



**RESHAPING MIRRORS:
MOTHERS AND DAUGHTERS IN CONTEMPORARY
IRISH AND GALICIAN WOMEN'S POETRY**

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DOCTORAL THESIS/ TESE DE DOUTORAMENTO

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DOCTORAL THESIS

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This is to certify that this dissertation has been carried out under my
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INFORME

A Dra. Manuela Palacios González, Profesora Titular de Filoloxía Inglesa da Universidade de Santiago de Compostela e Directora da tese de doutoramento presentada por Dna. Teresa Pérez Tilve, que leva por título “Reshaping Mirrors: Mothers and Daughters in Contemporary Irish and Galician Women’s Poetry”

INFORMA

De que esta tese conta co seu visto e praxe por reunir todas as características necesarias para proceder á súa defensa pública. Trátase dun traballo de investigación orixinal de calidade que achega nova información sobre a análise comparada das literaturas contemporáneas galega e irlandesa de autoría feminina. O marco teórico e a bibliografía secundaria empregados son os axeitados para o tema investigado e as fontes de información están debidamente citadas e recoñecidas. Tanto a estrutura da tese como a súa redacción cumpren cos requisitos para proceder á defensa da mesma e as conclusións son novidosas ao se tratar dun tema non analizado anteriormente desde unha perspectiva comparada.

Santiago de Compostela, a 7 de abril de 2014

Asdo. Manuela Palacios González



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*To my daughters Clara and Rebeca,
who are mothers themselves.*





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GENERAL INTRODUCTION

0.1. Irish and Galician Literature: A Comparative Approach

There have been some convergent economic, cultural and socio-political circumstances that have affected Ireland and Galicia in a similar way. Some of these affinities are grounded on real facts, such as the Atlantic situation, which determines weather and landscape, and the existence of impoverished agrarian communities whose landownership systems did not provide for the sustenance of the families in rural areas. In Ireland, as a result of English colonisation, the property of the land was assigned to English landlords, who left thousands of small tenants in a desperate situation during the mass eviction or *clearances*¹ in the context of the Great Famine.² In Galicia, poverty was the consequence of the fragmentation of the land in small farms and holdings and the persistence, until 1926, of almost medieval ways of landownership —*foros*—³ which did not allow peasants to own the land they had cultivated for centuries. Both Irish and Galician people had to resort to large-scale emigration⁴ as the only way to overcome poverty. Other similarities must be added, such as the strong influence of the Catholic Church, whose doctrine pervaded the legal systems in both countries, and the existence of two vernacular languages that have hardly survived the colonisation of English and Spanish master-languages.

Another important link between Galicia and Ireland is the claim of related Celtic origins, which is based on shared myths and legends. Manuela Palacios and Laura Lojo (2009) underline the asymmetry of the reciprocal interest in this connection shown in Ireland and Galicia since, in Galicia, there was a deliberate elaboration of a mythology that linked both countries, implemented by nineteenth-century writers and historians, whereas no comparable interest for Galicia was shown in Ireland. Besides, Galician nationalists found inspiration in the Irish fight

for independence as they struggled to get a Galician Statute of Autonomy, so Celticism “reached its highest peak in the 1920s and 1930s with the nationalist appropriation of the Irish model on the basis of a common Celtic heritage, which was adopted as a cohesive element of national identity” (Palacios and Lojo 2009, 13). Moreover, Celticism has become part of Galician popular culture and is reflected in the presence of a Celtic mythological hero —Breogán—⁵ in the Galician national anthem. Although there is no general agreement about the historical truthfulness of these Celtic roots, throughout the second half of the nineteenth century and all along the twentieth century, the interest in Irish culture has been present in many of the most outstanding Galician writers, especially in poets. The Irish writer Mary O’Donnell stated the lack of reciprocity in this interest: “Yet what became apparent was the amount and quality of articles, books and pamphlets which demonstrated a categorically clear interest in Irish writers by Galician scholars and poets over the years. The interest from there to here has been unstinting” (2010, 17).

Another important coincidence, and the most relevant one for the purpose of this work, is the extraordinary emergence of women writers both in Ireland and Galicia in the last decades of the twentieth century, with the special flourishing of poetry written by women. This has run parallel in Galicia to an increase in Irish studies and, in particular, in their concern for the literary creation of Irish women writers, during the first decade of this century.⁶ In this regard, I especially want to mention the project *Poesía y Género: Poetas irlandesas y gallegas contemporáneas*,⁷ coordinated by Manuela Palacios and carried out in the Department of English at the University of Santiago de Compostela, because it was in this context that this dissertation was initiated.⁸

Among the great plurality and variety of women’s poetic voices that can be heard both in Ireland and Galicia, I have focused my attention on those who belong to a generation of women who were brought up in a patriarchal-dictatorial society and had to struggle hard to get rid of all the oppressive ideological structures that subdued women’s lives so that they could find their way into a

professional career without renouncing motherhood. Furthermore, most of these women writers translate into their creative work their personal experience as mothers and/or daughters and, putting into practice the feminist claim that the *personal is political*, they give voice to issues that had previously been considered private matters not worthy of artistic representation.

These women writers speak from different perspectives and yet, we can perceive a common thread running through most of their poems: breaking women's silence and giving voice to issues which had been ignored so far, as well as producing counterdiscourses to a number of myths and stereotypes which have shaped the culturally-constructed concepts of feminine and masculine identities. Moreover, patriarchal discourses have often identified femininity with motherhood and have constructed an ideology that has idealised the image of the woman-mother and, at the same time, silenced or ignored the reality of flesh and bone mothers.

The aim of this dissertation is to see to what extent these mothers' and daughters' voices have become the speaking subjects of their own experiences in the literary creation of a number of contemporary Irish and Galician women writers. My analysis is indebted to those feminist theories about motherhood that have challenged the validity of a supposedly universal representation of the mother figure, in favour of unfixed multifaceted images of mothers that take into account not only the sociopolitical and economic circumstances that condition their lives, but also the changes in their relationship to their children in the different stages of their development. My hypothesis is that, through their poems, these women writers have shattered the image of a *woman-mother* mirrored by biased philosophical, religious and psychoanalytic male discourses, and have reshaped different images of mothers and daughters which are more grounded on real women's experiences. I will try to demonstrate that there is no single mother's voice that can represent normative motherhood, but multiple mothers' and daughters' voices as diverse as multiple and varied are the factors that determine women's lives.

The corpus selected for this dissertation is mainly based on poetry collections that have been published for the last twenty five years —with a few exceptions, such as some poems by Luz Pozo Garza, that were first published monthly in *Vida Galega* (1956), and by Eithne Strong in *Songs of Living* (1961), *Sarah, In Passing* (1974) and *Flesh: The Greatest Sin* (1980), as well as some poems by Eavan Boland (1982). Fifteen Irish and ten Galician women writers have been chosen with the criterion that they have given voice to mothers and daughters who reflect about their relationship in their creative work. The reason for the lower number of Galician poets is that there are not as many contemporary Galician women writers who have represented personal experiences of the mother-child relationship as there are in Irish literature. This may be due to the fact that, after almost forty years of General Franco's dictatorship, the priority of Galician women writers focused on the struggle for women's rights and the need to get their voices heard. They had to demonstrate that they could address the same issues men did.

All these Galician and Irish women writers belong to three different generations. Xohana Torres and Luz Pozo Garza were born before the Civil War and started publishing in the 1950s, in a time characterised by a strong censorship which restricted the issues that could be the matter of literary creation. Luz Pichel, Marilar Aleixandre, Marica Campo, Ana Romani, Marta Dacosta, Xela Arias⁹ and Luisa Castro belong to a generation who was born after the war and, as Manuela Palacios and Laura Lojo underline, “for the first time in history, had general access to third-level education and [...] began to write in an effervescent period of feminist, nationalist and left-wing activism” (2009, 20). This is the time when the long-lasting dictatorship of Franco came to an end in 1975 and the priority in the feminist struggle was focused on the conquest of civil rights in general and women's rights in particular. In addition to this, most Galician women writers were especially concerned with the use of Galician language as a personal and political commitment with a language that had been banned from the public domain and reduced to the rural areas.¹⁰ Finally, Lupe Gómez belongs to the

generation of women born in the 1970s who grew up in the longest democratic period of Spanish modern history.

Three generations of Irish women writers are also represented in this work. Eithne Strong and Mary Beckett are the oldest and they have passed away. However, they can be included with Eavan Boland, Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin, Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill, and Anne Hartigan in the generation of writers who, in the 1980s, “began to record women’s explicit gender-consciousness in their writings” (Palacios and Lojo 2009, 22). Paula Meehan, Mary Dorcey, Mary O’Malley, Mary O’Donnell, Kerry Hardie, Jessie Lendennie, Enda Wyley and Susan Connolly belong to an intermediate generation that followed the path opened by the previous one and asserted their right to put their lives and personal experiences into their art. Finally, Sinéad Morrissey is one of the Northern Ireland younger writers who have already consolidated their careers as poets. Some of these poets write in Irish and English and others do so only in English but they do not seem to see any conflict in their using one language or another and all of them consider themselves as belonging to the same culture.

All of these women writers have a strong commitment with Irish and Galician literature respectively, although not all of them were born in Ireland or Galicia. Jessie Lendennie — a well-known editor and publisher of Irish Poetry— is an American with Irish roots and Marilar Aleixandre was born in Madrid but works in Santiago and writes in Galician. Some of these writers have a vast literary production which is not restricted to poetry,¹¹ while Jessie Lendennie has published two poetry books so far.

The vast majority of texts analysed here are poems, except for Mary Beckett’s short story “Heaven” (1989), some fragments of Mary O’Donnell’s novel *The Elysium Testament* (1999), Kerry Hardie’s novel *A Winter Marriage* (2003) and Lupe Gomez’s *Fisteus era un mundo* (2001). Although this last one is not actually a poetry book, in most of its pages the boundaries between prose and poetry are blurred, subverting, perhaps deliberately, the traditional division of genres.

These women writers had to break the mirrors that reflected images of women that had been shaped for them by the conjunction of several patriarchal discourses. Their struggle takes place at three levels that are closely interconnected and, at some points, link with the general claims of feminist movements, although there are some others that affect them in a more particular way. Firstly, these women writers shared with most Irish and Spanish women the fight to break the walls of an idealised private sphere built for them by the Irish and Spanish nationalist patriarchal discourses.¹² These, together with the Catholic doctrine, which inspired the political ideology in both countries and influenced the legal framework in issues, such as divorce, contraception and abortion, affected women's lives deeply. Secondly, they had to disrupt and contradict images of women defined by seemingly universal discourses, like that of psychoanalysis, which elaborated a fixed feminine identity that was defined by motherhood. Thirdly, women writers had to struggle to place themselves and their work in the public sphere of literary creation, a world that had been men's domain, without being relegated to a ghetto inhabited by women who write about women's issues.¹³

In the "The Laugh of the Medusa", Hélène Cixous (1981) [1976] stated the need for woman to break the silence imposed on her and write as an act of liberation: "[Woman] must write her self, because this is the invention of a *new insurgent* writing, which, when the moment of her liberation has come, will allow her to carry out the indispensable ruptures and transformations in her history" (1981, 250). On a collective level, Cixous affirms that this act of writing will be "marked by woman's *seizing* the occasion to *speak*, hence her shattering entry into history, which has always been based on *her suppression*" (250). Writing will allow woman "to forge for herself the anti-logos weapon" (250) and "[t]o become at will the taker and initiator, for her own right, in every symbolic system, in every political process" (250). Cixous asserts that "[i]t is by writing, from and toward women, and by taking up the challenge of speech which has been governed by the phallus" (251) that women will be able to "break out the snare of silence" (250) and get out of the state of dumbness that had been reserved for them in and by the

symbolic. Cixous believes that women “shouldn’t be conned into accepting a domain which is the margin of the harem” (251).

Therefore, although the experiences and the points of view of the women writers object of this dissertation may differ considerably from one another, it can be said that they share the clear intention of holding firmly the tool of language in order to talk, from a different position, about those issues related to women’s lives which have been either ignored or used as aesthetic idealisations in literary texts. Manuela Palacios, following Eavan Boland, points out: “A emerxencia destas novas voces modificou as tradicións literarias respectivas ao pasar a muller de obxecto poético, ou sexa, tema ou imaxe na creación literaria, a suxeito, é dicir a autora” (2006, 4). In this dissertation, women are, most of the times, the speaking voices of these poems, not just the objects of contemplation of male poets, as they had usually been. But even when there is a calculated ambiguity about the sex of the poetic persona, the feminist perspective is clear. So, we can say that this objective of taking hold of the position of speaking subjects of the poems serves as a leitmotiv which links the work of these women writers, in spite of the differences of age, cultural background and point of view.

0.2.Motherhood: A Historical Background

I want to show an overview of the socio-political circumstances that conditioned women’s lives along the twentieth century both in Ireland and Spain—Galicia has been largely conditioned by the legal and economic measures taken by the Spanish central government— because I think it is important to underline the contradiction inherent in the patriarchal discourses of Irish Nationalism and Spanish Francoist National Catholicism. On the one hand, they developed an ideology that identified woman with mother and elaborated highly idealised images of motherhood, linking them with the image of Mother Ireland and the Maternal Fatherland in Spain. On the other hand, they deprived women-mothers of

any agency to carry out their function by denying them the civil rights and resources that would allow them to improve their lives and their children's.

Spanish women were not allowed the right to go to university until 1911. Amparo Rubiales observes that even primary and secondary education for women was considered advisable as far as it was useful for the education of children, or “en el caso de que tuvieran la desgracia de no casarse, se pudieran ganar la vida, primero como institutrices y, más tarde, como maestras” (Rubiales 2003, 4).

There was no reference to the equality of rights between men and women in the Spanish Constitutions previous to the Second Republic. In the first legislative elections of 1931 women could be candidates but not voters. Only three women were elected: Clara Campoamor, Victoria Kent and Margarita Nelken, all of them from leftist parties. The three of them were relevant activists in favour of women's rights. Clara Campoamor¹⁴ and Victoria Kent¹⁵ were lawyers and had opened the first female law firm in Madrid, and Margarita Nelken had already published several books about women issues (1919, 1931). Nelken underlined that the existing Civil Code rendered women invisible, as it did not consider her a citizen. She also denounced the exploitation by their employers they suffered at work, as well as the hostility of their own male workmates (1919).

The fight of Clara Campoamor¹⁶ in favour of women's votes was decisive and clashed with the opposition of her own party as well as that of her colleagues Victoria Kent and Margarita Nelken. Both Kent and Nelken argued that women's votes could be a danger for the Republic since the vast majority of women lacked the necessary preparation to decide by themselves and would follow the advice of their husbands and confessors.¹⁷ Despite this, the constitution of 1931 acknowledged women's rights by stating in article 25: “No podrán ser fundamento de privilegio jurídico, el nacimiento, el sexo, la clase social, la riqueza, las ideas políticas y las creencias religiosas”. Consequently, women's right to vote was declared in article 36: “Los ciudadanos de uno y otro sexo, mayores de veintitrés años, tendrán los mismos derechos electorales conforme determinen las leyes”. A total number of nine women were elected in the three elections (1931, 1933 and

1936) and all of them played important roles during the Republican period but, after the Civil War, these women —like thousands of people— were condemned to exile and their names were erased from official culture, leaving a political and historical vacuum in the field of women's rights that lasted until the last decades of the twentieth century.

After the Civil War there was a serious backward step in the field of civil rights which affected all the people, although it was especially painful for women, who lost all the rights they had achieved during the short period of the II Republic. Universal democratic suffrage¹⁸ and divorce were immediately abolished after Franco's coup d'état. In 1938, in the middle of the Civil War, one law enacted by Francoist government, *El Fuero del Trabajo*, established as an important goal of the new regime to free the married woman from the workshop and the factory. Moreover, there was both in Ireland and Spain a strong reaction of the Catholic Church against women's movements which were claiming for laws in favour of contraception, divorce and abortion all over Western European Countries. This reaction was supported by the doctrine expressed by the papal encyclical *Casti Connubii* published by Pope Pius XI (1930), in which the nature of marriage was attributed to God and, consequently, inalterable by man.¹⁹

The doctrine expressed in this encyclical also stated that sexuality was only allowed as a means of procreating children within the normative family and, outside this, it was forbidden and considered a grave sin. Thus, single mothers were considered public sinners unworthy of any social respect and consideration. In accordance to this doctrine, the Spanish Civil Code of 1945 proclaimed in chapter II, article 22: "El Estado reconoce y ampara a la familia como institución natural y fundamento de la sociedad, con derechos y deberes anteriores y superiores a toda ley humana positiva" (BOE, 199/1945). Within the family, the woman was completely subjected to the authority of man: father, husband or tutor. Some articles of this Code were reformed in 1958 so that it could be in accordance to the agreement signed between the Spanish Government and the Vatican in 1953. The Holy See was especially interested in the total abolition of the remnants of

civil marriage, which had been admitted when either the bride or the bridegroom were non-Catholic. After the modification, civil marriage was only allowed when both of them proved to be non-Catholic (BOE, 25/04/1958, 730). Besides, the authority of the husband was reasserted and justified by *nature, religion* and *history*:

Se contempla, por tanto, la posición peculiar de la mujer casada en la sociedad conyugal, en la que, por exigencias de la unidad matrimonial, existe una potestad de dirección, que la naturaleza, la Religión y la Historia atribuyen al marido, dentro de un régimen en el que se recoge fielmente el sentido de la tradición católica que ha inspirado siempre y debe inspirar en lo sucesivo las relaciones entre los cónyuges. (BOE, 25/04/1958, 730)

Children were classified, according to their origin, into legitimate, legitimised and illegitimate, and the latter could in turn be natural or adulterine. The responsibility of the father was different in accordance to each category but he maintained the priority of the custody. Rubiales underlines that “[e]l tratamiento diferente de los hijos, se justificaba en la protección de la familia, pero, en realidad, a quien se protegía era al varón, en perjuicio de los hijos y de las madres” (2003, 8). She also observes that Article 321 discriminated women in that, although the age of majority was 23 years for both sexes, daughters could not abandon their father’s home until they were 25, unless they got married or became nuns. “Se decía que la finalidad de esta disposición era el decoro público y personal de las hijas” (Rubiales 2003, 8). Behind this statement about the need to protect the morality of daughters, one can detect the interest to control women’s sexuality and the legitimacy of the future offspring.

Christine Arkininstall (2002) states about the situation of Spanish women that “for almost forty years the body of the mother becomes the dominant element around which sanctioned concepts of femininity, gender and nationhood are organized” (2002, 48). Arkininstall also observes how the close alliance of Falangist doctrine and Spanish Catholicism produced the powerful ideology of National Catholicism in which both Church and State disguised their patriarchal premises

“by representing themselves as feminized bodies: the Madre Patria (Maternal Fatherland) and Santa Madre Iglesia (Holy Mother Church) respectively” (48).

In “Women, the Vote and Revolution” Margaret Mac Curtain (2008a) [1978], points out how the Intermediate Act in 1878 allowed Irish girls access to higher education and, for the first time, women could take degrees and carry off university honours. Mac Curtain underlines the active role Irish women played throughout the nineteenth century until the years previous to World War One. In the first decades of the twentieth century women participated and contributed to what Mac Curtain calls the Irish renaissance, in the fields of theatre, history and art. Besides, there was “a growing consciousness about women’s rights which found expression in a demand for participation in government by means of the vote and, less noticeably, in organising trade unions for women” (Mac Curtain 2008a, 82).²⁰

The women’s suffragist movements clashed not only with the hostility of conservative parties but also with those politicians who showed sympathy for women’s claim but were afraid of their vote being influenced by the clergy. Mac Curtain records that John Redmond, the leader of the Irish Parliamentary Party “told a deputation of women in April, 1911, that he was against votes for women as it would increase the power of clergy” (87). It is curious to notice the coincidence of reasoning, in Ireland and Spain, of those who affirmed that they sympathised with women’s claims, but considered women’s vote dangerous on the ground that women would be easily influenced by the clergy and the most conservative sectors of society.

Women played an active part in the Easter Rising in 1916, —one of the most outstanding leaders, Countess Constance Markievicz showed a great courage as a lieutenant of the Citizen Army and she was imposed the death penalty, from which she was freed later under the general amnesty. Mac Curtain observes that, after the Rising, “the national question took precedence” over women’s claims and “nationalism sublimated all lesser concerns for the next few years” (94). During the Anglo-Irish War members of the Cumann na mBan “undertook scouting,

dispatch-carrying, intelligence work and first aid, often in high-risk zones” (95). Some were wounded and some suffered jail sentences. Mac Curtain wonders why, after the Civil War, women were not able to take advantage of the rights they had conquered, despite having proved their capability of creating and managing their own movements, their own trade unions and having participated in the socio-political events that led to the creation of the Free State: “In many respects it was a spectacular victory but the paradox remains to be explained: Irish women were free in the areas they had struggled for, why then were they content to remain subordinate in a society they had helped to create?” (2008a, 97). In “The Historical Image” (2008b) [1985], Mac Curtain observes that the active participation of women in the political and social struggle was overtaken by “the forces of counter-revolution” (2008b, 135). After the setting of the Northern State in 1920 and the Free State in 1922 women were forced to go back home: “Around Irish women, as in a cage, were set the structures of family life and women were assigned a home-based, full-time role as housewives, whose talents and energies were devoted to looking after husband and children” (2008, 135). Civil divorce was ruled out in 1925 and legislation on censorship about public morality was passed in 1923 and 1927 (Mac Curtain 2008b, 135-136).

The De Valera’s 1937 Constitution, with its emphasis on the importance of the family and the woman as the centre of it, showed how the state was determined to remove women from public life and take them back home, thus re-establishing a division of functions based on traditional gender roles. Patricia Kennedy highlights the fact that there was at the time a “moral crisis” in Ireland, with increasing illegitimacy rates and the Constitution “was seen as a perfect opportunity to promote Catholic social teaching and to control the citizens of Ireland, in particular women and to reverse the 1922-1936 Constitution” (Kennedy 2002, 45). Kennedy also states that the ideology behind the articles 41 and 41.2 echoes the doctrine of the Catholic Church expressed in the papal encyclical *Casti Connubii* (1930).

Thus article 41 declares the family an institution whose rights were prior and above all positive laws, cutting short the possibility of laws which might attempt the modification of this quasi divine institution. At the same time it emphasises the moral function of the family within the state and of woman within the family as the guardians of social order:

Article 41

1.1 The State recognises the Family as the natural primary unit group of Society, and as a moral institution possessing inalienable and imprescriptible rights, antecedent and superior to all positive law.

1.2 The State, therefore, guarantees to protect the Family in its Constitution and authority, as the necessary basis of social order and as indispensable to the welfare of the Nation and the State. (apud Kennedy, 2002, 45)

Article 41.2 does not establish a clear distinction between the terms “woman” and “mother” since, in part 1, it states that woman’s contribution to “common good” should be lived out “within the home”, leaving no other way for woman’s contribution to social welfare and, in part 2, the State guarantees the protection of mothers. It might seem that being a woman is a step previous to being a mother, which is considered as the right female identity

Article 41.2

1. In particular, the State recognises that by her life within the home, woman gives to the State support without which the common good cannot be achieved.

2. The State shall, therefore, endeavour to ensure that mothers shall not be obliged by economic necessity to engage in labour to the neglect of their duties in the home. (apud Kennedy 2002, 45)

Anne Fogarty observes that this article, which aimed at protecting mothers from engaging in the labour force and empowering their role at home, has in fact, the effect of diminishing their power; so, “well-intentioned paternalism paves the way to social oppression” (2002, 87).²¹ In Francoist Spain, National Catholicism afforded mothers a great symbolic significance while, in practice, denied them any kind of control over their bodies, children and the economic resources necessary to

fulfil their function. Thus, Irish and Spanish nationalisms in conjunction with the Catholic Church knitted an ideological framework in which idealised images of motherhood were associated with chastity and unlimited devotion to others, namely nation, husband and children. Catholic discourse of maternity promoted the image of the immaculate Virgin Mary who was liberated from original sin, sex and death. This model of maternal representation excludes the female body and the physical facts of sexuality, menstruation, conception, abortion and childbirth, which are associated with filth, waste and blood, and belong to the realm of what Julia Kristeva calls the “abject” (1982).²²

As we have seen, there are some similarities in the history of Irish and Spanish women’s struggle for civil rights. Both in Ireland and Spain, the Roman Catholic Church has exerted such great power that, as recently as 1978, Spain was a confessional Catholic state and Ireland was until recently one of the few remaining developed countries in which abortion—theoretically legal if there was a risk to the life of the woman—was considered malpractice by the body that held medical licenses.²³ In 1995 a Divorce Referendum was passed and Ireland ceased to be the last remaining Western democracy to disallow divorce. In Spain, it was not after Franco’s death in 1975 and the subsequent establishment of a democratic government that women’s rights to the decriminalisation of contraceptive methods (1978), divorce (1981) and decriminalisation of abortion (1985, 2010) were achieved. Even now, when religious practices have decreased considerably and the laicism of Spanish society is gradually increasing, issues like abortion or gay and lesbian marriage are highly controversial points, and the Church attempts to influence government policy about these matters.

In “Stabat Mater” (1986), Julia Kristeva affirms that “we live in a civilisation where the *consecrated* (religious or secular) representation of femininity is absorbed by motherhood” (161). But this representation comes from “a *fantasy* that is nurtured by the adult, man or woman, of a lost territory” and it does not involve the idealisation of an “archaic mother” but rather “the idealisation of the *relationship* that binds us to her” (161). If Kristeva’s statement can be applied to

the whole Western civilisation, both Ireland and Spain are societies which have taken further the consecrated ideal of motherhood as the essence of womanhood.

However, women did not submit completely to this ideological construction of womanhood and managed to get out of this framework that did not reflect the reality of their lives. Both Irish and Galician lower-class women had been working hard in agriculture, cattle breeding, industry and many of them had resorted to emigration in order to look for better life conditions for them and their families.²⁴ The problems that working mothers had to face to combine their work outside home with the care of their children were ignored by the official ideology, which continued presenting normative images of a middle class woman-wife-mother breeding her children in a heterosexual nuclear family in which man was the only breadwinner. During the 1960s and 1970s more and more women had access to second and third level of education and, little by little, they started breaking the walls of home and widening the range of jobs they could hold, while from the margins of the official discourses, feminist movements challenged the theoretical constructions of motherhood.

0.3. Psychoanalysis, Feminisms and Motherhood

The early 1970s saw the development of the second wave of feminist movements with their growing awareness of the change in social and familial structures derived from the increasing incorporation to the work market, in American and Western European countries, of a new generation of women who had had access to education and was claiming for a place in the public sphere. Looking for an active role in the cultural, economic and social world required a change in the ideological construction of female identities which had been based on women's roles as wives and mothers. This produced, in some cases, a feminist reaction against mothering, which was seen as the source of oppression and devaluation of women. In their "Introduction" to *Representations of Motherhood* (1994), Donna Basin, Margaret Honey and Meryle Mahrer Kaplan mention the

work of a number of feminists who adopted a radical opposition against motherhood and asserted the need to avoid it, so that woman could become a person in her own right, like a man:

Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) deemed home "a prison." Juliet Mitchell (1971) saw child rearing as an "instrument of oppression," and Shulamith Firestone (1971) went so far as to entitle a chapter "Down with Childhood" and called for a total severance of the tie between women and motherhood. (Basin et al 1994, 6)

The 1970s also saw a development in the methodology of feminist literary criticism which ran parallel to the increasing number of female psychoanalyst theorists, anthropologists and philosophers who reacted against some of the assumptions of traditional psychoanalytic thought. By the mid and late 1970s, there was intense work done by feminists who tried to integrate feminist theorising and psychoanalytic theory. Feminist anthropologists such as Sherry B. Ortner (1974), Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere (1974), as well as feminist psychologists like Nancy Chodorow (1971, 1974, 1978, 1989) analysed the biological, historical and sociological theories which have determined the nature of mothering and the familial division of labor, as well as tried to demonstrate "the potential parenting capacities in everyone who has been mothered" (1978, 90). Chodorow underlines what she calls "Freudian excesses" and "weak points" and admits that Freud's theories were based on his perception of a particular social class at a particular time. She affirms that, sometimes, Freud was only "describing how women develop in a patriarchal society" (142) and, "[a]t other times, he was simply making unsupported assertions which should be taken as no more than that, or as statements about how women (and men) ought to be" (142).

However, a great deal of the scholarly research done in the fields of literary criticism and in feminist psychoanalytic theory about the mother-daughter relationship turned around the topic of daughter subject-formation, her developmental process and her assumption of or reaction against the social roles

her mother represented. Some feminists critics, like Marianne Hirsch, have underlined that the mother's voice was still unrepresented.

The emergence of black American women critics helped to question some feminist theorising about motherhood that was based on the model of a white middle-class, nuclear, heterosexual family. In "Shifting the Center" (1994), Patricia Hill Collins observes that although "survival power and identity shape motherhood for all women"(72), the experiences of African-American, Latino, Asian-American and native American mothers have been ignored in existing feminist theories about motherhood. She stresses the lack of attention paid to the importance of the social and economic context in which these theories are elaborated and points out that some feminist scholars are not aware of the fact that "they themselves are rooted in specific locations, and that the contexts in which they are located provide the thought-models of how they interpret the world" (72). This decontextualisation of theoretical analysis, which tries to generate universally valid theories, in fact "routinely distort[s] or omit[s] huge categories of human experience" (72).

Adrienne Rich's book, *Of Woman Born. Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (1986) [1976], was considered a landmark in feminist theorising about motherhood as well as a challenge to traditional genre divisions, since Rich combined, in an unusual way, her own experience as a mother of three children, as well as other mothers' accounts and scholarly research in the fields of mythology, anthropology, religion and psychology to unmask the patriarchal repression of the crucial importance of the mother in the development of the female individual. She analyses all the complex social, ideological and institutional circumstances that constrain women's lives and, particularly, mothers' lives. This blurring of boundaries between genres is of itself subversive, and more so when it brings to the fore the unwritten stories of mothers' experiences. Rich explores the contradiction between the ideologically constructed institution of motherhood and the real experiences of real mothers. She claims for the need that all daughters heal the relationship with the mother: "The cry of that female child in us need not be

shameful or regressive; it is the germ of our desire to create a world in which strong mothers and strong daughters will be a matter of course” (1986, 225).

Rich’s book opened a trend in feminist theorising that was developed along the mid 1980s, the 1990s, and the first years of the 2000s. The ambivalence and, sometimes, rejection of an essentialist vision of motherhood which precludes women from entering the public sphere as shown in previous decades was replaced by the vindication of motherhood as a privileged female experience worth of representation, and as an important element of empowering women. This trend has been developed by French feminist writers like Julia Kristeva, Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray who “have emphasized the salient role that motherhood plays in providing access to unappreciated and previously unspoken female experiences” (Bassin et al 1994, 9).

Rich’s *Of Woman Born* has been influential in the work of feminist literary critics such as Marianne Hirsch (1989), Adalgisa Giorgio (2002), Andrea O’Reilly and Silvia Caporale Bizzini (2009), among others, who have tried to validate the mothers’ voices and experiences, while, from the field of philosophy, Sara Ruddick (1989, 1994) has tried to rescue the objectified mother from the passive role assigned by what she calls “psychoanalytic tales”, which she considers to be “of little help in representing mothers as thinkers” (1994, 31). In her essay “Thinking Mothers/Conceiving Birth” (1994), she notices the lack of representations of mothers as thinking people engaged in a thoughtful project. Jessica Benjamin (1990, 1994) developed the theory of *intersubjectivity*, which, applied to the mother-child relationship, implies the coexistence in the child of “the fantasy of maternal omnipotence and the capacity to recognize the mother as another subject” (1994, 132).

0.4. Structure

In chapter 1 “Pregnant Bodies/ Embodied Subjectivities”, I will follow Susan Bordo’s reflection (1995) about the hierarchical dichotomies mind/body,

soul/matter, culture/nature that have pervaded most philosophical trends in Western thought and become an essential constituent of Christian Religion. In these dichotomies the first terms: mind/soul/culture have always been considered superior and assigned the right to control the second ones: body/matter/nature. In this division of roles man appropriated the first domain and woman was ascribed to the second one, due to her reproductive powers, which were considered biological matters that equated her to the rest of female mammals and, as such, had to be controlled by patriarchal authority and excluded from the *higher* world of culture. These dichotomies are still present in the social and political debates about issues like abortion and surrogacy, which consider women's bodies as matter subjected to legal control or objects that can be hired.

In this chapter, we will see, through Sinéad Morrissey's poem "Matter" (2009) the attempts to create life without the female body and how the poetic voices of Eithne Strong (1993) and Anne Hartigan (1991) bring to the fore the dark aspects of the oppressive control that patriarchal ideology has exerted on women's bodies. In doing so, they express women's desire of "speaking the unspoken" (Bassin et al 1994, 9). However, in contrast to the mind/matter dichotomies, we will also find voices of mothers who integrate body and mind to represent their experiences of pregnancy and childbirth, in the poetry of Sinéad Morrissey (2009), Luz Pozo Garza (2004), Mary O'Donnell (1993, 2005), Susan Connolly (1993) and Enda Wyley (2009).

In chapter 2, "Tying and Untying Bonds" I will reflect briefly about the essentialist/anti-essentialist debate about the definition of feminine/masculine identities that have divided feminist theorising for the last decades of the twentieth century. Anti-essentialist feminists like Monique Wittig (1979, 1981), Christine Delphy (1984), Diana Fuss (1989) and María Xosé Queizán (2008) contend that concepts like man and woman are social constructs and so is motherhood. Adrienne Rich's differentiation between motherhood as a personal experience and the social construction that links it inexorably with woman's destiny (1976) has been shared by some feminist psychologists like Nancy Chodorow (1978) and

Sarah Ruddik (1998). Chodorow did not discard biology completely, but stated that the exclusivity of women's mothering was due to a gendered division of labour and Sarah Ruddik (1989) split motherhood in two separate functions: birthgiving and mothering. Ruddik considered that, while birthgiving is undeniably linked to female's biology, the capabilities required to care and nurture children are not innate and do not have to be inexorably associated to hormonal processes.

However, other feminists such as Luce Irigaray, Hélène Cixous and Julia Kristeva asserted the need to rescue women's bodies from the censorship imposed on them by patriarchy, so that women can enjoy the richness and complexity of experiences the female body can provide, including those related to motherhood, which is considered as a privilege of female biology.

In this context I will draw on some poems by Luz Pozo Garza (2004), Eavan Boland (1982, 1991), Mary O'Donnell (2005) and Enda Wyley (2009) which represent different aspects of the mother-child bond in the first stages of their relationship. We will also find, in the poems of Sinéad Morrissey (2009), Xela Arias (1996) and Luz Pozo Garza (2004), "thinking mothers" who, not only express love for their children but, are also able to reflect about the child's own independent development.

Chapter 3, "Redressing the Balance", will deal with the consequences of the changes in social and familial structures derived from the increasing incorporation, to the work market, of a new generation of women who have had access to education and have been claiming for a place in the public sphere. Playing an active role in the cultural, economic and social world requires a change in the ideological construction of female identities which has been based on women's roles as wives and mothers. Christine Arkininstall underlines, that this new scenario has brought about a recurrent theme in women's writing: "the conflict arising over the possible reconciliation of motherhood and a profession, frequently one involving writing" (2002, 64). Arkininstall points out that in some women's narratives one can see how this situation "has culturally fragmented women, [...]"

making them less of a mother if they work and less of a person in a competitive consumer society if they choose to mother exclusively” (Arkininstall 2002, 64).

In this chapter 3 we will see, in the poems of Eavan Boland (1995) and Eithne Strong (1993), the inner conflicts of the poetic personas who do not accept being defined by traditional roles and claim for an individual identity that is not limited to their being mothers. They state their right to a personal development which will not diminish their love and dedication to their children. We will also see in some of Sinéad Morrissey’s poems (1996) how the troubles in Northern Ireland affect families. The socio-political oppression exerted on mothers can trigger maternal anger and violence as seen in Luz Pozo Garza (2002), Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill (1992), Mary O’Donnell (1999) and Kerry Hardie (2003). In this chapter we will also reflect about the so-called *new momism* and its implication in the construction of a seemingly new ideology of motherhood which has striking resemblances with the old traditional one.

Chapter 4, “Revising Myths and Archetypes”, will deal with the research done in the fields of archaeology and anthropology regarding ancient religions that worshipped a powerful Mother-Goddess and we will see how these discoveries have prompted some feminist theorising to contradict images of women derived from Jewish-Christian religions, whose rules were supposedly dictated by a supreme male God and determined the devaluation and submission of women to male dominion. Through some poems of Kerry Hardie (1996) and Anne Hartigan (1991), we will trace the feelings of disempowered mothers and daughters who must submit to a patriarchal authority which is presented as inscribed in the immutable order established by God. We will also see revisions of the myth of the Fall and the image of Eve done by Mary O’Donnell (1993), Marta Dacosta (1998), Marilar Aleixandre (2003) and Marica Campo (2007), as well as the re-writing of some mythical legends and archetypes related to motherhood which emphasise an adult mother-daughter relationship, and represent a rich gamut of feelings. These feelings range from jealousy and over-protection from the mother in Eithne Strong (1993) and Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin (2001), to the use of the classical myth of

Demeter and Persephone by Eavan Boland (1995, 1998), Mary O' Malley (2003) Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill (1999) and Luz Pozo Garza (2004). This old myth is appropriated by the mothers' poetic personas in order to address actual issues, such as sexuality, rape, white slavery, emigration and ageing.

In chapter 5, "Inflicting and Healing Wounds", there is a change of perspective with regard to the previous chapters in which mothers were the speaking voices in most of the texts examined. In this chapter the reflection about the mother-daughter relationship is seen from the point of view of the daughter. I will briefly examine the feminist debate that took place in the 1970s and 1980s between those who blamed the mother as the perpetuator of patriarchal ideology and those who considered that mothers were not the agents of patriarchal oppression but the victims of the social, economic and political system that had restricted their development. We will observe how the mother-daughter relationship is multidimensional and is mediated by changes of age, personal circumstances and social context.

We will analyse the daughter's feelings of loss in Jessie Lendennie's (2001) and Luz Pichel's (2006) poems, as well as the state of defencelessness of both mothers and daughters in the face of the violence exerted on them, in Jessie Lendennie (2001), Paula Meehan (2000, 2003) and Eavan Boland (2007). We will also reflect about the ambivalence of domestic spaces, which can be protective female domains but also the sites of violence and oppression where the submissive roles of women were transmitted from mothers to daughters, as is represented in the work of Lupe Gómez (2001), Marta Dacosta (1998), Anne Hartigan (1991, 2008), Jessie Lendennie (2001), Paula Meehan (2000, 2003) and Marilar Aleixandre (1999, 2003). We will find daughters' voices who demystify the supposedly gratifying domestic tasks and rebel against the mothers as collaborators in the perpetuation of patriarchal roles, particularly in the control of their daughters' sexuality.

However, a completely different perspective of the mother-daughter relationship can be found when the mature woman becomes the carer of her old

mother. We will see, in Mary Dorcey's poems (1994, 2001), a reversal of the mother-child roles that awakes contradictory feelings in the daughter. The chapter ends with the tribute paid to their grandmothers by Eithne Strong (1993) Mary O'Donnell (2005), Sinéad Morrissey (1996), Xohana Torres (2004) [1980], Ana Romaní (1998) and Marta Dacosta (1999). By writing about the unknown lives of their female ancestresses, these writers acknowledge the struggle of these women and place them in history while, at the same time, they situate themselves in a genealogy of strong women.

This goal of reinscribing women in history was expressed by the former President of Ireland, Mary Robinson, who affirmed in her "Inaugural Speech" in 1991: "I want this Presidency to promote the telling of stories —stories of celebration through the arts and stories of conscience and of social justice. As a woman, I want women who have felt themselves outside history to be written back into history" ("The Inaugural Speech", apud Donovan et al. 1994, 255).





CHAPTER 1

PREGNANT BODIES/EMBODIED SUBJECTIVITIES

1.1. Introduction

In “Corporeidad y lenguaje en la poesía irlandesa actual” (2008a), Laura Lojo observes that motherhood as biological and/or spiritual experience has been socially constructed through literary and visual images “filtradas por una conciencia masculina, de manera que la asombrosa capacidad de la mujer para crear vida se ‘domestica’ y transforma para servir a las instituciones” (52). Moreover, metaphors of gestation and birth have been traditionally appropriated and used by male poets to represent artistic creation. In “Suspended between Two Worlds” (2010), Katharina Walter quotes a letter James Joyce wrote to his wife Nora in 1912, in which he equated the book he had conceived in his imagination and written with the child his wife had carried in her womb. Walter points out that this analogising of literary creativity with woman’s procreativity is only an example of “the cultural paradigm [...] which was premised upon an inapt dissociation and gendering of male mind versus female body, with the implicit assumption that the corporeal was unworthy of art and literature” (Walter 2010, 103). Thus, women’s experiences of pregnancy and childbirth were not only reduced to silence but also robbed and transformed into metaphorical idealisations by male artistic creation.

In the “The Laugh of the Medusa”, Hélène Cixous (1981) reacted against this appropriation and stated the need for woman to break the silence imposed on her and write as an act of liberation both individual and collective. On an individual level, writing will allow woman to “return to the body which has been more than confiscated to her” (250) and has often been turned into “a nasty

companion, the cause and location of inhibitions” (250). Cixous establishes a close connection between the censorship of the woman’s body —whose sexual and reproductive powers were considered dangerous— and the censorship of woman’s speech: “Censor the body and you censor breath and speech at the same time” (250). She is convinced that, by the act of writing, woman will be able to break the censorship imposed on her relation to her sexuality and will recover the strength that was stolen from her. Cixous (1981) also disowns traditional psychoanalytic theorising about woman’s desire for a child as compensation for her sense of castration,¹ as well as widespread conceptualisations about the mother-child bond: “The child is the other, but the other without violence, bypassing loss, struggle. We’re fed up with the reuniting of bonds forever to be severed, with the litany of castration that’s handed down and genealogized” (261). Cixous also states the need for women to liberate their bodies from the taboos and the repression they have suffered and to find strength in the physicality of their bodies as well as in a new way of representing themselves and their relationship with the child. She equates the gestation drive to the desire to write:

We won’t advance backward anymore; we’re not going to repress something so simple as the desire for life. Oral drive, anal drive, vocal drive—all these drives are our strength, and among them is the gestation drive—just like the desire to write: a desire to live self from within, a desire for the swollen belly, for language, for blood. We are not going to refuse, if it should happen to strike our fancy, the unsurpassed pleasures of pregnancy which have actually been exaggerated or conjured away—or cursed—in the classic texts. (1981, 261)

Cixous also affirms that the “taboo of the pregnant women” is the cause of the repression woman has suffered and it is originated in the fear of the creative power of the female body, “because it has always been suspected, that, when pregnant, the woman not only doubles her market value, but —what’s more important— takes on intrinsic value as a woman in her own eyes and, undeniably, acquires body and sex” (261-62).

Drawing on Kristeva's theory of abjection, Heather Ingman states that abjection is "in the underside of the symbolic, what society must reject, cover over and contain, usually involving repudiation of our link with animality, sexuality and mortality" (2009, 228). Consequently, patriarchal ideologies have always tried to control and hide physical realities related to female procreative powers and this has resulted in leaving real mothers' lives out of public concern. Anne Fogarty states that it is no wonder that the last decades have seen in Ireland how "many of the most virulent moral and ethical debates have hinged on issues of women's rights and female sexuality" (Fogarty 2002, 88). Patricia Kennedy underlines the contradiction inherent in the fact that the physiological dimension of motherhood is an area of a woman's life that has been considered as private "and as such outside the sphere of social policy, whereas such essentially private areas as contraception and abortion have been commandeered by the media, legislators and the Church as public issues" (2002, 8).² In Spain, women's claims of decriminalisation of contraceptive methods and abortion, achieved some success, not without a strong political and social debate, with the Organic Law 9/1985, which decriminalised abortion in certain cases. However, the modifications introduced by the Organic Law 2/2010 raised almost the same political controversy as the one in 1985, with the Catholic ecclesiastical hierarchy championing against it.³

Little by little, women's issues like pregnancy, childbirth and childcare were brought into the public debate and women's voices started challenging widely established patriarchal and religious assumptions. At the same time, some women writers shook off traditional representations of motherhood in literature by challenging the relegation of maternal subjectivity to the abject and translating their experiences—which sometimes include, pain, sweat, blood and amniotic fluids—into their artistic creation.

In this chapter we will see how the dualities mind, soul / body, matter, that have informed Western science and philosophy from the Greeks to the first decades of the twentieth century, have defined conceptualisations of female bodies

and procreativity that are still in the background of some debates about pregnancy, mothering and birthgiving. We will journey with Sinéad Morrissey's poem "Matter" (2009), through the history of science to see the attempts to demonstrate that life could be generated without the female body. I will examine some poems by Eithne Strong (1993) [1980], Marilar Aleixandre (2003), Luz Pichel (2006) and Anne Hartigan (1991) which denounce the dark aspects of the oppressive control that patriarchal ideology has exerted on women's bodies. By contrast, in a number of poems by Sinéad Morrissey (2009), Luz Pozo Garza (2004), Mary O'Donnell (1993, 2005), Susan Connolly (1993) and Enda Wyley (2009), we will find various representations of pregnancy and childbirth that are the culmination of a long-desired personal project.

1.2. Enduring Dichotomies

In *Unbearable Weight. Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body* (1995), Susan Bordo, in a general overview through the history of Western philosophy, shows how a hierarchy has often been established in the dichotomy mind/body, which privileged mind, idea, and intellectual creation, over body, matter, and physical reproduction: "The body as animal, as appetite, as deceiver, as prison of the soul and confounder of its projects: these are common images within Western philosophy" (1995, 3). To generalise this dichotomy and extend it to all the philosophical thought would be to oversimplify history. Quite the contrary, Bordo acknowledges the historical variations of this "imaginal shape of the body" (3) or even the somewhat contradictory position of philosophers like Plato, whose attitude toward sex and bodily life is not the same in all his texts.⁴

Christian thought and philosophy not only established the dichotomy soul/body but also privileged unequivocally the hierarchy of the soul over the body, the latter being considered the soul's enemy, the animal subjected to gross instincts and appetites that lead to the worst sins and must be controlled and tamed by the rational, spiritual will. This conception of the body as the site of instinct prevailed

in the mechanistic science and philosophy of the seventeenth century, although it was not necessarily linked to the idea of sin. “Rather, the instinctual nature of the body means that it is a purely mechanical, biological programmed system that can be fully quantified and (in theory) controlled” (Bordo, 4).

It was Descartes who settled clearly at the centre of his metaphysics the distinction between mind and body. He considers them two separate substances created by God apart from one another. The mind is a substance whose essence is thought alone, while the body is a substance whose essence is extension alone. In his *Meditations II* he defines the body as something that has shape, fills a space and can be perceived by the senses.⁵

Descartes affirms that powers such as self-motion, perceiving and thinking do not pertain to the nature of the body, and they are attributes of the soul; although he acknowledges that walking or perceiving, for instance, would be impossible without the body. He also asserts that our senses are not reliable sources of knowledge because they cannot inform us about the true nature of things, but they are the necessary means of knitting together soul and body; although for some contemporaries it was not clear how this union could be compatible with the previous separation he established.

Descartes is much more categorical when assigning the soul the attribute of thinking, which is defined as the true essence of the self:

Thinking is another attribute of the soul; and here I discover what properly belongs to myself. This alone is inseparable from me. I am—I exist: this is certain; but how often? As often as I think; for perhaps it would even happen, if I should wholly cease to think, that I should at the same time altogether cease to be. I now admit nothing that is not necessarily true. I am therefore, precisely speaking, only a thinking thing, that is, a mind. (Html edition 2005. John Veitch’s translation 1901)

For Descartes, the mind is the site of our personhood and, with the right philosophical method, it can transcend and overcome the limitations and deceptions of the body and be able to acquire true knowledge. Therefore, as Susan Bordo points out, “what remains the constant element throughout historical

variation is the construction of body as something apart from the true self (whether conceived as soul, mind, spirit, will, creativity, freedom...) and as undermining the best efforts of that self” (1995, 5). On the other hand, “[t]hat which is not-body is the highest, the best, the noblest, the closest to God” (5).

This dualism has been frequently gendered and this is an issue that is far from being a matter of the past, as some feminists from Simone de Beauvoir on, have shown. Due to woman’s biological peculiarities, especially those related to her procreative powers, it has been thought that woman’s subjectivity is imprisoned within the limits imposed on her by her own nature. Thus, Beauvoir observes, “[i]t is often said that she thinks with her glands. Man superbly ignores the fact that his anatomy also includes glands, such as the testicles, and that they secrete hormones” (Beauvoir 1981, 43). Consequently, woman has been “cast in the role of the body” (Bordo, 5) and has been defined mainly as a sexual being, while man thinks of himself as the rational, the essential, the site of consciousness. “He is the Subject, he is the Absolute —she is the Other” (Beauvoir 1981, 44). Therefore, the consequences of this duality for women are evident, as Bordo points out:

The cost of such projections to women is obvious. For if, whatever the specific historical content of the duality, the body is the negative term, and if woman is the body, then women are that negativity, whatever it may be: distraction from knowledge, seduction away from God, capitulation to sexual desire, violence or aggression, failure of will, even death. (1995, 5)

Closely related to this gendered duality mind/body is the assignment of active/passive qualities to each one of the terms. Thus, the “duality of active spirit/passive body is also gendered, and it has been one of the most historically powerful of the dualities that inform Western ideologies of gender” (Bordo, 11), and, as Bordo has shown in her work, it is still at the basis of some theoretical discourses that justify some legal and medical practices concerning reproduction, such as abortion and surrogacy.

Aristotle, in *On the Generation of Animals* (Arthur Platt’s English translation 2007), was the first one to develop a philosophical theory about the conception of

a living being. After defining the female as a sort of “impotent male” incapable of elaborating semen, he concludes that her only contribution to the procreation is by providing the nutriment, the matter from which the fetus can be framed by the power of the male sperm. Thus the male’s contribution to generation is the efficient cause which will impose a form on the unformed matter, which will be the female’s only contribution:

If, then, the male stands for the effective and active, and the female, considered as female, for the passive, it follows that what the female would contribute to the semen of the male would not be semen but material for the semen to work upon. (Aristotle 2007, 20)

Although it could be thought that a better knowledge of the mechanisms of generation should have outdated Aristotle’s thought, the mechanistic theory went further, as Bordo observes, “representing the female body not even as providing the *material* stuff out of which the human being is formed (Aristotle’s view), but merely as a *container* for the housing and incubation of already formed human beings” (Bordo, 90). “In 1557 the Dutch microscopist Antoine van Leeuwenhoek received what was for him decisive confirmation of this theory, when he discovered “tiny tadpole-like creatures —*animalcules*— in the semen of male animals” (Bordo. 90). Even when advances in the knowledge of biological processes clearly settled that women’s ova were as essential in the creation of a human being as the semen, the representation of the egg as passively waiting for the spermatozoon to win the race and conquer her is still deeply rooted in what Bordo calls “contemporary representations of the romance of the sperm and the egg” (90).

The conception of man as the effective principle and woman as fetal incubator has been decisive throughout history in most Western legal systems to legally justify the father’s rights over his offspring, which have prevailed until very recently over the rights of the mother. This affected almost every realm of life, from serious matters such as the almost absolute power of the father over both mother and children, while the label of illegitimacy was put on those children

whom no man claimed —with the legal and social exclusion this brought about— to apparently less important things such as the prevalence of the father’s surname over the mother’s. To put only an example, in Spain, until very recently, the first surname of the child was almost always that of the father, which prevailed over that of the mother. Only illegitimate children wore their mothers’ surnames.⁶

The Cartesian conception of the human body as the site of the personhood — the I, the inner self— has had a definite influence on modern conceptualisations of embodied subjects and the right of the conscious subject to his/her bodily integrity, privacy and personhood, which have informed the ideologies concerning legal and medical practices that are still present in Western culture. However, as Susan Bordo observes, while in theory these rights are acknowledged to all human beings, in practice, there have been two different traditions: “one for embodied subjects” and other for those who have been “treated as mere bodies” (72). “Some groups have clearly been accorded subject-status and its protections, while others have regularly been denied those protections, becoming for all medical purposes pure *res extensa*, bodies stripped off their animating, dignifying “subject-ivity” (73). Pregnant women belong to this second category. Bordo asserts that there is still now a legal double standard for pregnant and non-pregnant subjects. Moreover, she affirms that, while the fetus is endowed with the status of “super-subject”, pregnant women are considered “fetal incubators” only. Bordo shows how this double standard can be traced through court decisions in the United States which acknowledge the *sacred* right of an individual to his bodily integrity, even when the life of another individual is at stake. On the one hand, nobody can be forced to submit without consent to a blood-transfusion or a bone-marrow donation to save the life of a relative, because it could be considered an intolerable attack against an individual’s right over his/her bodily integrity. On the other hand, as soon as a woman gets pregnant those same rights are erased in favour of the fetus. The philosophy behind most of Western legal systems, while theoretically asserting the right of all human beings to their own personhood, in practice is

strongly gendered and leads to deprive woman of control over her reproductive life.

The nature of pregnancy is such, however, that to deprive the woman of control over her reproductive life—whether by means of involuntary or coerced sterilization, court-ordered caesarean, or forbidden abortion—is necessarily also to mount an assault on her personal integrity and autonomy (the essence of personhood in our culture) and to treat her merely as pregnant *res extensa*, material incubator of fetal subjectivity. (Bordo, 94)

Bordo asserts that some trends in feminist theorising, have helped to reinforce the duality mind/body when they admit that pregnancy and parturition can be considered functions that could be “disengagable from the being of the subject and —like all alienated labor— amenable to being sold or rented” (Bordo, 94). She laments that the abortion debates, for instance, have been conceptualised as a conflict between women’s rights to choose and control over their procreative powers against the foetus’s right to live, instead of as a pregnant woman’s claim for her ethical and legal status as a person, “which most people wrongly assume is fully protected legally” (94).

The second wave of feminism linked pregnancy and mothering with the traditional roles of wife and mother imposed on women, which helped to maintain them outside the public sphere and to control and repress women’s sexuality as well. The emphasis of some feminist discourses was put on the need to demonstrate that, although pregnancy and breastfeeding are female functions, the structure of parenting is a result of social structure and not determined by biology. Psychologists like Nancy Chodorow questioned in *The Reproduction of Mothering* (1978) some theories that tried to explain the biological roots which determined the inevitability of women’s mothering. She does not find enough evidence either in the “evolutionary-functionalist explanation” (21), which considers caretaking behaviour as an essential biological need for the survival of the species, or in a “hormonal/physiological basis” (23) that could cause the mother-infant symbiosis. Consequently, it is assumed that women learn to love and nurture their children through experience.

Adrienne Rich distinguishes, from the title of her work, *Of Woman Born, Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (1986) [1976], two meanings in the concept of motherhood: “*the potential relationship* of any woman to her powers of reproduction and to children; and the *institution*, which aims at ensuring that that potential —and all women—shall remain under male control” (1986, 13). She admits the deep implication of both body and psyche in the creation of a new being but denies the instinctive character of caring and nurturing. In this respect, she affirms that “[m]otherhood is earned, first through an intense physical and psychic rite of passage —pregnancy and childbirth— then through learning to nurture, which does not come by instinct” (1986, 13). On the one hand Rich describes the intense interconnection between mind and body a mother can experience in her relationship with her child, without omitting what has been a taboo: the sensual pleasure she can feel in some moments of this relationship. However, Rich’s description of biological mechanisms of the body, such as producing milk in response to the child’s cry, is in contradiction with the previous statement that nurturing is not a matter of instinct:

From the beginning the mother caring for her child is involved in a continually changing dialogue, crystallized in such moments as when, hearing her child’s cry, she feels milk rush into her breasts; when as the child first suckles, the uterus begins contracting and returning to its normal size, and when later, the child’s mouth, caressing the nipple, creates waves of sensuality in the womb where it once lay; or when, smelling the breast even in sleep, the child starts to root and grope for the nipple. (1986, 36)

On the other hand, Rich observes that, throughout history, the function of mothering, in its aspects of caring and nursing the children, has been a collaborative task in which not only the female relatives —grandmothers, aunts, sisters— of the extended family participated, but also the very young and the very old were included.

Among the women writers who adhered to this trend in feminist thought I will cite Jessica Benjamin (1988), and Sara Ruddik who, in *Maternal Thinking* (1989), construed mothering as a kind of work which is no longer distinctly

feminine and does not require a fixed biological or legal relationship. Ruddik considered maternal work as a complex project that involves not only a specialised practice but also a development of cognitive capacities and attitudes that goes beyond the biological fact of birthgiving. This separation of the functions of birthgiving and mothering justified the feminist claim of a shared parenthood and acknowledged the rights of moral mothers —stepmothers, foster and adoptive mothers— independently of their biological or sexual identity, sometimes at the expense of a devaluation of pregnancy and birthgiving as mere physiological activities which do not greatly affect women’ minds and feelings.

