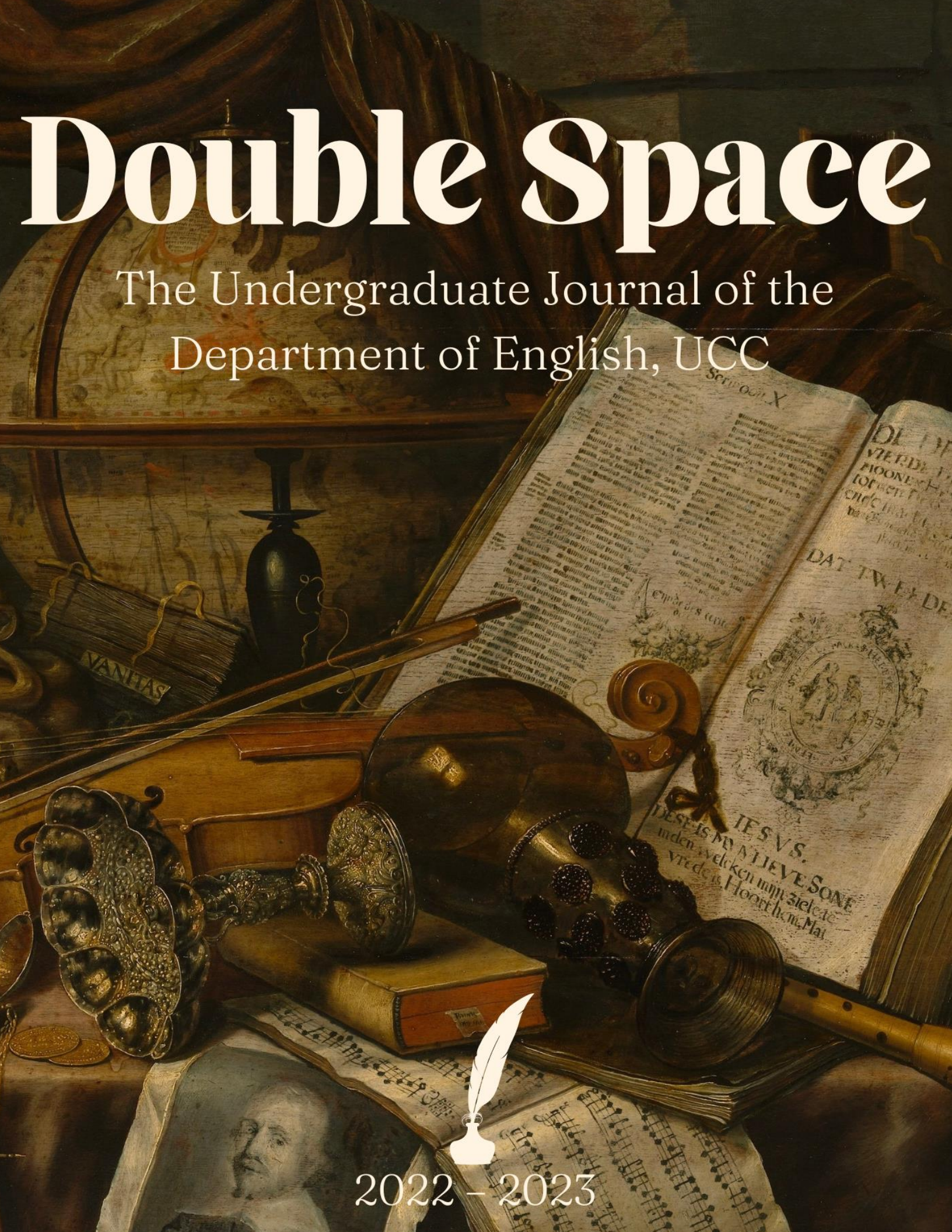


Double Space

The Undergraduate Journal of the
Department of English, UCC



2022 – 2023

DOUBLE SPACE

The Undergraduate Journal of the
Department of English
University College Cork
2022-2023



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Editorial

Double Space launches its second issue this summer 2023, showcasing the academic excellence of UCC's English students. The essays and creative work included in this issue have been granted recognitions such as UCC's own English Undergraduate Awards and its official Global Undergraduate counterpart, as well as the Patricia Coughlan Award, the Louise Clancy Memorial Prize, and the Eoin Murray Memorial Prize. We have grouped the articles according to the award they won or were highly recommended for. As well as academic essays, we have also included "Flying Kites," a short story by Aoife E Osborne, winner of the Eoin Murray Memorial Prize for creative writing, in order to showcase UCC's creative excellence as well as academic.

Our aim with this journal is to create a space to share the award-winning work of our contributors with current and past students, as well as a wider audience. Moreover, we follow last year's hope to enhance a wider recognition of the Arts with the publication of this journal, which we hope will become an integral part of the UCC Department of English.

We would like to thank all the people who have helped us in the publication of this issue. To start, the contributors for their first-class work that they have kindly allowed us to include in the journal. We thoroughly enjoyed reading and editing each and every essay. Then, Maria Butler and Maria Manning, editors of the UCC Aighe Journal, for the skills they taught us in their fantastic editorial workshops. Finally, we would like to thank our staff editors, Dr Heather Laird and Dr Miranda Corcoran, for their invaluable support and advice throughout the process.

We hope you will enjoy reading *Double Space* as much as we have enjoyed creating it.

– The *Double Space* Team

Articles

Patricia Coughlan Award

The Female Perspective in the Poetry of Rhoda Coghill and Mary Morton.

Ellen O'Sullivan

Winner

My name is Ellen O'Sullivan and I graduated with a BA in English and French in 2022. For my final year seminar, taught by Dr. Adam Hanna, I composed an essay entitled 'The Female Perspective in the Poetry of Rhoda Coghill and May Morton', for which I was honoured to receive the Patricia Coughlan Award. Having always been drawn to women's literature, especially from 20th century Ireland - the era in which both Coghill and Morton were writing - I was immediately captivated by their poetry.

Regrettably, their work has been buried under the weight of Irish history where women were discouraged from participating in the public sphere and confined to their homes by various laws. However, their words have provided me with a fascinating and insightful glimpse into the realities of Irish life for women during that time.

Coghill and Morton's poetry not only resonates with a poignant power but also stands as a testament to their defiant spirit. It is an honour to share their work and I hope their contributions to Irish literature continue to receive the recognition they deserve.

Rhoda Coghill and May Morton lived through a turbulent time in Irish history which saw, after independence, the stripping away of women's rights. Despite the Proclamation of the Irish Republic promising equal rights for all citizens, the reality of life in Ireland after independence

was much different. From the late 1920s onwards, with the growing influence of the Catholic Church, Irish women experienced subjugation rather than liberation. Contraception and divorce were banned in the 1930s and there was an introduction of the ‘marriage bar’ which made it very difficult for women to work after getting married. All of this was done to ensure that a woman’s place, as the constitution still reminds us today, is in the home. Women were discouraged from the public sphere, and for this reason, female voices were silenced. Irish female poets seemingly disappeared for half a century between the 1920s to the 1970s and with this erasure of female writing comes an erasure of the female perspective and experiences. There are many similarities in the themes discussed by both Coghill and Morton in their poetry such as violence towards women especially sexual violence and the criminalisation of female sexuality. However, any criticism of the Irish state, society or the Catholic Church had to be concealed beneath the surface of the poetry owing to Ireland’s strict censorship laws. Nevertheless, both Morton and Coghill’s poetry makes fascinating reading in relation to the predicament of women in mid-twentieth century Ireland.

Coghill and Morton were acutely aware that their poetry would not be remembered like that of their male counterparts. They experienced what Kathy D’Arcy describes as “extinction-in-life” (“Why Uncomplicated Recovery Isn’t Enough” 2020). This awareness of her own “extinction-in-life” is aptly exhibited in Coghill’s poem ‘Hail, Posterity’ in which she postulates “No one will seek my grave, or mark the date/ when I shall leave the world:” (Coghill 24). Here we see a profound recognition of her own suppression but also that of all women. Unlike the use of the word “woman” (Bunreacht Na hÉireann 164) in its “essentializing singular form” (Hanna) present in article 41.2 in the constitution, Coghill and Morton speak for women and of women, highlighting that women exist as an array of individuals rather than as one individual and dutiful

“woman”. But also their writing shows solidarity and unity among women. While the constitution attempts to segregate and isolate “woman”, oppress her and confine her to the home, Coghill and Morton speak of collective women’s issues and offer a voice to all women. “Afternoon by the Lake at Clogherrevagh” (1948) by Rhoda Coghill and “Masque in Maytime” (1948) by May Morton are two poems that deftly deal with themes of female subjugation. During their lifetimes, both Coghill and Morton were considered nature poets, however, when we look at the nuances of the poems we can see a polemical stance on the treatment or rather mistreatment of women in Irish society in the mid-twentieth century.

In “Afternoon by the Lake at Clogherrevagh”, Coghill highlights the disparity between male and female experiences of Ireland through the juxtaposition with Yeats’s “The Lake Isle of Innisfree” (1890). Both poems are situated on Lough Gill in Co. Sligo however they each portray the lake very differently. Lough Gill, in Irish folklore, is said to be named after a young maiden by the name of Gile, who was bathing naked in the water one day when a young man called Omra approached. Overcome with shame the young woman submerged herself in the water and drowned (‘The Metrical Dindshenchas’ 13). Here the shame and repression around female sexuality is striking and therefore makes Lough Gill the perfect setting for a poem about the criminalisation of female sexuality and the sexual abuse experienced by women. The lake takes on different connotations to that presented in Yeats’s poem. Coghill uses “The Lake Isle of Innisfree”, arguably one of Yeats’s most famous poems and a monumental work in the Irish literary canon, to highlight the lack of a safe space for women in Irish society. Yeats presents the lake as the epitome of serenity but Coghill depicts the lake as ominous and threatening by personifying many aspects of nature. This contrast is evident in the depiction of the lake water in both poems. In “The Lake Isle of Innisfree”, Yeats recounts “I hear lake water lapping with low sounds by the shore” (Yeats et al.

39) while Coghill states “The waves, muttering, / turn back their lips, teeth bared in a white scorn/ of stubborn boulders.” There is a marked difference in the portrayal of the lake in each poem with Coghill creating an image of destruction and severity in opposition to the serenity in Yeats’s stanza. She emphasises that there was no space in Ireland where women were fully accepted or safe and that women could not escape the oppression of their gender, not even in a place like Lough Gill, the peace of which Yeats yearned for.

Coghill mentions two women in “Afternoon by the Lake at Clogherrevagh”: Maeve and Leda. Both of these women are figures from mythology and both were subjected to sexual violence. In the poem, Coghill says “Leisurely swans/ skate in the shallows, pry with vivid beaks: / flame-anthered flowers, white wood violets. / Leda to such grave loveliness was bound.” The image of the swans prying is one of violation. Coghill’s use of flowers here is also significant, as she evokes a sort of metaphorical deflowering being carried out by the swans. She then links this to Leda; a figure from Greek mythology, who was raped by Zeus when he disguised himself as a swan. Here, Coghill is once again highlighting the deviation between male and female experience. She seems to suggest that a woman would not be safe on this lake as long as there are swans on it. This of course is stressing a wider issue of violence towards women in Ireland and how the lack of rights and legal protections offered to women meant that many were trapped in abusive marriages. The use of the word “loveliness” in the line “Leda to such grave loveliness was bound” is surprising. Perhaps Coghill takes issue with Yeats’s depiction of the rape in “Leda and the Swan” (1924), in which Yeats portrays the violence of the rape but does so using sensual language and focuses more on the mythological repercussions of the act (i.e. the birth of Helen of Troy) than the personal repercussions for Leda. Images such as “thighs caressed”, (Yeats et al. 214) “nape” (Yeats et al. 214) and “he holds her helpless breast upon his breast” (Yeats et al. 214) suggest an unseemly

sensuality considering the nature of the attack. Coghill may be challenging and even ridiculing this depiction through the use of the word “loveliness” as clearly, this is a strange way to describe a sexual assault.

Ovid in *Metamorphoses*, suggests that Leda’s story is not one of rape. Interestingly, Leda briefly appears in Book VI, “Of Praise and Punishment” in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* and Coghill mentions her in stanza six of “Afternoon by the Lake at Clogherrevagh.” Again, it is almost absurd to suggest that what happened to Leda is anything but rape and Coghill may be satirizing some of the male canonical representations and perhaps even misrepresentations of Leda’s assault. Throughout history, female sexuality has been viewed as unnatural and immoral while male sexual violence has often been portrayed as a natural primal instinct. To deny or eroticize rape, therefore, is a justification of the act. In “Reading Ovid’s Rapes”, Amy Richlin observes (in relation to the fifty tales of rape found in *Metamorphoses*) that “in general critics have ignored them, or traced their literary origins, or said they stood for something else or evidenced the poet’s sympathy with women” (158). This reluctance in literature and wider society to discuss rape for what it is – a violent violation, is why female voices such as those of Coghill and Morton are so important especially considering the time in which they were writing.

There is a palpable anxiety in both “Afternoon by the Lake at Clogherrevagh” and “Masque in Maytime” concerning the position of women and ubiquitous sexual violence experienced by women in a society that shamed and criminalised female sexuality; where young women were institutionalised for becoming pregnant outside of marriage. In her book *Republic of Shame: Stories from Ireland's Institutions for 'Fallen Women'*, Caelainn Hogan tells of a meeting held in the early 1940s between the Department of Education, judges, guards and Archbishop McQuaid regarding the “immoral conduct of girls” (49) and highlights the criminalisation of female

sexuality; “girls who had sex, even those who had been raped, were seen as an ‘evil influence’ on other children” (49). Here it is clear that female sexuality was considered a political and religious matter and that there was no distinction between sex and rape. Despite the fact that the large majority of victims of sexual violence were women, it was women who were punished for rape and Irish culture represented women as a “temptation and hence a threat” (Hogan 142) and “manifestations of Satan” (Keating 8). This dehumanisation of women furthered the oppression and maltreatment of women. The writings of Coghill and Morton offer an acknowledgement of this view of women and a rare female perspective on the precarious position of women in Irish society.

This apprehension of existing in a patriarchal society is clear throughout Morton’s “Masque in Maytime.” The poem has a frenzied atmosphere. Coghill’s “Afternoon by the Lake at Clogherrevagh” is much more disjointed in terms of rhythm and despondent in tone, created through the use of punctuation. “Masque in Maytime” begins with a buoyant mood as Morton almost imagines a Utopia, which we see in lines such as “Joy, joy, joy! Day is born, day is born”. However, the tone of the poem changes halfway through with “A troubled breath, / half shadow and half sound, shatters the spell/ that holds the shining day entranced in time.” The poem goes from being energetic to frantic, as Morton suggests that reality has hit and the “golden dream” is over. This frantic tone is created through the use of verbs such as “Demons leaping, / Maidens weeping, / Twisting, turning, swooping, spurning.” A sense of dread enters the poem and Morton underlines the apprehension of reaching sexual maturity for young women as this sexuality will be both exploited and criminalised. We see this in the line “Pyrus, in terror and alarm, / Must yield and lose her fair young charm!” Here Morton alludes to sexual violence experienced by women and their lack of bodily autonomy. Like the storm that overcomes the plants in the second half of

the poem, women could do little but “yield” to the violence. The personification of plants in the poem is significant also as plants are rooted in the ground, unable to escape the harsh weather similar to the situation of many women in mid-twentieth century Ireland. Morton highlights the dangers of marriage for women through the image “Bride-plant, dishevelled in her pain, / is beaten to the earth again!” This is indicative of domestic violence. Like Coghill, Morton points out that there was no safe space for women in Irish society. They were shunned from the public sphere and often abused in the private sphere.

Notably, Coghill and Morton use similar descriptive language in the two poems discussed in this essay. Words such as “barren”, “icy”, “shadow”, “shawl” and “puppet” for example appear in both poems. These words are quite telling in terms of the underlying sentiments of both women. The use of the word “puppet” in each poem is particularly interesting. In “Afternoon by the Lake at Clogherrevagh” Coghill writes, “Winter returns, a puppet government in April’s state”. A puppet government has the semblance of power but has no real authority over its territory. This image evokes a lack of autonomy. Similarly, in “Masque in Maytime”, Morton says “the mournful trees – frail puppets of the wind.” This image of puppets again elicits a lack of autonomy especially bodily autonomy. Both Morton and Coghill imply that although women are technically in control of their bodies, they have no free will especially when it comes to contraception and sex. Luce Irigaray described this objectification of the female body as “an essential dispossession” (94) claiming that women have been dispossessed of their bodies and are treated as mere “merchandise” (84) to be traded among men. While this stance may seem extreme, one could argue that the policing of female bodies in mid-twentieth century Ireland, through legislation and institutions such as Magdalene laundries was a form of State ownership of female bodies.

Concealment is a recurring motif in the work of both Coghill and Morton. Due to Ireland's strict censorship laws and the fact that Coghill and Morton were female writers, any criticism or political sentiments had to be hidden beneath the surface of their poetry. This is clear in the introduction to "Masque in Maytime" which claims it deals with "the underlying theme of a natural ballet produced on an Ulster landscape by the caprice of an Ulster climate" however, upon reading it the sexual politics are undeniable. The use of the word "masque" in the title is an indication of this need to disguise the real intent of the poem. Morton's personification of all the plants as female, the use of the words such as "maidens", "brideplant" "deflowered" and "veiled", among others all contribute to the undertones of sexual violence and concealment. Concealment in Coghill's poem highlights the burial and therefore erasure of female experience from history. Coghill highlights this erasure in the line "A night's snowfall, a purge of green, has covered / the high set-tomb of Maeve." This image of snow is a powerful one in that it removes the last trace of Maeve from the Irish landscape. Like Woolf who observed that woman "pervades poetry from cover to cover; she is all but absent from history" (49), Coghill stresses the historical erasure of women and challenges the idealised "woman" that exists in poetry and the Irish national discourse by challenging works central to the male literary canon.

The work of both poets has often been dismissed as dealing with stereotypical feminine themes such as nature, with Kathy D'Arcy asserting with regard to female poets writing in Mid-century Ireland:

"At first glance the poets can appear to be writing within either Revival or modernist discourses, and to concern themselves with the traditionally feminine themes of nature, religion and romantic love, and this is generally how they were read by their peers. The

possibility that they were actively engaged in troubling the patriarchal bases of those concepts was not considered.” (102)

Stephen O'Neill in his chapter titled 'May Morton' in *Irish Women Poets Rediscovered* maintains “The earlier lyric efforts of Dawn and Afterglow and Masque in Maytime resembled much of the then-dominant neo-revivalist strain in Irish poetry, but this was geared towards a romanticisation of the idea of ‘Ulster’” (82). O'Neill, too, seems to reduce Morton's writing to that of the stereotypical “feminine themes”, while acknowledging colonial politics but ignoring the gender politics. While poetry is open to interpretation and it is important not to force feminist readings onto texts, the sexual politics especially in “Masque in Maytime” are quite explicit despite the need for concealment. Morton politicises rather than romanticises the landscape. It is important to recognize Morton's critique of the treatment of women in Irish society as critiques like this and the female perspective on the experiences of women in Ireland have been implicitly erased from the national discourse. To deny or overlook this is a further form of erasure. Writing is an important form of empowerment and reclamation for disenfranchised groups as they can take control of their own narrative and voice. In *The Laugh of the Medusa*, Hélène Cixous attests that writing is important for women as it allows them to return to the body that has been confiscated from them (880). For Coghill and Morton to write of their experiences at a time when the Irish state attempted to silence women, was an act of defiance as “the very concept of a woman being a poet was inherently threatening, as witnessed by the extreme hostility that surrounds the subject” (Ni Dhomhnaill 24).

In conclusion, “Afternoon by the Lake at Clogherrevagh” by Rhoda Coghill and “Masque in Maytime” by May Morton are two subversive poems that deal with the distress of living in a state in which women were subjugated and female sexuality was paradoxically exploited and

criminalised. Coghill uses a juxtaposition with Yeats's "The Lake Isle of Innisfree" to highlight the lack of a safe space in Irish society for women while Morton comparably critiques the lack of autonomy for women once they reach sexual maturity. Morton underlines the prevalent domestic and sexual violence in Irish society and the feelings of powerlessness that many women endured. The writing of both women offers a crucial insight into the female perspective in mid-twentieth century Ireland when female voices were suppressed. Coghill and Morton were aware of their subjugation, with Coghill believing that her voice and writing would be forgotten, "leaving a name that echoes into silence". Both poets were exceptionally talented, and the act of writing was itself an act of defiance when the Irish State so clearly wanted to silence women. For this reason, it is vital that these writers' experiences are no longer erased, or their writing overlooked.

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How Does Doireann Ní Ghriofa's Poetry Address Missing People and Empty Spaces?

Nicole Carroll

Highly Recommended

I recently received my MA in Arts Management and Creative Producing from UCC, and I also hold a Bachelor's degree in History and History of Art. I entitled my essay "How Does Doireann Ní Ghriofa's Poetry Address Missing People and Empty Spaces?" and I chose the subject of Ní Ghriofa's work because I was so moved by the way she beautifully weaves together her gorgeous words, like literary caramel, fusing past and present through a distinctly female voice. The author's work resonated deeply with the studies I most enjoyed during my undergraduate degree, which were those with a strong female focus. Now that I have graduated from UCC I'm enjoying having more time to read for pleasure, not terror - those deadlines! I am very partial to a long walk on a windy beach and am rediscovering the joy of an evening dedicated to Netflix. And as UCC progressively fades into the past, I find myself strangely nostalgic for campus rambles, the Main Rest, and who would have thought it—Q3!

