structure meanders and floats as if released from the textual power of gravity, breaking the rules of the traditional word order and defying the conventional syntax in its linguistically being “stopless, niagaric.” The last two triplets of “Gravitations” and a single concluding line fail to comply with any “earth” rules, astonishing one with their unusual punctuation, the accumulation of enjambment and rhetorical questions. Commenting upon O’Reilly’s poem in his review of *The Sea Cabinet*, Carpenter notices that “[t]he short lines and the play of sense unit over line ending capture the vertiginous forces being explored; Melville’s principle of ‘light’, a dazzling but potentially blinding force, is jostled aside for the first person self-examination of ‘gravity’ (with its play on gravitas, seriousness and the blues, a ‘downer’). Such preoccupations and methods have antecedents, and this reader sensed a strong flavour of Lowell here” (“Into Dazzle” 105). The female voice in “Gravitations” concludes:

And still it drops  
 stopless, niagaric –  
 is it the principle

of gravity in me –  
 that waking  
 is falling, lying still

is falling?

(TSC 13)

Summing up, the question whether “lying still / is falling” cannot be resolved once and for all. On one hand, inaction may prevent the female voice in “Gravitations” from being spaced but on the other, it does not lead to any changes either. To some extent, it is the acceptance of the reality’s weight that constitutes the source of the persona’s grounding and of her female empowerment. The conclusion that “waking is falling” implies that the empowered female consciousness works like gravity in that it gets O’Reilly’s speaker’s down to earth, whether she likes it or not. On the whole, the poem “Gravitations” operates around the empowering process of female self-reflection. As Friedman points out: “Self-reflection is the process in which, roughly, a whole self takes a stance toward particular wants and values she finds herself to have. Self-reflective reaffirmation brings the (whole) self into accord with some of those wants or values” (*Autonomy, Gender* 5). Following this line of thinking, O’Reilly’s poem “The Maze” compares the activation of a woman’s self-reflective power to wandering in the meanders of the female corporeal labyrinth. The speaker’s journey towards the embodied empowerment (“I pass again though its twisted routes, / mislaid perspectives”) involves resisting powerlessness visualised as “a lidless dark that never splits.” In her discourse, the female voice in “The Maze” attempts to define the inherited territory as hers (“I live in a space that was bequeathed me”), not specifying who passed it down to her. The textual construction that O’Reilly’s persona delineates appears to resemble an elaborate prison or a steeped fortress (a linguistic masterpiece, the oriental-based “a **ziggurat** of **stepped spires** and **corridors**”) where she is kept hostage and which she cannot leave since “there is no road out.” In the related passage of “The Maze,” the female voice’s self-confinement appears to be encompassing. She states:

I live in a space that was bequeathed me,  
a ziggurat of stepped spires and corridors.

There is no road out.

Mornings, solar rays puncture the spiral,  
and the unsheathed cornea shrinks  
like a snail at an object –

the corners, the slanted ends on everything.

(TSC 15)

As the result of her powerlessness, O’Reilly’s speaker’s life in this towering keep is marked by her bodily and emotional discomfort (“mornings, solar rays puncture the spiral, / and the unsheathed cornea shrinks”). To depict her estranging attitude, the persona in “The Maze” proceeds by using the aesthetics of the sublime and of horror fiction. The Gothic elements of “the breast’s adhesive coral, a filament of blood” and “a red noise that pounds” remind one of the postmodern, feminist eroticised menace in Angela Carter’s fiction. The female voice in “The Maze” declares:

There is an itch, and sometimes,  
     among the whorls  
 of the breast's adhesive coral, a filament of blood.  
 What rises at this is the sound of the maze,  
     a red noise that pounds

(TSC 15)

Feeling insecure in her secluded dwelling place, the speaker in "The Maze" wishes to hide somewhere inside her bodily labyrinth. Apprehensive after dark, the disempowered persona cannot sleep. She wanders around being attentive to the strange noises and the disturbing voices that she hears or imagines to hear. In O'Reilly's poem, the phrase "aortic roads," collocated with "a red noise that pounds" seems to indicate that the mysterious maze is the speaker's own body or as suggested by Gamble, "'maze' of the poet's brain" ("Shaping Itself" 26). To resist her experienced powerlessness, the self-conscious female voice is exploring her corporeal self so that she might learn to trust her own carnality. In "The Maze," this self-reflective process seems to be necessary as O'Reilly's speaker feels completely alienated from her own body. She tends to enumerate her bodily parts as if they were not hers. Even her bony structure evokes in her irritation; the enjambed sentence ends with the phrase "the corners, the slanted ends on everything." The speaker in "The Maze" relates:

through aortic roads and storm-drains  
 in which, like caves, I have tried to hide.  
     Nights are the worst,  
 spent under the thin grey blanket, listening  
 to the shifting rumours issue through the routes of the maze,  
     waiting for what rises.

(TSC 15)

The sensation that "There are no words in the maze, no signs / pointing a way through the body's puzzle" is perceived by O'Reilly's speaker as an impediment to finding her way about the labyrinth. On the other hand in "The Maze," the lack of the exact human-made signification might be an advantage, as she has to rely solely on her own senses and her own judgements in this self-empowering reconnaissance. At first O'Reilly's persona may be at loss, disoriented by the mixed feelings that she has towards her own organism. In consequence, she tends to recognise her body simultaneously as "loved and entered, or ignored / dilapidates, an eyesore." But gradually, the female voice in the analysed passage becomes aware that "things are not / what they seem." Thus, in order to feel at home with her corporeality she has to "be more watchful" and learn to distinguish her own sensations from the imaginary phantoms of "twisted routes, / mislaid perspectives." Referring to the earlier-cited research, one may observe that in the process of cultural and social conditioning, young women "are showing a pattern of lowered self-confidence and readiness to accept the notion that they are not capable of mastering certain situations" (Lips 102). In "The Maze," female (textual and corporeal) powerlessness can be confronted when

O'Reilly's speaker begins to trust her own self, her own feelings and will have confidence in her own narrative account of the situation. She acknowledges:

There are no words in the maze, no signs  
 pointing a way through the puzzle that daily distends,  
     infecting mountains and fields  
 and all the city's membranes. And like a city,  
 what was loved and entered, or ignored  
     dilapidates, an eyesore.

(TSC 15)

To render the persona's incapacitation with semantic precision, O'Reilly employs an objective correlative of "a lidless dark that never splits." Here one collocation comprises the three dexterous images: an animal who does not have eyelids, an object that remains self-contained and does not open, and an emotional state of caution. Similarly the expression: "wincing walls," with its connotations of disquiet, or even soreness while cringing, seems to be linguistically accurate:

Inside these wincing walls, things are not  
 what they seem. I must be more watchful  
     for what rises  
 within a lidless dark that never splits,  
 as I pass again through its twisted routes,  
     mislaid perspectives.

(TSC 15)

Despite the fact that the speaker in "The Maze" tends to experience her own corporeality as imprisonment, she continues the empowered carnal probing. Nonetheless, the whole process appears to be extended in time, since her bodily integrity is disturbed and blocked, as suggested in "shut valves" and "lopped thoracic branches." Hence although estranged from her sensuality, O'Reilly's persona seems to be determined to unlock her corporeal fortress and make her home there. At the end of the maze, there is an empowering hope that the needed path can be traced back and re-entered. The examined poem does not conclude with easy optimism since the last word "nowhere" still abounds with the implied negativity. Nevertheless although female empowerment emerges into the discourse in crisis ("Each night / the light lessens"), the self-empowering process cannot be terminated once it has begun: "Agents are beings who can act from intentions, that is, who can do things because they want to or because of reasons or purposes that are theirs – beings who can engage in doings for which they are, and can be held, responsible" (Friedman, *Autonomy, Gender* 9). The female voice in "The Maze" concludes:

I never remember the road,  
 though I take it nightly. Each night  
     the light lessens.  
 Each night new pathways open to terminate



like shut valves or lopped thoracic branches,  
nowhere.

(TSC 15)

With regard to restoring female empowerment, O'Reilly's speaker's statement "I never remember the road" appears to be of key importance. This is because "forgetting makes women powerless to develop a liberating analysis. The merely foreground memory, in the context of which a woman forgets the identity of the primary agents of her affliction – remembering only the instruments . . . – is false because it is partial, because it is out of context, because it is the part taken for the whole" (Daly, *Pure Lust* 171). Daly's recommendation is for women "to reach our deep empowering memories" (*Pure Lust* 86). This can be achieved, among other ways, by the process of writing [see also "[e]mpowered by Memory" (Daly, *Pure Lust* 176)]: "Writing actualizes Memory in a specially potent way. The process of writing, and of seeing / hearing the words come forth on the page is journeying . . . A complex tapestry is found, woven. The writer becomes more energized as the process continues" (Daly, *Pure Lust* 173). To some extent, weaving seems to resemble in its root the meandering in O'Reilly's textual maze. This is how Griffin in her subchapter "Labyrinth" decodes its symbolic meaning in women's discourse:

The labyrinth from which none return. She falls into this labyrinth . . . . She circles this maze of her fears, of her fear of seeing, of her fear of being revealed, of her fear of touching . . . . Where the temptation to speak becomes large and the fear of speaking larger . . . . And she says the horizon is a lie. And the air is filled with stories about her. And she says space denies her . . . . The labyrinth from which they do not escape. Which keeps them going around in circles . . . . The labyrinth where she is afraid of perishing. (*Woman and Nature* 155–157)

Much in this vein, the poem "Floater" meditates on the drifting on the discourse's surface towards the newly-awaken female empowerment. Immersed in her lethargy, the persona in "Floater" seems to be "Just lying here in the angled / sunlight, watching the leaves." In O'Reilly's poem, the alliterated, disquieting images (the "shadow-stipple," "suddenly swims into sight," "a snaggle-toothed sea-beast, submerged") undermine the speaker's eyesight:

Just lying here in the angled  
sunlight, watching the leaves.  
shadow-stipple my window,  
it suddenly swims into sight  
like a snaggle-toothed sea-beast

(TSC 19)

Linguistically, the unsettling snaggle-tooth beast is linked with the anatomical idiom of the "vitreous humour" and the "jellied eel" coagulate (medically called the vitreous body) that makes up the inside of the eyeball. The account of how this physiological fluid impairs O'Reilly's persona's vision is

rendered with the child-like designation (“a crayon-scrawl”). Regardless of its familiar root, the referred-to notion constitutes the source of the speaker’s deep concern (see “feints” “flicks, / frantic”). The speaker in “Floater” relates:

submerged until now,  
jellied eel in my vitreous humour.  
It could be a crayon-scrawl  
high on the wall were it not  
for those snake-tongue darts

and feints it makes as my eye flicks,  
frantic to catch itself up.

(TSC 19)

As shown in O’Reilly’s poem, the alarming “snake-tongue darts” replace the domesticated crayons. It becomes clear that the speaker in “Floater” experiences her textual disempowerment with growing disquiet, which is vented out as an outburst of anger: “What vandal took a house key / to the windscreen? I dangle it / in space like a puppet” (TSC 19). On the whole, blocking anger inside the female self prevents women from properly locating its real target and the cause of their powerlessness. Miller provides three main reasons for the problems that women have in getting connected to their anger, namely, the alleged female weakness, their disbelief in their own worth, denying themselves the right and the reason to experience emotions perceived by others as negative (“The Construction of Anger” 184). In line with that:

Anger . . . tells us that something is wrong – something hurts – and needs changing. Thus, anger provides a powerful (and useful) recognition of discomfort and motivation for action to bring about a change in immediate conditions. It is a statement to oneself and to others. If it can be recognized and expressed, it has done its work. . . . changing something between us, moving from what hurts to something better. (Miller, “The Construction of Anger” 188–189)

Paradoxical as it may seem, the speaking voice in “Floater” wishes to perceive her “floating state” as caused by the medically diagnosed condition beyond her conscious will (the line “I dangle it / in space like a puppet” could confirm this hypothesis). The persona in O’Reilly’s poem recalls: “watching it creakily shift / its nodes and joints. Caduceus – / telluric snake on a stick / casting off the dull cells / from its refractive coat” (TSC 19). Textually, the disempowered persona in “Floater” imagines that her eye might shed off the infirm cells like a snake (the symbol of the healing) moults its skin. Subversively, the snake-like disposal of its outer, discursive shell is perceived by the speaker in O’Reilly’s poem as the waste that pollutes her eyesight and the foreign body that irritates the vulnerable eye tissue. In her move towards textual empowerment, the speaking voice plays with linguistic clichés (“**brisk beast fled**”), creating witty verbal puns. Let us take into account, for instance, the

comparison between “Caduceus,” “coat,” “caddis-case,” “a worm-cast,” and two names for the caddis fly’s pre-metamorphic stage: a caseworm and a caddis worm (*CED*). As argued above, the female voice toys with the linguistic ideas, conjuring up various parasites and insects feeding either on the dried human skin or on other organic materials. Due to such connotations, O’Reilly’s speaker’s previously abstract medical or psychological condition, acquires a more tangible verbal (textual) representation. As soon as the persona obtains control (if only discursive) over the overwhelming reality, her textual position becomes empowered. Resisting her incapacity envisaged as the loss of her vision (the fear of the impaired eyesight and other discerning skills), the speaker in “Floater” chooses clarity over the blindness of the gloom. She declares:

littering the bottom of my eye  
with its pile of minus signs,  
its nest of hair, a worm-cast  
or caddis-case from which  
(invisibly) some brisk beast fled.

(TSC 19)

With regard to the pun “the bottom of my eye” (see the pun “I”/ “eye” also stressed in the cited below passage), one may refer to the apt observation that Gamble makes in her review of *The Sea Cabinet* that “The eye (along with its silent partner, the ‘I’) occupies a position of central importance to the book as a whole . . . and ‘Floater’ deal directly with the matter of its physical illness” relating “the presence of a ‘floater’ which ‘litters’ the bottom of the poet’s eye” (26). Addressing O’Reilly’s speaker’s fears of mortality, “X-ray” contemplates the potentiality of the higher force, the absolute or a god spelled without capitalisation. In the idiom of the Biblical discourse, the female voice in “X-ray” confesses her belief in “the Tree of Life, but not / of Knowledge.” When confronted with the inevitability of death, O’Reilly’s speaker appears to distrust technological means of inspecting the human body and screening its organic functions. Hence the persona in the explored poem seems to be reluctant to accept the margin of the inexplicable in relation to female corporeality especially, and life in general:

A vertical chain of spine:  
flesh cloaks the bones’  
articulation in shadow.  
The Tree of Life, but not  
of Knowledge: shot through

(TSC 16)

The female speaker in “X-ray” gives the impression of being caught in the typical dilemma of a modern person who no longer relies on metaphysics but gives equally little credence to the scientific approach. What remains is the unknown “articulation in shadow,” occupying the space between the systematic categorisation and spiritual scepticism. In this space, the X-ray god reveals itself

as the futuristic machinery [“this god’s radiance, light / shook from his metallic hair” (TSC 16)]. Analysing *The Sea Cabinet*’s style, Carpenter rightly captures O’Reilly’s “canny syntax and shifts in diction” (“Into Dazzle” 105). What is more, the idiom that the speaker in “X-ray” employs might indicate that she has some giant computer in mind, particularly if one considers the expressions “scroll” and “decipher.” In the context of the vellum viewed as a writing surface, the cited words apart from the IT jargon, might function in reference to the ancient parchment annals. The female voice in O’Reilly’s poem relates:

the gravity of his glance  
decreeing me unscrolled  
as the killer might decipher  
his victim, delicately  
parting the belly’s vellum.

(TSC 16)

In “X-ray” the persona’s idiom, thus, skilfully combines modernity and antiquity. In the analysed passage, the word “victim” could imply the speaker’s own powerlessness, disclosed in the face of her inability to control let alone shape her life or health. This deterministic-like view appears to suggest that there exists some omnipotent “killer” who can take the persona’s life away any time and rip her body open like that of a skinned animal. Accordingly, the critics define O’Reilly’s writing method as applied in “X-ray” as “a step back from complete appropriation of ‘other’ experiences, the awareness of a kinship of the scientific and spiritual caught in the aura of ‘glossolalia’ (biblical ‘speaking in tongues’) with its knife in the side of glossology (scientific terminology)” (Carpenter, “Into Dazzle” 105). The persona in “X-ray” confesses:

I am lain against the plate  
and dazzled: the light inimical,  
the weight that enters weightless.  
A thrown shadow dissects  
the self from what it was.

(TSC 16)

The electromagnetic radiation generated by the diagnostic apparatus is regarded by the speaker in “X-ray” as directed against her bodily integrity. In O’Reilly’s poem, the self-exposed female voice imagines herself to be overpowered by its radiation and “the weight that enters weightless.” As experienced by O’Reilly’s persona, the medical equipment seems to dematerialise her organism when “a thrown shadow dissects / the self from what it was.” However the rhetorical question that the female voice dares to ask “Can flesh become all shadow?” is dismissed quite decisively by her as “Not yet.” This succinct phrase constitutes a manifesto of the speaker’s emerging empowerment, affirming her “fragile” existence. Nonetheless, she remains still alive:

Can flesh become all shadow?  
 Not yet: as through a glass  
 brightly and fragile as a bird's  
 shine my long blue bones.

(TSC 16)

In conclusion, in “X-ray” powerlessness which was once incapacitating does not immobilise O’Reilly’s speaker entirely, and it does not prevent her from perceiving her life as illuminating (“**b**rightly and fragile as a **b**ird’s / shine my long **b**lue **b**ones”). Therefore, female empowerment can also originate from acknowledging one’s vulnerability. In view of that, Jordan advocates:

. . . vulnerability per se is not the problem. Awareness of vulnerability, in fact, suggests to me good reality testing. It is the *disowned* vulnerability that becomes problematic. An openness to being affected is essential to intimacy and a growth-enhancing relationship; without it, people relate inauthentically, adopting roles and coming from distanced and protected places. Open sharing of our need for support or acceptance may be an essential factor in developing a sense of close connection. Therefore, part of what we are trying to transform is the illusory sense of self-sufficiency and the tendency to deny vulnerability. (“Relational Resilience” 33), emphasis original

O’Reilly’s poem “Now or When” subtitled “*On the Sundial at Beverly Minster*” operates upon a bleak discrepancy between short-lived mortals and timeless eternity. In agreement with that, one can identify the speaking voice with the gnomon whose shadow ceaselessly measures the hours. From the imagined heights of the observation point, the sundial in “Now or When” looks down upon the local community, not feeling any affinity with “the down-at-heels” humans. For that reason, the time-measuring device relates to people dismissively as “flesh / cold and perishable as the moon.” The persona in “Now or When” recounts:

All of my days fall into this easy measure.  
*The sun in his ecliptic marks me*, as candles  
 describing lucent circles in the dark. From my  
 high place on the wall I have seen the down-at-heels  
 pass in their own cycles, imagining their flesh  
 cold and perishable as the moon, my other  
 light. Moss overgrows me, and from my crumbling mouth  
 mottoes drop implacable as stones. . . .