Later on, in “Thinking Mothers / Conceiving Birth” (1994), Ruddik acknowledges the fact that women who had read *Maternal Thinking* had told her that “in disconnecting birthgiving from mothering [she] failed to read the facts of birth and therefore got their experiences quite wrong” (1994, 37). Ruddik reassures herself in the construction of mothering not as an identity but as a complex project:

Mothering work is no longer distinctly feminine. A child is mothered by whoever protects, nurtures, and trains her. Although it is a material, social, and cultural fact that most mothers are now women, there is no difficulty in imagining men taking up mothering as easily as women—or conversely, as women easily declining to mother. (1994, 35)

However, she recognises that, in establishing this separation between birthgiving and mothering, there is the risk of being lined up with the Western philosophical tradition Susan Bordo has examined, which “has honoured mind over body, idea over matter, intellectual creation over physical ‘reproduction’” which has led to “contempt for, if not revulsion from, female birthgiving bodies (Ruddik 1994, 37). She also agrees with Bordo in that, as a consequence of this devaluation, “birthgivers can be deprived of infants by a contract that has turned them —by means of turning their uterus with which they are identified—into an object of property” (37). In doing this, she may have “unwittingly replicated misogynist divisions between, to put the point crudely, ‘breeders’ and moral mothers” (38).

In this essay Ruddik concludes that, from the experiences related to her by birthgivers, pregnancy and birth are not mere physical functions but “intellectually transformative” experiences (41) and, borrowing from psychoanalysis and some feminists like Luce Irigaray (1985b, 1991) and Rossi Braidotti (1998), she opts for representing the “knowing self—the ‘ego’—as [...]a bodily ego” (41). Consequently, if the ego is rooted in the body, the body is much more than mere matter, it is the pre-condition of knowledge and the site of one’s own subjectivity.

1.3. Matter and Flesh

In Milton’s *Paradise Lost* the poetic persona laments what he considers the only failure of the Creator and asks why, having populated Heaven with masculine angels, he made the mistake of adding a feminine being to the race of men:

This novelty on Earth, this fair defect
Of Nature, and not fill the World at once
With Men as Angels without Feminine,
Or find some other way to generate
Mankind? (Milton, apud Bordo 1995, 88)

There have been throughout history several attempts to demonstrate the possibility of spontaneous generation of living beings, without any intervention of both sexes, which might have aimed at correcting what the poetic persona in Milton’s poem above considers a “fair defect / of Nature”. It seems feasible now that biotechnology will be able to erase the female role and fulfil male’s ambition of appropriating female procreative power. In this section I will analyse two poems that differ completely in content, but reflect two aspects of male fear of the female body. In Sinéad Morrissey’s poem “Matter” (*Through the Square Window* 2009, 13-15), the poetic persona of a pregnant woman goes back through history and summarises the main trends in the theory of *spontaneous generation*, from Aristotle to the 19th century, when Pasteur’s experiments demonstrated its falsity. One may think that, through these experiments, male scientists tried to find an alternative to sexuality and, consequently, to do without woman’s body. In Eithne

Strong's long poem *Flesh: The Greatest Sin* (1993a) [1980], religious fear of female sexuality resulted in a system that tried to control women's bodies.

The title of Morrissey's poem "Matter", reminds us of the Aristotelian duality: active principle, form / passive principle, matter. Although Aristotle believed that most animals originated from animals like themselves, he also thought that life had always been able to arise from matter and there were some bloodless animals which generated offspring but not of the same kind; "such are all that come into being not from a union of the sexes, but from decaying earth and excrements" (Aristotle 2007. Book I, 1). The poetic persona in "Matter" describes these attempts in the first lines of the poem, using a matter-of-fact tone that cannot hide touches of irony that underline the contrast between the alleged seriousness of scientific experiments and the undervaluation of women's knowledge of body matters:

Aristotle observed and recorded it all—
that out of rainwater, the marrow
of the human spine, foam from the sea,
or the putrefying carcasses of bulls and horses
spring living beings: frogs, serpents, anchovies,
bees and scarabs, locusts and weevils, maggots. (Morrissey 2009, 13)

The following lines of the poem mention the agreement of Saint Augustine with the theory of spontaneous generation, according to which, a residue of God's creative power was still left in the earth. The poetic voice echoes Augustine's theory that there are some animals which are born from inanimate things or from their corruption, without the union of the sexes,⁷ "and thus their seed is not in them, but in the elements from which they arise by spontaneous generation" (Edmund Hill and John E. Rotelle 2002, 227). This could explain the existence of all kinds of insects and worms, although their names "find no mention in the chronicle of the Ark" (Morrissey 2009, 13), and there was no need for them to have been saved from the Flood. There is strong irony in the analogy established between this effervescence of life that originates from putrefying matter and the

reference to Mary, the immaculate model of purity, who could also generate without any kind of sexual intercourse.

So long as alluvial mud remained, or rotted
wood, or rinsed white bones of crocodiles
after the wash abated and the salvaged couple
and their braying entourage were pitched
on top of Ararat, wasps and gnats and fleas
would manifest once more in clouds and colonies
without a union of the sexes (like Mary)
and the earth would effortlessly teem. (Morrissey 2009, 13)

On the following lines of the poem the poetic persona insists on the theory of spontaneous generation linked to putrefaction, defended this time by Paracelsus, who followed the Aristotelian tradition and took it further to the point that generative power was also attributed to menstrual blood and semen which, “exposed together to putrefaction may give raise to the basilisk, whose poison is similar to that in the eyes or breath of a menstruating woman” (Paracelsus apud Walter Pagel 1982, 116). The image of rottenness and impurity assigned to menstrual blood as well as to women’s birthing bodies has been a constant in most philosophical and religious theorising; it is no wonder that Paracelsus could imagine that menstrual blood mixed with semen could generate the basilisk. But the poetic persona mentions other recipes experimented by Paracelsus and his followers:

yet Paracelsus, arch-advocate of decay,
saw no reason not to apply
the laws of spontaneous generation
to ourselves: *let the semen of a man
putrefy by itself for forty days in a sealed
cucurbite, it shall begin, at last, to live.*
Fed on an Arcanum of human blood
and kept in darkness, his fleet homunculus
had all the features of a human child. (Morrissey 2009, 13-14)

Leeuwenhoek is the next step in the poetic persona's review of some turning points in the story of science and philosophy concerning human reproduction. His discoveries reinforced the theorising that tried to demonstrate that woman has no active principle essentially necessary for the creation of a child since the spermatozoa already had all the elements of a human being.

Leeuwenhoek bore this experiment in mind
when, decades later, using his own microscope,
he scrutinized his sperm, magnified
as much as three hundred times and fashioned
like a bell, with the wrought perfection
of a tiny man curled inside each globule. (Morrissey 2009, 14)

The poetic persona continues her way through history and mentions a different theory sustained by the Ovists, according to which the tiny animalcules reside in woman's womb where they were placed by God when she was created (Bordo, 315). These Ovists "may have envisaged instead / a sacred cabinet of children, encased / inside each egg, opening in time" (Morrissey, 14).

While all this theorising was developed by male philosophers and scientists, women's real worries and thoughts about their reproductive powers and needs were completely ignored and unwritten. Jane Flax reflects in *Thinking Fragments* (1990), on the contradictions inherent in some trends of postmodernist thought. On the one hand it asserts the death of all essentialist concepts of human being, nature, reason and history by declaring the three deaths —of Man, of History and of Metaphysics— and replacing the search for truth by a conversation in which "the philosopher's voice would be no more authoritative than any other" (32). On the other hand, the problem for Flax is that this philosopher's voice still "retains the privilege of defining what game is to be played and the rules" (32). Flax affirms that many male postmodernists seem unable to recognise the gendered nature of their interpretation of Western philosophy and the absence of women in their "master narratives" (226). She points out that if the history of Western thought had been told from the point of view of women's experiences, "the dramatic episodes might not be the three deaths, but rather an ongoing series of

struggles: to give birth or to avoid giving birth; to be represented or to avoid being misrepresented” (226).

In this respect, the poetic voice in Morrissey’s poem asserts that while reputed scientists seriously tried to demonstrate their theories of spontaneous generation, woman was left without any control of her body, and her uterus remained a place to be colonised at random by male sperm:

whether one believed in this, or the evidence
of a light-blached workshop and a knack
for polished glass, or whether one went back
to what the Greeks expressed
as the facts of reproduction,
a woman’s quest for contraception,
stacked against the odds of dogged visitors
finding lodging in the womb
at any beckoning, was hopeless. (Morrissey 2009, 14)

The poem goes on with a reference to Soranus of Ephesus, the Greek-Roman physician —96-138 AD— whose book, *Gynecology*, was a landmark in the study of the processes of pregnancy and parturition, as Owsei Temkin remarks (1956). This book reflects his meticulousness in the observation of those processes, and it deals extensively with the care of pregnant women, the qualities required for a good midwife and the care of newborn children, rejecting some practices related to magic and some uses he considered as barbarian. He also studied the effects of some substances that can be used to prevent pregnancy or even to induce abortion:

No wonder Soranus suggested water from blacksmiths’.
No wonder olive oil, the pulp of a pomegranate,
honey, pine resin, mercury, beeswax,
pennyroyal, tobacco juice, arrowroot, tansy
were burnt, brewed, inhaled, ingested,
inserted into the cervix, or buried in the fields left fallow
if the coppery stain of menstruation
persisted into the seventh day.
No wonder witches consulted the sky. (Morrissey 2009, 14)

The first lines in this section of the poem start with the words “no wonder”, as well as the last one. This establishes a parallelism and a contrast at the same

time, since Soranus' experiments were accorded scientific value, despite the somewhat unconventional recipes he tried, while reference to witches, in a line that might seem disconnected from the previous section of the poem, condenses a whole history of wise women whose knowledge about these matters was always despised when not directly outlawed because their practices were never given credit and related only to witchcraft.

In the last section of the poem we find a reference to Louis Pasteur, who disproved the theory of the spontaneous generation of microscopic organisms — through a laboratory experiment in 1864.⁸ The poetic persona admits Pasteur's contribution to a better knowledge of microscopic life and then she shifts from the rather impersonal historical description which has pervaded all the poem, to a personal voice which addresses the child inside her womb and reveals the physical and emotional ties between them. The feet of the fetus kicking against the “windowless dark” of her womb produce physical sensations which also affect directly the heart, traditionally considered the site of feeling, and her pelvis is the temporary cradle which provides for warmth and protection to the infant. And, disowning all the theories about the properties of matter to generate life, the poetic persona claims for the reality of sex and, in using the plural “our” and the word “lovemaking”, expresses her conviction that it was the parents' love and sexual desire that brought the child into being:

And though I know, thanks in part to Pasteur—
to his gauze impediments and penchant
for boiling—how you came to enter,
how you came to roll and hiccup and kick
against the windowless dark, feet to my heart
and skull to the pelvis cradle, I still think
of our lovemaking as a kind of door
to wherever you were, waiting in matter. (Morrissey 2009, 14)

In the long poem *Flesh: The Greatest Sin* (1993a) [1980], Eithne Strong represents the consequences of the repression of the woman's body by Catholicism and the obsession about sexuality that pervaded Irish religious education as well as

the devastating effects it had on women's lives. The emphasis put of the purity and virginity of Mary, as the only suitable model for woman, created an oppressive dark atmosphere around sex that aimed at inspiring on girls an awful feeling of rejection of everything related to the *greatest sin*. Drawing on Marina Warner (1976), Michaela Schrage-Früh observes that the model of purity and asexual motherhood embodied by the Virgin Mary is unobtainable and that this myth has provoked disturbing effects on the mind of a Catholic girl: "While in childhood it is possible to identify with Mary's purity, the onset of puberty is bound to cause problems for a Catholic girl, and can have serious effects on the girl's self-image and attitude towards her own body and sexuality" (Schrage-Früh 2006, 125). In part II of *Flesh* we can see how the methodology employed to instill fear of their bodies into the girls' minds is used in an orphanage. We can perceive the complete ignorance of the girls about sex and the insidious insistence of the nuns on the need to mortify the flesh through hard work. They do not find it necessary to answer the girls' questions because it is assumed that girls —as daughters of Eve— have an innate perverse knowledge about sexuality:

Never *never* offend the Immaculate Conception.
What does conceived without sin mean?
Isn't it plain —it means what it says.

The Terrible Sins are those against purity;
the vilest. Remember the sixth commandment
Thou shalt not commit adultery.
What is adultery? Hold your tongue
and learn obedience. Mortify the flesh,
that is the enemy; not to be pampered,
scourge it that you may not fall into eternal fire.
Remember what it is like to be burned. Imagine
your whole body burning and never any ending. (1993a, 15)

In order to mortify the flesh and avoid temptation orphans were systematically subjected to hard work, hunger and cold, while the nuns preached them about the virtues of these procedures: "polish harder, go hungrier; / be glad you are cold; cold and purity combine; / welcome the sweat of heavy labour, it

washes you pure” (16). When Ellen —the orphan protagonist of this section of the poem— left the orphanage, she was prepared to transmit this ideology: “Taught to teach tomorrow / what she learned today / Ellen, orphan, / product of edicts / denials, spartan procedures, / was finally dispatched” (17).

In part V of *Flesh*, an adult Ellen faces the opposition between the extreme purity she has been taught and the reality of sex in marriage. The poem reflects the deep breach this contradiction opens in Ellen’s mind and body. She has internalised the religious hate of the body and has developed strategies against the temptations of flesh, with the self-righteous conviction of being fighting the good battle against evil, with God and the Church on her side. However, once she is married, Ellen has to submit to the assail of this foe because “the Church was on its side / calling it Conjugal Right” (34). Ellen’s confusion is caused not only by her past experiences in the orphanage but also by the continuous public preaching from the pulpits, which obsessively insists on fighting against desire and pleasure while, in the privacy of confession, priests teach women to yield to conjugal rights because, as the *Casti Connubii* decrees, sex is only justified in marriage when it aims at procreating children:

Angrily confused was she before this foe.
From the first, Voices of Authority had forbidden:
Deny flesh: Mortify. Abnegate. Voices had wrought
fear: Remember Hell. Remember Mary, the Immaculate,
conceived *without sin*. Remember. Ellen
remembered that flesh was sin, flesh laid on flesh brought
stirrings that meant Hell. The old voices sounded always
unrelentingly in her life. Do not indulge. Punish.
Crucify self. And the new: from the pulpit, now,
the priest frenzied out this loathing; vituperation
of the flesh convulsed him near seizure. (1993a, 34)

Ellen had obediently accepted the Catholic doctrine and had succeeded in annihilating her body’s sexual responses to the point that, for her, sexual intercourse was a hateful activity: “Long since terrorized to non-response, flesh / of Ellen could not accommodate to this unwelcome licence / called Conjugal

Right: it established her bewilderment, / recoil, hate, but never joy” (35). Thus, Ellen conceived her five children “with no rejoicing” and reared the two who lived “with all respect / to received authority” (35). Thus, she becomes the transmitter of this repression and exerts on her children the same educational system that she suffered in the orphanage, in the conviction that “they must be primed / against the coil of flesh, made know the body should / be fed only for work to be done, not for gratification” (35).

In part VI of the poem, a pessimistic poetic persona reflects upon the fate of Ellen’s daughter Nance, conceived without desire or love and predestined from the womb to be the object of her mother’s strict adherence to the principles of Catholic education: “The helpless embryo passively received its legacy / of fear, intersticed through the cankered being. (What does / fear do to flesh that should be spirit’s blossoming?)” (41). Nance will be sent to a nun’s boarding school and her life will be a series of battles and rebellions against this oppressive environment until she can integrate flesh and spirit and reconcile herself with this “integral being” (63).

1.4. Female Body / Male Dominion

Seeing pregnancy as a common female experience would be to oversimplify the diversity of factors that determine women’s lives. Although undeniably a physical process rooted in female biology, pregnancy is also a subjective experience that is mediated by a wide range of personal and social circumstances. The experience of a well-to-do white, Western, married woman has nothing to do with that of a poor, single, immigrant woman. To cite only a few factors that precondition pregnancy in contemporary European societies, we must consider whether it is wanted or unwanted; if the future mothers will be able to combine full-time work or a professional career with the never-ending demands of mothering, which requires the availability of child-care centres they can afford to pay for; and what kind of support they may find from their partner —when there is

one—, their family, and the social context which they live in. Each pregnancy is, even for those women who have had several children, a thoroughly unique experience that cannot be labelled as merely physical. Body and mind are so tightly interwoven and affected by social relationships that motherhood cannot be inscribed into a unifying universal experience. In “Thinking Mothers/Conceiving Birth” (1994), Sara Ruddick asserts:

[T]he bodily ego is thoroughly social: from the beginning it is constituted in and constructed by relationships in which “the body” is held, touched, spoken to, heard, frightened, soothed, hurt, and comforted. Accordingly, potentially transformative physical experiences are imbued with meanings of past and future relationships and may therefore be also socially transformative. (1994, 41)

Women’s bodies are the sites where patriarchal ideology exerts its power and control. Until recently, pregnancies that happened outside the close boundaries of marriage had to be repressed and punished. In Luz Pichel’s *Casa Pechada* (2006), and Marilar Aleixandre *Desmentindo a primavera* (2003) we find some poems which express the powerlessness of women who were considered inadequate for the role of respectable wives and were the object of every kind of sexual abuse. Additionally, their children were frequently the victims of social and religious discrimination and violence. The speaking voices in these poems are narrators of other women’s experiences from a detached point of view.

Luz Pichel’s short poem “Letreiro para poñer na entrada da cova do penedo” (2006, 20) summarises the situation of helplessness of poor and mentally handicapped women, who were frequently used as men’s common properties and on whom rape could be exerted without any kind of moral or legal responsibility. When the mad woman in the poem gets pregnant, she tries to disguise her pregnancy and goes away to the mountain, perhaps to protect her unborn child. Since nobody is responsible for her pregnancy, her child will not be under any male’s protection and will be exposed to every kind of danger.

Quedou preñada a tola
dun ninguén.
Apertou a barriga apertadiña
cunha corda das vacas.
botouse ao monte. (2006, 20)

In another poem, “Non se sabe casi nada” (Pichel 2006, 19), the peacefulness and domesticity of the scene described in the first stanza, with the green beans dripping in the early morning dew, and the cats playing in the wet grass, is disturbed in the second stanza by the presence of the two predatory birds flying over the henhouse, which introduce a sense of danger. The poetic persona, on hearing a woman shouting madly in the woods, concludes that she is calling for her daughter and asks herself who has taken the girl away this time. This suggests it is a common occurrence. In the last lines of the poem, the barking dogs warn the poetic persona against the possible presence of predatory humans haunting the house, which is no secure refuge against male violence.

Pinga o orballo da folla do feixón
mentres os gatos brincan e foxen
da herba mollada.

Dous paxaros moi grandes pasan
voando na néboa
ao ras das coles do galiñeiro.
Que quererán?

E esa muller que berra no Souto coma unha tola,
por quen chamará tan cedo?
quen lle escapou esta noite coa filla?

Ladran os cans,
estou soa na casa? (2006, 19)

Marilar Aleixandre’s poem “o cuarto do sal” (2003, 52) is a good example of the disregard for woman’s life when she is not a valuable object in the patriarchal system of exchange of properties. The narrative voice describes the tenderness Gregorio showed to his favourite horse, which is the object of his caresses and in whose ears he whispers secret words. Gregorio finds it easier to fondle bodies of horses than to understand his mentally handicapped daughter’s

babbling laments. There is a parallelism between the caring relationship established by Gregorio and his horse, and that of his daughter with her rag doll. Both of them devote their love and tenderness to non-human beings from whom they cannot get a response:

Gregorio tiña dous cabalos
o roán era o preferido
todos os días ao volver do monte
cepillábao
aloumiñando as crinas
murmurándolle ao oído
palabras tan secretas como as trillas baixo a pedra
tamén a rapaza simple moumeaba ladaíñas que ninguén entendía
bardantes á súa boneca de carozo e trapos
envolveita en babas
e cun ollo menos. (2003, 52)

Both the girl's pregnancy and the horse's broken leg are described in the poem as having happened "nun mal paso". The use of the same words would imply the accidental character of both facts, but there is a radical difference in the treatment of both *accidents*: The horse is not blamed and it gets all the caring while the mentally disabled girl is punished hard, although it is not clear who caused the "mal paso" in the girl's pregnancy. Behind this lack of definition there is the possibility of incest, since these children are often abused by members of their families, even by their own fathers. In strong contrast with the caring love Gregorio shows to his horse, the human nature of his daughter is denied because she is not fit for the function of breeding healthy valuable offspring. In consequence, sexuality should be forbidden for her and, when she breaks the rule and gets pregnant, she is locked up for life and, when her son dies, he is not being buried in a graveyard because the presence of an illegitimate child would bring disgrace on the family. Moreover, the Church considered that unbaptised children were not cleaned from the original sin and consequently were not allowed to be buried in the cemetery.

nun mal paso o roán crebou unha pata

Gregorio pasou dúas noite na corte.
a rapaza simple nun mal paso
meteu no corpo mudanza incompreensible
o neno morreu aos cinco días
enterráronno na horta
ela ficou para sempre no cuarto
deitando choros e babas
no chan de terra. (2003, 52)

The moving image of the wretched girl crying in despair in her confinement is a painful example of the punishment that awaited women when they were victims of rape, while their abusers did not suffer any kind of chastisement. Woman's sexuality had to be tightly controlled by patriarchal authority because there was no room for a woman's illegitimate children in patriarchal families.

In Anne Hartigan's section of the poem *Now is a Movable Feast*, which is entitled "Growth" (1991, 42-53), the vision of woman's gestation and childbirth, although within the limits of wedlock, is far from the culturally idealised images of motherhood and it appears with all its natural and cultural complexities. In the poem, the description of pregnancy is intertwined with the lines of the prayer that repeat the dialogue between the archangel Gabriel and the Virgin Mary when the former hailed her with the announcement that she had been chosen to be the mother of God. Mary declares herself to be "the handmaid of the Lord" (Luke, 1, 38) and accepts the Word of God to take flesh inside her. The passivity of Mary and her acceptance of this inevitable fact, as inscribed in the order established by God, is the mirror in which the young wife of the poem is forced to reflect herself, since she has no control over the processes of her own body. In previous sections of the poem it has already been described how the protagonist was chosen as a wife and a breeder of offspring and how the seed was sowed in her. Now she has to wait for "the word to take place" because she knows "no action" and her only task is to fulfil the will of God/the patriarch/her husband. She is only the Aristotelian *passive principle*, the fertile ground where the male *active principle* will be made fruitful. For her, love has nothing to do with joy, affection or sexual

pleasure, but rather something “to learn about with children, / a duty taught, not understood”.

Who is our relief God?
What is your will for your servants?

Wait for the word
To take place.
I know no action.
Is love something
To learn about with children,
A duty taught, not understood? (1991, 43)

The restlessness of the young girl, who feels that her body has been invaded and does not know what is happening inside her, is an expression of pregnancy which is not willingly accepted: there is “no knowledge, / no will, / the woman invaded” (45), and this feeling clashes with the patriarchal assumption that it is in woman’s nature to find always joy and self-fulfilment in motherhood. But the uneasiness of the young wife in the poem finds relief only in the monotonous repetition of the five decades of the rosary.

The first decade.

Restless,
and not
knowing what,
here, under
the ribs
heals life. (1991, 45)

Around her, everyday routine, with the inexorable succession of days and nights, is set against the freedom of the migratory birds which “dance / light as dreams”.

The acceptance of her destiny is expressed in Mary’s response to Gabriel: “[t]hy will be done” (46), but fear is also present in the poem through the reference to “good and bad harvests” (46) as well as the mention of “deaths and keenings” (46) which are warnings about the imperfection of natural processes, of which failure and death must be accepted as essential constituents.

Woman's pregnancy is much more than a natural function. In the ordered control and power over nature, including woman's nature, established by patriarchy, the idea of *legitimacy* is a crucial one, as Marilyn French points out: "The term *legitimate* has no meaning in nature: a child who is born and lives is a living child. A child is labelled *illegitimate*, however, if no male takes credit or responsibility for that child by conferring upon it his name" (1983, 15). Hence the importance of woman's virginity and chastity in marriage and the control exerted on them by the whole society, as it is reflected in the next lines of the poem, in which women carefully observe the growing of the belly in the young wife. And, once pregnancy becomes evident, dates and months are counted to be sure that conception took place after marriage. Once this has been checked, pregnancy is sanctified and the women can tell her the blessing with which Elisabeth greeted her cousin Mary (Luke 1, 42).

Blessed art thou

Step back in the shadows
the eyes of the women
quick look to the belly
to notice a coming,

Pray for us sinners

the date and the days
taken into consideration
the months and the years
added and subtracted.
Nothing is missed.

[...]

Blessed is the fruit. (1991, 46-47)

In the next section of the poem the image of the pregnant woman wandering in the orchard is in harmony with the ripeness of the apple trees and the blossoms. Apples have an ambivalent meaning here. On the one hand, the image of the branches full of fruit that "bowed to her" in an invitation to pick the apples and eat them, reminds us of the scene of the temptation of Eve, an image that is negatively charged with references to sexuality, sin, and rebellion against God.⁹ On

the other hand, apples represent the blessed fruits of nature, which include the fruit of the woman's womb, and the whole scene of the young wife, sewing and feeling the feet of her child inside her, is full of hope and tenderness which is only disturbed by the presence of fear, that must be shaken as rooks are frightened away.

The second decade.

The apple trees usually had a good harvest.
Close to the house, she wandered under the
 Blossoms,
But, later, found it hard to stretch for fruit,
Some branches, heavy as she, bowed to her.
She could pick and eat.

She would sew there; and feel the feet
Of the child scrabble her stomach.
Laughter would shake fear as rooks
Rise from the trees with a clap of hands. (1991, 47)

The peacefulness and joy of the scene described in the previous lines contrast with the unrepressed feeling of anguish and terror the young woman expresses when she is in labour. Nature decides how and when to start the process of childbirth and, once it has started, woman has no control over her body. There is no possibility to stop it or to go back.

The poetic voice of the poem identifies her body with a "frail bark" that "carries a burden" and is being swept along by the river "to the unknown sea", without any possibility she can control it. The metaphor of the body as a boat over troubled waters is recurrent in most of the poems we are going to examine later, but in this poem, the powerlessness of the woman over her body, which does not answer her calls, is in accordance with her previous incapability of making decisions about her marriage and pregnancy. Her body has been used as an instrument of patriarchal exchange and now both mother and infant are left to endure a process in which life and death are at stake. The mother's fear of being metaphorically drowned in her pain is linked to the child's fear of being drowned

in the fluids of the body which drag him/her out of the secure refuge of the mother's womb.

The fourth decade

The river will not stop
this frail bark
my body, will not
answer my calls,

it carries a burden
and I flow
to the unknown sea,
I do not wish

to drown in this,
who
is being born
you or I? (1991, 49)

Every woman who has experienced labour pains can easily recognise in the following lines the desire to stop the “journey” and wait until she feels “more adventurous”. But nature follows its own path and there is time to ask oneself for the meaning of this pain. The poetic persona expresses her doubts about the idea that love could be the origin and the reason which can explain how it all began, and what awaits her at the end of all this “panting and heaving”. She questions the idealised concept of love that was at the basis of a Christian education of women. Love that was disconnected from sexuality and based on a self-denial of women's desire and a dutiful care for others —husband and children—, which has in the image of Mary the model of a disincarnated motherhood. The poetic voice also questions the wisdom every woman is supposed to acquire through pregnancy and childbirth. All these beliefs are useless to help her to control her body and to face the risks of real birthgiving.

[...]
this journey can wait;
I will leave,
until I feel
more adventurous.

Was it love
that pushed
my brown boat out
on the waters?

Was it love
that sent me peering
down into nets
for the salmon of knowledge?

What will I know
when panting and heaving
limbs lead I climb
hair clinging

To the shore?
And those cries
I hear over the water
mingling with sea birds,

are they yours,
or mine? (1991, 49-50)

The woman also questions the usefulness of some old Irish myths. The reference to the story of the Salmon of Knowledge,¹⁰ which gave wisdom to those who first ate it, is the counterpoint to the myth of Eve, who was castigated with the pains of labour for her attempt to taste the fruit from the tree of the science of good and evil. The difference of meaning is remarkable. While the Irish hero Fionn Mac Cumhaill was rewarded with wisdom, after having tasted the salmon, and became a famous king, the blame was put on Eve for the loss of paradise and, from then onward, all women have to pay for her sin. The poetic voice asks herself what kind of knowledge she will find at the end of her journey. But when it finishes, the cries of the newly born child are mingled with the cries of the mother and, over them, the cries of the sea birds may suggest that both mother and child might not have reached the shore safely and may have drowned in the waters of childbirth. In her introduction to the book, Anne Hartigan explains that among the voices of the poem is her “grandmother’s sister Lily who died along with her infant in childbirth because her husband refused to let her go to Dublin for medical attention” (7).

1.5. Embodied Subjectivities

The dark social aspects of gestation and birth reflected in the poems of Pichel, Aleixandre and Hartigan contrast with experiences of pregnancy as a thoughtful project present in Luz Pozo Garza's poems of "Adviento" (2004) [1959], Sidnéad Morrissey's "Found Architecture" (*Through the Square Window* 2009) Mary O'Donnell's "Daughter" (*Spiderwoman's Third Avenue Rhapsody* 1993) and "The Journey" (*The Place of Miracles* 2006) [1993], Susan Connolly's "Cycles" (*For the Stranger* 1993) and Enda Wyley's "Diary" (*to wake to this* 2009). The poetic voices in these poems represent motherhood as the culmination of a long cherished desire which responds to a conscious calling for the child. The mothers in these poems assert that it was their wilful determination that brought the children to them. They do not mention any lover or partner whose *active principle* may have taken the initiative in the fulfillment of their desire, and, in some cases, they even skip the hardness of childbirth to emphasise the longing for the child and the happiness of the mother when her goal is achieved.

I will also draw on Anne Enright's memoir *Making Babies. Stumbling into Motherhood* (2004) because she dares to dwell on physical as well as psychological aspects of childbirth and motherhood that have been hidden from public representation and, as Heather Ingman points out, she "reintroduces what has traditionally been repressed in the Irish Catholic discourse of maternity, namely, the female body" (2009, 225). I will see how some of these poetic personae's experiences relate to Kristeva's theory of semiotics as it is represented in "Stabat Mater" (1986), a text typographically split into two parallel sections: in one of which she analyses the cult of the Virgin Mary in Catholicism, and in the other, she represents her own experiences of pregnancy and childbirth in a text that, in some way follows the patterns of poetry.

Luz Pozo Garza has a vast creative production developed through a long span of time. The poems I am going to discuss here do not fit entirely into the period of time I have chosen for this dissertation, since they were written and first published monthly in *Vida Galega* along the year 1959. Besides, they were written

in Spanish, not in Galician, as is the case with the rest of my Galician corpus. However, I think that, apart from the fact that she is one of the major Galician poets, the subject matter of these poems is central to the issue of motherhood, as represented from the point of view of personal experience. This collection is a kind of diary in which, as Carmen Blanco has pointed out, the woman poet “*constrúe un calendario materno para ir anotando as vivencias da maternidade que se agolpan confusas no corpo e na mente, asombradas ante o empuxe irresistible do xurrar da vida*” (Blanco 2004, 23). Moreover, the poetic persona connects her pregnancy and childbirth with the seasonal cycles of nature, establishing a contrast and, sometimes, a parallelism between what happens outside and inside her body. At the same time, we constantly find references to the religious liturgical year from the title of the collection —“*Adviento*”— as well as to ancient mythologies that relate the creation of life with some of the four elements defined by the philosophers of ancient Miletus: water, fire, earth and air.

The first poem of this collection “*Enero*” (2004, 193), the month that opens a new year is attuned with the new life that is being conceived inside the woman’s womb. The poetic persona states clearly that love is the origin of the conception: “*Temblando para el amor, / Enero, creciente oவில். / Corazón del año nuevo, / dulce pájaro dormido*” (193). Christmas time is still present in the allusion to the Epiphany and we also find resonances of the Annunciation in the feeling of expectation that the miracle of a new life may happen: “*Gracia de la Epifanía / en un paisaje amarillo. / Como tú mi corazón / está aguardando el prodigio*” (193). There is a contrast between the poetic persona’s emphasis on the darkness of the night and the alertness of her heart that is waiting for the miracle:

Enero, noche cerrada,
puerta de la madrugada.
Noche que no se despierta.
Alerta,
alerta mi corazón
al milagro vivo. (2004, 93)

Pozo-Garza uses the rhymes and metrics of traditional Spanish lyric in all her poems of the “Adviento” series. In this poem we can find echoes of a “villancico” collected in the *Cancionero de Uppsala*¹¹ —“No la devemos dormir, la noche sancta”— which describes the moment of intimate expectation of the Virgin Mary before the birth of Christ. Pozo Garza translates this same feeling to the moment of the conception of a new being who is going to illuminate the darkness: “Hoy no debes, no, dormir / que sucede lo imprevisto: / Una estrella nueva. / Un niño” (Pozo Garza 2004, 193). Here again we find a parallelism with the star that announced the birth of Christ to the Three Wise Men and guided them to Bethlehem.

In the next poem, “Febrero” (2004, 194), February is the month when nature sleeps under the coldness of winter, waiting for the warmth of the spring to revive. The poetic persona feels that her heart is “dormido bajo la nieve” (194), but she also feels that warmth is growing underneath. She addresses the month underlining the fact that, while months and seasons go by, she keeps waiting for the light: “Te vas. Yo sigo esperando. / ¡Silencio! No se despierte. / Dime cómo nace el tiempo / mientras aguardo. ¿No sientes / crecer el calor del sueño / delirando bajo el vientre?” (194). The last lines of this poem abound in images of light and fire which are the counterpoint of the coldness outside. According to Erich Neumann (1972), there is a close connection between son and fire in ancient Indian, Greek and Carthaginian mythologies related to the Great Mother Goddess:¹² “The fire of the torch, the lower fire-light son of the wood, corresponds to the upper luminous sons —the stars, moon and sun— which are the children of the night” (1972, 311).

Escucha toda esa luz
que viene lejos. Enciende,
calienta, alumbrá. La llama
milagrosa permanece.
Aquí palpita el destello.
Todavía no amanece. (2004, 194)

In the third and fourth poems, “Marzo” (195-96) and “Abril” (197), springtime and the blooming of nature are in accordance with the growing awareness of the poetic persona of the life that is blooming inside her: “Llevo una flor dentro, dentro. / Silencio, / se me ha dormido. / Marzo me la va acunando / con un aleteo perdido” (195). March and April are often rainy months in Mediterranean climates and so are recorded in popular sayings and proverbs. But rainy weather is not only the pre-condition for the blooming of nature outside, but is also the background of a deeper significance of the symbolism of water: “Abril me llueve. / No es mañana. / Hay la esperanza de las noches. / La expectativa de las ramas” (197). Water—the first of the elements, according to the philosophers of Miletus—is a universal symbol of life, as Mircea Eliade points out: “Water symbolizes the whole of potentiality: it is *fons and origo*, the source of all possible existence” (1958, 188).¹³ In connection with this, Barbara Walker affirms that “springs, fountains, ponds, wells were always female symbols in archaic religions, often considered water-passages to the underground womb”(1983, 1067). In “March” and “April” we can see how the poetic persona uses these symbols as the leitmotif that can describe the presence of the life that is growing inside her.

He descubierto un arroyo
tan vivo
aquí. Ya lo toco apenas,
milagro mío.
Agua de mi corazón,
prodigio.
Te voy soñando despierta
en un silencio de río. (195)

Although Anne Enright describes her experience of pregnancy and childbirth in a humorous and down to earth style, she has poetic overtones when she explains the moment when body and mind seem to fully accept the reality of pregnancy: “I looked at the world around me and listened to my own blood. There was a deep note humming through me, so low that no one could hear. It was in every part of me, swelling in my face and hands, and it felt like joy” (2004, 18). This account is in accordance to Julia Kristeva’s representation of her own pregnancy, which, in

turn, reflects her theory of the semiotic, a stage of communication between mother and child that is previous to the symbolic and cannot be represented by the logic of language. Paradoxically, Kristeva uses language to transmit her impossibility of describing what is happening inside her body because to write it down “is an ordeal to discourse” (162):

FLASH – instant of time or of
dream without time; in-
ordinately swollen atoms of a
bond, a vision, a shiver, a yet
formless, unnameable embryo.
Epiphanies. Photos of what is
not yet visible and that
language necessarily skims
over from afar, allusively. (Kristeva 1986, 162)

There is a stage in pregnancy when the fetus ceases to be an undefined presence only perceived by changes in the woman’s body and gives unequivocal signals of its existence —by kicking the mother’s belly, for instance. Anne Enright describes this moment: “The first kick is the child talking back to you, a kind of softening up” (22). At this stage it becomes easier to see the child as another person, as Enright observes: “I began to have ideas about this baby, even conversations with it, some of which, to my great embarrassment, took place out loud” (2004, 22).

In Pozo Garza’s poems “March” and “April” we can see how the poetic persona represents a growing awareness of the development of the child, who is now more than a dream and has become a reality. She is conscious of the split of her body into two different beings: “No voy sola. Voy llevando / un vaso de dulce sueño”.[...] “Ya no voy sola. Me vienen / primaveras por el cielo” (196). The poetic voice of the mother expresses the wonder at this new presence and addresses the child expressing her need to know more about it.

Te conocí en un murmullo
como de río en calma.

¿Me escuchas, dí?
¿Ya tienes alma?
[...]
Te adiviné como un latido
de hierba acuática.
¿De dónde llegas?
¿Oyes las voces de la nada? (2004, 197)

Pregnancy as an emotionally complex waiting time is reflected in Sidnéad Morrissey's poem "Found Architecture" (2009, 18-19). On the first line, the poetic persona relates everything she does with her experience of waiting and, on the next lines, she addresses somebody¹⁴ to explain how she looks for the hidden architecture in everything that surrounds her. Architecture —the art of building— is an image of what is being built inside her:

These days are all about waiting. What would you say
if I tried to explain how my single true activity
this wet and shivery May is 'found architecture'? (2009, 18)

This "found architecture" in Morrissey's poem has multifaceted aspects like those of an "Italian kaleidoscope" (18) whose continuously changing images have an inner symmetry that suggests the changes that are happening inside the body, with the symmetrical divisions of the cells. However, this kaleidoscope is not made of mirrors that contain coloured objects, but one "that makes its heel-toes shapes, not from beads or seeds / or painted meticulous details, but from the room, / from whatever room I happen to be in" (18). So, the kaleidoscope is a metaphor of the poetic persona's changing body that accompanies her wherever she goes, and is, at the same time, her "waiting-house" in which she started to change colours from the beginning of her pregnancy. This use of metaphors to represent the changes she is undergoing is in line with Kristeva's expression of the difficulty to represent these sensations: "Words that are always too / distant, too abstract for this / underground swarming of / seconds, folding in / unimaginable spaces" (Kristeva 1986, 162). The poetic persona in Morrissey's poem uses colourful images to overcome this difficulty:

[...]

The day it arrived I mangled the blue of the bathroom
with the pistachio green of my bedroom ceiling

and sat entranced: such symmetrical splicing
of everything, anything, to make of my waiting-house
a star-pointed frame that entered and left

itself behind as the cylinder turned. (2009, 18)

The poetic persona finds also architecture in nature in her walk by the sea because she declares that “found architecture” is “the very business of beaches” (19). In spite of the reference to May, the month which is the climax of spring, we cannot find in this poem the usual association pregnant woman / blooming Mother Earth. Just the opposite, the images chosen here suggest destruction and decay after a storm or a shipwreck, and may hint at the creative power of nature in which life and death are two sides of the same cycle:

rotted glands of a pond between knee-high grasses
and a white tree undoing itself in its ink-stained
surfaces. The tree looked like a crocodile’s ribcage. (2009, 18)

To the things mentioned above the poetic persona adds “all the usual”, “skeletons of geranium, leaves on windowsills”, “snakeskins” (19), but the most important found architecture has recently happened when she can finally see the ultrasound scan of the small being inside her womb, more like a creature of the sea, and she claims that he comes from the deepest desire of her whole body:

[...] Most recently
(and most disarmingly) this: handed to me in a roll
of four like mug-shot photographs from a machine—

his seahorse spine, his open-shut anemone
of a heart, and the row of unbelievable teeth
shining high in the crook of his skull as if backstitched

into place. From blood and the body’s
inconsolable hunger I have been my own kaleidoscope—. (2009, 19)

In Mary O'Donnell's poems that are being commented next, the writer represents her own experiences of pregnancy and childbirth. In "Daughter" (1993, 85), the poetic persona expresses her long-standing yearning for the child that has accompanied her wherever she went:

For years I have called
across great distances,
feeling her hover
beyond demotic streets,
the summer dust,
the slanting rains. (1993, 85)

This longing establishes an emotional relationship between mother and daughter which is previous to the child's coming into being. The poem reverses traditional images of the woman's body as fertile land where the male seed is sown. Instead, the poetic persona has imagined her daughter as hidden somewhere among the crops of a fertile earth, waiting for her calling:

I have called to her
across miles of fields,
thinking I glimpsed her
in drenched grasses,
or near a poppy
in shimmering oats. (1993, 85)

In the final section of the poem, the mother expresses the sense of miracle a lot of mothers feel when a long-desired child finally comes, no matter the times this moment has been imagined. If, as astronomers have proved, the same processes that created billions of unimaginably distant galaxies also created us, the mother feels how the little being has answered her calling and has approached her from the outer space "testing glints of starlight"(85). This is a moment of recognition and of pride for having been able to bring her to life:

Now she sets out
from some wild galaxy:
as I sleep, she nears,
testing glints of starlight,
nights of hollow soul.
I have called her to be human.

Now she comes. (1993, 85)

In section I of “The Journey” (O’Donnell 2006, 50-51) [1993], entitled “The Moment” (50-51), the scene depicted takes place in May —as in Morrissey’s “Found Architecture”— and links the woman’s gestation with the fertility of the land. But this time the speaking voice adopts the point of view of a detached observer, who is comparing the scene she is seeing with that of Archangel Gabriel announcing her pregnancy to Mary as it was traditionally represented in art. There are no halos —signs of sanctity— here, like those that can be seen, for instance, around the heads of both Mary and the angel in Fra Angelico’s *Annunciations*, nor lilies —symbol of the purity of the Virgin— present, for instance, in the *Annunciation* of Simone Martini (1333): “It is not like the old masters. / No wavering halo, / like jellyfish / in a sea of grace; / no wingbeat brushing close, / or tremor of lilies / from some heart-lurching emissary” (2006, 50). The “May sun” that “shoots bronze rivets at buttercups” (50), provides the warm atmosphere for the “unburdening slumber” of the woman and has nothing to do with the ray of sun represented in the old masters’ paintings as a symbol of the immaculate conception of Mary, whose body conceived Christ by virtue of the intervention of the Holy Spirit. In contrast with the intensity of the moment represented in the old masters’ paintings, the poetic persona describes the sensuous lassitude of the woman “stretched flat / beneath the ash” (50) while she is enjoying the music and the colours coming from a circus that is crossing the fields. Despite the abandonment to the laziness of the body, suggested by the words quoted above, all the woman’s senses are awakened and stirred by the sound of instruments which accompany the circus caravan “with drums and trumpets, / then loud, raucous cymbals, / and caroling voices, / and tambourines closer, / and bells on painted elephants” (2006, 50).

The last lines of the poem finish the description of the circus with the sensuous mention of “the riot and ring-dance / of naked acrobats / cartwheeling close / to her indolent flesh” (51). Instead of the chaste disembodied conception depicted in the

Anunciations, this scene claims for the sensuality and the abandonment of the body to all kind of pleasant sensations.

The state of lassitude described in “The Moment” by a poetic persona who observes from outside, in which the immobility of the woman contrasts with the dynamism of the images of the circus, is reversed in part II, “The History of Seasons”, (O’Donnell 2006, 52), in which a first person poetic voice describes herself as drifting “in an undead slumber”, in a kind of atemporality in which “[t]ime is retarded” and “[w]inter immobilises” (52). While the woman in “The Moment” was absorbing external sensations, in “The History of Seasons”, she is concentrated on the inner perceptions of the child in her womb. A close non-verbal communication flows both ways between woman and child, who are active subjects in their conversation. Whenever the mother forgets its presence, the child can draw her attention with a “kick” on her “abdomen” and a “prod of an elbow” (52). This dialogue between mother and child contradicts the mind / body dichotomy that lies behind some legal theorising about female’s body, which is based on the premise that pregnancy is a physical function that does not affect women’s subjectivity.¹⁵ In this poem, the nourishment the child receives goes beyond the blood and oxygen it gets through the placenta. It also includes the absorption of the mother’s subjectivity, taking “memories from bones / sockets, softening ligaments” through its skull (52).

[...]
Even if I forget,
already the child is remembering.
Its head inverts thought,
absorbs memories from bones,
sockets, the softening ligaments,

Each time I pause,
mulling fragments
lost to the previous day,
a kick rakes the tight glaze
of my abdomen;

I come to my senses
at the prod of an elbow. (2006, 52)

There is some transference of feeling between mother and child. The uneasiness and uncertainty that accompanies almost always the processes of pregnancy and parturition, is transmitted to the child whose bones “score question marks” (52):

Occasionally, the bones of her fingers
score question-marks —

little hooks, they will
flush me out
in the high summer of a January night.
After, it will be my turn to remember. (2006, 52)

In section III, “Third Trimester Interlude” (O’Donnell 2006, 53) pregnancy is in an advanced state and the poetic persona describes her feelings, asserting firstly the absolute normality of the situation and her rejection of being analogised with the ripeness of nature. She tries to maintain a neutral position, equally distant from the dark repulsion patriarchal ideologies have felt for women’s pregnant bodies, which were considered impure and should be hidden behind loose clothes, and the modern mass-media exhibition and exaltation of their beauty:

It feels like nothing in particular,
certainly not like any fruit,
no plum or pink-fleshed pear,
is neither beautiful nor ugly.
Perhaps the spark behind my eyes
is less than mercurial
(one does not gleam
with such definite humours),
but that is all. (2006, 53)

Within this normality the poetic persona includes the recognition of her sexual desire as she dreams of Michael Douglas ¹⁶ and of “full swaying branches, / golden canopies of fruit” (53). This desire for fruit may be seen as the sudden want

of a special kind of food that pregnant women often experience, but it can also be the symbol of Eve's temptation in paradise. Temptation that the poetic persona does not want to avoid; just the opposite, she expresses her desire to enjoy all the bodily pleasures that can be bestowed on her, pointing out that her growing belly is not an obstacle. The fact that she is about to become a mother has not faded away her desire of love and sex. In this line, Anne Enright says that she used to have "vivid, intense, learning dreams" (2004, 21) during her second trimester of pregnancy and that many of the dreams "were completely filthy" (21). She puts the blame of this on the 30 per cent more of blood she had in her body, suspecting that "it was all going to the one place" (21). These assertions subvert the patriarchal-religious ideology that tried to strip off sexuality from the idealised images of motherhood, and promoted the *sanctification* of woman's body as a sanctuary for the male's heir that cannot be *stained* by the sin of sex.

I linger more than usual over the
Planes of your back and thighs,
Want to be petted, stroked, held,
Kissed, licked, sucked and juiced,
Till I am shining silver.
I can hardly see below my belly,
But it is not troublesome, no,
Not in the least. (O'Donnell 2006, 53)

In Susan Connolly's poem "Cycles" (1993), pregnancy develops in accordance to the seasonal cycles of the earth. Conception takes place in winter, blooms in spring and the fruit is ripe by the end of summer. In contrast with Mary O'Donnell's "The Moment", the poetic persona in "Cycles" appropriates both pagan and religious symbols related to the conception and birth of Christ to emphasise the sense of mystery that involves the creation of a new life. Winter is the time of infertility of the earth and the poetic persona feels her body enclosed in a "snow-shell", but Christmas is also the time of Christ's birth. The moment of conception in the poem, with the light passing into the woman's body, reminds us of the immaculate conception of the Virgin Mary, which was traditionally

explained and compared to a shaft of light which can go through a glass without breaking or staining it, and it was represented in painting by a beam of light coming from the sun. The mysterious pregnancy of the poetic persona is complemented with the mention of ferns, which relates to old popular European legends. Ferns used to be considered as places where trolls hid their treasures and, sometimes, hid themselves. In this context of European pagan traditions, the shaft of light could be associated to ancient celebrations of the winter light as well:

Christmas time that year,
watching a low sun tangled
in the pear-tree's branches,
I didn't yet know
how a different light
had passed into me —
from what hidden, fern-frondy
source did it rise,
to melt forever
the snow-shell around me? (1993, 21)

The blossom of the pear tree in April is attuned with the first movements of the fetus and, in September, when pears reach ripeness, the birth is represented by the falling of a ripe fruit:

by April I saw white petals
on the pear-tree,
felt movements
like a flower opening in me.
In September the ripe fruit
fell. A child whose eyes
were the blue sea
turning dark-leaved. (1993, 21)

In the next section of the poem, it is Christmas time again but the poetic persona does not identify with the cold infertility of the earth. She watches the “dark pear-tree” outside while she is with her child “warm in a firelit room” (21). Becoming a mother enables her to understand her own mother and makes her feel as the link in a chain that will continue a genealogy of mothers. In this poem we can see the interaction of two ways of conceptualising time that, according to Julia Kristeva are linked to reproduction and motherhood. In “Women’s Time” (1986)

Julia Kristeva states that: “[a]s for time, female subjectivity would seem to provide a specific measure that essentially retains *repetition* and *eternity* from among the multiple modalities of time known through the history of civilizations” (191). On the one hand the title of the poem refers directly to the “cycles, gestation, the eternal recurrence of a biological rhythm of nature” (191), on the other hand, the mother wants to insert her story in the linear time that connects her with the past—her mother—and will continue with her child:

I think back as far as I can,
and the way my mother
looked after me
unfolds like an old story.
My turn has come to make
that story for my child. (1993, 21)

The following lines of the poem describe the mother’s state of bliss as she watches the child sleeping while music is being played in a room downstairs. The atmosphere has an almost magic quality. Mother and child are in their “high rooftop” and the half-moon is shining. Although “the child is dreaming / and doesn’t hear” (22), the mother can feel the music “like an ocean all around him” (22). Music is somebody else’s artistic creation and surrounds mother and infant, but, for the mother the child is her artistic creation, he is the music that connects her with the harmony of the universe:

but I see him
like music played slowly
without beginning or end.
Tonight his notes hold me
more urgently than
the silent orbit of the heavens
around all of us. (1993, 22)

In Enda Wyley’s section 1 of “Diary” (2009, 44-45), we find again the tight bond that has already been established between the pregnant woman and the fetus. The poetic persona addresses the child in her womb using the word “we”, which implies the inclusion of somebody else, and tells him/her that they are getting ready the room for him/her. There are things scattered everywhere, most of them

old or useless “like the cracked terracotta pot, / a dusty old glasses case, one container / of printer ink, the wobbly wooden chair” (44). The description suggests familiar images of parents tidying up a room and preparing it to be the nest for the new born; but, at the same time, it reminds us of ancient rites of renewal in which old things had to be thrown away or burnt to allow the rebirth of nature.

I look and look, get used to these things
we should tidy away, to clear our life up,
as though you are a visitor we must prepare for. (2009, 44)

In the following lines the pregnant woman addresses the being inside her and describes how she is perceiving it. Alongside physical sensations like “a force that aches in my lower back, / a twitch below my appendix mark” (44), we find again the metaphor that links procreation and creation, in this case, body, “blood” with culture, “music”:

You —a floating fish,
a blip-blipping in my fluid,
a force that aches in my lower back,
a twitch below my appendix mark,
the plucking of fingers inside of me.
You will make music in my blood,
burst into our life
that is already yours. (2009, 44)

She is aware that this new life is going to change their lives and the remnants of their old life do not need be changed since the child is going to occupy the core of her body:

So lie back with me, little one,
in the pale sheets of our waiting.
Maybe, just for now,
I'll leave things as they are—
those dusty cracked scattered pieces
of what we have become—
and let your new life nestle between us,
beneath my skin. (2009, 44)

1.6. “Self versus self, / versus death, / versus love and fear” (Mary O’Donnell 2006, 55)

In “Stabat Mater” (1986), Julia Kristeva affirms that pain is inherent in motherhood: “One does not give birth in pain, one gives birth to pain: the child represents it and henceforth it settles in, it is continuous” (167). She describes childbirth as the “undecidable” (168) battle between life and death, between “calm” and “terror” as well as the paradox of “deprivation and / benefit” (168). However, when the battle ends, she feels that calm and life have won: “The life of that / other who wends his way while / I remain henceforth like a / framework. Still life. There is / him, however, his own flesh, / which was mine yesterday. / Death, then, how could I / yield to it?” (169).

In this section we will see how some personal accounts of childbirth are represented in the following poems: Sinéad Morrissey’s “Love, the nightwatch...” (*Through the Square Windows*, 2009), Mary O’Donnell’s “Pre-Birth Flirtation with Self and Others” and “Shipwrecks and Stories” (*The Place of Miracles*, 2006)—which is dedicated to Mary O’Donnell’s daughter Anna—as well as Susan Connolly’s “Breifne” and “Liadain” (*For the Stranger*, 1993). In these poems, the women writers transform into poetry their own experiences of birthing. The hardest physical aspects of parturition are not avoided and images of blood, storm, thunder and floods are used to describe the feelings of women in labour. The poetic personae in some of these poems describe the scenario in which the birth took place, with plenty of details that help define space and time.

In Morrissey’s poem, the poetic persona addresses her child telling him how it was when he was born. Flashes of visual images, intertwined with sounds are successful in depicting, like in an impressionist painting, the atmosphere around them. Thus, the anonymity of the “nightwatch, gloved and gowned” of the aseptic hospital staff, contrasts with traces left in the father’s hands, which are signs of the violence of the moment, but at the same time, are proofs of the support he gave to the mother and his active presence in the room. Radio sounds from “taxicabs” and

“police reports” are “intertwined” with the “distant hoof beats of a heart” (28). The image of the storm outside, with the weather “blowing showery” is attuned with the “thunder of blood” and the “flood-plain of intimate stains” (28). Images of stormy waters are recurrent in most of these poems as well as representations of the body as a “frail bark” as we have already seen in Hartigan’s “Growth”. Water is a universal symbol of life, and waves on a beach are the most evident example of the cyclical repetition of the attraction of the moon, whose cycles have been, in turn, associated to women’s menstrual periods. The rhythm of the waves can also represent the rhythmical sequence of the body’s contractions in labour. But uncontrolled waters can be extremely dangerous and threatening and, in this way they represent the risks a woman is facing during parturition, when there is the possibility of real showers of blood that can endanger both her life and the child’s.

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

when he held you to the light, held your delicate, dented
head, thumbed-in like a water font. They used
stopwatches, clip charts, the distant hoof beats of a heart

(divined, it seemed, by radio, so your call fell intertwined
with taxicabs, police reports, the weather blowing showery
from the north) and a beautiful fine white cane,

carved into a fish hook. I was a haystack the children climbed
and ruined, collapsing almost imperceptibly
at first, then caving in spectacularly as you stuttered and came
—crook-shouldered, blue, believable, beyond me—
in a thunder of blood, in a flood-plain of intimate stains. (2009, 28)

In the last stanza, images of a storm are used to describe the decisive moment of childbirth, and the metaphor of the woman’s body as a haystack “collapsing almost imperceptibly / at first, then caving in spectacularly” is an image of how the woman feels that every ligament and muscle that have knotted the structure of her body is being torn apart to allow the new being make his way

beyond the mother's body. But, despite the blood and pain, the child has become finally "believable" (28).

In Mary O' Donnell's "Pre-Birth Flirtation with Self and Others" (2006, 55-56) the poetic persona describes how she prepared herself carefully for labour. The first stanza relates how, the night before, she performed the beauty rituals of working her hair, making her up and preparing beautiful clothes for her "final sleep" (55). These rituals are the armours that can help her face the hardness of the moment she is going through, without losing her own identity, whose boundaries may be dissolved into the strain of the body's biologically programmed control of the process. The threatening resonances of the adjective "final" remind us that death can also be present in the labour room. The second stanza shows how the poetic persona tries to shake off her fear: "Perched on the hospital bed, / I waited in a turquoise robe / with red and golden birds of paradise; / wafting perfume," (55) and, although she jokes "with the chap who emptied the bins", there is nothing frivolous about the moment because she is well aware of the crucial importance of the coming struggle and the subsequent changes which will modify her life. Parturition is the moment of splitting of the mother-child shared abode into two separate bodies and subjectivities; a division that is, at the same time, wanted and feared. And the poetic persona represents this struggle with images of war: "armour", "battle" and "good blood". The battle has to be fought on two fronts: The mother self accepting the pain to favour the separation of the other self, and the struggle against death.