This paper will look at three poems by the Irish writer Doireann Ní Ghriofa – “The Horse Under The Hearth”, “I carry your bones in my body”, and “Waking” – and will explore the works through the lens of missing people and empty spaces. The paper will consider the space left by the loss of the Irish language, and will further examine the stanza and sentence structures used by the poet to create visible literary voids. Additionally, the paper will assess the subject of missing people; a topic that runs deeply throughout Ní Ghriofa's work and will consider her approach to things that

are conspicuously absent yet present, and her commitment to what is concealed beneath the surface.

A central theme running through Ní Ghríofa's poetry is the vacuum left by the Irish language and the empty space it creates. This is particularly evident in "The Horse under the Hearth", where elements of the original meaning are lost in translation as an English interpretation of an Irish poem. *Mo Chara*, a phrase in the Gaelic edition which literally means my friend, becomes 'my steady companion' under the weight of its English conversion becomes 'my steady companion'. *Chapall*, meaning horse, morphs into 'steed' and 'mare' and *mharbh*, meaning dead, modifies to 'deceased'. All are variants of the original, yet the ingenuity is somehow lost in the crossover as the words dissolve into something else as they mutate, underscoring the space left by the erasure of the Irish expression. Like tracing paper over words, they are a copy but not quite the original and remain submerged under the surface. The constraints of language and the empty space created through translation are further witnessed in the made-up words of 'froth-flecked', 'nostril-blaze' and 'stumble-legged' (Ní Ghríofa *Horse Under Hearth*), creating a type of liminal hybrid language that can never quite meet the demands of the original. This limitation of language is revealed by Ní Ghríofa, who acknowledges in her translation of Dubh's work that 'I try to capture a phrase of hers and re-create it within the strictures of another language' (Ní Ghríofa *Ghost in Throat* 41). In *A Ghost in the Throat*, Ní Ghríofa's speaks of the multiple translations of the poem that are according to the author as 'dead texts that try, but fail, to find the thumping pulse of Eibhlin Dubh's presence' (Ní Ghríofa 24), referencing the voids and search for missing people so ubiquitous in the poet's work. Although Ní Ghríofa's rewrite of the 'Caoineadh' is in English, there is an Irish musicality witnessed in the softness and rhyming pattern of Celtic storytelling, changing in rhythm and tempo from English pentameter to trimeter in the concluding line paralleling the

Caoineadh, the trace of Irish always present. The poem is composed in four-line stanzas, with the exception of the second stanza, which has only three lines, indicating the absence of the protagonist. The final stanza, like other works, is condensed to half the length of the preceding lines, giving the impression of an empty space on paper.

The subject of the missing individual is paralleled with the murder and burial of the mare in “The Horse Beneath the Hearth”, and the atmosphere is presented as one of silence and absenteeism from the opening line 'Quiet now' and echoes a longing for the past as Ní Ghríofa pens, 'Her neck, like mine, knew the rough stubble of his cheek' (Ní Ghríofa *Horse Under Hearth*). The red fluid that pumps around a body to provide life is in the poem the watery substance that escapes to end it, and the poem conjures images of loss with ‘saddle bloody’, ‘spilled blood’ and ‘wet sack that leaked’ all alluding to the missing character (Ní Ghríofa *Horse Under Hearth*). This poem pulls downwards into the ground as the skull is hidden, buried and submerged below the hearth and as ‘sunken’ as the deceased beast's eyes. As the head disintegrates from 'muscle and mane to bone and dirt'(Ní Ghríofa *Horse Under Hearth*) the loss continues, aided by the enveloping flames that turn flesh to dust. Ní Ghríofa defines the poem as ‘an evolving record of praise, sorrow, lust, and reminiscence,’ and the latter word alludes to the remembrance of a missing person (Ní Ghríofa *Ghost in The Throat* 19). The yearning is palpable as the final line declares ‘we are galloping and galloping and never reaching him’ (Ní Ghríofa *Horse Under Hearth*). In *A Ghost in the Throat*, Ní Ghríofa picks up a copy of *Caoineadh Airt Uí Laoghair* ‘inviting the voice of another woman to haunt my throat for a while’ (10) this action of engaging and forging a profound connection between an empty temporal space from aeons ago and an absent person, ‘dead for centuries’, is emblematic of the poet’s searching work. Ní Ghríofa speaks of her enchantment with

the poem, and describes its force 'when each spoken detail conjured him back alive again' (*Ghost in Throat* 18), illustrating her desire to evoke missing people from missing places.

The line "I carry your bones in my body", evocative of a nursery rhyme, also embodies missing people and empty spaces. Each fleeting sentence structure dissolves abruptly, leaving the reader to fall sharply off the page into the abyss. There is no length to these lines, merely a cavernous drop of words that tumble into the empty space. The 'little skeleton' and 'little skull' symbolise a corporal fleshy being reduced to bones, the very essence of a missing person; they are the remnants of a form that once was. This poem presents a deeply embodied experience, one that is exclusively female, and the event is happening out of sight, hidden within the body. Ní Ghríofa provides the unborn with an identity, calling them 'my small someone', an aching reference to the child who is not fully known to the poet and who never will be. She is haunted by the presence of the empty space within her body, once occupied by the child. The 'small someone' swiftly transforms into a missing person in the final line of the second stanza as the foetus becomes 'a tangled knot, undone'; what was secure has been unravelled, it has been lost, it is now a sexless missing person. The term 'nearlybody' evokes a deep longing for one who almost made it but is now lost in a liminal space where they do not exist in the world but yet live in the body of the poet occupying neither space entirely. Similarly, the empty space left by the loss of the Irish Language is again referenced with this fusion word that platforms the limitations of English and its inability to fully express the necessary sentiment (Ní Ghríofa *I carry your bones*).

"Waking: *For Savita Halappanavar*" illustrates loss from an explicitly female perspective, the happenings within a woman's body that only she can sense, submerged within her flesh as her empty womb becomes the vacant space. The poet voices the curious contradiction of evoking a

picture of what is missing by articulating what is left, and Ní Ghríofa asserts that 'in order to create a sense of absence, one must sketch all the things that remain, the edges that define the hole' (Ní Ghríofa *Writing Through Windows* [page number?]). This is apparent in "Waking", where a sizeable chunk of the first stanza is devoted to the remnants of loss. This poem speaks of alienation and empty spaces as the character lies alone in the ward with no infant, no companionship, and one heartbeat instead of two. The night-time backdrop as 'the hospital sleeps' conjures up an additional perception of missing people as if under the veil of darkness and in the still of the night, the speaker is completely alone. The final stanza reminiscent of her other poems becomes smaller, reflecting a fading away, and the first stanza is accomplished in six lines; the second stanza in only three. In "Waking" there is a physical disappearance of the missing person who has been removed from the speaker's body, and the only trace left is the scar where the extraction took place, 'the jagged map' insinuates a site on the body that is a place of searching and missing. In Ní Ghríofa's own words, 'A body holds so much more beyond the visible' (*Ghost in Throat* 37) and the poet poignantly refers to the unoccupied space where the child once lay as 'empty without and empty within' (Ní Ghríofa *Waking*) as the tracing activity around the wound probes for the missing person, the longing further compounded by the author's lament. The unborn child is absent, leaving a hollow void within her; there is a sense that the vacuous space created within her body is reflected in the echoing space that reverberates with the doctor's footsteps; the physician like the child fades away to become another missing person.

Ní Ghríofa's work explores various topics, but all are anchored by the fundamental premise of searching for individuals who are not there, and the void left in their wake. Her work is haunting prose that investigates the themes of missing persons and empty spaces in a multitude of ways as the author attempts to forge connections to those who have departed. The poet's work underscores

the emptiness created by the demise of the Irish language and death, and her masterful construction of stanzas and sentences visibly illustrates such loss. Longing, searching, and vacant spaces abound in Ní Ghríofa's poetry, and what is hidden and out of sight is granted careful consideration as she masterfully fashions her writing to emphasise what is hidden beneath the physical surface and what is concealed below the skin in her embodied female work.

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Nature Versus Nurture: Arthur Huntingdon and Debased Masculinity in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*.

Grace Morey

Highly Recommended

My name is Grace Morey and I graduated from UCC last year with a Bachelor of Arts degree in English. I chose to write about Anne Brontë's The Tenant of Wildfell Hall because I have a particular interest in issues of gender in literature and this text is considered to be one of the first feminist novels, causing so much disruption that it's re-publication was suppressed by Anne's own sister following her death. Since graduating from UCC, I began an M. Phil program at Trinity College Dublin in Medieval Studies, specialising in languages and literatures.

Written at a time when women existed only to fulfil the needs of their husbands in the eyes of the law, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* is a merciless critique of toxic masculinity and the devastating effects it had on Victorian society. From the positively violent and coercive Arthur Huntingdon to the more subtly contaminated Gilbert Markham, Brontë presents a broad spectrum of male characters to illustrate the harmful consequences of debased masculinity in all its manifestations. Castigated by critics for its coarseness and rejected by her eldest sister Charlotte, the novel held a mirror up to Victorian society and reflected the results of their oppressive gender roles back to them in scrupulous detail, making the true effects of such a misogynistic system all the more unpalatable. This essay argues that Brontë offers a scathing critique of debased masculinity through the characterisation of Arthur Huntingdon. By shining a light on the overly indulgent

upbringing of men and misogynistic education system of Victorian society, Brontë illustrates the cultural pressures, anti-femininity and glorification of unhealthy lifestyles that Victorian men were subject to, allowing us to understand Arthur Huntingdon as not just a villain but a product of his environment.

Accustomed to being indulged in his every whim, Arthur Huntingdon is the epitome of debased masculinity, with Thormählen arguing that the “rake's progress from genial *bon viveur* to terminal patient is central to the development of the story” (831). Contrary to the purpose of boys being exposed and girls sheltered, his indulgent upbringing has rendered him utterly childlike in many respects, the extent of which is first shown when they are walking home from the Sunday service not long after being married. Incensed at Helen's deep concentration and devotion to her prayers, he is intensely jealous that he is not the sole object of her veneration. Helen is appalled at his suggestion that her “earthly lord” should be more worthy of her attention than God himself and as a result, he rips off his hat to demonstrate a dip in his skull, a trait indicative of a defective “organ of veneration” (Brontë 199). This reference to phrenology indicates not only a limited capacity for religious devotion but also weakness of character, an early warning sign of his eventual descent into complete depravity (Thormählen 834). Later, when Helen has learned of his affair with Lady Lowborough, she asserts that from that moment forth they will be husband and wife “only in the name” (303). He neither reacts nor cares, as he must be the sole object of her love and her thoughts or nothing to her at all, the possession of her body on its own being of no importance. Accustomed to receiving what he wants when he wants it, he has never been equipped to deal with being denied in any way. His realisation that he can never possess Helen's soul in its entirety, despite having full legal control of her child, her freedom and even her body marks the point of no return for Arthur Huntingdon, illustrating that the most powerful threat to the

patriarchal norms that uphold Victorian society is a woman who knows her own mind. These early signs of his jealousy culminate in the rejection of his new-born child, the “little wretch” and “ugly little creature” which in his eyes has become the sole object of Helen’s affection (Brontë 236). Through Huntingdon’s self-pity and self-obsession, Brontë reveals the disturbing consequences of an educational tradition that teaches men to demand their needs be met but never teaches them to be in any way sensible or nurturing, possibly an inadvertent allusion to her complicated relationship with her brother Branwell, who squandered her own family’s resources. As the baby becomes less helpless and Huntingdon begins to take an interest in him, his attempts to educate his son to drink like his father, swear like Hattersley and “to have his own way like a man” (347) are reflective of his own indulgent upbringing and education. The disturbing image of the innocent baby Arthur sending “his mamma to the devil” (347) when she tries to spare him from his father’s corrupting influence casts a mirror back on Huntingdon’s own childhood, displaying how men inevitably come to be as they are in Victorian Society. Part of the reason that critics found the text so offensive is that it shows women as possessing more capacity for reason and moral perfectibility than men. Anne claims in her preface to the second edition that if she has “warned one rash youth” from following in her characters’ footsteps or “prevented one thoughtless girl from falling into the very natural error” of her protagonist, then her efforts will not have been in vain (2). Her intention is to illustrate that both sexes must pay the price of a society with such an unequal education system, where sons’ every whim is indulged and daughters are excluded from everything outside of the domestic sphere. Ultimately, it is only by completely removing her son from the influence of Arthur Huntingdon and all “the landed bourgeois men who descend on the secluded country estates” (Carnell 3) that she can spare him a similar fate, choosing to keep him completely insulated from this toxic patriarchal society in the remote location of Wildfell Hall.

Central to Brontë's critique of debased masculinity in the novel is her portrayal of the culture of drinking to excess and the glorification of an unhealthy lifestyle, which is ultimately the cause of Huntingdon's early death. As well as drawing first-hand on the widespread infatuation surrounding the very publicly documented affairs of Byron, Anne drew first-hand on her own close experiences with the effects of profligacy through the misbehaviour of her brother Branwell. Her detailed descriptions of Arthur's "irreproachable" conduct, violent tempers and fits of lethargy and idleness (259) when he returns from one of his extended trips in London could only be written by one who is intimately acquainted with the devastating effects of the glorification of drinking culture amongst men. According to Armstrong, if men in the Victorian novel are not seen as "agreeable" partners, we can simply assume that is because men are masculine as opposed to feminine (108). Even the faintest attempt at self-care is seen as an exclusively feminine attribute with Arthur asking Helen whether she thinks he has nothing to do other than "stay at home and take care of myself like a woman?" (249). Those "laughing eyes" she refused to see any harm in when they first met have become emblematic of his complete inability to resist earthly pleasures and purely physical activities, as he has never been taught to foster other interests despite having the male privilege of the freedom to do so (Brontë 154). Her fears, captured in the disquieting question, "what will I do with the serious parts of myself?" come to fruition as this culture of excess eventually costs Arthur his life and transforms Helen from a happy girl into an unusually solemn young woman, hardened by a patriarchal society that ultimately serves the interests of nobody.

Arthur's tragic demise, accelerated by his hedonistic, self-destructive lifestyle exposes the fallacy that girls should be sheltered, and boys indulged and exposed, the view endorsed by Mrs Markham who accuses Helen of turning little Arthur into a "mere Miss Nancy" (Brontë 23). Mrs

Markham's comments give us some context as to why men like Huntingdon and his profligate companions come to be as they are. The issue of exposing boys and sheltering girls is a protracted debate throughout the novel. Brontë makes quite explicit statements regarding the dramatically different upbringing of men and women, with Helen claiming she would rather her son die the next day than become what Mrs Markham describes as "a man of the world" (23). Though Helen's use of aversion therapy for turning her child off wine may seem extreme, it shows the lengths she is willing to go to in order to prevent her child turning out like his father, portraying Brontë's perceptiveness about "prevailing constructions of gender, especially the way in which discourses of manliness produce men" (Matus 105). The dangers of anti-feminine world in which Huntingdon grew up are illustrated through his long and painful death and largely self-imposed suffering. Now that his body has failed him, there is nothing left for him to enjoy in this world. He has ultimately been rendered helpless, his "poor trembling soul...hurried away to everlasting torment" with neither a family who loves him nor Helen's constant comfort of faith in the divine to ease his passing (Brontë 449).

As a result, it is clear that Brontë offers a detailed critique of the devastating consequences of a society and educational system that glorifies debased masculinity in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. Unafraid to present the difficult truths behind domestic violence, coercive control, alcohol addiction and abusive marriages, Anne portrays the dysfunctional gender roles of her society in detail through the demise of Arthur Huntingdon and the suffering of his family, regardless of the consequences or reception she received. Through bringing our attention to the various cultural pressures and overly-indulgent upbringing of men in Victorian society, Brontë helps us to understand how difficult it would be for Arthur Huntingdon to possibly turn out any other way.

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The Structure of *The Canterbury Tales*

[Undermines] the Notion of Literature as a Vehicle for some Fixed Truth.

Anna O'Callaghan

Highly Recommended

My name is Anna O'Callaghan and I am a final year English Student. I wrote my essay on feminine subtexts in Chaucer's The Canterbury Tales because I have a great interest in Middle English Literature. I found when I was reading the tales, the silences of the women spoke, they were pointed. Much about their thoughts, experiences and desires is revealed through subtle symbolism and language choice. Where from one tale only a broken, half-developed female narrative could be excavated, the gaps in the feminine subtext could be filled in through study of other Tales in the collection. When I'm not writing about Chaucer, I am re-watching Anne with an E on Netflix (which is my favourite piece of art ever made!)

Through the conflicting genres of romance and fabliaux, Chaucer creates beautiful images of the world and then mocks them. “The Knight’s Tale” and “The Merchant’s Tale” offer conflicting views on the depth and realness of human connection. This essay will examine the contrasting ways in which these tales depict the value of romantic love and the virtues of powerful men as they interact with women. This essay will argue that “The Knight’s Tale” overtly depicts a world of undying connection and virtuous kings. However, Chaucer weaves threads of doubt into the shimmering romance image to be pulled loose by “The Merchant’s Tale”. It is true that tales in the

collection often directly oppose each other. But truths can also be broken apart from within a tale and pieced back together by association with another pilgrim's story. The tales do not simply oppose unresolved questions with each other but also within themselves. Furthermore, tales that seem to contrast can also -through an alternative reading- build to the same conclusion. Both romance and fabliaux are overtly anti-feminist. "The Knight's Tale" and "The Merchant's Tale" occupy the masculine perspective in the marriage debate. Romance depicts Emelye as a passive object to be attained. Fabliaux depicts May's pleasure as base and ugly. However, this essay argues that Chaucer lays down a feminist subtext which bridges the two narratives and covertly opposes the patriarchal overtones within the stories, "a different kind of reading, no longer a sublimated relation to the spirit of the text, but an intercourse with its body" (Gallop, 129). This essay aims to examine the conflicting proposals of truth these tales offer. It also aims to dissect the ways in which the tales, by association with each other, heal a feminine version of the truth broken apart in their own stories.

"The images of Guinevere led out to the fire, clad in only her shift; [...] of the black-robed queens who weep and shriek as they bear Arthur away in the barge, have a powerful appeal because they convey fundamental human emotions: they are trans-historical" (Saunders, 1). The language of romance crystallises the heights of human feeling. The genre is a world of living and dying in someone's name, a gaze intent on "lips that love to laugh" (Armitage Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, 1207). But the integrity of love in The Knights Tale is called into question by "The Merchant's Tale". Through mockery of romantic language and imagery, the fabliaux of "The Merchant's Tale" exposes the flaws in the Knight's idea of masculine devotion. The Knight's and Miller's stories- romance and fabliaux- outwardly evoke contrasting gazes on women: "Emelye [...] fairer was to sene/ Than is the lylie upon his stalke grene, / And fressher than the May with

floures newe” (1035-37). Here, the male gaze appears admiring and respectful. “The Merchant’s Tale” makes a mockery of such a blazon by praising “fresshe May” (1822) and then how “fairer been [hire] brestes than is wyn!” (2142). Furthermore, January insists he will not have a haggard wife over age twenty. But the inclusion of a blazon amongst the base language of fabliaux draws parallels between the stories’ seemingly contrasting views of women. In both texts, the male gaze is symbolised by a walled garden. The garden represents a femininity which men have designed and cultivated; a palatable plot of feminine nature grown for their pleasure. In the gardens, May and Emelye are expected to fulfil pleasing roles, “fressher than the May with floures newe” (“The Knight’s Tale”, 1037) and “stille as stoon” (“The Merchant’s Tale”, 1818). Emelye’s private desire to “walken in the wodes wilde” (2309) emphasises how limiting the male gaze is, how little of a person fits in that neat little garden. Arcite’s and Palamon’s desire for Emelye, turned to gold by the blazon, is revealed to be just as base and disrespectful as January’s gaze on May: “The beestes and the briddes alle/ Fledden for fere, whan the wode was falle;/ [...] the ground agast was of the light, / That was nat wont to seen the sonne bright” (2929-2932). At best, the burning of the woods speaks of how little these men understood her, how little of her soul they had seen in the garden. At worst, the burning exposes how Arcite and Palamon’s love for her was only ever the love of having her in their power. The vibrancy and variety of her identity is stacked up as kindling for Arcite’s rotting corpse. The message is clear- men will own her even in death. The image of the grieving soil, exposed and vulnerable, reflects the base and greedy ugliness behind Palamon’s and Arcite’s love. They have burned down the symbol of her choice and autonomy. They would have “asseged” (881) her, amongst her deafening silence. If the courtly language of romance will not depict where an unwilling marriage goes, fabliaux will: “The bryde was broght abedde as stille as stoon.../ He lulleth hire; he kisseth hire ful ofte;/ With thikke brustles of his berd unsoften” (1818-

1824). The tangible imagery of the unwanted touch brings Arcite and Palamon's love for Emelye down from chivalric heights. January's desire for May is "chained to an image of femininity, vulnerable to his desire to make himself the man he wants to be through a submissive spouse" and he thus searches for a partner "in the mirror of his own imagination" (Crocker, 183). The burning of the forest reveals a similarly cruel and one-dimensional understanding of Emelye. Men see her as something beautiful to be had. The embellishment of the reoccurring image of women "on hir bare knees" ("The Knight's Tale", 1758) before men suggest as certain pleasurable power within the dynamic. "The Merchant's Tale" parallels the flaws of courtly love in the Knight's story, regurgitating them in a vulgar light. Suddenly, the depictions of Emelye's gold hair and fresh beauty are as base as January's repulsive attraction to May's breasts. When Emelye wails by the pyre, the reader wonders if she mourns Arcite or what he has taken from her. "The Merchant's Tale" distorts romantic imagery and depicts of the reality of forced touch. It thus shatters the illusion of a pure love in "The Knight's Tale". The argument about the virtue of men's love for women is won by the Merchant. The illusion of respect and dignity weaved in the pretty language of romance is unravelled by the ugly depiction of the male gaze pursued in "The Merchant's Tale."