(TSC 54)

In O’Reilly’s poem, despite the declared superiority towards mortals, the persona in “Now or When” itself admits being affected by the flowing of time and the on-going material deterioration. In the cited passage, the line: “**m**oss **o**ver**g**rows **m**e, and **f**rom **m**y **c**rum**b**ling **m**outh / **m**ottoes **d**rop **i**mplacable” constitutes a sound mosaic of “r” and “m” interchangeably. Ironically, the destructive power of time annihilates even those who function as its visible representation. In line with that, the sundial complains about repetitiveness and

boredom that creep into the clock's daily schedule, amplifying the contrast between the world's fast changing pace and its own enduring, unaltered perseverance ("rooted here / unmoving and unmoved"). The speaker in "Now or When" complains:

. . . *Nobody*  
*looks at me when the sun is not there.* Is it good  
 always to say the same thing? My tilt no longer  
 mirrors the world's, or the calculations have changed.  
*The last is hidden so we have to watch them all.*  
 Every decade since, his path has been removing,  
 his meridian eluding me, rooted here  
 unmoving and unmoved. . . .

(TSC 54)

Employing the italicised out-of-date idiom, the speaking voice in "Now or When" addresses its prayers for the return of the bygone epoch in which the sundial calculations were the centre of the universe. As argued by O'Reilly, people tend to pretend that time (and its passing by) does not exist, failing to recognise how momentary their own lives are. Thus, the poem's conclusive reminder *Remember life is short* may not be strikingly original but few dare to lead their lives bearing this maxim in mind. When faced with transient existence, the female empowerment in "Now or When" can only result from standing up to the most poignant matters, without plunging into despair. The speaker in O'Reilly's poem concludes:

. . . *O light, I hope for thee*  
*in this darkness.* I pray this earthly pendulum  
 swings back towards its first innocent embroidery  
 of stars – *time is an arrow that flieth* – and I  
 can regain my zenith. *Remember life is short.*

(TSC 54)

Empoweringly facing the "unthought" life and death matters, the poem "But to the Girdle do the Gods Inherit" does not shun confronting female agency and free will. O'Reilly's poem is addressed to the undefined yet omnipotent "you" which could be interpreted as the titular capitalised Gods. Speaking on behalf of others, the persona in "But to the Girdle do the Gods Inherit" assumes the collective, plural voice ("we are the stuff," "We rise"). The Gods' discourse is marked by "your dreams, / at one with the pewter fog and sea" and "the kist-graves of your mind's." The female voice in O'Reilly's poem assumes that in the Gods' immortal minds, people are the creatures doomed to annihilation. She envisages that the Gods are appalled with the "filth layer of destruction," connoted with "graves" and synonymous with disaster "at one with the pewter fog." The persona in "But to the Girdle do the Gods Inherit" announces:

It's true we are the stuff of nightmare,  
 peopling the caves of your dreams,  
 at one with the pewter fog and sea.  
 We rise as the sea releases, disinterred  
 from the kist-graves of your mind's  
 filth layer of destruction. . . .

(TSC 45)

Regardless of their power, the speaker in O'Reilly's poem does not presuppose that the Gods might comprehend the complexities of the human condition. In asking them to "Imagine / how it is with us," she simply implores them to listen impartially. In doing so, the female voice in "But to the Girdle do the Gods Inherit" attempts to draw upon the bonding experience of the shared uncertainty that accompanies each and every person throughout their entire lives. Admitting that "Whether the **salt-sting** of our indivisible / lower halves is pain, or akin to pain, / we cannot say" (TSC 45), the speaker in "But to the Girdle do the Gods Inherit" reveals the experienced edginess of (female) corporeality and the sense of guilt associated with it:

how it is with us: our stone implements,  
 our combs and early mirrors, ceding  
 no reflection. Even to ourselves unknown.

(TSC 45)

The contrastive and defiant statement "Yet we shine" marks the self-assertive moment of the advent of female empowerment into the discourse. It appears that in O'Reilly's poem, people do not shine solely with the Gods' mercy. It is actually the other way round, they shine despite and even contrary to the Gods' critical assessment. In her distrust of the Gods' good will towards humanity, the speaker in "But to the Girdle do the Gods Inherit" defines people as the "prisoners of your regard." O'Reilly's persona seems to liken the Gods' fascination with the aquatic ("it is the glitter / of sea that beguiles you") to their power to take mortals lives away ("the cold grey / irises of her many dead"). She argues:

. . . Yet we shine.  
 Prisoners of your regard, it is the glitter  
 of sea that beguiles you, the cold grey  
 irises of her many dead. Pictures  
 of a death forever out of reach,  
 with our famished nightmare mouths.

(TSC 45)

However O'Reilly's poem's ending ("Pictures / of a death forever out of reach, / with our famished nightmare mouths") suggests a different interpretation: its collective voice might belong to the figures of the Sea Cabinet curiosities who direct their resentment not to Gods but to the people who captured them and still come to view their dead bodies as freak exhibits.

Accepting such an interpretation would reverse the weight of responsibility and shift the perspective from the divine will to people's own accountability. Likewise the poem "A Brief History of Light" appears to construe a Grand Narrative's apocalypse, criticising people's persistent refusal to take full accountability for the fate of the human race. O'Reilly's poem commences with the italicised archaic Biblical idiom: "*And the light shineth in darkness; / And the darkness comprehended it not*" (TNB 40) to continue:

Over the hill a dozen furnaces glowed,  
the gold gleamed that smelted in secret,  
and the trapped white light shone bitterly  
at the heart of the hardest stone on earth.  
But they knew enough to know it was not theirs.  
(TNB 40)

The speaker in "A Brief History of Light" begins her story in a solemn register and the archaic inflective idiom (see "shineth"). O'Reilly's poem imitates old-fashioned syntactical arrangements with an inverted word order: "The dazzle of ocean was their first infatuation, / its starry net, and the fish that mirrored it" (TNB 40). The following sentence: "They knew enough to know it was not theirs" (TNB 40) constitutes the narrative's recurrent refrain. In "A Brief History of Light," the repeated mantra reminds people that they did not "invent" or "create" the world, they only inhabit it temporarily. The female voice in the examined text accounts:

Then their hoards of light grew minor,  
since none could view the sun straightly  
and jealousy burned their lives to the core.  
So they made a god of it, shedding glory,  
shedding his light on all their arguments.  
(TNB 40)

As shown in O'Reilly's poem, having discovered that there is something that defies human control ("none could view the sun straightly"), people's "jealousy burned their lives to the core." Linguistically, the expression "so they made a god of it" leaves some doubt about the referent of "it" pronoun: is it the sun or jealousy itself? What appears to stem from people's possessiveness is the appropriation of the reflected light as their own. As a result, the speaker in "A Brief History of Light" asks rhetorically: "Did they know enough to know it was not theirs?" (TNB 40). But instead of providing an answer, the cited refrain assumes an open question form. Although the source of the natural enlightenment is decreasing ("then their hoards of light grew minor"), even "the god in his wisdom" cannot prevent people from expansion. The persona in "A Brief History of Light" continues:

The god in his wisdom preceded them westwards,  
and the forests, in whose pillared interiors



black shapes dwelled, were banished for good.  
 They promised an end to the primitive darkness:  
 soon there was nothing that was not known.  
 They thought: *Our light is made, not merely reflected* –  
 (TNB 40)

When people maintain: “*Our light is made, not merely reflected*” their arrogant boasts seem to have lost sensible limits. In their hearts and minds, humans allow little room, if any, for a power more absolute than theirs. On the whole, the expression: “they mistook the light for their knowledge of the light” captures the essence of the modern man-made civilisation: its self-referential and self-explanatory character that does not permit other points of view. In addition, the line that “soon there was nothing that was not known” discloses humanity’s insolence. Ironically, the people’s “last illumination” is far from the truth. O’Reilly’s poem seems to prove that “Knowing barely enough to know it was not theirs,” humanity of today appears to be shining the reflected light:

And they banished the god from the light of their minds.  
 But they mistook the light for their knowledge of the light,  
 till light, and only light, was everywhere.  
 And they vanished in this, their last illumination,  
 Knowing barely enough to know it was not theirs.  
 (TNB 40)

On the whole, “A Brief History of Light” demonstrates a clear difference between the imitative and prescriptive Enlightenment narrative (understood as power-over) and the textually absent female power-with that draws upon women’s potency to make meaningful changes. Returning to the issue of passing time, the female voice in “Calculus” who admits to “collect fine words,” denies that “the most beautiful word in the language / is *haemostasis*, which means the stopping of clocks” (TSC 55). Due to the power of language, O’Reilly’s speaker attempts to resist the inevitable powerlessness of the lifespan’s biological limits. That is why the linguistically empowered persona in “Calculus” refuses to favour “the most beautiful word” over any others, treating *haemostasis* simply as an ear-pleasing signifier. Accordingly, she explains that “Were it not that my natural disposition is hurried, / you’d have me convinced” (TSC 55). The female voice in “Calculus” confesses:

. . . I am detained by shadows, those details  
 (again) you’d have me accrue: the copper moth’s clownish flight  
  
 in my yard, how the sweet pea tethers itself to those  
 scalene strings I’ve pinned to the wall. . . .  
 (TSC 55)

In O’Reilly’s poem, the desire to stop or at least slow down time, can be partially realised by the mindful, meditative observation of each minute detail of the here and now, the sensuous and sensory being-in-the world: admiring the

variety of colours, sounds, textures etc. Empowered by this realisation, the female voice in "Calculus" explains how every moment of life alters our perception of reality and how our insight into things might be affected by "the light's blandishments." As in Vermeer's paintings, female empowerment, operating around the centrality of the woman's experience, might draw upon inner and not just outer inspirational sources. The speaker in "Calculus" admits:

Here is the letter I wanted to write, the one  
that shows me succumbing to the light's blandishments

like a Vermeer housewife, my silk skirts swollen  
as mariposa tulips, my complexion milky.

(TSC 55)

In "Calculus," the speaker's habit of selecting the most exquisite visual and linguistic sense-perceptions amounts to an act of female artistic authority. In doing so, the dynamics of the constantly fluctuating reality can be rendered in image / language, without losing its alternating meanings. Motivated by this, O'Reilly's persona realises her need to preserve fleeting impressions in the linguistic actuality. She achieves her textual goal by the alluring smoothness in the alliterated "silk skirts swollen" and "scalene strings," in the fairness of the comparison in "mariposa tulips," the protected rarity of the animal species (kestrel and wren) and the ear-pleasing vegetation signifiers (roseapple and pearlwort). Last but not least, O'Reilly's speaker realises her empowerment in an aesthetically accomplished image: "the copper moth's clownish flight." The persona in "Calculus" sums up this process as follows: "I collect fine words the way others collect birds' eggs: for kestrels' I have *roseapple*, for wrens' *pearlwort*" (TSC 55), emphasis original. She concludes:

I drive another nail in to mark the day's high-water moment,  
the sun's clumsy arabesque in that makeshift analemma.

I've sketched on the floor: your regard's incalculable angle.

(TSC 55)

Aiming to safeguard "the day's high-water moment" from textual oblivion, the female voice in "Calculus" seems to be driven by the need to register the time already passed to retain what cannot be retrieved and undo what cannot be held back: the person who is gone. Even the precise calculus, thus, has to allow for unknown variables "your regard's incalculable angle." The discursive presence of "you" appears to be substantial in O'Reilly's poem. It is by this companionship that her persona cherishes "those details / (again) you'd have me accrue" and admits: "you'd have me convinced." Although female empowerment does not give a woman magical powers to make a beloved person stay, if their mind is already set otherwise, it may help her to deal with the loss and with the inevitability of grief that will follow. Analysing the poem, the critics have noticed that O'Reilly sometimes "dessicates too much, overloading

on the ‘fine words’: ‘Calculus describes as being gathered in ‘the way others collect birds’ eggs’ and sending the poem in so many directions that one becomes totally lost in the labyrinthine paths of scene and reference, gleaning from it only a couple of those stunning trademark lines” (Gamble, “Shaping Itself” 27). Operating on the affirmative assumptions, O’Reilly’s poem “Pollen” draws female empowerment from the sensuous pleasures of the here and now. Subsequently, the speaker in “Pollen” outlines a framework for the whole narrative:

Lying with one eye open I can see  
a yellow spot staining the clean sheet

I put there yesterday,  
a fleck of yolk suspended  
in albumen, . . .

(TSC 59)

On the discursive level, O’Reilly’s speaker’s colour imagery ranges from tactile perceptions (“viscous”) to religious connotations (“Virgin’s mantle”). What is more, the analysed poem operates around the dichotomy of cleanliness / purity (“the clean sheet”) and stain / stigma / sin (“a yellow spot staining,” “brave enough to stain / their lives,” “a fleck of yolk”). With this in mind, it becomes clear why “Pollen” is organised around the various shades and hues of the colour yellow. The female voice describes:

. . . gold coin at the end  
of a barren viscous sea

for those brave enough to stain  
their lives to gild the Virgin’s mantle.

(TSC 59)

O’Reilly’s central conceit *Azafrán* is the yellowish shade (the colour of light) that is close to saffron also linguistically in its Arabic root of “zafarān” (*CED*). Additionally in “Pollen,” the referred to colour carries a corporeal dimension of “blood mixed with foam.” Going beyond the limits of perception (“spilling its light inside the borders”), *Azafrán* has the specified taste of unfulfilment (“the flavour of honey that never reaches / the lips”). The speaker in “Pollen” relates:

Their blood mixed with foam  
dries to crackling on the shores of Spain.

*Azafrán* – the colour of evening sun,  
the flavour of honey that never reaches

the lips, edging instead a labyrinthine Gospel,  
spilling its light inside the borders.

(TSC 59)

Moreover in O'Reilly's "Pollen," the careful observation renders the sensory visual experience into the audio-linguistic signification. Consequently, the cited fragment is abundant with the "ai" and "i" sound in "lying, eye, yellow, yesterday," and finally in the focal "yolk." The image technique seems to be best manifested in the expression "a fleck of yolk suspended / in albumen." The persona in "Pollen" admits:

Even now I can barely contemplate  
its brightness in the eye of the bee,

how it dusts his muscular back  
and grain for grain matches his gold

in the gasp of the calyx,  
in the petal's ragged breath.

(TSC 59)

The empowered female self in O'Reilly's poem cherishes the pollen and the yellow shades of the "brightness in the eye of the bee." In the expression: "it dusts his muscular back / and grain for grain," she praises gratifyingly the insects' drudgery. The repeated alliterated phrase is reiterated in the "matches his gold / in the gasp," to culminate with the precise expression of "the petal's ragged breath." Out of O'Reilly's works analysed so far, "Pollen" appears to cherish female artistic empowerment in its most affirmative form.

The poem "Shortcut to Northwind" explores further female empowerment conveyed in the genre of the supernatural ballad. The structure of "Shortcut to Northwind" has an undemanding rhyming pattern (ABBCCAD, see the first stanza), which is typical of balladic melodiousness. O'Reilly's narrative operates as a rite of passage from one's everyday reality to the imaginary underwater realm ("what was it what I had wanted, / if not some afterthought of his on which I'd counted?"). In doing so, the poem illustrates the illusory sources of power which are frequently confused with true female empowerment. The first false clue comes from the computer screen. Promising the (self) authorising route to the mystery, in the end, all the computer icon disappointingly reveals is "nothing but a white glare from an empty screen" and "glass undulate." The persona in "Shortcut to Northwind" recalls:

I opened it expecting something else –  
the icon *Shortcut to Northwind* on a borrowed machine –  
but found nothing but a white glare from an empty screen.  
And after all, what was it what I had wanted,  
if not some afterthought of his on which I'd counted?  
Its regular flicker was an electrical pulse

A  
B  
B  
C  
C  
A

that made the thick with glass undulate.