[...]
'Gorgeous' he called me,
which is how I felt.
I knew I'd need every armour,
for the coming day,
mostly to remember who I was,
what I could be,

in the time of good blood.
Flailed into battle,
self versus self,
versus death,

versus love and fear,

the complacent deceit
(or was it kindness?)
of woman after birth
flared up. (2006, 55)

The poetic persona affirms that this is “the time of good blood”. Images of blood are not unusual in poetry, but in these poems, in addition to the widespread meaning that links blood with battle and death, we find a positive meaning because blood will be the vehicle that will bring the child into these women’s arms. Women are used to menstrual blood and are not afraid of it. Love for the child can give them the capability of enduring pain and, when the moment comes, they will use all their strength to push the child out of them. In O’Donnell’s poem the poetic persona, states clearly that it is only for the child that this violence is going through:

In those moments
when I thought
I would burst, hands and nails

ridged blood-sweet,
I pushed
to the edge of oblivion,
pushed to the edge of my life,
pushed for her,
only for her. (2006, 56)

In “Shipwrecks and Stories” (2006, 59-60), a poem Mary O’Donnell dedicated to her daughter Anna —born 20 January 1993— the birth of the child is set in a specific temporality in which the coming of a new life contrasts with the destruction of nature caused by the oil from the Braer tanker that ran aground in the Shetland Isles on 5th of January 1993. In the first stanza, nature and life are opposed to death caused as a collateral effect of industrial capitalism. The image of the full moon, that governs the cycle of tides and was also traditionally associated with the completeness of women’s gestational period and the time for childbirth, is counterpointed to TV pictures “of slack-feathered / oil-furred creatures” (59) that have been sentenced to death.

In the second stanza the poetic voice addresses her child telling her how on the day of her birth “a new president was sworn in”,¹⁷ creating a social atmosphere of hopes and expectations of peace and “the rights of living and dying” (59). These expectations about the future, contrast with the fear of the poetic persona of dying during childbirth, connecting once more life and death in that process:

On the day of your coming,
a president was sworn in,
messages unfurled, hopes
of freedom, tolerance,
the rights of living and dying.
I thought I would die that day. (2006, 59)

Time seemed to have stopped and even “[t]he minute hand on the labour ward clock / seized up with [her] pain” (59). The woman used all the resources culture had given her to counteract the growing labour pains: She “tried to sing, / told stories to the midwives” (59), although she knew that they were already used to hear “the lives of women in birth / never before so compressed / as in that moment” (59). But she did so because she needed to get hold of her identity so as not to be overcome and dissolved into the waves of pain. By repeating like a mantra her wilful determination of steering the process, she asserts the power of will over the uncontrolled forces of nature.

I told stories, spoke slowly
between the pains, spinning fables
to save me, remind me

of who I was. And they did.
At the close of every story,
I repeated one saving phrase,
was delivered from battle:
'I can and I will, I can and I will!'
Believing that, you were born. (2006, 59-60)

In the last stanza, the images of animals whose fur and feathers are covered by a slippery layer of oil that is going to lead them to death, contrast with the smooth glossy skin that had helped the child through the path towards life.

In the Shetlands, a tanker
had split into two,
birds and otters slipped into death
as darkness fell.
In Dublin the wet dark threw up our child,

sleek with life. (2006, 60)

In Susan Connolly's "Breifne" (1993, 23), we find again images of seas, waves and ships to describe childbirth. The female poetic persona tells the child the story of labour as if it were a dangerous adventure in which they both were active protagonists. Thus, the woman's body is a ship "steered" by the child, shaken by dangerous seas; people in the labour ward are described as "strange voices in command", and the rhythmical contractions of the uterine muscles are the waves that alternately "washed" the child "overboard" or "back again", until "[a]t last a hot wave engulfed [them] / and swept [them] ashore" (23). When the adventure finishes with a happy end, each character can recover their true identity and the mother affirms that this adventure they have gone through together has established between them ties that are tighter than those which linked them into the womb.

[...]
So we survived.
I became myself again

and held you;
others looked after me

On that warm September evening
I stood up after your birth,

my body light — my spirit lighter.
I looked over at you,

closer to me now
than you had been within. (1993, 23)

In "Liadain" (28), images of a personification of blood as a vehicle of communication between the mother and the daughter in her womb appear on the first lines of the poem: "Blood-whisper and bone-shell / began together; / then her

blood whispered in me”(28). We find also, as in O’Donnell’s “Daughter”, images that propose an alternative secular representation of the origins of life that challenges the religious teaching. Life becomes the product of the interactions of elements coming from different places of the universe and a sense of magic is introduced through the use of numbers —seven and three— as well as through the protective spaces of circles, which have had a powerful significance in all Indo-European cultures. Thus, the poetic persona posits the possibility that “seven stars / gave her light as a gift / to create her spirit-world” and “earth bloomed at her birth” (28).

The next stanza comes down to earth with the fear of being “drowned in pain” (28), which we have already seen in poems analysed above, but magic is present again with the three circles made of people who are going to welcome and protect the child.¹⁸

I dreamed I drowned in pain
till I saw her plunge
into life’s waters.

Three circles rippled outwards,
three nurses laughed with me —
at my pleasure, my relief.

In the first circle — those
who welcomed her; in the second —
those who would share her life. (1993, 28)

In the last stanzas, we find again the image of the body as a beach bathed by waves, but this time, the waves are calmed after the storm and they bathe the poetic persona’s body with a feeling of plenitude and happiness. The “two-faced god” of the “Boa Island” is an image of the two-sided reality of childbirth, from which pain and joy are inseparable.

Quiet as a shore I lay there,
and waves of contentment swept
over me. I needed nothing more.

But remembering Boa Island
where the two-faced god

stares east and west —

I thought of my split-second change
from pain to joy; felt
his ancient glare embrace the night. (1993, 28)

1.7. Conclusion

In “The Fantasy of the Perfect Mother” (1989), Nancy Chodorow and Susan Contratto acknowledge that, without denying the fact that mothering can be “conflictual and oppressive”, it can also be “emotionally central and gratifying in some women’s lives” (79). Through the poems that have been examined in this chapter, we have seen how motherhood can be oppressive under the constraints of patriarchal ideologies, which have considered women’s bodies as properties that had to be controlled. However, we have also seen that pregnancy and childbirth can be complex and fulfilling experiences when motherhood is freely chosen. The women poets studied in this chapter, have unearthed the physical realities of motherhood, making them the raw material for creative work that challenges philosophical dichotomies that have conditioned traditional images of motherhood, as they integrate mind and body in the representation of an enriching personal experience.

There cannot be a unifying theory about these experiences since they are determined by personal and social circumstances that condition women’s lives. Hence, pregnancy and childbirth are lived in radically different ways, depending on the situation of the woman who is the poetic persona in the poems analysed here. In some of the poems, we find a denunciation of the obsessive repression of women’s sexuality by Catholicism but, in some others, religious symbols, associated to the birth of Christ, are appropriated to represent the intimate feelings of pregnant women. Some poems represent motherhood as something imposed without taking into account woman’s will but, some others express woman’s agency and determination to become a mother. The diversity of points of view and perspectives that these poems reflect, proves that motherhood cannot be simplified

and reduced to theoretical discourses that do not consider the specific location in which this experience takes place.





CHAPTER 2

TYING AND UNTYING BONDS

2.1. Introduction

In the previous chapter we have seen how some feminist theorising about motherhood in the 1970's and 1980's tried to demonstrate that the activity of mothering is a social construct which does not have to be necessarily linked to female biology and consequently, can be done by the male parent, or by adoptive or foster parents. Adrienne Rich (1976) and Sara Ruddik (1989) among others, tried to disengage the biological function of birthgiving from the work of mothering and from motherhood as a conscious, freely chosen project and not as woman's inexorable destiny. They claimed for a shared parenthood that would allow women to enter the public sphere and to develop an identity other than that of wife and mother. This social-constructionist theorising is frequently intertwined with the anti-essentialist/essentialist debate about the definition of *feminine/masculine* identities, a debate that divided feminist theorists in the last decades of the twentieth century.

In this chapter I will first summarise some trends of this theoretical debate and then I will examine how this theorising intersects with representations of the mother-child relationship in the poetry of some Galician and Irish women writers. In most of the poems selected for this chapter it is the poetic persona as mother the one who speaks about her relationship with her child, putting into question the traditional representation of the silent passive mother who is the object of the child's desire or hate. These mothers recognise the child as the other who has been freely admitted into their lives, not as the means to compensate for their sense of castration as it was stated by Freud. In this line, Jane Flax affirms that "Freud even

reverses the actual power relation between the mother and small child. Conceptualising the woman/mother as *castrated* and in need of a son in order to acquire the longed-for penis renders the mother dependent on her *son* for psychological fulfillment” (1991, 79-80). The mothers’ voices we are going to analyse in this chapter show an agency that disowns the traditional psychoanalytic image of a dependent unfulfilled mother. In this regard I will analyse some poems by Luz Pozo Garza (*Memoria Solar. Obra poética*, 2004), Eavan Boland (*Night Feed*, 1982), Mary O’Donnell (*The Place of Miracles*, 2006) and Enda Wyley (*to wake to this*, 2009) which represent the mother’s enchantment with her newly born child. We will also find, in the poems of Sinéad Morrissey (*Through the Square Window*, 2009), Xela Arias (*Darío a diario*, 1996) and Luz Pozo Garza (*Memoria Solar*, 2004), “thinking mothers” who can reflect about their children’s own independent development, contradicting images of absorbing mothers who are guided only by maternal instinct.

2.2. Biology or Culture?

In “La luna en el cristal: Poetas irlandesas y naturaleza” (2008), Manuela Palacios points out that there is the risk of presenting motherhood as something linked to woman’s biological destiny without taking into account the social and legal context that conditions this experience:

Hay un riesgo incuestionable en la presentación de la maternidad como algo primordialmente “natural”, pues se ciñe a la mujer a un destino biológico y normal —en el sentido de “habitual” y “normativo”— a la vez que se pasa por alto toda la regulación social que fija los criterios sobre quién y cuándo puede engendrar una criatura. Algunas tendencias ecofeministas identifican como prioritaria esta dimensión natural de la maternidad, mientras que el feminismo con una base materialista destaca los condicionamientos sociales de dicha experiencia”. (2008, 23-24)

From a standpoint of anti-essentialist materialist feminism, Monique Wittig asserted the need to go beyond the dichotomy men/women, defined by the cultural ideology of what she calls the heterosexual mind, and to go further away from

biology and rethink the human condition in terms that can be inclusive of diversity. She considers that *men* and *women* are political categories that cannot be differentiated by the specificity of their bodies (1981). Moreover, for her, the body itself is a social construction that cannot be discussed without taking into account the economic and social reality in which it is inscribed. Wittig also attacks psychoanalysis as “the official discourse of sexuality” (1979, 114 apud Fuss 1989, 41) and she puts into question theorisations of the psyche which are “untouched by history and unworked by class conflicts” (1980, 104 apud Fuss, 41)

Among the feminists who subscribe the constructionist theory, I will mention Christine Delphy, Diana Fuss and M^a Xosé Queizán. Delphy’s position is in line with Wittig’s in *Close to Home: A Materialist Analysis of Women’s Oppression* (1984). She adheres to the anti-essentialist materialist position that insists on the primacy of the social and the political over biology, and considers dangerous to accept natural explanations for facts that are the result of socio-political circumstances. Diane Fuss, in *Essentially Speaking. Feminism, Nature & Difference* (1989), also subscribes the constructionist theory, but she has underlined the contradictions and paradoxes of both rigorous essentialist and anti-essentialist positions, and the need of a theoretical reformulation of biology in relation to sex and gender. Fuss warns against the risk that “substituting social determinism for biological determinism, and replacing sex with gender, may not be the most productive ways to deal with the question of biology” (52). She affirms that “[b]iology will not simply go away, much as we might wish it to; it has to be theorised” (52). Drawing on Adrienne Rich’s distinction between *the* body and *my* body (Rich 1986, 215), Fuss points out that the use of the definite article *the* essentialises the body giving it the metaphysical category of a universal abstraction, whereas the use of the possessive *my* “de-essentialises its object through particularisation” (Fuss, 52). Fuss considers this distinction “a place to begin the project of reintroducing biology, the body *as matter*, back into poststructuralist material discourse” (Fuss, 52). Fuss also puts forward some questions that should be answered in order to develop social constructionist

theorising: the need to redefine what is *the natural, the biological and the cultural* and to explain how social reality acts upon the body and vice versa, how the body articulates the social.

The Galician writer M^a Xosé Queizán, from a radical feminist constructionist standpoint, expresses in *Anti natura* (2008) serious doubts about attributing only to biological characteristics —hormonal and chemical— physical features that mark the differences between men and women, such as strength and musculature. She suggests that these characteristics may well be the result of the kind of life men and women have led for centuries, since men trained their muscles in the public sphere in tasks that required in most cases physical strength, whereas women were excluded from them. To this Queizán adds that men always took priority over women in matters of food: “A menor dose de alimentos que toman as mulleres é propio de todas as culturas. Cando hai pouca comida ou poucos recursos para comprala, a mellor tallada é para o pai de familia” (57). Moreover, female bodies had to suffer the consequences of numerous pregnancies and lactating periods which debilitated them. In spite of that, working class women were not spared hard work in factories and agricultural tasks; tasks that they still carry out all over the world and require in some cases physical strength, which not all men would be able to do.

Queizán welcomes the social and legal changes that have allowed women access to the public sphere and undermined the gender-biased dichotomy nature/culture as well. She underlines “o afastamento progresivo entre o humano, o cultural, e o biolóxico, o natural” (118). In this respect, she considers the Spanish Lei de transexualidade of 2007 (BOE 16/03/2007), which was passed at parliament almost unnoticed, as a milestone in the acknowledgment of the primacy of culture over biology.

Lexíslase que non é necesario operarse os xenitais para ser legalmente muller ou home. Non hai que cortar ou poñer, substituír penes por vaxinas ou viceversa para ser legalmente muller ou home. Abonda coa decisión persoal, coa vontade persoal e subxectiva que fai que a persoa se consider dun xénero ou doutro. A cultura vence á bioloxía. (Queizán 2008, 119)

Among those who have claimed for the specificity of the female body, Luce Irigaray has been assigned the label of essentialist and she has raised a lot of criticism against her theories of the *two lips* and their implication in a distinctive female difference in writing. However, Diane Fuss has tried to demonstrate that Irigaray's language of essence does not mean "to imprison women within their bodies but to rescue them from enculturating definitions by men" (1989, 61). In this sense, Fuss affirms that Irigaray's essentialism "participates in the very construction and symbolisation of the female body; hers is an essentialism profoundly intricate with the grammar and logic of social constructionism" (1989, 53).

Anti-essentialist / essentialist discourses about the body have a direct effect on theorisations about motherhood and mothering, both on those who affirm the crucial importance of biology in the mother-child bond and those who reject the very existence of such a thing as a *maternal instinct*. As we saw in the previous chapter, Nancy Chodorow does not find evidence that can explain the biological basis for the exclusivity of women's mothering, "since human culture and intentional activity have to so large an extent taken over from what is instinctual in other animals" (Chodorow, 23). She admits that there is a widespread belief in the existence of "some sort of hormonal / physiological basis for women's mothering", but she does not find enough evidence to support the argument "that infants need these biological mothers specifically or that women are harmed by not caring for the infants they have borne" (Chodorow 1978, 23). Chodorow does not deny the "emotional or physiological experiences of particular women who, for various reasons, may not be able to care for or nurse their infants when they want to" and admits the possibility of painful effects on their children. Furthermore, she draws on the work of Therese Benedek (1959) and Donald L. Winnicott (1960), to support her contention. Chodorow states that, although Benedek claims that the mother-infant symbiosis has "hormonal as well as psychological origins for the mother" (Chodorow, 23), she also affirms that "the infant's need for the mother is absolute, whereas the mother's for the infant is relative" (Chodorow, 23).

Chodorow also observes that Winnicott “warns against thinking of a ‘maternal instinct’ and stresses that the changes brought about by pregnancy must be thought of in psychological terms, because they vary so much with the state of the mother” (Chodorow, 23).

From a radical anti-essentialist feminist standpoint M^a Xosé Queizán affirms in *Anti Natura* (2008) that it is anachronistic to speak of such a thing as maternal instinct, “aquele amor de nai baseado no imperio da natureza, na forza do sangue” (2008, 118). She asserts that there is no difference in the way mothers care and nurture their children whether biological or adopted and adds that maternal love is not rooted in animal instincts but in individual consciousness. Queizán observes that at present, in Spain, women can be not only biological, but social and legal mothers; she welcomes the fact that there has been an increasing participation of fathers in child caring for the last thirty years and affirms that they feel happy and gratified in doing this task. Moreover, maternal love can be exerted by homosexual parents:

Parellas masculinas homosexuais adoptan criaturas que son atendidas con <<amor de nai>>. Sen dúbida, no relativo a compartir tarefas coa parella, o coidado da infancia é o que os homes fan con máis gusto. Daquela, nas mentalidades actuais, lonxe quedan os instintos biolóxicos, sanguíneos, uterinos. Rexen outros valores que nos achegan a maternidades e paternidades intelixentes. (Queizán 2008, 118)

This theorising welcomed the social and legal changes which allowed homosexual and lesbian marriage,¹ as well as the advances in reproductive technologies, which have helped to break the boundaries of the nuclear heterosexual family as the only suitable setting to bring children up. Moreover, in her theorising of mothering as a thoughtful complex project which she separates from the biological fact of birthgiving, Sara Ruddik subscribes an anti-essentialist position. Without completely rejecting the influence of biology, Ruddik does not think that sexual difference is more relevant in the attitudes required to child caring than other social or individual differences:

Although biological differences between female and male styles of mothering might survive in an egalitarian society, I see no reason to believe—and good reason to doubt—that these differences would make women (or men) more “naturally” suited to protect, nurture and train children. (Ruddik 1994, 35)

In “Taken the Nature Out of Mother” (1993), Adria Schwartz asserts that the advance in reproductive technology “has shaken the very foundation of our notions of motherhood and seems to have taken the nature out of Mother Nature” (240-241). To the already varied categories of mothers, new types must be added within the category of surrogacy. A great ethical debate about surrogacy arose when the first cases came out in the news and biotechnology opened new possibilities. A distinction was established between a genetic surrogate, who provides her own ovum and is inseminated with the sperm of a male donor, and the gestational surrogate, who becomes pregnant through in vitro fertilization but is not genetically related to the offspring.

At first, these advances were greeted by many feminists because they seemed to break the constraints placed on women by biology, as Schwartz points out: “The associative link between women, fertility and motherhood is being eroded, if not broken, in the laboratory” (242). At the same time, a new range of possibilities were open for single women, lesbian and homosexual couples who can have children genetically related to them. However, both Sarah Ruddik and Adria Schwartz agree in that the famous Baby M trial case raised “fundamental questions about motherhood” in the United States (Schwartz, 242) and was further evidence of the need to revise some feminist theorising about this issue.

Marybeth Whitehead, who had already had two children, signed a contract of surrogacy and agreed to be artificially inseminated by William Stern to conceive a child for him and his wife in exchange of ten thousand dollars. Before the pregnancy came to the end, Marybeth recognised that “she had made a grave mistake” (Schwartz, 243) and, after the child was born, she felt that she would not be able to give her baby to the Sterns and intended to keep it. She decided to give back the money she had already been given as well as forfeit that which had been promised. Indignation and anger were the public reactions toward the behaviour of

a mother who had tried first to sell her child and then to break a legal contract, attitudes that automatically defined her as a morally unsuitable mother. Schwartz observes that “[t]he fact that is elementary in contract law that performance may not be enforced, but merely affects to the damages collected, made no difference” (243).²

At the initial trial, an expert witness, psychologist Lee Salk stated that “Mr. and Mrs. Stern’s role as parents was achieved by a *surrogate uterus and not a surrogate mother*” (Phyllis Chessler, 1989, 231, apud Schwartz, 243). It is clear in this case that the genetic material provided by Mr. Stern —the Aristotelian male *effective and active principle*— prevailed over that of Marybeth’s. Moreover, Mrs. Stern was liberated from the *natural* limitations of her body —multiple sclerosis— and her rights as moral mother were achieved through her legal connection with Baby M’s genetic father, establishing once more the prevalence of the male line, while Marybeth was reduced to an uterus as Schwartz points out:

Far from being liberated from her body, in the state’s eyes, Marybeth Whitehead became her body or rather a disembodied part-object, an instrumental construct to fulfil the needs of a man who wishes a genetic offspring. If she was only her body, or rather, a body part, then she could not be a mother. (1993, 243)

Baby M’s trial raised a strong feminist debate between “essentialists championing women’s biological rights to motherhood, and social constructionists rejoicing at their liberation from the primitive bond of women’s reproductive capacity” (Schwartz, 244).

All the technological advances in in-vitro fertilization which allow men to have children with their genes conceived in a *hired womb* as well as the ascendancy of movements of father-rights reinforce the old Aristotelian conception of man as the true parent and woman as a temporary fetal incubator, with no subjectivity of her own. In *The Sacred Bond: Legacy of Baby M.* (1989), Phyllis Chessler takes sides with the biological mother affirming that only in a patriarchal society a woman’s labour and attachment to her offspring would be regarded less valuable than the sperm of the father and a contract.³ She underlines the fact that in

the preliminary surrogacy agreement M. Stern was referred to as the “natural father or “natural and biological father” while Marybeth Whitehead is referred to exclusively as “surrogate” (Chessler, 1989, 167-173).⁴ It is clear that, in this contract, two different categories of *nature* are established: the primacy of the *true nature* of the father’s sperm in contrast with the non-essential quality of the mother’s ova, and the nullification of her womb, which is considered only “a temporary shelter that may even soon be replicated or subsumed by reproductive technological advance” (Schwartz, 244).

Moreover, we can see in the news how pregnancy as an exclusive female function is in some cases omitted from the seemingly innocent fashionable language used for famous people, saying that they —both members of the couple— are pregnant, as well as the erasure of the word *woman* or *mother* which is substituted by *hired womb*. As an example of this I will cite three pieces of news: In the first one Nicole Kidman and Keith Urban present their biological daughter Faith Margareth “concebida mediante un vientre de alquiler” (<http://mujer.es.msn.com/celebrities/> 26/01/2010, 4). The second is an interview (*El País Semanal* 14/01/2011), in which Ricky Martin talks about his twin sons who were born from “un vientre de alquiler”, and in the third one a well-to-do homosexual couple —legally married in Spain— speak about their experiences as parents of their children (*El País Semanal* 29/05/2011, 36-46). In this case the surrogate mothers are mentioned by their names and there are two photographs in the article in which each surrogate mother appears with the children object of surrogacy together with her own family, which suggests that the ties with the biological mother have not been cut completely. However, when one of the fathers—a gynaecologist— describes his feelings about the pregnancy and birth of his third son, we can observe how the feelings, the pain and the whole personhood of the mother disappear in favour of the parents as the only protagonists of the event (*italics mine*):

Yo soy ginecólogo, y he estado muchos años ocupándome de partos y embarazos de alto riesgo. Veía a diario complicaciones. Quizá por eso viví

nuestro embarazo con cierta ansiedad. Se me hizo eterno. En el parto, cuando nació Alonso y vi que rompía a llorar con un llanto muy enérgico —pesó más de cuatro kilos—, sentí muchísima paz, me tranquilicé, vi que había llegado bien. En cuanto le cortaron el cordón umbilical nos hicimos cargo y tratamos de separarnos lo menos posible de él. (EPS 29/05/2011, 38)

This erasure of the mother as lifegiver has been stated by Patricia Kennedy (2002). Kennedy develops what she calls “A Three Dimensional Model of Motherhood — Mother as Carer, Earner and Lifegiver” (8). She observes that, while the function of carers and earners can be passed onto other people or even the State, “[i]t is only woman who can conceive, lactate and give birth. It is only the birth mother who is caught in the grips of labour pain. It is she who lies under the abortionist, suffers the pain of a miscarriage or the ecstasy or trauma of birth” (7-8).

Furthermore, it is not clear that biology can be dismissed so easily. Some research done with rodents in the last decades has shown that some hormones and peptides such as estrogen, progesterone, oxytocin, cortisol and vasopressin determine how well mothers care for their pups. Beth Azar acknowledges in “The Postpartum Cuddles: Inspired by Hormones?” (2002, 54-56), the difficulty of translating the conclusions of these experiments to human behaviour, as well as the ethical restrictions that do not allow researchers to manipulate human brains; but Azar mentions some experiments carried out at the University of Toronto by the psychologist Alison Fleming and other colleagues about the influence of cortisol on lactating mothers.⁵ The level of cortisol greatly increases in the last phase of pregnancy and drops abruptly after delivery. According to Azar, this research showed that “women with higher levels of cortisol postpartum are more attracted to their babies’ scent and more attentive to them” (Azar 2002, 54). The results of this research might explain “the excitement, bonding and utter contentment of new motherhood, bolstered by a flood of *cuddle hormones* that are particularly potent in nursing mothers” (Azar, 2002, 54). This is an assumption that most popular magazines about mothering take for granted. These cuddle hormones could be somehow a safeguard against postpartum depression. But Azar is very cautious

about putting all the weight on biology and points out that “Fleming emphasizes that her research finds that correlations between hormones and mothers' behavior are usually mediated by environment or the parents' experience with babies and caregiving” (Azar 2002, 54).⁶

Moreover, research done about the function of the placenta and the nature of the interchanges that take place between the bodies of the mother and the fetus during pregnancy puts into question some widespread assumptions about the nature of mother-infant relationship. In an interview with Luce Irigaray (1993), the biologist H el ene Rouch explains the complexity of the function of the placenta as a “mediating space, which means that there’s never a fusion of maternal and embryonic tissues” (39). Although this organ is a formation of the embryo, it acts in an almost independent way, playing its “mediating role” in different ways, because it not only regulates the interchange of nutritious substances and waste matter between mother and fetus, it also modifies the metabolism of the mother: “transforming, storing, and redistributing maternal substances for both her own and the fetus’ benefit” (39), creating an environment that provides for a “peaceful coexistence” (39) between mother and child:

This relative autonomy of the placenta, its regulatory functions ensuring the growth of the one in the body of the other, cannot be reduced, either to a mechanism of fusion (an ineffable mixture of the bodies or blood of mother and fetus), or, conversely, to one of aggression (the fetus as foreign body devouring from the inside, a vampire in the maternal body). These descriptions are of imaginary reality and appear quite poor indeed—and obviously extremely culturally determined—in comparison to the complexity of biological reality. (Irigaray 1993, 39)

Consequently, Rouch does not agree with psychoanalytic theorisations about the fusion between a child and his mother during pregnancy and the first months after childbirth. Such a fusion would have to be broken by a third term in order for the child to be constituted as a subject. Rouch affirms that “the differentiation between the mother’s self and the other of the child, and vice versa, is in place well before it’s given meaning in and by language” (42) and the reality of this

differentiation is not necessarily in accordance to that of our cultural imaginary, which has described it as a “loss of paradise, traumatizing expulsion or exclusion, etc” (42). She does not accuse these forms of the imaginary of being wrong, but “of being the only ways of theorizing what exists before language” (42).

Therefore, research done in the field of biology affects theorisations about the nature of the mother-infant bond during pregnancy and puts into question psychoanalytic explanations about the process of subject formation of the individual’s identity. In both Freudian and Lacanian theorisations the mother is a fixed passive object, without any previous or further identity apart from that of a mother, unable to undergo any kind of personal development in accordance or in contrast to her child’s growing. Moreover, as we have seen above, the mother has been often reduced to a *maternal body* and, more recently, to a womb liable for hiring. Sara Ruddick has noticed not only the absence of the voice of the mother in psychoanalytic theorisations, but also the conceptualisation of the child as somebody who has to fight against the absorbing love of the mother to achieve a real subjectivity.

Not only is a mother’s voice virtually absent in psychoanalytic tales; worse, the child that psychoanalysts reveal is often a stranger to her mother. In one dominant psychoanalytic story, an infant is at first part of a mutually desiring mother-child couple. Then, still primarily attached to “the mother,” “the child” moves through a stage of development that sounds like a prelude to the “real” thing—preoedipal, presymbolic. (Ruddick 1994, 32)

Ruddick also suggests that the obsessions of the “child hero of the psychoanalytic stories” (32) about gender difference, sex, mother and father may be a reflection of the preoccupations of psychoanalysts themselves, and she underlines the strong contrast between what she calls “psychoanalytic tales” and the stories some mothers tell about their own experiences:

When mothers talk about themselves, when they appear as characters in their own maternal stories, they often depict themselves as grappling with problems their children present or that the world presents to their children. But this thinking mother is not reflected in psychoanalytic tales any more

than she is in philosophy or more ordinary varieties of feminism. (Ruddick 1994, 33)

From the field of philosophy Jane Flax also accuses object relations theorists⁷ of having told the story of human development from the point of view of the child. She laments that “the separate aspects of the developmental processes of a mother qua mother and the child are not adequately considered”. Each member of the dyad has different internal processes which are not fully investigated. Mother and child have been considered as “misleadingly isomorphic” when, in fact, they go through “developmental processes specific to each partner in the dyad as well as fusion, mutuality, and interaction between them” (Flax 1990, 123). Although both mother and child can share situations of unity, separation and reciprocity, the mother’s experience of this development and the meanings it has for her “cannot be identical to or confounded with an account of the child’s process” (Flax 1990, 124). More recently, Celia Shiffer (2009) has pointed out that dominant narratives have “sublimated or even erased the subject who is called, and who calls herself, a “mother”” (213), without leaving her “room to speak” (213).

2.3. Moments of Enchantment

In this section I will explore how the mother-child bond is expressed by the poetic personae of these mothers who address their children and tell them their feelings about the first stages of their relationship. I will show how this first stage of the mother-child bond has been represented in very different ways in some poems of Luz Pozo Garza (2004), Eavan Boland (1982), Mary O’Donnell (2006) and Enda Wyley (2009). I will underline in these poems the voice of the mother as an active subject who, not only enjoys her connectedness to the child, but is also able to reflect about her feelings and about the changes that becoming a mother has brought about. Such a mother’s voice contradicts the image of the silent passive object of the child’s desire or hate so often described in Freud’s and Lacan’s theories. Besides, these mothers’ voices also contradict the assumed

undifferentiating unity of the mother-child dyad and they recognise that the child, using Kristeva's words, "once the / umbilical cord has been / severed" (1986, 178), is the other.

No connection. Nothing to do
with it. And this, as early as
the first gestures, cries, steps,
long before its personality has
become my opponent. The
child, whether he or she is irre-
mediably an other. (Kristeva 1986, 179)

In this line, Anne Enright describes this moment of intimate recognition of the child as an independent being and the feeling of wonder she experiences at this discovery, which happened on the third night of her child's life:

I looked into her eyes and realized that nothing I believed could explain this. It was an embarrassing moment. I think I saw her soul. I suffered from the conviction that a part of her was ancient; and that part chose to be there with me at the beginning of something new. I had a wise child. (2004, 111)

If I had to look for a common thread in the diversity of voices we find here, I would say that, in these poems, women writers have translated their own experiences of motherhood and it is the poetic persona of the mother the one who addresses the child and tells him/her what she feels, breaking the silence she was assigned by patriarchal symbolic discourse.

In Luz Pozo Garza's "Nana de Octubre" (2004, 207-208) [1959] we find again—as in the poems commented in chapter 1—the rhymes and metrics of traditional Spanish lyrics in a lullaby written at the time when her first daughter Mónica was born. The poem is the tenth of the series of twelve belonging to the "Adviento" collection we have already seen in chapter 1. In this calendar, October is the month in which the child has already arrived and the poetic voice of the mother sings a sweet lullaby to get her asleep. Under the symbols and images frequently used in Spanish traditional and religious lyrics we find the warm atmosphere of mother-child intense communion.

The first line of the poem, “[d]uérmete, mi niña”, is recurrent in many popular Spanish lullabies transmitted orally and is repeated in lines twenty five, twenty nine and thirty three. The mother urges the child to sleep and gives her the reasons why she should get asleep. In popular lullabies there are frequent references to the moon in the sky, or to the absence of the sun, as well as some warnings of what might happen if the child refuses to sleep. In this poem, the mother refers to the arrival of the month of October accompanied by the clouds and the rain of autumn. The mother transfers the singing to nature, personified in the character of October, while the only rays of sunlight left are kept in her heart.

Duérmete, mi niña,
que ha venido Octubre
y quiere cantarte
su canción de nube.
No quedan naranjas
en el naranjal.
No quedan limones
en el limonar.
Quedan muy poquitos
rayitos de sol.
Están bien guardados
en mi corazón. (2004, 207)

The references to oranges and lemons remind us of some popular romances such as the “Romance de la Virgen y el ciego” also known as “El naranjel”, of which many different versions have lasted to our days. Moreover, oranges and lemons have been widely used in Spanish popular lyrics as symbols associated with love, as Stephen Reckert has observed in *Lyra Minima: Structure and Symbol in Iberian Traditional Verse* (1970):

There is a consistent association of oranges and lemons respectively with gold and silver, (or the white of purity) sun and moon, ripeness and unripeness, fruitfulness and sterility, the acceptance and rejection of love, and ultimately even life and death. (1970, 27)

The use of diminutives, so common in children’s songs, has an affective quality and, at the same time it has an evocative power which gives us the image of a world of toys inhabited by the characters of the fairy tales: little horses and

castles with battlements; a world where dreams and fantasies may become real and in which the infant may be the princess:

Caballitos blancos
juegan en la playa,
beben despacito
la flor de las aguas.
Tenía un castillo
con doce almenitas,
y en las doce almenas
doce naranjitas. (2004, 207)

The poetic persona will then refer to a window she will climb to: “A la ventanita, / sube que te sube, / abriré los sueños / de octubre” (207). Her mention of the window she is going to climb up reminds us of Grimm’s Fairy Tale of Rapunzel, the girl shut by a bad witch in a high tower which had neither stairs nor doors, with only a small window at the top, from which a brave prince tried to rescue her but failed. But in this poem it is the mother the one who will rescue the baby to open up for her the world of dreams. October recovers its meaning as a time of the year in which two different kinds of dreams can merge: those of the sleeping baby and the daydreams of the mother who wants to introduce the girl into the poetic imagery she is creating for her:

Duérmete, mi niña,
que viene la lluvia
mojando las hojas
blancas de la luna.
Duérmete, mi niña,
que no sale el sol.
Islita querida
de mi corazón.
Duérmete, mi niña,
que viene el Otoño
con sus peces grises
nadando en el fondo. (2004, 208)

The last poem of this cycle, “Diciembre” (2004, 211), has religious resonances associated with the birth of Christ. These twelve poems are grouped under the title of Adviento, —Advent—, a word that comes from Latin *adventus*,

which means arrival. In the Christian liturgical year it covers the four weeks previous to Christmas and it is a period of time devoted to the preparation for the *adventus Redemptoris*. One of the readings prescribed for the second Sunday of Advent is Isaiah 11, which is considered to be a prophesy of the birth of Christ, who will come from Jesse's ascendancy: "And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots" (Isaiah 11, 1). The poetic voice in Luz Pozo Garza's poem feels that a branch has grown in her heart and she is filled by a cascade of grace, in a clear reference to Mary who was impregnated by the grace of the Lord. December is also the prelude of the Epiphany, when a white star heralds the good news, like the one which announced the Three Wise Men the birth of the Messiah:

Diciembre, con una estrella
blanca.
Mi corazón tiene una rama.
Mi corazón tiene una rama.
dentro
me brota una cascada
y me lleno
de gracia. (2004, 211)

The next lines of the poem emphasise the feeling of fulfillment: "Ahora es el tiempo / de la llama, / la plenitud / de la mañana" (211), when the darkness of the night, like the obscurity of the maternal womb gives way to dawn, in which the white star shines and the dumbness of the wind might symbolise the impossibility of translating into language the complexity of sensations that exist in what Celia Shiffer (2009), paraphrasing Kristeva, calls "the semiotic, the material, maternal realm, which cannot be heard in the words themselves but rather in the rumblings and ruptures beneath and between" (Shiffer, 211). In this poem, the maternal realm can be heard only through the heartbeats that resound like bell tolls.

La noche
se hizo alba.
El aire mudo,
sin palabras.
El corazón

se hace campana,
casi alma.
El viento
lleva una estrella blanca. (Pozo Garza 2004, 211)

I have already commented, in the previous chapter, part 1 of Enda Wyley's "Diary" (2009, 45). Now we are going to see parts 2, 3, 4 and 5 of the same poem, which describe the first weeks of the mother-child relationship. In part 2 the poetic persona of the mother addresses her child to tell her/him, from the first line, the happiness she experiences now that the baby is here and how s/he has fulfilled all her expectations: "You are here. What can I say / but that you are everything / I knew you'd be" (45). This poem reflects the complex nature of the mother-child relationship, since the mother speaks to the child not as an undifferentiated part of herself, but as a separate being, someone she has already imagined and created in her mind before he was a flesh and bone reality, to the point that she cannot conceive his not having been here. We will find in the following lines a similarity with a statement in Xela Arias' long poem *Darío a diario* (1996): "E ves / ti / agora / primeiro imaxinado e xa querido" (47).

You are someone
I have always known.
You have never not been here.
And how definite you are
After just a few short weeks on this earth. (Wyley 2009, 45)

The mother's acknowledgement of the independent subjectivity of the child is in accordance to Kristeva's statement: "The / child, whether *he* or *she* is / irremediably an other." (1986, 178-179). The mother in Wyley's poem shows her surprise at "how definite" her child is and describes the distinctive features of a personal identity:

You do not take things lightly—
stare at everything,
wide-eyed, frowning.
And when your eyes catch the light,
a deep chuckle shakes your body. (2009, 45)

The next lines describe the happiness of the mother when she plays with her child. Moments that many mothers can easily recognise to be part of the joys of a desired motherhood and that Sara Ruddik defines as “moments of passionate infatuation with an astonishingly marvellous infant” (32). But it is also undeniable that mothers have a lot of tasks to do and new problems to deal with: sleepless nights with babies ceaselessly crying, changes in the affective and sexual relationships with a partner —when there is one —, or the lack of support when there is none. These elements interact and disrupt the presupposed perfect symbiosis of mother and child and, as Sara Ruddik observes, mothers “are unlikely to remember themselves as absorbed lovers in a baby couple” (32). Furthermore, drawing on the work of Madeleine Sprengnether, Ruddik agrees with her in considering an absurdity the concept of symbiosis, “for a mother can only act as a mother if she perceives herself as such, as separate and different from her infant. A mother who felt in every way like an infant would be worse than useless as a caretaker” (Sprengnether 1990, 233 apud Ruddik, 1994). However, these poems by Enda Wyley reflect only the positive aspect of this close connection between mother and child.

Jessica Benjamin in “The Omnipotent Mother” (1994) observes that, for most of its history, psychoanalytic theory “has failed to conceptualise the mother as a separate subject outside the child”, but she thinks that new trends in psychoanalytic theorising, as well as new research done about infancy, describe early development “as a process that involves a mutual recognition between mother and child” ((1994, 133). Benjamin also draws on infancy theorists, like Beatrice Beebe and Frank Lachman (1988), as well as Daniel Stern (1985), to question the validity of Lacan’s theory of the mirror stage and she affirms that “even at four months an attuned mother is not undifferentiated, does not create the illusion of perfect oneness and is not perfectly attuned” (133). When the mother plays with her child she is able to create a situation in which she can stimulate “an incipient recognition of otherness, difference, discrepancy, and this pleases the infant, who likes the excitement that a brush with otherness brings” (133).

At this point, the child is able to realize that another shares her or his excitement or intention and enjoys that fact. Likewise, the mother is aware of her child's capacity to share feeling and now takes pleasure in contacting her or his mind. Thus the infant's sense of the other develops incrementally through a tension between sameness and difference, union and disjunction. (Benjamin 1994, 133)

In the next lines of Wyley's poem we can see how both mother and child enjoy playing together and how the mother creates sensory stimuli that find a response in the child, who "squeals in delight" (45), and in return stimulates in the mother the wish for more playing. The importance of play in the interaction between mother and child has been stressed among others by Maxson McDowell (2004, 499), who draws on Daniel Stern's research (1985) to affirm that "continuous eye contact stimulates the mother to play more with the infant: she plays with facial expression, with voice, with face presentations, with head movements, and with proximity games" (McDowell 2004, 499). In the poem, playing is interrupted when the baby is scared by a barking dog or a "sudden wind" but, for the mother, the feeling of fulfillment that the presence of the child has brought about has the power of putting aside all her worries since the child has confirmed all her expectations.

Then I am happy.
Then I lift you in my hands
and hold you flat over my head—
you squealing in delight.
When I nuzzle into your stomach,
you clutch at my hair and won't let go.
They are the moments
before the dog barks at a cat
and scares you, or a sudden wind
makes you cry.
Why should I worry
about anything anymore?
You are here. (Wyley 2009, 45)

In part 3 of "Diary" (46) there are some differences from the previous section of the poem: Perhaps the most important one is the inclusion of the father as a third element in the relationship with the child. But the father is not the

powerful element that ruptures the mother-child symbiosis; he is a silent character, and the only poetic voice is that of the mother, who continues her conversation with her child; although this time she introduces the father as a passive figure in the playful scene that takes place at night in the parents' bedroom. The mother is the active subject, her agency is shown from the first line because she controls the toy giraffe the child has been playing with all day and now is "under [her] pillow". Furthermore, she is the observer of the child's development, while the father is only mentioned twice and does not appear until line ten, once playing has finished and he is included in the "us" to whom the child's tired eyes have to be closed on. He reappears again in the last line, as an object of the child's discovery of the world, when the mother tells the child that s/he has a lot of things to explore in the next morning and, after a list of new exciting things, she includes "[his/her] father's bristly skin, our eyes" (46):

In the morning you will stretch
for the soft, tinkling ball,
the bright cloth storybook,
the doll with the mad string hair
and forget about the giraffe,
you have other things to find, explore—
like my hand in yours, the straps of my dress,
your father's bristly skin, our eyes. (2009, 46)

Thus, the introduction of the father breaks the conceptualisation of the mother-child dyad as a reality isolated from other social relations, as Jane Flax has underlined in her critique of the object-relations psychoanalytic theorists:

These relations enter into and help shape the qualities of the dyadic one and of each of its members. These social relations include the mother and child's other object relations with the father, siblings and other significant kin/affectionate ties. Perhaps this abstraction is in part a logical consequence of telling the story from the child's viewpoint. (Flax 1990, 124)

Part 4 of Enda Wyley's "diary" represents the complexity of feelings the mother experiences at breastfeeding. On the one hand, this is perhaps the moment of closest intimacy between mother and child, when the mother's body reacts to

attend the child's need and both mother and child's bodies get in touch in a way that has been considered the highest peak of the mother-child bond. On the other hand, breastfeeding is a hard task that takes a long time, it is not always as serene as it should be expected and it implies most of the times lack of rest for the mother and the impossibility of being replaced by other members of the family in the task of nurturing the child. This ambivalence is reflected in Julia Kristeva's "Stabat Mater":

Nights of wakefulness,
scattered sleep, sweetness of
the child, warm mercury in my
arms, cajolery, affection,
defenceless body, his or mine,
sheltered, protected. (1986, 171-172)

In her memoir Anne Enright has tried to demystify breastfeeding affirming that she had never liked being around nursing women because "there was always too much love, too much need in the room" (2004, 40) and asserts that breastfeeding "may be an iconised activity made sacred by some and disgusting by others, but it is first and foremost a meal" (41). She admits that she breastfed her child because she thought she should, and although she smiled and cooed her a bit while doing this activity, she tried to do other things simultaneously, like reading or writing. Enright also observes that, despite the Catholic emphasis in the cult of the Virgin mother and the nationalist idealisation of the nurturing mother, breastfeeding was hidden and completely absent of public representation. In contrast with the scarcity of representations of the Virgin breastfeeding the child, she humorously notices the abundance of another religious image: "The closest the culture came to an image of actual nursing was in the icon of the Sacred Heart, endlessly offering his male breast, open and glowing and crowned with thorns" (43).

The task of breastfeeding is not romanticised in Enda Wyley's poem. The poetic persona describes the tiredness of "late-night and early-morning feeds" (47); tasks that can be exhausting since they mean repeated interruptions of sleep that

have drawn “black circles below [her] eyes” (47). She explains the state of alertness so familiar to most mothers, who react immediately to the child slightest movement. There is a contrast between the lightness of the movement of the child’s eyes and the numbness of the mother caused by the lack of rest. The image of the mother, who sees herself as a “waking dead” coming out from her “tomb-stone” (47) might suggest that of a mother-vampire awakening at night to look for nurturance. We find the counterpoint of this image in that of a child-vampire in Anne Enright’s description of her first experience of breastfeeding: “So there we were in the hospital dark; me and my white Dracula, her chin running with milk and her eyes black” (2004, 44). But in Wyley’s poem it represents just the opposite of a vampire. She is able to overcome her tiredness so that she can answer to the need of the child:

[...]
and my sleep shortens
with your shuffling,
your opening eyes.
Now I must stumble to attention.
I am the waking dead,
pushing a tomb-stone aside,
pulling you out and up
from your basket warmth. (2009, 47)

The next lines reflect the biological response of the mother to the child’s need, because as soon as she starts undressing her breast she can feel them filling with milk. In the last line of this section, the mother expresses the feeling that through her breast she is feeding the child with her whole self. We find a similar image in Xela Arias *Darío a diario* (1996) when she tells the baby that she is “a gran teta ofrecida” (45).

I fumble with buttons,
and milk speeds
like lightening
through my breasts.
I fill your mouth with me. (Wyley 2009, 47)

In part 5 of Enda Wyley's "Diary" the mother contradicts the widespread assertion that babies are most beautiful when they are asleep, perhaps because it is then when the mother is allowed a bit of rest. But the poetic persona tells her child that she/he is most beautiful when she/he is awake and admires the vitality of child, and above all "The deep-cut mark / above your nose / where thinking has begun" (48). The last lines of the poem reassert the mother's conviction that it was her longing that brought the child home:

5.
Most beautiful when you wake,
you come to me resisting food
as you did sleep hours before,
your fingers a web of energy,
your face a thousand knots,
your skin blotched with the stains
of just being alive—
the deep-cut mark
above your nose
where thinking has begun.
Oh, so much longing
brought you here. (2009, 48)

In Enda Wyley's poem "Little Heart" (2009, 13), which is dedicated to her daughter Freya, the scene depicted suggests a state of mother-child connectedness that may well be inscribed into what Kristeva defines the semiotic stage. The mother explores the body of the child and finds traces of food hidden in the folds of the baby's skin. The poem plays with the visual image of the infant's body covered with pieces of strawberries and tuna that does not awake any sense of disgust on the mother. Just the contrary, she sees the corn beads as a necklace that makes the baby more lovable and can awake the sense of taste, as if she were a delicious meal ready to be eaten.

In your folds tonight
are strawberries
to wash away,
some knots of tuna
netted there,
and up along

your neckline
sweet corn beads
that make
a precious chain. (2009, 13)

In the second stanza the sensorial images are the sounds the mother cannot really hear, but she thinks they resonate into the baby's head as memories of the factual sounds, and she encourages the little heart to go on beating.

In your head
the dog is barking
and the small wall clock
is gently ticking,
your tongue clicking
to its time.
Little heart
not yet hurt,
bear on. (2009, 13)

No matter how much the advantages of breastfeeding may be praised, the fact is that there is no definite evidence that the moments of close intimacy and mother-child enchantment cannot be achieved when the mother uses the bottle to feed the baby. We can see how these moments are reflected in Mary O'Donnell's poem "Survival Tactics" (2006) [1993], and in Eavan Boland's three sections of "Domestic Interior", titled "1. Night Feed", "2. Monotony" and "3. Hymn" (1995, 88-91) [1982].

In O'Donnell's "Survival Tactics" (2006, 58) we find the poetic voice of the mother describing the moment of feeding the child. The fact that this time the mother is using a bottle does not alter the feeling of intimate connection between mother and child. And the poetic persona shows the surprise she feels before the wisdom the child has acquired during the short span of her life. Wisdom that goes beyond the instinctual need of nourishment, and includes the skills necessary to attract the mother's attention. The mother feels that, for the baby, sucking is not a trivial task and that she tries to fix her mother's attention by staring at her with the power of her gaze. In this respect, we find a similar feeling of surprise in Anne

Enright's first experience of breastfeeding her daughter: "What I remember is how fully human her gaze was, even though it was so new. She seemed to say that this was a serious business, that we were in it together" (44). The poetic persona in O'Donnell's poem implicitly admits that the instinctual knowledge of the child seems to exceed the experience she has achieved along "half [her] life":

Sucking furiously, her eyes
bore through me, unwavering.
The kid's been here before,
more experience in her eight weeks
than I've managed in half a life,
knows how to look you straight
in the eye without smiling,
hedging her bets
until hunger pains retreat,
the bottle half-empty. (O'Donnell 2006, 58)

The importance of the eyes has been stressed among others by Maxson J. McDowell, who draws on the work of Daniel Stern (1985) to affirm that although infant and mother engage each other through all their senses, the eyes play a crucial role in their mutual recognition: "Stern's model of development suggests why the eyes are important. The mother senses the infant's inner life in part through the infant's eyes. Likewise, the infant senses the mother's inner life in part through the mother's eyes" (McDowell 2004, 498).

Thus, mother and child are not presented as an undifferentiated unity, but as two independent individuals who are learning to know each other. And in this relationship it is not only the mother the one who does the cooing, the baby seems to have an innate knowledge and ability to win the love and attention of adults. Once the feeding has finished, the baby displays "the smile that melts icebergs / raises sea-levels, could / sink the Netherlands /or drown half London / cooing kindness". The mother makes a humorous use of the overspread fashion of self-help books and affirms that the baby has written a treatise about how to win mothers in a previous existence:

she ghost-wrote *How to Win Friends
and Influence People*,

learnt in a previous existence
that bees are caught
with honey, not vinegar.
and so are mothers. (O'Donnell 2006, 58)

Anne Enright notes the fact that Eavan Boland's choice of the bottle instead of the breast in "Night Feed", "places the poem in the bland modernity of the suburbs" (43) in which Enright grew up, and she writes that she knows what middle-class women were running away from. Enright states that "[a]fter the arrival of infant formula⁸ in the fifties, breast-feeding became more of a chosen middle-class activity, but it was still common in the countryside" (43). With bottle-feeding also came the possibility of getting rid of a task that was linked with the animality and sexuality of the mother's body and had to be hidden, despite the fact that Ireland had, in Enright's words, "the closest thing to a cow cult outside India" (43). The bottle was a small symbol of the modernity and cleanliness of the suburban women's lives and with it the disappearance of the disturbing image of the mother's body. It cannot be denied that it was also a tool that allowed women more freedom. But bottle-feeding is only one aspect of the changes that were taking place in Ireland. More relevant for artistic creation was Boland's claim for the right to translate women's experiences—including motherhood—into poetry, as Niamh Nahir, has underlined: "What is significant in this collection is Boland's repeated association between maternity and poetry and her quiet insistence that the home, the nursery, and even the kitchen, are places where poetry can happen" (2011, 64).

Boland's poem "Night Feed" reflects the moments of closest intimacy we have already found in Wyley and O'Donnell's poems. The first and second stanzas set the time of the scene that takes place at dawn, when nature is awakening, flowers and birds are preparing themselves to greet the sun and the mother "tiptoe[s]" into the baby's room to fulfill the daily routine of feeding her. According to Nahir, "[t]his suggests that, for Boland, this is a time of transitions, a place of beginnings, where we are privy to minute transformations, where we savour the interlude before action, the brief reflective meditation before flight"

(Hehir 2011, 64). It is also a time to forget the worries and enjoy the moment that belongs to mother and child. The last verse of the second stanza, the moment when ‘finder is keeper’ (Boland, 88) represents, in Hehir’s words, “a moment when needs are met and desires are satisfied, when something lost is momentarily found” (Hehir 2011, 65).

I tiptoe in.
I lift you up
Wriggling
In your rosy, zipped sleeper.
Yes, this is the hour
For the early bird and me
When finder is keeper. (Boland 1995, 88)

The third and fourth stanzas describe the surprise of the mother at the intensity of the baby’s sucking and expresses the rotundity of her feeling of fulfillment with the statement: “This is the best I can be / Housewife / To this nursery / Where you hold on, / Dear life” (88). These are the moments when there is nothing that can interfere in her relationship with the child and the mother fully accepts her role as a kind of privilege that allows her to share the beating of life.

In the fourth stanza we find again the importance of the child’s eyes in the communication between mother and child, the latter seeming upset once feeding has finished. As the earth is awakening, the moment of enchantment fades away in the same way as the face of the moon fades, stars disappear and mother and child begin their “long fall from grace” (88), when this state of blissful connection will be substituted by a process of separation. The fall from grace suggests the progressive loss of this feeling of communion associated with this paradise-like space of the baby’s bedroom. According to Hehir, “[t]his poem claims a new territory of transcendence with the suggestion that the simple landscape of the nursery, the setting for this night feed, becomes a site of inspiration that nourishes both the needs of the new baby and the poet mother” (Hehir 2011, 65).

A silt of milk.
The last suck.

And now your eyes are open,
Birth-coloured and offended.
Earth wakes.
You go back to sleep.
The feed is ended. (1995, 88)

The atmosphere of intimate closeness between mother and child that pervades “Night Feed” changes in “Monotony” (1995, 89-90). The feeling of intense joy and peacefulness contrasts with the weariness and the doubts about the mother’s role. In “Monotony”, the poetic voice of the mother does not address her daughter but herself in a reflection about the meaning of what being a mother represents for her. The scene takes place again in a time of transition between the busy activities of the day and the restful break the night brings about and it describes a moment when the household chores have almost finished and “[t]he stilled hub / and polar draw / of the suburb / closes in” (89). The mother has not finished her tasks yet and is placed in a transitional space, neither up nor down, but “in the round / of the staircase / [her] arms sheafing nappies”, while in her mind there is a turmoil of doubts and “a well of questions” that perhaps “an oracle” would be able to answer:

[...]
am I
at these altars,
warm shrines,
washing machines, driers

with their incense
of men and infants
priestess
or sacrifice? (1995, 89)

In contrast to the confident statement expressed in “Night Feed”: “I am the best I can be”, the poetic persona in “Monotony” feels the contradiction between the idealised image of the mother constructed by Catholic and Nationalist ideologies, which placed the mother at the heart of home and at the core of the nation, while the reality was marked by the monotony and tiredness of the

household chores and the undervaluation of women's traditional functions. The poetic persona asks herself whether she is "the priestess" in this almost sacred realm of the home, or the victim offered in sacrifice to men and children in the "altars" of an ideology for which mothers' sacrifices, made at "these altars", were taken for granted.

She lets "[her] late tasks / wait like children: / milk bottles, / the milkman's note" (89), while she looks at the stars for an answer to her questions. One can perceive in the poetic persona a shade of despair at the difficulty of liberating herself from the prosaic household chores so as she can look at the skies in search of the immense possibilities that both nature and old myths can provide her with for her poetic creation:

[...]

will I find
my answer where

Virgo reaps?
Her arms sheafing
the hemisphere,
hour after frigid hour,

her virgin stars,
her maidenhead
married to force,
harry us

to wed our gleams
to brute routines:
solstices,
small families. (1995, 89-90)

Being the priestess of the home has nothing to do with the epic grandiosity of the myths. In this sense, the mention of Virgo⁹—the Virgin— not only carries with it the name of the largest constellation in the sky but it also embraces a number of symbolic meanings associated to the ancient Goddess in her twofold aspects of Virgin and mother and their power over nature, as Neumann points out:

The childbearing virgin, the Great Mother as a unity of mother and virgin, appears in a very early period as the virgin with the ear of grain, the heavenly gold of the stars, which corresponds to the earthly gold of the wheat. This golden ear is a symbol of the luminous son who on the lower plane is borne as grain in the earth and in the crib, and on the higher plane appears in the heavens as the immortal luminous son of night. (Neumann 1972, 317)

However, the contrast between Boland's poetic persona, who is "sheafing nappies" (89) and Virgo, who is "sheafing the hemisphere" (90), represents the distance between myth and reality. The last lines of this poem state the difficulty of wedding "gleams" to "brute routines" (90).

In "Hymn" (1995, 90-91), the poetic voice of the mother recovers the feeling of intimacy and peaceful acceptance of the sacrifices motherhood entails. Like in "Night Feed" the first stanza sets the scene after dawn, at "[f]our a.m. / December. / A lamb / would perish out there" (90). The image of the lamb recalls the image of Christ who, according to Christian tradition was born in December and was to be the victim offered in sacrifice to redeem humankind, fulfilling Isaiah's prophecy that said: "he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth" (Isaiah 53, 7). But in the next stanza the mother distances herself from this image of sacrifice because it "has nothing in it / [she] want[s] to follow" (90). She accepts her function of carer and nurturer and admits the importance of the child, as the star around whom her life revolves, but she sets this situation in the everyday life of a suburban landscape:

Here is the star
of my nativity:
a nursery lamp
in a suburb window

behind which
is boiled glass, a bottle
and a baby all
hisses like a kettle. (1995, 90)

In the last stanzas the mother reasserts herself as a priestess of the domestic realm in which she is acquainted with all the elements necessary to perform the rituals of her task. The last lines of the poem contradict the words in Saint John's Gospel: "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us" (John 1, 14). On changing "Word" into "world" the poetic persona erases the religious transcendence of motherhood bringing it to the terrain of flesh and bone reality.

I wake by habit.
I know it all by heart:
these candles
and the altar
and the psaltery of dawn.