"The Merchant's Tale" and "The Knight's Tale" both break apart female dignity and deny the complexity of female characters. However, through association with each other, the stories build a feminist version of the truth which runs beneath the patriarchal overtones of the texts. Chaucer reiterates Emelye's humanity through subtle symbolism when it is lost amongst male gazes. "She gadereth flowres, party white and rede/ To make a subtil garland for hire head" (1053-54). The image follows imagery of Theseus' bloodletting at Thebes, his great white banner casting light on the open fields, his head crowned with laurel. Emelye's mirror crown of white and red represents her suppressed desire for her own sovereignty, for power under an open sky. When the

Merchant gives her no voice, these symbols speak. When the royal party discovers Arcite and Palamon brawling beneath the trees, it is decided that they will win Emelye through combat. The little, passed-over image of her green dress is the only voice that speaks for her. It evokes again the contrasting symbols of the garden and the “wodes wilde” (2309). The image of her “clothed al in grene” (1686) reminds the reader of her humanity. The image gives colour to her identity; it evokes her “asseged” (881) home in the Amazon, memorialises her desire to escape into the trees as the dream dies before her eyes and she says nothing. When men deny her humanity, Chaucer leaves traces of Emelye’s spirit for us to find. This subtle assertion which is broken apart in “The Knight’s Tale” is healed in the merchant’s. What Emelye whispers to Diana in the dark, May says aloud: “‘I have’, quod she ‘a soule for to keep/ as wel as ye’” (2188). With that, she climbs into the trees. Maybe she even climbs higher than the walls of the garden because the plain assertion of her desire that follows depicts her from anything but the male gaze: “He stoupeth down, and on his bak she stood, /And caughte hire by a twiste, and up she gooth / [...] anon this Damyan/ Gan pullen up the smok, and in he throng” (2349-2353). The patriarchal tone of the text tries to make the moment as ugly as possible. May stands on January’s pitiful, withered back. The assertion of her autonomy, the fulfilment of her desire, is cast in a vulgar light. But from a feminist reading, the only words that echo as Damyan thrusts into May are I have a soul. Her desire, her humanity spread out above the walled garden and beyond the male gaze. Her identity thus spans out across the open fields like Theseus’ great white banner, winning back the choices that Emelye has lost. May takes back the humanity that Emelye is denied. Emelye depicts the variety and vibrancy of the female soul that the merchant never bothers to show in May. Therefore, these tales, by association with each other, heal a feminine version of the truth broken apart in their own stories.

In conclusion, stories in *The Canterbury Tales* offer different versions of the truth. “The Knight’s Tale” depicts male devotion as rife with trouthe and “The Merchant’s Tale” mocks and defiles such an idea. Both tales suffocate female identity beneath the male gaze. But both tales covertly explore the vibrancy and variety of female humanity and pay attention to the denials and assertions of feminine desire. Stories in *The Canterbury Tales* are in conflict with themselves and each other and sometimes offer a surprising harmony. The tale collection, then, holds conflicting truths that break apart and heal each other.

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The Louise Clancy Memorial Prize

Exploring the Link Between Ethnic Identity and Linguistic Identity in the Poetry of Paul Laurence Dunbar.

Angela Stratos

Winner

My name is Angela Stratos and I have recently graduated from the BA in English programme. My dissertation, "Linguistic and Ethnic Identity in African-American, Irish, and Mexican-American Literature," and this chapter from it, explore the link between language and identity- how the languages you speak inform your sense of identity, and how the absence of language can ultimately feel like a loss of self. This idea became of major interest to me in my second year of college & is one that has prevailed over my own relationship with language. This idea threads over chapters from my dissertation, and explores language in different circumstances and time periods. Another chapter from my dissertation, the position of Spanish in Mexican-American poetry, is also in publication for Charles University's Protagonist Press.

This essay seeks to explore African American dialectal poetry and how it may celebrate or impede upon black expressions of race and identity, and furthermore, how black dialectal poetry informs the national identity of America as a whole, using the poetry of Paul Laurence Dunbar as a case study to do so. In relation to African American dialectal poetry, and reconciling linguistic identity

with ethnic identity, a separate language may be substituted by dialect. In “Educational Language Planning and Linguistic Identity”, Peter Sutton explains that “linguistic variation [can be] caused by geography, ethnicity and socioeconomic class”, and thus we can identify the dialect of Paul Laurence Dunbar’s poetry as an “ethnolect” (133-135). *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature* corroborates this as they claim, “Dunbar made his way to the top by remaking a regional persona into a racial one” (885). In this way we see how this distinct dialect is not simply associated with region or class but with black Americans as a whole. Prior to Dunbar’s poetry, African American dialect was most common in the works of white writers; this tended to evoke stereotype, ridicule and racism. Dunbar thus became one of the most famous and influential writers of dialect and significantly, one of the first African American writers to be published writing in vernacular. This chapter seeks to explore the consequences of his writings, the interpretation of it as a celebration of black communities, and conversely, possible controversy regarding how it impedes on black identities.

One can easily see how poetry in an African American dialect evokes a sense of commemoration for black Americans, and is commended for its representation, black expression, and its resistance toward the dominant, white “standard” English. It certainly seems a significant feat for it to “penetrate [the] prestigious editorial circuits from which it had always been excluded”, and in this regard the celebration of Paul Laurence Dunbar’s dialectal poetry is representative of a new direction for black writing and holds a significant legacy (Bonaffini 279). Ralph Ellison argues that vernacular writing accounts for “black Americans legacy of self-awareness and endurance” in which they “attempt to humanize an often harsh world, and do so with honesty, with toughness, and often with humour” (Norton 2). Dunbar’s dialectal writing thus does something significant for black America; it acknowledges the hardships of African Americans and paints

them with a humbling dignity. This is evident in the content of his dialectal poetry as well as its nature, for example in his poem *When de Co'n Pone's Hot*:

When you set down at de table

Kin' o' weary lak an' sad,

An' you 'se jes; a little tiahed

And purhaps a little mad;

How yo' gloom tu'ns into gladness,

How yo' joy drives out de doubt

[...]

When yo' mammy says de blessin'

An' de co'n pone's hot. (lines 13-18, 23-24)

This poem displays a stark juxtaposition between the hardships of African American life, and the humanity of African Americans, with which they are often not treated. This is only depicted in dialectal poetry written by black writers, as William Robinson points out in *Early Black American Poets*: “[t]he black man in the hands of most white dialect writers is a subject for ridicule, and served to document the learnings and expectations of white readers in need of repeated

confirmations of their psychological and social notions about superior and inferior races” (Wheat 27). Conversely, Dunbar subverts these associations with dialectal writing, marking it a space for the celebration of African American voices, and in the case of the above poem, a celebration of the black family unit, around whom the narrator’s cares and hardships dissolve. This outlines the capability of dialect poetry to display genuine sentiment and emotion, intimacy and honesty, rather than the ridicule and stereotype the black dialect had previously been associated with.

It proves also an apt form for black expression as Dunbar himself claims in an 1897 interview: “I must confess my fondest love is for the Negro pieces ... These little songs I sing because I must. They have grown instinctively in me ... [the] poems form in my mind long before they are written on paper” (Wheat 27). This confession outlines an instinctive relationship between Dunbar and dialect and corroborates the link between his linguistic identity and his identity as a black man. Dialect in this regard is read as “an homage to the black man”, which affirms the place of black writing, black culture and black expression in a literary industry which is dominated by white figures, in the shape of writers, publishers and also readers (Wheat 28). Dunbar ensures black figures are displayed with genuine affinity, appreciation, and sympathy. Thus, his dialectal writing displays the link between ethnic identity and linguistic identity as it subverts a form which had previously been used to ridicule African Americans with racist stereotypes and uses it to depict black dialectal writing as the medium with which to celebrate and represent black Americans.

However, as demand and interest in Paul Laurence Dunbar’s work grew over the course of his career, he became increasingly restricted and censored in which works of his were published in literary magazines. This begs the question: if you are writing within confines, to what extent can one truly express or explore their own identity? In an 1896 review of Dunbar’s poetry in Harper’s Weekly, critic William Dean Howells “declare[d] that Dunbar’s dialect poems [were] his

true strength and that there [was] nothing “especially notable” about the standard English verse “except for the Negro face of the author” (Licato 132). In March of the following year a letter from Dunbar revealed he saw “very clearly” that Howells had done him “irrevocable harm in the dictum he said regarding [his] dialect verse.” and feared “it [would] even influence English criticism” (Licato 132). Dunbar’s fear proved correct as editors increasingly rejected Dunbar’s poetry written in “standard English”, with a view of only publishing his dialectal poetry, and seemed to find a novelty in this writing being produced by an African American. Thus, we see how Dunbar is restricted within the publishing industry, despite the calibre of his poems, and is forced to grapple with his want for commercial success and money and his want for creative freedom. Moreover, this theme of his restriction becomes evident in his poetry, such as his poem “Misapprehension”, which details the passion and effort which goes into a poem, only to be told “Ay, brother- ‘t is well writ, / But where’s the joke?” (lines 10-11). It so becomes evident that the writing of black poets and authors must relay the “expectations and demands of white editors” (Norton 761). These constraints embody the limits placed upon black writers such as Dunbar, with the appeal being his race and his ability to represent the African American race in the eyes of his predominantly white readership. As Aderemi Bamikunle summarises in “The Harlem Renaissance and White Critical Tradition”, “[f]rom the beginning of black writing, writers had depended on white publishing houses, white reading public, as well as white critics to introduce them to that reading public through literary magazines. Black creative writing had to develop at the rate at which the above conditions could be fulfilled [...] because of [this], it could only be developed by pandering to the tastes of the white reading public” (83). Dunbar was made aware that he must produce racialized poetry while still appealing to the expectations of white critics, publishers and readers. James Weldon Johnson recounts Dunbar lamenting his position of the “trap of dialect” and quotes him

as saying “I simply came to [the] conclusion that I could write it as well, if not better, than anybody else I knew of, and that by doing so I could gain a hearing. I gained a hearing, and now they don’t want me to write anything but dialect” (Licato 133). Johnson himself holds a sympathy for the pressure black writers are under to appease the white general public, judging that “[t]here is not a single writer who is not, at least secondarily, impelled by the desire to make his work have some effect on the white world for the good of the race” (Bamikunle 88). Thus, we see the overwhelming pressure for black writers to firstly, appeal to white readers in order to be financially stable, but also to write on black issues, or to be a representative of their race, in order to better the conditions for black people in America.

The question must also be raised, on how much dialectal writing may play on racial stereotypes. It remained a divisive subject amongst the black writing community, with James Weldon Johnson calling for the end of dialectal writing in order for African Americans to “disentangle themselves from the stereotypes that had reached their highest form of art in the poetry of [...] Dunbar” (Norton 932). A large portion of Dunbar’s popularity amongst white readers seems to stem from the more ‘realistic’ nature of his dialect in contrast with the use of it in the works of white writers. However, this ‘realism’ is complicated as we discover this was not the way English was spoken in Dunbar’s home growing up, as his mother Matilda, a freed slave who spoke with “perfect English”, notes in an interview that “the dialect which her son used in many of his poems was learned ‘in the streets’ not at home” (Licato 147). This complicates matters, as is described in “Paul Laurence Dunbar’s Metapoetics”, as, though it “seems reasonable that audiences would consider black writers to be more credible in representing black voices, this meant that Dunbar found himself in the uncomfortable position of adopting, profiting from, and even reinforcing racist stereotypes established by white writers before him, all while being acutely

aware that his fiction would be interpreted by much of the reading public as realistic” (139). If linguistic identity informs ethnic identity, and accordingly vice versa, Dunbar’s poetry holds the power to affect one’s sense of self within their racial grouping and the white majority’s perspective on said grouping, and thus change the sense of black identity.

Paul Laurence Dunbar’s own sense of identity evidently also seemed impacted by the conditions placed upon him and the position he had been put into as a result of this. Many critics have written about the double consciousness experienced by African Americans, and it is this phenomenon which places Dunbar in the uncomfortable position as a black writer with a predominantly white readership. This forces him to be in a constant relationship with a white demographic and white dominated society while grappling with the pressure to affirm his identity as a black man who is contributing to a larger body of black writers legitimising the African American population. His identity as a black man was insurmountable as he was “what in his time was called ‘pure black’- meaning that his parentage was pure freed slave, with no white master lurking in the woodpile”, and thus his dark complexion and the dialectal nature of his most popular poetry means that his identity as a black man and his identity as a writer became indistinguishable, and the general consensus leaves his poetry often read through the lens of his race (Licato 138). For example, as Shelley Fisher Fishkin and David Bradley have pointed out, Dunbar’s poem “We Wear the Mask” is often read as one of his “strongest racial protests”, despite not truly referencing race in the poem (Licato 136). One could argue that the same is true in perhaps one of his most famous poems, “Sympathy”. It also does not allow black writers to write fictionally; there is an overwhelming assumption that the fictional personae or narrator’s voice in both Dunbar’s poems as well as many black poet’s works is the same as the perspective of the poet.

Perhaps one of the most damning examples of the pressures placed upon Dunbar's poetry affecting his ethnic or racial identity is the following statement of his: "My position is most unfortunate. I am a black white man" (Licato 147). In 1938, psychiatrist Walker M. Allen produced an analysis of Dunbar entitled "A Study in Genius" for *Psychoanalytic Review* and attributed the above quote to a superiority complex in regard to other African Americans, and his lamentation of his talent as "too great for a black man and yet not great enough to be white" (Licato 147). It also details Dunbar's mother's (presumed) distaste for dialectal poetry as a contribution towards his inevitable rejection of it. The lengthy debate amongst black writers on whether dialectal writing was a celebration or regressive display of black expression, coupled with the pressures exerted by the white demographic prove to have impacted Dunbar's psyche in one form or another, and in this regard, one must consider whether dialectal writing and linguistic identity informs the ethnic identity of Dunbar in a negative light, so much so as to denounce himself as a member of the black community

On a larger scale than just Dunbar's own identity, language, dialect, and linguistic identity, also inform and shape the identity of America as a whole, and moreover, the perceptions America holds of its black population. As Keja Valens and J.D Scrimgeour outline in *Words / Matter*, "writers and literary scholars [...] understand that words not only represent what exists, but shape it. Words strung together can make the story of an individual life or a national identity" (461). Looking at Dunbar's poetry through this lens, one can see how the restrictions placed upon him reflect the limitations put on black society as a whole, whether it be slavery, segregation, or day to day racism. It mirrors the confines in which black people are allowed to exist in American life and the constraints afforded to them. Conversely, the dialectal poetry of Dunbar, whether he wanted to produce it or not, also prove to have done immense good for African American communities. The

representation afforded to black communities in his poetry forces his white readers to read African Americans with sympathy, compassion and respect, rather than the ridicule they were often the subject of. In this regard, Dunbar's poetry has the power to change a white reader's perception of African Americans and perhaps even invoke national change. The perception of African Americans by white Americans proves vital to black rights as, at least in Dunbar's time, those were the people who decided upon any laws or reform concerning black citizens. In this regard, Dunbar's poetry was political, just by virtue of existing, and had the power to influence to some degree, and provided a long legacy, and affected the national identity of America as well as its perception of black Americans. As James Baldwin aptly states: "the story of the Negro in America is the story of America" (Valens and Scrimgeour 462).

To conclude, Dunbar's dialectal poetry is a form of linguistic identification which works in tandem with ethnic identity. It both functions as a celebration of black expression and shows black people in a light which avoids the ridicule or caricature of African Americans, while simultaneously highlights the pressures put upon black writers. These pressures include the constraints afforded to them, the issue of stereotypes, and the burden placed upon black writers to write about black issues. All these issues as well as praise which come in part with his writing style impact the individual sense of identity of African Americans, including Dunbar's own, as well as the national identity of America as a whole, influencing the perceptions held against African Americans.

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The School Undergraduate Awards (2nd Year)

Why We Watch Ourselves Watching: Brechtian *Verfremdungseffekt* in *Northern Star* and *The Freedom on the City*.

Leah Mulcahy

Winner

My name is Leah Mulcahy and I am a third year English student. I probably wrote my essay on Verfremdungseffekt because I did after-school drama classes at a formative age, and have been plagued with an interest in audience/performer interactions ever since. It's no surprise that my undergrad dissertation, fourth walls in film (official title pending), falls under a similar category to this piece. Before you ask, yes, I am a fan of Fleabag. This essay came to be through a Northern Irish literature module, which I really enjoyed. One of the things I love most about my course is the scope of study available, with choices across history, cultures, genre, and medium. Sometimes it feels like there are too many topics I want to come back to in the future.

I really do sound like a stereotypical English student: much of my free time is spent on fiction when I'm not working on academics. I read it and then I write it, and then I watch video essays about anything and everything: history and internet culture and feminism. My other notable hobbies include yoga, knitting, cooking every kind of food (and eating it), gaming, and getting into escapades with my friends. Regarding future aspirations, my dream would be to publish novels of my own at some point. I'd also like to continue my studies and contribute to English lit academically. Honestly, as long as I end up working with words and people I'll be happy out.

Abstract: Both Stewart Parker's *Northern Star* (1984) and Brian Friel's *the Freedom of the City* (1973) seek to alienate audiences from their respective narratives through the employment of different dramaturgical techniques. Close reading of both texts investigates this need for spectatorial alienation in 'Troubles Era' media, focusing in particular on set design, stage direction, and narrative structure[ing]. Extensive media coverage on the Troubles period spawned intense

scrutiny, polarisation, and sensationalising of horrific events, exacerbated by the speed at which (mis)information could travel. Unsurprisingly, these plays mimic this phenomenon of contemporary media – public opinion is formed from *how* a story is told, rather than (any) elements of truth within it. In Parker and Friel’s works this creates an environment in which the audience is overtly aware of its role as spectator, and the characters (and the actors who play them) seem overtly aware that they are being watched.

Theatre is an art form that cannot be replicated in other performative mediums such as film, radio, or television. It is live and tangible – creating a suspension of disbelief onstage. Space becomes temporal – the stage can become a café, a rocket ship, a childhood bedroom, merely through the medium itself and regardless of the use of a set or stage props. This suspension of disbelief shrouds actors as well [,] who can become one or multiple characters with or without appropriate costuming. The theatre can be used to immerse both audience and actor in a fictionalised world, but the inverse is also possible. The fragility of suspension of disbelief allows it to be easily shattered, a technique that is purposefully used in the plays *Northern Star* and *The Freedom of the City*. While *Northern Star* is the only one of the two plays to employ Brechtian techniques, both utilise Brecht’s *Verfremdungseffekt* (alienation effect) (Altamiranda 85). The audience is estranged from the onstage events that may try and present themselves as ‘real’ through purposeful disruptions: comments or sounds that do not align with whatever is taking place, jumps in time, or other abrupt changes that shatter the illusion of reality. The purpose of these orchestrated disruptions is to “provide the spectator with an opportunity to think rather than connect emotionally” (Hashim and Alizadeh 13). This prevents the audience from “being absorbed or

captured by the stage”, therefore keeping their objective judgement awake” (Hashim and Alizadeh 16). If the *Verfremdungseffekt* is successful it should allow audiences to “deconstruct social processes as they watch” (Hashim and Alizadeh 10). Their focus should be on their own objective response to the play as an individual spectator, rather than becoming immersed in the storyline and forming an emotional connection to the piece.

In his own works, German playwright Brecht employed the *Verfremdungseffekt* to prevent audiences becoming so emotionally involved in the fictionalised events, they forgot themselves and their own lives (Hashim and Alizadeh 16). His plays are described as “a loosely linked series of events” that allow for “the representation of socio-cultural situations” (Harrop and Epstein qtd in Hashim and Alizadeh 6; Altamiranda 85). Stewart Parker states that *Northern Star* “employs pastiche as a strategy” in his introduction to the trilogy plays, and it is no surprise that he chooses to mimic the politically charged genre of Brechtian epic (“State of Play” 10). We examine how Parker estranges his audience using Brechtian techniques: “the use of narrators, plot fragmentation, experimentation with masks, music, and other expressive resources, and acting styles designed to avoid empathy with the public” (Altamiranda 85). The central narrative between McCracken and his lover Mary as they hide out in the safe house is constantly interrupted by the rotating cast of characters in McCracken’s imagination, played by different performers. Consider the play’s opening stage directions:

*We are looking at the cottage interior as though from the exposed rear aspect. [...] These [lambeg] drums are played by members of the company, **who may each play several roles in the action. A change of role may be accomplished merely by a change of a hat, coat, or wig [...].*** (Parker, “Northern Star” 3).