D

(TSC 26)

By clicking the icon, the speaker in “Shortcut to Northwind” hopes to reclaim her access to the intimate past once shared with the computer’s owner [“It reminded me of falling back on sheets, / cool sheets, with him that day in June – / at least the falling movement seemed the same” (TSC 26)]. Nonetheless, the descending motion indicates the failure in their relationship [“but it was a desert I entered. What heights / those rock-needles reached I couldn’t speculate” (TSC 26)]. What is more, the desert metaphor construes O’Reilly’s persona’s own powerlessness (see the auditory semblance of “needles reached” to *needless* reached). The female voice in the analysed text employs the phrasing of bareness (“the wasteland all around me,” “moonless,” “murdering with stones too small to see”) to render the desolate state in which she finds herself. Here, T.S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land*, with the spiritual and intellectual crisis of the Western civilisation, reduced to nothing more than “this stony rubbish / . . . A heap of broken images” (80), comes obviously forth to the discourse’s surface. In O’Reilly’s “Shortcut to Northwind” one might detect a similar tone of an in-between epoch where one era has come to an end but nothing new has emerged yet. In addition, the continuity of the past, present and future can point to Eliot’s essay “Tradition and the Individual Talent.” Then again, the fusion of the uncanny and unearthly elements contributes to the correspondence with “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner.” Coleridge’s poem, with its folk ballad form, the references to the medieval past, the presence of the supernatural, and a less solemn idiom than the modernist collage of erudite allusions – might constitute an appropriate intertextual analogy. The persona in O’Reilly’s poem relates:

And it was dark there though I seemed to see  
by moonlight – it was moonless – a mica-glitter  
or schist-shine from the wasteland all around me.  
Then the wind picked up. Desert winds are bitter,  
murdering with stones too small to see  
that have ground each other down for centuries  
(TSC 26)

“Shortcut to Northwind’s” idiom, on one hand seems to be predominantly colloquial, on the other hand, scientific and geologically accurate. The phrases such as “mica-glitter” or “schist-shine” stand out with their reflected textual shine. Abandoning the familiar lexicon, the quoted passage introduces an idiomatic turning point, switching from the everyday idiolect to the dense and symbolic narrative mode [“The red breath / of the desert screeched its grievance in my face / in a devil- or a lion-voice” (TSC 26)]. In this case, the textual reference would be W.B. Yeats’s “The Second Coming.” The unidentified voice in “Shortcut to Northwind” pronounces solemnly:

*there are worse things than the silence of the dead.*  
*The silence that the living keep, that is a voice*  
*of stone that will condemn. Condemn to Death. –*  
(TSC 26)

Resonating with an Eliotesque tone, the italicised message in “Shortcut to Northwind” resembles the thunder’s prophecies from *The Waste Land*. In O’Reilly’s poem, the utterance’s elevated tone indicates the spiritual guidance needed by the incapacitated speaker. The voice’s teachings point to the persona’s death-in-life existence (borrowing Coleridge’s words) which results from her sensory unresponsiveness. On the whole, O’Reilly’s narrative assumes the form of the enlightening epiphany: “and then it snatched me upright off my feet / and took me to a space awash with light / like diamonds thinly sprinkled on the night” (TSC 26). Its hopeful message stands sharply in contrast with the bleak “seeds sown in the furrows of darkness” (TSC 26). The speaker in “Shortcut to Northwind” asks:

Did someone hold my hand? The air’s thickness  
grew, and it was without fright

I knew that I was breathing water.  
It was like sliding down the surface of a jade,  
like entering the glossy throats of flowers.  
All the while a thin string of bubbles like tears  
fell upwards from me. This rope of bead  
was all that held me to the surface of the water  
(TSC 26)

Paradoxical as it might seem, the female voice in “Shortcut to Northwind” does not seem to be frightened by the life-threatening plunge into the sea (see “I was breathing water”). Regardless of its potential danger, she feels surprisingly safe as if secured by some powerful force. The speaker in O’Reilly’s poem relates the whole liminal experience with calmness (“the surface of a jade,” “flowers”) but also a hint of apprehension (“tears / fell upwards from me,” “rope of bead . . . held me to the surface”). In the passage, the ear-pleasing melody (“calcined captives / like a creature”) appears to be juxtaposed with the textual implications of the potential servitude. Endowed with the mesmerising elegance, the eerie tropes (“**blond fronds wavered in the underwater wind**”) display the poet’s visual and auditory dexterity (“**turned mother-of-pearl / pale in the descending light, all rippled and restive**”). The persona in “Shortcut to Northwind” recalls:

as I watched the sea nosing its calcined captives  
like a creature, rolling them over in the sand.  
A mariner’s dead face wore a blue toothy smile  
And his blond fronds wavered in the underwater wind.  
A galley’s nutmeg turned mother-of-pearl  
pale in the descending light, all rippled and restive.  
(TSC 27)

O’Reilly’s speaker’s self-destructive confession “I could have rested there” reveals her attraction with the enchanted underwater nothingness. The female voice in “Shortcut to Northwind” seems to be tempted to yield to these self-

annihilating fantasies: “a **salty sleep** on the **tongues** of a **mollusc**, / under a **nacreous canopy**.” Being unconscious (sleep / death), she feels securely hidden inside the nacre protected by its hardened shell. The aforementioned vision betrays O’Reilly’s persona’s nonexistence-wish, which is challenged textually in the adverbial clause of contrast (“But something shattered”). Nonetheless what appears at first to be a desirable way out to terminate the speaker’s powerlessness turns out to be the pseudo-power of non-being. On realising that, the female voice in the analysed poem rejects the illusory comfort of the dead underwater dream-world in favour of coming back to life. In doing so, O’Reilly’s speaker records the force that interrupted her gentle drifting into “that good night,” as Dylan Thomas once defined the process of dying. As a result, the persona in “Shortcut to Northwind” gets knocked out of her unconscious state and is brought back into experiential reality. This is how she describes her return to life:

I could have rested there. It would have been  
 a salty sleep on the tongues of a mollusc,  
 under a nacreous canopy. But something shattered  
 my watery chandelier and littered  
 the sea’s pavement with spears or narwhal-tusks  
 or blades of ice as hard as anything I’d seen.  
 (TSC 27)

As rendered by O’Reilly’s speaker, the process of coming round gives the impression of being less pleasant in its sensory nature than the serene state of numbly passing away. The persona in “Shortcut to Northwind” complains about the irksome sensations i.e. feeling chilled and pierced (“the sea’s pavement with spears or narwhal-tusks / or blades of ice as hard as anything”). For some reason, she insists upon depicting her re-activated bodily responsiveness as enforced upon her from the outside. However it is her own self-preservation energy that prevents the female voice in O’Reilly’s poem from submerging too deep into the powerless aquatic torpor:

And I was lifted bodily, still dripping wet,  
 out of the sea and into the chill of the air.  
 The frigid blast of his breath froze my hair  
 to waves of ice and froze my fingers and toes  
 as he wrapped me in his wings and rose  
 with me into the North. . . .

(TSC 27)

As demonstrated, the cited fragment’s last line introduces the third person singular male presence (“as he wrapped me in his wings”). One might wonder if the mysterious (winged?) man ought to be associated with the saving impulse or quite to the contrary with the reason for the persona’s self-destructive voyage. The female voice in “Shortcut to Northwind” does not provide a specific answer

to that question. The passage below places the emphasis upon the man's actions and their influence upon her:

. . . The stars went out

when he trailed his dirty cloak across the hills  
and I saw nothing but the icicles in his beard  
and eyebrows. In his pupils, back and wide,  
a frosty fire burned. And he said  
nothing. . . .

(TSC 27)

Although at first the man's textual presence looks as if it was linked with the speaker's return to life, the sea-bed tranquillity is replaced with the equally off-putting harshness of cold and silence. Being openly fascinated with him, the female voice in "Shortcut to Northwind" appears, at the same time, distrustful towards her companion. She has little faith in the mirage's lasting potential. Admitting that "It was a kind of consummation, hard / and comfortless, it was exchanging one spell / in the desert for another" (TSC 27), the speaker in O'Reilly's poem locates the phantom alongside the enchanting marine death apparitions.<sup>194</sup> Even though the ghostly man remains textually distant from the desolate tract's mirages, the persona in "Shortcut to Northwind" feels wary of his "hard and comfortless spell." Taking everything into account, the flights of fancy so far entertained by her lead O'Reilly's persona to one, at last, empowering conclusion:

. . . I dream

now of getting back to my resistless life,  
to music like river-water makes in a gourd,  
those plunging harmonies, myself a leaf  
drunk on the surface tension and singing aloud.  
Not staring at this blank and empty screen.

(TSC 27)

Structurally, in "Shortcut to Northwind," the birth of the first-person agency ("I dream") replaces the earlier female voice's passive quiescence ("I was lifted bodily," "then it snatched me . . . and took me to a space," "something shattered"). Instead of making the mysterious (male) force responsible for her decisions, the speaker in O'Reilly's poem herself assumes accountability for her life choices. It appears that the persona's empowerment depends to a large extent upon her willingness to take responsibility for her female agency.

In the process of struggling with the paralyzing and polarizing effects of self-blame and the reproach of other women, feminists have also underscored the importance of women's *taking responsibility* for their feelings, perceptions,

<sup>194</sup> Compare T. S. Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock's" ending.



desires, and actions as a prerequisite for reclaiming and expanding their personal and political agency. (Benson 73), emphasis original

Hence by assuming responsibility, the female voice in “Shortcut to Northwind” becomes empowered as a result of her reclaimed agency and regained sense of self-worth (Benson 78–85). This time O’Reilly’s speaker’s declaration “of getting back to my resistless life” sounds credible and one believes when she argues “music like river-water makes in a gourd, / those plunging harmonies.” On the whole, the voice in “Shortcut to Northwind” learns to draw her empowerment from being a part of the process of life and not death, “myself a leaf / drunk on the surface tension and singing aloud.” Accepting that women’s empowerment does not have to entail absolute control over all living functions (compare the leaf metaphor), O’Reilly’s persona affirms her power-from-within. Limited as it might be, it still enables her to be a subject and not an object in the life’s theatre. In O’Reilly’s poem, the speaker’s final declaration about “[n]ot staring at this blank and empty screen” signifies empoweringly that the death drive has given way to the life force. In other words, the speaking voice in “Shortcut to Northwind” does not want to drift towards powerlessness and nothingness, opting for the capability to act and grow. Following Tillich, Daly calls such a potency “the courage to be as a self and the courage to be as a part” (*Beyond God* 27). She explains that “all authentic human hope is ontological, that is, that it requires facing nothingness” (Daly, *Beyond God* 27). Furthermore

. . . there is value in a life lived in accord with the perspective of the one who lives it. The best way to appreciate that value is to start with a first-person perspective. I start with my own wants and desires, cares, concerns, values, and commitments . . . . If I also conceive of myself as a being in the world who can act to bring things about, then it is only fitting for me to try to guide my efforts to act so as to attain or realize those things toward which I am positively oriented . . . . My life, after all, is who I am. It is the narrative, space-time trajectory that is me. (Friedman, *Autonomy, Gender* 56–57)

O’Reilly’s cycle “In the Deaf Man’s House” constitutes an empowering dream-work narrative, enabling the speaker to confront her fears (disguised in the dense, metaphorical imagery) from which she is safely distanced. Like Keats’s “Ode on a Grecian Urn,” O’Reilly’s cycle is divided into several mosaic scenes, each of them being devoted to a theme which is dissimilar to but linked with the others. The outwardly surreal series of images enables the female voice to confront the intimidating visions that immobilise her. These debilitating visualisations are the prime causes of her powerlessness, cutting the persona off from the life energy of female empowerment. It happens because

We live in an androcentric (male-centred) society – that is, one that is organized in terms of the experience of men as they have been able to define it and elaborate on it. This elaboration is called “culture” and “knowledge.” The society also is largely patriarchal, in that men (of a certain group) have held all

of the legitimate leadership, power, and authority. (Miller, "The Construction of" 182–183)

Each of the five subsequent parts of "In the Deaf Man's House" exorcises one particular ghost (fear) that the speaker holds. To begin with, *Who are these coming to the sacrifice?* and *Yo lo vi* deconstruct the myth of the sacrificial femininity which stigmatises female sexuality as connoted with shame, guilt and moral corruption. This fiction is punitively controlled by the censors who "created the Witchcraze, in a blaze of archetypal patriarchal 'creativity'" (Daly, *Pure Lust* 100). *The Sleep of Reason* challenges another imputation attached to free-thinking women: that of madness. Evoking the demon of rage, *Sabbath-Asmodeus* enables O'Reilly's speaker to overcome her powerlessness by releasing the suppressed anger which can amplify her resistance. In the double-stated text of *Palimpsest*, the woman's own voice gets articulated. Defying the false authority of the silencing discourses, *Palimpsest* becomes a true manifestation of women's artistic, creative and personal empowerment. Drawing upon the Keatsian vision, the first section *Who are these coming to the sacrifice?* comprises the procession of the townsmen and priests in the enigmatic sacrificial ceremony. The opening part operates upon the archaic idiom [i. e. "varlets" and "black bile," attributed to the melancholic mood (*CED*)]. The tone in O'Reilly's poem seems to be more provocative than in Keats's ode both as regards sexual imagery (i.e. "a snake that clings / to the sexual outline of the earth," "sucking the penis of a billy goat," "the animal-breath of madness," "cavorting with devils") and as regards vocabulary (i.e. "spews forth," "rot-nose," "vomiting prophetic eggs"). The persona in *Who are these coming to the sacrifice?* claims to derive the depicted images from the experiential world ("this view suffices me for windows / I know the noble citizens by sight") whereas, in fact, these textual creations remain her own unbounded artistic vision ("I have made them articulate"). She argues:

**I *Who are these coming to the sacrifice?***

The town spews forth its varlets  
 this morning like black bile.  
 This view suffices me for windows.  
 I know the noble citizens by sight:  
 I have made them articulate  
 like a snake that clings  
 to the sexual outline of the earth,  
 their clot of moaning faces as its head,  
 their mouths issueless as flowers  
 opening on walls of silence.

(TSC 28)

As demonstrated above, O'Reilly's speaker's untamed fantasy is permeated with the sexual overtones which prevail in the patriarchal and religious discourses (compare the snake symbolism). The pejorative correlation between

the snake and erotic energy (“a snake that clings / to the sexual outline of the earth”) discloses a contemptible attitude towards the supposedly sinful female sensuality. The serpent-like coil of the mouths wailing (“issueless”) because of suffering or ecstasy reminds one of Francis Bacon’s paintings with the deformed or crucified characters writhed in their silent screams. The flower blooming metaphorically “on walls of silence” equips O’Reilly’s speaker’s vision with a hint of sarcasm. Entitled enigmatically: *Yo lo vi* (your loving?) the second part of “In the Deaf Man’s House” commences with a surreal image that even Dali could subscribe to: “The **matadors minced** in their / coats of light, the forms of women / glowed like moons in my youth” (TSC 28). In addition to bullfighting, the denotation “matador” refers to the rank in a game of cards in “skat” (*CED*). The speaker continues her narrative:

Now in this bitumen-flicker  
 I see prognathous Jane, old rot-nose,  
 cavorting with devils in her sleep,  
 sucking the penis of a billy goat,  
 or vomiting prophetic eggs.  
*I have seen it*: anything may happen  
 between these dark discovered walls.

(TSC 28)

The opening images of dimness (“**black bile**”) are elaborated into the deeper darkness (“this **bitumen-flicker**”) that leads to a textual trace of the phantasmagorical hallucinations coined in the misogynist minds of the Holy Inquisition. The idiom of the second passage appears to imply that the female victim “prognathous Jane, old rot-nose” is accused of witchcraft and sexual intercourse with the devil. The ludicrous details of these degrading accusations (“cavorting with devils in her sleep, / sucking the penis of a billy goat, / or vomiting prophetic eggs”) disclose the latent hatred of women’s bodies and the fear of female sexuality projected upon the so-called “witches” by the disturbed male minds. The italicised words (*I have seen it*) might be uttered by the female voice rather than the dreaming Jane. The confining motif of walls (“Between these **dark discovered walls**”) reappears in the concluding lines, echoing the final passage from the section one (“opening on walls of silence”).

### III *The Sleep of Reason*

My friend, you write about the cold,  
 and how the words themselves  
 seem cancerous. On these walls  
 faces take the place of words.

(TSC 28)

*The Sleep of Reason* part three of O’Reilly’s narrative marks a complete change in the cycle’s tone. It is claimed to be addressed to a friend, as it assumes an epistolary form of the reply to the letter (email?). Its content, however,

appears to be equally subversive as the earlier-referred-to sequences. The placement of the two purportedly dissimilar aspects (the atmospheric weather conditions) and the semi-philosophical meditation on the nature of signification creates an absurd ambience in tune with the previous fragments of the poem. The third line evokes the repeated motif of the walls ("on these walls / faces take the place of words"). As argued earlier, walls constitute a frequent symbolic image in O'Reilly's poetry, suggesting the confinement of the female body and self. In the manner of Derrida and Baudrillard, it is argued that signs replace the reality, turning into a simulacrum in its place. The female voice in *The Sleep of Reason* confesses:

I have heard nothing for many years  
 but the animal-breath of madness  
 in my ear. The open skies  
 smite me with imaginary noise.  
 I keep to my house, conjuring  
 inquisitions from cracked plaster.

(TSC 28)

O'Reilly's speaker's declaration about the "animal-breath of madness / in my ear" seems to undermine the textual credibility of the text, implying it to be the ravings of a tormented mind. Ironically, the plausibility of self-diagnosed insanity remains deeply questionable, as only a rationally-minded person would perceive the irrational traits in her behaviour. Nonetheless one cannot deny that the female voice in *The Sleep of Reason* does feel agitated ("the open skies / smite me with imaginary noise"), even while being aware that her delusions are not real. The evoked sense of powerlessness and her voluntary isolation ("I keep to my house") betray the speaker's fear of the surrounding reality. The textual implication is further confirmed in the concluding image ("conjuring / inquisitions from cracked plaste"), which reintroduces the cycle's recurrent motifs (witch, black magic, inquisition), joined with the similar-sounding qualifier of the "cranky" ("cracked") person. The provocative subtitle of the section, *The Sleep of Reason* provides a mock-patriarchal commentary upon the persona's state of mind. Writing about suppressed anger, Miller observes that when "finally expressed, it often appears in exaggerated form, perhaps along with screaming or yelling, or in an ineffective form, with simultaneous negations and apologies, or with various other untoward accompaniments. Such attempts can then be dismissed with a label such as "hysterical" and thereby discounted" ("The Construction" 185). Similarly, Daly claims that

Clearly, among the women burned as Witches, as well as among those confined as "hysterics" or incarcerated as "psychotics," among those destroyed by psychosurgery, shock treatments, drugs, and psychoanalysis, many have been endowed with inspiration, sometimes experienced as locutions, and with great talent for expressing such inspiration. (*Pure Lust* 295)

In *The Sleep of Reason*, the infamous associations of womanhood with insanity are subversively ridiculed by an already empowered persona. What is more, if one examines the speaker's dream visions within the poetics of that genre and within the surreal logic of the unconscious mental practice, then, the discourse seems to be aptly logical in its rendering of the trance sequences. The fourth section's title, *Sabbath-Asmodeus*, introduces the mythical Jewish demonic spirit associated with wrath. *The Collins English Dictionary* explains the derivation of the name Asmodeus as literally "the spirit of anger." Hence the fourth part of "In the Deaf Man's House" allows the female voice to be re-connected with her experience / expression of rage.