And in the dark
as we slept
the world
was made flesh. (1995, 90-91)

2.4. Thinking Mothers

In her critical analysis of object relations theories, Jane Flax acknowledges their contribution to a reconsideration of the mother's influence on the lives of men and women. This is for Flax "an important step in the process of doing justice to the subjectivity of women and undoing the repression of experiences of ourselves as mothers and as persons who have been mothered" (1991, 123). However, she finds that despite the object relations theorists' claims that "the mother-child relation is a mutually constituted, reciprocal one, the mother appears within the theory primarily as the child's object. The mother disappears as a separate person" (1991, 123). Her reality, her wishes, her desires and hopes do not exist in their relationship.

In contrast to this silent image of the mother, we are going to see how the poetic personae, in the poems of Xela Arias, Luz Pozo Garza and Sinéad Morrissey we are going to comment next, are mothers who do not restrict themselves to the position of observers of their children's development but are

thinking human beings who have the capability of reflecting about this process, which is bidirectional and affects both mother and child. Each one of these poetic personae acts as “a mother who does the loving and thinking about love, someone who sees the children who see her” (Ruddick 1994, 33).

Faced with the experience of motherhood, the mothers in these poems want to reject the assumed innate wisdom all mothers are supposed to have and they try to live their relationship with the child as a learning process in which mistakes must be accepted. In the chapter titled “Nine Months” of Anne Enright’s memoir (2004), the author describes in two parallel entries the experience of the first nine months of the mother with her newly born child. One of the headings is entitled “Development (the baby)” and the other “Regression (me)”. This thinking mother, in Ruddick’s words, is able to combine her close connectedness with her child with the capability of analysing their relationship as that of two separate individuals. The fact that she chooses a period of nine months to describe the development of both mother and child is a counterpoint to the nine months of pregnancy and it establishes at the same time a contrast, because the quality of their interaction is different, and a continuum, since this relationship is the continuation of that maintained during pregnancy. Under the heading “Regression (me)” Enright writes in the entry that corresponds to “The Ninth Month”: “I have no notes for this month.[...] On the day she is nine months old, I think that she has been outside of me, now, for just as long as she was inside. She is twice as old” (64). Thus, Enright’s statement is in accordance with Hélène Rouch, who affirms that she disagrees with the psychoanalytic assumption that the fusion between mother and child after birth is an extension of the fusion during pregnancy, and it “has to be broken in order for the child to be constituted as a subject”:

The rupture of this fusion by a third term—whether it’s called the father, law, name of the Father, or something else—should facilitate entry into the symbolic order and access to language. This third term supposedly avoids the fusion that would lead into the chaos of psychosis and is said to guarantee order. But surely all that’s needed is to reiterate and mark, on another level, a differentiation that already exists during pregnancy thanks to the placenta and

at the moment of birth, as a result of the exit from the uterine cavity (Rouch apud Irigaray 1993, 42)

The poetic voice of Xela Arias, addressing her own child in *Darío a diario* (1996) sets the first principles that are going to guide her maternal project and states clearly that both mother and child are starting together a new path, which is not without its difficulties: “Imos, meu ben, camiñar sereno / pola cidade sen ramplas nas aceras” (9). The physical obstacles of going for a peaceful walk with a baby stroller through a city without ramps on the pavements represent the lack of concern of society for the real needs of mothers and children and are symbols of other difficulties, among which she mentions the consequences of sleepless nights present in the bags under her eyes.

The mother is well aware that there will be problems and, although she does not acknowledge any innate wisdom, she reassures the child that she will be able to deal with them. She affirms an identity of her own before the child was born, when she had two arms to hold the world,¹⁰ but now she will need to develop another set of different skills and she compares herself with Kali, the Hindu goddess of multiple arms, who is the goddess of time and change, among whose attributions are destruction and death, but who is considered in many recent religious trends a benevolent mother goddess.

Teremos, terás, ¿acaso non temos, tes?,
problemas: mais non te apures.
Tiña eu antes de ti dúas mans para apaña-lo mundo;
desde ti, ¿sabes? Son a deusa hindú de múltiples brazos. (1996, 17)

Despite her multiple arms she does not use them to hold the world but to attend the needs of the child. She admits the changes: sleepless nights are suggested with the rings under the eyes and she thinks that she has been the object of an invasion that she qualifies as fantastic. “Invadíuseme a vida de cueiros e biberóns / de roupiñas pequenas e xoguetes de cores, / de risas, choros, agarimos, agarimos” (19). She will use her multiple arms to provide the child with nourishment, to help him discover the world and the people and, above all, to develop his identity, a task that has already started: “Son eles para che sacia-la

sede, para amosa-lo mundo, /para che da-la xente e un día, tan axiña, agora mesmo, / empurrarte cara a ti. (17). We cannot find in these lines any traces of the mother's possessiveness, which is the source of the much talked about fear of the *devouring mother* which is at the basis of many psychoanalytic explanations. On the contrary, she states clearly that she does not possess him and the only possessiveness she admits is that of the child possessing himself: "Nada que ver coa posesión. / Non te posúo nin quero. / Córdote, ámote e manteño a esperanza / de aprenderche a te posuíres" (19).

Moreover, the mother in this poem asserts her will of helping the child acquire autonomy and independence. By asking herself what are the things necessary to achieve this goal, she does not accept the received wisdom and the set of rules assigned to the mother's role in patriarchal societies. Besides, she declares that when she was a little girl she did not like playing with dolls, nor does she enjoy cooking now; all of which ascribes her to "[u]n xénero feminino algo a desmán das narracións para o ano en que nacín" (1996, 47). Consequently she declares her intention that both mother and child will explore together the path of their development. Although she acknowledges that she will make mistakes, she is decided to go on searching for the right way to do her task, a skill that she had always put into practice, before becoming a mother, and that now, both she and her child are going to do together.

Dis ma-ma-má
e consegues oito pasos seguidos sen axuda
cara a nós. ¿Vesme?
Son a nai que te pariu e coida
face-lo necesario porque avances.

¿Que é o necesario?
Coma sempre:
asumir que me equivoco e seguir investigando.
Coma sempre en min,
e máis contigo. (1996, 25)

This "thinking mother", in Sara Ruddik's words, who had a personal identity before becoming a mother, is decided to take an active role in her child's

development and contrasts with the passive character of the *preoedipal* or *oedipal* mother, who is the object of the child's love or hate in most trends of psychoanalytic theorising. A mother whose subjectivity is ignored or, still worse, denied and reduced to the pure nurturing maternal body not far from the Aristotelian *res extensa*, as Ruddik has pointed out:

Sometimes, in a rhetorical elision, the mother herself is identified with "the maternal body" or is herself called "the preoedipal mother" as if she, like her child, has yet to become a social, thoughtful being. As he inches toward language, the child also often inches toward "the father" and His Law; too much "mother love," some psychoanalysts suggest, is madness. (Ruddik 1994, 32)

Motherhood as common experience of all mothers as well as the uniqueness of a particular mother-child relationship is stressed in Arias' poem. The poetic persona acknowledges that her son is going to follow the path of life like all human beings, but for her, he is original and unique and, although she feels identified with all women who are mothers, she states her unique personal identity. She accepts the common label of *mother* but claims for the distinctness of each individual mother, in the same way as under the label of *flag* or *river*, lots of different flags and rivers can be included. We find here an echo of Adrienne Rich's claim for a politics of location of the body: "Not to transcend this body, but to reclaim it. To reconnect our thinking and speaking with the body of this particular living human individual, a woman. Begin, we said, with the material, with matter, *mma*, *madre*, *mutter*, *moeder*, *modder*, etc., etc." (Rich 1986, 213).

Tódolos bebés son *tu* e ningún coma ti.
Tódolos nenos son *tu* e ningún coma ti.
Tódolos adolescentes son *tu* e ningún coma ti.
Tódolos mozos son *tu* e ningún coma ti.
Tódolos anciáns son *tu* e ningún coma ti.
Tódalas nais son eu e todas, coma min, saben que es único. (15)
[...]
Tódalas nais serán nais e tódolos fillos fillos
mais,
con perdón tamén
difiren as bandeiras e entre si os ríos. (1996, 39)

When she hears the first faltering words of the child she is ready to listen to him and she seems very enthusiastic about starting her educational task. She observes the difference of size between their hands and fears that too many words are not necessary for them, claiming instead for the kind of relationship which is previous to the logic and rationality of language, the kind of communication that would belong to what Kristeva calls the semiotic:

A túa man ocupa un cuarto da miña xigante,
por iso detesto un pouco tantas palabras.
Todas para ti, ¡son a raíña parlante!,
¡emperatriz de sonidos guturais en diante! (1996, 19)

However, she will move herself further from this state of joyful sharing of guttural sounds to another stage in which she will have to face the moral aspects of education, telling her son what is right or wrong, but the mumblings of the child have the power of awakening in her a feeling of confidence that will give her the strength to fight against panic.

Dis ma-ma-má
e prepárome a escoitarte:
—non me gusta así o que fas,
non quero, erras nisto e nestoutro...
deberas deixar, deberas tomar...

Pero dis ma-ma-má
e échesme de forza contra o pánico. (1996, 27)

She looks at her task as a creative process in which she tries to accompany the child in his development, without being an obstacle in it; being well aware that he will have to create his own identity as well as helping him to shape his world: “Busco o modo de te acompañar sen estorbo, / que sexas ó meu carón feliz e creador / de ti, / de ti e mailo mundo que apañes” (31).

From the short distance of two metres the mother can observe not only the evolutions of the child’s eyes and hands, she can also perceive his thoughts and reassures herself that the child knows how to learn and that he will achieve wisdom through his errors: “A distancia, observo que observas, / que probas,

vacilas e recólle-las certezas” (33). She rejects the idea of an undifferentiated mother-child unity. The image of herself she projects is that of a great mother who provides for nurturance and protection for the child and, at the same time, she will be the guide who will prevent him from taking dangerous ways which she does not know exactly where they lead, but she will try to show him “o mais exacto carreiro das estrelas”. This path to the stars is perhaps a symbol of the way she wants her son to follow, the way to a world where everything —creativity, personal autonomy and even utopia— could be made possible. The mother would like to open the mind of her child to the exploration of the whole universe.

Non sangue do meu sangue.
Non carne da miña carne.
Son a gran teta ofrecida,
a gran boca que te agarima,
a man enorme en recollerte.
Hei ser quen che mostre e reña
por te dirixir quen sabe a onde,
anque coide procurar para ti
o máis exacto carreiro das estrelas. (1996, 35)

The mother has already assumed that the day will come when her son will say her goodbye, and she hopes that all she will have taught him will enable him to share the world with other people since he will be carrying with him all the love and care and even some of the mother’s sins. The emphasis put in the last word of this section, written in capital letters, plays with different meanings of the word *grande* in Galician language and underlines the main hope of the mother that her son will be not only big in size, grown up in age but, above all, great:

E cando te despidas sabe
comparti-lo mundo cos demais.
Contigo vai
un cacho do meu traballo, tal vez algún pecado,
o meu amor todo e por riba
ti, sexas cando sexas, GRANDE. (1996, 35)

In the next lines the mother summarises the received knowledge she already has about what is good for the baby. She expresses her concern for a healthy physical development of her child as well as for setting the best environmental

conditions that will facilitate the infant's acquisition of language but, above all, she asserts her conviction that she will not impose on the child her own vision of the world; her task will be to provide the child with all the stimuli necessary to spur his creativity, so that he will be able to create his own conception of the world:

Se andas a gatiñas fórma-la columna
e a planta dos pés;
Se te alimentas ó meu peito medras san,
rexo e forte.
Se che falamos con tino, a modo
recompós termos e frases.
Se a luz non é moi forte
descansan os teus ímpetos de neno.
Se te-lo ritmo da música has
rima-lo aceno dos días.
Se estimulado, creara-lo mundo sen que cho impoñan...(1996, 45)

The mother makes fun of herself about all the knowledge about education she has shown in the previous lines, but she states that all of that is nothing compared to the new things the baby surprises her with continually: “¡Canto sei! E, sen embargo, / que ananez perante tanta novidade / que ti agasallas a cada instante” (45). And she acknowledges that “hai posible en ser muller un privilexio imposible de transferir” (47).

Once again the mother asserts her main aim in the education of her son, contradicting once more the feeling of strong possessiveness all mothers are supposed to have: she wishes him to be the active agent of his development: “Que con cabeza e corazón limpo dirixas, / meu ben, / a orquestra da túa vida” (49). She is perfectly aware that there will be a lot of people who will try to impose on the child's mind a lot of different sets of “moldes perfectos” (51). Even she, who wants her son to be free, recognises that she will try to model him after or against herself, contradicting her own principles, but she hopes that the son will be able to find his own way, even if it would be difficult for her to accept that the boy did not choose the path she shows him.

Eu mesma que libre te deseño, canto

de min por min, de min contra min non tentarei
introducir.

Que saibas derruí-las marcas e apropiarte,
facer teu o aceno, e só aquel que elixas. (1996, 51)

The mother's love for the child will enable her to accept his freedom of choice because she knows that "así se fan / as persoas humanas" (53) and she will be most happy if her son fully achieves the category of a human being.

In Luz Pozo Garza's poem "A meniña Mónica identifica o Rei" (2004, 508-509) there is a reference in the first line to Alvaro Cunqueiro's novel *Un hombre que se parecía a Orestes* (1969), in which the old myth, rooted in the Trojan wars and developed in Aeschylus's *Orestíada*, is reshaped in a way that allows the atemporality of the plot.¹¹ In Cunqueiro's novel, Egisto and Clitemnestra are waiting for the vengeful Orestes, who wants to take revenge for the murderous death of his father Agamenon. But, despite the deployment of spies, they mistake some foreigners for Orestes while the real one wastes his time delaying his revenge.

In this poem, the poetic persona of Luz Pozo Garza addresses her little daughter Mónica asking her to look through the window and see if the King is coming. When the girl tells her that she does not know the King, the answer of the mother creates an atmosphere that echoes that of legends and fairy tales to tell the little girl the signs that will allow her to recognize the king: "Coñeceralo polo arco da neve / pola rola de lume / por canción manifesta..." (508).

The girl imagines him like a fairy-tale king on horseback and wearing a crown of diamonds, and asks the mother if he is coming through the portico of dreams. With this question, the girl adopts the world of magic and fantasy her mother is creating for her, a world in which dreams can be fulfilled. The mother reinforces this feeling giving the girl more magical elements that will announce the coming of the King. She will recognise him "polas aves secretas / pola liña do vento / polos ollos fluviais" (508). But in the twelfth line a man appears against the

light, who does not fit the image of the wonderful King since he is coming “transido de noite / transido de mágoa / transido de amor...” (508) and he is carrying in his hand a book and a blooming piece of broom. The mother observes that he takes after the girl’s father and claims for him the honours due to his rank because he is their King:

Que lle boten axiña unha alfombra de lilas
unha ponla de pombas
unha palma de luz
¡Ese é o noso Rei! (2004, 509)

The broom and the book the father is carrying have a special significance: the broom plant—also known as Scotch broom and Irish broom—is linked in Celtic tradition with the sacred and magic, despite, or perhaps because of, the fact that it contains a toxic alkaloid called *cytisine*.¹² The brooms made with them were tools commonly used to sweep the house and the ashes of the hearth. But they also had a higher function when used to clean and purify ritual spaces. Besides, brooms have been traditionally associated with witchcraft due to their magical power to fly. Thus, the blooming broom has a powerful evocative sense of connection with old conceptualisations of the sacred and magic which links Galicia with the other Celtic peoples and, at the same time, with the warmth of home. On the other hand, books are tools of culture. They allow us to go beyond the bounds of space and time and nurture our imagination so that we can live in a dimension where everything, magic included, is possible. In this poem it is the mother who nurtures the imagination of the girl and opens her mind so that she will be able to acknowledge the father and the tools of culture he brings with him.

In Sinéad Morrissey’s poem “Augustine Sleeping Before He Can Talk” (2009, 31), there is a significant difference with the poems we have analysed so far: the poetic persona of the mother does not address her child, but adopts the position of a detached observer of the development of her son, trying to guess how he may record and organise his experiences while he is sleeping, and construing her own theory of how the baby is acquiring knowledge through sensory

experiences. In the first line she asserts that “[t]he only places he can dive to are the senses” and, in the next lines, there is not only a description of the images the child has perceived, but she also places herself in a position from which she can experience the world from the child’s perspective and put forward an interpretation of the child’s reactions to these stimuli. Thus, “[t]he Christmas lights his father dangled from the corners / of his ceiling in July are his palimpsest for the world— / a winking on and off of ebullient colour, unnamed and so untamed, / to be committed to memory and then written over” (31).

There is also a reflection about language as the element that will introduce order and meaning into the happy chaos of the child’s life for whom the world is still a place to be enjoyed without fear, before the rules and constraints of society, the Lacanian symbolic order, may fall upon him and determine how he will be modelled and fitted into written theories “with the mean-spirited vanishing act of an ink-black horizon” (31):

For now the world is simply to be crawled into, like the sea,
of which he has no fear, a bubbling, transmogrifying, all-
attracting mechanism that has not yet disappointed
with the mean-spirited vanishing act of an ink-black horizon. (2009, 31)

Meanwhile, the child has already explored the potentiality of his senses. He has already discovered the mystery of the tongue as a site to experience pleasant sensations and as a tool to produce sounds, and “that when he opens / his mouth to admit the spoon, anything can happen, / from passion fruit to parmesan,” the sounds of his name, “and the purring / of cats and cars and the howling of dogs and fireworks. / His fingers adjust the tufts of the sheepswool coat / he lies on in his sleep” (31). And the mother concludes that these are the only things the child can dive into, because it would be thrilling to accept that it could be possible to trace back the child’s memories beyond the mother’s womb to “the undiscovered bourne poor Hamlet dreamed / of entering” (31). The reference to Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* [1605] reinforces the fear of the blurring of boundaries between this world and other unknown worlds that may happen in our dreams: “But that the dread of

we were surely to be held back:
until I could explain, until I could build
you a zoo of improbable candidates
and properly introduce you. (2009, 53)

However, the child does not follow the ordered stages the mother expects to and she has to admit that the baby is “too quick” and the process uncontrollable, “like panic, there was no stopping it” (53). Language seems to be created by the child at random, out of his own inner and outer experiences and, “in whatever ramshackle order / it made its presence felt” it is as if it “rained down and into” the child like “Catherine Linton’s wine-through-water / dream of the heath and expulsion / from heaven” (53). The mention of Catherine Linton introduces the unconscious, the uncontrollable world of dreams and refers to Emily Brönte’s *Wuthering Heights* [1847], in which the character of this name tells Nelly Dean that she had had dreams that changed her ideas: “they’ve gone through and through me, like wine through water, and altered the colour of my mind” (Brönte 1963, 72) [1847]. The mother in “Cathedral” acknowledges that it is impossible for her to control the power of experiences that have the capability of soaking the child like rain:

[...] I cannot hang
a curtain to keep it off. I cannot
section it. It is entering via
the ear’s aqueduct, every
listening second, trickling in
to its base equilibrium
and carrying with it an image in negative
to be absorbed by the brain and stored. (2009, 53)

Knowledge and language prove to be able to burst through the narrow limits of the home and of the family and the child surprises his parents when he is able to repeat what he heard from an unknown man and, more shockingly, when he can construct and give utterance to something that expands the boundaries of his seemingly knowable world, opening it to the uncontrollable power of dreams and

to an imaginative world of his own, as if he had fallen into the rabbit's hole after all. It is the verification of this that leaves his parents "speechless":

Bah! Humbug! You say, aged two,
like the terrible man
in the cape with the walking stick
you glimpsed in the afternoon,
and what we assumed you knew
is jolted on its axis; then this:
*at six o'clock the ghost
of a child might come and eat porridge.*
We are speechless. (2009, 53)

The threatening power of dreams to represent our most intimate and unconscious desires and fears appears again in Sinéad Morrissey's "Through the Square Window" (2009, 32). The poetic persona of the mother describes a nightmare in which the dead are haunting the house and she is terrified of them being after her son. The scene is set in the beautiful landscape of Strangford Lough.¹³ In the sky above the Lough the clouds "are stacked" like those in Johannes Vermeer's *View of Delft*, but the stillness of the landscape in Vermeer's painting does not conceal the threat of rain, which in some of Morrissey's poems is a threatening symbol of unknown danger. Thus, the dead, like rain had arrived "to wash the windows of [her] house" (32). The peacefulness of the landscape of the Lough contrasts with the anguish of the mother who feels defenseless to protect both herself and her son against the uncontrollable fears that haunt her dreams and "[t]here are no blinds" (32) to shut out the windows of her house nor those of her mind, so that she can prevent the huge heads of the dead to peer through them: "The heads of the dead are huge. I wonder / if it's my son they're after, his / effortless breath, his ribbon of years" (32).

However, the daunting appearance of the dead has not affected the child, who "sleeps on unregarded in his cot, / inured, it would seem, quite naturally /to the sluicing and battering and paring back of glass / that delivers this shining exterior..."(32). The sense of mystery is reinforced by another disturbing image: "One blue boy holds a rag in his teeth / between panes like a conjuror" (32). The

image of the blue boy might refer to one of the most popular representations of hand painted traditional pottery of Delft, but it may also refer to Thomas Gainsborough's portrait of Jonathan Buttall *The Blue Boy* (1770), called so because the boy is dressed in blue silk.¹⁴ Whatever possibility we consider, it is undeniable that the poem subverts a representation of beauty and innocence transforming it into a menacing image of a boy with a "rag in his teeth", although he can act as a conjuror and make possible the departure of the dead.

Once the dead are gone, the landscape recovers its familiar appearance, although for the poetic persona, waking up from the nightmare does not mean getting rid of her fears. She feels all the anguish accumulated in her body as if she was suffering from "dropsy",¹⁵ but she feels also like the bottle that contains the "herbalist's cure" for this illness, and her mouth is closed with a cork, in an image that reflects her impotence to cure her anguish and the impossibility of talking about and/or representing these irrational fears.

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

the massed canopies of Hazelbank,
the severed tip of the Strangford Peninsula,
and the density of the room I find it difficult to breathe in

until I wake, flat on my back with a cork
in my mouth, bottle-stoppered, in fact,
like a herbalist's cure for dropsy. (2009, 32)

2.5. Conclusion

Through the poems analysed in this chapter we have seen mothers' voices that break the narrow limits of traditional discourses about the mother-child bond, which have represented silent, passive images of a mother embedded in absorbing love with her child. It is true that the mothers in these poems are engaged in a close relationship with their children and that they enjoy this connectedness. However, it is also evident that they see their child as a subject with an identity of his/her own,

contradicting the widespread theorising of traditional psychoanalysis about the undifferentiated unity of the mother-child dyad that needs to be severed so that the child can achieve his/her own personhood. In this chapter, we have found “thinking mothers” who, not only express love for their children but are also able to reflect about their relationship and want to facilitate their children’s developmental process. In doing so, these poetic personae show an agency that disowns representations of the mother as a passive object of their children’s love and/or hate. Moreover, some of these poems depict maternal functions, like feeding the child, that had been idealised or sublimated, giving representation to ambivalent feelings that reflect the moments of intimacy but also the tiredness of sleepless nights.





CHAPTER 3

REDRESSING THE BALANCE

3.1. Introduction

There is no doubt that the last decades of the twentieth century have seen an increasing incorporation of women to the public sphere. The acquisition of financial independence has favoured the possibility of developing a personal identity different from the traditional roles of wife and mother. However, patriarchal ideology has been so deeply rooted in the social construction of these roles that the change of attitudes has not kept pace with women's achievements in the fields of culture, economy or law. In accordance to the ideologies that aimed at the seclusion of women within the home—which we have already seen in the Introduction—a legal framework was decreed in the 1930s, both in Ireland and Spain, that tried to prevent married women from having a job outside the home. In Ireland, married women were banned from Civil Service¹ and, in Francoist Spain only single women and married women under certain circumstances were allowed to work.² Spanish married women's legal status was equated to that of children since they needed their husbands' authorisation for every legal action they wanted to carry out.³ However, in the 1960s and 1970s the reality of women entering the work force in several fields of economy as well as the fact that a greater number of women had access to university, awoke an increasing awareness of the situation of the married woman and, consequently, in the seventies and eighties, the struggles of the women's movement were focused on the need to change those obsolete and unfair regulations. In Ireland the 1973 Act⁴ removed the ban on married women and in Spain the 1972, 1975 and 1981 amendments of the Civil and Commerce Codes allowed married women to achieve their age of majority.⁵ The last decades

of the twentieth century have witnessed a change of attitude towards women's role in society that, in Spain was favoured by the advent of democracy and, both in Ireland and Spain, by their entry in the European Union.⁶ Little by little, women's issues have come out from the private sphere and started to be considered of public concern. Regarding Ireland, Patricia Kennedy observes that:

In recent years there has emerged in Ireland the beginning of a rich body of literature on women's experiences within society. This has come from a variety of sources, influenced undoubtedly by the women's movement and the development of women's studies within the major universities, the increased involvement of women in employment and in community-based initiatives and the increasingly visible linkages between women's organizations across Europe, as Ireland has become part of a greater European Union. (2002, 5-6)

However, the split between domestic and public domains has not disappeared as Anne Enright observes in her memoir (2004). Enright uses the image of a glass wall which separated mothers from women who just *were*. She sees herself —a woman with a professional career as a writer— completely disconnected from those women who fulfil the traditional role assigned to them. But the perception she has of her identity as a woman writer is somewhat fragmented and not complete, while those women who are mothers seem to embody the image of the *real woman*:

I spent most of my thirties facing a glass wall. On the other side of this wall were women with babies — 'mothers', you might call them. On my side were women who simply *were*. It didn't seem possible that I could ever move through the glass — I couldn't even imagine what it was like in there. All I could see were scattered reflections of myself; while on the other side real women moved with great slowness, like distantly sighted whales. (Enright 2004, 13)

The difficulty of reconciling a job outside the home with the persistence of female roles, as wife, mother and housewife, meant for women a double burden since they had to demonstrate their capability to do the work men did, while, at the same time, they had to prove that they could carry on with their tasks at home

because, despite the feminists' claim for a shared parenthood, reality stubbornly showed that men's acceptance of responsibilities at home has happened at a much slower pace than the incorporation of women to the public sphere.⁷ Irish women poets had to face the supplementary difficulty of inserting their voices into the male dominated Irish poetic tradition. In this context, Mary O'Donnell (1984, 2009) observed that, in the eighties, the Irish poetic world was still male dominated and supported by "prevailing social structures and attitudes" (1984, 16).⁸ She also underlines the difficulty for women to find time and space to write without previously dismantling "the politics of marital/familial possession" (1984, 16-17).

The aim of this chapter is to see how mothers grapple with the doubling of responsibilities that is the consequence of the gendered assignation of roles. In the texts analysed, we will find the diversity of feelings and situations originated as a result of the conflict between the traditional mother's role and the incorporation of women to the public domain. We will look for women's voices who speak about their experience as thinking people whose personhood cannot be defined exclusively by motherhood and we will also reflect on the sense of frustration and anger that comes from the awareness of having been oppressed by an ideology that has tried to impose motherhood as the only possible true identity for women. I will analyse a number of poems by Eavan Boland (*Collected Poems* 1995 and *Code* 2001a) and Eithne Strong (*Spatial Nosing: New and Selected Poems* 1993b) [1974] that elaborate on the inner conflicts of women who try to develop a career as writers without renouncing motherhood and claim for an individual identity that cannot be limited by the fact that they are mothers. These mothers state their right to a personal development which will not diminish their love and dedication to their offspring. We will also find, in some of Sinéad Morrissey's poems (*There Was Fire in Vancouver* 1996), how mothers suffered the consequences of political violence during the *Troubles*⁹ in Northern Ireland and how the socio-political oppression exerted on mothers can trigger maternal anger, as is reflected in some poems by Eavan Boland (1995) [1980], Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill (*The Astrakhan*

Cloak 1993) and Luz Pozo Garza's dramatic poem *Medea en Corinto* (2004), as well as in Mary O'Donnell's novel *The Elysium Testament* (1999). We will also find how some mothers express different ways of facing their own and their children's independence in Eithne Strong (1993), Anne Hartigan (*Unsweet Dreams* 2011), Mary O'Malley (*Three Irish Poets: An Anthology* 2003) and in Mary Beckett's short story "Heaven" (1989). Finally, in Kerry Hardie's novel *A Winter Marriage* (2003) we will see the coexistence of different models of motherhood.

3.2. Looking for Balance

Donna Bassin, Margaret Honey, and Meryle Mahrer Kaplan (1994) have remarked that, in the 1970s, one of the aims of feminist theory was "to dismantl[e] the ideology of motherhood by understanding its patriarchal roots and by underscoring that it did not represent the experiences of mothers themselves" (3). While patriarchal ideology tried to establish the role of the mother based on the ideal nuclear, heterosexual, white, middle-class family, mothers who did not fit into this category were left outside. This included mothers who had entered the work force since the industrial revolution and those who worked in rural areas all over the world. Moreover, it did not take into account the increasing number of middle-class mothers who had gained access to education in the 1960s and 1970s and were trying to fight their way into the work market

Although there is no general agreement about the use of the word *generation* to define a social group or movement in a given period of time, in "Women's Time" (1986), Julia Kristeva uses this word to characterise the different stages of feminist movements and observes that, in relation to motherhood there has been an important change of attitude in what has been called the third wave of feminism:

The desire to be a mother, considered alienating and even reactionary by the preceding generation of feminists, has obviously not become a standard for the present generation. But we have seen in the past few years an increasing number of women who not only consider their maternity compatible with their professional life or their feminist involvement [...] but also find it

indispensable to their discovery, not of the plenitude, but of the complexity of the female experience, with all that this complexity comprises in joy and pain. (1986, 205)

Drawing on Kristeva, Toril Moi points out that the need to “reconcil[e] maternal time (motherhood) with linear (political and historical) time” (Moi 1986, 187) could be equated with the need to find a balance between woman’s domestic and public sphere, without renouncing any of them. This has been, perhaps, the most difficult task most women, in developed Western societies, have had to struggle with for the last decades of the twentieth century. And this struggle partakes of both cyclical and linear time. It is historical and political time, since the acknowledgement of women’s rights to enter the public domain has been gradually conquered, but is also cyclical. Women fight the traditional roles embodied by their mothers but, when some of them become mothers themselves, they are immersed into “cycles, gestation, the eternal recurrence of a biological rhythm which conforms to that of nature and imposes a unison with what is experienced as extra-subjective time” (Kristeva 1986, 191).

It has not been an easy task to integrate the biological rhythms of motherhood into a personal project with a public dimension and it has often meant a division of experience that affected all women. In this section, we will focus on some poems by Eavan Boland that reflect the difficulties for women writers to find their time and their own space to write, as well as the writer’s claim to represent this struggle and to put it into her art.

Although there are several Irish women writers —such as Eithne Strong, Paula Meehan, Mary O’Donnell and Mary Dorcey— who have claimed their right to integrate personal experiences into their creative work, one of the most outstanding is Eavan Boland. She has written extensively on the process of freeing herself from male-dominated Irish poetry and on her evolution towards a tough stance from which she claims her right to put her life, and other women’s lives, into her poetry. In “The Irish Women Poet: Her Place in Irish Literature” (2001b), she says that the traditional Irish poem she inherited “contained passive, ornamental images of women” and, when she finished her university degree, she

took away with her the clearly established assumptions about the kind of issues that could be suitable or acceptable to inscribe into the Irish poem:

The national ethos, as it had been allowed into Irish writing, continued to issue certain permissions as to what the poem could be about. You could have a political murder in it, but not a baby. You could have the Dublin hills, but not the suburbs under them. This is a vital point in considering the poem written by the Irish woman poet. The life of the Irish woman—the ordinary, lived life—was invisible and, when it became visible, was considered inappropriate as a theme for Irish poetry. (Boland 2001b, 104)

In an interview with Jody Allen Randolph (2007) [1993] Boland observes that “[t]he ordinary lived life of the woman was something which might come into the object-matter of the poem, but couldn’t be imagined as the subjective stance of it” (103). The poem a woman writer was offered had to be “genderless” (103) and the best thing that could be said of a poet’s work was that “you never know it was by a woman” (103). Against this, Eavan Boland reacted claiming her right to put in her poetry her life as a writer, wife and mother of young children living in the suburbia of Dublin.

In the poem “It’s a Woman’s World” (1995, 79-80) the female poetic persona explains how women’s lives have hardly changed since prehistoric times; “since a wheel first / whetted a knife” (79), and how women have been relegated to the enclosed domestic space and excluded from history. The speaking voice admits that there have been changes that may have improved people’s lives, but which have not greatly affected those of women:

Maybe flame
burns more greedily,
and wheels are steadier
but we’re the same. (1995, 79)

With a slight touch of irony, the poetic persona emphasises the fact that the only “milestones” that might have highlighted the lives of women are their “oversights”. Women’s history has been defined by everyday tasks that have maintained them outside historical and cultural development: “living by the lights /

of the loaf left / by the cash register, / the washing powder / paid for and wrapped” (79). Women’s lives are defined “like most historic peoples” by what-they-are-not, by their absence from the domain of history and culture, by the lack of possibilities of flying high, “by what we never will be” (79):

star-gazers,
fire eaters.
It’s our alibi

for all time:
as far as history goes
we were never
on the scene of the crime. (1995, 79)

The poetic persona puts at least part of the blame on women themselves who, in the face of some dramatic historical events, “when the king’s head / gored its basket”, they carried on with her domestic tasks and adopted a passive position of spectators: “We were gristing bread / or getting the recipe / for a good soup / to appetite / our gossip” (80). In the next stanzas she laments that the situation has not changed yet. Mothers’ role continues to be a decisive factor in the socialisation of children into traditional values, attracting them like moths to the flame of home, instead of pushing them into the stream of historical changes. Although the poem refers to children, without distinction of gender, it is undeniable that this socialisation has been more decisive for daughters than for sons in the perpetuation of the roles that tied women to the home. The poetic persona laments the absence of written records that can unearth the unwritten women’s lives —something that Virginia Woolf had already underlined in *A Room of One’s Own*— and laments the lack of reactions to this injustice:

It’s still the same.
By night our windows
Moth our children
To the flame

Of hearth not history.
And still no page

Scores the low music
Of our outrage. (1995, 80)

And using again irony, which is the pervading tone of the poem, she compares herself —“her mouth / a burning plume”— with another woman she is watching who, although she seems to be absorbed in the contemplation of “the starry mystery”, is “no fire-eater”, but only a neighbour who “is merely getting a breath / of evening air” (80).

Eavan Boland has declared that among the many challenges women poets had, and still have, to face, one of the most important is to “disrupt the permissions issued by the tradition of Irish poetry and put their lives—their gardens, their friendships, their washing machines, their vision of the connection between their life and its expression into the Irish poem” (2001, 105). She has done it and there are other women poets who have done it and who are still doing this. She cites Paula Meehan, Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin, Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill, and Medbh McGuckian among the poets whose work she admires. Boland claims that their poems cannot be considered poems written by women about women’s issues and aimed at women readers. On the contrary, she affirms that these poems are primarily “good poems” which “will be read and valued in places where there is no knowledge of the disruption they caused, the balances they upset, the traditional silences they broke” (2001, 105). And she dares to assure that all this will bring a “generous restructuring of context” in Irish Poetry (2001, 105).

Eavan Boland has also written extensively on the difficulty of integrating her private self with a personal poetic voice, but she decided to do it and she explained the reason why she did it: “I wanted to prove my life in poetry. And that in turn had to do with the fact that, until then, I couldn’t find my life in poetry. The tradition I knew and the poem I had learned to write didn’t name it” (2007, 107). In “The Women” (1995, 114), the poetic voice describes the happiness of the moment when she can concentrate on her creative powers. The speaking voice of the woman places herself in a kind of liminal time and space which can be seen as a transition between her two identities: The housewife and the woman writer:

This is the hour I love: the in-between,
neither here-nor there hour of evening.
The air is tea-coloured in the garden.
The briar rose is spilled crepe-the-Chine. (1995, 114)

The image of the woman “going up the stairs in two minds” suggests a shifting from the role of a housewife, worried by household duties, to that of the writer who is seeking for time to develop her creativity. As she goes up she is “leaving something behind”. The space downstairs is the place where most of her duties as mother and wife are performed. It could also represent a lower space where undervalued tasks take place, in contrast to the space upstairs, where highly valued creative tasks are developed. But, significantly, while going upstairs the poetic persona is still carrying things, “cloth or glass”, which belong to her identity as housewife and she has doubts about bringing with her something she “should have left behind”. This line could be understood as the need for the woman poet to leave behind the patterns and issues dictated by male poets and to find her own voice. However, she takes these objects upstairs with her. The poetic voice expresses the instability of identities and the difficulty of separating the two worlds. Moreover, in bringing with her “cloth or glass”, her aim is to integrate her two selves translating into her writing her life as a suburban woman.

The poetic persona enjoys the transformation she experiments when she can test her creative powers and a world of infinite possibilities of representation opens up. Therefore, “in the words [she] choose[s]” and “the lines [she] write[s]”, she can weave a tapestry full of images of women that “rise like visions” before her:

The hour of change, of metamorphosis,
of shape-shifting instabilities.
My time of sixth sense and second sight
when in the words I choose, the lines I write,
they rise like visions and appear to me. (1995, 114)

In the following stanzas, the poetic persona describes herself at her desk engaged in an exciting creative task, “testing the water with a sweet quartet, / the

physical force of a dissonance— / the fission of music into syllabic heat”, through which she can render the wide range of women’s images that can be the subject matter of her creation, from ordinary to mythical women:

women of work, of leisure, of the night,
in stove-coloured silks, in lace, in nothing
with crewel needles, with books, with wide-open legs

who fled the hot legs of the god pursuing,
who ran from the split hoof and the thick lips
and fell and grieved and healed into myth. (1995, 114)

But creative work is not an easy task and, in the last stanzas, the poetic persona gets “sick” of her struggles with verses and goes downstairs “into a landscape without emphasis, / light, linear, precisely planned, / a hemisphere of tiered, aired cotton,” (114). This going downstairs can be read from two levels of representation: the first one could be the danger for women of a retreat from the strain that creative work demands by seeking refuge in the established domestic roles; the second one would be the difficulty for a woman writer to create new literary imagery and the temptation to go downstairs to the male writers’ traditional female images, where everything “is precisely planned” (114).

In “Limits 2” (2001a, 43), Boland represents her own experience as a suburban woman engaged in a routine that, in accordance to the title, sets the limits that engage her in the role of housewife and mother of little children, whose life seems to be determined by the cycles of nature and the domestic tasks associated to them:

If there was
a narrative to my life
in those years, then
let this
be the sound of it —
the season, in, season out
sound of
the grind of
my neighbour’s shears. (2001a, 43)

Describing her life in the suburbs Boland explains that, in her lexicon, there were “the kettle and the steam, and the machine in the corner and the kitchen, and the baby’s bottle” and that “not to write about them would have been artificial” (2007, 108) since they were inserted in her life. However, in the last lines of “Limits 2”, the beauty of August has for her the “music of limitation” (43) while her landscape seems also reduced to the Dublin hills that delimit the horizon which encases her in a narrative determined by traditional images of homeliness:

Of my children sleeping in
A simpler world:
An iron edge
The origin of order. (2001a, 43)

The poetic persona in Boland’s poem “Is It Still the Same” (2001a, 47), adopts a detached perspective of an observer of another “young woman who climbs the stairs, / who closes a child’s door, / who goes to her table / in a room at the back of the house?” (47). This scene may refer to any woman’s life but the next lines show the young woman “her head / bent over the page, her hand moving, / moving again, and the hair” (47). The last lines of the poem reveal that the poetic persona is seeing a reflection of herself when she was younger and was trying to find a voice in Irish poetry:

I wrote like that once.
But this is different:
This time, when she looks up, I will be there. (2001a, 47)

These last lines condensate Eavan Boland’s evolution as a woman writer. They can summarise her personal development from a position of the young writer who tried to make her way into Irish verse, to the perspective of a mature writer that knows that she has helped to place the Irish woman’s life into the Irish poem.

Boland’s poem “Suburban Woman: Another Detail” (2001a, 48) can be read as the feeling of nostalgia tinged with guilt that a woman writer expresses because, while she is writing at her desk, another woman is caring for her little daughter. This is a situation that working mothers can easily understand, as well as the

sensation that your work is depriving you of living in depth some special moments of connection with your child:

Here at my desk I imagine
wintry air and the smart of peat.

And an uncurtained
front room where

another woman is living my life.
Another woman is lifting my child.

Is setting her down.
Is cutting oily rind from a lemon.
Is crushing that smell against the skin of her fingers. (2001a, 48)

However, the poem can also be understood as the metaphor of the difficulty of melting the identities of mother and woman writer, as if these identities belonged to different people who are living different lives. The poetic persona emphasises the ownership of the spaces and the child, as if she were trying to reassure and hold tight her identity: “The kitchen, / the child she lifts again and holds / are all mine: / and all the time / the bitter, citric fragrance stays against her skin” (48). The poem is open-ended because the woman-mother puts herself and the child out of reach of the woman-writer: “She stares at the road / in the featureless November twilight. / Stares for a moment at / the moon which has drained it. / Then pulls the curtains tightly shut. / And puts herself and my child beyond it” (48).

3.3. “Let me be. / There is much / I am starving for” (Eithne Strong 1993, 22)

In the front cover illustration of *Representations of Motherhood* (Bassin et al. 1994), taken from an advertising campaign in the 1940s, it can be seen how the characters of mother and child are reversed. A huge toddler looks at his tiny infantilised mother sitting in a swing with an attitude that looks more like that of

an authoritative father controlling his daughter. Commenting this picture in their “Introduction” to the book, Bassin, Honey and Kaplan observe how this image can be representative of the feelings “that mothers, especially mothers in isolated nuclear families, often have: the baby is in charge, controlling time and space”. “It is as if he belonged there, as if making demands, dominating, keeping her in her place, doing what pleases him were his right” (1994, 1).

Bassin Honey and Kaplan affirm that this image subverts the idealised vision of the all-powerful, all-giving mother who provides all the care her defenceless child needs. Instead of this, the picture shows the reaction of the mother as “a mixture of apprehension, intimidation, curiosity and helplessness”, which “suggests the horror of the mother dominated by her child” (1994, 1).

Drawing on the sociological analysis of Jessie Bernard (1974), Bassin, Honey and Kaplan underline the fact that Bernard was one of the first feminist critics that explored “the tension between the image of the all-giving mother and the actual lives of women” (1994, 3). Bernard denounced that the Victorian invention of the nurturing, self-sacrificing, ever-patient mother is an image that has not been suitable for women for decades:

Bernard, pointing to women’s entry into the workplace, called for a balance between work and family within women’s lives and for shared parenting as ways of moving beyond stereotypical views of motherhood. She celebrated rebellion against maternal myths and found that women of all classes had dared to say that “although they love their children, they hate motherhood”. (Bassin et al.1994, 3)

The division of experience between women’s professional career and her motherhood had already been expressed by Adrienne Rich in *Of Woman Born*. When asked why she did not write poems about her children as many male poets did, she answered that for her, “poetry was where [she] lived as no-one’s mother, where [she] existed as [herself]” (1986, 31).

Eithne Strong is an Irish woman poet who has integrated her life and her art into most of her poems. In “O Magnificent Why”, her introduction to Eithne Strong’s *Spatial Nosing. New and Selected Poems* (1993b), Mary O’Donnell

writes: “A poet’s relationship with words and her relationship with life are inseparable. The technique reflects the vision, the vision reflects the technique, and as we live, we write” (O’Donnell 1993b, unpaginated). Strong, who bred nine children and developed a career as a writer, has reflected on the difficulty of trying to find time to write while attending the unending tasks of mothering.¹⁰ In her autobiographical account, “Married to the Enemy” (*My Self, My Muse*, 2001), she narrates the family break she had to endure because of her marriage to the non-Catholic Englishman Rupert Strong and the subsequent decision of not having their children baptised in the Catholic faith. With her behaviour she rebelled against the imposed image of the faithful Catholic mother who humbly accepts to breed children to achieve eternal glory. On the contrary, she challenges the traditional Irish morality, which ignores or denies women’s sexual needs, and asserts openly her sexual desire, admitting that both she and her husband were neither good “in restraining delights of fleshly rioting” (2001, 88) nor were they very enthusiastic about artificial birth control. Consequently, she recognises that their children are the result of what she calls the “tyranny of the orgasm” (88). She accepts with responsibility the consequences of both her husband and her bodily pleasures. “Everything carries its price. The little babies, poor little scraps, did not ask to be born—one with brain damage. Clearly my first responsibility was to them” (88).

However, she was deeply convinced that she had been born to write and she affirms that she never renounced her project of becoming a poet. Strong describes her difficulties and the lack of continuity in her writing. In “Married to the Enemy” (2001, 88), she admits that she knew “times of discouragement at the paucity of opportunity” as well as “frustration in this regard, impotence, fierce resentment” (88).

On little slips of paper were often jotted ideas as they sprang in the midst of imperative tasks. The slips got thrust into a drawer, to be worked on, I hoped, at a future point. That point frequently had to wait a long period, years sometimes. I was quite certain the children—in all there would be nine—were my priority. (88)

In a time and a society in which the ideological constructed image of the perfect, nurturing and self-sacrificing mother was still deeply rooted, it must have been shocking that a nine children's mother tried to fight her corner in the male dominated Irish literary tradition. It is easy to imagine the difficulties she had to face. Moreover, she translated some of her experiences into her poems, and this was something rather unusual, since real women's experiences with their children were considered matters which belonged to the private sphere of the home and not suitable issues that could be inserted into Irish verse. However, Strong's poems delve deep into a wide range of women's experiences, highlighting the injustices of a man-made culture, as Mary O'Donnell has noticed:

Diversity of thought and impulse makes these poems radiate humanity, belief and a revelatory sense of justice. The inequities of human relationships is something this poet is particularly adept at exploring, and none too gently either, with flesh locked between the teeth as she tears back to the bone. (O'Donnell 1993b, unpaginated)

The struggle between Strong's role as a mother of nine children and her need of fulfillment as an individual is reflected in "Statement to Offspring" (1993b, 22) [1974]. The poetic voice of the mother reassures the children that they are her priority and she could never leave them because they are part of her flesh. The first line tries to state this clearly and she leaves no space for doubt:

Look, I'll never leave you, issue
of my bone: inside
the marrow's marrow tissue
I am true no matter what. (1993b, 22)

But she needs room to breathe and to build her own identity as a separate individual. She assumes the implications of being her children's birthgiver and remembers that she has given them "sweat and pain" and "breaking labour". But, at the same time, she claims her right to seek her own personal fulfillment and she firmly asserts that she is not going to be their slave and allow them to suck her later life. As Haberstroh points out: "Motherhood can sometimes seem like slavery [...] and mothers are entitled to the same space and nourishment they give to their

children” (1996, 42). In affirming that a woman’s life goes beyond her being a mother, the poetic persona rebels against the widely established models of perfect wife and mother that the alliance of the patriarchal ideologies of Nationalism and the Catholic Church had defined as Irish Women’s function.

As if answering to an accusation of rebellion against her sacred duties, she admits the charge and affirms that her personal development goes beyond her gendered maternal self and, with the use of the pronoun “we” she includes herself into the ungendered category of every human being for whom growing is a long-living process. In doing this, she deconstructs the image of a mother as a fixed, stable identity, stressing not only the multifaceted aspects of maternal subjectivity but also, the need to assert her right to have dreams as in her “callow years” and so, she claims for a space of her own:

Rebellion? Yes. I am but part
grown. We grow till death.
Let me space. I cry for stars
as in my callow years. (1993b, 22)

In “Married to the Enemy”, Strong acknowledges that the children were her responsibility because the little babies “did not ask to be born” (2001, 88) but, in “Statement to Offspring”, the poetic voice of the mother reverses the statement and, although she is very conscious of the subversive power of her words, she addresses her children and says that she never planned to have them. As Haberstroh underlines: “The heretical admission ‘I never asked to have you’ is one that many mothers might understand but few could never express” (1996, 42). However, she states once more her total availability to their children:

Let my statement grate whom will.
I am no easy choice.
I never asked to have you
but having, I’m entirely true. (1993b, 22)

The poetic persona of the hungry mother, who is “starving” and begs her children to let her be, reverses the traditional image of the mother who provides all the nourishment her children need. At the same time, this statement subverts

Donald Winnicott's theories of the "good-enough mothering" and "the ordinary devoted mother", who would provide for the love and care her child needs while allowing room enough for the emergence of the child's selfhood. In this view, a "good enough" mother would let her child be. In "The Capacity to Be Alone" (1958), Winnicott applies his clinical experience with patients to elaborate a theory about the mother-child bond and stresses the importance for the child to develop the capacity to be alone in the presence of the mother. Only when he is let alone the infant would be able "to exist for a time without either being a reactor to an external impingement or an active person with a direction of interest or movement" (Winnicott 1958, 34). But the reliability of the ever-present mother or mother-substitute is taken for granted. Drawing on Winnicott's work, Elsa First agrees with him in that "[T]he capacity to be alone, is a capacity to be apart from others—not actively relating, though neither withdrawn nor craving, simply relaxed, as-if-held" (First 1994, 151). But she observes that all this theorising is focused on the child and Winnicott "does not inquire into the mother's subjective experience" (First, 152). In Eithne Strong's poem, it is the poetic persona of the mother who asks her children to "let [her] be":

Let me be. There is much
I am starving for. (1993b, 22)

She does not accept, as her only role in life, the task of being the protecting shield of her children. With an image that visualises the everyday task of dressing the children with their scarves to protect them from the cold, she warns them that she is "No muffler I to scarf your / years. I cannot aye be shield" (22). She reminds them that she has generously breastfed them and that she is always there, but now she asks them to let her explore and enjoy other possibilities that life may offer her.

But test me and I'm there.
In the meantime, let me burgeon
whatever else may fruit.
I have suckled without stint.

Just allow me room. (1993b, 22)

In “Measuring” (1993b, 23) [1974], the poetic voice compares herself with a sow looking for her “wallow” and her “snore in the sun”. The visual image of the sow wallowing in the mud asserts the right to female’s bodily pleasures and is blatantly opposed to the disembodied model of a motherhood personified by the Virgin Mary. Moreover, she contradicts the vision of the woman engaged in unending household tasks and weighs the possibility of “bar[ring] the house and read[ing] all day” (23). This longing for a time of her own is in direct opposition to the demands of her children, whom she sees as the foes who maintain her entrapped into their needs. This intention of barring the house to others and taking possession of it for her own leisure has a potentially subversive power, and contains more than one level of signification. On the one hand, the domestic space of the house has been traditionally considered a woman’s realm, although the fact is that the home has been a working place where women fulfilled the needs of others and where they hardly ever had a space of their own, as Virginia Woolf expressed in *A Room of One’s Own* (2000) [1928].¹¹ On the other hand, images of the house as symbols of the female body have been largely used by writers and critics. In this sense, the intention of the poetic voice of barring the house to others could be seen as the need to repossess her own body, rescuing it from her maternal duties to give it the intellectual nourishment she is longing for.

Gilbert and Gubar explain how images of the house have been used as “primary symbols of female imprisonment” by nineteenth-century women writers (1979, 85). Moreover, drawing on the theories of Gaston Bachelard (1970) and Erik Erikson (1968), they point out that “[W]omen themselves have often, of course, been described or imagined as houses” (1979, 88). However, they remark the significant differences this symbol has for male critics and for female authors. For Bachelard, the image of the house is linked to maternal features of protection and Erikson uses “his controversial theory of female ‘inner spaces’ to account for little girls’ interest in domestic enclosures” (Gilbert and Gubar, 1979, 88). In

relation to this, Gilbert and Gubar remember the existence in medieval times of images of the Madonna which could be opened up to show inside the holy family. But for female authors, these images of the house as a womb, a space to be possessed by a man and to be occupied by a child, are representative of the role women have been assigned by patriarchal ideology, which is based on their “purely biological usefulness to the species” (Gilbert and Gubar 1979, 88). “To become literally a house, after all, is to be denied the hope of that spiritual transcendence of the body which, as Simone de Beauvoir has argued, is what makes humanity distinctively human” (Gilbert and Gubar 1979, 88).

There is no idealised vision of motherhood in either “Statement to Offspring” or “Measuring”, since these poems portrays the tension between the absorbing demands of the children and the yearning of the mother for burgeoning “whatever else may fruit” (22). It is clear that the poetic voice rejects what Chodorow and Contratto have defined as “the fantasy of the perfect mother” (1989). They point out that this fantasy is rooted in a cultural ideology in which “idealization and blaming the mother are two sides of the same belief in the all-powerful mother” (1989, 90), a maternal image that belongs to the realm of infantile wishes and fantasies but not to reality. On the other hand, in “The Omnipotent Mother. A Psychoanalytic Study of Fantasy and Reality” (1994), Jessica Benjamin describes this fantasy of omnipotence as “the tension between asserting self and recognizing the other” (134) and warns the mother against the dangers of the fantasy of the perfect child:

This conflict also confronts the mother with the problem of her own separate existence and so with conflict; she may experience the child’s demands now as threatening, as tyrannical, irrational, wilful. The child is different from her fantasy of the perfect child, who would want what she wants. (1994, 135)

Thus, in Strong’s poem, the poetic persona assumes the confrontation between her ambition and her children’s demands, that negate the capacity to recognise the mother as another subject, but she also has to get rid of the fantasy of

the perfect child and accept that she will have to fight her right to her own independent subjectivity.

Sometimes I am very strange to all
my young; they, the foe
inimical to my private schemes, negate ambition. (1993b, 23)

The ambivalent feelings at play in her relationship with her offspring are acknowledged in that the poetic voice admits that there is no symmetry because she has to show “[...] endless resource / to their fulfilling, who am the centre / to which cling / their fluctuant hate, initial focus of their weight” (23). But there will be a time when their focus will be outside home.

The acknowledgement of contradictory feelings present in the mother-child/children relationship was described by Rich in *Of Woman Born* (1986). In the chapter titled “Anger and Tenderness”, Rich deconstructs what she calls “unexamined assumptions” about motherhood. First of all, that a mother “is a person without further identity” (22) whose only gratification is based on her spending the whole day with her small children, devoted to attend their needs. This implies that a mother does not have needs of her own. She also denies the widespread idea of a maternal love which is and should always be “unconditional” and that “children and mothers are ‘the causes’ of each other’s suffering” (1986, 23).

Drawing on her own experience, Rich describes a situation that would be easily recognisable for the vast majority of mothers of small children. As soon as she was engaged in an activity which was not directly connected with their children’s needs, like reading a book, typewriting or talking on the phone with someone “toward whom my voice betrayed eagerness”, no matter how busy or absorbed in his own world the child might be, “as soon as he felt me gliding into a world which did not include him, he would come to pull at my hand, ask for help, punch at the typewriter keys” (1986, 23). Rich admits that at those moments she could experience bursts of anger because she felt her child’s wants as “fraudulent,

as an attempt moreover to defraud [her] of living even for fifteen minutes as [herself]" (23).

In an interview with Helen Thompson, Mary O'Donnell states the difficulty of finding a balance between the need for the silence and time required to do creative work and her little daughter's attempts to get her attention. She declares:

The greatest gift/privilege a writer can achieve for herself is silence and time. On the other hand, I don't want my daughter growing up slipping little notes under the door of my study because "Mum can't be disturbed while Great Art is being made"! So the battle for balance goes on. Or imbalance, now that I think of it. (O'Donnell 2003, 117-118)

In Eithne Strong's "Measuring" the poetic persona knows that, although their children seem to depend exclusively on her, this is a temporary situation "before they swing / ambivalent load / outside to friendships, teachers, lovers" (1993b, 23).

The poetic persona uses again the image of the sow, grunting and snorting to keep her breed still while admitting that her love is not as pure and flawless as it might be supposed, but a mixture of selfless and selfish feelings towards her children. She acknowledges that she has tried to "[s]till them with grunts / and snorts and wallows" (23) and has loved them "mixed / muddily" (23). The poem finishes admitting that, for this complex task of attending her children's needs and her own needs, "[t]here was never made /the measuring tape" (23). This explains the title of the poem, which summarises the difficulty of finding balance between her children's demands and hers.

As Rich points out in *Of Woman Born*, no matter how intensely reciprocal and fulfilling the relationship between a mother and her children may have been, this is only "*one part of female process; it is not an identity for all the time*" (1986, 37). There has to be a time to let your children go and if you do not do it, this would be seen as "an act of revolt against the grain of patriarchal culture" (37) and you would be blamed for preventing your children's development as independent individuals. Rich asks herself what happens with the mother if, in the eyes of

society, her only identity is that of mother, and she states that “we need selves of our own to return to” (37).

The complexity of feelings involved in real motherhood, in contrast with the simplified elaboration of the idealised institution promoted by patriarchy, is present in Eithne Strong’s “Retarded Child” (1993b, 24-25) [1974]. Once again, this poem reflects what Bassin, Honey and Kaplan call the “tension between the image of the all-giving mother and the actual lives of women” (Bassin et al 1994, 3).

Drawing on Strong’s own experience with her youngest handicapped child, who she had to take care of all her life, the poetic persona expresses a mixture of feelings for her retarded child which are in direct opposition to the monolithic image of the mother who is all the time, during all her life, the loving self-sacrificing mother without a flaw in her love. The variety of feelings expressed in this poem include anger at what she considers the “[Fool] doctor’s fault”, hurt pride, at the suspicion of genetic inheritance and relief and healed pride when this possibility was rejected:

A lack of air.
Nothing genetic.
The doctor since dead.