Indeed, one of the most prominent Brechtian strategies employed in *Northern Star* is its utilisation of actors. In the same way that the audience is estranged in Brechtian theatre, so must its actors be. This allows for acting styles that “avoid empathy with the public” as the actor is afforded the possibility to “maintain a distance from his role” (Hashim and Alizadeh 10). In the first production of the play, a maximum of five roles were given to individual actors. This shifting of roles throughout disrupts our sense of immersive reality.

While Brian Friel’s *the Freedom of the City* takes a ‘conventional’ approach to casting, it too uses character to disrupt the main narrative. The situation that political protesters Michael, Lily and Skinner find themselves in is pitted against an unfolding court case, sociological diatribe, propagandist requiems, and sensationalist news reports, all of which eventually override the ‘truth’ of what happened. Ironically, it is possible to apply Brecht’s definition of realism to the non-Brechtian play more accurately, with realism:

1. Revealing the casual complex of society
2. Unmasking the ruling viewpoints of the rulers
3. Writing from the standpoint of the class that has in readiness the broadest solutions

for the most urgent difficulties besetting human society (Brecht qtd. in Barnett 8)

Acute contrast between the down-to-earth protesters and the clinical, authoritative bodies such as the Judge, Priest and Sociologist makes the jumping between narratives jarring and alienating; it feels as though we are moving between two vastly different worlds (the upper and lower class) that cannot possibly coexist, although this is perhaps the most ‘realistic’ reflection of real life. Overt realism follows the play throughout; Michael, Lily and Skinner become near satirical archetypes of the working-class man, and the complete failure of the biased justice system becomes

a parody of itself. The onlooking audience is “jolted back and forth between sympathy and detachment” as both sides of the picket line overlap their parts (Winkler 13- 14).

It is therefore unsurprising that the play’s treatment of spectatorship and performance also takes on a realistic tone. We are estranged from the characters within the play through the constant back-and-forth, the erasure of linear narratives, but the characters themselves are also separated from each other in the same way. Critic Patrick Male categorises the characters into “two distinct groups of characters: those that are speaking in public to the audience or at least aware of its presence [...] and those that are unaware of the audience, speaking only to each other, in private” (66). Of course, it is really only Michael, Lily, and Skinner (and some miscellaneous soldiers) that fall into the latter category. The majority of characters *want* to be watched. They address an audience, yet not in a *Brechtian* way: they do not reference performing, there is no ‘fourth wall’ break. Instead, there is an unseen audience within the world of the play, perhaps the jury in the courtroom, the congregation in the requiem mass, the unseen broadcast the RTÉ reporter records. We the audience are put in the position of omniscient spectator – and in doing so allows us access to *all* narratives taking place: we are both the auditorium audience, the fly on the parlour house wall, and the in-text television watcher who does not have access to the other perspectives. We cannot help but become aware of ourselves in the act of *watching*, which prevents becoming immersed in the in-text world.

The Freedom of the City uses the temporality of space to show and emphasise our omniscient position. Consider *Freedom’s* set design in comparison to that in *Northern Star*:

The Mayor’s parlour takes up almost the entire stage, with the exception of the apron and a small area stage left (left and right throughout are from the point of view of the audience) “[...] at ceiling height the walls are embattled. (Friel 104-105)

Within the Mayor's parlour occur the 'true' events of the narrative. Stage left, right, downstage (closest to the audience) and the embattlements act as spectatorial places: they are used for courtroom proceedings, news reports, requiem mass, sociology reports. The invisible audience within the narrative likely does not have access to *all* of the spectatorial segments, in particular the latter. We investigate the character Philip Alexander Dodds, the sociologist who provides abstract commentary throughout. It is clear that he is not affected by onstage events, but more interestingly he does not give exposition about the characters Michael, Lily, and Skinner; his discourse could be removed with no change to the plot. Instead, his sole contribution to the play is to serve as another reminder of our spectatorial position.

*While the meeting is going on offstage, DR DODDS enters left and addresses the audience.
[...] Panic. Screaming. Shouting. [...] Very slowly the noise fades to background. As it
does, DODDS resumes as calmly as before. (Friel 110-111)*

Despite being removed from the storyline, he does not appear to take a Brechtian role. We are confident that these lines are delivered by an actor immersed in his role as Philip Alexander Dodds, who speaks to an imagined audience through a medium that we also just happen to have access to as an omniscient presence.

Northern Star speaks to us the audience proper, rather than an imagined one. McCracken constantly references performing, acting, and the stage, to an extent that we begin to feel in on the joke. There is no division of space – the 'actually happening' scenes between McCracken, Mary, his sister, the Sergeant etc. take place simultaneously and in the same place as the hallucinogenic episodes that McCracken experiences. Throughout the play he continuously imagines his own hanging, 'performing' his last words to an imagined audience:

McCracken: I hope your folk at the back can hear me, [...] no flowers at the house please.
(Parker 15).

Of course, this line can double as a joke for the audience at the back of the auditorium. Similar to in *Freedom*, McCracken speaks to an imaginary audience, but that audience is not watching him *in the moment* like one may watch the news reporter in *Freedom* who is being broadcasted. This is explicitly for us; it seems the actors are speaking to directly to us rather than the characters doing so:

McCracken: Citizens of Belfast – you rehearse all of your chosen parts, and you play them with the utmost zeal – except that maybe they are really playing you. [...] They costume themselves in your flesh and bones, borrow your voice, strike your poses, and at the end they move on. (Parker 34)

While it makes sense within the context of the narrative, it is also an apt description of McCracken's actor describing himself play McCracken's role. Boundaries between what is part of the show and what exceeds it blur further when the McCracken character calls out stage directions, taking agency of his own 'hallucinations' and the 'actors' within it:

McCracken: Harry Steps In. A popular melodrama. Scene – the country of Armagh [...] Enter the noble and fearless young McCracken [...] Music, please. (Parker 29).

Character McCracken's 'philosophy' on life, i.e. [,] continual references to performing, become most prominent when addressed to Mary, the only 'in-character' character in the piece. She never acknowledges the others onstage that act out McCracken's memories/hallucinations, and her presence usually indicates an end to one of his 'episodes'. She dismisses his philosophy:

McCracken: You act out your small parts in a huge drama, Mary, but it is not of your own creation. You are acting all along in the dark, no matter how clear it seems at the time. You

only have one choice. Either retire from the stage altogether. Or play out all your allotted roles until the curtain falls.

Mary: Aye, that's right. On a stage full of corpses. (Parker 53)

Mary's obliviousness at being in a play makes the spectatorial experience all the more disruptive and unsettling. It makes the presence of an audience voyeuristic in nature. By act two, Mary is no longer an indicator of what is real and what is not [,] as Jimmy Hope interrupts McCracken's conversation with her. While Mary still does not acknowledge his presence, McCracken 'speaks' to Jimmy in front of her.

McCracken: Jimmy Hope would have told you better. [...] I hear you, Jimmy. (Parker 53-54)

Subsequently, the characters Thomas Russel, Wolfe Tone and Samuel Neilson enter when Mary is in the bed onstage. Even if she is meant to be sleeping, her presence has before warded off the hallucinations, and will not any longer, disrupting the pattern we have grown accustomed to.

'Ghosts' (including those that are existing 'living' characters in the narrative moment) take up a prominent role in alienating the audience from narratives. In *Northern Star* they are the primary disrupter of the narrative save for McCracken's quips about performing. The structuring of *The Freedom of the City* is so effective because we know the outcome in the end – the three main characters are killed, and regardless of what happens to them throughout the play, there is no preventing or changing that outcome: "the play's structure never asks us to suspend our awareness that Michael, Skinner, and Lily are already dead" (Maley 67). Since we know 'the end' at the very beginning, this non-linear feedback "undermines the idea of finality as a mode of existence" according to Maria Germanou (487). What is not expected however is the turning point in act two, in which the dead address us, the audience:

When MICHAEL, LILY and SKINNER speak, they speak calmly, without emotion, in neutral accents. (Friel 149).

Germanou comments that this “[allows] the theatre to become engaged with provisionality, incompleteness, and unpredictability” (487). There is no longer a boundary between the protesters and the authoritative figures – positioned upstage – in the area associated with addressing the audience rather than being unaware of one. The ghostly figures also use formal, measured language, another hallmark of the authoritative narrative. The subsequent continuation of the court case jars us – which is then further disrupted by the return to the Mayor’s parlour [,] in which they ‘come alive’ once more. Despite an initial appearance of realism, there is no boundary between the living and the dead, and no linear time structure; there is a strange moment outside of time, “the possibility of a temporality in excess of the staged finality” (Germanou 491). This seems to mimic real-life reflections of a crisis, in which a timeline can distort itself. Any chance to become immersed in the realism of the play is dissolved by the turning point of act two. Similarly, in *Northern Star* the second act marks a turning point: the removal of the Mary Bodle ‘safety net’ and the climactic hallucination of the memory of Kilmainham Jail, the only instance in which any notable change is made to the set. The chorus moves onstage and offstage in rapid succession as past characters reappear.

Both *Northern Star* and *The Freedom of the City* are in essence alternate history plays. Patrick Maley describes *Freedom* as a play that “puts its audience in the position of reconciling the alienation of fiction and the absorption of a shared history”, with Seamus Deane stating that it “import[s] memories of history into the theatre only to blur them, [...] defining itself through incongruity with both history and theatrical convention [...] to reshape [the audience’s] own relationship to history” (68, Deane qtd in Maley 57). Elmer Andrews describes it as an exposure

of “bogus language” in both “corrupt state authority” and “the traditional Nationalist mythology” (Andrews qtd in Maley 58). Indeed, *Freedom* takes a narrative instance, a “loosely linked series of events” that would plausibly have happened in that time period, weaponizes (and to an extent destroys) the audience’s suspension of disbelief in order to alienate them from an empathetic[al] response. The audience is forced to respond to their witnessing of a situation objectively, viewing the event and the performed media response in a way that they may not have responded to real-life historical events. Although set over one hundred and eighty years before the play’s publication, *Northern Star* similarly imposes alienation on its audience through use of Brechtian techniques, forcing reconciliation of our perceived beliefs between history and truth, performance and story.

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The Use of Documentary Poetics in the Works of Muriel Rukeyser and Gwendolyn Brooks.

Áine Feeney

Highly Recommended

My name is Áine Feeney and I am a final year English and History student. I wrote my essay about documentary poetics in the works of Muriel Rukeyser and Gwendolyn Brooks. I wrote this essay as part of my second year English seminar and was drawn to the topic because of an interest I took in the concept of documentary poetics. Interestingly, my research for this essay involved employing the skills of my second subject. As a student of history, I was fascinated by how documentary poetics could be used as an unconventional method of recording history in a way that a regular history book might ignore. The writing of history in its usual form is sterile and objective in nature. However, documentary poetics allows the feelings of the speaker to come through without changing the historical narrative. In doing so, it sheds the literary conventions of rhyme and meter and takes the form of a political tool in a poetic format. This is unbelievably moving to me because of how it gives a voice to bystanders of historical events who might otherwise be powerless while also remembering the victims of great tragedies throughout history. Outside of academic work, I'm a writer, reader, and self-confessed theatre kid. I really enjoy writing opinion pieces and articles and am fortunate to have had my work published in the UCC Express, Motley, and the F-Word Magazine.

Abstract: I undertook this piece of research as part of one of my English seminars on poetics and politics in American women's poetry. The particular title was of interest to me because of the

oftentimes unacknowledged power of poetry to document past events or tragedies, often inflicted upon certain marginalised groups. I began by forming my own understanding of the meaning of documentary poetics and the typical literary conventions attached to them. This facilitated a much easier close reading of the works of Muriel Rukeyser and Gwendolyn Brooks. From this close reading and consultation of various secondary sources, I concluded that documentary poetics are powerful political tools with multiple facets. They often take the format of a narrative recall and rarely employ poetic conventions such as rhyme or meter. Their true purpose is to allow for the victims of tragedy and injustice to be remembered while also giving a voice to those who witnessed these historical moments, even just as bystanders. Documentary poetics explores poetry that is directly linked to historical events and examines the moments that inspired the work. The Princeton Encyclopaedia of Poetry and Poetics describes documentary poetics as consisting of “[...] objective records of facts or events [that are used] to support, elaborate, or advance an often passionately held partisan position” (Cushman, 372). Documentary poetics is prevalent in the work of two American poets: Muriel Rukeyser and Gwendolyn Brooks. Rukeyser’s “The Book of the Dead” is a commentary on the 1930 Hawk’s Nest Tunnel disaster in which hundreds of workers died due to complications arising from poor working conditions in the tunnel. Meanwhile, Brook’s “Riot” is a collection of works about the 1968 Chicago riots and is a wider commentary on the Civil Rights Movement. In the works of both poets, the structure takes a narrative format which is told from the point of view of the individuals involved in and directly affected by the historical events that took place. In both cases, the reader is made bear witness to these events as they happened. By examining both the structure and content of these poems, I will explore the poets’ use of documentary poetics, the impact this has on the reception of their work, and the historical significance this has for the events that inspired them.

Rukeyser's "The Book of the Dead" exhibits documentary poetics, both in its content and structure. I intend to focus on the section of the poem that is subtitled "Absalom". This is the section that deals directly with the aftermath of the tunnel disaster. The speaker is a mother of three young men who worked in the tunnels, seeking justice on their behalf. The use of the first-person narrative is striking in this instance as the poem bears resemblance to a testimony being told in court. Indeed, when Rukeyser was researching the disaster, she collected a variety of primary documents including copies of court hearings and information from the investigation committee (Lobo, 79). Rukeyser's methods have been described as journalistic and "The Book of the Dead" has been criticised for being "too documentary, too poetic, too stridently anticapitalistic, and too cravenly procapitalist all at the same time" (Thurston 62). The testimony of this grieving mother is communicated through a combination of factual anecdotes and italicised emotional interludes. Rukeyser is prioritising the event itself as the stories of those effected are allocated more textual space. In this way, she is making the reader a witness. Rukeyser does not neglect the emotional aftermath of the tragedy as she "forfeits some of the possible advantages of journalism [...] in favour of some of the possible advantages of poetry" (Dayton, 225). In this way, Rukeyser is combining the impact of documentary with the potency of poetry. The speaker fluctuates between past and present tense. She speaks about how she "first discovered what was killing these men" while also referring to the present day struggles that have come about as a result of "this trouble" (Rukeyser, lines 1, 17). This technique is effective as Rukeyser roots the reader in the present but makes the historical context the central theme of the poem. In doing so, Rukeyser also places the speaker in a position of retrospection, as well as documentation. Dara Barnet describes this methodology as Rukeyser's attempt at "playing the ultimate poet-as-witness, poet-as-photographer" (103). The poem is punctuated with careful accuracy and there

are no rhyming schemes or set metres throughout. This creates a sense of simplicity and illustrates how the information that the speaker is giving is more important than the style and flair of its delivery. This is a reflection of how the poem “[confronts] the profound negativity of these deaths that appear to be without meaning” (Dayton, 225). Rather than searching for meaning or using these deaths as metaphors, Rukeyser is simply emphasising the scale of the loss that occurred. Ultimately, documentary poetics serves as a reminder of historical events without allowing literary conventions to diminish their significance.

The content of “The Book of the Dead: Absalom” also exhibits the use of documentary poetics. The primary way in which Rukeyser achieves the effect of documentary in this poem is through her use of concrete specific details. The speaker mentions names and ages of those affected, including her own sons “Cecil, aged 23, Owen, aged 21, [and] Shirley, aged 17” (Rukeyser, line 3). However, she also mentions the names of those involved in the lawsuit, the names of local doctors and hospitals, as well as nearby towns that were affected. Rukeyser is making the reader a witness in this instance as this serves as a reminder that there are real people behind the statistics which do not depict the magnitude of the tragedy in the same way. Essentially, Rukeyser encourages the reader to face the reality of history as she makes an “ideological effort to ‘reach beyond the self’ [and] [...] to serve as witness to [...] social injustices that others turn away from” (Barnat, 103). This reflects a key function of documentary poetics which is the confrontation of uncomfortable topics in their true form without neglecting the finer details. As Tim Dayton puts it, “inclusion of the ugly and unpleasant simply emerges from Rukeyser’s commitment to poetic Modernism” (225). Rukeyser also includes a number of direct quotations in this poem. The speaker recalls how on his deathbed, her son entrusted her with the task of seeking justice and finding out “if that dust killed [him]” (line 42). The inclusion of direct

speech in the poem adds to its testimonial nature. It can be argued that the entire poem is a sample of direct speech. The speaker, “a simple, stoic citizen” is the primary voice and “her diction is plain [...] and unsentimental” (Thurston, 79). In this way, Rukeyser “[speaks] to various audiences by speaking as them, in language marked as their own (Thurston, 69). The theme of witness is one that runs from beginning to end in “The Book of the Dead: Absalom”. The speaker identifies the reader as a witness, as well as “the whole valley” (line 62). This implies that the act of witnessing is not restricted to the living generation that were physically present. The aim of documentary poetics is to ensure that the past is not forgotten and Rukeyser achieves this by placing the reader in the same position as those who lived to see the tragedy unfold.

Another tenet of documentary poetics in this poem is the inherent call for action occurs after the testimonies have been shared. While the key function of the poem is to document the tragedy and make the reader a witness to the factual events that took place, Rukeyser also takes the opportunity to mobilise her readership to take collective action. The speaker is a mouthpiece for the injustice and neglect that took place as she vows that her son “shall not be diminished, never” (line 77). These final lines are effective because they allude to the pursuit of justice without taking away from the poem’s primary objective of documentary. In the midst of documenting this historical tragedy, Rukeyser “[showcases] and [praises] the political achievements that are possible through the action and will of the people” (Lobo, 96). The focus of this poem is the effect of the disaster on the everyday citizen. Likewise, the solution lies with the citizen. Throughout the poem, there is no great intervention by a higher power or political authorities. Instead, the action is taken by one mother on behalf of her children as she “[hitchhikes] eighteen miles” and carefully rations her income to feed her family and livestock (line 63). Rukeyser emphasises the hardships endured by the individual when social injustice goes unnoticed by the majority. Indeed,

“The Book of the Dead” incorporates various elements of documentary poetics to elucidate the aftermath of the tragedy as well as the general struggle of the working class to pursue justice.

Features of documentary poetics are also prevalent in Gwendolyn Brooks’ *Riot*, a poem in three parts which chronicles the 1968 Chicago Riots. Like Rukeyser’s “The Book of the Dead,” *Riot* documents a historical event and makes the reader a witness to what happened. In the first section of the poem, entitled “Riot”, the speaker mocks “the white, prosperous, highly cultured [...] and liberal John Cabot” (Sullivan, 562). The poem is told from his point of view, a key feature of documentary poetics. However, there is a clear satirical undertone, particularly in places where Brooks includes quotations of his plea to God not to let “the blackness” touch him (9). Cabot is not the speaker of this poem and subsequently the reader gains more of an insight into his downfall. The riot is personified and speaks on behalf of its participants, condemning Cabot as “a desperate man [who will] die expensively today”. Not only does the reader learn of Cabot’s fate but also of the power of the oppressed. James Sullivan describes Brooks’ technique as an attempt to portray a “white point of view [by a] black speaker unsympathetic with it” (562). This arguably creates a more realistic impression of the events that occurred as they are not tainted by white self-righteousness as “even as the rioters take him down, [John Cabot] sees himself as a Christly sacrifice, blessing his executioners” (Sullivan, 562). There a stark difference between Rukeyser and Brooks’ work. While Rukeyser’s poetry takes documentary poetics seriously with the inclusion of purely factual information, Brooks takes artistic license by placing a 15th century explorer in a poem about riots of the 20th century. John Cabot was an Italian explorer who discovered the New England coast on behalf of the English government (Cabot, 712). By placing him in a 20th century context, Brooks is “[connecting] the 1968 riots to the violence aimed at African Americans since their arrival in the Americas in the sixteenth century” (Debo, 144). In

this way, the effect of documentary poetics in *Riot* is unique as it forfeits the testimonial tone of “The Book of the Dead” in favour of a more artistic style that still fulfils its purpose of making the reader a witness.

The second section of *Riot* entitled “The Third Sermon on the Warpland” continues the theme of violence. Like “Riot” it focuses explicitly on rioting itself and once again, the speaker is a participant. The structure of this section is much more fragmented than the previous one as it is scattered across several pages, leaving large empty gaps on the pages. This illustrates Brooks’ attempt to emulate “precisely what [...] a riot is – local, chaotic, explosive [and] fragmentary” (Debo, 150). She explains how “a clean riot is not one in which little rioters long-stomped, long-straddled [...] go steal in hell [...] and sun themselves in Sin” (14). This is an example of documentary poetics at work as Brooks reveals the realities of rioting and social injustice “with no transitions, no warnings, and no explanations” (Debo, 150). As well as reflecting the overarching theme of violence in *Riot*, “The Third Sermon on the Warpland” is a frank discussion of death. Brooks makes simple statements such as “a woman is dead” and “nine die” (16-17). In this way, Brooks “does not flinch at the most tragic fact of the riot” (Sullivan, 565). While Brooks is documenting the riots, she does not pass judgment on them. It can be argued that this is a part of the documentary poetics in her work. She does not reject the violence but simply accepts it as “a necessary part of the Civil Rights movement” (Debo, 149). “The Third Sermon on the Warpland” contains a call for action amongst the chaos of the riot as the speaker vows “it’s time to help these people” (19). Similar to “The Book of the Dead,” this call for action is subtle and does not overshadow the aim of the poem as a documentary. Brooks does not explicitly accept the violence either although the fact that she avoids condemnation suggests that she supports the continuation of the violence to “demand immediate social change” (Debo, 149). Annette Debo

has likened Brooks to Malcolm X, as the violence documented in *Riot* “creates tangible political and personal gains” (149). Nevertheless, “The Third Sermon on the Warpland” clearly documents the reality of rioting during the Civil Rights Movement and places the reader in a witness position as the speaker chronicles the violence that ensued as a result of social injustice.