. . . a basic point that underlies the interdiction of women's anger: Women are not supposed to use their own activity for their self-initiated and self-defined goals or for their own development . . . women have lived in a situation of being subordinate, a situation that continually generates anger; simultaneously women have been told that to be angry is destructive to their psychological being and sense of identity. Further, anger is seen as threatening to women's life work, (Miller, "The Construction of" 184, 187)

In line with that, the persona's anger is directed against the clichéd gender stereotypes that have been related in the three previous parts of the cycle. To refute them in her syllogistic reasoning, O'Reilly's speaker deduces from the lack of auditory sensations that she remains within her own dream-world: "I cannot hear my own footfalls, / so like a sad sleeper kicking / a foot free from twisted sheets, / I am condemned to dream" (TSC 29). In doing so, she affirms her textual control over the narrated discourse. Consequently, the part four of "In the Deaf Man's House" evokes the female anger demon named Asmodea. Following the trope of the red colour of her imaginary robes, O'Reilly's persona wonders whether she might be herself the female incarnation of rage. She asks:

Am I the one that Asmodea  
smothers in her red cloak?  
That town on the anvil-shaped hill  
withstands the light's assaults.  
Prodigiously sick and dizzy  
I fall nightly over its edge.

(TSC 29)

As an avenger, the speaker in *Sabbath-Asmodeus* returns in her empowered vision to the "town on the anvil-shaped hill" which signifies the repressive super-ego. The word anvil (reminiscent of devil) is also related to the Inquisition's Hammer directed against witches. The motif of the fire being extinguished ("smother") could render the need to put an end to the discriminatory, misogynist flames to which women were / are exposed. Historically, if the phrase "withstands the light's assaults" refers to the instances of witch burning, then "smothers" could imply the women who were burnt alive, suffocating due to the smoke from the (patriarchal) pyre. The female voice in *Sabbath-Asmodeus* herself diagnoses her condition as "prodigiously sick and

dizzy” but not as powerless, since she is able to challenge her fears “fall[ing] nightly over its edge.” After all,

The weapons that modern technology is developing for social control of deviants, particularly women, are more subtle than burning at the stake. They merely destroy minds – the capacity for creativity, imagination and rebellion – while leaving hands and uteruses intact to perform the services of manual work and breeding. (Daly, *Beyond God* 65)

O'Reilly's cycle's final part points to a duality of discourses, one text being recorded on the other's wiped out narrative. The poem makes a derisive reference to the pastoral genre of *fête champêtre* with the artificial bucolic settings (“done in daubs of flesh and silks”) and decorative female characters (“supine duchesses”). The speaker argues:

My original scheme foresaw  
*a fête galante* of supine duchesses,  
*majos* done in daubs of flesh and silks.  
 Instead I watched the python Time  
 devour them all and tore myself to bits  
 below the unoffending sky.

(TSC 29)

Abandoning the pretentious convention in favour of the real life representations, which are ever-changing and ultimately destroyed by the passage of time, the speaker in *Palimpsest* moves towards female empowerment. The false art versus life dichotomy brings one back to the analogy with Keats's “Ode on a Grecian Urn,” which was argued for before. In her reply to the question whether beauty is truth or truth is beauty, O'Reilly's speaker opts for the “truthful” rather than “beautiful” discourse. Only admitting her own vulnerability and susceptibility to both time and experience (“the python Time / devour them all and tore myself to bits”) can lead in the end to women's empowerment. The female voice in *Palimpsest* recalls:

Then I learned the uselessness  
 of light. These walls absolve me  
 of the years' thick impasto,  
 of the scrawl that became my life.

(TSC 29)

As shown in O'Reilly's cycle, the women's power gained in this self-awareness process results from the speaker's rejecting the false comfort of denial. Acknowledging that “I learned the uselessness / of light” might sound like escapism into the world of fantasy but, in fact, it is a statement of self-cognition. The persona in “In the Deaf Man's House” does not draw upon somebody else's enlightenment. What is more, O'Reilly's speaker does not hide beyond the walls (of her body?) but she has learnt to rely upon herself. Accordingly, she feels empowered, realising that she does not need anybody to

forgive her because she can exculpate herself from whatever she had earlier sought forgiveness from others for. Embracing “the years’ thick impasto, / of the scrawl” as her own life, the female voice in “In the Deaf Man’s House” finds strength to identify herself with her past, present and future actions, without the overwhelming sense of powerlessness, guilt and shame. Entitled appropriately “Envoi,” the concluding poem in *The Sea Cabinet* sums up the volume’s theme of the emerging female empowerment. The persona in “Envoi” addresses her final words to the listening “you,” “bending . . . ear / to . . . ravenous desires:”

the same story –  
the going out

under violet stars  
that seem to pin  
your skull to the sky –

you will do it:  
bending your ear  
to their ravenous desires.

(TSC 61)

In O’Reilly’s poem, the farewell words sound like a postscript to a story that has already ended. The speaker leaves it behind her with no regrets, in a conciliatory tone reminiscent of Donne’s “A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning.” It appears that O’Reilly’s persona’s closing words might as well be addressed to her former, powerless self to whom she is saying goodbye, having developed a self-reliant and empowered female identity. Hence “although it will be / the same story” “so it will challenge.” The Buddhist saying claims that change is not becoming different but becoming more whom you really are. The speaker in “Envoi” confesses:

‘We realised some time  
ago that restlessness  
was not to be assuaged’ –  
so it will challenge  
your store of images,  
those cheques you draw

against yourself.

(TSC 61)

Ironically quoting the addressee’s words, O’Reilly’s speaker does not lament upon the relation’s end. In separating with the quotation marks the declarative statement from the rest of the poem, the persona in “Envoi” sets herself at a distance from the cited message. The cliché that “restlessness / was not to be assuaged” mocks the apparent truth of the content. On her own account, the speaker in the analysed poem admits the unavoidability of the things being

altered. Her words: "it will challenge" do not express resignation but O'Reilly's persona's own empowered decision to act upon her will. She asks:

Who can say  
if a loved face will lie

at the end of it?  
Death, desirelessness:  
such kinless things.

(TSC 61)

Whether one wishes it or not, in the terminal moment, instead of love, one may be accompanied only by "death, desirelessness." In "Envoi," even faced with the uncertainty of never being sure whether love will remain invariable and will survive both the passage of time and the changes of the human heart, the speaker in "Envoi" does not fall into despair. In other words, the awareness of "such kinless things" does not render the speaker powerless and paralysed by fear. After all "who can say" what "will lie / at the end of it?" But an empowered woman who can rely on herself does not really need this knowledge to go on living. As if addressing this line of thinking, Kelly argues that:

Feminism is about alleviating women's powerlessness. Women must share half the earth and half the sky, on our own terms and with our own self-determined values. Feminism seeks to redefine our very modes of existence and to transform nonviolently the structures of male dominance. I am not saying that women are inherently better than men. Overturning patriarchy does not mean replacing men's dominance with women's dominance. That would merely maintain the patriarchal pattern of dominance. We need to transform the pattern itself [and] . . . to restore balance and harmony between women and men and between masculine and feminine values in society and within each of us. ("Women and Power" 113–114)





## CONCLUSION

When quoting Lukes's famous claim that power is "an 'essentially contested concept'" (30), one cannot but add that "women's empowerment" evokes even more controversy. As argued earlier, apart from legal, political and historically-grounded restrictions upon women's access to power, there exist as well culturally and socially maintained clichés and deterrents that women have to face on their way to female empowerment. Along these lines, Miller outlines the most prevailing biases about women's relation to power. In her own words:

- A woman's using self-determined power for herself is equivalent to *selfishness*, for she is not enhancing the power of others.
- A woman's using self-determined power for herself is equivalent to *destructiveness*, for such power inevitably will be excessive and will totally disrupt an entire surrounding context.
- The equation of power with destructiveness and selfishness seems impossible to reconcile with a sense of feminine identity.
- A woman's use of power may precipitate attack and *abandonment*; consequently, a woman's use of power threatens a central part of her identity, which is a feeling that she needs others. ("Women And Power" 204), emphasis original

The aforementioned tendency seems to ignore the basic fact that the capacity to act, decide about one's choices and values, principles and commitments is the core foundation of any free being. What is more, to be able to fully exercise their rights, women must feel empowered to do so. Otherwise, the changes will be realised only in theory and not in practice. In other words, women cannot afford to dismiss their own power because female empowerment means "*the capacity to produce a change* – that is, to move anything from point A or state A to point B or state B. . . . It also can include acting to create movement in an interpersonal field, as well as acting in larger realms such as economic, social, or political arenas" (Miller, "Women and Power" 198), emphasis original. Kelly rightly notices:

There is a saying: where power is, women are not. Women must be willing to be powerful. Because we bear scars from the ways men have used their power over us, women often want no part of power . . . . We have all seen men whose power has caused them to lose all sense of reality, decency, and imagination, and we are right to fear such power. But playing an active part in society, on equal footing with men . . . means putting our own ideas of an emancipatory society into practice. (“Women and Power” 114)

As argued by Kelly, women have to redefine their relations to power because without it, their functioning in the social and political context, let alone the personal one, will be put into erasure. Bearing the above in mind, seizing power “does not mean adopting the old thought patterns and strategies of the patriarchal world” (Kelly 114). Challenging popular misconceptions about power held and expressed by various thinkers in her essay “Home To Roost” Arendt points out that:

The trouble, I think, is less that power corrupts than that the *aura* of power, its glamorous trappings, more than power itself, *attracts*; for all those men we have known in this century to have abused power to a blatantly criminal extent were corrupt long before they attained power. (*Responsibility* 268), emphasis original

One more obstacle that women have to face up to is the myth of “the inevitability of men’s power” (Fox-Genovese 26) and the inevitability of their own helplessness. Following this line of thinking, women’s disempowerment is rendered in “[c]oncepts such as ‘fear of owning one’s power,’ ‘identification with the victim,’ ‘fear of success,’ and the ‘Cinderella syndrome’ [which] describe women as they deviate from the more traditional models of power and action” (Surrey, “Relationship and Empowerment” 166). In addition, “[d]isempowerment, then, is difficulty in creating or sustaining a healthy relational context<sup>1</sup>” (Surrey, “Relationship and Empowerment” 166).<sup>2</sup> In line with this, Surrey explains the reasons for women’s problems with accepting a patriarchal, hierarchical model of power, defined by her as “vertical:”

Women often feel unable to act when considering action in the “power over” or “power for oneself only” model . . . . If power or activity is viewed in this

<sup>1</sup> Surrey argues that “Kaplan (1984) suggests that the constellation of factors that can lead to depression includes inhibition of action, which follows from the loss or distortion of a relational context” (“Relationship and Empowerment” 166).

<sup>2</sup> In other words, according to Fox-Genovese

The power that men exercise over women depends upon the polity, society, and economy in which it is embedded and which it articulates. Yet as Lynne Segal has argued, the “uneven, sometimes widening gap between what feminism had seemed to promise and women’s still vulnerable, and for some increasingly impoverished, position in the world, fits most neatly with a biologicistic and fatalistic interpretation of the inevitability of men’s power.” (25–26)

model, women will often choose to focus on the needs of the other person in order to allow the other to feel powerful. Therefore, when viewed from this dichotomous model, women's behavior often looks "passive" or "inactive" or "depressed." The alternative model of interaction that we are proposing might be termed a "power *with*" or "power *together*" or "power emerging from *interaction*" model. ("Relationship and Empowerment" 165), emphasis original

As proved by Surrey and others, in various power relations, the degree of symmetry tends to differ, depending upon altering variables (age, social position, the degree of dependency, the type of relation, etc.). Nonetheless in most cases, female empowerment arises from mutual and reciprocated energy (capacity). Therefore, women can become empowered by drawing strength from their immediate relational resources: connections with ancestors, relatives, offspring etc. The poetry of Sinéad Morrissey demonstrates how female relational empowerment may be realised as power exchange, or power flow, in which its resources are shared and, due to the mutual engagement of the participating agents – constantly renewed. However it is how and whether women can activate this potential, "acting to create, sustain, and deepen the connections that empower" (Surrey, "Relationship and Empowerment" 164) that determines whether or not female empowerment may take place. O'Donoghue's poetry elaborates further the conditions and provisions that have to be met in order to achieve women's empowerment in connection, that is "our shared responsibility for mutual security and well-being through the aliveness and growth-supporting aspects of our relationships" (Surrey, "Relationship and Empowerment" 174). In other words, Mary Donoghue examines the empowering dimension of power realised with other women: friends, sisters, colleagues, etc. O'Donoghue's poetry is abundant with the narratives of women who draw their strength from Be-Friending relations that are mutually empowering for all the parties involved. The aforementioned level of female (relational) empowerment entails multiple forms in which women support one another, act together and create changes by having solidarity with, being empathetic, and loyal to one another. Denying the collective dimension of power would undermine women's personal agency and their individual strength. The poetry of Vona Groarke probes another commonly challenged matter: that of women's autonomy realised within relations. A female persona in Groarke's poems can remain an autonomous agent as an poet and a woman and, at the same time, she might function in loving connection with her partner and offspring. By examining her relations critically and honestly, Groarke's speakers develop their autonomy and they practise it in a relational context. Reading this personal but not confessional diary of the contemporary Irish woman's (and poet's) path into relational autonomy, one may appreciate how much emotional capital is invested in her day-in and day-out "windmill hymns." Realising her relational vision of life is empowering for a woman as long as she can make choices according to her own values, commitments and norms. In the discussed here model, autonomy fosters connections based on mutual respect for each other's values, choices, opinions, etc. On the other hand,

Caitriona O'Reilly analyses the strategies of overcoming woman's chronic disconnection (see Jordan, "Relational Awareness" 56). In the examined poems, such disconnection stems from non-responsiveness and a failure to address vital aspects of the subject's needs. When the woman's empowerment is de-activated, the female persona gets cut off from her resources, and she feels entrapped in her disconnected state. Bearing the above in mind, O'Reilly's writing offers a way of "move[ing] out of more narrow self-awareness" (Jordan, "Relational Awareness" 56) by re-telling her "anxious" narratives.

Apart from connections, women can draw their empowerment from ecology and from the ecofeminist view of the natural world. Examining the interconnectedness between women and nature discloses the mechanisms of their interrelated subjugation. Mary O'Donoghue probes in detail, with compassion and care, women's relations to the non-animate constituents of the natural world and animals alike. Her "econarratives" demonstrate how by applying an ethical stand, a woman poet may dismantle patriarchal laws of domination of women / nature. O'Donoghue's poetry extends this textual care and attentiveness into the ethical ground of asymmetrical power relations. One can observe that, for O'Donoghue, writing is a practice of consciously assumed responsibility for the words and for the world alike. The preservation and protection of the natural world constitutes one of the key problems in the poetry of Caitriona O'Reilly. In O'Reilly's poetry, the mechanical model means not only the destruction of nature but also the subjugation of women: the ideology operated around the systematic exploitation of natural resources,<sup>3</sup> which means women as well. In the analysed poems, ecofeminist empowerment is drawn from challenging the mechanistic order by demonstrating the interconnected view of the natural world as an organic and unified whole. Subsequently, Vona Groarke looks at nature as a construct upon which clichéd social and cultural views are projected. On the most basic level, in Groarke's poetry, gendering of nature occurs against the onset of stereotypical gender-biased views that promote the binary women (nature) versus men (culture) opposition.<sup>4</sup> In the poetry of Sinéad Morrissey, the contemplation of nature allows a female persona to experience spiritual sustenance, wisdom and compassion. Morrissey's poems deal with the vision of spirituality available to women on non-patriarchal terms. In practise, it entails the process theology advocated by Carol P. Christ. Such spirituality encompasses the environmental protection, it records the suffering of dying creatures and the critique of people's indifference towards it. Morrissey's poetry and her view of spirituality induce thoughts about the moral responsibility of humans for their actions. Situating herself on the side of the defenceless and those who try to protect them, Morrissey's speakers make choices that lead to the changes of consciousness, to the changes in their own ways of thinking, and maybe in the future, to wider social changes. If one goes back to the definition of

---

<sup>3</sup> See the aforementioned phenomenon of *The Death of Nature* is related Merchant (193).

<sup>4</sup> For more on the usage of the mother nature metaphor in the environmental discourse, see Catherine Roach's "Loving Your Mother: On the Woman-Nature Relation."

empowerment cited earlier, namely, “*the capacity to produce a change*” (Miller, “Women and Power” 198), then, it becomes clear that seeing other beings as spiritual, and realising one’s own spirituality in connection with them, can be deeply empowering for women.

The female empowerment can also stem from rejecting, defying and resisting the violence of the organised system of masculine domination. The poetry of Vona Groarke studies resistance articulated in historical terms, as resistance against political domination (colonisation). Groarke’s persona finds her modes of expression and analogies in the studies on architecture, interior design, catering provisions, etc., detecting within these scripts, the political texts of unequal power and gender divisions, and unfair, asymmetrical distributions of capabilities.<sup>5</sup> In other words, Groarke’s poetry enables one to detect disproportions of power where they may not be so obvious to an untrained eye. Her persona “resists” pomposity and a lofty tone, searching for a heterotopic perspective<sup>6</sup> of multiple interpretations. What is more, Sinéad Morrissey questions the expressions of political violence in the North, even those that might directly result from the reaction against the officially sanctioned system of domination. Nonetheless, Morrissey’s speakers never glorify or justify the occurrence of violence. In her poems, the perpetrators of violence and their rights are shaded in the background. The foregrounded perspective belongs to the victims and their bereaved families. Furthermore, the poetry of Mary O’Donoghue probes two correlated though not synonymous phenomena: women being the actual victims of masculine violence, and the social mechanism of victimisation of women that ascribes to the female gender the “natural” and “established” role of a Victim. Hence, O’Donoghue’s speakers demonstrate that “the interest in resistance emerges out of the need to understand the power that women exercise specifically *as a response* to such domination” (Allen, *The Power* 122), emphasis original. Last but not least, in her resisting female powerlessness, Caitriona O’Reilly analyses the fears that may be considered as existential (the passage of time, death, loss) that contribute to the sense of women’s incapacity. Here O’Reilly’s poetry seems to work like an empowering catharsis: imagining the least desired course of action and facing up to these vision, without plunging into despair or hopelessness. In doing so, the speaker in O’Reilly’s poems chooses to resist the false comfort of denial, looking “Death, desirelessness: such kinless things” in the eye, and gaining in this way, her own (even if conditional or limited) female empowerment.

---

<sup>5</sup> It can be argued that: “The notion that space plays a vital role in informing practices of subjectivity and power has received much theoretical substantiation of late” (Hook 178).

<sup>6</sup> Hook further explains that “The heterotopia, then, by definition, is a *differential space* . . . This is to say that the analysis of the heterotopia typically yields a variety of contradictions and paradoxes” (182), emphasis original.



## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- A Dozen Lips*. LIP Pamphlets. Dublin: Attic Press, 1994.
- Adams, Carol J. "Ecofeminism and the Eating of Animals." *Ecological Feminist Philosophies*. Ed. Karen Warren. Bloomington Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1996. 114–136.
- . "Woman-Battering and Harm to Animals." *Animals & Women: Feminist Theoretical Explorations*. Eds. Carol J. Adams and Josephine Donovan. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1995. 55–84.
- Adams, Carol J. and Josephine Donovan, eds. *Animals & Women: Feminist Theoretical Explorations*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1995.
- . Introduction. *Animals & Women: Feminist Theoretical Explorations*. Carol J. Adams and Josephine Donovan. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1995. 1–8.
- Adkins, Lisa and Beverly Skeggs, eds. *Feminism After Bourdieu*. Oxford and Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2004.
- Adkins, Lisa. "Reflexivity: Freedom or Habit of Gender." *Feminism After Bourdieu*. Eds. Adkins and Skeggs. Oxford and Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2004. 191–210.
- Airaksinen, Timo. "The Rhetoric of Domination." *Rethinking Power*. Ed. Thomas E. Wartenberg. New York: State University of New York Press, 1992. 102–120.
- Allen, Amy. "Foucault, Feminism, and the Self: The Politics of Personal Transformation." *Feminism and the Final Foucault*. Eds. Dianne Taylor and Karen Vintges. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2004. 235–257.
- . "Rethinking Power." *Hypatia* 13.1 (winter 1998): 21–40.
- . "Rethinking Resistance: Feminism and the politics of ourselves." *Eurozine*. 5 May 2010. Accessed 20 May 2014.
- . *The Power of Feminist Theory: Domination, Resistance, Solidarity*. Boulder, Colorado and Oxford: Westview Press, 1999.



- Antonio, Diane. "Of Wolves and Women." *Animals & Women: Feminist Theoretical Explorations*. Eds. Carol J. Adams and Josephine Donovan. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1995. 213–230.
- Arendt, Hannah. *Between Past and Present*. 1954. Introduction. By Jerome Kohn. New York: Penguin Books, 2006.
- . *On Revolution*. 1963. Introduction. By Jonathan Schell. New York: Penguin Books, 2006.
- . *On Violence*. Orlando Austin New York San Diego London: A Harvest Book Hartcourt Incorporated, 1970.
- . *Responsibility and Judgement*. Ed. Introduction. By Jerome Kohn. New York: Schocken Books, 2003.
- . *The Human Condition*. 1958. Introduction. By Margaret Donovan. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1998.
- . *The Promise of Politics*. Ed. Introduction. By Jerome Kohn. New York: Schocken Books, 2005.
- Astley, Neil, ed. *Staying Alive: Real Poems for Unreal Times*. Northumberland: Bloodaxe Books, 2002.
- Ball, Terence. "New Faces of Power." *Rethinking Power*. Ed. Thomas E. Wartenberg. State University of New York Press, 1992. 14–31.
- Balzer, Wolfgang. "Game Theory and Power Theory: A Critical Comparison." *Rethinking Power*. Ed. Thomas E. Wartenberg. State University of New York Press, 1992. 56–78.
- Barclay, Linda. "Autonomy and the Social Self." *Relational Autonomy: Feminist Perspectives on Autonomy, Agency and the Social Self*. Eds. Catriona Mackenzie and Natalie Stoljar. New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000. 52–71.
- Beck, Ulrich. *Power in the Global Age*. 2002. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006.
- Beckett, J.C. *The Making of Modern Ireland: 1603–1923*. 1966. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1980.
- Benson, Paul. "Feeling Crazy: Self-Worth and the Social Character of Responsibility." *Relational Autonomy: Feminist Perspectives on Autonomy, Agency and the Social Self*. Eds. Catriona Mackenzie and Natalie Stoljar. New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000. 72–93.
- Bergman, Stephen J. and Janet L. Surrey. "Couple Therapy: A Relational Approach." *The Complexity of Connection: Writing from the Stone Center's Jean Baker Miller Training Institute*. Eds. V. Judith Jordan, Maureen Walker and Linda M. Hartling. New York and London: The Guilford Press, 2004. 167–193.
- Birke, Lynda. "Exploring the Boundaries: Feminism, Animals, and Science." *Animals & Women: Feminist Theoretical Explorations*. Eds. Carol J Adams and Josephine Donovan. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1995. 32–54.

- Birmingham, Peg. *Hannah Arendt and Human Rights: The Predicament of Common Responsibility*. Bloomington Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2006.
- Bitel, Lisa. *Land of Women: Tales of Sex and Gender from Early Ireland*. 1996. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1998.
- Bleakney, Jean and Sinéad Morrissey. Interview: "Poet In Residence... Writing From a Deafening Silence." *Fortnight* 408 (Nov. 2002): 12–13.
- Block, Peter. *Community: The Structure of Belonging*. San Francisco: Berrett-Kohler Publisher, 2009.
- Boiling, Patricia. *Privacy and The Politics of Intimate Life*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1996.
- Boland, Eavan. *Object Lessons: The Life of the Woman and the Poet in Our Time*. 1995. London: Vintage, 1996.
- Boran, Pat, ed. "Ninety-and-Fifty Swans: Glimpses of Nature in Recent Irish Poetry." *Flowing Still: Irish Poets on Irish Poetry*. Ed. Pat Boran. Dublin: Dedalus Press, 2009. 146–161.
- . "Poetry in Hard Times." *The Watchful Heart: A New Generation of Irish Poets: Poems and Essays*. Ed. Joan McBreen. Salmon Poetry. Cliffs Of Moher. Co. Clare: Salmon Publishing, 2009. 9–10.
- . *Flowing Still: Irish Poets on Irish Poetry*. Dublin: Dedalus Press, 2009.
- . Introduction. *Flowing Still: Irish Poets on Irish Poetry*. Ed. Pat Boran. Dublin: Dedalus Press, 2009. 7–14.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. *Language and Symbolic Power*. 1992. Ed. Introduction. By John B. Thompson. Trans. Gino Raymond and Matthew Adamson. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005.
- . *Masculine Domination*. 1998. Trans. Richard Nice. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2001.
- Bradley, Anthony and Maryann Gialanella Valiulis, eds. *Gender and Sexuality in Modern Ireland*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997.
- Bradley, Candice. "Keeping the Soil in Good Heart: Women, Weeders, the Environment, and Ecofeminism." *Ecofeminism: Women, Culture, Nature*. Ed. Karen Warren. Bloomington Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1997. 290–299.
- Brannigan, John. *Race in Modern Irish Literature and Culture*. Edinburgh University Press, 2009.
- Brennan, Rory. "Landing a Poem." Rev. of *Selected Poems* by Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin; *John Jordan: Selected Poems* by Hugh McFadden, *Lament for Art O'Leary* by Vona Groarke; *Spindrift* by Vona Groarke, *Temple of Lilac* by Owen Raymond Stauton; *Long-Distance Swimmer* by Dorothy Molloy; *Venetian Epigrams: Translations from Goethe* by Seán Lysaght. *Books Ireland*. 317 (Dec. 2009): 277–278.
- Bronfen, Elizabeth and Misha Kavka, eds. *Feminist Consequences: Theory for the New Century*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2001.

- Brewster, Scott and Michael Parker, eds. *Irish Literature since 1990: Diverse Voices*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009.
- Bushe, Paddy. "Translating Mermaids and Mourning." Rev. of *Fifty Minute Mermaid* by Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill; Paul Muldoon, *Lament for Art O'Leary* by Vona Groarke. *Poetry Ireland Review* 96 (2008): 76–82.
- Butler, David. "Alive Alive O." Rev. of *Staying Alive: Real Poems for Unreal Times* by Neil Astley; *Being Alive: a Sequel to Staying Alive* Neil Astley; *Dancing with Kitty Stobling* by Antoinette Quinn. *Poetry Ireland Review* 81 (2004): 80–82.
- . "Consolations of Observation." Rev. of *Reel* by George Shirtes; *The Quick of It* by Eamon Grennan; *The State of the Prisons* by Sinéad Morrissey. *Poetry Ireland Review* 83 (2005): 102–106.
- Butler, Judith. "Bodies and Power Revisited." *Feminism and the Final Foucault*. Eds. Eds. Dianne Taylor and Karen Vintges. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2004. 183–194.
- . *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection*. Stanford California: Stanford University Press, 1997.
- . *Undoing Gender*. New York and London: Routledge, 2004.
- Byrne, Anne and Madeleine Leonard, eds. *Women and Irish Society: A Sociological Reader*. Belfast: Beyond Pale Publications, 1997.
- Cahill, Gerry. "The Altered Edge: the Impact of the Construction Boom on the Landscape of the Urban Periphery." *Irish Contemporary Landscapes in Literature and the Arts*. Ed. Marie Mianowski. Hampshire and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012. 183–188.
- Cairns, David and Shaun Richards. *Writing Ireland: Colonialism, Nationalism and Culture*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988.
- Campbell, Matthew, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Contemporary Irish Poetry*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.
- Cantrell, Carol H. "Women and Language in Susan Griffin's *Woman and Nature: The Roaring Inside Her*." *Ecological Feminist Philosophies*. Ed. Karen Warren. Indiana University Press, 1996. 197–210.
- Capildeo, Vahni. "Changing What Is Thinkable." Rev. of *Lament for Art O'Leary* by Vona Groarke, *Speed and Other Liberties* by Andrew Sant, *The Sphere of Birds* by Ciaran Berry, *The Sinking Road* by Paul Batchelor and *The Earth in the Attic* by Fady Joudah. *Poetry Review* 98: 3 (autumn 2008): 113–118.
- Carney Clíodhna. "Poets and Makers." Rev. of *Black Wolf on a White Plain* by Mary Montague; *Flight* by Vona Groarke; *Exemplary Damages* by Dennis O'Driscoll. *Poetry Ireland Review* 76 (spring/summer 2003): 145–149.
- Carpenter, Peter. "Into Dazzle." Rev. of *The Sea Cabinet* by Caitríona O'Reilly; *Without Title* by Geoffrey Hill. *Poetry Ireland Review* 86 (May 2006): 104–108.
- Carville, Daragh. *New Soundings: An Anthology of New Writing from the North of Ireland*. Belfast: The Blackstaff Press, 2003.

- Castells, Manuel. *The Information Age: Economy, Society, and Culture. Volume Two. The Power of Identity*. 1997. Second Edition. Oxford and Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2006.
- Chomsky, Noam. *Chomsky on Anarchism*. Ed. Barry Pateman. Edinburgh, Oakland and West Virginia: AK Press, 2004.
- Christ, Carol P. "Rethinking Theology and Nature." *Reweaving the World: The Emergence of Ecofeminism*. Eds. Irene Diamond and Gloria Feman Orenstein. San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1990. 58–69.
- . *Rebirth of the Goddess: Finding Meaning in Feminist Spirituality*. New York and London: Routledge, 1997.
- . *She Who Changes: Re-imagining the Divine in the World*. Hampshire and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003.
- Clark, Heather. Rev. of "The New North: Contemporary Poetry from Northern Ireland edited by Chris Agee." *Harvard Review* 36 (2009): 231–233.
- Code, Loraine. "The Perversion of Autonomy and the Subjection of Women: Discourses of Social Advocacy at Century's End." *Relational Autonomy: Feminist Perspectives on Autonomy, Agency and the Social Self*. Eds. Mackenzie and Stoljar. New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000. 181–209.
- Collins, Lucy. "Architectural Metaphors: Representations of the House in the Poetry of Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin and Vona Groarke." *Irish Literature since 1990: Diverse Voices. Manchester University Press*. Eds. Brewster Scott and Michael Parker, 2009. 142–159.
- Connolly, Claire. "Ugly Criticism: Union and Division in Irish Literature." *Field Day Review* 4 (2008): 114–131.
- Connolly, Linda and Tina O'Toole. *Documenting Irish Feminisms: The Second Wave*. Dublin: Woodfield Press, 2005.
- Coughlan, Patricia and Tina O'Toole, eds. *Irish Feminist Perspectives: IASIL Studies in Irish Writing. Dublin. A Carysfort Press Book*, 2008.
- Coumo, Chris. "Toward Thoughtful Ecofeminist Activism." *Ecological Feminist Philosophies*. Ed. Karen Warren. Bloomington Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1996. 42–51.
- Cullen, Mary and Maria Luddy, eds. *Female Activists: Irish Women and Change 1900–1960*. Dublin: Woodfield Press, 2001.
- Curtin, Deane. "Toward an Ecological Ethic of Care." *Ecological Feminist Philosophies*. Ed. Karen Warren. Bloomington Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1996. 66–81.
- . "Women's Knowledge as Expert Knowledge: Indian Women and Ecodevelopment." *Ecofeminism: Women, Culture, Nature*. Ed. Karen Warren Bloomington Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1997. 82–111.
- . *Out of Earth: Ecocritical Readings of Irish Texts*. Introduction. By John Elder. Cork: Cork University Press, 2010.

- Cusik, Christine, ed. "Mindful Paths: An Interview with Tim Robinson." *Out of the Earth: Ecocritical Readings of Irish Texts*. Ed. Christine Cusik. Cork: Cork University Press, 2010. 205–211.
- Daly, Mary. *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation*. Boston: Deacon Press, 1974.
- . *Pure Lust: Elemental Feminist Philosophy*. London: The Women's Press, 1984.
- Davis, Karen. "Thinking Like a Chicken: Farm Animals and the Feminine Connection." *Animals & Women: Feminist Theoretical Explorations*. Eds. Carol J Adams and Josephine Donovan. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1995. 192–212.
- De Angelis, Irene. *The Japanese Effect in Contemporary Irish Poetry*. Hampshire and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.
- Deutscher, Penelope. *A Politics of Impossible Difference: The Later Work of Luce Irigaray*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2002.
- Denman, Peter. Rev. of *Seatown* by Conor O'Callaghan; *Other People's Houses* by Vona Groarke. *Irish University Review* 30.2 (autumn-winter 2000): 381–383.
- Diamond, Irene and Gloria Feman Orenstein, eds. *Reweaving the World: The Emergence of Ecofeminism*. San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1990.
- Dinnerstein, Dorothy. *The Mermaid and The Minotaur: Sexual Arrangements and Human Malaise*. 1976. Introduction. By Vivian Gormick. Afterword. By Adrienne Harris. New York: Other Press, 1999.
- Donchin, Anne. "Autonomy and Interdependence: Quandaries in Genetic Decision Making." *Relational Autonomy: Feminist Perspectives on Autonomy, Agency and the Social Self*. Eds. Catriona Mackenzie and Natalie Stoljar. New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000. 236–258.
- Donnelly, Brian. "Making It New." Rev. of *An Awful Racket* by Rita Ann Higgins; *Like Joy in Season, Like Sorrow* by Mary Dorcey; *The Nowhere Birds* by Caitriona O'Reilly. *Poetry Ireland Review* 72 (spring 2002): 109–112.
- Donner, Wendy. "Self and Community in Environmental Ethics." *Ecofeminism: Women, Culture, Nature*. Ed. Karen Warren. Bloomington Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1997. 375–389.
- Dooley, Cate and Nikki M. Fedele. "Mothers and Sons: Raising Relational Boys." *The Complexity of Connection: Writing from the Stone Center's Jean Baker Miller Training Institute*. Eds. V. Judith Jordan, Maureen Walker and Linda M. Hartling. New York and London: The Guilford Press, 2004. 220–249.
- Dorgan, Theo, ed. *Irish Poetry Since Kavanagh*. Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1996.
- Dunayer, Joan. "Sexist Words, Speciesist Roots." *Animals & Women: Feminist Theoretical Explorations*. Eds. Adams and Donovan. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1995. 11–31.

- Eisler, Riane. "The Gaia Tradition and the Partnership Future: An Ecofeminist Manifesto." *Reweaving the World: The Emergence of Ecofeminism*. Eds. Irene Diamond and Gloria Feman Orenstein. San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1990. 23–34.
- Evans, Eibhlín. Rev. of *The New Irish Poets* by Selina Guinness. *Irish University Review* 35.2 (autumn-winter 2005): 470–473.
- Fadden, Aidan. Rev. of *Other People's Houses* by Vona Groarke. *Fortnight* 308 (Sept. 1999): 32.
- Faith, Karlene. "Resistance: Lessons From Foucault and Feminism." *Power / Gender: Social Relations in Theory and Practice*. Eds. Lorraine Radke and Hendrikus J. Stam. London Thousand Oakes, New Delhi: Sage, 1995. 36–66.
- Fedele, Nikki M. "Relationships in Groups: Connection, Resonance, and Paradox." *The Complexity of Connection: Writing from the Stone Center's Jean Baker Miller Training Institute*. Eds. V. Judith Jordan, Maureen Walker and Linda M. Hartling. New York and London: The Guilford Press, 2004. 194–219.
- Fine, Michelle and Pat Macpherson. "Over Dinner: Feminism and Adolescent Female Bodies." *Power / Gender: Social Relations in Theory and Practice*. Eds. Lorraine Radke and Hendrikus J. Stam. London Thousand Oakes, New Delhi: Sage, 1995. 219–246.
- Flanagan, Laurence, comp. *Irish Women's Letters*. Foreword. Edna O'Brien. New York: Sutton Publishing, 1997.
- Flannery, Eóin. "Ireland of the Welcomes: Colonialism, Tourism and the Irish Landscape." *Out of the Earth: Ecocritical Readings of Irish Texts*. Ed. Christine Cusik. Cork: Cork University Press, 2010. 85–107.
- Fletcher, Joyce K. *Disappearing Acts: Gender, Power and Relational Practice at Work*. 1999. Cambridge, Massachusetts, London: The MIT Press, 2001.
- Flynn, Leontia. "Poetry and Work." *The Watchful Heart: A New Generation of Irish Poets: Poems and Essays*. Ed. Joan McBreen. Salmon Poetry. Cliffs Of Moher. Co. Clare: Salmon Publishing, 2009. 56–58.
- Foucault, Michel. "Interview with Michel Foucault." *Foucault Power: Essential Works* 339–297.
- . "Space, Knowledge, and Power." *Foucault Power: Essential Works* 326–348.
- . "The Subject and Power." *Foucault Power: Essential Works* 298–325.
- . "Truth and Power." *Foucault Power: Essential Works* 111–133.
- . *Power: Essential Works of Foucault 1954–1984. Volume 3*. Ed. James D. Faubion. Trans. Robert Huxley et al. London and New York: Penguin Books, 1994.
- . *The History of Sexuality*. Volume I. New York: Vintage House, 1978.
- Fox-Genovese. *Feminism Without Illusions*. Chapel Hill & London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1991.
- Frawley, Oona. *Irish Pastoral: Nostalgia and Twentieth-Century Irish Literature*. Dublin, Portland, Or: Irish Academic Press, 2005.