No fault in genes:
O comfort to pride
I hope myself right. (1993b, 24)

Perhaps the most painful feeling she has to admit is guilt and sorrow for both her and her child, whose birth has put an end to her plans of personal development. She has to face the unspeakable, the fact that her child’s birth has tested “her miser heart”, and admit that in her “coward part” she wished her son dead.

I wished him dead
He came between
He stopped my moves. (1993b, 24)

As Pope, Quinn, and Wyer (1990) have stressed, the “ideology of mothering can be so powerful that the failure of lived experience to validate it often produces either intensified efforts to achieve it or a destructive cycle of self-and/or mother-blame” (442). Haberstroh points out that Strong “creates a speaker whose love is never questioned but whose feelings we understand” (1996, 46).

He has cut athwart.
My blazing drive
He braked dead stop. (1993b, 25)

The retarded child not only stops her moves and her “blazing drive” but also obliges her to examine her own feelings and confront them against the aspirations of glory and fame that she now considers greedy.

Cruel mighty dreams.
Reality
Has been quite other:
He has tested me
To my miser heart
Whose greedy aim
Was glory, fame.
My own prisoner, I. (1993b, 25)

3.4. Maternal Anger and Violence

If pain, guilt and self-compassion are the pervading feelings in “Retarded Child”, a higher degree of maternal anger and violence can be found in Eavan Boland’s “In Her Own Image” (1995, 56-57), in Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill’s poem “An Bhatráil”/ “The Battering” (1993, 24-27) and in Luz Pozo Garza’s “Medea en Corinto” (2004, 625-648) as well as in Mary O’Donnell’s novel *The Elysium Testament* (1999).

Maternal violence against the child has long belonged to the terrain of the unspeakable. It disturbs the idealised monolithic image of motherhood so deeply that the mother who exerts it is dispossessed of any kind of human personhood and

considered a monster. No further attempt is made to understand the personal and social circumstances that could have led her to commit such a crime.

But reality stubbornly shows that, far from being a matter of the past, this is a current issue newspapers bring to the fore from time to time and it has gradually become an object of concern for some institutions like the Spanish CRSEV (Centro Reina Sofía para el Estudio de la Violencia). In a report presented in Valencia in 2007 the CRSEV denounced the alarming increase of every kind of violence against children, from murder to sexual abuse. It was stated that between 2001 and 2006 the number of cases had risen from 2.600 to 6.400. The same report also noticed the increase of children murdered at home.¹² To cite only an outstanding example of this kind of violence I will choose a case that shook Spanish society recently because of the parallel it has with the myth of Medea and the literary use Euripides made of the myth. Like Medea, the mother killed her children as a reaction against institutional violence, which deprived her of the social and economic support to secure her and her children's lives, and she vented all her anger against her children.¹³

In contrast with the ancient Greek myth according to which Medea is a dangerous sorceress that can use her magical power to achieve her aims, Euripides' Medea is fully human in her feelings. She is an outraged woman whose husband, Jason, has sought a new younger bride, forgetting all the things Medea has done to help him achieve success in all the enterprises he has previously undertaken.¹⁴ She is an obstacle that stands in the way of the ambition of two powerful men: her former husband and Creon, the King of Corinth, whose daughter, Creusa, Jason intends to marry, sealing an alliance that will benefit both of them. Besides, Medea's sons might also become dangerous rivals for the children Jason may have from his new wife. Hence, Medea and her sons are going to be sent to exile, although Jason finally accepts that the sons can remain under his protection. However, Medea is not the kind of woman who passively submits either to fate or men's decrees. She feels that her love has been betrayed, and now she is going to be deprived of her sons, and because of all of this, she falls prey to

a rage which inspires fear in everybody around her. Medea carefully plans the murder of the young bride and of her two sons as a revenge against both Jason and Creon. She will put an end to their ambitions leaving Jason without a kingdom and an heir.

In “At the Heart of Maternal Anger” (2008b), Laura Lojo observes that “[t]he myth of Medea, culturally constructed as the archetypal murderous mother figure, may be taken as an example of how maternal generative power collides spectacularly with the communal representatives of paternal control” (103). In Euripides’ tragedy there is a clash between the female private sphere where love and tenderness are allowed, and the male-dominated political sphere in which ambition justifies every action and where wives and children are used as properties or tools that can be easily dismissed when they cease to be useful, with no concern about their feelings.

The poetic voice of Medea reacts against this division and therefore asserts her rights on her children: “Mine, whom no hand shalt steal from me away!” (Murray 1912, 46). Although she affirms that they are her “best-beloved”, she is determined to overcome her maternal feelings and use her sons as instruments of her revenge. A revenge that is at the same time private—a retribution for her hurt love and pride—and public—against male power over women and children’s destinies. Thus, Medea, victim of political violence and deprivation, fights back against this injustice through the murder of her sons.

Then, leaving Jason childless, and the day
As night above him. I will go my road
To exile, flying, flying from the blood
Of these my best-beloved, and having wrought
All horror, so but one thing reach me not,
The laugh of them that hate us. (Murray 1912, 46)

In order to carry on with her plan, Medea has to tear off all her maternal feelings. She experiences moments of doubt and strong tenderness towards her sons that make her lose heart about her plans, because she is well aware of the grief they will bring to her: “Why should I seek a war / So blind: by these babe’s

wounds to sting again / Their father's heart, and win myself a pain / Twice deeper?
Never, never! I forget / Henceforward all I laboured for" (Murray 1912, 60).

When Medea and Jason blame each other for the murder of their sons, Jason undervalues Medea's love for him calling it lust: "Thou hast said it! For thy lust of love they died". And when Medea asks him for the value of love, Jason's answer excludes her since only "women pure" are worthy of it:

Medea
And love to woman a slight thing should be?
Jason
To women pure! All thy vile life to thee! (Murray 1912, 76)

Luz Pozo Garza's *Medea en Corinto* (2004, 625-648), places Medea at Corinth, when she is plotting her revenge against Xasón and his new bride Creusa. However, as Carmen Blanco points out, Galician landscape appears in the poem, as well as some key references to some poems of Rosalía de Castro¹⁵ that are considered landmarks in her poetry:

[N]a súa dimensión da simbólica muller vulnerada, a Medea pozogarciana foi profundamente galeguizada facendo resoar nela os motivos rosalianos das que non cantan ás pombas e as flores, morren de sede e lles falta o aire, ademais de levar cravado no máis profundo do corazón o cravo da paixón inarrancable. E na galeguización están presentes tamén as illas Cíes coas que soñaba a Medea dos primeiros anos e os fíos de ouro do Sil cos que as ninfas de Gallaecia teceron o peplo co que a heroína vai agasallar mortalmente á súa rival Creusa. (Blanco 2004, 31-32)

Pozo Garza's Medea maintains the basic characteristics of that of Euripides' and, although there is a reference to the influence of the gods in human fate, Pozo-Garza stresses even more the feeling of passion and betrayed love as the origin of Medea's revenge. She challenges the definition of heroes and victims designed by patriarchal societies since she is a murderer and a victim at the same time. Medea's motives are complex and driven by passion. She is a powerful passionate woman whose love and dedication as a supportive wife have been despised. She claims her right to rebel against the disloyalty of her husband and to

inflict on him all the pain she can in retribution for his betrayal, but she is also a loving mother who knows that her revenge will be fulfilled at the cost of a terrible pain for her. Carmen Blanco points out the strength of the character of Pozo Garza's Medea:

A escrita de Luz déixase admirablemente levar pola paixón trágica de Medea no seu delirio desbordante e ábrese á asombrosa xustificación das profundísimas razóns da súa senrazón, penetrando na boca do volcán do seu *patos* traidor e asasino, fillo do máis enlouquecido amor-odio, arrasador de todo e castigo de inocentes. (Blanco 2004, 32)

Medea sees herself as the symbol of the wounded woman and, when she addresses the Nodrizza, she tries to explain the reason of her anger. She blames Atenea and Citerea for having plotted everything against her and states her lack of power to fight against these powerful goddesses: “¿Cómo me ía opoñer eu soa ós seus designios? / ¡Unha muller soña é unha folla no vento!” (627). However, Medea revolts against her fate and does not accept the exile Xasón tries to impose on her because it entails not only to abandon her children but also to be expelled from the only fatherland she acknowledges, which is that of love. She is a woman hurt by the betrayal of the man who was the centre of her life and her anger comes from the feeling of having been cheated by love. It was out of love that she accepted the role of the devoted wife who helped Xasón to achieve his aims and gave him children to perpetuate his glory and now she does not fit into Xasón's all-consuming ambitious plans for the future:

Miro agora o pasado e vexo a patria consumada no exilio
E véxome a min mesma apátrida pois fáltame Xasón
O soporte do amor a única patria que coñezo
¡Eu son a testemuña da muller vulnerada! (2004, 627)

Medea wonders why she does not fit into the traditional role assigned to woman: “Ás veces me pregunto por qué eu non son / Como as demais mulleres” (627). She depicts a detailed portrait of the traditional code of behaviour women should follow, which is characterised by unselfish endless love, silent suffering

and passive acceptance of the pain men inflict on them. Medea states clearly that she is not that kind of woman and rebels against stereotyped images of femininity.

Resignarse á evidencia aceptar os desaires
E rezar en silencio ou chorar entrementes
Ás bágoas máis amargas enriba da almofada
Sempre ocultando a ira. Sempre con mansedume
Cun sorriso nos labios. Non. Eu non son daquelas
Que cantan ás flores e ás pombas xa o sei (2004, 631)

In an interview with María Xesús Nogueira (2009), Luz Pozo Garza states that “the climax of [her] possible feminism can be seen in the words of the protagonist of *Medea en Corinto*, in her affirmation as a woman and in the autonomous consciousness of her own freedom” (208). The protagonist of Medea “assumes the reflections made by Rosalía and her rebellion within her living environment” (Nogueira 2009, 208). Thus, Medea goes further in her rebellion and voices the rejection of the kind of poetry women writers are supposed to write, appropriating the lines of Rosalía that are considered a feminist declaration of principles by most Galician women writers: “Daquelas que cantan as pombas i as frores, / todos din que teñen alma de muller. / Pois eu que n’as canto, Virxe da Paloma, /¡ai!, ¿de qué a terei? (Castro 1968, 17) [1880]. In *Sexo e lugar* (2006), Carmen Blanco observes that this poem is a feminist statement that warns potential readers that they should not expect to find the traditional poetry women are supposed to write:

Neses versos o eu lírico cuestiónase a subxectividade feminina preestablecida, postulando unha reformulación do ser muller que inclúa a diversidade real das mulleres que se apartan dos patróns sociais, como fai ela ao non cantar as pombas e as flores, dúas realidades simbólicas plurisignificativas propias da poética romántica permitida á feminidade. (Blanco 2006, 84)

Pozo Garza’s Medea rejects meekness and resignation and claims the right for women to feel and express passion and to lead a life in which strong feelings are not repressed. Paraphrasing Rosalía’s poem “Unha vez tiven un cravo” (Castro

1968, 21) [1880], Medea describes the strength and intensity of feelings that a passionate life entails, asserting her right to feel anger and stating that passion is in the essence of her being. “A min márame a sede. A min fárame o aire / levo un cravo moi fondo de amor e de paixón / nin o podo arricar que arrincarí a alma” (631). She proclaims once more that she is not one of those who “cantan ás flores e ás pombas” / das que se resignan ante o desamor / e rezan e consumen bágoas sobre da almofada” and reasserts herself as a woman who has a personality that does not fit into traditional clichés: “¡Non! ¡Eu son Medea!” (632).

Medea’s anger and violence is not the consequence of a sudden uncontrollable impulse but a careful planned revenge that must be fulfilled publicly since it aims at inflicting on Xasón the worst punishment of all, as well as blaming him for the crime she is going to commit. Medea is not one to disappear silently from the stage, on the contrary, she seeks a dramatic performance in which she and Xasón are going to share the sacrifice of their children, attributing to him the cause and to her the action: “O impulso é teu e meu o sacrificio: / Ferímonos os dous nas súas febles carnes” (647).

Ti prepara infeliz a pira funeraria para os teus fillos
E adícalles un túmulo de rango principesco...

Levanta as pálpebras e mira
Como sucumben xuntos pola ignominia túa...

Con esta espada cruel de dobre folla
Firo con saña porque a ti te firo. (2004, 646)

Looking back, Medea laments not having been infertile so that she could avoid this pain: “¡Sinto moi dentro a dor de ser fecunda! / ¡Quixera ser infértil. Non ter vínculos!” (647). She conceived her children in a time of splendour and exaltation when her life was totally governed by her love: “Enxendramos os fillos cando vibraba o mundo / Dinos a luz para che dar a vida / Houbo un intre en que quixen vivir en ti por sempre / Houbo un intre en que quixen morrer de ti contigo” (647). Medea’s fiery determination is encouraged by the desire to destroy, along

with her children, the life that once linked her to Xasón. By killing the innocent children who were engendered by their passion and share their parents' flesh and blood, she destroys the remnants of their love:

¡Firo o meu corazón de parte a parte
E despréndome da alma que foxe pola boca!

¡Todo acaba en vos fillos queridos!
¿Como podes AMOR causar tales excesos?

¡Abre os brazos Xasón recolle estes despoños!
Son carne da túa carne... ¡Era o que che debía!
¡Nada quero de ti! ¡nada che debo! (2004, 647)

The poem ends with the chorus divided between those horrified by the cruelty of Medea, who curse her with a restless life, and those who put the blame on love and justify her, although the last line gives back the responsibility of the tragedy to the gods, absolving Medea, in a certain way, and giving her the character of victim.

—¡Onde vaias Medea serás sempre maldita!
—A culpa foi do amor...
—¡Levas o Mal contigo: Non acharás acougo!
—A culpa foi do amor...
—A culpa foi do amor...
—A culpa foi do amor...
—¡A culpa foi dos deuses intrigantes!
¡NON CULPEDES Ó AMOR! (2004, 648)

In Eavan Boland's poem "In Her Own Image" (1995, 56-57) [1980], we find the poetic voice of a mother who has just killed her own child, although it seems clear that the poem refers to a symbolic killing of the child. Laura Lojo (2006) observes that "[t]he overt violence underlying "In Her Own Image" targets at dismantling traditional visions of motherhood as understood by means of patriarchal conceptual schemes" (97) and offers the possibility of metaphoric representation of the unresolved conflict between "the writer and her own creation, here a daughter strangled at her mother's own hands" (97). In this line, Pilar

Villar-Argáiz (2007) points out that this maternal violence is the consequence of the rejection of the image of motherhood which results “from her uneasiness with the social conventions regarding women as mothers” (116). Thus, this poem could be seen as a direct attack against the exclusive role of wives and mothers that the constitution of 1937 relegated women to, as well as against the idealised model of the mother that nationalist ideology has developed, identifying it with the symbolic Mother Ireland. The killing and burying of the child can be read as a metaphor of the killing, at the same time, of the traditional roles of mother and daughter and of the literary stereotypes used by male poets. According to Laura Lojo:

Boland’s poem thus works against a particular definition of women as ‘naturally’ private, belonging properly to a domestic sphere constructed as free and non-economic, untainted by the logic of capitalism and its rules of supply and demand, production, consumption and exchange. Thus defined, women and the domestic sphere could be accused of safeguarding a kind of transcendent moral value from the encroachments of the marketplace. (2008b, 110-111)

In the first stanzas of the poem the poetic persona stares at the eyes of her dead child comparing her golden irises with her wedding ring: “the irises are gold / and round they go / like the ring on my wedding finger, / round and round” (56). The repetition of the word “round” not only links the shape of irises to her wedding ring, a symbol of her entrapment in the role of wife, but, its association with the verb “go” also suggests a movement that evokes a terrifying image of violence when she is strangling the child, as the speaking voice is seeing the rolling eyes of the child and her own hands at the same time. Once she has finished, the poetic voice laments the loss of these eyes, whose centre she has been, but from which she will be shut out:

To think that they were once my satellites!
They shut me out now.
Such light years! (1995, 56)

The third stanza shows, according to Villar-Argáiz, a woman who “feels confused and disconcerted at her awakening to the oppression she has been

suffering” and whose “inability to define herself leads her to an act of self-negation” (Villar-Argáiz 2007, 117). The lines show a divided self who tries to untie the knot that linked her body to her daughter’s.

She is not myself
anymore, she is not
even in my sky
anymore and I
am not myself. (1995, 57)

Having killed the daughter the mother has precluded the repetition of the model of motherhood, but she has also killed herself as a mother and she is not able to recognise herself, since she has destroyed the received image of motherhood and cannot find another self.

In the following stanzas, the violence and confusion seem to have disappeared and the poetic persona describes how she is going to prepare the burial of the child. She does not want to disfigure “her pretty face” and can imagine that the thumbprints the girl wears on her neck are like jewels: “a family heirloom, / a sort of burial necklace” (1995, 57). The connection between the “amethyst thumbprints”, as the traces of the violence exerted against the girl, and the “family heirloom” many women inherited from their mothers, is a clear reference to the family as the site where the socially established traditional roles for women were transmitted and where daughters were taught to submit to them. Thus, the mother is an active agent who helps in perpetuating the “violent parameters towards women” (Villar Argáiz, 117) and the only way to break this cycle is the killing of the child and of her maternal traditional role at the same time, as Villar-Argáiz has underlined: “Unable to escape from this destructive heritage, killing her own child and liberating herself from a possible offspring” (117) are the means that the poetic persona uses to “have access to her own identity” (117).

While in Boland’s poem “In Her Own Image”, the violence of the mother against the daughter can be seen as a rejection of the social role imposed on women, in Mary O’ Donnell’s *The Elysium Testament* we find a mother whose

violence is a mixture of rebellion against an undesired motherhood that stands in the way of her career, and her non acceptance of the peculiarity of her son.

The novel is a painful attempt of Nina, the first person female narrator to explain to her ex-husband, after the accidental death of their youngest son, the reasons and the motives of the violence she exerted against the child. As Helen Thompson has observed in the introduction to an interview of Mary O'Donnell, the character of Nina contradicts motherhood "as a sanctified institution" since "instead of being a nurturing caregiver, she beats her son and because of her obsession with her work, neglects her family, her husband becoming the primary caretaker" (Thompson 2003, 117).

The whole novel revolves around Nina's attempts to understand and clarify the reasons behind her failures to her children — Elinore and Roland— and her need "to find a route to some kind of reconciliation with herself, if such is possible" (Thompson, 2003, 128). She is determined to commit suicide as the only way to put an end to her suffering, but the fact that she tortured her son is so inadmissible that she tries to explain it and justify it on the basis of the weird nature of the small boy who could do such strange things as to levitate. In Nina's work, "science and spirituality clash as her restorations are grounded in concrete research rather than ethereal faith" (Thompson 2003, 117). So, it was her duty as a mother to bring him down to earth and turn him a normal boy.

In O'Donnell's words, Nina "has a fierce logic and a great capacity to tease things out. She is a natural researcher who needs truth and who cannot rest until she finds one that satisfies her torment" (Thompson 2003, 125). However, behind all the protagonist's attempts to give a rational explanation of what happened we can perceive the bursts of disturbing confusion which intermingle with a seemingly objective narrative. Nina's narrative is confronted with that of her eldest daughter Elinore, a character we know through her mother's account and through the letters she wrote asking for help in a situation she clearly perceived, as a witness, as the aggression of her mother against her little brother. She is the only one who tries, unsuccessfully, to break the silence and the blindness of all the

people around, a situation that “suggests a regression, back to the old order of intimidation, conformity and belief in appearances” (Thompson 2003, 117). Elinore’s account of the scene in which Nina found the little boy levitating coincides with Nina’s narration and, consequently, “makes it quite clear that none of this is imagined and that Nina is sane. Elinore is unafraid of blaming her, of telling her that she should be guilty, that she had failed in her responsibility” (Thompson 2003, 128).

Nina has a career as a restorer of grottoes and she has seen her children as obstacles that came between her plans of personal development. She defines the birth of her first child as the time when she was entrapped into a cage and warns women to think it carefully before deciding to become mothers:

Then came the cage which dropped over my life with the birth of Elinore, the darling. Nonetheless a cage. My advice to all women, were I in a position to give advice to anybody, would be to think long and hard before rushing into motherhood. (O’Donnell 1999, 31)

The narrator’s voice gives a first person’s account of childbirth that is far from the romanticised discourses about this issue, let alone the metaphors frequently used by male and some female writers which equated the gestation and birthing processes to the writer’s creative process. Nina reminds her husband that he saw her “nearly die in the effort to push her out into the world” (31), and explains him that the courage she showed during childbirth, so praised by her husband, is “a courage that nobody chooses because it comes from being trapped” and that she “would have done anything to push the forty-week old parasite out of [her] body” (32). However, despite this crude definition of the child as a “parasite”, she has to admit that the moment she saw Elinore “was undoubtedly the most exquisite in [her] life” (32).

With the intense delight of Elinore’s touchdown, the mysteries of the universe opened to us. She might as well have come from outer space, so bewitching was her presence. In that instant, it was as if we were the first ever parents to the first ever child. (1999, 32)

The presence of Elinore seems to compensate Nina for the pains of childbirth but when she gets pregnant of Roland, this second pregnancy takes her by surprise because “[t]he possibility of our having another child hadn’t entered the remotest corner of [her] consciousness” (48). Nina reproaches her husband his desire of more children so that they would be “a *real* family”, while she questions what kind of family he thought they were because, for her, their family seemed “real enough” (48). Nina experiences her falling into a new pregnancy as a kind of practical joke the pill has played on her and rejects to assume the role of self-sacrificing mother and wife her husband and society demand from her. She chooses her career and leaves the nurturing and caretaking duties to her husband.

The clash between Nina’s professional aims and the entrapment she experiences with her mothering duties could be seen as the source of the violence she exerts on her child. The contradictory feelings she expresses when she is about to beat her son reflect the conflict that splits her inner self between the tender mother she would like to be and the enraged woman whose face she sees reflected in the mirror:

One part of me wanted to hang onto him, to lean against him, and for a moment I imagined his small frame could carry me. But again, my need for him was transformed into something else. My face was hot, yet the perspiration which broke on my brow and my upper lip seemed chilly. The heat of anger rose through my body, the surge of blood to my head. As I knelt, level with him, I could see my reflection in the mirror and recognised that rage. (1999, 158)

When she is about to finish the restoration of the grotto and is showing some signs that suggest the possibility of healing the relationship with her small son, the tragic death of the child stabbed by a stalactite that falls down from the ceiling of the grotto, hints at a sacrificial religious ritual, as if the little boy has offered himself in sacrifice to purify his mother’s sins.

Another example of maternal violence can be found in Nuala Ní Dhomhnail’s poem “An Bhatráil”/ “The Battering” (1993, 24-27). In this poem the author uses the Celtic legends of abductions of babies by envious fairies, to

represent the mother's violence against children. The poetic persona of the mother, in a state of mental derangement, is unable to accept the fact that she has battered her child and presents herself as a heroine who rescues her child from the "fairy fort" (25) where the fairies have taken him. For her, the nurses who cared for the child are the careless dangerous fairies who had snatched her child from her and had breastfed him with their milk so that the spell could be done; also, the hospital where the child has been cured of his wounds was their fort. She needs to reverse the situation of violence and, in her account, it was the fairies that hurt the child and it is she who has to clean and cure the child's injuries once she reaches home, as a dutiful and loving mother would do it.

He was crawling with lice and jiggers
and his skin was so red and raw
I've spent all day putting hot poultices on his bottom
and salving him with *Sudocrem*
from stem to stern. (1993, 24)

She protects the child with the sign of the cross made with a pair of tongs, which are tools that have an ambivalent meaning: they belong to the domestic sphere, but they have been used in Christian iconography as symbols of the crucifixion and martyrdom of Christ. The gesture of the mother is also ambivalent since it can be seen either as a desire to protect the child or a wish to detach herself from his death by giving it the quality of a ritual sacrifice:

So far, so good.
I've made the sign of the cross
with the tongs
and laid them on the cradle. (1993, 25)

The last stanza of the poem presents an important change in the mother's mind. She calls the hospital, for the first time, "hospital" instead of the "fort" or "fairy fort" as in the three previous ones. Although her mental disorder continues and she seems unable to recognise her responsibility for the child's injuries, at least one part of herself is aware that, the next time this happens, she will not take the child [...] "anywhere next / or near the hospital" (27), because she will not be

able to convince anybody that she was not the one “who gave [her] little laddie this last battering” (27).

As Luz Mar González Arias has noted, “The Battering” could be read as a postpartum reaction and the mother’s need to recuperate that part of her identity that has been lost. “El lado más oscuro de la madre proyecta toda su rabia sobre el bebé en una reacción contra los roles de domesticidad que la oprimen” (González Arias 2000, 149). It could also be added that the blissful state of happiness described as the prevailing feeling a mother experiences after birthgiving are conditioned by the social and personal circumstances behind the mother’s situation. It depends greatly on the kind of support she has in order to face the stress and physical strain that the caring and nurturing of a newly born exerts on the mother, which can deeply affect both her mind and body.¹⁶ In “The Battering”, the need for the mother to emphasise her heroic rescue of the child may be a need to compensate for her real feeling of powerlessness in facing the responsibilities of mothering.

From time to time, we can find echoes of this kind of mental disorders that are the cause of mothers’ aggression to their children in the newspapers. To quote only a recent example, I will mention the start of the trial against Kelly Meining who stabbed her son to death in May 19, 2006. At the conclusion Judge Robert Lewis was asked to acquit Meining by reason of insanity.¹⁷

There is no doubt that insanity could be a reasonable explanation for this kind of violence. Far from decreasing, violence and aggressiveness against children seem to be increasing, as the report of the CRSEV quoted before shows; but insanity cannot be the only explanatory cause. In many cases, it is the result of the violence exerted against women and children by men. But it can also be the consequence of the lack of help and/or protection from a society that, through the media, promotes glamorous images of powerful mothers —successful top models, singers and film stars— who proclaim the unspeakable happiness of being a mother, while the real financial, social and psychical problems many mothers have to face remain unspoken.

In “The Horror of the Unlived Life” (2002) Anne Fogarty underlines the fact that the ideals of femininity and maternity established in the famous article 41 in the Constitution of 1937, which recognised the importance of maternal work and tried to prevent mothers from engaging in the labour force, far from empowering mothers, “has the effect of diminishing their power; well-intentioned paternalism paves the way for social oppression” (87). The state neglected the protection mothers were promised in the Constitution and precluded their access to the economic and material means to undertake their task. Therefore, these ideals have been “fiercely contested in contemporary Ireland in the continual upheavals caused by the clash between entrenched patriarchal values and advancing feminist ethos” (Fogarty 2002, 88).

So far, the texts examined in this section deal with maternal violence but I want to comment briefly two poems that present mothers and families as the victims of political violence in Northern Ireland. In Sinéad Morrissey’s “Ciara” (*There Was Fire in Vancouver* 1996, 12), the terrible consequences of the *Troubles* are set against a scene of peaceful celebration of Christmas. The poetic voice, presumably of a girl, remembers one Christmas afternoon when a walk to the lakes was cancelled because an unnamed “she” “was crying over potatoes” (12). The potatoes are the focus of attention of the poetic persona because they seem to be the objects through which the inexpressible sorrow of a mother can be expressed. For the speaking voice, some details of domestic life, like the fishtank and the blue slippers, concentrate the feeling of desolation that pervades the house: “The bewildered mother and silent child, / formed an image in my head of boiling potatoes / and wondered about their powers of catastrophe” (12).

After the desperate mother “was shuttered off from view” (12) into a white van, the image of the potatoes remains stuck in the narrator’s mind. They represent the common tasks of everyday life whose monotony and repetition are perfectly defined, articulated and inserted in women’s lives, and are also safeguards against the unpredictable consequences of political violence. This contrasts with the

mother's incapability of articulating the sorrow for the son who has been the victim of that violence.

The potatoes stuck in my mind.
Something easier for her to articulate
Than the mess of love and various motherhood,
Than the son who had his knees blown somewhere else.

A frightening rain, pouring out
Of the Armagh sky, had filled the lives
Of Ciara's household. One shattered woman
A fraying edge of the legacy. (1996, 12)

The reference to "the frightening rain" which fills the lives of Ciara's household is mirrored in another poem by Sinéad Morrissey, "Belfast Storm" (1996, 17), which starts "With rain like that lashing into the city / And a wind that blew streets dark before you could blink". In the next lines the image of the storm is compared with angry angels "[w]ith heads in hands howling it out all over us" (17). The howling angels contradict the religious image of the Guardian Angel, who, in traditional Christian angelology, was a benevolent attendant spirit who protected faithful people, especially children, from danger. The angels in this poem are angry and they cannot protect the boy from the storm of violence. The last stanza of this poem connects with the issue of "Ciara" with the reference to "The great gap in the street where his knees hit the wall / Meant wheelchairs, rather than coffins" (17). The absence of representation of the long-lasting consequences of the violence is a "gap in the street", and the wheelchair is the future of a disabled boy and perhaps of a disabled society, in contrast with the aura of heroism that surrounded those who died for their political ideals.

3.5. Leaving the Stage

The issue of what some psychologists have called the "syndrome of the empty nest", and the sense of frustration and uselessness some mothers experience when their children grow up and leave home, was much talked about in the last

decades of the twentieth century. This was the direct consequence of the absence, in Rich's words, of "selves of [their] own to return to" when the exclusivity of mothering ceased to be necessary. In rural Ireland and Galicia women worked hard taking an active participation in the activities developed in the small economic family unit. Hence, the independence of children did not mean a significant change in women's lives. However, the massive emigration from the country to the city increased the number of urban middle-class women who were only housewives and this situation coexisted with the emergence of women who had a professional career. For mothers who had dutifully accepted the mother role as exclusive, the situation created by their children's independence could not be counteracted by the existence of a separate social identity other than those of wife and mother.

However, the mothers' responses to this situation can be as diverse as mothers are themselves. Of the four literary texts I am going to comment here, in the first one, Anne Hartigan's "Forgive Us Our Trespasses" (2011, 66), the poetic persona of the mother comments how the children establish their own limits; in Eavan Boland's "Women in Kitchen" (1995, 76) an anonymous poetic persona describes the loneliness and isolation of a woman in a noisy kitchen where the appliances are doing the housework; in Mary Beckett's short story "Heaven" (1989, 29-36) and Eithne Strong's poem "Confrontation" (1993b, 15) [1974], both protagonists contradict the psychoanalytic assumption that it is the children's duty to sever the mother-child bond in order to acquire an individuality of their own. In both texts, it is the mother the one who actively provokes her own erasure from her children's lives.

The title of Anne Hartigan's poem "Forgive Us Our Trespasses" is a line of, perhaps, the most important prayer of Catholic faith, the "Our Father Prayer",¹⁸ that Christ himself taught to his disciples. The poetic persona analyses with a mixture of humour and nostalgia the fact that, as children grow and reach maturity, they create their own space and delimit the areas that their parents can share with them and which ones they are not allowed to interfere with; hence, the need for the parents to ask for forgiveness whenever they trespass these limits. It is always

surprising for parents to discover that they are partially excluded from their children's space, that they do not know everything about their offspring and that there are other people who know aspects of their children's lives that they ignore.

What place do your children give you?

They will allow you to trespass on their
green gardens but wait for you to go
because they tell their friends their secrets
Not you. (2011, 66)

Children cannot avoid being influenced by the widespread image of the all-giving mother and they often take for granted that it is in the nature of being a mother to be always there to support them if necessary. However, mothers are supposed to belong to their past and, once their tasks as mothers have been completed, they are not expected to be part of their children's future, let alone to have an independent future of their own. The poetic persona in Hartigan's poem reflects about this situation: "You are the beginning for them and they want / you behind but left there. Doing nothing / in particular but not rocking the boat" (66).

The poetic persona underlines the fact that mothers are supposed to adjust themselves to the image that has been created for them and, accordingly, they should behave in such a way that their behaviour does not disturb their children's lives. The image of the mother as well as her own life should be frozen within the limits of her motherhood with no further development of her own.

Don't do

Anything outrageous until they are middle-aged
then they won't mind because it will reflect well
to have an interesting foremother. Basically it's a
No go area.

Parents are increasingly obsolete, dumb dinosaurs
Made to be stuffed. (2011, 66)

Behind the irony of Hartigan's poetic persona, we can perceive the feeling of nostalgia for a time when the mother was the centre of their children's universe and the reluctance to acknowledge that they have to build their own independence.

In Eavan Boland's "Women in Kitchen" (1995, 76), an anonymous poetic persona describes a woman in a noisy kitchen in which "[The] silence is a death" (76) once the work has been done. The woman in this kitchen seems lost "islanded by noise" (76) and disoriented, in contrast with the perfectly programmed work of the machines which have a clear aim and a specific destination whereas "[She] has nowhere definite to go: / she might be a pedestrian in traffic" (76). The whiteness of everything in the kitchen described in the second stanza creates a cold atmosphere, with contrasts with images of the warm atmosphere of the kitchen, when it was the centre of extended families' lives, and a place often linked to economic activities shared by all the women of the family. The kitchen in the poem is more like a technological laboratory in which the machines have taken over: "Machines jigsaw everything she knows. / And she is everywhere among their furor" (76). She is entrapped in this mechanised space where there is no room for creativity and the only tropic she can dream about is that of the dryer and the only moon is "[T]he round lunar window of the washer" (76).

It is undeniable that technological advances have facilitated housework but they represent also the alienation and depersonalisation of work after the industrial revolution. Deprived of a subjectivity that can engage in different ways of fulfillment, the woman in this kitchen faces the silence that encompasses her own emptiness and that is similar to death. Even the white sheets she is ironing seem to be the shrouds of a mortuary:

The wash done, the kettle boiled, the sheets
spun and clean, the dryer stops dead.
The silence is a death. It starts to bury
the room in white spaces. She turns to spread
a cloth on the board and irons sheets
in a room white and quiet as a mortuary. (1995, 76)

In Mary Beckett's short story "Heaven" (1989) the empty house is repossessed by the mother once her four sons have grown up, married and left home; in Eithne Strong's poem "Confrontation" (1993b), the mother takes an active stance by leaving the house where her adult daughters are engaging in their own motherhood.

The third-person omniscient narrator in "Heaven" starts saying that "[T]o Hilary in her early sixties, heaven was an empty house" (29). The narrator gives a disturbing account of how this perfectionist mother, who had devoted her life to her children, faces the reality of the empty home describing her standing "in the hall with her hands clasped, looking into empty rooms and wondering how she would celebrate" (31), and how, little by little, she starts to enjoy the silence and solitude and the time to make some tea for herself and eat a cake: "Gradually she realised that this was not an occasional luxury, this solitude, but a routine. So she fixed a time every morning to sit and relish the quiet" (31). To achieve this heavenly silence, Hilary cuts down even on her family's relationship, to the point that she had insisted on her daughters-in-law to call first to arrange a suitable time for a visit. Although she does baby-sitting for her grandchildren from time to time, she firmly rejects the proposal of one of her sons that she might do daily caretaking of the children while they are at work.

Hilary cannot cling to her wife role either. Her identification with her mother role was so complete and absolute that the absence of the sons highlights also the vacuity of her marriage after the end of a cooperative project focused exclusively on their bringing up the children. When Hilary's husband retires, she cannot stand him around the house, disturbing its quietness, and looks for tasks and hobbies which maintain him outside.

Hilary gets so engaged in her newly acquired solitude that she "began hurrying home in the mornings to shut herself in" (31). Years of discipline allow her to carry on with the household chores as she had always done. But once she has finished them, she likes to get lost in a kind of vacuous reverie so attuned with the stillness and silence of the house that she begins "thinking of heaven", which

she pictures in “deep silence” (31), full of people who “stood in rapture, no one touching another”(31); the peaceful quietness of both her mind and her house is anticipatory of death, of an afterlife she does not fear, because she is convinced that she is worth it, to the point that, when she attended funeral masses, “she happily saw herself as the dead person and arranged in her mind how things should be done about food, flowers and cars” (31). Hilary had always looked for perfection in the performance of the socially established patterns of a good wife and mother. However, she feels that, after a life entirely devoted to others, nobody is going to give value to her life: “No one would miss her, she had done all that had been asked of her, she could fade out any time” (31). This thought summarises the feeling of uselessness many women can experience when they cease to be necessary for the task that patriarchal society has assigned to them and they have no other identity to hold on to.

We can find a different attitude in the poetic persona of the mother in Eithne Strong’s poem “Confrontation” (1993b, 15). She describes a scene with her adult daughters when she visits them to say goodbye before being off to her “important day” (15). There is a deliberate vagueness about what this “important day” means but, in any case, it underlines the fact that she is leaving and she can observe her daughters completely absorbed with their own children. This situation reminds her of the time when she, “the fine maternally”, cooed and kissed and indulged them. This poem diverges from the theories developed by Nancy Friday—among many others— that emphasised the need for the daughter to sever the bond in order to not to be like her mother. Just the opposite, in this poem it is the poetic persona of the mother who achieves her independence and, acknowledging that she was once the centre of her daughters’ tyranny, she warns them against the danger of repeating the model:

You sit daughters, on either side of the table,
your sons on laps, feeding them their little necessary messes. You talk only
to your sons. So short a time since I
so held you to coo and gladly kiss
messed faces; accept, indulge caprice—
me, the fine maternally.

You, adored, the centre of your tyranny. (1993b, 15)

The invisibility that the poetic persona experiences is suggested by the daughters talking “only to [their] sons” while they spare her their “round brown stare” (15). This non-existence for them can be seen as a symbolic death of the mother once the knot that tied her to the daughters has come loose and now she is looking at them with a detached gaze which allows her to adopt a position of objective criticism. Thus, she berates her daughters for overindulging their sons and declares that she is “no longer / tolerant of [their] messiness” (15).

This detachment finds its correspondence in the cold stare of the daughters once they are adults, which makes them as unrecognisable for the mother as “Amazon territory” (15):

Now you stare back at me from adult eyes
that I no more know. Layer upon
layer, you are more unknown to me than
Amazon territory. I make a few inanities,
my silly admonitory jollities to you. (1993b, 15)

In contrast with the protagonist of “Heaven” who closes herself in the empty house, the poetic persona of the mother in “Confrontation” adopts an active stance and leaves the house for her “important day”. Although there is something in the rain, the trees and the birds that “seemed like pain” (15), the mother decides that she does not know her daughters “anymore” (15).

In Eithne Strong’s “My Darling Women” (1993b, 120-122) the poetic persona adopts an ironic tone to describe the achievements of women in present times. From the first lines she warns the reader about the title: “It’s just a way of speaking —don’t take / the darling too seriously” (120) and, in the next stanzas, she claims for “some salutary self-ridicule, / Narcissus dying laughing” (120). However, behind the irony and the affirmation that “it’s all best seen / as comedy” (120), we can perceive the concern for the “senseless waste of bodies, efforts / artefacts like temples, towers of rule” (120). These lines underline the strain on women’s lives as a consequence of their entry in the labour market, while they have not been completely liberated of the traditional roles nor are they allowed to

control their own bodies, which are subjected to strict regulations established by State and Church. Irony appears again when the poetic persona states that women are “determined / on information and leaving the country / whenever” (120). This is a clear reference to the great number of women who travelled to England in order to have a legal abortion.¹⁹

As a token of the degree of power a woman can conquer, she mentions the “admirable Head / of State” in a clear reference to the former president of Ireland, Mary Robinson. But, although she admits that women have worked hard and some important goals have been achieved, on the whole, she is not very optimistic about the consistency of the changes which have affected women’s lives. There is a contrast between the ironical mood adopted by the poetic persona and the dialogue with the assertive character of the widow who appears in the sixth stanza, in a meeting of women who are claiming for women’s rights “before Maastricht” (121). She is a strong woman who admits that her time “was brainwashed” and, despite a drunkard husband “[s]he’s stitched / to school their spawn of eight, all / good jobs now. ‘Tis the women do it” (121). The widow’s assertion that “[t]hose up there are great, claiming the claims” (121) is ambivalent. On the one hand, it may show a genuine admiration for the speakers in the meeting but, on the other hand, it might well suggest that while some women can have their voices heard, it is the common women’s struggle that changes and improves women’s lives.

In the last stanza the poetic persona recovers the irony to summarise women’s achievements stressing in the last line that there are some things that have not changed:

And after Maastricht, there we were
in the future, free to choose—
information, travel, matters of the womb.
We had worked hard at it, hadn’t we?
Sorority. For presuming hussies who
warbled into rehearsal, divas—
Searc Yeelis, Cailleach Nimhe and others—
still showed thumbs down. In some respects,
matters of ego for example, nothing had changed. (1993b, 122)

Another poem that expresses a certain degree of pessimism about the kind of personal independence most women have conquered is Mary O'Malley's "These Are Not Sweet Girls" (2003, 55-56). The reference to Ophelia, the self-sacrificed Shakespeare's heroine who drowned herself when her prospects of marrying Hamlet failed, can be seen as a reproach to those women who try to acquire either financial power or socially approved status through advantageous marriages instead of fighting for personal independence. This kind of women contributes to perpetuate patriarchal ideology by emphasising women's *feminine* qualities as a way of conquering power and social significance through men.

The wounds women inflict softly on women
are worse than any lover can do
because they are more accurate. Such women
lead from behind silence. They are Ophelia's big sisters,
the marrying kind, their power mediated through men. (2003, 55)

The poetic persona in O'Malley's poem questions the truth or validity of the widespread ideology of romanticised love —of children and/or men— as the centre around which women's lives have to orbit. She uses the irony to denounce the assumed power of love and blames women who passively accept being cheated by this ideology:

We pay attention briefly to our own desires
over the wants of our children
who orbit us like small moons — this is why we love them.
You Latin women are not fooled.
When he leaves you say: 'Such bastards.'
and 'Love has done this to me',
as if love happens to women

governing them as a verb, or the moon. (2003, 56)

Finally, we can find the coexistence of several women's roles in Kerry Hardie's *A Winter Marriage: A Novel* (2003): Hannie, the protagonist who has made of marriage her job; her friend Beth, who has believed and accepted the traditional ideology of the perfect wife and mother; Jessica Woodburn, a

successful broadcasting executive producer who personifies the modern independent woman.

Hannie is looking for a new husband who can provide a position for her and her troublesome son. She has just arrived in Ireland from the former British colonies where she has had several husbands and, in a party, she meets Jessica Woodburn. The first thing she notices is that Jessica wears no rings, which was until recently, of crucial importance in assigning an identity and social status to a woman, since you could only be a respectable member of society as a married woman or as a nun, and in both cases you would wear a ring. In a brief dialogue we can see the contrast between the two women's positions when Jessica, after talking for a while about her job, addresses Hannie:

“What do you do?” she asked Hannie. Her tone was pleasant, conversational. Your turn, it said, I've done my bit.
What you don't do, Hannie thought. Live off men. When I get the chance.
“Marry,” she said starkly.
[...]
“So you are currently out of a job?” Jessica asked lightly.
Hannie nodded. “I am looking for a new position.”
“Oh?” Jessica said. “That must be tedious. Wouldn't you rather a break?”
“Economic necessity,” Hannie said. (2003, 7)

Coming from a long stay in the former colonies, Hannie is an outsider who has not experienced firsthand the changes in women's lives, and she is very curious about this new kind of woman. In another scene Hannie asks her friend Beth, a traditional housewife, about what these Jessica Woodburns are like. Beth misses the life in the colonies where a white woman had servants to do the housework and she considers Jessica's life wonderful: “Oh, you know...” Beth flapped her hand around vaguely. “Not having to wait for the right moment. A job. Confidence. Beautiful clothes...” (11). Beth's feelings are contradictory since she had adjusted herself to a role model which was considered the perfect one for a woman, and this new kind of woman destabilises her assumptions by showing her that another life is possible. While she tries to reassure and convince herself that she likes her life, she admits her uneasiness at the feeling of having done nothing,

apart from “marry and have children and run a house” (12). Moreover, she has to face the reproaches of her daughter Sara, who considers her a “bad role model” and, following a trend that trivialises some widespread psychoanalytic theories, is ready to blame the mother just in case she decides to imitate her example:

You have to *do* something, you know. Not just marry and have children and run a house. Sara says I’m a bad role model. That means an example for her to base her on. She says it won’t be her fault if she turns out just like me. (2003, 12)

Hannie’s curiosity about these new women includes the subject of motherhood because, for her, this is an important element which determines her plans for the future. Beth’s response summarises the situation of white upper/middle-class mothers who at present, as they did in the past, leave the child care in the hands of nannies or servants.

“These Jessica Woodburns,” Hannie said, “do they have children?”
“Oh, yes. One or two. Late. It’s all wonderful. Then they get a nanny and go back to work. Just like our mothers, my dear, only they went back to their social lives. Which is what work is to them anyway, as far as I can see. Still it gives the lie to the men laying down the law about the sacrifice they make for us, slaving away in the office all their lives. These women simply can’t wait to get back there.” (2003, 12-13)

Beth’s remark “It’s all wonderful” expresses the late twentieth century widespread trend of the importance given through the media to the birthgiving and mothering of famous top models or film stars. These new successful career women could be, in a way, representative of what Susan Douglas and Meredith Michaels label *the new momism* (2004). They present motherhood as an extraordinary rich and fulfilling personal experience that is the inevitable complement to their professional careers. Drawing on Douglas and Michaels, Caporale Bizzini underlines “how an idealized self-image of (famous) mothers and mothering takes shape within the collective imagery and tends to displace other more real and less attractive pictures of ‘dark’ motherhood” (2009, 40). In this sense, this seemingly new ideology of glamorous motherhood constructed by mass media has striking

resemblances with the old one. By giving motherhood the character of an individual experience, the social and financial circumstances that condition that experience are omitted. Thus, the vast majority of low and middle-class mothers are left alone to face their responsibilities. There is the risk that this *new momism* may become the substitute of the traditional patriarchal ideology whereas, once again, mothers' real struggles remain silenced. Douglas and Michaels underline some points of this ideology:

[T]he insistence that no woman is truly complete or fulfilled unless she has kids, that woman remains the best primary caretakers of children, and that to be a remotely decent mother, a woman has to devote her entire physical, psychological, emotional, intellectual being, 24/7, to her children. The new momism is a highly romanticized view of motherhood in which the standards for success are impossible to meet". (Douglas and Michaels apud O'Reilly 2009, 242- 243)

In "The Motherhood Memoir and the 'New Momism'" (2009), Andrea O'Reilly observes that in the fifties and sixties mothers were required a full time work at home, but this did not mean an absorbing dedication to their children who, after school, used to play in the neighbourhood with their friends or siblings. O'Reilly points out that today "the ideology of good motherhood demands more than mere physical proximity of mother-child: contemporary mothers are expected to spend what the discourse of experts call 'quality time' with their children" (2009, 242-243) and this implies to share with them almost all the activities they do. O'Reilly observes that very young children are enrolled in a lot of classes — music , dance, swimming— and mothers are expected to participate in these activities, without taking into account that lots of mothers are engaged in full-time employment.

In *Le Conflit la Femme et la Mère* (2010) Elisabeth Badinter denounces the existence in our time of a silent revolution that has happened unnoticed, without raising any public debate, which is in fact an involution, since it aims at giving back motherhood to the heart of women's destiny. She observes that thirty years ago it was thought that the objective of sharing public and private domains —

particularly childcare and housework— by men and women would be consolidated along the eighties and nineties. However, Badinter observes that the convergence of three different crises, —economic crisis, egalitarian crisis and identity crisis— has helped to reinforce the new reformulation of motherhood as the true gratifying female identity. The economic crisis with the subsequent massive unemployment, which specially affected women, has had the effect of convincing them that motherhood can be more rewarding than an underpaid job. Besides, the egalitarian crisis has put an end to the expectations of equal pay for equal work and has reinforced the prevalence of men over women when jobs are scarce. In parallel with these two crises, Badinter states the existence of a crisis of identity without precedent in the history of Humanity. Once women have demonstrated that they can assume the same functions as men in the public sphere, the seemingly essential gender differences were erased, but for pregnancy and childbirth. However, advances in reproductive technology have widened the concepts of mother and father,²⁰ as we have seen in previous chapters. In this scenario Badinter remarks that, in a time of uncertainties, there is the strong temptation to go back to “bonne vieille Nature et de fustiguer les ambitions aberrantes de la generation précédente” (2010, 13). This temptation is reinforced by the emergence of a discourse called naturalism, which is surrounded by an aura of modernity, although, according to Badinter, this discourse proposes a return to traditional ways of childcare that clash with women’s attempts to reconcile motherhood with a job.

3.6. Conclusion

The women writers whose work has been analysed in this chapter, have succeeded in representing a variety of conflicts derived from the incorporation of women to the public domain and the persistence of the ideology of *good motherhood* that, far from disappearing, has been substituted by new requirements of *intensive mothering*. Through the texts examined in this chapter we have found mothers who speak about the difficulty of integrating their function of nurturers

and caregivers with their determination to develop a personal identity on equal terms as men, as well as the sense of uselessness some women experience when the full-time dedication to the traditional maternal function ceases. We have also seen how some of these mothers react against the social and structural pressure they suffer when they are expected to behave according to patriarchal codes. The voices of these mothers challenge idealised images of motherhood by incorporating negative feelings, like anger, despair and destructiveness, to the traditional set of positive traditional feelings of love, generosity, care and tenderness.

One might expect that there would not be a step backwards, after decades of women's fight to conquer the right to have time and space to develop a career in the public domain without renouncing motherhood. However, as Caporale Bizzini, O'Reilly and Badinter observe, the discourse about the importance of intensive mothering expected from mothers today is more demanding than the post-war discourse about good motherhood. O'Reilly underlines the over-abundance of magazines about motherhood that reflect this ideology of intensive mothering and states the need of "unmasking motherhood" (243), "to say that the boredom, exhaustion, ambivalence, guilt, loneliness, anxiety, and self-doubt mothers feel is normal and common —indeed more real than the contented, calm, and composed mothers found in magazines" (243-244). O'Reilly raises the question of the "discrepancy between myth and reality" (244) and wonders about the purposes — social, political, economic— which this new ideology of good motherhood serves. The current situation, in the middle of the crises signalled by Elisabeth Badinter, proves that the issues addressed by the mothers' voices in the texts examined in this chapter, are not a matter of the past. Just the opposite, the contradiction between ideological constructions of motherhood and women's attempts to have an active role in the public domain, is still present in everyday life.

CHAPTER 4

REVISING MYTHS AND ARCHETYPES

4.1. Introduction

In the introduction to *The Mother-Daughter Plot. Narrative, Psychoanalysis, Feminism* (1989) Marianne Hirsch underlines the importance of the myths we read and take for granted because they “determine our vision of how individual subjects are formed in relation to family structures” (2). Freud’s choice of the Oedipus myth determined the optic through which he developed all his theories about the conflict that arises in the process of subject-formation and the interactions which occur in what Hirsch calls, using Freud’s term, a “family romance” (9). However, Hirsch asks herself what happened to the female characters in the Oedipus myth: the Sphinx, who does not appear in either Sophocles’ or Freud’s appropriation of the myth, and, most important, Jocasta, who is the silent mother in Sophocles’ play and the passive “object of desire and exchange in Freud’s theory” (2).¹ Hirsch observes that although there have been feminist revisions of the myth, as for example, those of Muriel Rukeyser (1948) and Teresa de Lauretis (1984), they were more interested in the character of the Sphinx, while Jocasta is “virtually ignored” (2).² Hirsch remarks that there are other mythologies, as those of Iphigenia, Electra, and Clytemnestra, of Demeter and Persephone, or of Antigone, that allow for “different plot patterns” because they “revolve around mothers and daughters as well as around brothers, sisters and fathers” (2). However, even if the stories of mothers and daughters are given relevance, the point of view is frequently on the daughter’s side, while the silence of the mother “is not radically reversed” (Hirsch 1989, 2).

Moreover, Hirsch remarks that some trends of psychoanalytic feminisms have succeeded in developing the psychology of the female child, almost forgotten by Freud, but they have failed to inscribe the adult mother into the frame: “The adult woman who is a mother, in particular, continues to exist only in relation to her child, never as a subject in her own right” (1989, 179). The relationship of an adult mother with their adolescent or adult children seems to have only a function. She must facilitate them to untie the bonds that link them, even if this break means for her to endure the hostility, aggressiveness and rejection of her maternal function. The only thing she can do is to disappear from the scene since “a continued allegiance to the mother appears as regressive and potentially lethal; it must be transcended” (Hirsch 1989, 168) so that the children can reach maturity.

In *When God Was a Woman* (1993) [1976], Merlin Stone stresses the importance of myths not only in the representation of what are the women and men’s roles but also in the definition of what is “good and bad, right and wrong, what is natural and what is unnatural among the people who hold the myths as meaningful” (5). Consequently, there is a crucial difference between images of womanhood provided by the myths, legends and religious beliefs created by religions in which the main deity was female “and revered as wise, valiant, powerful and just” (6) and the ones propagated “by the male-oriented religions of today” (6). Stone quotes Sheila Collins’ affirmation that:

Theology is ultimately political. The way human communities deify the transcendent and determine the categories of good and evil have more to do with the power dynamics of the social systems which create the theologies than with the spontaneous revelation of truth from another quarter”. (Collins 1974, apud Stone 1993, 66)

Consequently, there is a close connection between the sex of the main deity and the social and economic relevance of the people of the same sex. Research done in this field goes beyond an interest for the past, since it may prove that the patriarchal ideologies that have prevailed in the social organization of Western societies are not based on inexorable natural laws.

In this chapter, I will start by summarising some aspects of the research done in the fields of archaeology and anthropology regarding ancient religions that worshipped a powerful Mother-Goddess and I will discuss how these discoveries have prompted some feminist theorising to question images of women derived from Jewish-Christian religions whose rules were supposedly dictated by a supreme male God and how the substitution of a female deity by a male one brought about the disempowerment of mothers and daughters. We will also see the revisions done by some Irish and Galician women writers of the myth of the Fall, which justified the devaluation and submission of women to male's dominion. I will focus as well on some poems that revise the mythical archetypes related to motherhood, rescuing those which emphasise an adult mother-daughter relationship, like the classical myth of Demeter and Persephone. We will also find poetic voices who claim their membership to a genealogy of mothers which breaks the boundaries of time and space and tries to empower female identity by linking it with an age prior to patriarchal societies when "the primacy of the Mother" as Adrienne Rich puts it (1986, 85), was not contested.³ Rich affirms that "[i]f women were powerful once, a precedent exists; if female biology was ever once a source of power, it need not remain what it has since become: a root of powerlessness" (1986, 85).

4.2. Looking for Powerful Ancestresses.

In her study of women's fiction in the inter-wars period, Heather Ingman (1998) points out how the emergence of a discourse on motherhood ran parallel with the interest awakened by the research done during the first half of the twentieth century by anthropologists and archaeologists about matriarchal and matrilineal societies, along with religions in which the main deity was a Great Goddess. In this context of a reconsideration of the figure of the mother, some female psychoanalysts like Helene Deutsch, Karen Horney, Anna Freud and

Melanie Klein, started to revise “Freud’s patriarchal and phallogocentric theories and prepare the way for today’s mother-centred psychoanalysis” (Ingman, 24).

In the first decades of the twentieth century, there were several studies which, from the field of archaeology and anthropology, opened new perspectives in the study of the history of human development, putting into question that patriarchal societies, with patrilineal structures and moral codes based on seemingly revealed truths, dictated by a supreme male deity, were the only ways of organising *civilised* societies. Heather Ingman underlines the importance of the work of Jane Harrison, Helen Diner, Robert Briffault and Robert Graves and affirms that “[o]nce anthropologists started to look seriously at non-western societies, it began to be possible to envisage that the patriarchal, patrilineal family of western culture was not inevitable” (Ingman 1998, 21).

As far back as 1861, Johan Jakob Bachofen had asserted that motherhood is the germ of all human societies and that the mother-right —*Mutterrecht*— was at the basis of a developmental stage of matriarchal societies characterised by the emergence of agriculture and the first manifestations of law, which were presided by the cult to a female deity whose characteristics could be assimilated to Demeter. Bachofen’s work is said to have awakened the interest of Jane Ellen Harrison (1903, 1912),⁴ —whose application of the archaeological discoveries to the study of Greek religion set the basis for a methodological approach that was followed by a great number of scholars. Heather Ingman points out that in *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion* (1903), “Jane Harrison gives a fascinating account, in mythological terms, of the suppression of the mother and the splitting off of the daughter from the mother that occurs in a patriarchy” (1998, 21).

From the field of anthropology Sir James Frazer (1907, 1920, 1924) contradicted the theological perspective of religions, discussing them as cultural phenomena and linking their development with magic and science, which, according to him, come from the same source of knowledge, although they have undergone a different process of evolution. At the same time the work of Mathilde and Mathias Vaerting *The Dominant Sex: A Study in the Sociology of Sex*

Differentiation (1923) showed the close connection between the sex of the supreme deity and the sex of those who are endowed with a position of power in that society:

When, in any nation, one of the two sexes has become supreme, the members of that sex, simply because they are supreme, are regarded as more gifted, wiser, more efficient, in every respect better, than the members of the subordinate sex. Inasmuch as the godhead is the symbol and the embodiment of the highest, as a matter of course it is endowed with the sex of the rulers. (Vaerting 1923, 162)

Not only is the supreme deity endowed with the sex of those who are dominant in the social and economic sphere, but, when he/she alone is given the exclusive rights of divinity—in monotheistic religions—and no other God or Goddess is allowed, there is no better way of preventing deities of the other sex from pushing “their way to the front” (Vaerting, 171). And the sexual identity of the supreme deity is often related to the kingship system prevalent in each society (Robertson Smith 1903).