The final part of *Riot* is entitled “An Aspect of Love Alive in the Ice and Fire” and unlike the preceding parts, it documents a different aspect of the riots: the sense of solidarity. The title itself illustrates this as the focus is shifted away from “the ice and fire” of the riots towards the sense of unity and “love alive” at the centre of the Civil Rights Movement. The “ice and fire” motif that Brooks uses to symbolise the riots is an interesting one that links to the other sections of the poem. She perceives the rioters as “the phoenix, consuming themselves in the fires of riot” (Furman, 7). Not only does the reader bear witness to the violence of the riots, they are also made aware of the unequal fight between the rioters and the system that oppresses them. The system has the advantage over its oppressed people, much like fire has the advantage over ice. In one sense, the human race as a whole bears witness to these riots as “the world is at the window [and they] cannot wonder long” (Brooks, 21). There is also a drastic shift of tone in this final section. When examined on its own, it does not appear to document the same events and subject matter as the other pieces. However, the cumulative impact of all three sections of *Riot* symbolises how the act of rioting is “full of individualised experiences [presented as] a collage” (Sullivan, 564). In this way, Brooks illustrates how in the midst of the violence, “there is a moment in Camaraderie” (22). As well as documenting the historical events, Brooks also reveals the feelings and personal experiences of the participants. As such, the impersonal aspect of documentary poetics in this poem fuses with the personal address to the participants. Brooks described *Riot* as “an effort at communication with a lot of people” and although she believed she only succeeded in “patches,”

the aspect of documentation is extremely prevalent in this section (Debo, 150). Brooks addresses the rioters directly, using “you” and “us” pronouns. Subsequently, she identifies her own place within the community. There is a tone of empowerment in this section of the poem as Brooks encourages the rioters in their “direct and respectable stride” (21). By speaking directly to the participants, Brooks addresses the perception of the 1968 riots “as an outrageous explosion” rather than “a reflection of white mob violence” (Debo, 144). Subsequently, she documents the real truth of the riots and attempts to disprove the myths of their origins. Albeit in a contrasting tone to its preceding parts, “An Aspect of Love Alive in the Ice and Fire” is a powerful conclusion to Brooks three-pronged sermon exposing the reality of the Chicago Riots.

Ultimately, both Muriel Rukeyser and Gwendolyn Brooks employ features of documentary poetics in their respective works. As a result, the act of witnessing the historical events that inspired them is not just limited to those who were present at the time. By enshrining documentary poetics into their work, they ensure that future generations bear witness to the events that shaped history and remember the people who may have been forgotten in the meantime. Rukeyser’s “The Book of the Dead” is an example of documentary poetics in its most literal sense as it reads like a court testimony or the transcript of an interview of a real person that witnessed a tragic event. By placing the speaker in the position of a direct witness and including several names of those involved, Rukeyser achieves the desired effect of documenting and preserving the facts of the incident, as well as the scale of the loss that occurred. Likewise, Brooks’ *Riot* gives a voice to the rioters and combines their shared experiences to effectively portray the realities of fighting against social injustice. By making violence the centrepiece of *Riot*, Brooks leaves no room for misinterpretation as the reader is forced to witness the brutality of the riots, as well as the sense of solidarity felt by the participants, even in the midst of the chaos. Referring back to

the Princeton Encyclopaedia of Poetry and Poetics, the work of Rukeyser and Brooks accurately fits the description of documentary poetics. As per the definition, documentary poetics “engages both the empirical world in which we live and the political or ethical ideals through which we navigate that world” (Cushman, 372). By combining the artistry of poetics with the didactic impact of documentary, these poets succeed in placing the reader in the position of witnessing these events and the effect they had those who experienced them.

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‘I Believe She Dreamed Too Much’: Joanne Kyger’s Depiction of Mythical Female Experience.

Mia Power

Highly Recommended

My name is Mia Tobin Power and I’m a final-year BA English student. I discovered Joanne Kyger’s poetry in a seminar about the Beat Generation last year, and I immediately fell in love with it. I’m fascinated by how she retells Greek myths by giving the female characters a voice and by bringing her own perspective to the stories. I loved getting the chance to go deep into her work and understand it more fully through writing this essay, and I hope that anyone who reads it will love her poetry as much as I do! Outside of writing about Kyger, I enjoy watching films and TV shows and writing about them too (including for my dissertation), as well as walking and listening to podcasts.

Abstract: The female writers of the Beat Generation are often overlooked in favour of their male counterparts. In her poetry collection *The Tapestry and the Web*, Joanne Kyger applies her own experiences of being dismissed and neglected to fictional women who have experienced the same: namely, Penelope and Circe from Homer’s *Odyssey*. She reclaims these women who have been objectified and demonised throughout history and retells their stories from their perspectives, and from her own, as the female poet and speaker of these stories. This essay explores how Kyger combines the past and present of female experience through her reinvention of sections of the *Odyssey*, by examining her multi-dimensional portrayal of Penelope and her use of motifs and contrast to tell stories which are

both personal and universal. It then investigates how Kyger reimagines Penelope's story and character to give her greater agency and subjectivity.

According to Ken Dowden, "Greek mythology is by and large a man's mythology, describing a world from a man's point of view" (qtd. in Encarnación-Pinedo 25). As one of the only female writers within the inner circle of Beat poets such as Allen Ginsberg, Joanne Kyger was well-versed in the world of male writing, storytelling, and mythology. Kyger herself has described her position as one of the only women in this men's world:

I resisted the Beat label during the time I was associated with the Beat writers because they never considered me a Beat writer. [...] they never said, "Oh, you're one of us," ever! (qtd. in Grace 87-88)

This experience of being on the outside looking in echoes the experience of any woman reading Greek mythology, or any text wherein women are written by men merely as a one dimensional archetype – the good wife, the seductive and vindictive enchantress. Since the world of Greek mythology is not made for her or the fictional women trapped inside it, in her 1965 poetry collection *The Tapestry and the Web*, Kyger creates an alternative narrative with women at the centre. Kyger explains that she "didn't think of rewriting or parodying *The Odyssey*, but more of entering the story and seeing what applied to me, my life, seeing what fit" (qtd. in Grace 90). Therefore, her mythical poetry can be viewed as a palimpsest – she puts her own experiences as a woman over the existing myths and creates something new. She revises and reimagines sequences and scenarios from Homer's *Odyssey* with a focus on some of its female characters, namely Penelope and Circe. These characters and their stories are reshaped using the poet's own

thoughts and experiences, resulting in an undeniably personal reinvention of the supposedly objective and universal myths. Thus, through her revised mythical tales, Kyger portrays, tells, and reinvents female experience through her characterisation of Penelope and Circe, and her own presence as the female speaker in these women's stories.

In Kyger's poem "waiting again", she writes, "I am no picker from the sea of its riches / I watch the weaving" (3-4). Thus, she sets the tone for her mythical poetry: she is not interested in the sea – Odysseus' world; she is more interested in the domestic realm where Penelope resides as she waits for Odysseus to return. Kyger's deep interest in Penelope and her world manifests itself in a nuanced and complex depiction of this character, which she uses to portray a truth about the female experience as a whole: no woman is a stereotypical, one-dimensional being, no matter what the myths may lead us to believe. In the *Odyssey*, Penelope is merely Odysseus' loyal wife who waits patiently for his return. As a result, most artistic depictions of Penelope show her "sitting down to symbolize her waiting, and crossed legged to suggest her sexual inactivity in the absence of her husband" (Encarnación-Pinedo 27). Kyger, however, creates several differing images of who Penelope is as a person, outside of Odysseus. In "April 23. Possibilities IV" from her "Odyssey Poems" section of *The Tapestry and the Web*, Kyger draws a sharp contrast between her Penelope and the traditional conception of her as the loving and faithful wife: "Still after 15 years or more she doesn't know / and may go off with the likeliest and most generous suitor" (1-2). Penelope is at the centre of the narrative here: Kyger foregrounds her desires, rather than any necessity to remain loyal to Odysseus. This version of Penelope is indifferent and seemingly impulsive. She does not particularly care for any of the suitors, but she will follow any desires that may arise within her. Later in the poem, Kyger writes that "[s]he never refuses or accepts / stands against a pillar of the house, / watching and planning" (6-8). This Penelope is strategic

and cunning, and looks out for her own best interests. She has the agency in this situation – she is in control, and takes her time to make the decision that is best for her. The ‘possibilities’ of the poem’s title are crucial to this particular characterisation of Penelope. In contrast to her repressed role in Homer’s myth, this Penelope has a relatively wide degree of freedom, at least when it comes to her dealings with her suitors.

Penelope’s characterisation in “IV” contrasts with that of “VI”, another “Odyssey Poem”. This poem is set after Odysseus’ return, and Penelope’s new life and freedom have been upended. Kyger’s depiction of Penelope is immediately different to that of “IV”; she writes, “Not a new marriage as some might have thought / 12 ladies were hung by the neck. / as usual Penelope slept through all this” (11-13). Although she is still looking out for herself, as she did in “IV”, the context has changed, and she now appears ignorant and selfish. However, Kyger encourages the reader to consider why Penelope seems like a different person in this poem. Odysseus has returned, and the balance of power in the household has shifted. When Odysseus tells Penelope, “up to your room now to wait a while”, “she does what he says” (17-18). Penelope’s agency has been stripped from her now that her husband is home. She is no longer in control of any situation. Considering this loss of agency and control, it is now clear why, elsewhere in the collection, Penelope hopes that a boat will have “gone astray / and flung itself upon the shore / for all to watch”, so that she can safely express her desire for her husband’s downfall (“The Maze”, 21-23). Through this subversion of expectations, Kyger builds a complex portrait of Penelope as a woman at the mercy of her environment.

In her poem “The Maze”, Kyger adds another, more violent dimension to Penelope. While Odysseus is held prisoner in a cave, “sobb[ing] for his wife”, Penelope is free and unconcerned (63). Later, Kyger compares Penelope to an impassioned and violent spider:

She
tortures
the curtains of the window
shreds them
like some
insane insect
creates a
demented web (79-86).

The use of the words “tortures”, “shreds”, “insane”, and “demented” create an image of Penelope as sadistic, an agent of chaos and violence (80; 82; 84; 86). Kyger shocks the reader by juxtaposing weaving, an activity traditionally associated with women in the home, with this violent and extreme language. It is not Odysseus, travelling and fighting monsters, who is capable of violence and cruelty – it is the woman expected to stay at home, quiet and passive. Thus, Kyger adds another layer to her Penelope, the famous female character whose rewriting allows her to represent many types of women. Throughout *The Tapestry and the Web*, “[t]he shifting representation of Penelope offers a multi-faceted character” (Manwell 63). Penelope may see herself as “a flat dimension character of beauty”, but Kyger does not (“12.29 & 30 (Pan as the son of Penelope)” 14). She creates a character who is alternatively clever and scheming, repressed and passive, and violent and aggressive. Her multi-dimensional depiction of Penelope is ever-changing, an apt device to portray the complexities of women as individuals and the female experience.

Throughout *The Tapestry and the Web*, Kyger’s poetry appears scattered across the page like a “weaving” or a “tapestry” (Kyger, qtd. in Grace 90). By creating her own tapestry, Kyger places herself within a female tradition that goes back centuries, evoking a sense of enduring

female experience and solidarity that echoes through the past to the present. Using this tapestry effect also creates a parallel between the poet herself and her character, Penelope. Kyger uses the motif of Penelope's weaving to tell the reader about female creativity and escapism through art. The device of weaving is crucial to "12.29 & 30 (Pan as the son of Penelope)", wherein Penelope is trapped inside her home, under siege from her suitors. Kyger describes her as "[f]alling into her weaving", creating an image of Penelope passing from one world into another through her art, her weaving (12). Kyger also describes Penelope concentrating solely on her art in the hopes of distracting herself from the threat looming outside the door: "keeping one task in mind and letting nothing *Human* touch her" (15; original emphasis). Her weaving is an escape for Penelope from her fears and obligations, which are associated with the suitors. Kyger's phrase, "letting nothing *Human* touch her" is reminiscent of an earlier section of the poem, wherein the poet wonders who Pan's father is if Penelope is his mother, and decides that it must be one of the suitors; she writes, "I notice Someone got to her" (15; 4). Thus, later in the poem, Penelope's weaving becomes a refuge from the threatening and intimidating presence of her male suitors, and her escape into her art therefore becomes a distinctly female experience. This depiction of art as a refuge is continued by Kyger through her assertion that "[s]he knew what she was doing. / OUTSIDE / of that he grabbed her" (17-19). In the world that she has created through her art, Penelope is in control, she can protect herself. The outside world, the realm typically gendered male, is dangerous to her; as a desired woman, she is not safe out in the men's world, the world of her suitors. The frightening image of the world outside Penelope's home and her weaving is amplified by Kyger's use of the word "grabbed", which suggests aggression and a violent possessiveness (19). This is an escalation from her use of the word "touch" in a similar context earlier in the poem, and therefore serves to intensify Penelope's fear and apprehension towards

the outside world and justify the creation of an escapist fantasy through her art (15). In Kyger's poem, "Penelope's artistry...becomes the medium through which she exemplifies...the oppression she is suffering" (Encarnación-Pinedo 29). Her escape into her weaving, her art, is her way of expressing how threatened she feels by the outside world of men, and her suitors in particular. By associating Penelope's artistic refuge with the hostile presence of her suitors, Kyger tells the reader about women's experience of feelings of unsafety around men, and about female creativity as a coping mechanism and healing tool.

In her poem "The Pigs for Circe in May", Kyger uses contrast to tell the story of two differing female experiences. The poem begins with images from the poet's own domestic life, evoked by several references to food. Kyger creates a jarring, uncomfortable rhythm and sense of chaos in this first section of the poem through her numerous repetitions of the word "and" (1; 5-7; 9-10). The unexpected capitalisation of the word "Where" in the opening line immediately shocks the reader and establishes this chaotic, confusing world (1). Her simple, isolated statement, "This is known as camping in Yosemite", normalises this sense of chaos and anxiety, giving the reader a clear picture of what the poet's domestic life is like (12). Kyger's transition from the world of the poet into that of Circe is similarly confusing – she writes:

Already I wish there was something done.
Odysseus found a stag on his way to the ship
I think of people *sighing* over poetry, *using it*, I
don't know what it's for (13-16; original emphasis).

Circe's life begins to collide with the poet's: a reference to Odysseus is placed between the poet's own ruminations. Thus, a relationship is created between Circe and the poet – the poet sees Circe as a part of her life. Kyger's description of Circe's life is relatively calm in comparison with that

of her own life. Although she continues to use the tapestry effect, the depiction of events in Circe's world contains more punctuation than that of the poet's world, and thus those sections flow more smoothly, for example:

And when the time came, she did right
Let them go
They couldn't see her when she came back
from the ship, seating themselves and wept, the wind
took them directly north (26-30).

Kyger creates a contrast between the rhythm used for stories from her own life and the rhythm used for Circe's life, thus creating a contrast between the two women themselves and their experiences of the world.

Kyger also contrasts herself with Circe through her parallel images of domesticity. As mentioned above, the poem opens with images of domesticity created by food. In these images, however, food, and thus domestic life, is associated with stress and anxiety. The poem begins with the lines, "I almost ruined the stew and Where / is my peanut butter sandwich" (1-2). The use of personal pronouns is important here; the poet's use of 'I' and 'my' establish her alone as being responsible for keeping her and her partner's domestic life afloat. Thus, from the first few lines of the poem, it is clear that the poet is struggling with the burden of domesticity. Circe, however, is thriving. Kyger presents Circe as the perfect hostess:

She is busy at the center, planning out great
stories to amuse herself, and a lot of pets,
a neat household, gracious

honey and wine

She offers (51-55).

Again, the use of punctuation creates a smooth, flowing rhythm, conveying that Circe does not view her domestic obligations as a curse, as the poet does. For Circe, domesticity is a power; it is a tool she can use to gain the trust of Odysseus and his men before ultimately turning them into pigs. By comparing and contrasting herself to her character Circe, Kyger tells a broader truth about the female experience in relation to domesticity.

In *The Tapestry and the Web*, Kyger engages in acts of revision, “of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering a text from a new critical direction” (Rich 18). Throughout this collection, Kyger looks back at the existing myths from a new direction, with the intention of re-imagining the *Odyssey*’s female characters and giving them greater interiority and more complex and authentic characterisation. Her own form of reinvention is largely defined by her own presence as the speaker in her poems. Although myths, by the nature of their inclusion in the literary canon, can be seen as objective and universal, Kyger’s acts of revision are deeply personal to her, by virtue of her use of ‘I’ in many of her poems. As a result, the lines between the objective speaker and the character she is speaking about begin to blur. The personal nature of Kyger’s interpretation of her characters is established early in “12.29 & 30”, wherein she writes, “I believe she dreamed too much” (12). With the words, “I believe”, Kyger demonstrates that her construction of Penelope as a character is heavily influenced by Kyger’s own experiences and impressions of Penelope from the myth (12). She is not trying to be unbiased or objective; she is embracing the fact that her reinvention of Homer’s *Odyssey* will be inevitably coloured by her own beliefs and experiences. In “IV”, Kyger gives the reader an insight into her reinvention process, when she asks herself about Penelope, “But what’s on her mind?” (5). This sums up what Kyger is trying to achieve

with her rewriting of the myths – she wants to find out what these women are thinking, to give them the interiority they originally lacked. This aside also highlights her own presence as the speaker in the poem. Kyger supposedly “saw myth as a way to remain faithful to Jack Spicer’s admonishment to keep oneself ‘out of the poem’”, but as seen in “12.29 & 30” and “IV”, this does not end up being the case in *The Tapestry and the Web* (Manwell 57). As the poet, Kyger is inevitably within the poem, but she embraces this, and emphasises her presence as the female poet and speaker through her own interjections into the narrative of her poems. Furthermore, as the female speaker, she reinvents Homer’s myths from a distinctly female perspective; therefore, her poems about Penelope and Circe are more truthful to the female experience.

The embedding of Kyger’s own female perspective and experiences into her revisionist poetry also manifests itself in her reinvention of the myths to give Penelope greater subjectivity and agency. At the time Kyger was writing:

Subjectivity was not an outcome intended for women, who, by both mainstream and Beat notions of gender, were regarded as ineligible for it by virtue of their presumed—and naturalized—inferiority, their essentialized condition as objects (Johnson 20).

In this instance, once again, the experience of the poet parallels that of her character. Women such as Kyger had to fight for their subjectivity, their right to be the subject rather than the object. She thus transposes her own experience as a woman, and a female artist, onto Penelope. In contrast to her position in the *Odyssey* as an object, the loyal and patient wife, Penelope is at the centre of Kyger’s mythical reinventions, as the subject. This is exemplified by “The Maze”, most of which is told through Penelope’s first-person perspective, for example:

my hair was bound
against the fish in the air
who begged for the ocean
I longed for their place (6-9).

With Penelope as the subject rather than the object, Kyger reinvents Homer's myths and places a woman's experience of the world at the centre.

Kyger also reinvents the *Odyssey* by giving her version of Penelope greater agency. This form of revision is intertwined with the poet's own presence as the female narrator in her poetry; her reimaginings of Penelope's actions are accompanied by the pronoun 'I'. In "12.29 & 30", Kyger presents her own memory of Odysseus' return in the *Odyssey*: "She did not run up and embrace him as I recall. / He came upon her at the house" (22-23). Kyger's Penelope exercises her agency by remaining where she is and refusing to meet Odysseus – she forces him to meet her where she is, to reunite with her on her own terms. This greatly shifts the power balance in the relationship between Penelope and Odysseus. Later in the poem, Kyger explicitly presents one of her descriptions as reinvention: "I choose to think of her waiting for him / concocting his adventures" (24-25; original emphasis). Kyger wants to see Penelope as a woman with agency; therefore, she reimagines her as the puppet master of Odysseus' fate. She is not waiting patiently at home; she is dictating every step of his journey. Kyger emphasises that Penelope is in control by describing her as "bringing / the misfortunes to him" (25-26). Again, this changes the power dynamics in their marriage; Penelope chooses to make Odysseus suffer, because she can – she has agency as well as him. Kyger thus reinvents female experience by imagining what Penelope might have done, had she been given agency in the original myth.

Joanne Kyger's *The Tapestry and the Web* can be viewed as an attempt to rewrite Homer's *Odyssey*, using its tools to create a more authentic representation of female experience. Through her changing and multi-dimensional depiction of Penelope, she portrays the complex nature of women as people and of their experiences. She uses the motif of Penelope's weaving to tell the truth of women's relationships to men and creativity. She uses contrast to evoke the differences between individual women, which she explores through her characters' relationships to domesticity. She revises Homer's myths by retelling them from a distinctly female perspective, and ultimately reinvents these centuries-old mythical female characters. Manwell writes that "second-wave feminists...saw female mythic figures as powerful examples through which to articulate female oppression and resistance", which Kyger achieves in her mythical poetry (58). Her female characters' experience oppression both within their stories and from their original creator, but both they and Kyger resist their relegation to a one-dimensional, passive archetype.