- French, Marilyn. "Power / Sex." *Power / Gender: Social Relations in Theory and Practice*. Eds. Lorraine Radke and Hendrikus J. Stam. London Thousand Oakes, New Delhi: Sage, 1995. 15–35.
- Friedman, Marilyn. *Autonomy, Gender, Politics*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2003.
- . "Autonomy, Social Disruption, and Women." *Relational Autonomy: Feminist Perspectives on Autonomy, Agency and the Social Self*. Eds. Mackenzie and Stoljar. New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000. 35–51.
- Gaard, Greta. *The Nature of Home: Taking Root in a Place*. Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2007.
- Gamble, Miriam. "Shaping Itself In Shadow." Rev. of *The Sea Cabinet* by Cairiona O'Reilly. *Fortnight* 441 (Feb. 2006): 26–27.
- Gamman Lorraine and Merja Maniken. *Female Fetishism*. 1994. New York University Press, 1995.
- Genz, Stéphanie and Benjamin A. Brabon. *Postfeminism: Cultural Texts and Theories*. Edinburgh University Press, 2009.
- Gilsenan-Nordin, Irene, ed. *The Body and Desire in Contemporary Irish Poetry*. Dublin, Portland: Irish Academic Press, 2006.
- Goodby, John. *Irish Poetry Since 1950: From Stillness Into History*. Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2000.
- Guinness, Selina, ed. *The New Irish Poets*. Northumberland: Bloodaxe Books, 2004.
- Graybeal, Jean. *Language and the 'Feminine' in Nietzsche and Heidegger*. Bloomington Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990.
- Grennan, Eamon. "Coaxing a World Into Plain View: Spindrift." Rev. of *Spindrift* by Vona Groarke *The Irish Times* 17 October 2009: Irish Times pg. B 13. Accessed 10 May 2013.
- . "The American Connection: An Influence on Modern and Contemporary Irish Poetry." *Flowing Still: Irish Poets On Irish Poetry*. Ed. Pat Boran. Dublin: Dedalus Press, 2009. 90–119.
- Griffin, Susan. "Curves Along the Road." *Reweaving the World: The Emergence of Ecofeminism*. Eds. Irene Diamond and Gloria Feman Orenstein. San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1990. 87–99.
- . "Ecofeminism and Meaning." *Ecofeminism: Women, Culture, Nature*. Ed. Karen Warren Bloomington Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1997. 213–226.
- . *Woman and Nature: The Roaring Inside Her*. London: The Woman's Press, 1994.
- Groarke, Vona. "'Foreignism': A Philadelphia Diary." *The Dublin Review* 18 (spring 2005): 40–72.
- . "A Broth Boy." *The Dublin Review* 32 (autumn 2008): 34–50.
- . "A Hundred Acres, a Few Ditches, Some Mist" *The Dublin Review* 5 (winter 2001–2002): 21–31.

- 
- . "Basho in Kinsale." Six Poets Respond to Derek's Mahon's Latest Collection, *Harbour Lights* (Gallery Press, 2005). *Poetry Ireland Review* 84 (2005): 38–39.
- . "Conjuring the Landscape." Rev. of *Scarecrow* by Seán Lysaght; *Unlegendary Heroes* by Mary O'Donell, *What the Hammer* by Dermot Healy. *The Irish Times*. 12 December 1998. Irish Times pg. A 11. Accessed 8 May 2013.
- . "High Infidelity: Katie Roiphe Explores the Unconventional Domestic Lives of Writers in London in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century." Rev. of *Uncommon Arrangements: Seven Portraits of Married Life in London Literary Circles 1910–1939* by Katie Roiphe. *The Irish Times* 12 July 2008. Irish Times pg. B10. Accessed 8 May 2013.
- . "It Hot?" *The Dublin Review* 27 (summer 2007): 67–81.
- . "Left Tousled." Two Readings of John Burnside's 'Parousia', by Dennis O'Driscoll and Vona Grocke. *Poetry Ireland Review* 63 (winter 1999): 114–118.
- . "Like Corks on Water." *Poetry Ireland Review* 81 (2004):28.
- . "Majestic Reminders amid the ennui." Rev. of *Harbour Lights* by Derek Mahon. *The Irish Times* 7 January 2006. Irish Times pg. C10. Accessed 8 May 2013.
- . "Remakes." *The Dublin Review* (autumn 2006): 52–71.
- . "That Way It Goes." *Poetry Ireland Review* 64 (spring 2000): 42–44.
- . "The Passion Behind the Poetry: BIOGRAPHY Far from Being a Fey Recluse Obsessed with Death, a New Biography Reveals Emily Dickinson as Being a Lively, Empathetic and Humorous Intellectual." Rev. of *Lives Like Loaded Guns: Emily Dickinson and Her Family Feuds* by Lyndall Gordon. *The Irish Times* 27 February 2010. Times pg. B10. Accessed 8 May 2013.
- . "W.B. Yeats." *Poetry Ireland Review* 59 (winter 1998): 14–16.
- . "War. Not War." *The Dublin Review* (winter 2006–2007): 109–125.
- . *Flight and Earlier Poems*. Winston-Salem: Wake Forrest University Press, 2004.
- . *Flight*. Loughcrew Oldcastle Co Meath: The Gallery Press, 2002.
- . *Juniper Street*. Loughcrew Oldcastle Co Meath: The Gallery Press, 2006.
- . *Lament for Art O'Leary. From the Irish of Eibhlín Ni Chonaill*. Loughcrew Oldcastle Co Meath: The Gallery Press, 2008.
- . *Other People's Houses*. Loughcrew Oldcastle Co Meath: The Gallery Press, 1999.
- . Rev. of Brian Maguire, Tristann's Gallery, Dundalk, 15<sup>th</sup> October – 7<sup>th</sup> November 1997. *Circa* 82 (winter 1997): 65.
- . Rev. of Deidre Behan, Basement Gallery, Dundalk, March 1996. *Circa* 76 (summer 1996): 59
- . Rev. of Dundalk / Drogheda. *Circa* 88 (summer 1999): 48.
- . Rev. of Dundalk / Drogheda. *Circa* 89 (autumn 1999): 50–51.
- . Rev. of Dundalk / Drogheda. *Circa* 90. (winter 1999): 44–45.



- . Rev. of Dundalk. *Circa* 92 (summer 2000): 50–51.
- . Rev. of Lorraine Whelan, Basement Gallery, Dundalk, November 1996. *Circa* 79 (spring 1997): 49–50.
- . *Shale*. Loughcrew Oldcastle Co Meath: The Gallery Press, 1994.
- . *Spindrift*. Loughcrew Oldcastle Co Meath: The Gallery Press, 2009.
- . X. Loughcrew Oldcastle Co Meath: The Gallery Press, 2014.
- Gilsenan\_Nordin, Irene, ed. *The Body and Desire in Contemporary Irish Poetry*. Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2006.
- Gruen, Lori. “Revaluing Nature.” Ed. Warren, *Ecofeminism: Women*. 356–389.
- Haberstroth, Patricia. *Women Creating Women: Contemporary Irish Women Poets*. Dublin: Attic Press, 1996.
- Hall, Dianne. *Women and the Church: In Medieval Ireland, c. 1140–1540*. 2003. Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2008.
- Hammer, Langdon “Conflict and Culture.” *The American Scholar* 76.1 (winter 2007): 69.
- Hartling, Linda M. et al. “Shame and Humiliation: From Isolation to Relational Transformation.” *Jordan and Walker* 103–128.
- Hartstock, Nancy H. “Gender and Sexuality: Masculinity, Violence, and Domination.” *Rethinking Power*. Ed. Thomas E. Wartenberg. New York: State University of New York Press, 1992. 249–276.
- Held, Virginia. “Gender Identity and the Ethics of Care in Globalized Society.” *Global Feminist Ethics: Feminist Ethics and Social Theory*. Ed. Rebecca Whisnant and Peggy DesAutels. Lanham Boulder New York Toronto Plymouth, UK: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers 2010. 43–57.
- Helsztyński, Stanisław. *Specimens of English Poetry and Prose. Part One*. Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1982.
- Hill, Myrtle. *Women in Ireland: A Century of Change*. Belfast: The Blackstaff Press, 2003.
- Hook, Derek. *Foucault, Psychology, and the Analytics of Power*. 2007. Hampshire and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.
- Hooley, Ruth, ed. *The Female Line: Northern Irish Women Writers*. Belfast: Northern Irish Women’s Rights Movement, 1985.
- Howell, Nancy R. *A Feminist Cosmology: Ecology, Solidarity and Metaphysics*. New York: Humanity Books, 2000.
- Holdridge, Jefferson. Rev. of *The Nowhere Birds* by Caitriona O’Reilly. *Irish University Review* 32.2 (autumn–winter 2002): 337–380.
- Inglis, Tom. *Global Ireland: Same Difference*. New York And London: Routledge, 2008.
- Innes, Catherine Lynnette. *Woman and Nation in Irish Literature and Society: 1880 – 1935*. New York London Toronto Sydney Tokyo Singapore: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993.
- Isaac, Jeffrey C. “Beyond the Three Faces of Power: A Realistic Critique.” Ed. Thomas E. Wartenberg 32–55.

- Irigaray, Luce. *Between East and West: From Singularity to Community*. Trans. Stephen Pluháček. New York: Columbia University Press, 2002.
- Irish Feminist Review*. Ed. Rebecca Pelan. Vol. 1. Galway: Women's Studies Center, 2005.
- Johnston, Dillon. *Irish Poetry After Joyce*. Syracuse University Press, 1997.
- Johnston, Fred. "Fashion and Profit." Rev. of *Sruth Teangacha (Stream of Tongues)* by Gearóid Mac Lochlainn; *Daytime Sleeper* by Gerard Smyth; *Flight* by Vona Groarke. *Books Ireland* 252 (Oct. 2002): 247–248.
- . "Surprised by Familiarity." Rev. of *Shale* by Vona Groarke; *Coming of Age* by Joan Newmann; *Golfish in a Baby Bath* by Áine Miller; *Turane: The Hidden Village* by Patrick Deeley; *The Empty Quarter* by Gerry Murphy; *Stone Floods* by Trevor Joyce. *Books Ireland* 191 (Dec. 1995): 323–324.
- Johnston, Maria. "Beyond Belfast." Rev. of *Here Comes the Night* by Allan Gillis, *Through the Square Window* by Sinéad Morrissey. *Poetry Ireland Review* 102 (Jan. 2011): 104–109
- . "Hauntings and Returns." Rev. of *Juniper Street* by Vona Groarke; *Gas Light and Coke* by Fergus Allen. *Poetry Ireland Review* 87 (Aug. 2006): 99–104.
- Jordan V. Judith. "Therapists' Authenticity." *The Complexity of Connection: Writing from the Stone Center's Jean Baker Miller Training Institute*. Eds. V. Judith Jordan, Maureen Walker and Linda M. Hartling. New York and London: The Guilford Press, 2004. 67–72.
- . *Women's Growth In Connection: Writing From The Stone Center*. New York and London: The Guilford Press, 1991.
- . "Empathy and Self Boundaries." *Women's Growth In Connection: Writing From The Stone Center*. Eds. V. Judith Jordan et al. New York and London: The Guilford Press, 1991. 67–80.
- . "Empathy, Mutuality and Therapeutic Change: Clinical Implications of A Relational Model." *Women's Growth In Connection: Writing From The Stone Center*. Eds. V. Judith Jordan et al. New York and London: The Guilford Press, 1991. 283–290.
- . "Relational Awareness: Transforming Disconnection." *The Complexity of Connection: Writing from the Stone Center's Jean Baker Miller Training Institute*. Eds. V. Judith Jordan, Maureen Walker and Linda M. Hartling. New York and London: The Guilford Press, 2004. 47–63.
- . "Relational Resilience." *The Complexity of Connection: Writing from the Stone Center's Jean Baker Miller Training Institute*. Eds. V. Judith Jordan, Maureen Walker and Linda M. Hartling. New York and London: The Guilford Press, 2004. 28–46.
- . "Restoring Emphatic Possibility." *The Complexity of Connection: Writing from the Stone Center's Jean Baker Miller Training Institute*. Eds. V. Judith Jordan, Maureen Walker and Linda M. Hartling. New York and London: The Guilford Press, 2004. 122–128.

- . "The Meaning of." *Women's Growth In Connection: Writing From The Stone Center*. Eds. V. Judith Jordan et al. New York and London: The Guilford Press, 1991. 81–96.
- . "Towards Competence and Connection." *The Complexity of Connection: Writing from the Stone Center's Jean Baker Miller Training Institute*. Eds. V. Judith Jordan, Maureen Walker and Linda M. Hartling. New York and London: The Guilford Press, 2004. 11–27.
- Jordan, V. Judith and Maureen Walker. Introduction. *The Complexity of Connection: Writing from the Stone Center's Jean Baker Miller Training Institute*. Eds. V. Judith Jordan, Maureen Walker and Linda M. Hartling. New York and London: The Guilford Press, 2004. 1–8.
- Jordan, V. Judith, Janet L. Surrey, Alexandra G. Kaplan. "Women and Empathy: Implications for Psychological Development and Psychotherapy." *Women's Growth In Connection: Writing From The Stone Center*. Eds. V. Judith Jordan et al. New York and London: The Guilford Press, 1991. 27–50.
- Jordan, V. Judith, Maureen Walker and Linda M. Hartling, eds. *The Complexity of Connection: Writing from the Stone Center's Jean Baker Miller Training Institute*. New York and London: The Guilford Press, 2004.
- Journal of Social Issues*. Community Involvement: Theoretical Approaches and Educational Initiatives. Stukas, Arthur A. and Michelle R. Dunlap. Vol.58 (Fall 2002).
- Judt, Tony. *Ill Fares the Land: A Treatise on Our Present Discontents*. London and New York: Penguin Books, 2010.
- Kahane, Adam. *Power and Love: A Theory and Practice of Social Change*. San Francisco: Berrett-Kohler Publisher, 2010.
- Kaplan, Alexandra G. "Empathic Communication in the Psychotherapy Relationship." *Women's Growth In Connection: Writing From The Stone Center*. Eds. Jordan, V. Judith, et al. New York and London: The Guilford Press, 1991. 44–50.
- . "The 'Self-in-Relation': Implications for Depression." *Women's Growth In Connection: Writing From The Stone Center*. Eds. V. Judith Jordan et al. New York and London: The Guilford Press, 1991. 206–222.
- Kaplan, Alexandra G., Rona Klein, Nancy Gleeson. "Women's self Development in Late Adolescence." *Women's Growth In Connection: Writing From The Stone Center*. Eds. V. Judith Jordan et al. New York and London: The Guilford Press, 1991. 122–140.
- Kappeler, Susanne. "Speciesism, Racism, Nationalism...or the Power of Scientific Subjectivity." *Animals & Women: Feminist Theoretical Explorations*. Carol J Adams and Josephine Donovan. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1995. 320–352.
- Kiberd, Declan. *The Irish Writer and the World*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.
- Kiberd, Declan, Edna Longley, and Andy Pollak. *Multiculturalism: The View of the Two Irelands (Cross-Currents)*. 2001.

- Kiely, Gabriel et al., eds. *Irish Social Policy In Context*. 1999. Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2002.
- Kearney, Richard. *Postnationalist Ireland: Politics, Culture, Philosophy*. London and New York: Routledge, 1997.
- Keenan-Thomson, Tara. *Irish Women And Street Politics: 1956–1973. 'This Could Be Contagious.'* Dublin, Portland: Irish Academic Press, 2010.
- Kennedy, Patricia, ed. *Motherhood in Ireland*. Cork: Mercier Press, 2004.
- Kelly, Angeline A., ed. *Pillars of the House: an Anthology of Verse by Irish Women from 1690 to the Present*. Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 1997.
- Kelly, Petra. "Women and Power." *Ecofeminism: Women, Culture, Nature*. Ed. Karen Warren. Bloomington Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1997. 112–119.
- Kelly, Rita. "The Sinew of Memory," Rev. of *Brow Head* by John Boland; *Other People's Houses* by Vona Groarke; *The Ballad of HMS Belfast* by Ciaran Carson; *The Minotaur and Other Poems* by Anthony Cronin. *Books Ireland* 229 (Mar. 2000): 64–65.
- Kennedy, Patricia, ed. *Motherhood in Ireland: Creation and Context*. Cork: Mercier Press, 2004.
- Kheel, Marti. "Ecofeminism and Deep Ecology: Reflections on Identity and Difference." *A Diamond and Feman Orenstein* 128–137.
- . "License to Kill: An Ecofeminist Critique of Hunters' Discourse." *Animals & Women: Feminist Theoretical Explorations*. Carol J Adams and Josephine Donovan. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1995. 85–125.
- King, Robert J. H. "Caring about Nature: Feminist Ethics and the Environment." Warren, *Ecological Feminist Philosophies*. Ed. Karen Warren. Bloomington Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1996. 82–96.
- King, Ynestra. "Healing the Wounds: Feminism, Ecology, and the Nature / Culture Dualism." *Reweaving the World: The Emergence of Ecofeminism*. Eds. Irene Diamond and Gloria Feman Orenstein. San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1990. 106–121.
- Kirkpatrick, Kathryn, ed. *Border Crossings: Irish Women Writers and National Identities*. Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 2000.
- Kristeva, Julia. *Hannah Arendt*. Trans. Ross Guberman. New York: Columbia University Press, 2001.
- Lahar, Stephanie. "Ecofeminist Theory and Grassroots Politics." Warren, *Ecological Feminist Philosophies*. Ed. Karen Warren. Bloomington Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1996. 1–18.
- Legler, Gretchen L. "Ecofeminist Literary Criticism." *Ecofeminism: Women, Culture, Nature*. Ed. Karen Warren. Bloomington Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1997. 227–238.
- Lee-Lampshire, Wendy. "Women-Animals-Machines: A Grammar for a Wittgensteinian Ecofeminism." *Ecofeminism: Women, Culture, Nature*. Ed. Karen Warren. Bloomington Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1997. 412–424.