Moreover, the sex of the supreme deity not only determines the economic and social empowerment of the ruling sex—namely, the property of land and/or cattle—but it also justifies the ethics that rule men’s and women’s lives, most especially those concerning sexual behaviour: “Invariably the ruling sex has sexual privileges and freedoms which are denied to the subordinate sex” (Vaerting, 56). These privileges are of crucial importance in the question of legitimacy or illegitimacy of children and, consequently, in the social consideration of the mothers as well as the importance given to issues like virginity, fidelity and abortion. In matrilineal societies women enjoyed great sexual freedom and the matter of who was the father of their children had no relevance, since the possession of the land, house or cattle was transmitted through the mother-kingship line, either to the daughter, who often remained in the female group, or to a male member of the group, frequently to a brother of the matriarch. Hence the question of legitimacy was irrelevant since motherhood is an undeniable biological fact, properties are transmitted through the female line and neither the mother nor

the illegitimate children were the object of social discredit. But in patrilineal communities women's sexuality has to be under strict control, since fatherhood cannot be clearly established and it is of the utmost importance to transfer the properties to the right heir. Consequently, in Men's State "chastity and conjugal fidelity are imposed on woman as parts of their womanly duty" (Vaerting, 56-57), illegitimate children have an inferior status and are the object of social contempt, which is also extended to the mother because they were the proof that the mother had broken the code of sexual ethics, and her transgression of this code must be punished. In this respect, Stone underlines the obsession of the Levites⁵ with women's sexuality:

The Hebrew prophets and priests, the Levites, wrote with open contempt of any woman who was neither virgin nor married. They insisted that all women must be publicly designated as the private property of some men, father or husband. Thus they developed and instituted the concept of sexual morality—for women. (Stone 1993, 181)

Little by little the acknowledgement of the existence of these matriarchal/matrilineal societies which worshipped a female Goddess as supreme deity proved to be much more than an anecdote in the history of humankind. Merlin Stone observes that the duration of this religion lasted for a period considerably longer than the relative short span of time since the apparition of Judaism, Christianity and Islam:

Archaeologists had traced the worship of the Goddess back to the Neolithic communities of about 7000 BC, some to the Upper Paleolithic cultures of about 25,000 BC. From the time of its Neolithic origins, its existence was repeatedly attested to until well into Roman times. Yet Bible scholars agreed that it was as late as somewhere between 1800 and 1550 BC that Abraham had lived in Canaan (Palestine). (Stone 1993, 10)

Stone also underlines the fact that, when the first evidences appeared in university and museum libraries of the existence of societies in which a female Goddess was revered as supreme deity, most of the information gathered and analysed was gender biased, since the vast majority of scholars who compiled and

studied the archaeological remnants as well as the ancient literary and religious texts, were male. Moreover, they had been “raised in societies that embrace the male-oriented religions of Judaism or Christianity” (Stone, xviii) and it is probable that their analysis may have been influenced by their “religious preconceptions” (Stone, xix). Thus, in most of the scholarly texts the female religion is lowered to a category of a fertility cult, “perhaps revealing the attitudes toward sexuality by the various contemporary religions that may have influenced the writers” (Stone, xx). For Stone, there were enough archaeological and mythological evidences that proved the existence of a widespread religion in which a supreme female deity was revered, under different names, as “creator and lawmaker of the universe, prophetess, provider of human destinies, inventor, healing, hunter and valiant leader in battle” (xix-xx). To reduce this complex theological structure to a mere fertility cult may be “a gross oversimplification” (Stone, xx). Moreover, the function of the temples was not reduced to the cult of the Mother Goddess. To stress the social and economic importance of these holy places, Stone draws on the work of Christopher Dawson (1928), who affirms that “[t]he earliest agriculture must have grown up around the shrines of the Mother Goddess, which thus became social and economic centres, as well as holy places and were the germs of future cities” (Dawson apud Stone, 18).

In “Religious and Civil Myths” Luce Irigaray (1993, 24), draws on Bachofen’s works and affirms that it is clear that the existence of these gynocratic structures “should not be restricted to matriarchy but should include eras when women reigned as women” and, to find them, we don’t need “to go back to the time of cave living, nor to the early paleolithic period” (24), or to assimilate them to “certain forms of animal behaviour as it is interpreted and understood in supposedly knowledgeable circles” (Irigaray, 24). On the contrary, they can be found in cultures that existed “when ours were in their origins but that are closely related to ours” (24). Irigaray observes that, under the label of Prehistory, specialists have grouped together different facts and periods of time, as well as the cultures that have flourished in them, whose cultural and religious manifestations

have been often reduced to a category of myths, fairy tales or legends. In doing so, the reality of these historical cultures has been omitted from the patriarchal vision of History, which has been considered as the only vision possible:

To consider the meaning of mythical representations of reality as merely incidental is concomitant to repressing and destroying certain cultural dimensions that relate to the economy of difference between sexes. Such an approach also leads to a partial, reductive, and fruitless conception of History. (Irigaray 1993, 24)

In *The Great Mother* Erich Neumann admits and values the reality of societies in which women had a preponderant role—as queens and priestesses of a female Goddess, as the main agents in the economic development of the clan or tribe, or even as courageous warriors or hunters. But, in Neumann's view, these cultures with matriarchal and/or matrilineal structures and religions which paid homage to a Great Goddess are considered to be in a developmental stage in which the creative power of the unconscious created the myths and archetypes related to a Feminine principle. In Neumann's view, this historical stage is previous to higher and more developed patriarchal-patrilineal societies in which the creative force is the conscious rational mind and the supremacy of a male god is not to be discussed. Both Neumann and Stone agree on the importance of the myths associated to the religion of the Great Mother, although there is a crucial difference between their approaches. Neumann's approach is based on the Jungian theory of the formation of myths and archetypes⁶ and considers the substitution of the religions which revered the Great Mother as a somewhat natural step in the development of humankind. Merlin Stone's contention is that these cultures were destroyed when Indo-European invaders, coming from Russia and the Caucasus region arrived in the Near and Middle-East as well as some areas of the Mediterranean sea, in waves that lasted between one thousand and three thousand years. These Northern invaders brought with them a father-kingship social structure and the supremacy of a male deity who was attended by male priests. The conquest of land and power by these invaders was accompanied by a systematic destruction of the shrines where the Great Goddess was worshipped.

The emergence of the male deity in their subsequent literature, which repeatedly described and explained his supremacy, and the extremely high position of their priestly caste may perhaps allow these invasions to be viewed as religious crusade wars as much as territorial conquests. (Stone 1993, 66)

Stone observes that the existence of widespread worship of a Great Goddess as Queen of Heaven in the land of Canaan is the reason for the severe laws written in the Bible by the Levite scribes against everybody who attempted to worship any other god but Yahweh. These laws aimed at a total destruction of this matriarchal religion. Thus, in the Bible, men are ordered to kill even their brothers, sons, daughters, friends and wives if they tempt others with serving other gods. (Deut. 13, 6-9). And if they hear that certain men in a city have decided to adore other gods, they have to kill “the inhabitants of that city with the edge of the sword, destroying it utterly, and all that is therein, and the cattle thereof, with the edge of the sword” (Deut. 13, 15). After this they have to burn the city and “it shalt not be built again” (Deut. 13, 16). Therefore it seems quite clear that the change from the worship of a supreme female deity to a male one did not obey to a *natural* evolvement of society.

It is important to define matriarchal, matrilineal and matrilocal societies, because the structures these terms name do not always occur together in the same society, although it is undeniable that there are tight connections among them. Merlin Stone defines matriarchy as “women in power, or more specifically the mother, as the head of the family, taking this position in community or state government as well” (32). “Matrilineality is generally defined as that societal structure in which inheritance takes place through the female line” (32) and matrilocal societies are those in which women stay in their parents’ group and frequently in their own house, when they marry, instead of joining their husbands’. Stone underlines the importance of the ownership of the house, the land or the title— in the case of queens— when it comes to define the real power of women. Not less important for a woman is the difference between living in her parents’ home or village or those of her husband’s.

Matrilineal kingship has been documented by Herodotus in Egypt and confirmed by the work of scholars like James Frazer and Margaret Murray (1949), to cite only a few of them. Matrilineal inheritance cannot be considered only a matter of ancient and primitive societies. Barbara Walker draws on the work of Robert Briffault (1927), Mary Beard (1946), Elise Boulding (1976) and Walter Johnson (1980), among others, to affirm that matrilineal systems of succession were the “rule among British tribes until the coming of Christianity” (Walker 1994, 620) and traces of matrilineal inheritance still existed in the British Isles up to the ninth century and were common among Celts.

Traces of mother-kinship social structures have been found both in Ireland and Galicia. In “The Fathers as Gatekeepers” (1997) Frances Devlin wonders why, in a nation which has sought to define itself by recovering old myths and symbols from its past, politicians, linguists and historians have been silent about ancient Irish law, which allowed women some rights, such as “the power to initiate divorce on a variety of grounds” (12), that Roman-Christian law denied:

“[S]ymbol-analysts/manipulators in Ireland have acted uncharacteristically in failing to claim what is a remarkable fragment of its ancient heritage, its dark ages pre- Christian marriage laws. The Brehon laws appear to be the most liberal in the western world in relation to divorce and marriage, and survived operationally until the seventeenth century, though strongly contested (and influenced) by the canon lawyers throughout the Dark and Middle Ages”. (Devlin 1997, 11)

In this legal system, which is described by Donncha O Corr ain (1978, 2), one of the most interesting features was that, in marriages between people of the same class, both parties “jointly contribute to the marriage goods. Though these are held in common for the duration of marriage, each of the partners retains the ultimate ownership of what he or she contributed” (2). Moreover, woman keeps her rights over her properties to the extent that “as far as this personal property is concerned, a woman may buy, sell and lend up to a certain legal amount. She does not require her husband’s permission and he can make no complaint about the matter” (2).

Some Galician historians affirm that in pre-Roman Galician society there were some aspects of marriage which shocked the Greek historian Strabo, as Marco García Quintela quotes in “O mundo castrexo e a súa integración no Imperio Romano” (1993):

Di Estrabón que os norteños casan coma os gregos (III, 3, 7) e que “os homes dan o dote ás mulleres, as fillas son as que herdan e dan muller ós seus irmáns” (III, 4, 18). Di ademais, que estes usos non lle parecen moi civilizados pois constitúen “unha especie de xinecocracia”. (García Quintela 1993, 350)

Marriage was for the Greeks a matter of agreement on the dowry between the father of the bride and the future husband. The only similarity Strabo found resides in the presence of a wife who carried a dowry, but he considered all the other uses about marriage as barbarous and uncivilised, since women could own the land, because it was the daughter who inherited the properties from her mother and looked for a wife for her brothers.⁷

“En efecto, en primeiro lugar pódese deduci-la existencia de dous tipos de bens: Por unha parte aqueles dos que dispoñen os homes, pois senón, non poderían ceder un dote ás mulleres. Por outra parte, dos que dispoñen as mulleres e que herdan por liña materna. Estes últimos serían con seguridade bens inmoables: a propiedade ou o usufructo das terras familiares. [...] Os correspondentes ós homes serían bens inmoables, especialmente gando, pero tamén o botín conquistado nas súas expedicións guerreiras ou obxectos de ourevesaría de produción local”. (García Quintela 1993, 350)

In rural areas of Galicia matrilineal customs were still in use until recently. The married daughter stayed in her parent’s house and it was the husband the one who moved to her wife’s home. These uses disappeared along with the extended family, which was more than a social structure, since it was also an economic, productive unit in which all the members of the family worked.

Although the references quoted above do not allow us to infer the existence of matriarchal societies either in Ireland or Galicia, it seems evident that the patriarchal ideology present in Roman Law, with its emphasis on the *patria potestas*, deprived women of some rights they had previously had and turned them

into individuals with no legal capacity who were totally dependent on their fathers and husbands. Furthermore, with the establishment of Christianity the old laws were gradually suppressed until the married woman was deprived of any right to dispose of the properties she might have without her husband's consent. Barbara Walker stresses the fact that "patriarchal religious authorities everywhere changed ancient systems of matrilineal inheritance to put property in the hands of men" (1995, 622). Besides, one of the main goals of European Christianity was the acquisition or appropriation of land which meant "overturning pagan systems of matrilineal inheritance" (Walker, 623).

This situation of disempowerment of women affected directly the relationship between mothers and daughters. Since married mothers did not have the legal capacity to transmit their properties to their daughters, they did not have the financial means of leading an independent life and, for centuries, daughters were transferred like properties from father to husband.

4.3. Disempowered Mothers/ Helpless Daughters

In this section we will see how the situation of powerlessness that patrilineal kingship brought about on women's lives is represented in Kerry Hardie's poem "The Young Woman Stands on the Edge of her Life" (*A Furious Place* 1996, 14-15) and in some sections of Anne Hartigan's long narrative poem *Now is a Moveable Feast* (1991). We will see how this situation determined the mother-daughter relationship, since powerless mothers perpetuated the oppressive patriarchal structures that constricted their daughters' lives.

We can find the notion of the inevitability of women's fate in "The Young Woman Stands on the Edge of Her Life". In part 1 of this poem the poetic persona of a girl expresses the anguish she feels before the prospect of having to leave her mother's home and join the family of her husband through marriage. The first and second stanzas present a female alternative to the quasi religious male trinity of

“*father, brother, son*”, by emphasising the familiar female world, which provides for warmth, love and protection:

1
Saying the words
mother, daughter, sister.
A trinity more dense
than *father, brother, son.*

Mother, the deep mud in the yard.
Daughter, a bowl,
a love-word, a receptacle.
Sister, stands beside me,
her sword drawn. (1996, 14)

This sense of warmth and protectiveness contrasts with the fear the unknown world of men inspires in the young woman. She is weighing up her options of remaining under the warm protection of the women of her own family or abandoning it to live “up on the hill where the dogs bay / and the men / feed watchfires” (14). While she is asking herself where she would live, creating the illusion of her possibility of choice, the “cleft stick” (14) she holds in her hand is a symbol of her entrapment and gives her no possibility of avoiding her destiny, since the machinery of the established patriarchal use has drawn the path and “[t]he path seeks / its own way” (14).

In part 2, the poetic voice belongs to an unknown narrator who uses a brief story of a hazel tree, which was planted where a rabbit had been buried, as a symbol of how the girl’s flesh is going to be parted so that the roots of a new being may grow out of it: “The earth dragged at the new roots/ which parted the crumbling flesh as sweetly / as touch parts silk / soaked years in the sun” (14). The last lines of the poem state how everything had been decided for the girl “before she remembered that she had forgotten / to make her choice” (15).

Anne Hartigan’s *Now is a Moveable Feast* (1991) contains a section titled “Townland” which starts with the speaking voice of God asserting the permanence of the earth against the passing away of generations:

God ‘One generation passeth away,
 and another generation cometh:
 but the earth standeth for ever.’

ECCLESIASTES 1.4 (1991,

12)

The recurring use of the trope of the circle in the Ecclesiastes, which is being repeated throughout this section of the poem, highlights the inevitability of the cycles of life and death following one another against the eternal permanence of the earth. This image of permanence is translated to the house to which the surrounding land is attached and which is in “a commanding position”, something the Auctioneer stresses, as an image of the commanding position of God:

Auctioneer This desirable old-world residence is in a highly
 sought-after area. Standing in its own grounds,
 it is in a commanding position overlooking
 river and sea... (1991, 12)

From this privileged situation the patriarch of the house, as a delegate of God, can exert his power over the land and the human beings attached to it. Since woman’s subordination to man is justified as the will of God expressed in the Bible, possession of the land and control of nature by man is thought to be the logical consequence of the power God bestowed on Adam. The repetition of the words “position” and “commanding” reinforce the androcentric position from which the patriarch can “bend the land” according to his will: “The position was...commanding. / The position was...detached” (14).

In the next lines of the poem, there is a play with the words “desirable” and “desire”. While the narrative voice repeats the Auctioneer’s notion of a “desirable family residence” and insists on the position being “desirable” because it is two hundred acres worth, the last line of this stanza affirms that “there was no desire” allowed to the young girl whose body will be used in exchange for a desirable position. She will become one more of the properties attached to the house.

The position:

Was desirable,
Was detached,
Was two hundred acres

There was no desire. (1991, 19)

The poem continues with the speaking voice of the mother who tries to soothe her daughter's uneasiness and convince her of the excellence of marrying a man who "is well blessed with land" (20). The mother here plays an important part as a transmitter of the role that patriarchal society has established for her and, in doing so, she helps to engage her daughter in a situation of oppression she has probably experienced herself. The repetition of the words: "Come daughter come", "[c]ome daughter sweet daughter" (20) has resonances of a chant meant to calm down the uneasiness of a child. And the way she explains her daughter the reason for her future marriage is like telling a fairy tale—they have found a rich husband for her—from which the promise of a happy end has been erased. That is why, in the last stanza, the mother expresses her anguish about her daughter's future using the image of a "white tern"; a bird whose whiteness and freedom may be a symbol of the innocence of the girl, who is unaware of the reality that awaits her, while her mother is conscious of the entrapment the marriage will be for the girl, who will not be able to find a place to "flash her wings" (20).

Come daughter come,
By the Boyne river stand
Come daughter sweet daughter
You will take his hand,

Sweet daughter dear daughter
You must understand,
We have found you a husband
Who is well blessed with land.

Where will the white tern go?
Where dip where start?
Where will she flash her wings?
Her dive to the heart,
Where waters slash apart. (1991, 20)

The second section of the book, whose title is “Land”, starts again with the speaking voice of the Auctioneer emphasising the desirability of the property and then, an unknown narrator states clearly the nature of the marriage contract by which the woman is bought like a piece of land. In the third line of the following fragment it is clear that she has no entity as a human being. While the male is named “man”, ascribing him a fully human category, the woman is just a “mate”, which means that she is merely a piece of flesh to mate with. Thus, the only important thing to check is the genetic conditions of the mate, with the concern placed on the health of the breed. It is important to underline that the poem remarks the lack of any “spiritual relationship”, which might imply a position of equality between two human beings that would deny the supremacy of the male. The patriarchal allegiance of “Church and State” is sanctioned by the quotation from the Bible that closes these lines reassuring the inevitability of women’s fate, which is seen as inscribed in the natural order of things established by God:

They were bound
by Church and State,
man and mate.

No impediment was found;
no consanguinity,
affinity,
no spiritual relationship.

The contract was signed,
was sealed,
underlined and delivered.

‘And thou shalt be under thy husband’s power.’(1991, 22)

In the following lines of the poem the sexual relationship of the couple is briefly described, with a coldness which makes clear that there are no feelings at play and that the aim of the intercourse is to provide the father with a male heir who will inherit the land. Once more, the different words used for the male — “man”—, and the female —“maid”—, express concisely the only thing that matters in the woman, which is her virginity, necessary condition to ensure the exclusivity of the male’s possession and the legitimacy of the future heir. Words

such as “plough”, “seed”, “cleave”, “penetrate” and “grow” vividly show how the woman’s body is being used the same way the land is. Thus, the nature of the woman’s body and the nature of the land are identified as sites where man plants his seeds and reasserts his dominion over them. The importance of this control of the future of the land as well as the established patrilineal heritage are clearly stated and cannot be a matter of discussion since they are sanctioned by God in the Bible:

The land, must prove,
must know, must pass,
from hand to hand,
from Father to Son,
The need, in the cut of the plough,
the yearn
for seed,
the ache
for increase
to cleave
penetrate
and grow,
‘And he shall have dominion over thee’. (1991, 23)

Once “[t]he contract was signed / was sealed / was delivered” (23) the woman falls completely under her husband’s power. The sacrificial aspect of this contract sanctioned by the church is reflected in the lines that equates the woman to “the lamb / to the altar / a dumb hurt, / the double crunch / of church on duty” (1991, 23-24).

In another section of the poem we can see how the mother is the most useful ally of patriarchal ideology and how she fails to lessen her daughter’s anxiety. When the obedient daughter expresses her uneasiness and looks for her mother’s reassurance that her dutiful acceptance of all the steps that have led to the planned marriage will be rewarded, the anguish of the girl is answered by the monotonous repetition of the mother who insists on convincing her that she must “do the will of God”. And, at the same time there is a painful recognition that “this is the only chance”. The word “chance” reinforces the sense of entrapment,

because it expresses that there is no future for a woman outside marriage, and those who dared to leave the trodden path should pay for their boldness, and, at the same time, this kind of marriage is a closed social structure in which everything is tied and the woman's will has no chance:

Mother when you bade me
Take his hand to dance.

Do the will of God dear
this is the only chance.

I obeyed you Mother
without a second glance
took me to my duties
learnt to do the dance.

It is the will of God dear,
nothing's left to chance. (1991, 26-27)

The poem goes on with references to other obedient children: King Lear's Cordelia, who dutifully performed her part without rebelling against her father's will and there is also an explicit reference to the biblical story of the sacrifice of Isaac, asked by God to test the faith and obedience of Abraham.⁸ The image of the white lamb which substituted Isaac is also an image of Christ who obediently accepted his sacrifice. But the difference is that Isaac and Christ's sacrifices are seen as exceptional while "heroines often have uninteresting parts / The good can appear dull, / Are seldom permitted the laughs" (27-28) and their sacrifice and docility is seen as a consequence of the natural order established by God and not as a role imposed on them by patriarchy:

But docile as Isaac,
He too carried a small bundle of twigs.
[...]
Once she had understood
What the word meant,
The role she had to play, heroines
Often have uninteresting parts,

The good can appear dull,
Are seldom permitted the laughs. (1991, 27-28)

This fragment of the poem shows how patriarchy and religion together elaborated an ideology which deprived women of any right to oppose the legal and social roles imposed on them, so that their obedience and sacrifice was taken for granted. In the next stanza of the poem, the poetic persona accepts this ideology and her use of the plural “we” reflects the inevitability of women’s fate, which is compared to the ineluctable facts of birth and death, to which we run “[p]ushed or pulled” (28) and have to go “willy nilly” (28). The poetic persona wonders if they should have told the girl that “[s]he was set an impossible task” (29). The poem mentions the dull and sometimes painful tasks some heroines of folk tales have to perform, like the character of Dorchá in the Irish tale of “The Children of Lir”,⁹ who had to sew shirts of nettles in order to free her siblings from the spell that had turned them into swans, hurting her hands with the task. The poetic persona in Hartigan’s poem asks herself whether the newly married woman would be up to the task:

Would she sew shirts of nettles
In the dead of midnight,
Issuing no complaint?

Not all fairy stories
Have happy endings. (1991, 29)

These doubts are dismissed with the statement that “[d]aughters are bred / to be obedient” (29) and this section of the poem ends with the daughter asking her mother to “smooth down” the “pure white sheets” (29) of the bed, in an image that reminds us the white clothes that cover the church altars where the sacrifice of Christ is renewed. Thus, the mother acts in a way as a powerless priestess who offers her daughter in sacrifice and encourages her to accept her role of sacrificial lamb: “Lie down / Lie down / Dear daughter, / On this your marriage bed” (30). In the last lines of this section we cannot hear the voice of the girl but her fear and uneasiness is present in the voice of the mother who tries to soothe and prepare her

for the sexual intercourse: “Listen / My dear / O listen / Sing roses / White and red” (30). These white and red roses symbolise the blood on the white sheets that will prove the virginity of the girl.

Once the woman has accepted her destiny she finds that she is following the path many other women have trodden before and she has to get used to the new situation. The first line of this fragment, which belongs to the section titled “Growth”, is part of a popular prayer which expresses the feeling of being in the constant presence of God, whose representative on earth is the patriarch’s authority.

In my rising up and my lying down
Where where is my resting place?
I have left my father’s house
And these lands are strange to me. (1991, 42)

4.4. Revising Eve

There has been an extensive revision of some classical myths, religious icons and traditional legends in the work of some Galician and Irish women writers. In chapter 3 we have already seen the reinterpretation of Medea’s tragedy in the poetry of Galician writer Luz Pozo Garza. In this section I will focus on the image of Eve, given the crucial influence Catholic religion has exerted both in Ireland and Galicia and because the myth of the Fall has conditioned images of womanhood and motherhood in the patriarchal ideologies of Western thought. Merlin Stone (1993) [1976] refers to the decisive power that “the myths that accompanied the religions that worship male deities had upon “[her] own image of what it meant to be born a female, another Eve, progenitress of [her] childhood faith” (5).

In *Beyond God the Father* (1985) [1973], Mary Daly observes that most people in modern societies declare not to take seriously the story of the Fall of Adam and Eve. Moreover, there have been some trends in modern theological thought that have either “removed the shell of myth while retaining some alleged

content” (1985, 44) or have tried to maintain the myth as such, not taking it literally but as a metaphor that represents the abstract concept of “a universal state of alienation” (45) of human beings. Against this idea of the erasure of the explicit “sexist theological imagery” (45), Daly’s contention is that the images of woman the myth has projected are still deeply rooted in modern consciousness and representations of woman as a temptress Eve are present everywhere in jokes, literature and mass media and, what is more important, the notion of dangerous female sexuality has informed the theorisations which are still at the basis of some laws, such as those related to abortion, “which incorporates punitive attitudes toward women’s sexual function” (45).

There have been revisions of the myth of the Fall by some Irish and Galician women writers which disown Adam’s appropriation of the creative power of woman and the subsequent position of man’s dominion over woman. There are also poems which try to subvert the image of Eve as temptress and empower her as representative of the ancient Great Mother, who denies the power of a male god and claims that she has been the agent of her own birth. Among the women writers who have emphasised this aspect, I have chosen Mary O’Donnell (1993), Marilar Aleixandre (2003), Marta Dacosta (1998) and Marica Campo (2007).

In *Cuerpo, mito y teoría feminista: re/visiones de Eva en autoras irlandesas contemporáneas* (1998), Luz Mar González Arias has studied how some contemporary Irish women poets have rescued some myths belonging to the oral Irish tradition “rico en diosas creadoras y paridoras” (68) that had been suppressed by the Christian monotheism of the English colonisers. They have also revised the myth of Eve, creating new images that defy the traditional version of the story written in the Bible.¹⁰

The poetic personae in Mary O’Donnell’s “The Rib” (2006, 32) [1993] and Marilar Aleixandre’s “lección de anatomía” (2003, 41) reject the myth of Eve’s birth from Adam’s rib and the idea implicit in this myth of the subordination of woman to men. This story is, as Barbara Walker states, a patriarchal appropriation of previous ancient myths about the creative power of the ribs. Drawing on the

work of Samuel Henry Hooke (1963), Walker affirms that this divine creative power has its origins in the Sumerian Goddess Nin-ti, who “made infants’ bones *in utero* from their mother’s ribs, which is why biblical writers thought that ribs possessed the magic of maternity” (Walker, 108). She goes a step further and affirms that in the Gnostic Gospels studied by Elaine Pagels (1979),¹¹ it was said that Adam “came into being from the virgin Earth, who was none other than Eve” (Walker 1995, 108).

According to Mary Daly, the greatest achievement of this myth was to serve as justification for the inferior situation of woman in society—since she has her origin in man—and her sexual oppression, because she is the cause of the Fall. Daly wonders at the fact that this story had been taken literally for thousands of years and affirms that “[h]umorless treatises on the subject of Eve’s peculiar birth and woeful sinfulness written by the indefatigable fans of Adam down through the millennia are their own best parodies” (Daly 1985, 46).

In O’Donnell’s poem the poetic persona of Eve complains about the attempts of man, who “has always shadowed [her]” (2006, 32) and, from a position of subordination since “he stands behind [her]”, “is imagining that he owns [her]” (2006, 32). Eve rebels against this myth as it has been told and she wonders “what gave them the idea” of her spawning from a rib. Luz Mar González Arias points out that Eve decides to tell the truth about her birth, which differs from that of the Bible, because she does not accept the fact that “su historia y el origen de su cuerpo hayan sido alterados y transformados en una versión que difiere significativamente de su verdad” (1998, 78). Eve states that she is the daughter “of wide skies, wheatfields / to the horizon” (O’Donnell, 32) and connects herself with all the elements of nature as the embodiment of what Erich Neumann calls the *Great Round*. In his analysis of the Archetypal Feminine through the old myths and religions related to the Great Mother, Neumann states that primordial ocean, earth and heaven, sky and underworld are contained in the elementary character of the Feminine, the Great Goddess as the Great Round, “which is and contains the universe” (Neumann 1972, 211). Besides this, Eve goes beyond abstract

conceptualisations of nature and inscribes her body in attunement with the effervescence of life: “my ecstasies in veins on leaves, / in teeming green-ness / and balls of midges, / furious with lust beneath apple trees” (O’Donnell 2006, 32). González Arias affirms that “[e]n esta naturaleza de la que Eva se siente parte queda inscrita la lujuria y el placer como algo natural, algo que, por otro lado, servirá para condenarla” (1998, 80). The poem ends with Eve claiming her uniqueness and independence of anyone’s body. As González Arias observes, she cannot be seen “como un apéndice de Adán, sino como un ser independiente y singular” (80).

Life itself spawned me,
not the wedge of bone,
I am as singular as he is,
and so alone”. (O’Donnell 2006, 32)

The same vindication of the independence and equal status for man and woman is present in Marilar Aleixandre’s “lección de anatomía” (2003, 41); although in this poem the poetic voice is not that of Eve but of a woman who firmly states her own identity, assures her lover that she does not come from anybody’s rib and is not to be blamed if he lacks one: “eu son eu / non veño da costela de ninguén / se encontras que che falta unha / a min que non me tomen a requesta” (41). Far from the passive attitude attributed to woman, she claims for a sexuality freely enjoyed and takes an active and uninhibited part in lovemaking, declaring that the only things she has stolen from her lover, in the heat of love, were his body’s juices and some curls. In the last section of the poem, the sexual relationship is described as a joyful fusion of bodies that are learning new uses for each of their limbs and there is no power or dominion of one of them upon the other.

In Marta Dacosta’s long poem *Setembro* (1998) we find images of Eve linked with the cyclical renewal of nature in which, the poetic voice describes her own birth from her mother and the birth of Eve from the mother earth, without any reference to Adam or God. These two births are inscribed in a genealogy of women from which male protagonists are excluded.

The poetic persona of the daughter describes her own birth placing it in September —a month that signals a moment of change in nature, a time of transition between the ripeness of summer, when the earth has already produced its fruits, and the wetness that advances the coming of autumn. The humidity of the weather suggests other kind of liquids, like the amniotic fluid and the blood that are present in childbirth: “Nai pariume á humidade de setembro / cunha marca de sangue / e un instante de luz” (17). Mother Earth participates in this childbirth through the personification of the sea, the great maternal womb from whose amniotic fluid all life was originated. The sea shouts over the rain sending residues of salt through it: “O mar atravesou un berro na distancia / sobre a chuvia que viña / en corpo de salitre” (Dacosta, 17). Erich Neumann, who has analysed the Archetypal Feminine through the old myths and religions related to the Great Mother, observes that primordial ocean, earth and heaven, sky and underworld, are contained in the elementary character of the Feminine, the Great Goddess as the Great Round, “which is and contains the universe” (1972, 211). For Neumann, despite the attempts of patriarchal religions to create an origin of mankind from a god of heaven, “nearly all the early and primitive documents trace the origin of the world and of man to the darkness, the Great Round, the goddess” (212). This Great Round is characterised by darkness as the symbol of the unconscious, but from this darkness light is also created:

Whether, as in countless myths, the source of all life is the primordial ocean or whether it is earth or heaven, these sources have one thing in common: *darkness*. It is this primordial darkness which bears the light as moon, stars, and sun, and almost everywhere these luminaries are looked upon as the offspring of the Nocturnal Mother. (Neumann 1972, 212)

In Marta Dacosta’s poem, the mark of blood the newly born bears is, as Teresa Seara observes in her introduction to the book, a reminder of the pains of labour and is a symbol of her inclusion in her family’s matrilineage while the “instant of light” expressed in the poem is a desire which will accompany the newly born for all her life, “mentres se integra nos ciclos que reñen dun xeito

constante e inmutable a vida do cosmos, nas secuencias que se veñen iterando desde a noite dos tempos” (Seara 1998, 9).

But this instant of light could also be interpreted as an appropriation of the myths related to the “ancient matriarchal mystery of the birth of the luminous son” (Neumann 1972, 312). This luminous child had different names —Horus, Osiris, Helios, Dionysus or Aeon— and has been present in Akkadian cultures, Egypt and Greece. It represents the rebirth of the light after the process of the fecundation of the maternal darkness by fire or light, the masculine principle which is also contained in the Great Round. Neumann affirms that the birth of this divine child stood at the centre of the matriarchal mysteries and there are evidences that it was celebrated in a temple dedicated to Kore, in Alexandria, on the day of the winter solstice (312), when “the moon is full and occupies the highest point in its cycle, the sun is at its nadir, and the constellation of Virgo rises in the east” (313). From this position of moon and sun in the sky, Neumann concludes that “in astral mythology the moon has an upper-world character and the sun an underworld character. The moon signifies life; the sun signifies death” (314). Thus, in these old matriarchal rituals of celebration of the birth of the divine son, the “new light” (314) means in fact the light of the new moon, not the patriarchal reelaboration of the myth as the birth of the sun-child, which is, according to Neumann “relatively late and abstract” (314).

After the mythical resonances present in her birth, it seems that the poetic persona of Marta Dacosta’s poem wants to insert herself into a particular domestic paradise through the memories of her home, next to which there was a plum tree whose unripe fruit her mother stole: “Había unha ameixeira ao pé da casa / árbore sempre verde que eu recordo, / e miña nai a roubar antes de tempo / aquel certo veludo que cegaba” (21). But this seemingly common tree is an ambivalent symbol since, contrary to what happens to real plum trees, this one was always green and the fact that the mother stole the fruit suggests that of Eve’s renewed attempts to defy the divine prohibition and acquire the knowledge that was denied to her. Merlin Stone affirms that a sacred tree —apple tree, sycamore or fig tree—was one

of the most outstanding symbols of the great female Goddess. The forbidden fruit, which according to the biblical story, was said to be the source of knowledge of good and evil, was clearly the “provider of sexual consciousness” (Stone 217). Eating the fruit gave Eve access to “the understanding of what ‘only the gods knew’ —the secret of sex— how to create life” (Stone, 217). This knowledge is represented in the next lines of the poem, which play with two different meanings of the word “lingua”, tongue and language: “Había unha ameixeira ao pé da casa / en que eu sen saber, souben da lingua, / aquela que tiñamos agachada, / aínda que sempre alí, ao pé da casa” (21). The tongue is a sensory organ able to experience sensuous pleasures and it is also the organ indispensable to speak. In this regard, the “lingua” that was hidden in the house concentrates in itself several layers of meaning because it represents, on the one hand, the double silence imposed on women because of their sex and as speakers of a marginalized language — Galician— that had been excluded from public discourse for centuries and, on the other, the negation of women’s sexuality.

In another section of the poem the poetic persona describes her attempts to break the doors and the walls locked by the silence imposed on women. For this task she needs the help of her mother and all the rage accumulated by generations of women:

A tentas vou errando contra os muros
e as portas no silencio clausuradas
son cómplices da usura e do desterro.
Preciso esa machada e o martelo,
preciso as túas mans, nai, sobre todo,
e esa rabia que está no noso herdo. (1998, 23)

The memories of the pains of labour not only of the mother but also of many other unknown women are transferred to the rainy and salty month of September, and this deep pain has left a mark “nas rodeiras dos labios” (25). We notice the ambivalence of the Galician word “labios”, which may refer at the same time to the labia through which the physical birth takes place and to the lips through which the speech comes out, though, in the case of women, it has been silenced.

Setembro leva aínda a dor que foi o parto,
os días de salitre baixo a chuvia do outono.
Unha muller e outras tantas que non sei
cunha dor tan profunda nas rodeiras dos labios. (1998, 25)

The little girl, lost in the darkness and silence of a night without stars, feels the burden of guilt all the female lineage of Eve has been charged with since the original sin: “Unha nena en silencio / esgota a súa culpa / na estirpe da femia mutilada” (31). The night without clouds, stars and wind may symbolise the gloomy atmosphere created around women by the powerful influence of a religion that blamed all women for the loss of paradise. Merlin Stone points out that when she was a young girl she was taught that, as a penalty for Eve’s sin, she was condemned to bear her children in pain and, far from being admired or respected for her courage, “[she] was to experience this pain with guilt, the sin of [her] wrongdoing laid heavily upon [her] as punishment for simply being a woman, a daughter of Eve” (Stone 1993, 5-6).

Against this obscurity, the poetic persona in Dacosta’s poem claims for an image of woman which integrates maternal love —considered to be the purest feeling a woman can experience— within the reality of a body which has been the site of patriarchal repression and violence:

Muller ou ser de lama
e colo transparente, o beixo
na inocencia.
Distancia de argazo a do teu sexo
parido de dor, sempre
ferido. (1998, 33)

The poetic persona rewrites the myth of the creation of Eve from the earth, without any intervention of God, giving her the power of being the agent of her own birth. As Teresa Seara points out: “o día en que Eva, a primeira nai, asistiu a tempo ó seu propio nacemento, a ese desprenderse da terra sen présas para inundarse de vento e luz” (1998, 11). In this description of Eve’s birth we find some of the elements that, according to Neumann, are contained in the Great Round: the wind, the water, the earth and the light. She raises herself from the

earth helped by the wind as Aphrodite rose from the foam of the sea helped by the breath of the western wind, Zephyros; she is bathed in light like the other luminous children of the Great Mothers and contains in herself the water, source of life, which will be, in Teresa Seara's words, "o xerme das súas fillas, netas e bisnetas" (1998, 11):

Eva naceu despacio
sen darlle presa ao vento,
cos ollos levantados á luz que a inundaba.
Chegou moi de vagar, sen apurar camiños,
sen derramar a auga que en corpo transportaba.
Eva chegou a tempo,
Eva chegou despacio,
sentindo a terra negra
desprenderse da carne. (1998, 35)

This Eve arrives slowly "contra esa luz do día / con corpo de muller, / lastrado de pasados" (39). Her body carries the burden of all the negative connotations that have been assigned to her by Jewish-Christian religions and this burden obliges her to move slowly toward the light as a metaphor of the difficulty for women to get rid of the weight of centuries of biased interpretations of myths that have been used to justify the situation of dependence and oppression of women: "Tan a modo / con ese peso enorme, / tan a modo / sobre a tona do tempo" (39).

In another section of the poem, the poetic persona remembers again her birth, the feeling of loss when her body is expelled from the maternal womb "ao centro do océano, ás augas / dunha mañá de grises e de chuvía" (45). But this separation, that she experiences as a kind of death, precedes the warmth of her reunion with the nurturing mother: "Deixou saír a vida do meu corpo / para volver despois, tras longos días / chea de leite morno e de fartura" (45).

In her travel along the construction of her own identity "nesta brevidade, nesta loita diaria / contra min e contra o mundo" (Dacosta, 53), the poetic persona links her life with those of her ancestresses, who "viviron e vivirán esa tarefa común e ancestral de verse obrigadas a construírse como persoas de xénero feminino" (Seara 1998, 11). She feels indebted with them for all the love and care

they invested in their families and is well aware of the difficulty of acknowledging their toil since the short span of an individual life is not long enough to dismantle the silence of centuries: “Como parar este momento / e facer inmenso este traxecto / de amor e de memoria” (Dacosta, 53).

A different revision of the myth of the Fall can be found in Marica Campo’s poem “12. Eva” (*Sextinario: trinta e seis + tres* 2007, 51-52) which was published in a moment when, in Spanish society, there was a growing awareness of the violence that was being exerted against women, which resulted in high figures of women killed by their partners. This gendered violence was seen as the male reaction against the rebellion of women who did not accept the position of submission to the male anymore and it affected not only women but also their children.

In Marica Campo’s poem the poetic persona goes further in her rejection of Eve’s origin as she reverses the myth of the creation and affirms that Adam was born of Eve. In doing so, she is in line with the feminist revisions of patriarchal interpretations of the myth which had previously appropriated older versions of the creation of the first man and woman. Barbara Walker points out that “the biblical idea was a reversal of older myths in which the Goddess brought forth a primal male ancestor and then made him her mate—the ubiquitous, archetypal divine-incest relationship traceable in every mythology” (Walker 1983, 289). Drawing on the work of Samuel H. Hooke (1963), Walker also asserts that, “[Adam] didn’t produce the Mother of All Living from his rib; in earlier Mesopotamian stories, he was produced from hers” (289).

The poetic persona in Marica Campo’s poem does not want to take advantage of her power of giving birth, which seems to have been “the distinguishing mark of the earliest gods” (Walker, 106). She affirms that Eve did not claim for her a status of superiority over Adam but just wanted to share gains with him on equal terms. The reversal of the myth is paralleled with the reversal of the name. Thus, Eva becomes Ave, a symbol of the freedom this new being has conquered. This Eve can get rid of the chains that have tied her with the burden of

sin and have justified the oppression and submission to men. She can transform herself into an Ave, so that she can fly “e mirar desde arriba, ollos de ave. / Recoñecerse igual, non máis que o home, / nin menos, porque Adán naceu de Eva.” (Campo 2007, 52). This transformation is not an easy one and it has been achieved after much blood has been shed. Long years of rebellion against male dominion have been needed before Eve was able to spread her wings and start her own flight. It has entailed breaking the old mirror, which projected that false image that man had constructed for her, and buying a different one in which she can reflect her own new image: “A nova imaxe ten prezo de sangue, / quebrou aquel espello que era o home” (51). This transformation has not been easily accepted by man, who tried to stop woman’s flight “disparándolle as ás tal como ao voo (51). Hence, it does not suffice for woman to change from a situation of dependence on man into an independent human being, able to create her own identity. It also requires the birth of a new image of man and for this rebirth woman’s help is needed:

Deixar de ser costela por ser ave,
axudar a nacer un outro home,
acordar entre os dous o son do voo,
trocar moral de escrava en ar de dona,
tirar as vestiduras que fan Eva,
igual que trasfundir un novo sangue. (2007, 51)

There is a note of hope that underlies the last lines of the poem. The confidence in the capability of woman to fly away from her submission, despite all the violence and the blood that tried to cut her wings and, whether the man wants to join her or not, her flight cannot be stopped: “Ela soubo voar, fixo do home / un espello quebrado e houbo sangue. / Xurdiu outra muller de nome Ave, / anda a voar de seu, agora é dona” (52).

4.5. Fear, Loss and Recovery: Demeter and Persephone

In “The Paradox of Separation and Dependence: A Mother’s Story” (2009) Jenny Jones underlines the fact that “the fixing of female identity to that of a

mother not only constricts and constrains her, but also leaves a mother vulnerable as she ages” (104). Moreover, the patriarchal stereotype of the nurturing, self-sacrificing and asexual mother has been centred on the image of the mother of young children while the adult mother of older children “is rarely recognized or acknowledged. When it is, it is from a marginalised position” (104). It has been widely stated in dominant narratives concerning motherhood —mainly in psychoanalytic theorising— that the good mother must untie the bonds with her children and withdraw to the background in order to allow them to enter the public sphere, the realm of the father. Due to this marginal position in society the voices of the mothers have been silenced and officially deprived of any kind of authority “when the process of mothering older children requires change in the relationship” (107). This lack of agency and authority to deal with the problems of adolescents and older children leaves all the members that are party to the relationship vulnerable.

In this section we will find alternative images of mothers who do not accept this situation of vulnerability passively. They try to play an active role as mothers who do not want to vanish from the scene and seek to maintain the bonds with their adult daughters, although their relationship is not free from contradictory feelings. Thus, we find a mixture of jealousy and protectiveness in Eithne Strong’s poem “Mother and Daughter” (1993b) [1961] and in Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin’s “The Girl Who Married a Reindeer” (2001). We will also see how the Demeter-Persephone myth allows for a representation of the mother-daughter relationship in the context of current issues which affect their lives. In the poems of Mary O’Malley, Eavan Boland and Luz Pozo Garza we find the voices of mothers who relate to the myth to represent the problems both they and their adult daughters have to deal with. Hence, sexuality, contraception, abortion, ageing or emigration can be given voice through these poetic personas. We will also see how the drama of white slavery is expressed through the voice of Persephone in Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill’s poem “Persephone Suffering from Sad” and another vision of

modern emigration can be found in Luz Pozo Garza's poem "As arpas de Iwerddon" (2004, 656-657).

Eithne Strong represents in "Mother and Daughter" (1993b, 4-5), the image of a strong mother who describes herself as an "old witch", a "Matriarch" who watches the "beautiful gazelle" her adolescent daughter has become. The feelings of this mother are ambivalent, since the desire to protect the daughter from the beasts that are stalking in the jungle is mixed with the jealousy and hate of the girl's blooming youth.

In the first stanza the poetic persona of the mother addresses her daughter and remembers with acute nostalgia the time of close intimacy between them and the joy and pride she felt for her when she was a little baby: "You that were / my babe / first mother-joy of mine / so proud I" (1993b, 4). But now that the daughter is growing she is aware of the risk for such a "beautiful gazelle" of becoming a prey of the wild male beasts which are stalking in the jungle. So she has transformed herself into an old witch who watches both the gazelle and the tiger. She expresses clearly the mixed feelings of fear, protectiveness and hate which move her watch: her fear of the dangers that are awaiting the young girl and the need to protect her from the male's wild desire, but, at the same time, there is also hate in her words because she can no longer be the object of this desire: "I am the old witch. / The old witch watches / the beautiful gazelle / with hideous eyes of hate" (1993b, 4).

In the next stanza there is a description of "[t]he bulls flourish in their maleness / in the morning air / and snuff for the young odour" (1993b, 4). The power of sexual instinct represented by the bull in rut, snuffing for the female odour, awakes in both the witch and the tiger "the smell of blood" (4). This powerful mother takes us back to one of the archetypes of the Great Goddess described by Neumann: a "Lady of the Beasts" (272) who not only dominates wild and tame beasts but can adopt animal form, as the mother of the poem does, affirming once again that she is an old witch "and a tiger too / and godless blood-rite pound in [her]" (Strong 1993b, 4). Neumann points out that in contrast to

Demeter, who brought agriculture, culture and manners to the world, the goddess Artemis was characterised as a goddess closely related to the savage instinct-governed side of nature, to “the free wild life in which as huntress she dominates the animal world” (1974, 276). According to Neumann, this characterisation “is a symbolic projection of her role as ruler over the unconscious powers that still take on animal form in our dreams —the “outside” of the world of culture and consciousness” (1974, 276-277). The voice of the mother in this poem expresses the power of her instinctual drives, but far from being unconscious of them, she acknowledges that they are part of maternal love: “With sad self-knowing / aye, thus can a mother be” (Strong 1993b, 5).

In the last section of the poem, the mother accepts the inevitability of the cycle of life in which both mother and girl are immersed, with the added weight of the old traditions that have constructed mother’s roles and identities: “Old swamp of ages / from which we arose / the babe and I” (5) and there is a tone of hope in the last lines of the poem with the mother stating that she can “hear the singing stars” (5) for her and her “gazelle”.

In Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin’s “The Girl Who Married a Reindeer” (2001, 22-24) we find, enwrapped in a fairy tale related to Irish legends,¹² the struggle of the daughter to achieve independence and maturity and the tricks of the queen mother who uses magic to recover the girl at the cost of destroying her daughter’s happiness. The poetic persona tells the story of a girl who left her home, “turned right and walked as far as the mountains” (22). But on her way she finds a blackthorn ripe with sloes. In this poem, instead of the pomegranates present in the Demeter-Persephone’s myth, the fruit that symbolises sexual desire is the sloe. The girl, ready to experience her sexuality, was gathering the sloes when a reindeer “halted before her and claimed the sloes” (22). Shape shifting is a common feature of a lot of fairy tales. In this poem, the reindeer embodies the character of a man who has been transformed into an animal by a magic spell and has to be saved from it by the love of an innocent girl. The woman’s acceptance of the reindeer’s claim of the sloes means her consent to experience sexuality. In addition to sloes,

there are several images that suggest the girl's acceptance of the sexual relationship, such as "[t]he sloes piled up into the hollows of her skirt" (22), and her riding on the reindeer's back "[h]olding her rolled-up skirt" (22). Most important is the fact that the girl is not afraid of running away with him and grasps firmly the phallic "wide antlers" of the beast.

Thirteen months later she comes back home to attend her sister's wedding and she shows evidence of having given birth to a child, because "Her breasts were large from suckling, / There was salt in her hair". The family receives her warmly but they pour a powder in the girl's drink which will cast a spell on her so that she forgets her child, because, as the queen says: "How could let her go back to stay / In that cold house with that strange beast?" (22). The warmth of the female group is a trap that prevents the woman from going back to the man she has freely chosen. With the excuse of protecting her daughter from the hardness of marriage, the mother puts an end to the young woman's attempt to live an independent life. The mother's excessive protectiveness destroys the daughter's fulfillment, since she is separated from her husband and child and is reduced to the function of nursing the old woman and her grandchildren. Only when the witch dies the spell can be undone and the woman can recognise her son in the "child from the north" (23) who stands at her gate accompanied by a reindeer. The latter recovers his human shape before he dies. "Naked in death his body was a man's, / Young, with an old man's face and scored with grief" (23). The reunion of mother and son is "[l]ike the meeting of two tidal roads, two oceans" (24), but it is only possible after the mother-daughter bond has been cut.

The myth which best reflects the mother-daughter relationship as well as the cyclical renewal of nature is the Greco-Roman myth of Demeter and Persephone—or Ceres and Proserpine. Jungian feminists such as Christine Downing (1994) and Cathie Carlson (1997) encouraged women to enter the myth and to relate it to themselves and a number of Irish women poets did so. I will focus next on Mary O'Malley's poems "Ceres in Caherlistrane" (2003) [2001], "The Wineapple" and "Prescribing the Pill", (2003) [2002] as well as on Eavan Boland's "The

Pomegranate” (1995) [1994], “Ceres Looks at the Morning” (1998, 44) and “Daughter” (1998, 42-43).

In *The Greek Myths* (1981) [1955] Robert Graves gives us an image of Demeter as a strong mother who, after her daughter Kore had been kidnapped by Hades, king of the underworld, did not accept resignedly the agreement between Hades and Zeus on the marriage of Kore. Against this patriarchal use of the maiden as an object of interchange, Demeter used all her power to force Zeus to untie the pact; she abandoned the Olympus and cursed the land so that nothing would grow from the earth till Kore returned to her. She succeeded in frightening Zeus, who sent Hermes with a message to Hades telling him that he had to restore Kore. Demeter’s happiness was marred when she knew that Kore had eaten the seeds of the pomegranate which would force her to return to the underworld. Despite her dejection a compromise was reached and the curse on the land was removed: Kore should spend three months of the year in Hades’s company, as Queen of the Underworld, with the title of Persephone, and the remaining nine in Demeter’s. Adrienne Rich underlines the importance of this reunion of Demeter and Persephone which goes beyond the restoration of the fruitfulness of the land and affirms that “the Homeric hymn tells us that Demeter’s supreme gift to humanity, in her rejoicing at Korê’s return, was not the return of vegetation but the founding of the sacred ceremonies at Eleusis” (1992, 137-138).

This classical Myth represents the whole cycle of mother-daughter relationship in connection with the cycle of earth fertility. It is at the basis of the Eleusinian rites, which constituted, according to Homer, the most important religion known in ancient Greek culture, whose rituals were thought to have been established by Ceres herself. This religion represented a kind of passion — loss/death, descent to the underworld, recovering/resurrection— experienced by female goddesses. Erich Neumann (1972) goes beyond the idea a fertility cult and stresses the spiritual transformation that must have been at the basis of the Eleusinian mysteries, in which the essential motif, as in all matriarchal mysteries, is the reunion of mother and daughter. Psychologically, this restoration is

necessary for the healing of the mother-daughter relationship after the disruption caused by Persephone's abduction and marriage:

[T]he nuclear situation of the matriarchal group, the primordial relation of daughter to mother, which has been endangered by the incursion of the male into the female world, is renewed and secured in the mystery. And here Kore's sojourn in Hades signifies not only rape by the male—for originally Kore-Persephone was herself Queen of the Underworld—but fascination by the male earth aspect, that is to say, by sexuality. (Neumann 1972, 308)

In Mary O'Malley "The Wineapple" (2003, 64- 66) [2002], we find the poetic voice of a mother addressing her adult daughter who is moving out from home. She thinks that it is time for them to talk about the story of Demeter and Persephone. But their talk reflects a need for the mother to heal the wounds caused by what happened when the daughter was a little girl since, behind the myth, there is the real story of a "childhood robbed" (65), of sexual abuse of the child whom her "working mother" (64) was not able to protect. Sexual abuse was for long hidden from the Irish public sphere, but little by little is being uncovered and it is possible to talk about it today.

You'll remember most of it from when
You were small: the working mother,
a strange lustre on the leaves the child gathers,
the ground opening, the man.
He shaded his eyes from the light, not the deed —
nowadays there is nothing that cannot be told. (2003, 64)

The poetic persona admits that she is telling the story from "the mother's point of view" and that they might differ completely on details "as daughters and their mothers do" (65), but they must agree on the first word the girl pronounced, which was "flower". The flower the little girl snatched from the neighbour's bougainvillea symbolises the innocence that was ripped off from her. The scene of the girl in the garden gathering flowers reproduces that described in the Homeric "Hymn to Demeter", which presents Persephone among the flowers, herself "a radiant flower", at the mercy of two male gods who had agreed on a compromise of marriage:

Apart from Demeter, lady of the golden sword and glorious fruits, she was playing with the deep-bosomed daughters of Oceanus and gathering flowers over a soft meadow, roses and crocuses and beautiful violets, irises also and hyacinths and the narcissus, which Earth made to grow at the will of Zeus and to please the Host of Many, to be a snare for the bloom-like girl—a marvellous, radiant flower. (Hugh and Evelyn White, 1924, II 4-18)

The blissfulness of the scene was interrupted when the earth opened, and the lord of the underworld “with his immortal horses sprang out upon her” (White 1924 II 4-18). In O’Malley’s poem the reference to the neighbour’s bougainvillea hints at the fact that most of sexual abuses of children happen at home or in the houses of their parent’s friends and relatives. In “Rape: Myth and Reality” (1993), Madeleine Leonard affirms that one of the myths concerning rape is that “it is an act between strangers, carried out in a dark, deserted place” (108) while research done by the Belfast rape Crisis Centre (1991) demonstrated that “71.5 per cent of women were raped by someone they knew” (Leonard, 109).

In the third stanza of “The Wineapple” the mother recognises that the mother’s point of view is “never as simple as it seems” (O’Malley, 65). Looking retrospectively, it is easier for her to forget the individual and social responsibility over sexual violence against women and to think that everything was determined by fate, “because otherwise madness lies crouched in every night” and both mothers and daughters know what means to have been to hell: “There are daughters emerging from the ground / and mothers entering” (65). Leonard points out that far from being an isolated act of violence carried out by strangers, rape is “a mechanism of social control to keep women in their place” (107) and that rape and the fear of it “produce and reproduce patriarchal social structures sustaining female subordination to males” (107).

Coming back to the myth, the poetic voice asserts the difficulty for Demeter to fight against the “god’s weaponry” and her determination to pay “any ransom”. Thus, “[a] sullen bargain was made” (O’Malley, 65). Mothers had to agree a lot of times with their daughter’s marriage to the men who had raped them because it

was the only way out to avoid public shame, mainly when they got pregnant as a result of this.

However, the poetic persona does not accept the role of transmitter of this ideology of oppression and warns her daughter about gods and mothers because they “fight dirty” in their attempt to control women’s lives. She recognises that marriage is a tempting offer since it has been presented in patriarchal narratives as the only possible way for women to achieve personal and social fulfillment, while the harder aspects of it have been hidden:

The gods fight dirty. So do mothers — they claw
time back line by line. The legend is told well. It sketches
over the uglier close-ups. The story is hard enough
but not uncommon. He offered marriage and girls are tough. (2003, 65)

In her admitting that mothers also fight dirty, the poetic persona hints at the role mothers have often played as agents that collaborated in the perpetuation of patriarchal models of oppression, but she wants her daughter to follow a third way. On telling her to remember the seeds of the wineapple in Persephone’s teeth she is encouraging her daughter to take control over her own sexuality. She advises her to separate wine from apple, “juice from pulp” (65), which means perhaps to separate sexuality from pregnancy and compulsory marriage, so that she will not have to look for the protection of a mother or a husband. She advises her to choose none of the two houses of her life and “rent a temporary room in the sun” (65), so that she can discover the world by herself. In this case, maternal love prevails over fear and possessiveness, although the mother admits that there is “hardly hope” (65) that her daughter will follow her advice.