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An Analysis of Jennifer Johnston's *Shadows on Our Skin*, with a Specific Focus on the Representation of Women.

Ciara O'Brien

Highly Recommended

My name is Ciara O' Brien and I am a final year Arts student studying English and History. I wrote this essay for the Northern Irish Literature and the Troubles English Seminar in second year. I chose this topic as I am specifically interested in how women are represented in Irish literature and how conflict disrupts the everyday life of the domestic space and intervenes in the idealistic image of motherhood. Outside of working on my degree you will probably find me going for walks with my dog, listening to music, or fuelling my book buying habits. Once I finish my degree I hope to travel and pursue a Masters in Library and Information Studies.

Within Jennifer Johnston's *Shadows on our Skin*, the representation of women is a central aspect of the text. The representation of female characters has often been portrayed through a patriarchal lens that places emphasis on the idealised vision of women as subordinate creatures, mythical figures, and as love interests or victims, within Irish nationalist literary tradition (Wilson 291). However, Johnston does not limit herself to these natural stereotypes and gender norms. Instead, she challenges these ideals by focusing on the influence that the two main female characters, Mrs. Logan and Kathleen Doherty have on Joe Logan, the main character. Johnston effectively utilises literary devices, imagery, and symbolism to subvert expectations and explore the complexities of

the roles and responsibilities of women during the Troubles. This essay analyses how Johnston incorporates the representation of women into *Shadows on our Skin* and whether she effectively explores the feminine aspects of the Troubles. It will do this by first looking at Mrs. Logan and Kathleen Doherty and their relationship with Joe. It will then examine the symbolism of the two characters and their connection to Mother Ireland and Cathleen Ni Houlihan. Finally, it will analyse the disruption of the domestic space and the downfall of Joe's idealisation of Kathleen.

Johnston effectively explores the representation of women through Mrs. Logan and her relationship with Joe. It becomes evident throughout the text that Mrs. Logan is incredibly protective of her son: "she always wanted to know where he was going, who he was with, every moment of his time had to be accounted for" (87). Even when he was younger, she always wanted him by her side, as what he believes was a sort of protection against his ill father and his constant needs. By keeping Joe from the outside world, Mrs. Logan is attempting to shelter her son from the external dangers of the Troubles and using him as a shield to protect herself within the home. Johnston presents Mrs. Logan as the overbearing mother figure who is very conscious of the brutal and tragic reality of the conflict and the danger it poses to her Catholic family. Her overbearing nature stems from her instinct to protect Joe from the physical threat of 'stray bullets' and from the violent world of nationalism that her eldest son, Brendan, has become entrapped by (11). She is a passive force that shows empathy towards both sides of the conflict. She understands that the Troubles has created a world where even children can become victims of violent conflict, either by being directly involved or just by being in the wrong place at the wrong time. However, her overprotective nature also negatively affects her relationship with her son: "Joe was glad to be leaving the house [...] He always tried to keep out of her way" (87). In attempting to keep him as close to her as possible, she has instead forged a

division between them. Joe often feels ignored and pushed aside by his mother. While he should feel comfortable talking about his interests, such as his poetry, and what he does during the day, he is usually met with 'silence' and indifference', as his mother is often too caught up with her own personal war to listen to him (41). This leads to him keeping his friendship with the schoolteacher from his mother, as he now has someone else to confide in. Although Mrs. Logan does try to connect with her son, she is overloaded with other responsibilities, such as her obligations as the head matriarch of the household and as a carer to her ailing husband, which conflict with her maternal duties. This prevents her from being the stable and comforting force that Joe seeks. While Johnston presents Mrs. Logan as the mother figure, the constraints on their relationship lead Joe to seek maternal comfort elsewhere.

Kathleen Doherty is another female character that plays a crucial role within the text. Unlike Mrs. Logan, Kathleen is open and willing to give Joe the attention he seeks: "she bent slightly towards him so that she could catch every word he spoke, as if it were important. He liked that. She had a good listening face" (91). While they start out as two strangers sitting on a wall, they eventually form a strong friendship in a space that is removed from the 'searching, judging eyes of their own communities' (Donovan 44). Kathleen acts as a guiding light in Joe's stagnant and confined world that represents the warmth and stability that he has always wanted, and, in return, he provides her with an escape from her isolated life. There is a mutual trust between them that allows their relationship to flourish, which creates an outlet for Joe to outwardly express his inner thoughts and emotions. He even feels comfortable talking about his poetry with her. Joe's mother is unable to provide Joe with a safe haven, as the quarrelling with her husband and her inability to listen to Joe, quickly breaks any illusion of security within their home. However, when Kathleen invites him over to her house, even the action of pulling "the curtains tight together"

gives Joe the impression that she is capable of 'keeping safety in' (56). This comforting gesture acts as an antithetical foil to his hapless home life and draws him further towards his companionship with Kathleen. The longer he can keep her separate from the rest of his life, the longer she can continue to represent that safety he sees within her. The sacred bond they have with each other is encapsulated in their trip to Grianan: "She was talking. The vibrations of her voice reached into his mind, but not the words" (96). Without anyone else around to interject in the solitary countryside, they are free to discover the many philosophical wonderings and instinctive similarities that they share, which only serves to deepen their rapport. Although she is dealing with much inner turmoil, such as the death of her parents and her other 'commitment', Joe only sees her as a good person that he would happily keep to himself for all eternity (56). Johnston's portrayal of Kathleen as a companion and creative outlet for Joe provides an alternative approach to the harsh and isolating reality of the Troubles. However, once this isolated companionship is broken by Brendan, Joe is forced to discover that Kathleen is a far more complicated woman than he let himself believe.

Johnston also utilises symbolism to define her female characters and give the reader a better insight into their motivations and vulnerabilities. This symbolism can be found in Mrs. Logan and her connection to Mother Ireland. Within Irish literature, the mother figure represents the nation, the struggle for independence, and the intertwined concepts of nationalism and patriotism. According to Gerry Kearns, the personification of 'Ireland as female' is a "native tradition" that only serves to play into the idealisation of female oppression and a generalisation of their "distinctive needs" (443). It also further emphasises the exploitation of women's bodies as propaganda tools to express political anxieties and pro-militarist messages. It does this through Mother Ireland, a nationalist symbol that mourns her fallen sons, but celebrates their blood

sacrifices for the end goal of victory for the nation, which helps spread patriotism and glorifies involvement in violent conflict (O'Toole 88). Within her work, Johnston utilises Mrs. Logan, as the maternal figure, to subvert Mother Ireland's nationalist ideas. The violence within her nation has already destroyed the stability of her home life. She has had to send her eldest son, Brendan, off to England, in the hopes of keeping him safe: "I don't want him coming back here [...] He's out of trouble" (13). She believes that she is protecting Brendan by keeping him away from the 'Provos' and from his pro-nationalist father, whose romanticised tales of his glory days could potentially spur him on to carry on 'where he left off' (202). Mrs. Logan is resentful of her husband's talk of fairy tales and heroes: "I've learned a bit of sense. I see only sadness. So much for the heroes" (71). Unlike Mr. Logan, she does not ignore the injustices of war that lead to tragedy and death. She recognises that many of the soldiers are just 'children', some of them even 'younger than Brendan', and refuses to separate her humanity from the tragedy and loss that is happening outside of her home (170). To her, there is no side more worthy of death or victory, there are only victims of the tragic conflict. Joe's mother acknowledges the true reality of the Troubles and attempts to prevent Brendan from becoming wrapped up in the conflict by refusing to be a mouthpiece for nationalist rhetoric. Johnston represents Mrs. Logan as a rejection of Mother Ireland, which challenges the ideology that exploits women's bodies as propaganda tools and instead places emphasis on their distinctive needs and desires. Through Mrs. Logan, the reader acquires a better understanding of the complex actions and emotions of women during times of conflict.

Another incarnation of Mother Ireland is Cathleen Ni Houlihan, a symbolic emblem for Irish nationalists. It is yet another example of nationalist rhetoric utilising women's voices as a call for men to sacrifice themselves for their nation. According to John A. Byers, Cathleen "mourns

for the loss of her four green fields” and symbolises an Ireland that grieves over the “British control of her race” (40). However, through Kathleen Doherty, Johnston effectively shifts away from traditional concepts of ‘gendered and nationalist identity’ and challenges the ‘mythological and essentialist’ portrayal of women that allows them to be taken advantage of (Fulford 130). Kathleen sympathises with the soldiers on both sides of the conflict: “He’s a kid. Something like that... Do you think he knows what he’s doing here?” (93). Similar to Mrs. Logan, Kathleen dislikes the violence and only sees it ending in “tragedy” (93). Despite this, Kathleen still finds herself forging a relationship with Joe’s brother: “He’s in a great state of confusion. That always appeals to me” (196). She is aware of his militaristic and nationalist tendencies; however, she continues to pursue a relationship with him. Eventually, Kathleen’s influence begins to take a hold of Brendan and he begins to reevaluate his life choices and his connections to the Irish Republican Army (IRA): “She listened. I’ve never met a girl like her before” (203). Their newfound relationship has allowed him to see himself as negatively altered by the ideology of violent nationalism. Although the traditional Cathleen figure acts as a provocation to engage in violence, Johnston’s Kathleen becomes a vessel of motivation to leave the violence and conflict of the Troubles behind. Brendan truly believes that they can start a new life together in England. However, Kathleen also neglects to tell Brendan about her engagement to Fred Burgess, a Protestant soldier stationed in Germany. Her indecisive nature leads her to detach herself from urgent and potentially dangerous situations. Once the truth comes to light, due to Joe accidentally revealing Kathleen’s secret fiancé to Brendan, he once again becomes consumed by the IRA. Although she did not intentionally set out to hurt him, Brendan has once again set his sights on the ideology of Cathleen Ni Houlihan. Kathleen’s power over him, which once acted as a guiding force that cleared his mind and set him on a more peaceful path, has now solidified his involvement in “the movement” (69). Through Kathleen, Johnston has exhibited

how even when women attempt to take back control of the narrative, it can still have negative consequences, due to their own mistakes and the patriarchal influence that twists their words and intentions.

Another way in which Johnston represents women is through her examination of the home as a female sphere. Mrs. Logan is inexplicably tied to the domestic space, through her role as head of the household: "Someone has to keep the home together" (53). She ensures its upkeep by working in a café four times a week and by routinely cleaning it "down from top to bottom" every Saturday (87). The domestic space has traditionally granted power to women and acted as a safe haven from destructive outside forces, such as the violence of the Troubles (Reisman 64). Mr. Logan acts as the decaying patriarchal presence within the home that disrupts the stability of the female space. Mr. Logan often degrades his wife and blames her for his sickness: "your mother has me destroyed with her tongue" (21). He has broken her down to a "hard woman", whose neutral stance on the conflict has twisted her role as the mother into the hostile enemy, instead of the warm presence she is meant to be (71). Joe struggles to maintain the illusion of "the perfect family" (69). However, the bitterness and hatred that has seeped into the domestic space due to their "quarrelling" has "stripped" him of his warmth and created a personal war within the confines of the home that is 'inescapable' (27). The female sphere is further disrupted by the return of Brendan, as it gives power to his father's political ideology. His romanticised notions of Irish freedom can be passed onto his son. Mrs. Logan's attempts to intervene are futile, as his patriarchal control corrupts his son's future and fulfils his own unsatisfied wishes and fantasies. He takes advantage of any opportunity to further distance Brendan from his mother and her feminine influence: "I'm with you son, I'm with you" (70). Just like the debilitating sickness that has destroyed his life, his patriarchal presence has infected the domestic space, disrupting the lives of his family and their

freedom. Johnston puts emphasis on the destruction of the female space through the imagery of Mrs. Logan's hands: "the swollen joints, the scraped look of the skin, the white flecks on her ridged nails" (170). The descriptive imagery represents the wearing down of the domestic space and Mrs. Logan's influence over it. Her hands are a metaphor for how she has been physically and emotionally eroded due to her husband's passionate ranting and his constant belittling of her role in supporting her family. Johnston has effectively portrayed how patriarchal influence can wear away at feminine power within the domestic space, causing an irreversible shift in the balance of power.

Finally, Johnston's breakdown of the dangers of the idealisation of women is also factored into her representation of women. Joe has idealised Kathleen as his perfect companion: "She's my private life, my friend, my person" (86). Her loneliness allows Joe to project his isolation onto her and see himself within her. Joe is content with the idea of Kathleen as a "brooding solitary" that has no other friends and only lives for their private conversations (112). In his mind, she is a "safe person", whose happiness should be protected at all costs (132). While he can handle his parents and their bitter fighting, the idea of Kathleen being eroded by the pain and suffering of life is too awful to think about. Joe's idealisation of Kathleen is largely contingent on keeping her separate from the rest of his life. Any moment where he must share Kathleen with other people, whether it is with his intruding brother or with soldiers passing on the street, takes her attention away from Joe, which leads to him becoming jealous:

Bloody cheek, thought Joe. Lies, too. I bet that's a lie. The wain. He looked at Kathleen who was looking at Brendan as if he were an honest, good-hearted sort of person. (106)

The realisation that Kathleen has other people in her life that she cares about greatly upsets Joe. She is no longer one of those “solitary people like himself” that Joe has led himself to believe (130). She is capable of having flaws and being unhappy, just like every other person in his life. In trying to protect the stability and safety of his private friendship with Kathleen, Joe ends up destroying it by telling Brendan about Kathleen’s engagement and unintentionally setting her up to be attacked by his “friends” (212). His desperation to claw back the picturesque version of his friend leads to Joe not fully understanding the true consequences of his “deliberate destruction” (206). By treating Kathleen as an ideal figure, rather than a real person, he has removed her autonomy and power over her own life. Johnston is also guilty of being “exclusively concerned” with Joe’s relationship, as according to Florence Minnis, the reader never fully sees Kathleen as an individual, which takes away from their empathy for her situation (13). She is not a mythical figure or nationalist symbol; she is just a woman who has been further isolated from the world around her. Through Kathleen, Johnston has exhibited how idealisation of women can lead to detrimental consequences, as it strips them of their power as individuals and forces them to meet impossible standards.

In conclusion, Jennifer Johnston effectively incorporates the representation of women into *Shadows on our Skin* and successfully gives the reader insight into the feminine aspects of the Troubles through the female characters, Mrs. Logan and Kathleen Doherty. She does this by exploring their relationship with Joe, the symbolism within the text, examining the domestic sphere, and by exhibiting the dangers of idealising women. She also does this by utilising well-constructed imagery, literary devices, and wider themes of family and betrayal, which Johnston has effectively woven into the text. In doing so, she has created an image of how women are represented within Troubles fiction and uses it to subvert traditional ideals of female characters

and their connections to the patriarchal narrative. Despite this, Johnston does not go far enough in exploring Mrs. Logan and Kathleen individual lives outside of their relationship to Joe, which would have given the reader better insight into the depth of their characters and the motivations behind some of their actions. However, Johnston still effectively presents the reader with engaging and complex characters, without resorting to stereotypes or caricatures. She effectively establishes Mrs. Logan and Kathleen's importance within the text and their role in helping Joe discover his sense of identity in a world of incomprehensible conflict and tragedy.

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The School Undergraduate Awards (3rd Year)

Almost Human: Monstrosity and the Abjection of Physical Difference in the *Beowulf Manuscript*

Hannah Keniry

Winner

My name is Hannah Damaris Keniry and I recently graduated with a BA joint honours in Asian Studies and English in 2022. I wrote 'Almost Human' in my final year of university; for this essay I was awarded highly commended in the 2022 Global Undergraduate Awards and I was also fortunate enough to win the UCC department of English 3rd year undergraduate award.

'Almost Human' explores the abjection of physical difference by examining representations of 'monstrous' beings in Old English literature. This essay was inspired by and is dedicated to my younger brother Isaac - who everyday confounds, astounds, and motivates me. It is through him that I've been able to catch glimpses of how the world still perceives and marginalises those whose bodies are deemed as being abjectly different. During my time in university, I noticed how little disability and its intersection with literature is touched on or discussed and while researching this paper, I realised how little research on disability in literature there really is - this essay is my contribution to a field that I hope will continue to grow.

Since graduating I spent a brief stint working at UCC as a research assistant with the Asian Studies department and now I am currently living in South Korea teaching English. I still spend a lot of my free time reading, researching, and writing, which seems to be a trend for most English graduates. When I'm not doing that, I like to spend my time traveling - seeing new sights, meeting new people, and most importantly, trying new food.

Abstract: Monsters, while integral to so many medieval literary works, are notoriously difficult to parse due to their transgressive nature. In literary theory, monsters are often viewed as a metaphor for the cultural body - lending intimate insight into the societies and cultures that created them, dreamed them, desired them, and feared them. *The Beowulf Manuscript*, which is arguably

one of the most important early English literary collections - in both a cerebral and historical sense, can in essence be considered a book of monsters since every work in the collection is connected through the presence of monstrous beings or behaviours; this pervasive theme of monstrosity heightens its value then as a cultural work also. This paper, utilizing both monster theory and philosopher and literary critic Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection, examines representations of medieval culture and anxieties that are expressed through the typified abjection of physical difference, specifically in relation to race and (dis)ability, which is often translated as monstrosity in the *Beowulf Manuscript*, concentrating on how this abjection informs our understanding of these texts. Focusing on three works from the collection (*Beowulf*, *The Passion of Saint Christopher*, and *The Wonders of the East*), this paper attempts to pinpoint that it is the monster's physical non-normative body that is made abject due to both its grotesque difference and uncanny similarity to the humans it threatens, and that these abject physical differences that define the monsters' monstrosity can be seen as being allegorically representative of how Anglo-Saxon societies may have perceived those who have ethnic, racial, and/or ability differences. By reading these medieval monsters as allegorical, abject beings, representative of difference, we can more thoroughly understand the nuance of Old English literature, as it is transformed into more than just an important work of literary history, but also cultural and political history too, since it lends insight into the norms, biases, and prejudices of those who wrote and read them.

Monsters, while integral to so many medieval literary works, are notoriously difficult to parse. They are transgressive, both physically and socially, subverting and disregarding norms and expectations; they are "difference made flesh, come to dwell among us" (Cohen 7). The unknowable, illusive other, monsters do important cultural work by forcing us to deal with

difference and face the reality of our “fear, desire, [and] anxiety” that gives “them [their] life” (Cohen 4). Monsters “are both absolutely unlike and remarkably like the human civilization they threaten” (Knapp 94); it is this uncanny similarity coupled with their grotesqueness that solidifies their place as abject beings. This essay will examine the typified abjection of physical difference that is often translated as monstrosity, specifically in relation to race and (dis)ability, in the monsters presented in *The Beowulf Manuscript*, and how this abjection informs our understanding of these texts.

Monsters are inherently abject beings, they “swallow up our cultural mores and expectations, and then, becoming what they eat, they reflect back to us our own faces, made disgusting or, perhaps, revealed to always have been so” (Mittman “Introduction” 1). It is in this consumption, regurgitation and reflection of humanity that lies the abjectness of medieval monsters. Julia Kristeva, in her seminal work *Powers of Horror*, defined the abject as being most simply “only one quality of the object – that of being opposed to I” (1). The abject is something “radically separate, loathsome. Not me. Not that. But not nothing, either. A ‘something’ that I do not recognize as a thing.... On the edge of non-existence and hallucination... The primers of my culture” (Kristeva 2); monstrous bodies represent ‘pure’ culture (Cohen 4), and therefore pure abjectness. Monsters are constantly fragmented, decided, and reconstructed through culture, becoming unknowable and singular (Cohen 11-12, 20) in a way that forms them into “liminal personae... [who] elude or slip through the network of classifications” (Turner 95) and are uncategorizable. The abject is “radically separate” (Kristeva 2) because of its ability to “arouse dread and horror” (Freud 59) due to its uncanniness; the abject reflects the parts of us that we push into the periphery. Monsters are peripheral creatures that induce fear; they are unnatural and unnerving, they shock and appal, but they still, eerily, are recognizable for the traits they share

with us, the traits in us that we ignore, which make them all the more frightening. It is their uncanny likeness to the un-monstrous that makes them abject beings; we do not fear abject monsters for being inhuman, but rather we fear them for being almost human, but not quite (Cavell “Constructing” 163).

One way in which the monstrous creatures of *The Beowulf Manuscript* are signified as being abject is through physical, bodily difference, since “[l]ike objects whose structural binds hold them together, the body itself is imagined as an interwoven entity in Old English” (Cavell Weaving 195). In *The Wonders of the East* (Fulk ed. 15-31), the monstrous bodily difference of the peoples described can be seen as outward, physical representations of stigmatized cultural and racial differences. The abject is an “‘object’ of primal repression” (Kristeva 12), and many of the peoples described in *Wonders* are depicted as being so uninhibited in their ‘barbarism’ that they have fully succumb to their primal nature. This ferity is highlighted in their horrifying and transgressive cultural practices, like speaking foreign languages and cannibalism (Fulk ed. 23-25), which are viewed as being equally wicked. These ‘primal’ races are even depicted as having hybrid animal-human features, like having mostly human bodies with “dogs’ heads” (19) or the “tusks of a boar and... an oxtail” (27). Inhuman features are often described in tandem with and given equal weight to human ones, like varied skin and hair colour – rather than juxtaposing what is human with the inhuman, real ethnic groups, like the Ethiopians (29) are depicted as being as equally horrifying as the mythical races described; lumped together they are all deemed as having “offensive and disgusting bodies” (27), transforming very real people into beings that are less than, considered inhuman, grotesque, abject, or in short, monstrous. Physical differences show the physical abjectness of these peoples since they behave and somewhat look like ‘real’ people

but are not deemed as being truly human because of their perceived difference and peripherality (Wright 179).