- Leopold, Aldo. *A Sand County Almanac and Sketches Here and There*. 1949. Illustrated by Charles W. Schwartz. London Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1968.
- . *The River of God and Other Essays* by Leopold Aldo. Eds. Susan L. Flader and J. Baird Callicott. Madison Wisconsin and London: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991.
- Lipman-Blumen, Jean. "The Existential Bases of Power Relationships: the Gender Role Case." *Power / Gender: Social Relations in Theory and Practice*. Eds. Lorraine Radke and Hendrikus J. Stam. London Thousand Oakes, New Delhi: Sage, 1995. 108–135.
- Lips, Hilary M. "Female Powerlessness: a Case of 'Cultural Preparedness'?" Radke and Stam 89–107.
- Lukes, Steven. *Power: A Radical View*. 1974. Second Edition. Hampshire and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.
- Luke, Brian. "Taming Ourselves or Going Feral: Toward a Nonpatriarchal Metaethic of Animal Liberation." *Animals & Women: Feminist Theoretical Explorations*. Carol J Adams and Josephine Donovan. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1995. 290–319.
- Lloyd, Genevieve. "Individual, Responsibility, and the Philosophical Imagination." *Relational Autonomy: Feminist Perspectives on Autonomy, Agency and the Social Self*. Eds. Catriona Mackenzie and Natalie Stoljar. New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000. 112–123.
- Lloyd, Moya. *Beyond Identity Politics: Feminism, Power & Politics*. London Thousand Oakes, New Delhi: Sage, 2005.
- Lysaght, Seán. "At Home and Abroad." Rev. of *Other People's Houses* by Vona Groarke; *Seatown* by Conor O'Callaghan; *Privacy* by Justin Quinn. *Poetry Ireland Review* 63 (winter 1999): 33–37.
- Mackenzie, Catriona. "Imagining Oneself Otherwise." *Relational Autonomy: Feminist Perspectives on Autonomy, Agency and the Social Self*. Eds. Catriona Mackenzie and Natalie Stoljar. New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000. 124–150.
- Mackenzie, Catriona and Natalie Stoljar, eds. "Autonomy Refigured." Introduction. *Relational Autonomy: Feminist Perspectives on Autonomy, Agency and the Social Self*. Eds. Catriona Mackenzie and Natalie Stoljar. New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000. 3–31.
- . *Relational Autonomy: Feminist Perspectives on Autonomy, Agency and the Social Self*. New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.
- MacSween, Morag. *Anorexic Bodies: a Feminist and Sociological Perspective on Anorexia Nervosa*. London and New York: Routledge, 1993.
- McAuliffe, John McAuliffe. Rev. of *X* by Vona Groarke. "X Marks a New Place for Vona Groarke and for Irish Writing." *The Irish Times* 15 March 2014. Accessed 15 May 2014.
- McBreen, Joan, ed. *The White Page: An Bhileog Bhán: Twentieth-Century Irish Women Poets*. Cliffs of Moher, County Clare: Salmon Publishing, 1999.

- McBreen, Joan, ed. *The Watchful Heart: A New Generation of Irish Poets: Poems and Essays*. Salmon Poetry. Cliffs Of Moher. Co. Clare: Salmon Publishing, 2009.
- McCabe, James. "Language and Landscapes of Ireland." *Irish Contemporary Landscapes in Literature and the Arts*. Ed. Marie Mianowski. Hampshire and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012. 51–65.
- McCarthy, Thomas and Catherine Phil MacCarthy. Interview with Thomas McCarthy. *Poetry Ireland Review* 95 (2008): 56–64.
- McElroy, Wendy, ed. *Liberty for Women: Freedom and Feminism in Twentieth First Century*. Forward. Wendy Kaminer. Oakland California: An Independent Institute Book, 2002.
- McElroy, Wendy. *Individualist Feminism of the Nineteenth Century: Collected Writings and Biographical Profiles*. Jefferson, North Carolina, and London: McFrand & Company, Inc, Publishers, 2001.
- McIntosh, Gillian and Diane Urquhart, eds. Foreword. Keith Jeffrey. *Irish Women at War: Twentieth Century*. Dublin, Portland: Irish Academic Press, 2010.
- McKenna, Ivonne. *Made Holy: Irish Women Religious at Home and Abroad*. Forward. Margaret MacCurtain. Dublin, Portland: Irish Academic Press, 2006.
- McLaren, Margaret A. "Foucault and Feminism: Power, Resistance, Freedom." *Feminism and the Final Foucault*. Eds. Taylor and Vintges. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2004. 214–234.
- McNay, Lois. "Agency and Experience: Gender as a Lived Relation." *Feminism After Bourdieu*. Eds. Adkins and Skeggs. Oxford and Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2004. 175–90,
- McWilliams, Monica and Joan McKiernan. *Bringing It Out in the Open: Domestic Violence in Northern Ireland*. Belfast: HMSO, 1993.
- Merchant, Carolyn. "Ecofeminism and Feminist Theory." *Reweaving the World: The Emergence of Ecofeminism*. Eds. Irene Diamond and Gloria Feman Orenstein. San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1990. 100–105.
- . *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology and the Scientific Revolution*. New York: Harper One, 1989.
- Meyers, Tietjens Diane. "Intersectional Identity and the Authentic Self." *Relational Autonomy: Feminist Perspectives on Autonomy, Agency and the Social Self*. Eds. Catriona Mackenzie and Natalie Stoljar. New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000. 151–180.
- Mianowski, Marie. *Irish Contemporary Landscapes in Literature and the Arts*. Hampshire and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.
- Mill, Stuart John. *On Liberty and The Subjection of Women*. London: Penguin Books, 2006.
- Miller, Jean Baker. "The Construction of Anger in Women and Men." *Women's Growth In Connection: Writing From The Stone Center*. Eds. V. Judith Jordan et al. New York and London: The Guilford Press, 1991. 181–196.

- . "The Development of Women's Sense of Self." *Women's Growth In Connection: Writing From The Stone Center*. Eds. V. Judith Jordan et al. New York and London: The Guilford Press, 1991. 11–28.
- . "Women and Power." *Rethinking Power*. Ed. Thomas E. Wartenberg. New York: State University of New York Press, 1992. 240–248.
- . "Women and Power." *Women's Growth In Connection: Writing From The Stone Center*. Eds. V. Judith Jordan et al. New York and London: The Guilford Press, 1991. 197–205.
- Miller, Jean Baker et al. "Therapists' Authenticity." *The Complexity of Connection: Writing from the Stone Center's Jean Baker Miller Training Institute*. Eds. V. Judith Jordan, Maureen Walker and Linda M. Hartling. New York and London: The Guilford Press, 2004. 64–89.
- Milton, Kay. *Loving Nature: Towards An Ecology of Emotion*. London and New York: Routledge, 2002.
- Montague, Mary. "Contemporary Irish Poetry." *The Watchful Heart: A New Generation of Irish Poets: Poems and Essays*. Ed. Joan McBreen. Salmon Poetry. Cliffs Of Moher. Co. Clare: Salmon Publishing, 2009. 106–109.
- Morris, Peter. *Power: A Philosophical Analysis*. 1987. Second Edition. Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2002.
- Morrissey, Sinéad. "Counting China." *Poetry Ireland Review* 79 (2004): 44–45.
- . "Our Kinky Forbears." Rev. of *Lascivious Bodies: A Sexual History of the Eighteenth Century* by Julie Pekman. *Fortnight* 429 (Oct. 2004): 21.
- . "Uncommon Talent." Rev. of *Not Common Speech: A Voice of Davoren Hanna* by Davoren Hanna. *Fortnight* 287 (Sept. 1990): 21.
- . "War on Iraq: Against All Rhyme and Reason." *Fortnight* 413 (Apr. 2003): 16–17.
- . *Between Here and There*. Manchester: Carcanet Press, 2002.
- . Rev. "Crucial Collection: Les Murray *Translations from the Natural World*." *Poetry Ireland Review* 86 (2006): 48–49.
- . *Parallax*. Manchester: Carcanet Press, 2013.
- . *The State of the Prisons*. Manchester: Carcanet Press, 2005.
- . *There was Fire in Vancouver*. Manchester: Carcanet Press, 1996.
- . *Through the Square Window*. Manchester: Carcanet Press, 2009.
- . "English in Northern Ireland." *Fortnight* 441 (Feb. 2006): 17.
- Murdoch, Iris. *The Bell*. London: Penguin Books in Association with Chatto and Windus, 1962.
- Nussbaum, Martha C. *Women and Human Development: The Capabilities Approach*. 2000. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.
- O'Donoghue, Mary. "Alone in a Crowd." Rev. of *Almost There: The Onward Journey by a Dublin Woman* by Nuala O'Falain. *Women's Review of Books* 20. 6 (Mar. 2003): 9.
- . "L. casei. Immunitas." *Agni* 70 (2009): 76–85.
- . "Motorcross." *Agni* 62 (2005): 96–108.

- 
- . "On Disgrace and the Need for a New-fangled Envoy." *The Watchful Heart: A New Generation of Irish Poets: Poems and Essays*. Ed. Joan McBreen. Salmon Poetry. Cliffs Of Moher. Co. Clare: Salmon Publishing, 2009. 140–142.
- . "Plumanna." *The Dublin Review* 17 (winter 2004–2005): 14–25.
- . *Among These Winters*. Dublin: The Dedalus Press, 2007.
- . *Tulle*. Cliffs of Moher, Co. Clare: Salmon Publishing, 2001.
- O'Grady, Helen. "An Ethics of the Self." "Foucault, Feminism, and the Self: The Politics of Personal Transformation." *Feminism and the Final Foucault*. Eds. Dianne Taylor and Karen Vintges. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2004. 91–117.
- Olkowsky, Dorothea, ed. *Resistance, Flight, Creation: Feminist Enactments of French Philosophy*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2000.
- O'Rawe, Des. "Habitations and Odysseys." Rev. of *Other People's Houses* by Vona Groarke; *Shelmaliar* by Medbh McGuckian; *Seatown* by Conor O'Callaghan; *The Company of Children* by James Simmons. *The Irish Review* 25 (winter 1999–spring 2000): 160–164.
- O'Reilly, Caitríona. "Astonishing Alchemy." Rev. of *The Eyes: Versions of Antonio Machado* by Don Peterson; *On the Bus with Rosa Parks* by Rita Dove. *Selected Poems* by Blake Morrison. *The Irish Times* 28 August 1999. Irish Times pg. B8. Accessed 10 May 2013.
- . "Exploded Diagrams." *The Dublin Review* 4 (autumn 2001): 77–90.
- . "Fair Poetic Game." Rev. of *Protestant without a Horse* by Robert Greacen; *The Shadow Keeper* by Jean O'Brien; *True North* by Fred Johnston; *The Pen Shop* by Thomas Kinsella. *Books Ireland* 209 (Dec. 1997): 332–333.
- . *Geis*. Northumberland: Bloodaxe Books, 2015.
- . "Old Weather." Rev. of *The Deregulated Muse: Essays on Contemporary British and Irish Poetry* by Seán O'Brien. *The Irish Review* 23 (winter 1998): 191–194.
- . "On the Complexities of a Long Marriage." Rev. of *Talking to the Dead* by Elaine Feinstein. *The Irish Times* 5 May 2007. Irish Times pg. C10. Accessed 10 May 2013.
- . "Proclaimed Incompleteness." Rev. of *The Familiar and Godhead* by Thomas Kinsella; *Upon Foreign Soil* by John F. Deane. *Poetry Ireland Review* 63 (winter 1999): 9–13.
- . "Purple Murder." *The Dublin Review* 8 (autumn 2002): 59–67.
- . "Testaments of a Native Daughter." Rev. of *The Lost Land* by Eavan Boland. *The Irish Times* 10 October 1998. Irish Times pg. C11. Accessed 10 May 2013.
- . "The Poetry is in the Line." Rev. of *According to Small Hours* by Aidan Mathews. *Talking My Letters Back* by Dermot Bolger. *The Irish Times* 16 January 1999. Irish Times pg. B11. Accessed 10 May 2013.



- . "Things'Thinginess." Rev. of *Our Double Time* by Michael O'Siadhail, *The Bible Globe* by Catherine Phil MacCarthy; *Penguin Modern Poets. The Irish Times*. May 16, 1998. Irish Times pg. A11. Accessed 10 May 2013.
- . *The Nowhere Birds*. Northumberland: Bloodaxe Books, 2001.
- . *The Sea Cabinet*. Northumberland: Bloodaxe Books, 2006.
- O'Reilly, Caitriona and Justin Quinn. "Two Readings of Jorie Graham's 'Salmon.'" *Poetry Ireland Review* 64 (spring 2000): 13–23.
- Ó Seaghdha, Barra. "Rough Guide to New Irish Poetry." Rev of *The New Irish Poets* by Selina Guinness. *Poetry Ireland Review* 82 (2005): 110–113.
- O' Sullivan, Brendan and Karen Ray. "The Metropolitan Cork Green Belt: Synergies and Tensions between Strategic and Local Understandings of Landscape Value." *Irish Contemporary Landscapes in Literature and the Arts*. Ed. Marie Mianowski. Hampshire and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012. 217–231.
- O'Toole, Bridget. "Tellers of Tale." Rev. of *The Third Shore: Women's Fiction From East Central Europe* by Agata Schwartz, Luise von Flotow; *Scéalta: Short Stories by Irish Women* by Rebecca O'Connor; *Taking the Field and Other Stories* by Patrick O'Hagan; *Finding Tom Cruise and Other Stories* by Anne Chambers; *Tales from Rainwater Pond* by Billy Roche. *Books Ireland* 293 (2007): 75–77.
- Parker, Michael. "Neither here nor there: new generation Northern Irish poets (Sinéad Morrissey and Nick Laird)." *Irish Literature since 1990: Diverse Voices*. Manchester: Manchester University Press. Eds. Brewster Scott and Michael Parker, 2009.177–198.
- Parker, Michael. "Neither here nor there: new generation Northern Irish poets (Sinéad Morrissey and Nick Laird)." *Irish Literature since 1990: Diverse Voices*. Manchester: Manchester University Press. Eds. Brewster Scott and Michael Parker, 2009.177–198.
- . *Northern Irish Literature: 1975–2006: The Imprint of History*. Volume Two. Hampshire and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.
- Peill, James and The Knight of Glin. *The Irish Country House*. Photographs by James Fennell. London: Thames and Hudson, 2010.
- Pelan, Rebecca and Alan Hayes. *Women Emerging: A Decade of Irish Feminist Scholarship*. Galway: Women's Studies Center, 2005.
- Phillips, Brian. Rev. of *Flight and Earlier Poems*. *Poetry* (June 2004): 236–237.
- Phillips, Janet. "Criminal Records." Rev. of *The State of the Prisons* by Sinéad Morrissey. *Poetry Review* 95 (spring 2005): 73–75.
- Pierce, Tapp Joanna. "'Nothing Can Happen Nowhere': Elizabeth Bowen's Figures in Landscape." *Out of the Earth: Ecocritical Readings of Irish Texts*. Ed. Christine Cusik. Cork: Cork University Press, 2010. 50–65.
- Plant, Judith. "Learning to Live with Differences: The Challenge of Ecofeminist Philosophy." *Ecofeminism: Women, Culture, Nature*. Ed. Karen Warren. Bloomington Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1997. 120–139.

- . "Searching for Common Ground: Ecofeminism and Bioregionalism." *Reweaving the World: The Emergence of Ecofeminism*. Eds. Irene Diamond and Gloria Feman Orenstein. San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1990. 155–161.
- Poloczek, Katarzyna. " 'How Freakishly We Split:' Decomposing Into Elements in Poems by Caitriona O' Reilly, Moya Cannon, Sinéad Morrissey and Sara Berkeley. " *Changing Ireland: Transformations and Transitions in Irish Literature and Culture*, eds. K. Poloczek, M. Goszczyńska. Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego. 2010: 68–80.
- . "'Against Love Poetry?' Contemporary Irish Women's Love Poems." *Acta Universitatis Lodziensis. Folia Litteraria Anglica* 7, ed. M. Edelson. Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, 2007: 111–124.
- . "Integrating the Split Irish Female Selves in the Poetry of Paula Meehan, Mary O' Donoghue, Moya Cannon and Mary O' Malley." *The Cultural Representations of Psychiatry and Mental Illness*, ed. K. Szmigiero. Piotrków: Naukowe Wydawnictwo Piotrkowskie, 2009: 221–231.
- . "Ironies of Language and Signs of Existence in Contemporary Irish Women's Poetry: Sinéad Morrissey's *Between Here and There*, Paula Meehan's *Dharmakaya* and Eavan Boland's *Code*." *Ironies of Art/Tragedies of Life*, ed. L. Sikorska. Frankfurt am Main, Berlin: Peter Lang, 2005: 275–300.
- . "Symbolic Power, the Revolutionary Practice of Laughter and Social Changes in the Poetry of Moya Cannon, Sinéad Morrissey and Mary O'Donoghue." *Humor. Teorie, Praktyka, Zastosowania / Humour. Theories, Applications, Practices*, Tom 1/2: *Zrozumieć Humor*; Tom 2/2: *Making Sense of Humour*, eds A. Kwiatkowska and S. Dżereń-Głowacka. Naukowe Wydawnictwo Piotrkowskie, Piotrków Trybunalski 2009: 103–114.
- . "Writing the New Irish into Ireland's Old Narratives: the Poetry of Sinéad Morrissey, Leontia Flynn, Mary O'Malley, and Michael Hayes." *Literary Visions of Multicultural Ireland. The Immigrant In Contemporary Irish Literature*, ed. Pilar Villar-Argáiz. The Manchester University Press. 2013: 133–148.
- . „Lista Nieobecności: Współczesne Poetki Irlandzkie.” *Współczesna Literatura Brytyjska w Polsce*, ed. T. Dobrogoszcz. Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, 2008: 143–155.
- . „W stronę Tolerancji: Pojęcie 'Różnicy' w Wierszach Współczesnych Poetek Irlandzkich.” *Dyskursy i Przestrzenie (Nie)tolerancji*, eds. G. Gazda, I. Hübner i J. Płuciennik. Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, 2008: 229–240.
- Potts, Donna L. *Contemporary Irish Poetry and the Pastoral Tradition*. Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press, 2011.
- Price, Janet and Margrit Shildrick, eds. *Feminist Theory and the Body: A Reader*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999.