Remember the seeds in her teeth, how she had to stay
six months of every year with her kidnapper — you won’t.
But on his cusp look carefully at the two houses of your life.
Choose neither. Wine. Apple. There’s enough mapped out.
Separate juice from pulp. Rent a temporary room in the sun
and try to figure out what keeps so many stars from falling. (2003, 65)

In the last stanza the mother acknowledges her incapability to modify her daughter’s future and affirms that the only thing she can give her, instead of “hard

words piercing the silence” (66) “is a splash of holy water, good perfume” (66), relying only on the power of these religious and mundane rituals. In the last lines the cyclical character of this relationship is stressed by the poetic persona saying that: “[t]his is the oldest story of all. / Open-ended. Home, the point of departure and return” (66). And among the jumble of clothes about to be packed, the mother selects the “gold shoes [they] chose together” (66). The shoes are the symbol of the mother’s and daughter’s commonality of feeling because they represent the mother’s encouragement and the daughter’s excitement about the new path she is going to take: “for the heels and thongs / are impatient to be off. These are the bookends of [her] song” (66).

Marianne Hirsch observes that in the Homeric “Hymn to Demeter” “the cyclic solution that mother and daughter work out together in response to the patriarchal reality in which they live resolves this plot in a way that is quite unique” (1989, 35). Persephone does not break the bond with her mother, to whom she returns for half of the year, nor renounces to her allegiance with her husband. But the poetic persona in “The Wineapple” suggests that a different solution is possible if the daughter follows her advice of renting “a temporary room in the sun” (O’Malley, 65).

In “Prescribing the Pill” (O’Malley 2003, 66) [2002], the issue of contraception is clear from the title, as well as abortion as a risky way out of undesired pregnancies. Although this poem does not relate directly to the Demeter-Persephone myth, we find again the poetic persona of an adult woman who addresses somebody, presumably her daughter, and warns her against idealised images of motherhood which hide the darker aspects of real mothers’ lives, entrapped between the allegiance of the state’s ideology with the religious values of the Catholic Church and the strain that too many children put on their lives. Contraception and abortion are considered sins by the Catholic Church whose doctrine of the natural law pervaded the Constitution of 1937, as we have already observed in the “Introduction” to this dissertation. In “Moral obligation of the state or a woman’s right to privacy?” Dorota Gozdecka points out that:

In accordance with the natural law doctrine, the legal order of Ireland for many years considered practices found to be morally sinful by the Roman Catholic Church to be illegal. The prime examples are divorce, contraception, gay relationships and abortion. Abortion has always been illegal yet the explicit ban on abortion was introduced to the Irish constitution in 1983 by the Eighth Amendment, which was incorporated in the text of the constitution as article 40.3.3. (Gozdecka 2009, 90)

In the first stanza of “Prescribing the Pill”, the poetic persona orders the daughter to “[s]ay goodbye to the fixed idea: / a mother holding a child / looking at it in the appraising way / you would a treasured ring, / an emerald or a wedding band / with becoming pride, muted joy” (66). The second stanza insists on the need of saying goodbye to that idea, but this time the images she uses do not refer to beautiful things that are symbols of the happiness for ever after promised in fairy tales. The image of “a straining dog’s leash / a primed shotgun” (66) hints at the potential danger contained in sexual relationships. The ambivalence of the word “shotgun”, which suggests at the same time the lethal power of a gun and a “shotgun wedding”, that is to say, a marriage enforced by the bride’s pregnancy, is a clear warning about the consequences of undesired pregnancies. The difficulty of abortion is hinted at in the last lines of this stanza: “People always say ‘Let it go’ / as if it were that simple / but there is recoil” (66).

In the third and fourth stanzas the poetic persona summarises the real life of this supposedly happy mother and how all the things she enjoyed belong to the past while her present is continually threatened by the danger hidden in the act of making love.

This mother has no choice.
All her life she has loved the sea, a man, hills.
Now this, the serpent coiled in her ovary.
Its black lidless eyes look out through hers
every time she makes love
and there will be always more of them. (2003, 66)

Despite this, she feels that she should feel lucky because “[s]he knows she has been blessed” with a man’s love and she is a loving mother of all her children, except this last one. The poetic persona puts the blame of this on the idealised

images of motherhood: “It is the idea’s fault / and she has clutched this idea close — / see how her eyes guard it” (66). The poem ends with the woman, who is “due to be churched”, accepting the ritual of purification established by Jewish law and copied by the Catholic Church in the ceremony that repeats the presentation of Jesus by Mary in the temple that is commemorated at Candlemas. According to the Mosaic law a woman who has given birth was considered unclean and was excluded from sanctuary for forty days if the child born was a male and eighty if the newborn was female.¹³ This distinction on the length of the period of exclusion shows clearly that the dirtiness caused by the birth of the female child doubled that of the male, and on the whole, it is a consequence of the fear and repulsion the male priests who wrote these rules felt about women’s sexuality and creative powers.

The Catholic Church tried to disengage this ritual from its sense of purification by showing it as an acceptance of the mother and her newly born into the church and as a remembrance of that of the Virgin Mary. However, the fact is that the period of forty days of exclusion remained and the child was admitted into the temple by the ritual of baptism, in which the mother could hardly ever participate, because, until the 1970s, it used to be celebrated during the first weeks of the infant’s life and she was still in her period of exclusion.

She’s due to be churched.
The baby knows nothing of this
But all her life a hunger for cobalt blue
Will course through her belly like a rip-tide. (2003, 67)

In Mary O’ Malley’s poem “Ceres in Caherlistrane” (2003, 59) [2001], the Demeter-Persephone story can be read against the backdrop of Irish women’s emigration.¹⁴ The title of the poem situates Ceres in the rural landscape of Caherlistrane —county Galway—, a place full of remains of pre-Christian settlements that prove the existence of an ancient culture representative of the true spirit of Mother Ireland. In opposition to this, the underworld Persephone has descended into is set in the urban landscape of New York at night, with the atmosphere of night clubs and dirty subway stations: “Somewhere near forty-

second street. / A girl, copper-haired, sings for a hawk-eyed-man” (59). The song of the girl is the link that connects her with the past of the motherland: “This is the voice of Ireland, of what we were” (59). The girl’s descent into the underworld of the subway station is accompanied by the echoes of voices that come out of the tunnel’s mouth. As in a nightmare the girl hears cries of love and death that try to attract her attention to the invisible presence of the Irish immigrants who worked like slaves and died in the railroad and canal projects of which she knows nothing: “She has no idea of these underriver walls / are shored up with Irish bones, black men’s bodies” (59).

She thinks all the buskers in New York are down
here tonight like cats. She hears them – a keen,
a skein of blues. They speed her passage. She hums,
picking up the echoes in her river-run. (2003, 59)

The last stanzas set the scene again in Galway where the girl’s “stooked hair ripens that Summer” like the sheaves of grain which represent the fruitfulness of nature and are the attributes of both Demeter and Persephone. They meet again until Fall comes, and with it Hallowe’en, when “there are wineapples” whose seed “will keep the cleft between this world / and the next open” (59). The idyllic landscape and the happiness of the reunion of mother and daughter will not prevent the girl’s desire to enjoy sexuality and experience a mature life even if that means to risk the dangers of the underworld. The poetic persona hopes that the “all souls’ chorus” will counteract the attraction Persephone might feel by “certain songs that rise from a cold source” (59). Songs in which “brandy and honey notes replace spring water” (59). The purity of the idealised life of rural Ireland will be substituted by the reality of the city life.

Erich Neumann, who has underlined the transformative aspect of the Eleusinian rites, observes that both Demeter and Kore are represented as enthroned goddesses in some reliefs from the V century BC found at Eleusis and Pharsalus, Greece. According to Neumann they “appear as the twofold aspect of the mother-daughter unity” (1972, 307). In the stone relief found at Eleusis “virgin and mother

stand to one another as flower and fruit, and essentially belong together in their transformation from one to the other” (307).

However, this transformation of the daughter into Demeter and the subsequent renewal of the mother into the Maiden Kore are not possible for real mothers and daughters for whom the process of growing, reaching maturity and ageing is irreversible. And this is one of the remarkable aspects of Eavan Boland’s use of this myth. In “‘Words We Can Grow Old and Die In’: Earth Mother and Ageing Mother in Eavan Boland’s Poetry” (2006), Veronica House, places these poems in the context of Boland’s “growing awareness of the absence of ageing women in poetry and mythology” (106). The archetypal qualities in the Ceres/Persephone myth¹⁵ relate to Boland’s experience and make the mother-daughter relationship relevant and present in her poetry. Boland cannot identify completely with Ceres since mortal mothers do not have the possibility of becoming fertile again, but she can be “a mother grieving the loss of her daughter, Persephone. Boland can enter the myth through personal experience that links her to Ceres” (House, 113). Moreover, there are cyclical aspects of the myth that remain true since mothers become irremediably older as their daughters reach maturity and, in some cases, become mothers themselves. In “The Poetics of Motherhood in Contemporary Irish Women’s Verse” (2009), Laura Lojo points out that Eavan Boland’s use of this myth “is particularly pertinent for an analysis of the mother-daughter relationship, since it encompasses the dynamics of closeness and separation inherent to mothering” (2009, 133).

Boland’s poem “The Pomegranate” (1995, 184-185) [1994] allows for a multiplicity of readings from different points of view. Laura Lojo affirms that, in this poem, “Boland explores further her personal attachment to the myth, which her poetic voice enters and assimilates as part of a natural, unavoidable fate” (2009, 134). Veronica House emphasises the will of the poetic persona “to place herself in time” (115) and she points out that Boland’s identification with both Demeter and Persephone “seems to place her more fully in the human world” (115). The myth has also been analysed by Pilar Villar-Argaiz, who stresses the

point of view of the child exiled in a foreign country and relates this with the author's experience of living in London, when she was a little girl and her Irish accent labelled her as a foreigner.

In "The Pomegranate" The poetic persona acknowledges, from the beginning, that this is "the only legend [she has] ever loved" (184). She also affirms: "And the best thing about the legends is / I can enter it anywhere. And have" (184). Thus, she was first Persephone, lost in an unknown city "[a]s a child in exile in /a city of fogs and strange consonants" (184), and she can identify herself with the sense of estrangement the girl may experience in a country, a city and a language whose different accent exposed her foreign origin. Later, she is Ceres, looking for her daughter at night, the time when all dangers are at play, especially the risks related to sexuality: "I walked out in a summer twilight / searching for my daughter at bed-time. / When she came running I was ready / to make any bargain to keep her" (184). However, in the middle of the blooming nature that frame the mother-girl reunion, Ceres is aware that this is a transitory situation since the process of ageing cannot be deferred and she knows that winter is awaiting "[o]n every tree on that road. / Was inescapable for each one we passed. / And for [her]" (184).

The next section of the poem shows a very human mother in winter time watching her adolescent child asleep with her "teen magazines", "her can of Coke" and "her plate of uncut fruit" (184). The domesticity of the scene is broken when the mother remembers the myth: "The pomegranate! How did I forget it?" (184). She thinks that she could have warned her daughter about the story but admits that "the child can be hungry" (184) and she cannot prevent her from growing up and taking her own decisions, like eating the seeds of the pomegranate, which according to Neumann, symbolises the woman's womb and its red seeds the woman's fertility. The poetic persona places herself again in the suburbs of a city with "cars and cable television" (185). These elements as well as those in the girl's room quoted above, place this mother in the real world not in the realm of fantasy. She declares that this is "another world", although she asks herself whether a

mother can give her daughter anything better than those “beautiful rifts in time” (185). The daughter will taste the pomegranate, she might become a mother herself or not and, for her, the cycle will start again, but not for the poetic voice of the mother who accepts that the pain of separation will be compensated by the joy of seeing her daughter reach maturity:

If I defer the grief I will diminish the gift.
The legend will be hers as well as mine.
She will enter it. As I have.
She will wake up. She will hold
the papery flushed skin in her hand.
And to her lips. I will say nothing. (1995, 185)

In Eavan Boland’s “Daughter” and “Ceres Looks at the Morning” (*The Lost Land* 1998), we find an ageing Ceres who is aware of the declining of her life and misses her daughter, whose life is reaching its peak. In “Daughter” (1998, 42-43) there is a contrast between the promise of the renewal of nature and the consciousness of the mother of her ageing body, a topic that has not been represented in Irish poetry, as House remarks: “Here, Boland is no fertile earth. She is a middle-aged, menopausal mother dealing with a topic not talked about in Irish poetry — the mother who can no longer give birth” (117). The poetic persona has been listening to “the sound of chain-saws” (42) which have cut down her poplar tree. The promise of renewal of nature will not affect the old tree, whose death is premonitory of what awaits the poetic persona, who feels the decay of her body: “In dark spring dawns / when I could hardly raise / my head from the pillow” (42). She remembers that her first child was conceived at the edge of spring, but it could not be possible for her to have a child if she wanted one: “Except through memory. / Which is the ghost of the body. / Or myth. / Which is the ghost of meaning” (1998, 42). Veronica House observes that Boland revises this myth to contradict the association of women with the “eternally fertile Earth Mother” (117) and to present an image of Ceres who is “fully human, aware of her ageing body and of the necessity of her daughter’s growth away from her” (117).

In “Ceres Looks at the Morning” (1998, 44), the poetic voice of Ceres describes how she wakes slowly in the morning feeling that her body “is a twilight: Solid. Cold / At the edge of a larger darkness” (44). This fading away of the light and the coldness she experiences in her body, which anticipates the darkness and cold of death, contrasts with what is happening outside the window, where “a summer day is beginning. Apple trees / appear one by one. Light is pouring / into the promise of fruit” (44). The apple trees bathed in light appear again as symbols associated to sexuality, a sexual ripeness that is outside Ceres’ reach but is ready for Persephone.

The poetic persona addresses the morning asking it to look at her “as a daughter would / with that love and curiosity —/ as to what she came from. / And what she will become” (44). Since light and darkness are two sides of a cyclical process, and so are birth and death, youth and old age, the mother wants her daughter to look at her as a mirror that reflects at the same time Persephone’s origins, the maternal womb she comes from, and her future, the ageing woman she herself will become.

According to Erich Neumann, beyond the finding of Kore by Demeter and the restoration of the fruitfulness to the earth, “the true mystery, through which the primordial situation is restored on a new plane, is this: the daughter becomes identical with the mother; she becomes a mother and is so transformed into Demeter” (308-309). However, in these poems of Eavan Boland, there is no possibility of renewal for Ceres as well as for actual mothers for whom the process of ageing has no reversal.

In Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill’s poem “Persephone Suffering from Sad” (1999, 57), we find the poetic persona of Persephone who asks her mother not to call the police to look for her and tries to calm down the mother explaining why she abandoned her home to run away “with that sexy guy / in his wow of an BMW” (57). Hidden behind the excitement of the girl, who has been promised a wonderful future, we can forebode from the beginning her descent to the underworld of white slavery, a highly topical issue which is one of the most

profitable business of our time. The girl admits that she “was out of line” and “over the top” when she accepted the ride and she could not resist his persuasive chat and the excitement of travelling in a car “so jet-propelled with revs / the engine soared with wings” (57). The naivety of the girl is evident in her acceptance of all the wonderful projects the man has planned for her, without any kind of suspicion about the booked holiday “no travel agent runs”, nor the kind of clothes he is going to buy her. Only at the end of the second stanza she observes the darkness of the place where he had placed her:

He said he would buy me velvet gowns
and satin underthings,
and his credit's fine. He leaves
me space, though I'd have to say
there's not much light in the place. (1999, 57)

In the last lines the young woman seems to be still unaware of the “title deeds” she has signed and continues listing all the promises the man has made and the presents he has given her, but she complains about the thinness of the menu: “I’ve just been served a pomegranate: / it’s crimson, dripping with seeds — / a veritable *Céad Míle Fáilte*¹⁶ of drops of blood” (57). Behind this beautiful description of her life, aimed at easing the mother’s worry, we can glimpse the brutality of sex slavery in the strong contrast between the warmth expressed in the Irish expression of welcome, *Céad Míle Fáilte*, and the drops of blood which suggest rape and forced prostitution.

We have already analysed in previous chapters some poems by Luz Pozo Garza, whose vast literary production covers the second half of the last century and is extended to the present times.¹⁷ The poems we are going to comment next were first gathered in *Memoria Solar* (2004) and then published separately in *As Arpas de Iwerddon* (2005). These poems establish a tight connection between Ireland and Galicia and they can be interpreted as re-enactment of the Demeter-Persephone loss and recovery in the context of a wave of Galician emigration that started in the last years of the twentieth century.

Since Spain became a member of the European Community in 1986, a wide range of opportunities were opened for Spanish students, who could apply for grants to study in different countries of Europe and join different transnational European projects. As a result of this, a lot of young people with high qualifications found jobs and in some cases a partner as well, in a foreign country. These new emigrants have nothing to do with those who left Spain in the sixties and seventies to look for unqualified work in several European countries. The new expatriates are better equipped to be integrated into the culture and society in which they live and this is an advantage, although sometimes, at the risk of losing their roots.

In “Most Faithful Stories: An Interview with Luz Pozo Garza” (María Xesús Nogueira 2009), the writer explains that her interest in Celticism has been a constant in her life. It was awakened by the writers of Galician Renaissance and has been present not only in her poetry but also in collaborations in the journals — *Nordés* and *Clave Orión*— she has edited or co-edited.¹⁸ Moreover, Luz Pozo Graz’s connection with Ireland was reinforced by her daughter Monica’s marriage to an Irishman and the subsequent creation of an Irish family, as she acknowledges in the interview:

Nowadays, with a whole Irish family, grandchildren and great-grandchildren, I regularly visit Ireland, which gives me an idea of the Atlantic unity, of its myths and mysteries, which the druids preserved from any chance of profanation. These myths survive in Gaelic and Breton Celtic poetry, and in the soul of a dark culture which will not be extinguished and in which we, Galicians, participate. (Nogueira 2009, 212)

In the same interview, Pozo Garza affirms that her daughter Mónica is “the implicit recipient” of this book (Nogueira 2009, 213), in which the warmth of family life is intertwined with Celtic mythical resonances. In “As arpas de Iwerddon” (2004, 656-657) —the poem that gives its name to the whole series— Luz Pozo Garza’s poetic voice addresses her daughter Mónica, admitting that everything is part of the cycle of life and is being written in the leaves of autumn: “E todo se cumpría como os signos da vida / nas páxinas do outono alá en Dublin”

(656). The mother expresses the fear of losing her daughter which she felt when she left with a yearning in her eyes that she could not decipher. The distance between mother and daughter was not only physical, but it also meant the inability of the mother to understand the motivations of the daughter:

semellabas tan lonxe
que houbo medo a te perder na lenda dos sulagos
pois levabas nos ollos un algo que nin sei. (2004, 656)

But now the daughter brings with her a white camellia “para plantar no frío delicado desa luz boreal / que nos fascina”. Camellias, which come from Japan, have been successfully adapted to Galician climate and have become familiar in Galician gardens and public spaces. In the poem, this expatriate flower is the symbol of the child the daughter is going to have and who will be the link between the two worlds: Galicia and Ireland. Autumn is the time of fruitfulness when everything is fulfilled.

Eu pensaba:
esta filla hanos dar un meniño
de nome Kevin Patrick
a bautizar na igrexa de Sutton polo outono
e todo se cumpría. (2004, 656)

This grandson is the reason why the poetic persona decides to face the dangers of a travel along different lands and seas taking with her the “Vulgata”, the Latin version of the Bible which represents the culture her daughter has inherited and is going to be a reminder of her native land in the middle of the Celtic traditions:

Por iso crucei auras... turbulencias
e aves extenuadas por ventos de través
Pirineos reservados por neves disolutas
Támesis
Mar de Irlanda e un fragmento de azul
cunha Biblia no colo. (2004, 656)

The poem ends with a plea to her daughter to not forget the native land: “Ai filla non te esquezas do reino da saudade / cando escoites as arpas nos templos de Iwerddon / no crepúsculo celta” (2004, 657).

“Bosque de rododendros”,¹⁹ subtitled “Conversa con Mónica” (2004, 688-689, is “a conversation with Mónica on the mystic mountain of Howth” (Nogueira 2009, 213). The poem starts with an invitation from the daughter: “Nesta mañá tan fría de Dublin nun domingo / de marzo / vaíamos miña nai á montaña de Howth / a ese lugar sagrado... / Desde aqueles outeiros pódese contemplar / a fábula da vida” (688). This place has intense connections with Irish historical and legendary traditions. In the bay below this mountain —called the Ben of Howth or Binn Éadair in Gaelic— the legendary hero Finn Mac Cumhaill fought back the men of Lochlann, who had landed there. The mythical resonances of this place are also present in this poem, with the reference to the Irish hero Brân, who was tempted to sail to a wonderful land by a silver branch with white flowers a mysterious woman gave him.²⁰ Brân’s adventures in the Land of Women were measured by different dimensions of time. For him, the time he had been abroad lasted no more than a year and the sails of his boats did not show traces of wear, but, when he came back home, for the people who had stayed in Ireland, a lot of years had passed and Brân had become a hero in old stories. When one of his men went ashore he disintegrated, so Brân sailed away and was not seen anymore. The story of Brân can be seen as a symbol of the inexorability of time and the impossibility of going back and recovering our lives at a certain point of the past. Only through memory and myth can we avoid disintegration. Hence, the importance for mother and daughter of this remembrance of old Irish legends, which also have an evocative power of the native land.

¿Pensas acaso que é ilusorio o deseño
do mar de Brân
seducido de xestas de prata e sortilexio
nesta saga irlandesa que estamos a asumir?

as velas liberadas da extinción
os invernos exánimes

o sal da marusía

e mesmo as fontes fundadas na intemperie
de Iwerddon
en tempos consagrados polas rulas do norde

Si. Pode ser todo efémero
todo tan fráxil como a flor de neve
Igual cás aves da memoria
e a caléndula virxe que apenas se respira... (Pozo Garza 2004, 688)

Wonderful views of the Atlantic ocean can be seen from the mountain of Howth and perhaps this climbing of mother and daughter to the mountain symbolises the desire to hold tight the ties that link them with Galician and Irish culture, which are separated/united by the Atlantic ocean.

Finally, I will analyse Luz Pozo Garza's poems "O meniño Alexandre acende a cheminea" (2004, 671) and "Intimidade" (2004, 672), because in both poems the child Alexandre, who has Irish and Galician blood, seals the mother-daughter relationship and represents the definite connection of the writer with Ireland. The warm atmosphere of the house of her daughter's home in Sutton, centered around the fireplace, is a safeguard against the coldness outside, which may symbolise the inexorability of old age. This room awakens in the poetic persona mixed feelings of nostalgia and gratitude: nostalgia for her infancy and for a place, her native land; gratitude for a life that is fulfilled. Both hometown and time belong to the realm of memory and have acquired a mythical and timeless quality: "Mentres que neva en Sutton / lémbrome do reino onde nunca nevaba / aló no mar Cantábrico / eu quixera volver á luz daquelas fontes / e dar gracias á vida segundo ordea o Tao" (671).

The awareness of the long gone by time of childhood can be softened and relived through the presence of the grandson, whose life starts a new cycle: "¿Como se vai o tempo e como se revive? / Dimo ti rapaciño neno dunha linaxe de poetas / que amaron. Dimo ti que regresas da escola / no crepúsculo celta / dunha tarde de inverno / Dimo ti que non sabes nada do tempo aínda" (671). These questions about time echo the one that Pozo Garza's poetic persona asked the child in her womb in "Febrero" —a poem that has been studied in chapter one: "Dime

cómo nace el tiempo” (2004, 194) [1959]. This apparent symmetry delineates two stages of life that are completely different: The poetic voice in “Febrero” is full of hope and expectation but the grandmother in the poems we are analysing here knows that she is closing a cycle.

The poem “Intimidade” (2004, 672), continues the meditation about the subjective perception of time in a scene that the poetic persona would like to extend. “Era o meu Paraíso e vólcome / en esencia pois o tempo non conta. / Mentres aquí en Irlanda / o meu neto Alexandre fermoso coma un anxo / vai acender o lume azul e púrpura / na nosa cheminea do salón de Binn Eadair” (672). The homeliness of the living-room with the boy about to light the fire has also a symbolic meaning since the fireplace was the heart of the home and now the grandson is the one who will maintain the family fire burning. In Galician folklore, the hearth is the place where the souls of ancestors meet and the ashes should not be swept at night. The grandmother asks the child not to fan the ashes because he knows nothing of these mysteries: “Non aventes a cinza coma un xogo / sobre os libros e a alfombra desta estancia / tan íntima / Non aventes a cinza / Ti non debes saber nada destes misterios...” (672). The poem ends with the poetic persona’s wish to prolong this moment while she is still dreaming about lost paradises. The last words of the poem “mar por medio” form a leit-motiv that is repeated through several poems of *As arpas de Iwerddon* and it summarises the writer’s professed Atlanticism,²¹ which considers Galicia and Ireland as two lands linked by “Atlantic and spiritual bonds” (Nogueira 2009, 213).

Fagamos do momento a nosa eternidade
a carón deste lume azul e púrpura

E quedan resoando as últimas palabras
As últimas palabras...

...eu sigo a matinar no paraíso mentres neva
por Sutton
e neva polos soños mar por medio. (2004, 672)

4.6. Conclusion

In the poems analysed in this chapter we have seen how traditional images of the mother-daughter relationship have been revised in the light of ancient myths which performed the empowerment of women, especially of mothers. We have also seen how revisions of the myth of the Fall and the character of Eve aim at recovering her as a symbol of the creative power of women as well as her right to sexuality, discharging her from the burden of sin which patriarchal religions had endowed her with. In the work of these contemporary Irish and Galician women writers analysed in this chapter we find mother's voices that contradict images of mothers as silent passive beings. They appropriate the myth of Demeter and Persephone in search of images that can empower the mother-daughter relationship so that they can counteract patriarchal discourses —political, religious and cultural— centered in the mother-father-son relationship and give us a wide range of adult mothers able to speak openly of the issues which affect both them and their daughters.





CHAPTER 5

INFLECTING AND HEALING WOUNDS

5.1. Introduction

So far my main aim has been to find out representations of motherhood written from the point of view of the mother because it is a perspective that has been often ignored or silenced in traditional discourses and narratives. Consequently, in the vast majority of the poems analysed in the previous chapters, the poetic persona was that of a mother. However, it is important to consider how the mother-daughter relationship has been represented from the point of view of the daughter, since this relationship raised a great debate in feminist criticism during the nineteen seventies and eighties. In this chapter, I will try to summarise some aspects of feminist theorising that have dealt with the mother-daughter relationship and to focus on the poems of some Irish and Galician women writers that reflect the complexity and multifaceted aspects of this bond from the point of view of the daughter.

In the nineteen seventies, within what has been called the second wave of feminist movement, there was an increasing awareness of the need to delve deeper into the causes of gender differentiation and the almost universal position of subordination of women in society. From the fields of anthropology, philosophy and psychology, authors like Sherry B. Ortner (1974), Adrienne Rich (1977) and Nancy Chodorow (1971, 1974, 1978) among others, put into question those theoretical discourses that universalised the gender roles as determined by the laws of nature. Against these discourses, the writers mentioned above, tried to find out the historical, economic and social causes that determined the gendered division of labour and the seclusion of women into the private sphere of the home in modern

Western societies. As a consequence of this research there was a movement of rejection of the traditional roles of wife and mother assigned to women and a tendency to blame the mother as the necessary agent in the perpetuation of these gender roles.

In *The Reproduction of Mothering. Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (1978), Nancy Chodorow maintains a critical stance about Freud's failure in dealing with women in general and, more specifically, in everything which concerns issues of gender. In her book she develops a detailed account of the importance of the pre-oedipal stage and the crucial importance it has in the development of the daughter's identity and her relationship with her mother. Chodorow considers the mother a model worth of identification and finds positive the fact that the daughter grows in close connection to her. However, she still moves within the psychoanalytic framework, which she considers "the most coherent, convincing theory of personality development available for an understanding of fundamental aspects of the psychology of women in our society, in spite of its biases" (1978, 142).

Another book that exerted considerable influence at the time was Nancy Friday's *My Mother/My Self* (1977). The book was celebrated because of the emphasis it put on the daughter's need to separate from the all-powerful mother so as not to become like her. Friday studied the daughter's development through the different stages of her life and the struggles of the mother to control and prevent her from getting an independent identity. As Chodorow and Contratto have remarked in "The Fantasy of the Perfect Mother" (1989), Friday's book achieved a great degree of popularity because "[i]t speaks to the daughter in all women and tells them that their problems are not political, social, personal, or, heaven forbid, caused by men; their problems are solely caused by their mothers" (1989, 92). Therefore, the mother is ultimately responsible for the unhappiness of the daughter.

Although there is no agreement about the issue of Friday's being a feminist or not, her theories connected with a widespread feminist position of mother-

blaming and mother-hate, taking it to the extreme form. Another author who followed this trend of thought, this time from a clear feminist stance, is Judith Arcana, who in *Our Mother's Daughters* (1977) coincides almost exactly with Friday's theoretical approach but for the fact that, as Chodorow and Contratto have underlined, "Arcana claims that maternal behavior is a product of mothers' entrapment within patriarchy rather than a product of their evil intentions" (1989, 81).

These trends in feminist and psychoanalytic theories delve deeper into the issue of the formation of the daughter's subjectivity and the necessary stage of severance from the mother to achieve personal autonomy. This constitutes a counterpart of the Oedipus myth of killing the father, although in this reformulation, it is the daughter's symbolic killing of the mother that is required so as to reach independence and maturity. Literary texts that reflect the mother-daughter tension are abundant in contemporary Western Europe and American literature, but most of them have been written from the point of view of the daughter, while the mother's subjectivity has remained silenced.

The publication of Adrienne Rich's *Of Woman Born. Motherhood as experience and Institution* (1986) [1976], and Alice Walker's essay "In search of Our Mothers' Gardens" (1984) [1974] meant an important change in the perspective from which motherhood has been represented. Both Rich and Walker try to vindicate a lineage of strong mothers that has been suppressed by an oppressive patriarchal construction of society. In "Writing the Mother–Daughter Relationship. Psychoanalysis, Culture and Literary Criticism" (2002), Adalgisa Giorgio observes that "Rich was the first white feminist to assert the need for women to gain knowledge of their suppressed bond with the mother if they want to gain strength in the world" (Giorgio 2002, 12):

The first knowledge any woman has of warmth, nourishment, tenderness, security, sensuality, mutuality, comes from her mother. That earliest enwrapment of one female body with another can sooner or later be denied or rejected, felt as choking possessiveness, as rejection, trap or taboo; but it is, at the beginning, the whole world. (Rich 1986, 218)

In her autobiographical essay, “In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens” Alice Walker asserts “the need for women to find the source of their creativity in their mothers’ repressed one” (Giorgio 2002, 12), and connects herself with a strong genealogy of mothers who had resisted the oppression of slavery and white abuse. She opens a new trend in feminist criticism in which the voices of African-American feminist writers, such as Patricia Hill Collins and Toni Morrison, to quote some of the most outstanding, challenge the supposed universality of most psychoanalytic and feminist theorising and establish a contrast with the prevalent white middle-class feminist analysis, according to which mothers were viewed either as powerful castrating images or as powerless individuals, “lacking in social value and authority and excluded from discourse[...] a mother who cannot act as a mediator for the daughter’s entry into the world” (Giorgio 2002, 12).

Both Irish and Galician women writers have translated into their poems the multifaceted aspects of the mother-daughter bond. The aim of this chapter is to provide an overview, through the daughters’ voices, of the whole gamut of feelings that respond to the diversity of situations that may occur between mother and daughter along their lives.

5.2. Absence. Losing the Mother

In most well known traditional fairy tales the heroine has lost her mother and has become defenceless before the cruelty of a stepmother, like Cinderella and Snow White, or the attempts of sexual abuse by the father as it is the case in Donkey Skin. The absence of the mother seems to be a necessary prerequisite for the girl to enter adulthood after overcoming a series of difficult situations.

Moreover, in a great deal of nineteenth century English novels the female protagonists are orphans who cannot count on their mothers’ protection or advice. We can find these motherless characters in Jane Austen’s novels *Emma* (1815) and *Persuasion* (1818), to cite only two examples. One may think that this was a reflection of the high mortality rate of women at childbirth, but this was not exactly the case.

Carolyn Dever, in *Death and the Mother from Dickens to Freud* (1998), has analysed the recurrence of absent or dead mothers in nineteenth-century fiction,¹ and she has found out that their number does not correspond to the rate of real women's mortality in childbirth:

The death rate of mothers in the Victorian novel is elevated far beyond the mortality rates among the same population of living women during this period; it is far more dangerous to give birth in a fictional world than in any region, under any conditions, within any social class in Victorian Britain. (Dever 1998, 11)

The figure of the mother, no matter how important it could be in official discourses, was often suppressed in Victorian literature. It has been observed that, although motherhood had been idealised in patriarchal Victorian society, real mothers did not appear frequently in fiction. Mothers were eliminated because they were seen as obstacles in the development of the female main character and, once the mother was killed or silenced in literature, the mother figure could be idealised according to patriarchal stereotypes. Dever underlines the influence exerted by these narratives in shaping psychoanalytic theories about subjectivity. She observes the paradox present in the fact that, whereas the mother is “the actual and symbolic site of generation, the earliest influence on development, and the domestic anchor of the most basic socioeconomic unit” (1998, xii), she is almost always gone, not only in fiction but also in scientific and political texts. Dever's contention is that the narrative structure that is based on the loss of the mother has proved to be “profoundly influential over the course of nineteenth century describing the melancholic construction of an idea through the loss of the living object, the embodied mother” (xii). Dever also affirms that Freud used this narrative structure to develop and justify his theorisation about the formation of subject identity:

The most immediate beneficiary of this narrative structure is Freud: in his theories of subjectivity, Freud presents the metaphor of maternal loss as the prerequisite for adult subjectivity and “normative” sexuality, reading all relationships of desire as repetitions of the original trauma of lost love, separation of the mother. (Dever 1998, xii)

In “Towards a Female Symbolic. Re-Presenting Mothers and Daughters in Contemporary Spanish Narrative by Women” (2002), Christine Arkininstall draws on the work of Margaret Jones (1983) and Sylvia Truxa (1982) and notices the “virtual absence of mothers” (51) in the fiction of Spanish women writers during the first decades of Franco’s regime. She observes that there is “a peculiar inversion of the Demeter-Persephone myth” (51), in which it is the daughter who “mourns the lack, and frequently death, of the maternal figure” (51). Following Luce Irigaray (1993) Arkininstall asserts that this fictional suppression of the mother mirrors the “matricide on which patriarchy erects itself “(51) generally, and specifically in the “masculine right-wing ideology of Francoist Fatherland” (51).

Furthermore, the preponderance of daughters in mourning may well signal the fact that the only legal position granted women was that of ‘dutiful daughter’: a role which, by disavowing a maternal genealogy, renders impossible the existence of the daughter outside of a patriarchal framework. (Arkininstall 2002, 51)

Adrienne Rich reacts against this erasure of the mother as well as against some trends of feminist criticism which emphasised the need for the daughter to symbolically kill the mother in order to achieve her own identity and independence. Rich asserts the importance of the mother-daughter bond and recognises that this feminist point of view allows us to analyse the oppression suffered by our mothers and understand rationally why they “did not teach us to be Amazons, why they bound our feet or simply left us” (1986, 224). Rich goes on to claim that we should go even further and admit that “our mothers were in some incalculable way on our side” (1986, 225). This would entail the recognition of the child in us that still needs the love and care of strong mothers.

There was, is, in most of us a girl-child still longing for a woman’s nurture, tenderness and approval, a woman’s power exerted in our defense, a woman’s smell and touch and voice, a woman’s strong arms around us in moments of fear and pain. (Rich 1986, 224)

In Jessie Lendennie’s *Daughter and Other Poems* (2001) and Luz Pichel’s *Casa Pechada* (2006), we find the feelings of anguish and pain that this “girl-

child” experiments as she confronts the loss or absence of the mother, as well as a daughter’s helplessness when her mother is unable to protect her.

In “Daughter”, the first part of Jessie Lendennie’s *Daughter and Other Poems* (2001), the four sections that open this long poem present the desolation of a young girl on the day of her mother’s funeral. She enwraps herself in her mother’s clothes looking for sensory experiences that can re-create the warm presence of her mother’s body. She touches the dresses, “knew them as alive” (11) and breathes “the lingering smell” (11), seeking refuge for her anguish among these physical sensations that are the remnants of her mother and can create a substitute of the maternal lap. But her attempts are useless since the clothes, which no one is going to wear, are witnesses to her mother’s absence and they cannot alleviate the pain of loss. The last lines of this section emphasise the universality of this unbearable pain.

...In the room Emma sat, hiding under her
mother’s dresses, under the clothes of no one,
under a lingering smell
[...]
She touched her mother’s dress, red orange
stripe, and her mother undressed for bed, pulled
the dress over her head, folded it... and the pain
was ageless...timeless. (2001, 11)

Emma is aware of not having a black dress to mourn her mother: “How would she have a / dress her mother had not bought her?” (11). This fact reinforces the situation of abandonment she feels because neither her grandmother nor her aunts, whose voices she can hear like “distant sounds” (11), have cared about this practical thing.

In the next section of the poem Emma feels “[h]er mother’s clothes brush her cheek.” (12), as if it was a caress from her mother who tried to soothe her, and it seems that the girl finds the strength necessary to confront this situation, as she worries about what people may think of her mother for not having bought her a black dress for the funeral. So she decides that she will wear “a dress with black in

it” (12) and she will face the criticism of the people. Her decision awakes Emma’s memories of similar situations when her mother was there but was not able to solve Emma’s requests. In the next section of the poem, Emma’s happy memories of a Hallowe’en night, when she wore a gypsy skirt her mother made, are the counterpoint of the presence of death and the hypocrisy of a society that puts the stress on religion while it fails to take care of children.

“Your Mama said you should read the bible...
that’s the last thing she said.”
But Emma knew that her mother also said, “Look
after her...” (2001, 13)

In the sections that follow, each page is typographically differentiated into two different parts: in the upper part, in italics, the poetic persona takes the point of view of an omniscient narrator and delves deep into the inner world of the girl in an attempt to represent the power of the unconscious, where the girl’s fear and anxiety are hidden. In this part of the text, night and darkness characterise the atmosphere in which subjective perceptions of landscape and weather acquire symbolic meaning, as part of the girl’s dreams and nightmares.

*In the East the sea rose, wave against wave, climbing
cliffs no longer visible.*

*She stirred in her sleep, falling downward with the
flow between rain and sea. (2001, 15)*

Dreams can create new timeless alternative spaces that provide the opportunity to transform experiences and re-enact one’s life in a different dimension. Thus, Emma finds in her dreams a new territory in which everything may happen, including the possibility of recovering her mother’s presence:

*She lay still and the night moved past her. Branches
brushed the window. She wondered, as a child, of
fingers tapping at windows, of hands that reached out
so softly to brush a cheek...but never moved away. (2001, 17)*

In the lower part of each page, a detached narrative voice describes patches of Emma's everyday life, which usually happen during the day, throwing light on the relationship she had with her mother. We know from these sketches the things her mother did for her and those she could not do. Her mother could abandon the task she was doing to play with her despite her tiredness, but she would not buy her the blue and red bird made of paper despite Emma's insistence. The girl is aware of her mother's hard toil: she sees her mending clothes or working hard in the cotton fields: "Emma's mother straightened herself slowly, rubbing one hand along her lower back." (16) She could also see "her mother's shadow move across the yard. She could see the beginnings of daylight as her mother stood working the pump near the willow tree" (20). This willow tree, which belongs to the real landscape of Emma's house stands at the centre of a mysterious scene which happens at dark in the parallel landscape of dreams: "*In the dark she traced a circle around the willow tree, knew the tree could not go beyond, for all its weeping*" (22).² The girl performs this magic ritual in order to prevent the tree from disappearing and to anchor it to the house, despite its weeping.

Several layers of symbolic meanings are condensed in the elements of this scene. The willow tree was considered the tree of immortality due to its ability to re-grow from a fallen branch. It was also the symbol of the virgin form of Hecate,³ who used the curative properties of its bark.⁴ Besides, in Celtic cultures the willow was considered the tree of enchantment, and magic wands and brooms were made of its branches. With regard to the meaning of the circle, Mircea Eliade (1957) affirms that, in all traditional cultures there was a need to demarcate a sacred space to be opposed to "the formless expanse surrounding it" (20). In this sacred space, there is an element that symbolises an opening which allows the passage from one cosmic region to another —from earth to heaven or underworld and vice versa. This communication "is expressed by one or another of certain images all of which refer to the *axis mundi*: pillar, ladder or tree" (Eliade 1957, 37). In most religions this *axis mundi* is signalled by the erection of an altar.⁵ In this connection, Erich

Neumann states that the circle represents the ancient round houses and symbolises the sacred space where the altar of the Great Mother stood.

As in the house roundabout, female domination is symbolized in its center, the fireplace, the seat of warmth and food preparation, the “hearth,” which is also the original altar. In ancient Rome this basic matriarchal element was most conspicuously preserved in the cult of Vesta and its round temple. This is the “old round house or tent with a fireplace in the middle”. (Neumann 1972, 284- 285)

In Lendennie’s poem both the circle and the willow delimitate for Emma a sacred/magic space where she can find protection against the hardness of life and establish a connection with other dimensions in which she can communicate with her mother.

In Luz Pichel’s *Casa Pechada* (2006) there are several poems in which the image of the mother is paradoxically present in her absence. So, in “Anacos de cousas vellas” (21) the daughter is checking some pieces of incomplete or fragmented tools with the common characteristic that all of them lack something. The last lines mention the family photo without the image of the mother in it and even the moon, which looks almost full, is not complete. The incomplete tools are worn out by use and time and are also dumb witnesses of an agricultural way of life already gone. But the absence of the mother in the family photo emphasises the gap in the family story and paradoxically makes her more present as the source of an unresolved conflict that has still the power of causing pain:

Atopo un anaco dun arado de pau
unha grade que foi serrada polo medio,
unha romana á que lle faltan os ganchos,
o mango da pa do forno sen pa,
o caixón das ferramentas de canteiro sen ferramentas dentro,
o retrato da familia sen a mamá dentro,
a lúa, que parece chea, pero fáltalle algo. (2006, 21)

In “Letreiro para poñer” (22), the mysterious absence of the mother is already present in the unfinished title since it does not mention a suitable place where to hang the notice. The daughter writes notices to label the tools and baskets

her father made or used, but there is one remaining notice that she cannot place anywhere, because there is no object that has belonged to her mother. In a short poem that remembers us the haiku pattern, but for the number of syllables,⁶ the poetic voice asks where the mother of the girl has gone, and condenses into these three lines the loneliness of the girl, suggesting that perhaps the mother left on a ship. This question hints at the silenced reality of female emigration in Galicia, which has not been fully studied yet, and contradicts the traditional idea that it was always the man who emigrated.⁷ The consequences of women's emigration were more devastating than those of the men's because when men emigrated, the women not only kept on caring and nurturing the children and the old people, but also did the agricultural tasks that provided for the maintenance and survival of the family, thus helping to preserve the economic and social structures in rural communities⁸ even when some men started a new life with a different family in the new country and they never came back. But the absence of the mother usually left a gap harder to fill, although in most of the poems in *Casa Pechada* we find a motherly father who is endowed with characteristics traditionally assigned to the mother. In this context, the patriarchal division of gender roles is blurred.

Onde lle vai a nai á nena
que quedou soa e non ten quen a arrole?
Marchou nun barco? (2006, 22)

In a very short poem, “Letreiro para gardar no caixón dos panos rotos e que se vaia desdebuxando” (55), the poetic voice addresses someone who left early in the morning and was not seen anymore. The image of the worn out cloths that are put aside in a drawer evidences the long-lasting absence and the title of the poem expresses a hope that the notice will fade away and with it perhaps the pain of the absence will be softened

Marchaches á mañá cedo
e non te vin máis.

Desfixéronse os panos
pouquiño a pouco. (2006, 55)

Pichel's "Letreiro para labrar na pedra do lavadoiro" (29) is a poem that condenses in the Haiku structure a whole story of desolation. A little girl is crying while she is washing clothes and the coldness of the place emphasises the sorrow and loneliness of the girl, who cannot find a loving face that can comfort her. The only face she can see is her own, reflected at the bottom of the washing place.

Frio na fonte.
A nena lava e chora.
Vese no fondo. (2006, 29)

In "letreiro para colgar no cobertizo cando non quede nada alí" (31) the repetition, with slight variations, of the line "durmirei ao quente" expresses the longing for the warmth of the maternal body, which can provide for shelter and refuge against the hardness of life. The non-presence of a maternal figure is stressed when the poetic voice states the possibility of sleeping in the dog pound or in the henhouse because all of them are warm places and she envies calves, because they can come near their mothers and sleep in the warmth. She considers that even those colts which die are luckier than she is because they can sleep in the warm belly of the earth.

Se me deito no cocho do can
durmirei quente.

Se coubese no niño das pitas
durmiría ao quente.

Os becerros achéganse á nai
e dormen ao quente.

Os poldros que morren
dormen ao quente. (2006, 31)

As I have said above, the absent maternal figure can be replaced by a motherly father. Thus, in most poems of Luz Pichel's *Casa pechada*, the image of the father is endowed with the tenderness and homeliness traditionally assigned to the mother. In "Dóeme esta man" (38), the daughter shows her father the wounds

in her hand and complains to him about the physical pain she feels, which is the consequence of hard toil in the fields, as well as about the more undefined pain caused by unfulfilled hope and desire, symbolised by the moon in the brook whose reflection, very much like the memory of the absence-presence of the mother, she is not able to wash away:

Dóeme esta man, papá,
a de apretar os caldeiros e o sacho,
a de arrancar as millás que afogan o millo
e secan sen dar nada,
[...]
Dóeme a man de fregar a lúa no regueiro, papá,
mira as feridas. (2006, 38)

In “O museo dos cestos que fixo o papá” (17), the poetic persona of the daughter is lovingly gathering the tools her father used and the baskets he made in order to make a museum with them. She wants to preserve the memory of the father as well as the traces of the life that was lived there and she is reluctant to discard the baskets his father did not sell as if, by throwing them away, she would be betraying his memory.

Vou facer no sitio do curro o museo do cesto, papá,
para que veña a xente e diga
ata cestos sabía facer o rei do pan de trigo.

Como levar ao colector do Concello
os cestos que ti nunca tiraches
nin vendiches na feira? (2006, 17)

In the fact that it is the father the one who weaves baskets and sells them at the local fair, we can find not only a change of roles for an activity usually performed by women, but also a link with the prehistoric Great Mother or Great Goddess and the sacred character of pottery-making and vessel-making, as Erich Neumann (1972) [1963] and Robert Briffault (1969), observed. Neumann affirmed that the function of shelter and preservation “was incumbent on woman” and was ascribed to the “elementary Feminine character” (1972, 284). He stresses the

crucial importance of activities like weaving, binding and knotting in the creation of a shelter, as well as those closely related to the clothing of the body, such as preparation of animal skins to obtain leather and all the processes necessary to obtain thread from bast or leaves. Not less important were those activities such as weaving baskets and making pots of clay, since these containers were necessary for gathering food and transporting water. Moreover, they were essential for the storing of food and played a decisive role in the development of agriculture and culture:

These instruments of preservation are important for another aspect of feminine domination that is of critical importance for the development of culture, namely, the storing of food. This first measure to stave off hunger from the group when the hunt failed proved to be the foundation of property. The “stores” belonged beyond any question to the women, whose domination was thus enhanced. (Neumann 1972, 284)

Adrienne Rich admits that she is prejudiced against the symbolic connection of women with containers, developed among others by Erik Erikson (1968), since it entails a lot of old associations that have shaped a constructed female identity as passive, “receptive” (97) and as a “receptacle” (97). Rich adds that, the fact that many little girls like playing with dollhouses and some boys do not, would justify for patriarchy the allocation of woman’s place and role. She rejects the widespread ideology that affirms that “[w]oman’s place is the ‘inner space’ of the home; woman’s anatomy lays on her an ethical imperative to be maternal in the sense of masochistic, patient, pacific: women without children are ‘unfulfilled’ ‘barren’ and ‘empty’ women” (Rich, 1986, 97).

However, Rich agrees with Neumann and Briffault on the importance of the transformative character of the feminine: “The potential improvement and stabilization of life inherent in the development and elaboration of pottery-making could be likened to the most complex innovations of a technological age” (Rich, 97).

In this way, the image of the father who appears in most poems of Luz Pichel's *Casa Pechada*, is a maternal figure that can be endowed with some characteristics that have been traditionally assigned to female identity.

5.3. Representations of Home as an Ambivalent Space

In her essay "Being and Doing" (1971), Nancy Chodorow drew on the work of some anthropologists like Margaret Mead (1949) Herbert Barry, Margaret Bacon and Irving Child (1959), as well as that of Beatrice and John Whiting (1968), and she came to the conclusion that, although the gathering of data and the methodology employed in this cross-cultural research may be subject to criticism it showed that "there are no absolute personal differences between men and women" (260), and that the characteristics assigned to each sex in one culture may be the reverse in another culture. According Barry, Bacon and Child, the expectations about the behaviour of male and female children are closely related to the economic activities that determine the subsistence of the family and the division of work within it. In "Family Structure and Feminine Personality" (1989) [1974], Chodorow reflects on how the structure of the family determines the socialisation of the female child and is at the basis of the construction of a *feminine* identity.

In her essay "Is Female to Male as Nature Is to Culture?" (1974) Sherry B. Ortner analyses the historical, economic and social elements that may explain the construction of male and female identities and the reasons that might have led to an identification of woman with nature and man with culture, with the consequent devaluation of woman. Ortner agrees with Chodorow in that the differences between feminine and masculine personality "are not innate or genetically programmed; they arise from nearly universal features of family structures" (Ortner, 81). Among these structures, she underlines women's responsibility for child rearing and caring, which is reinforced by the differences in male and female role training. It is undeniable that children of both sexes are socialised by the mother in early infancy and that boys and girls develop a personal identification

with their mothers. However, boys “must ultimately shift to a masculine role identity, which involves building identification with the father” (Ortner, 1974, 82). Since the father is not usually the one who stays at home and is not involved in child rearing and family caring, this identification with the father is an “identification with father’s male role as a collection of abstract elements, rather than a personal identification with father as a real individual” (Ortner, 82). The identification with the father also implies the assimilation of certain social rules so that the son can find his place in the world outside home.

Ortner also agrees with Chodorow (1974) and Rosaldo (1974) when explaining the different formation of the girl’s identity. For a young girl, the early personal identification with the mother does not require a change and “can persist in the process of learning female role identity” (Ortner, 82). In contrast to a boy, “learning to be a woman involves the continuity and development of a girl’s relationship to her mother, and sustains the identification with her as an individual” (Ortner, 82). She does not need to go out to learn externally defined roles because she finds at home the model of the mother as well as the role-training activities necessary to shape her personality. Chodorow asserts that:

Feminine identification is based not on fantasied or externally defined characteristics and negative identification, but on the gradual learning of a way of being familiar in everyday life, and exemplified by the person (or kind of people — women) with whom she has been most involved. It is continuous with her early childhood and attachments. (1989, 52) [1974]

However, Chodorow admits the complexity of sex-role development of girls in modern technological advanced societies. Girls have had access to school and have achieved a preparation that allows them to take active social roles and develop a range of skills that were considered exclusive of men’s realm. However, Chodorow observes that this schooling is often been considered a “pseudo-training” that should not “interfere with the much more important training” (1989, 55) of a *feminine* identity that will prepare the woman to be a “wife and mother, which is embedded in the girl’s unconscious development and which her mother teaches her in a family context where she is clearly the salient parent” (1989, 55).

Both Chodorow and Ortner agree on the fact that this role training at home will prepare the girl for the caring and nurturing her children as well as the other members of the family, which will perpetuate the persistence of these *feminine* roles.

This personal identification with the mother and the female group in the enclosed domestic space has created abundant images of home as a warm shelter presided by a caring protective mother, though they are sometimes an idealisation of a reality that often disavows this image of blissful happiness. The house has also been the site of oppression for daughters who wanted to rebel against the imposed *feminine* roles and were, sometimes, the mute witnesses of the violence exerted against women and children.

In this section, we will find attractive images of home in Lupe Gomez's *Fisteus era un mundo* (2001), as well as in some parts of the long poems of Marta Dacosta (1998), Anne Hartigan (1991) and Jessie Lendennie (2001) that I have analysed in previous chapters and sections. I will also comment some poems of Jessie Lendennie (2001), Paula Meehan (2000), (2003) and Eavan Boland (2007), which are the counterpoint of this idealisation of the home. They show helpless daughters who witness or are victims of domestic violence, as well as powerless mothers who cannot protect their daughters from the violence exerted on them and, sometimes, help to maintain the situation of oppression. I will finally analyse the rebellion of the daughter against the imposed domestic role in some poems of Marilar Aleixandre (1999), (2003).

The ambivalence of the domestic space can sometimes be found within the same poem. Thus, in contrast with painful scenes of violence evoked in some sections of Lendennie's "Daughter" (2001), we also find warm memories of a domestic scene, such as washing the children, which closes the mother's daily tasks: "Emma's mother pushed her sleeves up further and rubbed the last child thoroughly. The round tin tub creaked with the struggling, the laughing" (22).

In Marta Dacosta's *Setembro* (1998), the warm atmosphere of the kitchen is the place where the little girl gets immersed in a female world with the

ambivalence of meaning that this space has: on the one hand, doing the tasks of cooking creates a feeling of solidarity among women and provides for a favourable atmosphere to share intimate feelings and secrets: “Co aceite poñíamos segredos, / palabras, conversas, / e a pota rebentaba fervendo de impaciencia” (47). On the other hand, the kitchen is the heart of a private female world, where daughters have been socialised in order to follow the roles of wives and mothers and perpetuate their confinement at home. The poetic persona explains the monotony of the tasks and routines of the work in the kitchen and the feeling of impotence because long years of toil result in nothing. Women have been fighting a battle against this undervalued domestic work whose importance for the family’s welfare has never been appreciated: “E así un día e outro foron facendo costra, / tixolas, cazos, potas, / non houbo nunca auga que arrastrara eses anos, / nin xabón que varrera tanto empeño diario (47).

In Lupe *Gómez Fisteus era un mundo* (2001), the happy memories from childhood of the girl protagonist and the more critical point of view of the adult woman are so closely intertwined in the narrative voice that, sometimes, they could be seen as contradictory, though this apparent contradiction derives precisely from the two different perspectives. Thus, the daughter can verify the consequences of patriarchal ideology and speaks with the conviction that “ser muller na aldea era como andar espida pola rúa. Era algo salvaxe. Era algo difícil”, and that, on the whole, “mandaban máis os homes” (Gómez 2001, 100). We can see an example of these seemingly opposing feelings in the attitude that the daughter shows towards her mother’s work. On the one hand, the girl expresses a feeling of exultant identification with her mother presiding the warm atmosphere of the kitchen: “Na paisaxe da lareira estaba miña nai facendo queixos” (20). Making cheese is, according to Neumann, an essential part of the transformative character of the feminine, —the ability to transform raw material into food that could be stored— and was crucial for the survival of the family. The little girl observes with admiration her mother’s work enjoying this instant of close intimacy with her. She sees her as a powerful lady despite her wearing rags: “Aquela dama

vestida con farrapos tiña a arte de facer ben os queixos. Eu non o vía como un traballo, eu vía como unha arte. Eu sentaba no banco. Ela no tallo. E mirabámonos. Nai e filla mirándose. Era o amor” (20). On the other hand, the adult narrator is well aware of the hardness of her mother’s life: “No corpo e na alma da miña nai hai moitos esforzos, moitos traballos, moita alegría, moito cansazo. Traballar era o único que se facía en todo o día. Tanto traballo impedía falar, sentir, pensar. Impedía cousas como dialogar” (105).

We can find another example of the warmth of this enclosed female world of the kitchen in “Growth”, (Hartigan 1991, 42). This poem presents the kitchen as the only place where the newly married woman, who has been separated from her own female group, can find refuge from the hardships of an imposed marriage. She feels welcomed in this space where women had worked before her and where she can find a substitute for the loss of her own family: “Memories of women / Cling to this house, / With them I laugh in the kitchen / Where brown crocks gleam / With white milk / Down in the dairy / Gold treasures of butter” (42).

In Jessie Lendennie’s “Daughter” we find two scenes that present a powerless mother unable to protect the daughter from the violence of the father. Following the pattern I described in the previous section, in the first lines of each poem the poetic persona describes first, in italics, the scene as it is experienced in Emma’s mind. Thus, in the first poem, the poetic voice says that “*she / lay in the dark in images of the dark*” (23) and then there is a direct description of the brutality of the corporal punishment the father is inflicting on Emma before her terrified mother.