Monsters are often a “xenophobic rendition of the foreign” (Cohen 14); even though “medieval people did not have a term that equates precisely with the modern English ‘race’ does not negate the presence of racial thinking” (Mittman “Monstrous” 40). *Wonders*, in its construction of the racial other as abject and monstrous signifies this xenophobia and “the [racist] Self’s internal and external boundaries, establishing its identity” (Giuliani 99) and superiority in contrast to this other. Disregarding mentions of actual ethnic groups, like the Ethiopians, xenophobic and racial thinking is quite apparent throughout the text. As previously mentioned, in *Wonders* speaking a foreign language is judged as being just as horrifying and monstrous as the act of cannibalism – if not more so; while language difference does not equate to racial difference, this work seems to associate the racial ‘other’ with linguistic and cultural differences. One passage in particular abjectifies two separate ‘monstrous races’ because of their linguistic diversity, describing them as being the most perverse and depraved of all the other beings depicted, despite being distinctly ‘human’ (25); one of these groups, identified as being “speakers of barbaric tongues” are considered to be “the worst people and the most barbaric” (23-25), seemingly just because of their ethnic differences – the other group are “humans who are called Donestre” (25) who “know all human languages” (*ibid*) and utilise their linguistic abilities to deceive foreigners to their demise “with devious words” (*ibid*). These undeniably negative depictions of the ethnic other works to position racial, cultural, and linguistic diversity in a way “that helps define the self and the social ‘norm’ by manifesting what is currently unacceptable” (Wright 180), demonstrating that “human monstrosity is also closely bound up with ideas of the ‘other’ and ‘otherness’” (*ibid*); it is the racialised ‘other’ that is abjectified (Giuliani 97-98).

Wonders maps out a world “edged by the abject” (Kristeva 12); these monsters lived in territories “beyond the direct experience of most [medieval] Europeans... [and] posed little threat to society... Confined to this remote and uncharted area, the Monstrous Races locate the transgressions they represent at a safe distance, far from “civilized” human society” (Wright 187). However, the abject “disturbs identity, system, order... [it] does not respect border, positions, rules” (Kristeva 4), abject beings are “violent but uncertain” (Kristeva 7), and monsters are not confined to boundaries (Cohen 7); the fear of encountering this outside other is clearly felt when reading *Wonders*, for in the few brushes with them they either killed or were killed (Fulk ed. 25, 27, 29). Racialized monsters are peripheralized, kept within “[b]oundaries [that] eventually hide the abject from society and... perpetuat[e] [their] position as the outsider” (Hien 412); it is when these boundaries are transgressed that the abject become truly frightening.

While the physical monstrosity depicted in Old English literature is often allegorically read as being representative of racial, cultural, and/or moral difference, I would posit that these abjections of bodily difference can also be read as possible representations of disability, either individually or in tandem with the aforementioned categories, even if it is just somewhat abstractly so. While Kristeva states that it is not a “lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order” (4), I would argue that, generally, those who are disabled, physically and/or intellectually, are often regrettably regarded as abject beings. The abject is what has been “permanently thrust aside in order to live” (Kristeva 3) since it constantly “confronts us...within our personal archeology” (*ibid* 13), and disability is nothing but confronting, since it reminds us of our vulnerability, morality and fragility (Hughes 400); disabled people are also often ‘thrust aside’ since they are categorized as being aberrant abject beings because of their perceived ‘lack’ (Dohmen). Abject “lives are based on exclusion” (Kristeva 6),

and disabled people are nothing but excluded (Dohmen 763, 771). Monsters, similarly, also signal the “fragility of... boundaries [between humans and almost-humans]” (Giuliani 99), and are creatures excluded from society, shoved into the periphery. Even though “in the Middle Ages, there was no conception of the disabled as it would accord with modern notions of embodied difference” (Godden and Mittman 6), in a pre-Christian context, those born “with marked deformities [were] monster[s]... something marvelous... a divine portent or warning” (Eberly 59). However, early Christian societies, began to view those who were disabled as casualties of original sin, and reminders of perfection lost (Eberly 59-60); the hybridity of these two contrasting ideas can be seen when reading physical ‘monstrosity’ as ability-difference.

One possible Anglo-Saxon conception of disability was that of being “*unhælo*”, which roughly translates to being ‘unhealthy’ either physically or spiritually (Wallace “Intersections” 42). Being *unhælo* goes hand in hand with both conceptions of monstrosity and disability since it can come from either lack or excess (Wallace “Grendel” 120, 123). In one of his earliest mentions in *Beowulf* (Fulk ed. 85-295), Grendel is described as being “[w]iht unhælo” (Fulk ed. 94); this epithet could refer to the state of his spiritual and moral malignancy, or more literally his abject and “non-normative body” (Wallace “Intersections”). Even though we cannot fully ascertain what Grendel looks like, from the few physical descriptions we get of him, we know that he is monstrously large and strong; these physical attributes cause him to “exceed those of almost all the humans around him, without removing him wholly from the realm of the human” (Wallace “Grendel” 116), he is also generally described as being physically and aesthetically human looking, but deformed (Wallace “Grendel” 115), which thrusts him into the realm of the uncanny not quite human, abject beings, marked by bodily difference. We know from accounts of his ancestry that Grendel at least is partly human or “distinctly humanoid” (Lehr 190), since

he is a descendant of Cain (Fulk ed. 93), one of the first men, and his mother is distinctly “described in human and social terms” (Chance 95) – solidifying both the non-normativity of his body in comparison to his kin and his humanity, making his physicality all the more abject in the eyes of his community.

Grendel, because of his abject behaviour and body, is referred to as a “wonsæli wer” (Fulk ed. 92), which is often translated as being an ‘ill-starred’ or ‘ill-fated man’, but it can also mean an ‘unblest’ or ‘miserable’ man – in early Christian communities, those who were disabled were often seen as being ‘unblest’ and ‘ill-fated’, either cursed by God or a product of original sin (Marini 4-5). Grendel is indeed cursed because of his monstrosity – he will always be marginalized from society, forced to live his life as an outcast, a “mære mearcstapa” (Fulk ed. 92) or ‘border walker’, which is the most miserable fate a man can have in the eyes of the Anglo-Saxons; this is also a fate many, if not most, who are deemed as abject beings due to disability have faced throughout the centuries, because of their liminality, existing on the border of what is arbitrarily deemed as ‘human’ enough, they are often resigned to a life in the periphery, on the border of acceptance and obscurity. Abjection lurks along the boundaries of what is perceived as ‘human’ and ‘inhuman’, and “must be kept away from society as this exclusion ensures that the established order remains intact and whole, and that society is kept pure” (Hien 412); similarly, to the anxieties expressed in *Wonders* of encountering the ‘impure’ ethnic ‘other’, *Beowulf* parallels these not so medieval fears of the encroachment of the socially and physically ‘impure’. Another possible representation of disability as an abject state can be seen in *The Passion of Saint Christopher* (Fulk ed. 1-15). Christopher, often described as being physically similar to Grendel (Wallace “Grendel” 123), is a creature of excess, being large, and deformed, with a dog’s head and a human’s body (Powell 5), and he is persecuted because of his deformities, since they make

him appear “hostile” (Powell 11). Unlike Grendel, however, Christopher serves as a portent of Christ’s love and the power of his salvation; even though he is deemed as an uncanny other in his abjectness and physical difference, he served as example of how God would reward “those earnestly seeking him.” (*New World Translation* Hebrews 11:16), and therefore can be seen as both a “cultural projection of... hope and desire” (Russell) and an abject monster. Despite his monstrous appearance and physical deformities, Christopher is always depicted as gentle and composed, which is markedly different to most other medieval monsters, which may be representative of how Cain’s ‘kin’ can be ‘redeemed’ through conversion; Christopher himself is a ‘redeemer’, as it was “through his teaching” that “forty-eight thousand one hundred and fifteen” were “acquired for God” (Fulk ed. 9). However, even though Christopher is clearly shown to be morally and spiritually ‘hælo’ in the eyes of early Christians, he is still physically ‘unhælo’ because of his monstrously deformed and excessive body (Wallace “Grendel” 123-124) – his physical abjectness is one of the catalysts of his gruesome execution (Fulk ed. 7, 9). A linking theme throughout the *Beowulf Manuscript* is the inevitable death of the monstrous that restores order – this fate was one in the same for both Christopher and Grendel. Both monstrous figures are “cut down to size”, transformed from beings of excess to “creatures of lack” – furtherly deformed and disabled, and it is “their dismemberment [that] restores order to the human community that they threatened” (Wallace “Grendel” 125). It is “in the heartlands of non-disability [that] the abject is a cause for concern because it is too close for comfort” (Hughes 405); often the remedy for discomfort is to cast away what makes you uncomfortable, to push it into the periphery, purge it from your life, or in extremity, from existence. Even though “abjection occurs at the level of the imaginary” (Dohmen 771), because “[d]isabled people ‘are constant reminders to the able-bodied of the negative body – of what the able-bodied are trying to avoid,

forget and ignore” (Hughes 406) around disability there is often a “visceral anxiety that calls forth avoidance, expulsion or even violence” (Dohmen 771). Both Grendel and Christopher are so close to being ‘human’ in the eyes of the Anglo-Saxons, yet they are seen as inherently perverse due to physical difference and are thusly peripherized, persecuted, and eventually killed; it is their perceived deformity and distinct physical difference that make them uncanny, very almost human, abject beings, subject to mistreatment.

It becomes clear, especially when considering representations of physical differences in Old English literature, that bodily deviations, and the moral and behavioural suppositions associated with these differences, are seen as abjections and therefore monstrous. Monsters “dwell at the gates of difference” (Cohen 7); their difference is *made* monstrous because, for many, what “exists outside the system is terrifying because it reveals the truth of the system, its relativity, its fragility, and its mortality” (Girard 108). However, this marginalisation of monstrous beings is “where abjection is complicated... [since] the abject itself is not always that which is situated outside of boundaries” (Hien 418), but rather something that “lies there, quite close” (Kristeva 1), never to be fully integrated, understood or accepted, justifiably or not. The medieval monsters discussed in this essay are abject in their fundamental humanity (Hien 418), for they are too close for comfort, too close to being ‘normal’; they have been “thrust aside” (Kristeva 3), yet remain always in the periphery, an uncanny reflection of what we do not want to see or accept as being ‘normal’. By reading these medieval monsters as allegorical, abject beings, representational of difference, we can more thoroughly understand the nuance of Old English literature, as it is transformed into more than just an important work of literary history, but also cultural and political history too, since it lends insight into the norms, biases, and prejudices of those who wrote and read them. When we more deeply connect with and understand

literature and the history that underpins it, recognizing the fact that “we continually redefine the parameters of the monstrous” (Mittman “Introduction” 7), we in turn can more intimately understand our own contemporary society and examine what it is that lurks in the shadows (within ourselves and our communities), that we too, find abject and categorize as monstrous.

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Female Characters and their Choices from a Post- Revolutionary Perspective in Maria Edgeworth's *Belinda*

Aoife E Osborne

Highly Recommended

My name is Aoife, and I graduated last October from the BA English programme. During my time in UCC, I was the 2022 Eoin Murray Memorial Scholar and a Quercus College Scholar. My main interests in English were feminism in literature, children's literature and creative writing. My first piece in this journal focuses on Maria Edgeworth's Belinda – I really enjoyed writing this essay because I'm fascinated by character development in a post-revolutionary context. I think Belinda is a gorgeous window into that period of history, and Edgeworth's writing just gives layers and layers to unfold and consider. Absolutely stunning, firm recommend. For creative writing, I like to draw on personal experiences and human interactions (though I'd like to clarify that I'm in a very happy relationship with a wonderful human being right now). I'm a chronic overthinker and I tend to feel all the feels very deeply. I like to combine these massive hindrances with my love of words and bring it into my writing, and hope it makes something readable. There aren't many perks to an overactive mind, so I feel like I need to work with the few strengths it gives me! I'm currently studying for my Masters in Arts Management and Cultural Policy at Queen's University Belfast - it blends my passions for the arts, culture, planning, problem-solving...and spreadsheets. When I'm not studying, I can probably be found reading in a café or exploring Belfast and trying not to get lost with my trusty sidekick: Google Maps.

Over the course of her novel *Belinda*, Maria Edgeworth offers a complex and comprehensive exploration of its female characters and their choices. Though the novel can be described as a courtship novel because it follows its titular character on a journey to find a suitor, it offers much more to evaluate when considering characters such as Lady Delacour, Harriet Freke, Virginia St Pierre and Belinda herself. When considering the intense political and intellectual controversy following the French Revolution, there is much to examine regarding the female characters' relationships, responsibilities, status, and education. It is a fascinating and multi-layered consideration of Edgeworth's interpretation of post-revolutionary philosophy. Though her personal beliefs were not necessarily always conventionally post-revolutionary, Maria Edgeworth's thorough development of her female characters in *Belinda* allows for a furthering of her ideas, [3] which she had previously developed in her earlier works. The result is a varied and diverse window into many facets of post-revolutionary life, emphasising life from a female perspective due to the nature of *Belinda* as a courtship novel. It is a consideration of how intellectual, political and philosophical concepts impacted women's choices and how these choices were reflective of post-revolutionary ideas.

When comparing her with either the dramatic and extravagant Lady Delacour or the eccentric Harriet Freke, Belinda is much more subdued and reserved in comparison; so much so that in later years, Maria Edgeworth would express exasperation with the character (Kaufman 166). Despite her later reservations about the protagonist, Belinda is highly observant and aware of her environment and the individuals around her. Outwardly, she may appear reserved, but Belinda's detailed insights throughout the novel highlight her awareness of society. The character's astute observations contribute to the construction of the 'domestic woman,'; a post-revolutionary figure defined in opposition to both the *ancien régime* and revolutionary enthusiasts (Ó'Gallchoir

Women 38). Similarly, Belinda's rejection of social expectations and her questioning of society echoes the investigation of society on a larger scale following the French Revolution. Her acute observations of inauthentic relationships and advantageous marriages in upper-class society are reminiscent of broader political criticism of the aristocracy. This is particularly true when looking at Lady Delacour and her companions, and Wollstonecraft's interpretations of the consequences of girls being taught to attract male attention. Belinda's concerns reflect the paradox that Wollstonecraft observed in defining a woman's worth by her ability to secure a husband, versus the belief that this resulted in unstable marriages (Ó'Gallchoir *Maria* 21). As is observed from the novel's opening letter from Aunt Stanhope, Belinda's insertion into upper-class society for the exact purpose of finding a husband. Belinda's distrust of these systems also reflects the post-revolutionary mind-set that women had greater intellectual capacity than they had previously been given credit for. While her overall character reflects the expectation to conform to society, Belinda's choices and beliefs reflect the post-revolutionary mind-set of rejecting social norms. Her insight into Lady Delacour's private life contributes to her disenchantment with elitist society. Moreover, her rejection also stems from an incident in which she hears herself described as a commodity about to expire (Ó'Gallchoir *Maria* 22). Being both aware and critical of these flaws in upper-class relationships, Belinda's character and beliefs communicate several post-revolutionary ideas from a social and political perspective and their tumultuous impact. Furthermore, her choices in opposition to aspects of the aristocracy reflect an intellectual post-revolutionary mind-set, as does Belinda's education.

For both Edgeworth and her father, education meant empowering children by teaching them that they could control events in their lives. As an advocate for practical education, Edgeworth chose to explore this post-revolutionary concept through the Percival children also, as

well as Belinda herself (Kaufman 195). From an intellectual standpoint, this post-revolutionary attitude toward education for women aligned with the growing awareness of the importance of liberty and freedom. For Belinda's character this is shown in her independent manner throughout the novel, and the choices that she makes. She is not regarded as her aunt's most docile pupil, but her immersion in upper-class society to prepare her for finding a suitor is evocative of the Edgeworths' faith in practical education. In leaving Lady Delacour and questioning her Aunt Stanhope's advice, there is ample evidence that Belinda can think and act for herself, which also embodies one of the Edgeworths' beliefs that children should be empowered to make their own decisions and should be allowed to control events themselves.

By extension, Belinda's interest in literature and reading marks a shift in changing attitudes towards education for girls and young women. While Belinda's immersion in the elite social circles of Lady Delacour, this is not the only comment on post-revolutionary education in the novel; with a passion for reading and books, she quickly becomes enamoured with Lady Delacour's library. This resourcefulness and self-sufficiency aid in Belinda's ability to think for herself and make her own choices (De Ritter 328), which in turn reflects the Edgeworths' argument for practical education. Her choice to read widely when coupled with her practical experience in society is crucial in developing Belinda's character. When considering a shift as domestic life following the Enlightenment gained a new significance "underscored by...feminist assertions of women's moral and intellectual equality" (Ó'Gallchoir *Maria* 5), reading widely allows Belinda to further her education and personality. De Ritter highlights that in immersing herself in literature, Belinda's choice shows her belief that reading is a form of internalised labour and produces a new, post-revolutionary attitude towards domestic identity (De Ritter 330). To emphasise the merits of Belinda's education, she is mirrored by the character of Virginia St Pierre, or Rachel Hartley,

whose education experience contrasts greatly with Belinda's. Virginia/Rachel's education under the guidance of Clarence Hervey is a fictionalised version of *Practical Education*'s critique of Rousseau's theories on education. Having followed Rousseau's approach with his eldest son, only to receive disastrous results, Edgeworth's father challenged the post-revolutionary concept, and Maria followed suit through the character of Virginia.

Though the storyline surrounding Virginia and Clarence Hervey is very much a subplot in *Belinda*, it offers much to consider regarding post-revolutionary political and intellectual controversy. It is particularly fascinating to consider when describing *Belinda* as a courtship novel because of how Clarence seeks Virginia as a wife contrasts hugely with his relationship with Belinda. With Clarence's idea of adopting and raising Virginia to be his wife coming from his pre-revolutionary time in Paris, there are strong allusions to Rousseau's work. Though Virginia has had little to no choice in her circumstances, her behaviour and decisions offer much to explore from a Rousseauvian perspective. In addition, the exploration of Virginia's character provides an insight into Edgeworth's own beliefs. In terms of her own choices, despite Clarence Hervey's attempts to eliminate Virginia's past existence by changing her name, educating and isolating her, she still develops feelings for the image of an anonymous man who she sees as a hero (Kaufmann 220). Hervey can control who Virginia sees, what she reads and her location, but he cannot control her mind, her imagination and her memories. The resolution in the Virginia/Rachel subplot emphasises her scepticism of the idea of grooming and isolating a young girl to create the perfect woman and wife. The subplot also echoes Rousseau's work *Émile*, particularly the character of Sophy. Rousseau's ideas were challenged and contrasted by both Maria Edgeworth and her father in their work *Practical Education*. With this in mind, the exploration of the Virginia subplot is a further response to Rousseau's argument for education (Kauffman 221). The character of Virginia

serves as a vessel for communicating and exploring the Edgeworths' post-revolutionary ideas and, by extension, criticises Rousseau's beliefs. In making fiction of *Practical Education*, *Belinda* becomes a 'wish-fulfilling affirmation of *Practical Education's* theories' (Kaufmann 222). The character of Virginia as a woman is crucial in furthering this idea. Though her behaviour might not necessarily be labelled as a choice, her inner struggle and turmoil against Clarence Hervey's attempts to keep her secluded emphasise Edgeworth's opposition to Rousseau's theories and her alignment with Wollstonecraft's approach to education.

As well as using the character of Virginia to communicate a distrust of Rousseau's principles, the subplot can also be argued to promote the view of novels as dangerous and harmful to women. Virginia's reaction to novels and her intense emotional associations with her readings. It promotes the Wollstonecraftian ideal for a 'rational education for women' and warns against the 'addiction to novels' (Kaufman 221). This hesitancy towards novels is reflected in Edgeworth's sentiments towards novels; *Belinda* itself is called a "moral tale – the author not wishing to acknowledge a novel" (Edgeworth 2). In assimilating the structures and philosophies of a novel and a moral tale, Edgeworth re-examines and re-defines the concept of femininity in sentimental novels (Gustafson 1), especially concerning female relationships. In terms of a post-revolutionary context, scholar Alan Richardson regards Edgeworth's *Belinda* to be a form of sub-genre, pioneered by Edgeworth herself, as well as Hannah More and Jane West; a "genre that integrated the moral pedagogy with the novel" (Gustafson 3). When considering *Belinda* as a courtship novel, it is essential to examine the various relationships within the novel in relation to assumptions around a sentimental novel. The emotional and impressionable side of Virginia's character is one aspect of this femininity often found in these 'sentimental novels' and reflects Edgeworth's distrust of the category. Through Virginia's inability to separate real life from the novels she is reading

and idolising Captain Sunderland, Edgeworth highlights the dangers of the genre she deems filled with 'so much folly, error and vice' (Edgeworth 2). When looking at other characters in *Belinda*, the coupling of Virginia and Captain Sunderland represents a sentimental romantic couple, the Delacours are representative of domestic bliss, and then Belinda and Clarence fall somewhere in between the two. The choice of Belinda to avoid seeking a fashionable marriage echoes a narrative of female development, which counteracts the traditional idea of a sentimental novel (Gustafson 26). This is similar to Lady Delacour's decision to pursue a pragmatic marriage for status and wealth; in disrupting a type of fashionable reading to secure social prominence, Lady Delacour's choice about her marriage also challenges the concept of a romantic or sentimental novel.