- Plumwood, Val. "Androcetrisism and Anthropocentrism: Parallels and Politics." *Ecofeminism: Women, Culture, Nature*. Ed. Karen Warren. Bloomington Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1997. 327–355.
- . "Nature, Self, and Gender: Feminism, Environmental Philosophy, and the Critique of Rationalism." *Ecological Feminist Philosophies*. Ed. Karen Warren. Bloomington Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1996. 155–180.
- Purcell, Mark. *The Big House Library in Ireland: Books in Ulster Country Houses*. Wiltshire: The National Trust, 2011.
- Quinby, Lee. "Ecofeminism and the Politics of Resistance." A Diamond and Feman Orenstein 122–127.
- Quinn, Justin. *The Cambridge Introduction to Modern Irish Poetry, 1800–2000*. Cambridge University Press, 2008.
- . "The Weather of Irish Poetry." Rev. of *Selected Poems* by Ciaran Carson; *The Weather in Japan* by Michael Longley; *Shelmalier* by Medbh McGuckian; *Smashing the Piano* by John Montague; *Collected Poems 1952–2000* by Richard Murphy; *Seatown and Earlier Poems* by Conor O'Callaghan. *The Sewanee Review* 111.3 (summer 2003): 486–492.
- Radke, Lorraine H. and Hendrikus J. Stam, eds. 1994. *Power / Gender: Social Relations in Theory and Practice*. London Thousand Oakes, New Delhi: Sage, 1995.
- Randolph, Jody Allen. "New Ireland's Poetics: The Ecocritical Turn in Contemporary Irish Women's Poetry." *Nordic Irish Studies* 8 (2009): 56–70.
- Rapport, Nigel. *I am Dynamite: An Alternative Anthropology of Power*. London and New York: Routledge, 2003.
- Reid, Bryonie. "Trellising the Girders: Poetry and the Imagining of Place in Northern Ireland." *Social and Cultural Geography* 5.9 (Aug. 2008): 519–533.
- Roach, Catherine. "Loving Your Mother: On the Woman-Nature Relation." *Ecological Feminist Philosophies*. Ed. Karen Warren. Bloomington Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1996. 52–65.
- Tim Robinson. "Mindful Paths." Interview by Christine Cusick. *Out of the Earth: Ecocritical Readings of Irish Texts*. Ed. Christine Cusick. Cork: Cork University Press, 2010. 205–211.
- Rowe Aime Carrillo. *Power Lines: On the Subject of Feminist Alliances*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2008.
- Roche, Anthony. Reviews Anne Kennedy's *The Dog Kubla Dreams My Life*, Vona Groarke's *Shale*, Shaun McCarthy's *A Cry from the Blue: Selected Poems 1983–1993*. *Poetry Ireland Review* 46 (1995): 105–108.
- Rowe, Carrillo Aime. *Power Lines: On the Subject of Feminist Alliance*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2008.
- Ryan, Louise and Margaret Ward, eds. *Irish Women and Nationalism: Soldiers, New Women and Wicked Hags*. Dublin, Portland: Irish Academic Press, 2004.

- Sampson, Fiona. "A Light Still Burns: Elegy, Comedy, and Music Feature in the New Collections of Three Irish Poets..." Review of *Gas Light and Coke* by Fergus Allen; *Juniper Street* by Vona Groarke; *Artichoke Wine* by Macdara Woods. *The Irish Times* 1 July 2006. Irish Times pg. C12. Accessed 10 May 2013.
- . "Avoiding the Lure of the Idyll: Poetry Through the Square Window Cross-Talk." Rev. of *Through The Square Window* by Sinéad Morrissey and *Cross-Talk* by Siobhán Campbell. *The Irish Times* 2 January 2010. Irish Times pg. B 13. Accessed 10 May 2013.
- . "Collections Connecting." Rev. of *The State of the Prisons* by Sinéad Morrissey and *The Latitude of Naples* by Eva Bourke. *The Irish Times*. June 11, 2005. Irish Times pg. C11. Accessed 10 May 2013.
- . "Stacking Myths, Making Meaning." Review of *The Sea Cabinet* by Caitriona O'Reilly. *Presence of Mind* by Dolores Steward; *Sundial* by Colette Nic Aodha. *The Irish Times*. May 20 2006. Irish Times pg. B. 10. Accessed 10 May 2013.
- Scott, Ivonne. "The Renaissance of the Forest Contemporary Art In Ireland." *Irish Contemporary Landscapes in Literature and the Arts*. Ed. Marie Mianowski. Hampshire and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012. 235–249.
- Scott, John. *Power*. 2001. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006.
- Shanley Mary Lyndon and Carol Pateman, eds. *Feminist Interpretations and Political Theory*. 1991. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994.
- Scholtmeijer, Marian. "The Power of Otherness: Animals in Women's Fiction." *Animals & Women: Feminist Theoretical Explorations*. Carol J Adams and Josephine Donovan. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1995. 231–262.
- Sessions, Robert. "Deep Ecology versus Ecofeminism: Healthy Difference or Incompatible Philosophies?" *Ecological Feminist Philosophies*. Ed. Karen Warren. Bloomington Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1996. 137–154.
- Shannon, Elizabeth. *I am of Ireland: Women of the North Speak Out*. Boston, Toronto, London; Little, Brown and Company, 1989.
- Shiva, Vandana. "Development as New project of Western Patriarchy." *Diamond and Feman Orenstein* 189–200.
- Shirtes, George, "The Sweet Dance." Rev. of *Sanctuary* by Matthew Sweeney; *The State of the Prisons* by Sinéad Morrissey; *New and Selected Poems* by James J. McAuley. *Poetry Review* 95. 3 (autumn 2005): 94–97.
- Smith, Stan. *Irish Poetry and the Construction of Modern Identity: Ireland Between Fantasy and History*. Dublin, Portland, Or: Irish Academic Press, 2005.
- Smith, Andy. "Ecofeminism Through an Anticolonial Framework," *Ecofeminism: Women, Culture, Nature*. Ed. Karen Warren Bloomington Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1997. 21–37
- Smyth, Ailbhe, ed. *Irish Women's Studies Reader*. Dublin: Attic Press, 1993.

- Smyth, Gerry. *Decolonisation and Criticism: The Construction of Irish Literature*. London, Sterling, Virginia: Pluto Press, 1998.
- Somerville-Arjat, Gillian and Rebecca E. Wilson, eds. *Sleeping With Monsters: Conversations with Scottish and Irish Women Poets*. Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 1990.
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "More on Power / Knowledge." *Rethinking Power*. Ed. Thomas E. Wartenberg. New York: State University of New York Press, 1992. 149–173.
- Spretnak, Charlene. "Ecofeminism: Our Roots and Flowering." *Reweaving the World: The Emergence of Ecofeminism*. Eds. Irene Diamond and Gloria Feman Orenstein. San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1990. 3–14.
- . "Radical Nonduality in Ecofeminist Philosophy." *Ecofeminism: Women, Culture, Nature*. Ed. Karen Warren. Bloomington Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1997. 425–436.
- Swartz, David. *Culture & Power: The Sociology of Pierre Bourdieu*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1997.
- Starhawk. "Power, Authority, and Mystery: Ecofeminism and Earth-based Spirituality." *Reweaving the World: The Emergence of Ecofeminism*. Eds. Irene Diamond and Gloria Feman Orenstein. San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1990. 73–86.
- Starrett, Michael. "Our Landscape, Our Heritage: Building Toward a New Legislative Approach to Empower Local Communities." *Irish Contemporary Landscapes in Literature and the Arts*. Ed. Marie Mianowski. Hampshire and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012. 189–216.
- Stiver, Irene P. "Beyond the Oedipus Complex: Mothers and Daughters." *Women's Growth In Connection: Writing From The Stone Center*. Eds. Jordan, V. Judith, et al. New York and London: The Guilford Press, 1991. 97–121.
- . "The Meaning of 'Dependency' in Female-Male Relationships." *Women's Growth In Connection: Writing From The Stone Center*. Eds. V. Judith Jordan et al. New York and London: The Guilford Press, 1991. 143–161.
- . "The Meaning of Care: Reframing Treatment." *Women's Growth In Connection: Writing From The Stone Center*. Eds. V. Judith Jordan et al. New York and London: The Guilford Press, 1991. 250–267.
- . "Work Inhibitions in Women." *Women's Growth In Connection: Writing From The Stone Center*. Eds. Jordan, V. Judith, et al. New York and London: The Guilford Press, 1991. 223–236.
- Stoljar, Natalie. "Autonomy and the Feminine Intuition." *Relational Autonomy: Feminist Perspectives on Autonomy, Agency and the Social Self*. Eds. Catriona Mackenzie and Natalie Stoljar. New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000. 94–115.
- Sturgeon, Noël. *Ecofeminist Natures: Race, Gender, Feminist Theory and Political Action*. New York and London: Routledge, 1997.

- Surrey, Janet L. "Eating Patterns as Reflection of Women's Development." *Women's Growth In Connection: Writing From The Stone Center*. Eds. Jordan, V. Judith, et al. New York and London: The Guilford Press, 1991. 237–249.
- . "Relationship and Empowerment." *Women's Growth In Connection: Writing From The Stone Center*. Eds. V. Judith Jordan et al. New York and London: The Guilford Press, 1991. 162–180.
- . "The Self-in-Relation: A Theory of Women's Development." *Women's Growth In Connection: Writing From The Stone Center*. Eds. V. Judith Jordan et al. New York and London: The Guilford Press, 1991. 51–66.
- Tasker, Ivonne and Diane Negra, eds. *Interrogating Postfeminism: Gender and the Politics of Popular Culture*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2007.
- Taylor Dianne. "Foucault's Ethos: Guide(post) for Change." *Feminism and the Final Foucault*. Eds. Dianne Taylor and Karen Vintges. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2004. 258–274.
- Taylor Dianne and Karen Vintges, eds. *Feminism and the Final Foucault*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2004.
- Tillinghast, Richard. "The Future of Irish Poetry?" *Flowing Still: Irish Poets on Irish Poetry*. Ed. Pat Boran. Dublin: Dedalus Press, 2009. 162–186.
- Thompson, John B. Editor's Preface. Pierre Bourdieu *Language and Symbolic Power*. 1992. Trans. Gino Raymond and Matthew Adamson. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005: 1–34.
- Thompson, Mary, Shine. "Straddling the Boundaries." Rev. of *Something Beginning with P: New Poems from Irish Poets* by Seamus Cashman." *Poetry Ireland Review* 81 (2004): 97–100.
- Topping, Nick. "Justice Marries Humanity." Rev. of *Through The Square Window* by Sinéad Morrissey. *Fortnight* 437 (Sep. 2005): 26.
- . "The New Formal Voices." Rev. of *The New Irish Poets* by Selina Guinness. *Fortnight* 431 (Dec. 2004): 22.
- Valverde, Mariana. "Experience and Truth Telling in a Post-humanist World: A Foucaultian Contribution to Feminist Ethical Reflections." *Feminism and the Final Foucault*. Eds. Dianne Taylor and Karen Vintges. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2004. 67–90.
- Vance, Linda. "Beyond Just-So Stories: Narrative, Animals, and Ethics." *Animals & Women: Feminist Theoretical Explorations*. Carol J Adams and Josephine Donovan. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1995. 163–191.
- Vickers, Jill. "Notes toward a Political Theory of Sex and Power." *Power / Gender: Social Relations in Theory and Practice*. Eds. Lorraine Radke and Hendrikus J. Stam. London Thousand Oakes, New Delhi: Sage, 1995. 174–193.

- Villar-Argáis, Pilar. "Between Tradition and Modernity: Twenty-First Century Ireland in Recent Works by Irish Women Poets." *Nordic Irish Studies* 7 (2008): 117–134.
- Viney, Michael. *A Year's Turning: Irish Nature at Its Lyrical Best*. Galway, Dundonald, Belfast: The Blackstaff Press, 1996.
- Walker, Margaret Urban. *Moral Understanding: A Feminist Study in Ethics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.
- Walker, Maureen. "Race, Self, and Society: Relational Challenges." *The Complexity of Connection: Writing from the Stone Center's Jean Baker Miller Training Institute*. Eds. V. Judith Jordan, Maureen Walker and Linda M. Hartling. New York and London: The Guilford Press, 2004. 90–103.
- Walker, Maureen and Jean Baker Miller. "Racial Images and Relational Possibilities." *The Complexity of Connection: Writing from the Stone Center's Jean Baker Miller Training Institute*. Eds. V. Judith Jordan, Maureen Walker and Linda M. Hartling. New York and London: The Guilford Press, 2004. 129–146.
- Wall, Eamonn. "Wings Beating on Stone: Richard's Murphy's Ecology." *Out of the Earth: Ecocritical Readings of Irish Texts*. Ed. Christine Cusik. Cork: Cork University Press, 2010. 5–19.
- Ward, Margaret. *Unmanageable Revolutionaries: Women And Irish Nationalism*. 1989. London And East haven: Pluto Press, 1995.
- Ward, Rachel. *Women Unionism and Loyalism in Northern Ireland: From 'Tea-Makers' to Political Actors*. Forward. Ivonne Galligan. Dublin, Portland: Irish Academic Press, 2006.
- Warren, Karen J., ed. "Ecological Feminist Philosophies: An Overview of the Issues." *Ecological Feminist Philosophies*. Ed. Karen Warren. Bloomington Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1996. ix–xxvi.
- . "The Power and the Promise of Ecological Feminism." *Ecological Feminist Philosophies*. Ed. Karen Warren. Bloomington Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1996. 19–41.
- . *Ecofeminism: Women, Culture, Nature*. Bloomington Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1997.
- . *Ecofeminist Philosophy: A Western Perspective On What It is And Why it Matters*. Lanham Boulder New York Toronto Plymouth: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2000.
- . *Ecological Feminist Philosophies*. Bloomington Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1996.
- . "Taking Empirical Data Seriously: An Ecofeminist Philosophical Perspective." *Ecofeminism: Women, Culture, Nature*. Ed. Karen Warren Bloomington Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1997. 3–20.
- Warren, Karen J. and Jim Cheney. "Ecological Feminism and Ecosystem Ecology." *Ecological Feminist Philosophies*. Ed. Karen Warren. Bloomington Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1996. 244–262.

- Wartenberg, Thomas E., ed. *Rethinking Power*. New York: State University of New York Press, 1992.
- Wartenberg, Thomas E. Introduction. *Rethinking Power*. Ed. Thomas E. Wartenberg. New York: State University of New York Press, 1992. xi–xxvi
- Webb, Jen, Tony Schirato and Geoff Danaher. *Understanding Bourdieu*. 2002. London Thousand Oakes, New Delhi: Sage, 2005.
- Wells Betty and Danielle Wirth. “Remediating Development through an Ecofeminist Lens.” *Ecofeminism: Women, Culture, Nature*. Ed. Karen Warren Bloomington Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1997. 300–313.
- Wenzell, Tim. “Ecocriticism, Early Irish Nature Writing and the Irish Landscape Today.” *New Hibernia Review* 13.1 (spring 2009): 125–139
- Wheatley, David. “Irish Poetry into the Twenty-First Century.” *The Cambridge Companion to Contemporary Irish Poetry*. Ed. Matthew Campbell. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003. 250–267.
- . “‘That Black Mouth’: Secrecy, Shibboleths, and Silence in Northern Irish Poetry.” *Flowing Still: Irish Poets On Irish Poetry*. Ed. Pat Boran. Dublin: Dedalus Press, 2009. 120–145.
- Whelan, Jackie, John Fry and Stuart Green. “Standardizing Terminology for Landscape Categorization: an Irish Agri-environment Perspective.” *Irish Contemporary Landscapes in Literature and the Arts*. Ed. Marie Mianowski. Hampshire and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012. 201–216.
- Whisnaut, Rebecca and Peggy DesAutels, eds. *Global Feminist Ethics: Feminist Ethics and Social Theory*. 2008. Lanham Boulder New York Toronto Plymouth: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2010.
- Wilson, Holyn. “Kant And Ecofeminism.” *Ecofeminism: Women, Culture, Nature*. Ed. Karen Warren Bloomington Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1997. 390–411.
- Winston, Greg. “George Moore’s Landscapes of Return.” *Out of the Earth: Ecocritical Readings of Irish Texts*. Ed. Christine Cusik. Cork: Cork University Press, 2010. 66–84.
- Wolf, Naomi. *Fire with Fire: The New Female Power and How it Will Change the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. New York: Random House, 1993.
- Women’s Studies Review: Women’s Activism & Voluntary Activity*. Ed. Vivienne Batt. Volume 9. Galway: Women’s Studies Center, 2004.
- Zabinski, Catherine. “Scientific Ecology and Ecological Feminism: The Potential for Dialogue.” *Ecofeminism: Women, Culture, Nature*. Ed. Karen Warren Bloomington Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1997. 314–324.
- Zimmerman, Michael E. “Deep Ecology and Ecofeminism: The Emerging Dialogue.” *Reweaving the World: The Emergence of Ecofeminism*. Eds. Irene Diamond and Gloria Feman Orenstein. San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1990. 138–154.
- Zwierp, Mary. “Sufficient Unto Our Day Recent Irish Poetry.” Rev. of *Flight and Earlier Poems* by Vona Groarke; *Dark Pool* by Ben Howard; *Selected Poems* by Peter Sirt; *Double Life* by Daniel Tobin; *The Narrows* by Daniel Tobin;



- The Wake Forest Series of Irish Poetry* by Jefferson Holdridge. *The Sewanee Review* 114.3 (summer 2006): 463–472.
- Young-Bruel, Elizabeth. *Hannah Arendt: For Love of the World*. 1982. New Haven London: Yale University Press, 2004.
- Young, Iris Marion. “Five Faces of Oppression.” *Rethinking Power*. Ed. Thomas E. Wartenberg. New York: State University of New York Press, 1992. 174–195.
- . “House and Home: Feminist Variations on a Theme.” *Resistance, Flight, Creation: Feminist Enactments of French Philosophy*. Ed. Dorothea Olkowsky. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2000. 49–75.