In addition to her decision on her marriage, other elements of Lady Delacour's choices can be considered in a post-revolutionary context. Her channelling of a desire or responsibility to be a wife and mother towards the latter half of the novel charts a journey toward realism and away from sentimentality. She is shifting towards a more realistic lifestyle herself and shying away from masked balls and make-up to "assert my real character...break the spell" (Edgeworth 292). This desire for authenticity and rejection of false appearances is indicative of a shift in post-revolutionary society away from the superficial and toward an 'anti-theatrical realism,' with the concept of theatre being considered as 'antithetical to true identity' (Robinson 164). However, despite this view, there is a great sense of theatre interwoven with Lady Delacour's life. Lady Delacour's own biography, as recounted to Belinda, echoes and directly quotes *An Apology of the Life of George Anne Bellamy, Late of Covent-Garden Theatre. Written by Herself*. The publication, regarded as 'one of the most scandalous and widely read publications of its time' (Robinson 156), would have been instantly recognised by readers of *Belinda*. The acknowledgement and the inclusion of the autobiography in *Belinda* by Edgeworth alludes to her belief that 'the theatrical

lends itself to realistic effect' (Robinson 147). With this in mind, both Lady Delacour's awareness and association with theatre as a character and her pursuit of realism and authenticity reflect Edgeworth's own beliefs. With a post-revolutionary mind-set, Lady Delacour shows a conflict between her desire to appeal to the fashionable world and her sense of duty to be true to her authentic self. This exploration of the character of Lady Delacour gives much to examine when considering a post-revolutionary context from an intellectual and cultural perspective. Just as there appears to be a conflict in Lady Delacour, this battle mirrors the conflict between a post-revolutionary distrust of theatre and Edgeworth's desire to explore realism through a sense of the theatrical. This intellectual post-revolutionary perspective is reflected in Lady Delacour's initially extravagant personality and her more subdued decision to assume her duties and responsibilities. The development of Lady Delacour's character and her choices reflect the effects and conflict of the theatre in the wake of a post-revolutionary environment.

Furthermore, the relationship between Lady Delacour and Harriet Freke also speaks to the move towards realism and authenticity. Lady Delacour herself remarks that she is drawn to the 'frankness' in Harriet Freke's manner, and in Harriet's outlandish ways it is apparent that she very much wears her heart on her sleeve. Despite the openness of her personality, there is much more to examine when looking closely at Mrs Freke's character when bringing forth the relevance of post-revolutionary ideas. With Maria Edgeworth belonging to a group of writers, including Wollstonecraft, reacting to liberating ideas following the French Revolution in 1789 and against conservative philosophers such as Edmund Burke, parallels were drawn between personal and private matters. In going against conservative philosophers, writers such as Edgeworth celebrated these philosophical ideas of freedom and liberty in their post-revolutionary world (Ty 155). Harriet's free-spirited and unapologetic behaviours certainly embody this celebration of freedom

that Edgeworth and her contemporaries were eager to highlight and explore. Harriet Freke's choices to both dress and behave as a man enhance the emancipation associated with a post-revolutionary world; however, the aftermath of trap injury does emphasise the author's personal ideals (Kaufman 225). Following the trap injury to her leg, Harriet cannot dress as a man. Therefore, the incident both punishes her for her extremist exploration of gender and also returns her to more conventional ideas of femininity – suggestive of the fact that Edgeworth believes that challenging femininity and enjoying freedom is fine, as long as it does not become excessive. The almost satirical nature of Harriet Freke's character and the circumstances surrounding her departure from the plot accentuate this plot characteristic. As a post-revolutionary writer, Edgeworth's characterisation of Mrs Freke offers a glimpse into her own moral conservatism and advocacy of 'women's education from association...attached to enlightenment feminism' (Kaufman 225). From an intellectual and philosophical perspective, the choices of Harriet Freke align with the desire for freedom which was becoming more commonplace following the French Revolution; however, the consequences of these choices spotlight the beliefs that Edgeworth has formed as a post-revolutionary writer around femininity and female representation.

Mrs Freke's crossdressing and experimentation with gender representation also align with post-revolutionary questions around being a 'natural' woman and ideas surrounding normative gender. As well as Harriet's character, Lady Delacour also challenges and explores sentiment around this topic. This concept of the natural woman is strongly reflected in Lady Delacour's initial shift away from her daughter and then her change of heart towards being an active mother. Considering Burke's beliefs around women's beauty and the idea that a woman's breasts are the most beautiful part of her body (Kavanagh 258), it is interesting that this belief is challenged through both Lady Delacour and Harriet Freke. Mrs Freke's crossdressing and experimentation

with her appearance denies her body as a 'natural woman' and perhaps rebels against the patriarchal concept of beauty. Similarly, Lady Delacour's wounded breast also contrasts with Burke's definition of what is aesthetically pleasing in a woman. With both of these incidents in mind, Edgeworth's examination of the female body is possibly reminiscent of Burke's beliefs around what he defines as acceptable or beautiful in a woman. At the same time, this examination of the natural woman is furthered in Lady Delacour's shift away from what is expected of her and the masked person she portrays and towards her role as a wife and a mother. The guilt that Lady Delacour feels over the death of her second child and her choice to send her third child to a wet nurse enhances her position as an 'unnatural mother' because she feels her breasts have poisoned her child (Larson 196). Lady Delacour firmly believes that she is unnatural due to her failures as a mother and her ill health. If considering Burke's philosophy around the importance of the breast in a woman's worth, it makes sense that she would feel unnatural or less-than if her breast is less than perfect. Given that Lady Delacour's poor health is remedied upon embracing her role and responsibilities as a mother to Helena, her choice is indicative of the post-revolutionary sentiment towards the importance of the body with regard to the concept of natural womanhood. Lady Delacour's change of heart reflects Edgeworth's belief that gender characteristics are learned and impacted by society and is representative of her advocacy for a gradual change in a rapidly developing post-revolutionary world (Ó'Gallchoir *Maria* 27).

The revolutionary world in which Maria Edgeworth worked and wrote was surrounded by intense political and intellectual controversy. As such, even though *Belinda* can be described as a courtship novel, its female characters and the choices they make reflect this controversy. Through her novel, Edgeworth explores the meaning of various post-revolutionary ideas using her female characters, including Belinda, Virginia, Lady Delacour, and Harriet Freke. The novel also offers a

thorough examination of Edgeworth's personal attitudes towards post-revolutionary ideas regarding education and authenticity. Furthermore, Edgeworth explores the concept of the novel as a genre and the idea of the natural woman. As a result, it gives a diverse consideration to multiple aspects of the political and intellectual controversies after the French Revolution. *Belinda* offers a fascinating insight into a post-revolutionary society from a female perspective.

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The Eoin Murray Memorial Prize

Flying Kites

Aoife E Osborne

Winner

One summer, when I was a child, my grandparents gave me a kite. The weather was almost always windy and rainy, occasionally calm and sunny, but never hit the perfect balance for kite-flying weather. I wasn't allowed out in the rain, so I had to try and make my own breeze on dry days. With my kite held firmly in hand, I would run to the end of the garden and back, and back, and back again. I'd run until I blistered my feet and felt a stitch burning into my ribs and my lungs couldn't soak in the air fast enough. Sometimes the kite would rise a few inches off the ground, and sometimes it bounced along lightly like a skimmed stone on a calm lake, but I could never get my kite to fly properly. I would flail onto the ground in frustration and anger and stare hopelessly at the sky, with the rudest swear words my eight-year-old mind could bear threatening to slip off my tongue in a furious whisper.

Towards the end of our relationship, this is what being with Oscar felt like. No matter how hard I worked or wished, ran or tried, I could not keep our relationship off the ground. It turns out that wishful thinking and steel determination are not enough to outrun gravity.

Of course, it doesn't help if someone else is pulling your kite in their direction.

Once I realised, I didn't know what to think or feel. Truthfully, I still don't know how I feel. When you see infidelity in films or on tv shows, you see people crying, screaming.

Usually, someone throws something. Sometimes it breaks, shatters, scatters across a floor.

There's a lot of shaking shoulders, narrowing eyes and raising voices. Sometimes, it's quiet, still shock – the kind that warrants a shiny foil blanket and a strong cup of tea, or a decent measure of good whiskey. It's because usually when someone finds out that their spouse is seeing someone else, it's accompanied by a degree of surprise. And though I didn't know what I felt, I knew I didn't feel surprised. It explained why I found myself feeling at a loose end, why I didn't feel like I fit anymore. It explained why talking felt like little more than courtesy or necessity, like our conversations were taking two almost identical paths but never quite reaching the same destination. It explained why I struggled to keep his attention, because it was clearly somewhere else. If I felt anything, I think I felt relieved to have an explanation. And in the absence of any stronger emotion, I gravitated to logic. My mind immediately went to problem-solving.

Step one, pack suitcases with essentials. As much of your wardrobe as you can fit, laptop, chargers, childhood teddy, hair straighteners, heirloom blanket, contact lenses, some books, the good wine glasses, dog treats and food, dog bed, dog toys, and dog (Note: do not put dog in suitcase, no matter how hard she tries to climb in. This isn't a work trip that she's trying to sneak on, she is coming with you this time).

Step two: make way to nearest and dearest friend, in proximity and affection. Explain situation and let friend give you hug. Let her rush you into her house and have her partner carry your suitcase inside. Try not to feel pangs of jealousy at their domestic normality. You will need to explain this turn of events over and over again, in excruciating detail, and most like to both partners. One (Lily) will be sympathetic, the other (Orla) will be angry. Patience is a virtue. Drop dog lead and replace with cup of tea from friend once inside house.

'Milk or sugar, Jill?'

‘Splash of milk for her Orla, she doesn’t take sugar. There’s some biscuits in the cupboard too.’

(You insist that you’re not hungry.)

‘Grand, tea for Jill, shortbread for me. Pass in the packet altogether, Orla, she might have some in a bit. Now, start again – what exactly happened?’

Step three: Over the next few hours, add tea as desired. Shortbread helps too. Order takeaway, replace tea with wine. Refill wine glasses repeatedly, never letting the glass empty until the small hours of the morning when you finally drag yourself and friend upstairs (Orla’s already gone to bed, she has an early start tomorrow). Laugh with friend as you try to pull out the sofa bed together, remembering that time in college when you broke a finger with this exact couch.

‘I swear, my pinkie is still crooked, I don’t think they set it properly.’

‘Ah they must have, you had that feckin splint on for weeks.’

‘Shur I had to, I was in agony. I was terrified it wouldn’t heal right.’

‘Well, that worked out for you then, didn’t it? With your baby finger still looking a bit wonky, three years later?’

Laugh with friend again, until your sides ache.

Step four: fall asleep, wake up with a wine-foggy version of events and several missed calls from boyfriend. Ex-boyfriend. Return phone calls. Awkward conversation.

Agree to come and move out the last of your stuff today while he’s at work. You’ll bring Lily with you, and her car. You’ll surely be able to get it all between the two of you, you assure him. She’s taken the day off to help (forever legend, this is why she’s your best mate), after a short but firm call with her manager.

‘I told her, it’s a family emergency. You are my family, and this is your emergency.’

‘But I don’t want an emergency.’

‘Jill, for feck’s sake, nobody wants an emergency.’

‘But it doesn’t feel like an emergency.’

‘It doesn’t yet, but it might. And if it does, I’ll help.’

Go to house, pack up last of belongings. Wait for tears, plan to collapse into hysterics: nothing happens. Load up your car, and Lily’s. It all fits in her spare room, surprisingly. She and Orla will tell you not to worry, take your time. As long as you need.

Step five: making new long-term plans. Start looking for places to live, realise that there’s nothing you can afford. Contemplate self-existence, start questioning employment, briefly considering moving to Liverpool or Glasgow, possibly even Melbourne. Friend talks you out of this, and will again promise that it’s no trouble, she and Orla really don’t mind.

‘Jesus, we’d rather you were here than across the sea.’

Start to accept that maybe you’ll need to stay here a bit longer, while you figure things out. Offer to pay something towards rent or at least bills. Friend says you can talk about All That later. For now, arrange to meet ex-boyfriend for coffee, to swap back keys and Chat Things Through. Arrive twenty minutes early, though you know he’ll be ten minutes late.

He always is.

With a cappuccino and my book in front of me, I’m waiting for Oscar to show up. When he comes through the door, I give a slight wave, and as small a smile as feels appropriate. He half waves, half nods. He orders his coffee, his usual Americano and sits across from me. It occurs to

me that I still don't know what I'm feeling. Maybe I'm just numb. I had been anticipating some surge of rage or sadness when I saw him but I'm only feeling emptiness.

He hasn't shaved in a few days but he's remembered to gel his hair. I wonder if it's the one I bought for him. I wonder if She's going to remember to buy it for him, or if She's going to find him a new brand. He's wearing his favourite jeans (though not his best ones, I notice – he's chosen comfort over style) and one of his Dad's old band t-shirts. I don't know the band, and neither does he. He just likes the artwork. For a while, I found it charming when we went out and people noticed and asked what his favourite song was. He'd make up random titles and somehow leave the asker feeling like they had missed some seminal classic rock ballad. As time went on, it irritated me more and more, seeing the deception play out. It stopped being funny after a while.

In hindsight, maybe this should have been a red flag.

He's the first to break the silence, and for this I'm grateful. Small mercies.

'How've you been?'

I weigh up potential answers in my head.

'I'm good.'

(Not true)

(Makes me feel better)

(Sounds forced)

'I'm alright.'

(Mostly true)

(Neither here nor there)

(Sounds flimsy)

'I'm not great.'

(Also not true)

(Makes no one feel better)

(Sounds needy)

I settle for:

'I'm doing okay.' I pause slightly. 'My neck hurts from staying on Lily and Orla's couch.'

He laughs too loudly and too quickly. He does that when he's nervous, or guilty. Or both.

'Is that the one you broke your pinkie on a few years ago?'

I nod, my forced mini-smile getting bigger and more natural, despite myself. I didn't realise my shoulders were hunched until I feel them slowly melt, my grip loosening around my cup.

'How long are you staying there for?'

I shrug, shaking my head and taking a sip of coffee to avoid answering. It's burnt, and it's too hot. There's a jug on the table, but only a glug of milk left. I tip it in, realising too late I've not left enough for Oscar.

'Shit. Sorry.'

'Ah it's fine, don't worry – I'll nick some somewhere.'

He leans over to the next table, adds his usual splash of milk, and takes a considerable gulp from his mug but he recoils quickly, his face screwing up like a stress ball. They must have scalded his too. He's not usually one to hurry through his coffee. The sooner he finishes with me though, the sooner he can close the Jillian chapter and move on with Her. He's got a new kite to fly now.

'Did you get your things okay?'

'Yeah, thanks. Did I leave anything behind? I think I got it all but if I forgot anything...' I find myself trailing off.

I'm almost sure I remembered everything. Before we left, Lily made sure that we went through each room, methodically and meticulously, three times. It never fails to amaze me; how pragmatic she can be when she really needs to be. She's never really been the levelheaded one, that's always been me. That time I broke my finger, she cried more than I did.

We had to get a taxi to CUH because she was too hysterical to drive. She thinks that's why I've not reacted to the Break-Up properly, that I've been too busy problem-solving and situation-fixing.

Oscar brings his coffee cup to his mouth, stopping halfway to his chest.

‘You left that half bottle of white in the fridge.’

The slightest of giggles escapes me before I can stop it. His cup has reached his mouth and even behind it, I can see the corners of a smile peeping over. I take another sip of my coffee, trying to keep pace with him.

‘Has there been any post for me?’

‘I don’t think so- if anything turns up I can send it to Lily’s though, yeah?’

I nod, keeping my eyes firmly on the table. That’s one thing I’d forgotten. I need to check the addresses on my bills when I get back to Lily’s. I sneak a glance at his cup – it’s half empty. Clearly, we’re making good progress. If we’re clever, we could tie this up in three to four more sips. And then we can all move on.

‘Oscar, I know I left in a hurry – do you want me to sort you out for rent this month? I know it’s going to be hard on your own, you can’t afford that by yourself, and I just sort of sprung it on you and-,’

‘Jill, it’s grand. I’m not on my own, I’m just going to have- eh. Well,’ he twists uncomfortably in his seat. I feel like I’ve poked or pinched him somewhere I shouldn’t have. He flinches the way he used to in tickle fights. He’s the only person I’ve ever known to be threatened by a tickle. His focus is glued to the last of his coffee. His cheeks have a very mild blush to them. Of course. She’ll be able to move in now. Her clothes in the wardrobe, Her good wine glasses in the cupboard, Her half-bottle of white in the fridge.

‘Oh-,’ I remember suddenly, reaching for my coat pocket for the house key. I slide it across the table to a halfway point without a word, the way I used to pass my leftovers after dinner.

‘Here, you can give it to- well, if you want. Maybe it’ll save you getting a new one

cut.'

He takes it, turning it in his hand. His eyes stop at the keychain. It's a miniature Big Ben, from our trip to London last summer. He hadn't been able to figure out the Underground, for love or money. I just dragged him through, to Hyde Park and Camden and *The Lion King*. We had a good trip though, it was one of our better holidays.

'Do you want this back?'

I feel my lips pursing together, my head tilting to the side like a bewildered puppy. I shake my head. I don't want it. I don't know what I'd do with it. He hesitates with it in his hand, and then shoves it in his pocket. He drains the last of his cup. I resign myself to leaving mine behind, and reach for my coat.

'Is that it, then?'

Oscar looks up, his face now wrought with more anxiety than it has all day.

'What about Toffee?'

I freeze with my arm mid-sleeve. My head snaps toward him.

'What about Toffee?'

'Do I get to see her?'

'Why would you?'

'She's our dog, we need to find a way to share her.'

'She's not ours, she's mine,' I suddenly find myself defensive and firm. 'Toffee was with me long before I met you, long before we moved into that bloody house.'

Something crosses his face. His smile drops and his eyes darken, lowering onto his empty cup. He's realising that I'm right. If I was angry with him, maybe I'd enjoy this, but I just feel immensely uncomfortable. It feels like memory is grazing his mind, and he's recalling the hours

we spent scrolling through rental websites to find properties that allowed pets because I refused to move anywhere without my Toffee.

I realise that Toffee might be more of a loss to Oscar than I am. Girlfriends and partners can be swapped with relative ease – you fall out of love with one and in with another, so you swap their keys, their wardrobes and their cars. One set of shampoo and conditioner moves out and a new one takes its place, the first girlfriend makes a slightly better veggie curry but the new one does a nicer spaghetti bolognese so you accept the trade-off with a side of garlic bread. This seems to have been pretty simple for him, and I'm sure for Her too. But it looks like Oscar has just realised that dogs have a tighter hold on us, one that's much harder to break free of. Dogs aren't so easily replaced, because it is almost impossible to fall out of love with them.

'I'm sorry,' I offer, ending the silence but not meeting his gaze. For the record, I don't feel sorry, it just feels polite to say.

'I miss her.' His eyes don't move from the table.

'I'm sure you do.' And it's true, I am sure. Toffee's the best. That's not my bias, it's objective fact.

We stare at each other for a moment. I don't think we've looked at each other straight on this whole conversation. I finish putting my jacket on. We leave without another word. The door behind us closes with a rubber squeak. Down the stairs, we see a couple walking to class. The President's Garden is filled with students catching as much sun as they can before their next classes. Oscar and I used to do that too. Usually between Philosophy and French on a Wednesday afternoon.

'I still walk Toffee around here on a Sunday morning,' I offer. 'Around campus, and down to Fitzgerald's Park sometimes.'

Oscar's shoulders twitch, with just the slightest inclination of his head toward me.

'I mean,' I pause slightly, suddenly needing a deep breath. 'If you happen to be around sometime, maybe you could come see her.'

He turns and stares at me, or maybe through me.

'I-I don't know if that'll work' he trails off. I'm not sure if he's talking to me, or myself.

'Cora and I have started swimming on Sunday mornings.'

Cora. She/Her. It suits him, actually. Oscar and Cora. Cora and Oscar. Oscora. Ultimate couple name. I don't know why, but it pierces me. I nod, understanding. Cora takes precedent now. Maybe with time, they'll find a spare morning to walk in the gardens.

Probably not though. More likely that they'll just get a new dog. Or a cat. Oscar always preferred cats. Toffee was the first dog he actually liked.

Hands in pockets, he shifts from one foot to another.

'Jill – I am sorry, yeah?'

I can't tell if he's telling me, or asking me. I don't think it actually matters. I try to make my mouth smile in response, but I don't know if it actually works.

We walk away from each other, with a brisk hug and an 'it-was-good-to-see-you, Oscar' and a 'mind-yourself-Jill.' I breathe in, breathe out. The sunshine is soft, gentle, but there's still a clip to the air. The warmth is muted by the wind which is rushing through the trees.

It's perfect weather for flying kites.

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