Emma sobbed as the belt cut her, making a sharp
noise through the air. She tried to run from her
father, to where her mother stood white-faced,
hands clasped. (2001, 23)

In the second poem, the apparently domestic peaceful atmosphere is disturbed by the threat of a danger that is revealed in the attitude of Emma’s mother. The lines in italics belong to Emma’s inner world where the silence of the

night is disturbed by threatening images of a storm that is premonitory of the danger that haunts her:

*She thought of the silence, the darkness of the storm;
Dark with the edge of winter light. Ice like the hardness
At the edge of the winter sky. (2001, 24)*

The poem follows with the narration of the way Emma is awoken by her presumably drunken father who brings her a parakeet he has won in the fair. Emma feels how “the smell of her father enveloped her” while she takes in her hands the agonising bird, which is “skinny, a faced blue-green, dying”. Despite his insistence on affirming that he has won the parakeet for her, Emma is frightened by her father’s swaying and the presence of the alert mother in the doorway suggests that Emma’s fear of her father is not an irrational one, but the result of the violence she has suffered: “She felt the dead weight of the bird; looked past / her father, saw her mother hesitating in the / doorway” (24). Emma’s fear of her father is so deeply ingrained that every attempt of her father to regain her is destined to die, like the bird.

Domestic violence is also present in Paula Meehan’s poems “The View from Under the Table” (2000, 12) and “Thunder in the House” (2000, 20-21). In these poems there is a significant difference with those of Jessie Lendennie commented above. The mothers in Meehan’s poems are not just the passive powerless women who cannot protect their daughters, but the transmitters of patriarchal ideology and active agents in the violence exerted on the daughters, a violence of which they are probably victims as well. In “The View from Under the Table (2000, 12) the little girl takes shelter from a scene of domestic violence under the kitchen table. The enclosed space limited by the table and the tablecloth isolates her in the larger space of the kitchen, creating the illusion of a small home in which she can feel safe. But she cannot avoid watching the scene that takes place outside her refuge and decides to take this place as a privileged position from which she can see the play that is running in the room, in the hope that “the table itself kept the sky from falling” (12). But there is no possibility of detachment for

her: “I was the audience. Listen to me laughing. Listen / to me weeping. I was a child. What did I know?” (12). When the storm ceases only the grandmother sees her and gives her the warmth and love that can transform the kitchen into a home. However, the girl is unable to tell the grandmother what frightens her and this reveals a fact that has helped to perpetuate domestic violence: the silence of the victims, who cannot articulate their suffering, because they feel that it would be like a betrayal of their parents, as well as the incapability of close relatives to see or admit this reality. When her grandmother asks her, the poetic persona in this poem prefers to give an easier explanation for her fear saying that she is afraid of the shadows that chase her all around the house. Telling the grandmother that she was afraid of the different kinds of ghosts that are “waiting to snatch [her]” (12) seems a plausible justification for her fear, because ghosts are, after all, part of popular folklore and children are told that most evils come from otherworldly bad beings.

Out, she'd say. Out. And up on her lap the smell of kitchen and
Sleep.
She'd rock me. She'd lull me. No one was kinder.
What ails you child? I never told her. Not
one word would cross my lips. Shadows I'd say. I don't like the
shadows. (2000, 12)

In this poem there is a change of roles in the Demeter-Persephone plot, since it is the daughter the one who is worried about her mother, lost in the rain. The poetic persona shifts in time and seems to be split into two conflicting feelings: on the one hand, she is the adult woman who reproaches the mother for being the transmitter of patriarchal violence “with her big words” (12), as well as an active agent of repression through “her belt and her beatings” (12). On the other hand, she can recall her mother’s “young face” (12) and can imagine the sadness and loneliness of the mother and revive the longing for the mother she experienced when she was four years old.

Somewhere, elsewhere, my mother was sulking in the rain. I call up
her young face. Who did she think she was with her big words

and her belt and her beatings? Who do I think I am to write her?
She must have been sad. She must have been lonely.
Discipline. Chastisement. I stretch out my four year old hands. (2000, 12)

In Paula Meehan's "The Pattern" (2003, 6-8) [1991], the poetic persona of the daughter reflects upon the complexity of feelings that characterised her relationship with her mother. Luz Mar González Arias affirms that this poem has an autobiographical character because it is a reflection of the author's relationship with her own mother already dead. "La longitud del poema y la diversidad de emociones que sugiere dan cuenta de la complejidad de estas relaciones, a las que la propia autora concede gran importancia y a las que dedica varios poemas en cada una de sus colecciones (González Arias 2000, 222).

In the first stanza, the daughter summarises her mother's legacy in a few objects that are charged with a deep symbolic meaning and she laments that her mother's early death prevented the daughter from starting a new relationship with her as two adult women without the gender "tags" that limited them to the traditional roles assigned to women (González Arias 2000, 222). However, the wounds are not healed yet, since she admits that she has never visited her grave:

Little has come down to me of hers,
a sewing machine, a wedding band,
a clutch of photos, the sting of her hand
across my face in one of our wars

when we had grown bitter and apart.
Some say that's the fate of the elder daughter.
I wish now she'd lasted till after
I'd grown up. We might have made a new start

as women without tags like mother, wife,
sister, daughter, taken our chances from there.
At forty two she headed for god knows where.
I've never gone back to visit her grave. (2003, 6)

The sewing machine condenses in itself a whole story of hard work done by women in sewing factories as well as that done at home by women and children.⁹ Advertised first as a wonderful appliance that will liberate women from

the time consuming activity of sewing by hand, the sewing machine certainly improved considerably the work of seamstresses and housewives, but it is not less certain that it became the tool of a black economy based on a domestic system of clothing production, which started before other processes of industrialisation and continued all along most of the twentieth century. In this system women and female children were employed, working unending hours a day and earning wages that could hardly allow them to survive. Thus, the sewing machine became for young women a symbol of a bleak future, as it is also reflected in Meehan's poem "The Exact Moment I Became a Poet" (2000, 24). In this poem, the poetic persona remembers the teacher's words warning them about what would happen if they did not study: "Attend to your books, girls, / or mark my words, you'll end up / in the sewing factory" (24). The poetic persona acknowledges that this prediction was based on the reality that surrounded her because many neighbours, some of the girl's mothers and her own aunt worked in the sewing factory. However, what struck her was that "those words 'end up' robbed / the labour of its dignity" (24) and left the girls with no hope of a better future as well: "Words could pluck you, / leave you naked, / your lovely shiny feathers all gone" (24).

In "The Pattern" the sewing machine is used to adapt the mother's old dresses for the girl and this signals the lack of money to buy a new dress, as the poetic persona asserts: "To me it spelt poverty, / the stigma of the second hand" (Meehan 2003, 7). Significantly, it is also used to sew a quilt, whose pattern follows traditional designs. As for the wedding band, it symbolises marriage as an inescapable project for women, while the sting across the daughter's face is the embodied memory of the violence the mother exerted on her in her attempts to control the daughter's rebellion.

In the next stanzas, the daughter remembers her mother wearing herself out with unending household chores and asks herself whether the mother recognises herself in the image she sees reflected on the waxed floor. She also wonders whether mother and daughter would have the same perception of the images that their mirrors give back to them. González Arias observes that the poetic persona

asks herself “si aquella mujer llegó a cuestionar alguna vez su identidad o por el contrario se alienaba en ella sin oponer resistencia” (223).

And as she buffed the wax to a high shine
Did she catch her own face coming clear?
Did she net a glimmer of her true self?
Did her mirror tell her what mine tells me? (Meehan 2003, 6)

Laura Lojo observes that, in this poem, “the issues of mirroring and reflection are especially problematic for the daughter, unwilling to identify herself with the mother, whose primary location is the domestic sphere, hierarchically placed below the male-dominated public realm” (2009, 129-130). However, the mother tries to convince the daughter of the inevitability of women’s oppression by telling her how she herself suffered violence from her own father when he discovered that she had gone out with her boyfriend. She wants to establish a bond of solidarity with the young woman reminding her that she was also young one time: “he dragged me in by the hair—it was as long as yours then— / in front of the whole street”. After saying that the father was “a right tyrant”, the mother assures her daughter that she will protect her against such kind of violence: “It’ll be over my dead body that anyone harms a hair of your head” (7). It would seem that the mother does not want her daughter to accept the pattern of submission to patriarchal authority. However, when the daughter helps her with needlework and lets her imagination fly, the mother will reel her “firmly home”. And so, she becomes the agent of perpetuation of the patriarchal ideology by cutting athwart the girl’s dreams and teaching her to follow the pattern of the quilt, which symbolises the pattern of established roles of daughterhood and motherhood:

Tongues of flame in her dark eyes,
she’d say, ‘One of these days I must
teach you to follow a pattern’. (2003, 8)

In Paula Meehan’s “Thunder in the House” (2000, 20-21), the scene of violence takes place at somebody else’s home with the silent complicity of the neighbours. The poetic persona of a girl describes with a neutral tone the violence

which happens routinely in the flat above. The speaker shows no sympathy for the twelve year old girl who is being “curst and soundly whacked”, while nobody does anything to help her and the poetic person’s mother prefers to ignore this reality, perhaps out of fear of unleashing this same violence in her own home.

My mother had no answers, or if she knew,
was leaving well enough alone. My own father
got cranky and threatened to settle his hash. God
love her , they’d say, she has nobody else. It’d go
even harder on her if anyone interfered. (2000, 20-21)

The proclaimed privacy of the domestic space has led to consider domestic violence as a private affair, justifying the indifference and silence of a society reluctant to admit the social dimension of the problem. In *Domestic Violence* (2007), Eavan Boland has devoted the first section of the book to explore various kinds of violence. In “Domestic Violence” (11-12) the poetic persona laments the passivity or indifference she and her partner, newly married, showed before the reality of violence which was happening in other people’s lives: “nothing we said / not then, not later / fathomed what it is / wrong in the lives of those who hate each other” (11). Domestic violence is also set against other social conflicts in Ireland. “In that season suddenly our island / broke out its old sores for all to see” (11). In comparison with these social wounds, the problems within private domestic spaces may have seemed to many of little relevance. However, the poetic voice in Boland’s poem underlines the hypocrisy of a whole society that pretended to ignore this reality, while the poem makes it clear that they had always known.

We lived our lives, were happy, stayed as one.
Children were born and raised here
And are gone ,
Including ours.

As for that couple did we ever
Find out who they were
And did we want to?
I think we know. I think we always knew. (2007, 12)

In contrast to the sense of solidarity among women in the warm atmosphere of the kitchen that we find in Lupe Gomez, Marta Dacosta and Anne Hartigan's verse commented above, Marilar Aleixandre's "derrotas domésticas" (*Catálogo de velenos* 1999, 15) demystifies the home by means of a cold gaze at the hardness of some domestic tasks, with a special emphasis on the monotony and frustration that characterises them, as opposed to the idealisation of the housewife role as the angel of the house, engaged in doing delicate *feminine* tasks. In this poem, the poetic persona of the daughter addresses her mother and reproaches her for having wasted her talents doing hard, unpleasant and somewhat absurd household chores for which her knowledge of foreign languages was useless. She imagines that it must have been difficult for her "degolar as anguías / sen cortar os dedos / arrandearte para que non te cubrisen / as escamas do ollomol" (15). In her detailed description of these domestic tasks, there is no place for sympathy or identification with the mother; just the opposite, the daughter finds it difficult to admit that her mother could have found fulfillment in her role of housewife and been happy. The poetic persona looks at the photos of her mother and she wonders how she could be possibly smiling in them. In spite of the apparent objectivity in the description of the mother's work, we can glimpse the daughter's hidden rage at her mother's passivity in accepting to be constrained to the identity of a housewife, while her intellectual training could have allowed her to lead a different kind of life.

e se o batifundo das tixolas
non che deixaba oír a música
se o teu francés e alemán
eran inútiles contra a graxa dos fogóns
se os tubos de auga berran como nenos
ou gaivotas e as patacas se pegan
no fondo da tarteira

nai
¿cómo é que estás sorrindo nas fotos? (1999, 15)

In Luz Pichel's "Bolboreta non son" (2006, 28), we can detect the contradiction inherent in the ideology of Francoist Spain which tried to present

images of women as mothers and daughters enclosed in warm homes, taking care of others or being cared for and protected by their husbands and fathers from the hardships of jobs outside the home. These images blatantly ignored the reality not only of women's work in rural areas and in factories, doing the same tasks as men, but also the painful aspects of household chores. It is not clear whether the poetic persona in Pichel's poem addresses somebody who is doing the washing or she talks to herself in a sort of stream of consciousness. In any case, this dramatic monologue goes beyond the hardships of washing up in the open air in wintertime: "A roupa contra a pedra, / o xabón contra a roupa, / a chuvia contra o tellado do lavadoiro," (28). The poem also reflects the feeling of entrapment a lot of daughters experienced when their lives were restricted to monotonous, and sometimes heavy, domestic tasks, without any possibility of an education which could open for them the doors to a different life. However, the comparison of her open hands with the wings of a butterfly, suggests that, perhaps, there might be the possibility of flying away.

A roupa contra a pedra,
O xabón contra a roupa,
A chuvia contra o tellado do lavadoiro,
E no medio da chuvia miras as mans
Abertas coma dúas mans arrugadas, moi limpas.
Pero ti non es unha bolboreta,
Non se che vai coa auga a fariña das ás,
Ti pódeste mollar. (2006, 28)

In the next poem by Marilar Aleixandre it is not clear whether the poetic voice belongs to a daughter or a son, but it might well be seen as that of a daughter who is closing the family home as a metaphor of her rejection of the traditional roles assigned to women. The home is also the space where she may have witnessed the toil of her mother and where she was supposed to learn and construct her identity in accordance to the established roles of patriarchal society. In the poem "varrer as cinzas", collected in *Desmentindo a primavera* (2003, 17-18), the poetic persona addresses the father to inform him that she is closing the family

house because she does not want to follow the pattern of daughterhood, by which daughters were supposed to substitute their mothers and accept the task of being the carers and nurturers of the family. Closing the house implies that she is looking for fulfillment in the public sphere. In this poem, the daughter asks herself why it has to be she, as one of five offspring, the one who maintains the fire of the hearth alight. In her rebellion, she announces that she will sweep the ashes of the hearth—an action that will frighten away the ancestral spirits of the family and, consequently, will definitely close the history of the house. Paradoxically, it was the father, “reading book after book”, who planted in the children “wind seeds” (18).

varrer as cinzas
no lar morrerá o lume
prendido hai catro séculos
e non vou recoller o tizón
caído da túa man
pai

á noite varrerei as cinzas
aída que escorrente as ánimas
dos antepasados
se a cheminea
cala as súas palabras de fume
gritando en silencio
a soidade de casa
non me tomes a requesta
¿por que a min de cinco irmáns? (2003, 17)

On the one hand, we can identify a feeling of nostalgia for a place and time long gone conveyed in the silent cry of the fireplace, which symbolises the centre of family life. However, the poetic persona in “varrer as cinzas” will not take the burning stick that fell from her father’s hand and will not keep alive the fire of a home that has been lit for four centuries. She does not accept the role of a dutiful daughter who confines herself to the responsibility of sustaining the home while her brothers go away. On the contrary, she remembers how it was the father himself who, with his fondness of books, sowed the seeds of wind that would take

the children away from home: “na cociña que o lume non quece / aínda bate o eco da túa voz / lendo libro tras libro plantando / en nós / semente de vento” (2003, 18).

5.4. Rebellions

In the previous section we saw a demystification and rejection of domestic roles by daughters who adopt a critical stance against the position of subordination of their mothers. In this section we are going to analyse some poems from Paula Meehan’s *Dharmakaya* (2000), Luisa Castro’s *Baleas e baleas* (1988), Anne Hartigan’s *To Keep the Light Burning* (2008) as well as from Marilar Aleixandre’s *Catalogo de velenos* (1999) and *Desmentido a primavera* (2003), in which the poetic voices of daughters go one step further in open rebellion against their mothers’ control over them to prevent them from leaving the trodden path of patriarchal roles. These poems range from the adolescent’s discovery of sex, which must be hidden from her mother, to the position of adult daughters who reject the image of the mother as a mirror of positive identification and claim their right to get rid of the constrictive rules established for women. In most of these poems their rebelliousness is directed against their mothers since they have been important agents in the transmission of patriarchal rules and values. However, there is a significant difference between Meehan’s poem “On Poetry” (2000, 55-58), which represents the rejection of the idealisation of an all-powerful mother and the more personal, intimate rebellion we find in Castro’s, Aleixandre’s and Hartigan’s poems.

Paula Meehan’s “On Poetry” engages with the difficulty for a woman writer to find her way into the Irish literary repertoire, which is pervaded by the iconography of Mother Ireland and it reflects the poetic persona’s rebellion against the use of symbols which do not relate to real women’s lives. The poem consists of three sections: “Virgin” “Mother” and “Whore”. Laura Lojo points out that “éestas no son conceptualizaciones disociadas, sino que más bien corresponderían a la

evolución del yo poético como mujer y como escritora” (2008, 51). In the first part, “Virgin” (55), the poetic persona looks back at the young woman she was once and remembers something that happened when “one particular moon snared in the willows” (55). In this memory she links the experience of pleasure of her first love encounter—which had taken place “earlier that day in the abandoned garden” (55)— with the pleasure and the hope of translating all her experiences into her poetic creation: “a notebook beside me with girl poems in it / and many blank pages to fill” (55). These blank pages on which all the memories of her life will be recorded: “and let there be a rose and the memory of its thorn / and a scar on my thigh where the torn had ripped” (55). The last lines of the poem cast a shadow on the fulfillment of this hope: “And let me be peaceful / for I wasn’t. / Not then, not for many moons after” (55). The mention of the moon and its association with the menstrual and reproductive cycles, hints at a non desired pregnancy that may cut short the young woman’s expectations. The uneasiness of the young woman about her biological procreative power also symbolises the doubts about her creative capabilities.

In “Mother” (2000, 56-57), we can find several layers of meaning which range from a personal rebellion of a daughter against the mother to a rejection of the nationalist construction of the image of Mother Ireland as a mirror of traditional motherhood. In Meehan’s poem, the poetic persona of an angry Persephone casts a ferocious tirade against an image of Demeter who embodies for her all the bad attributes of a devouring mother: “mother you terrorist / muck mother mud mother / you chewed me up / you spat me out / mother you devourer / plucker of my soul bird / mammal self abuser / nightmatrix huntress” (56). The Goddess mother depicted here has more in common with the powerful mother, who sees herself as a jealous “old witch” and watches the “beautiful gazelle”, in Eithne Strong’s “Mother and Daughter” (1993b, 4-5), a poem that has already been analysed in chapter four. The reference to calendars and the locking of the grain brings the image of an angry Demeter who does not want to allow the earth its fruit unless Persephone returns, and, at the same time, the “ticking off moon days” (56) is a

clear reference to the menstrual cycles that determine the woman's procreative powers, thus highlighting one of the main issues of mothers' oppression: the fear of the consequences of their daughter's sexuality. The diatribe of this rebellious Persephone is aimed at contradicting some of the key elements of the ideology of motherhood and goes against the whole society that tries to perpetuate the identification of woman to nature, while nature is being destroyed and even the maternal milk is contaminated with strontium.¹⁰ Thus, the mother is not the tender nurturing being whose realm is the home; she becomes the symbol of the house as a place of imprisonment of her daughter's desire and freedom. Even her breasts cannot provide healthy milk for her children anymore: "mother house and tomb / your two breasts storing / strontium and lies / when you created time" (56).

The poetic persona endows this mother with the attributes of the great ancient Goddesses. She acknowledges her as the supreme creator of universe as well as the origin of all the major achievements of humanity:

mother you created plenty
you and your serpent consort
you and your nests
you and your alphabets

mother your pictographs
your mandalas your runes
your inches your seconds
your logic your grammar. (2000, 56)

The mention of the "serpent consort" (56) makes reference to the snake as a symbol that is, in Neumann's words, "universal and polyvalent", with a "hybrid nature" (1972, 144). It allows for a wide range of areas of meaning, but it frequently appears as feminine, connected to the goddesses in Greek, Roman and Egyptian representations as well as in India.

The snake is associated with it in a subordinate role. Like the male and phallic element, it appears as a part of the Feminine or as its companion. Thus the snake in Crete and India is an attribute of the female deity, and is at the same time her male-phallic companion. (Neumann, 1972, 144).

The poem goes on describing the mother wearing a “necklace of skulls”, which brings forth the image of the Indian Goddess Kali who represents not only the creative force of nature but also its all-consuming destructive power. A creator “who calls into being / by uttering the name / mater logos metric” (Meehan, 25), but also the Terrible Mother who exacts bloody sacrifices, whose devotional image has been described by Heinrich Zimmer, in “The Indian World Mother”, as “dressed in blood red, standing in a boat floating on a sea of blood” (1968, apud Neumann 1972, 152). Despite the distance in time and place between Indian and Irish traditions, they are closely related according to Barbara Walker (1983), who draws on the work of Merlin Stone (1976), Arthur Avalon (1978) and Austine Wadell (1972) and asserts the similarity between the threefold aspects of the Great Goddess.¹¹

Thus, there is in Meehan’s poem a connection with the mythography of Mother Ireland, which was promoted by nationalism as an element necessary to shape national identity, so that it could be opposed to that of imperial Britannia. This myth still influences, as Anne Fogarty observes, “the ways in which femininity is construed in the country today” (2002, 87). It adopts three different representations: the young maiden, the old crone and, more relevant for this work, the “melancholic mother who demands unceasing sacrifice and devotion from her children and is herself defined by an unswerving propensity to self-immolation” (Fogarty 2002, 87). In this context, the poetic persona in Meehan’s poem rebels against the nationalist construction of a Mother Ireland that has justified the bloodshed and imposed a model of motherhood completely disconnected from the reality of mothers and daughters. In the last stanzas we find the expression of contradictory feelings in the daughter: on the one hand, after venting her rage, she wants the Goddess to recognise her as her breed: “old cow I’m your calf” (56), on the other hand, there is a gradual softening of her anger that gives way to the expression of regret for the loss of the mother. The last lines reflect the death of this powerful mother who is buried under a “granite headstone” (57). Killing the metaphorical mother may be a necessary step for women writers to achieve

independence and maturity, but it is undeniably a loss and so it is expressed with the weeping of the daughter in the last line.

mother fetishist
heart breaker
forsaker and fool
in the pouring rain

mother I stand
over your grave
and your granite headstone
and I weep. (2000, 56-57)

In the third part of the poem, “Whore” (58), the poetic persona tells us that she learnt the value exchange of female sexuality very early and decided to take advantage of it instead of wasting it by accepting the constraints a repressive society puts on women. Thus, she chose to profit from sex and “be cute, be wized / up and sussed, commodify the fun” (58). She adopts a critical stance against marriage as a contract of property on females’ bodies and the tricks women have to use in order to enter into this market. She rejects “the way the goodwives/girlfriends did / pretending to be meek and do as bid / while close-managing their menfolk” (58) and she affirms that “it wasn’t right” (58). This rebellion against the meekness and submission of wives and girlfriends can be seen as well as a metaphor of the rejection of the images of women that have been traditionally used in poetry.

The tone of the poem changes in the last stanzas in which the poetic persona addresses the reader as a witness of her decay: “See me now — / I’m old and blind and past my sexual prime / and it’s been such a long and lonely time / since I felt fire in my belly” (58). However, like the ancient Goddess who married a young husband, the poetic persona still waits for the young boy who will kindle “the spark that wakes the body into dance” (58), and will allow her a new incarnation. Laura Lojo observes that this triad of “Virgin”, “Mother” and “Whore” “expresa la evolución sexual, psicológica y poética de un sujeto femenino hasta alcanzar

conocimiento, experiencia auténtica y poder, que le es conferido a través de la inscripción de lo corpóreo en sus poemas” (2008, 51-52).

In some poems from Luisa Castro’s *Baleas e baleas* (1988), we find the conflicting feelings of an adolescent girl who wants to adjust her behavior to the rules of a nun’s school and be appreciated as a *good girl*, while her discoveries inside and outside the school contradict the authenticity of the role models she is taught. The poetic persona experiences the split between the idealised normative model of a girl and her authentic self. She addresses her mother and tries to convince her that she does all the things a good girl should do to please the nuns. This description of a good girl’s behavior is interrupted from time to time by the account of the spontaneous manifestations of her personality that contradicts this idyllic image. We can detect that, despite her efforts, she has not succeeded in getting the nuns’ approval and she can feel their contemptuous criticism about her parents.

As monxas mándanme ler as escrituras
porque son buena e teño cara de buena, loiriña, así,
e teño cara de vocación
e son a primeira
en resolver os problemas de Rubio

As veces xuro, pero iso é porque non teño pais, mamá

Pero son buena
e canto no coro flores a María,
vou ás novenas de maio có uniforme cheo de barro
de xogar cos pícaros a feitos e verdades
pero as monxas pensan que é porque son medio neno
e xogo ó fútbol. (1988, 49)

In the background of these poems, some issues stand out: corporal punishment, discrimination according to social class and the contradiction between the hypocrisy of religious discourse about sexuality, which was considered the worst of sins,¹² and the fact of sexual abuse of children that took place at some nuns’ and priests’ schools. The poems also highlight the need for the girls to

discover the reality of sex and to experience sexual desire, despite the repression they are subjected to. The poetic persona in Castro's poems tells her mother how some of her school's friends are punished, "péganlle nas puntas dos dedos coa vara de limitar a península" (51), and how she is spared physical punishment, "a min non me pegan porque pago o trinta. / Eu son pobre mamá / pero pago o colexio e sei demostrar o cociente" (57). However, she cannot avoid another kind of chastisement, despite all her efforts to behave as a good girl:

a min non me pegan, mamá, porque son a primeira en aprender
onde queda Cataluña chis-pun-fuego, porque son
a primeira
en demostrar o cociente
aínda que xure;
a min, mamá, se fago trasnadas
métenme man no cuarto do botiquín e non me pegan,
métenme man e que non ande en moto cos pícaros
que son uns xíbaros e só queren
baixarmne as bragas. (1988, 51)

The girl tries to minimise the sexual abuse by convincing her mother that the time she is exposed to it is shorter than that of other girls, because she does not do the bad things those other girls do: "Se fago trasnadas / féchanme no cuarto do botiquín por pouquiño tempo / porque son buena e non son coma Ana Franco" (53). Thus, she tries to safeguard her image of a good girl as opposed to some of her school friends that, according to the nuns' standards, are bad girls, like "Carme", who shows them her tits in the toilet and smokes, or "Ana Franco", who laughs at the nuns and frightens them. We can see how the nuns' obsession about sex, cold showers and Saint Thomas are echoed in the daughter's questions to her mother: "Mamá, / ¿Qué se sinte debaixo dun home? ¿Qué se sinte lendo a Santo Tomás debaixo da ducha fría?" (51). These questions are repeated intermittently as the girl discovers that sexuality is not only a threatening sin in the nuns' words, but a reality that is everywhere around her: "Mamá, qué se sinte debaixo de meu pai, os sábados" (57).

The lack of freedom to deal with the issue of sex, as well as the contradiction between the religious discourse of purity and the hidden sexual abuse, created an atmosphere of guilt and blame around sexuality. This brought about the need for girls to discover and experience it in hidden dark places of which mothers were supposed to have no notice.

Mamá,
ti non sabes o que pasa na última fila do cine
coas máis grandes.
Rosa ás veces tamén pero fago que non miro.

Mamá, ti non sabes o que pasa cando me quedo soa con Carme
a varrer a clase. (1988, 53)
[...]
As internas danlle bromuro á cea
Pero despois, pola noite, déitanse xuntas de tres.
Mamá, ti non sabes o que pasa coas internas cando se quedan soas. (1988, 55)

In spite of all the efforts of the young girl to fit into the mould of a *good girl*, her rebelliousness and spontaneity breaks out the stiffness of the model and, consequently, she is often expelled from the class and has to expend long hours in the corridors: “As veces xuro e bótanme fóra. / En terceiro paséi todo o ano nos corredores / vendo voar a Sampi” (59). Although the girl boasts about her lack of fear of unreal dangers, such as lions in the circus, she acknowledges that she is afraid of the medicine cabinet room and corridors, since these are dangerous places where the girl is unprotected from abuse: “Só lle teño medo ós corredores / e a quedarme soa coa monxa no cuarto do botiquín” (59).

Marilar Alexandre’s *Catálogo de velenos* (1999) is dedicated to her mother: “á miña nai Marilar Alexandre, / que escribía poemas para rompelos”. It is important to observe that both the writer and her mother have the same name because in the first poem of this book, “baixo as uñas” (1999, 13-14), the poetic persona acknowledges that she had usurped her mother’s name. This appropriation reveals a feeling of reconciliation with the dead mother and the recognition of her as an agent who propitiated the daughter’s rebellion. In the essay that closes the book, “A mazá envelenada sobe aos labios” (67-71), Pilar Pallarés affirms that

Catálogo de velenos “é un acto de amor e un axuste de contas” (67). The character of the daughter who questions herself about the mother has not been frequent in Galician poetry and to speak of this conflicting relationship was a kind of taboo for certain trends of Feminism. However, the dark aspects of the mother-daughter bond appear in fairy tales and we find the characters of Snow White and the jealous Step Mother in some of Aleixandre’s poems we are going to study next.¹³ They reflect the complexity of feelings that are intermingled in the mother-daughter relationship, as Pilar Pallarés explains:

Dese amor estrefebado con ódio falaron máis os contos de fadas que a literatura adulta, tan ben comportada. Rencor pola madrasta que nos envelena, que é a nosa rival, a que nos clausura na casa coma Cincentas ou nos abandona nun bosque tenebroso. (Pallarés 1999, 68)

In “baixo as uñas” (1999, 13), the poetic persona of the daughter addresses her dead mother and remembers how the night before she died she was removing the pink enamel from her mother’s fingernail so that the doctor could see the blood running underneath. At the same time, she remembers that, the previous year, she was twenty five years old and she was very busy at not being like her mother and erasing the enamel of all her fingernails. With this action she symbolises her rejection of the female role that takes for granted that it is part of the feminine identity to be attractive in order to seduce a boyfriend that will become a husband: “estaba tan ocupada / en non ser coma ti / non criar sete fillos / borrar os esmaltes / de todas as uñas” (13). She remembers that there is a part of her life, that related to sexuality, which was hidden from her mother, since sex was usually one source of misunderstanding between mothers and daughters. Now that the mother is dead, the poetic persona confesses the existence of a lover that the mother would not have approved.

However, despite her efforts to be different from the mother, the daughter acknowledges now that under the surface, once the enamel has been erased, there is the blood she has inherited from her mother. In fact, it was her mother who

taught her to rebel against the mother's influence "non sabía que fuches ti quen me educou / contra ti mesma" (14). She admits that

daquela non sabía
que o teu sangue callou
nesa terra que teño baixo as uñas
que a ti debía
as pugas que agromaban que
tamén levo por baixo das uñas
restos da túa tinta
que acabaría usurpando o teu nome

non sabía que fuches ti que me educou
contra ti mesma. (1999, 14)

The poem "o diario" (1999, 16-20), consists of three sections: "1 pesadelos ou soños", "2 cara adentro" and "3 rabuda", which follow a typographic pattern similar to that of Jessie Lendennie's "Daughter". In Marilar Aleixandre's poem, the first lines in italics are the entries the mother wrote in the little girl's diary using the first person. In the subsequent lines the poetic voice of the adult daughter, on reading the diary, reflects upon what her mother wrote and discovers with surprise the knowledge her mother had of her inner self as well as the fact that they both shared much more than the daughter would have guessed. Some popular characters of fairy tales appear in this poem. Thus, in the first section there is the wolf which hides under the bed at night while in the following sections we find Snow White, the step-mother, the dwarfs and the hunter. In her epilogue to *Catálogo de velenos*, "A mazá envelenada sobe aos labios" (1999, 67-71), Pilar Pallarés explains the function of this tale:

Catálogo de velenos refai o conto infantil de Brancaneves para indagar nas nosas coincidencias e desencontros coa nai hoxe. Del proceden os reproches á madrastra, as ansias de fuxirmos dela, o peite e a mazá con que aspira a destruír-nos, o espello no que espía a nosa xuventude e a súa decadencia, a rivalidade por un marido-pai que nunca se menciona, o cazador ao que ordena tirar-nos os sangomiños, os anáns e o seu acougo doméstico a cambio da nosa liberdade. (1999, 68)

In *The Uses of Enchantment. The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales* (1977), Bruno Bettelheim uses the Brothers Grimm's version to analyse some of the most popular fairy tales from the point of view of psychoanalysis. He considers "Snow White" as one of the fairy tales that best represents "the main phases of childhood development" (201). He observes that, like in many other tales, the pre-oedipal years are not mentioned and the story focuses on "the oedipal conflicts between mother and daughter; with childhood, and finally with adolescence, placing major emphasis on what constitutes a good childhood, and what is needed to grow out of it" (1977, 201-202).

In Alexandre's poem "1 pesadelos ou sonhos" (16-17), the mother wrote in the girl's diary: "*teño sonhos todas as noites / e moitas veces acordo asustada*" (16). For the adult woman, the revelation of her mother's understanding of the girl's dreams and nightmares, of her fear of ghosts hidden in the closets or under the beds can only be explained by the fact that the mother herself shared these same dreams and fears, but it is too late to ask her: "*é tarde non podo preguntarche / por qué sabías que eu acordaba / se o lobo antes de entrar no meu cuarto / visitaba o teu*" (16). The diary gives the daughter a new insight into her mother's life and she is able to discover the woman hidden behind the mother's role, with her dreams and fears. She can have a glimpse of the frightened little girl she once was and she laments the impossibility of establishing a dialogue with her mother on the common ground of their dreams and fantasies:

como non explicas mais non sei
se coidabas as fantasías para que criasen cerna
ou se as atabas curtas como o meu cabelo
coas tesoiras

se eran sonhos ou pesadelos
se hai quen non se atreve a soñar
por se o soño co tempo se fai pesadelo

¿era ese o destino que temías
para a túa filla a soñadora? (1999, 17)

In “2 cara a dentro” (18). The mother wrote: “*se estou lendo ou escoitando a radio / non me decato do que pasa arredor meu / nin do que me falan*” (18). The daughter sees herself reflected in her mother’s statement but she doubts whether this affirmation is a diagnosis or a warning against the danger of an introverted personality. Reading books and listening to the radio were considered dangerous activities for girls and women because of their power to create alternative worlds where everything may happen and dreams could be fulfilled. Hence, it was the mother’s duty to keep their daughters’ imagination on a tight rein so that they can accept with docility the traditional patriarchal roles established for them. The threat of the punishment that would be executed by the Hunter seems more rhetorical than real since this battle is between mother and daughter and the weak image of the father, embodied by the Hunter in “Snow White”, is completely absent in this poem.

diagnóstico ou acusación
etiqueta no envase: ¡ollo
esta é a que se mete cara adentro!
para fóra só ensina as pugas

non deben facer así as nenas de sete anos
por moito menos
mandou a madrasta ó cazador
tirarlle os sangomiños. (1999, 18)

The last section of this poem, “rabuda” (19), starts with a line that is at the same time the continuation of what the mother wrote in the previous section and the end of the diary: “*e teño bastante mal xenio*” (19). The daughter accepts this assertion about her personality and she develops this conclusive statement by describing what her mother could have said of her. She uses the words as the mirror that can reflect her mother’s thoughts. The next lines of the poem, “*e rabuda coma min / puidiches escribir*” (19), represent the acceptance of the mother’s statement as well as her identification with her. In doing so, the daughter acknowledges the things they have in common and the fact that she has forged her indomitable personality against that of her mother, as she would not negotiate her freedom at the price of accepting the traditional feminine role.

é rabuda coma min
pudeches escribir
non acepta sen protestar
que o luns siga ó domingo
nin negociaría como Brancaneves
un acougo ó prezo de cociñar lavar
coser e calcetar. (1999, 19)

In the next stanzas the poetic persona goes on giving voice to what her mother could have said about the negative and positive aspects of her personality she has copied or inherited from her mother. She has copied from the mirror of her mother's image her forked tongue as well as her disdain and the use of the words as blunt scissors, but she has also inherited the passion for writing that springs from her nails. The mother must have been proud that it was she who taught her how to thread words:

herdou de min os osos pequenos
a má uva a lingua gallada
a tinta ou veneno que lle brota baixo as uñas
vén de moi atrás
e aínda que se negue a recoñecelo
fun eu quen lle aprendeu
a enfiar as palabras. (1999, 20)

According to Bettelheim, the tale of Snow White “is not the first story of a mother's jealousy of her daughter's budding sexuality, nor is it all that rare that a daughter in her mind accuses her mother of such jealousy” (270). Bettelheim also points out that the magic mirror “seems to speak with the voice of a daughter rather than that of a mother” (270). When Snow White is a little girl, the mirror voices the daughter's conviction that her mother is the most beautiful woman in the world, but as she grows older the girl “thinks she is much more beautiful than her mother, this is what the mirror says later” (270). To support his assertion Bettelheim considers that a mother may reluctantly admit that her daughter is more beautiful than her, but the exaggeration of the mirror affirming that Snow White is the most beautiful among all women is “a statement much more akin to an

adolescent's exaggeration which he makes to enlarge his advantages and silence his inner voice of doubt" (270).

The image of the mother as the jealous step-mother of fairy-tales is also present in Aleixandre's poem "verme ou veneno" (1999, 22-23). The poisoned apple the stepmother gives Snow White is half poisoned and they share it, but it is the daughter who eats the red poisoned half, the one that symbolises sexuality, which is at the basis of the conflict between them. Bettelheim underlines the fact that neither the apple nor the comb kill Snow White; they only paralyse her and this is what the Step-mother wants: to hold up the progress of her daughter toward the plenitude of youth, which she has already lost. The daughter in "verme ou veneno" reflects on the loss of youth and beauty that are signs of the inevitability of decay and death and she does not know which will be the agent of this decay: "Se verme derrubando / desde o interior do corpo a arquitectura / destensando músculos que termaban / da máscara de pel" (22), "se veneno de golpe / porque a uña coa que abriches a porta / ficou manchada de sangue" (22). The daughter addresses the mother telling her that, whatever the cause may be, she cannot avoid her fate nor even have a choice: "verme ou veneno / pouco a pouco ou de golpe / esa é a opción / nin sequera serás ti quen escolla" (22) and she asks her not to give her the poisoned apple and to remember that, as her daughter, she is not to be blamed for the loss of youth the mirror reflects: "ti non es a miña madrasta / lembra son a túa filla / non me tendas a mazá envelenada / quen che roubou a beleza non fun eu / o espello traidor non ha devolverche / a tersura da pel altivez das cellas" (23).

In "o peite" (24), the daughter rejects the poisoned comb the Step-mother gave her although it cannot do her any harm because she first cut her hair and, when it grew again, she decided to let it undone. Thus, a female attribute of beauty is removed to rebel against the traditional image of femininity:

advertíрана de nena
que non debía peitearse
diante dos homes
(se era transgresión pecadenta

ou ritual máxico nunca se soubo)

por iso cando lle medrou o cabelo
levouno desguedellado
como os niños dos paxaros. (1999, 24)

Rebellion is an attitude that befits not only adolescent girls. We find, in Anne Hartigan's "Song" (*To Keep the Light Burning* 2008, 63), an adult daughter who tells her mother that she has dutifully done the household chores a housewife is expected to do, in accordance to the traditional roles established for her. But now, it is understood that this is the last time she submits to this *proper feminine* behaviour. She is putting an end to this and starting a new life for which, in a certain way, she needs her mother's permission to break the rules. So, she asks her mother for help so that she can get rid of the ties that bind them: "Mother untie my apron strings / And hang it on the door, / For I have washed the dishes, / And I have swept the floor, / I've smoothed my hair down carefully / And there is nothing more" (63). At first sight these lines may suggest the voice of a young girl who needs her mother's help to untie her apron and asks for her mother's permission to go out and play after she has done her domestic tasks, assuring the mother that nothing else is left undone. But the fact that she has smoothed her hair down carefully, suggests an ambivalence in meaning because, although it is an action that good little girls should do before they go to bed, for adult women, especially married women, to let one's hair down means "to behave wildly or uninhibited" (Oxford Dictionary of English 1998), a definition that reflects the widespread patriarchal ideology which considered that loose hair was a token of seduction that did not become adult women and, least of all, those who were married, who should wear their hair tightly tied, since honest adult women were not allowed any kind of desire. Thus, the fact of smoothing her hair down, perhaps for the last time, might symbolise, on the one hand, the poetic persona's resolution to break the rules that good girls must follow and, on the other hand, her challenge to an ideology that denied women's right to sexuality.

The next stanzas present the voice of a mature woman who has decided to start a new life in which she will enjoy the love and passion that are awaiting her.

Anne Hartigan explains, in the same book, the reason behind the writing of this poem:

In 'Song' I was telling myself and my long dead mother that I was about to live my life my own way, that the inherited rules I received from her were not going to hold me any longer, that I was going to step out and live by my own rules. (2008, 62)

The poetic persona is ready to forget everything she has been taught and to be guided only by “the ring around the moon” that “is playing on the floor” and “is singing in [her] head tonight” (63). The moon rings are optical effects produced by light reflection that, in weather folklore, often predict storms. Besides, the moon has been associated in patriarchal ideology with the dark creative force of female biology. However, in this poem the coming storm is a positive one and is caused by love. The last stanzas are addressed to her lover and are full of hope and determination:

I've lit a little lamp, my love,
It's burning in my mind,
The door is creeping open
I'm lifting up the blind.

I have undone my apron strings
It's fallen on the floor,
The moon has winked her eye at me,
My hand is on the door. (2008, 63)

5.5. Reversing Roles

The feminist struggle in the seventies claimed for the need of shared parenting and it also helped to increase the creation of public child care centres in order to allow women to combine motherhood with work outside home. Thus, the problem seemed to be, at least partially, solved. However, the present economic crisis together with the increase in life expectancy constitutes a new threat to women's independence, since they are considered the *natural* carers of their old parents in the absence of enough public social services. In Spain, the high rate of

unemployment affects specially women and this favours the option of remaining at home caring old and disabled people, at the cost of frustrating their hopes of a personal fulfillment as well as the realisation of being left alone to face a situation that is often difficult and distressing.

In the previous chapter, we already analysed the presence of aging mothers through the voice of Ceres in Eavan Boland's poetry. In this section we are going to see the process of illness and decline through the voice of the daughter, as well as the changes in the relationship when the daughter becomes the one who cares for the mother. I will focus on the work of Mary Dorcey to analyse how she represented this painful experience in some poems published in *Moving into the Space Cleared by Our Mothers* (1994) and in *Like Joy in Season, Like Sorrow* (2001) as well. In the poem titled "Grist to the Mill" (2001, 8-9), the poetic persona remembers her mother saying that everything can be "grist to the mill" and she has to remind herself "[t]hat a writer can make / Use of everything" (8). Thus, she has decided to transform into poetry the painful experience of seeing her mother losing the memory of herself and her progressive transformation into a dependent child.¹⁴ In her review, written in the back cover of this book, Eavan Boland says that "[t]his poetry is, above all, a celebration of the power of the memory in the face of its destruction".

The poem is set in a hospital room while the daughter is feeding the mother and, at the same time, she is transcribing the dialogue that takes place between them. The image of the daughter feeding the mother with a spoon and wiping her chin suggest that of a mother with her child, but for the dialogue, which has the tone proper to adult people. The daughter repeats her mother's words: "Nothing is wasted, / you say, / No experience, / However dismal — / Entirely redundant" (2001, 8). She understands these words as both an offer and a permission to make the most of this situation by giving it poetic representation and, on doing so, she will bring to the light this reality that, like many other aspects of women's lives, has been absent from artistic creation.

To take this sorrow —

This irreparable loss;
The erasure
By stealth,
Of culture and past —
This commonplace and
Unreported suffering,
And put them to work. (2001, 8)

Moreover, the daughter wants to rescue from erasure the image of the mother she once had. She needs to reconstruct through memories a solid image of the woman who inhabited this body before and recover from oblivion her “laughter”, her “sudden shafts of vision”, her “dark ironies” and even her pride, so that she can give them the shape of “an artefact” (9), of “[s]omething / One can take up / And put down” (9). And with this reconstruction of the woman her mother was once she will be able to face the actual woman, with “[t]his sly dispossession — / This infant dependence” (9). The daughter is determined to be honest and use everything and, despite the pride she has inherited from her mother, she will not mask the hard reality of the present: “Damage and indignities, / Piled day by day, onto / The wreckage of self” (9) and she will do it for her mother’s sake and for her own.

The poem which opens the book, “Uncharted Passage” (2001, 3-4), is a reflection on the sense of protection against the storms of life and against death we feel when we still have parents that precede us in this struggle. It seems that, as long as they are alive, they are like a bulwark that protects us against death. In this poem, the poetic voice of a daughter addresses her mother comparing her to the flagship that directs the course of the family:

You are the flagship —
gladly or not
we travel in your wake.

So long as the masthead
bears your colours
we hold course. (2001, 3)

However, the sense of security about the steadiness of the hand that governs the ship has disappeared and both captain and crew have to face this progression through illness and loss across this “uncharted passage” “[w]here the storms and shallows / threaten alike” (3) and they have to stand helpless “[w]hile half a lifetime’s / cargo is jettisoned / and the flotsam / Of memory; the silks / and the bric-a-brac, / float out, / On an ebb tide” (3). Parents have been the repository of the story of the family and the memories of our childhood, which are an important part of our personal story. When the mother loses her memories it seems that an important part of our life is in danger of dissolving into nothingness since the person who gave us life cannot recognise us as her children. The metaphor of wreckage suggests this sense of destruction and irreparable loss. The poetic persona wants to hold tight to this mast to delay the moment of the definite destruction.

So long as you hoard
a remnant of self
above water,

A frail bulwark
survives.
In the late middle-age

We remain, all
of us — somebody’s
children, still. (2001, 3-4)

In “Each Day Our First Night” (2001, 5-7), the title of the poem suggests the sense or repetition of routines and dialogues in which time seems to have come to a standstill since the mother cannot remember what has been talked about the previous day. The poetic voice of the daughter looks back forty years to recover the images of the mother she had when she was young and compares these images with those of the old woman who can be “anybody’s mother” (5). This contrast produces in her a feeling of estrangement as if time had not been linear and there had been a gap between past and present that prevents her from recognising the

course of time. The daughter expresses her adoration for a mother who was in her memories “beautiful”, “tall and graceful”, “dark haired” and “laughing” (5). These memories had nothing to do with the worn out old woman she lives with and who answers when she calls out the word *mother*:

Now I climb the steps
To a cold house

And call out a word
That used to summon her.
An old woman
Comes to the door:
Gaunt eyed, grey haired,
Feeble. An old woman

Who might be
Anybody’s mother. She
Fumbles with the locks,
And smiles a greeting
As if the name spoken
Belonged to her. (2001, 5)

The daughter tries to build bridges between past and present through routines and questions that can bring her back to her previous self and place her in time, but her efforts are useless and have only the effect to reinforce the similarity of this scene with that of a mother trying to teach her little child the basic knowledge about seasons, hours and days. But teaching a child is a gratifying activity, which bring surprises everyday and allow parents to enjoy their children’s progression towards youth and adulthood. On the contrary, there is no hope for this child-mother being able to remember anything that has been taught her and the only result is to make her feel ashamed of her incapability of retaining anything.

She cannot remember

The day of the week,
The hour, nor
The time of the year.
Look at the grass,

I say,
Look at the leaves —

You tell me!
Autumn, she answers
At last. Her hands
Wind in her lap,
Her eyes like a child's,
Full of shame. (2001, 5-6)

However, this kind of stagnation in time is not a safeguard against loss. The daughter knows that all her efforts to anchor her mother in the present and delay the definite annihilation of her identity are doomed to failure: “Each day, / A little more / Is lost of her, / Captured for an instant, / Then gone” (6). Against this, the daughter has to hold on to the memories of a younger mother and she accepts these present routines that the old woman is still able to perform, as the repetition of an “[e]xperimental piece” in which the mother can still follow the “stage directions” she has practised all her life and can lift her hand to wave her daughter off “[w]ith such command — / Watching her / Take a bow / From the curtain — / You could swear she / Was born for it!” (7).

In “First Love” (1994, 17-19) the first stanza might seem the voice of a lover describing with adoration the beauty of the loved one, but we soon discover that the poetic persona is a daughter who addresses her mother, going back to a time when she was a beautiful and charming woman and the daughter was a little girl in love with her. The poem represents moments of happiness and perfect connection between mother and child walking together hand in hand. The mother was still young enough and the child was old enough to share secrets of childhood and both of them could look at the future with great expectations because illness, decay and death were not in their emotional landscape.

You were tall and beautiful.
You wore your long dark hair
wound about your head,
your neck stood clear and full
as the stem of a vase.

You held my hand in yours
and we walked slowly
talking of small familiar happenings
and of the lost secrets
of your childhood. (1994, 17)

The next stanzas place this shared experience in a time of the year which seemed to have come to a halt since it was “always autumn” and in a beautiful wild landscape that is described as the scenery in which mother and daughter enjoyed the playful experiences that linked each other. They “laughed in a wind” / that cracked the leaves from black boughs /and sent them scuffling about [their] feet” (17). They “would climb” “to the cliff’s edge” and would enjoy “the wind howling” and “the breath from white checked waves” (17), and the girl is not afraid of these impressive natural elements because her mother is there to protect her.

You steadied me
against the wheeling screech
of gulls and I loved to think
that but for your strength
I would tumble to the rocks below
to the fated death
your stories made me dream of. (1994, 17-18)

The daughter remembers that they had no need of asking questions nor even looking into each other’s eyes to communicate. She says that their blood was the way through which their thoughts passed “and the slightest pressure / of [their] hands / decided all issues wordlessly” (18). The fact that no conversation between them is necessary reinforces the girl’s feeling that the sole presence of the mother and the physical connection established between them are enough to give her the warm security of a protective love. Furthermore, the sense of protection can change even the threatening aspects of nature, of “the water’s fierce, inhuman / company”, which can be transformed into a promise “of some future, timeless / refuge from the fixed / anxieties / of our world” (18). The protection of the mother, who enwraps her in her coat, gives the girl strength to face the “ice teeth” (18) of

the wind. Although this scene may relate to factual memories of the girl, it also has a strong symbolic power with the image of a loving mother who is powerful enough to protect the daughter against the storms of life. And this sense of protection is emphasised by the warm atmosphere of the home when they arrive there. This home means “fire” and “sweet, strong tea” but also the stories that link the characters with tradition and folklore in the songs the mother sings. These are songs that have an evocative power of representation because they speak “of Ireland’s troubles / and of proud women loved / and lost” (19) and the vividness of the images set for the girl “a brilliant stage of characters” that seem more alive than her “own chosen friends” (19). These songs connect her to a romanticised past inhabited probably by brave heroes and beautiful heroines like her mother. The poem starts and finishes with the same description of the mother’s beauty, but in the last four lines the daughter expresses the nostalgia for a past that has forever gone: “I was young – / you were my mother / and it seems / it was always autumn then” (19).

The happy memories of a time shared with a beautiful young mother described in the previous poem contrast sharply with the feeling of witnessing our own voyage towards death in the face of our mother’s decline that is represented in Mary Dorcey’s “Repossession” (1994, 56-57). The poetic persona addresses her old mother whose womb has been taken out because she has “no use for it” (56). In previous chapters we have seen how women have often been considered bodies by patriarchal ideologies and, frequently, as wombs to be used. Consequently, losing the creative function of the womb has symbolically been equated to losing *feminine* identity. The daughter describes her old mother as “stooped and frail / and thin” with “fingers swollen” and knees that “don’t work” (56) and, on seeing the decay of her mother’s body, she finds difficult to imagine that this same body was once so young and strong, that it was her daughter’s “chariot” and “tree house” and, before that, it was the vessel that contained her.

To think that once
your flesh
was fat and full enough
to feed me
to think you suckled me –
to think I broke from your body
wet and dark –
sleek as a seal's head
breaking water. (1994, 56)

The realisation of the changes in her mother's body awakens the daughter's awareness of her own changes since that time when she broke from her mother's body and obliges her to face her own ageing process. She observes how the decline affects also the old woman's mind, who "mislays everything / but the past". She gets lost in the house but her mind goes back to the past, to the memory of her own mother, "who died in a Home" (57) because she had all her children "to think of" (57) and could not take care of her. The poetic persona attends to this imaginary conversation between mother and grandmother that reflects the sense of guilt and the need of justification and recognition that can heal the wounds of the past. For the daughter it seems that as the mother's mind is gradually failing to grasp the present, the figure of the grandmother is growing more and more important as if she were repossessing that body which was once part of her.

Becalmed at your fireside –
you talk to her
and she talks back –
endlessly sifting
the argument.
Hour by hour
she reclaims you
She has grown into your lapses –
into your hands
into your walk.

Like mother – like daughter
I say: excuses – justification. (1994, 57)

When the daughter gets tired “of all this blather” and stands up “to clear the table” (58), she catches a glimpse of herself in the mirror her grandmother gave to her mother and she can see with surprise that the face reflected in “the gilt-framed glass” (58) is her mother’s face “looking out from / [the daughter’s] eyes” (58). Thus, beyond the fact that, as we grow older, the physical resemblance to our parents gets more and more conspicuous, these last lines stress the feeling of belonging to a chain of women who have preceded us in the path of life and whom we are going to follow towards death. That is the reason behind the uneasiness and anguish we can feel when we witness our mothers’ decline because it forebodes our own.

The poems I am going to comment next, “When You’re Asleep” (1994, 79-82) and “Going Home Without You” (2001, 10-11), reflect a wide range of feelings the daughter experiences before the not completely assumed fact of her mother’s gradual infantilisation and dependence, as well as her reluctance to accept the reverse of roles that force her to adopt the identity of a mother.

In “When You’re Asleep” (1994, 79-82) we find a situation easily identifiable with that of a busy mother doing the domestic routines while attending the unceasing demands of her child. In the opening line, “I’m worn out with you” (79), which is repeated two more times along the poem, the daughter expresses her exasperation toward her child-mother, who follows her restlessly everywhere asking questions that may help her to reconstruct the family’s story and her own past, like a child who wants to hear her mother repeat stories she already knows, but the details of which she has forgotten. So, she wants her mother to go through them over and over so that she can build the whole picture. However, there is a crucial difference between the scene described in the poem and the one that might take place in a real mother-child relationship because, for an actual child, these details are retained in her mind and help her to build her own identity as part of the family, but for this old child-mother all the efforts aimed at the reconstruction of the past are useless since her mind is unable to hold on to these memories and the

daughter knows that all her repetitions will not prevent the erasure of her mother's identity:

I'm worn out with you.

All day long
fetching and carrying
upstairs and downstairs
my back broken
picking up after you
forever under my feet.

Upstairs downstairs
your questions trailing me
never quiet for two
minutes together -

How old were you the year that we went...?
Do you remember the time
somebody said...?
Wasn't it grand the first
summer we saw...? (1994, 79)

In the next section of the poem, which starts again with the statement "I'm worn out with you" (79) we find a difference of feeling between mother and daughter. We can perceive the daughter's despair and tiredness, since this endless repetition of questions and answers will not result in any improvement in her mother's mental decline, while for the mother, who is unable to remember the times she has asked the same questions before, each question is a new one, each time is the first one, and she enjoys these days when she "can talk / all day long" (79) because, like a demanding child, she has all the attention of her daughter, who is there "to listen" (80).

The poem goes on with the poetic persona reporting familiar scenes that are part of the daily routine of a mother of little children. She emphasises the sense of repetition by saying that her words are "an old litany" and the sense of dissociation of her personality as if a part of herself remained as an observer and

could hear the other self giving orders and encouraging her mother to do the things a good child should do in the same way mothers usually do:

I hear my voice give out
an old litany:
Eat up now
stop talking
your food will be cold.
Mind the stairs
don't hurry...you'll fall...(1994, 80)

The identification of the mother with a small child continues in the poem with the preparations for bedtime and the detailed instructions the daughter-mother gives to her child-mother, which reveals the degree of transformation of the old woman into a helpless little child, unable to remember how to do these simple tasks: “Fasten your buttons / put on your slippers / Watch where you’re going / come on now – we’re late.../ wash yourself quickly / get into bed” (80). And once all these tasks have been done the woman in the mother role extends her protection through the night and reassures the woman in the child role against night fears telling her that she will “leave the door open” (80). The poetic persona expresses her relief, her need to rest and to have a time for herself, “to read a book / or watch television”, a wish that most mothers of little children can share; she needs to recover, at least for a while, her identity as a woman, which cannot be reduced simply to her maternal function. She is too tired to kiss or say goodnight to her *child* but, when she has the last look to check if she is already asleep, she realises that her head seems to have shrunk, as if not only the old woman’s mind but also her body were stepping back into childhood, and she wonders at this transformation, which she seems to have seen it for the first time: “your head sunk in the pillows / so still and so small... / when did it grow so small?” (81). The vision of the old woman’s mouth, “almost smiling” (81), awakens in the daughter memories of this same scene, when she was the real child and had a real mother that reassured and protected her with her love.

And I'm returned
thirty years or more
when I would call out
at night
as you closed the door
to hold you there
one moment longer.
Do you love me still?
I'd sing;
and back came the same answer
always -
When you're asleep! (1994, 82)

Thus, the end of the poem confirms the complete reversal of roles that has taken place but, despite the feelings of exasperation, despair and tiredness that are repeatedly expressed, we find also patience, tenderness and acceptance of this painful reality.

In "Going Home Without You" (2001, 10-11) the daughter rebels against this infantilisation of the mother. She would like to think that her mother is sometimes playing a game, "[a]n over long joke" (10) that could be stopped. She can hardly believe that her mother may have forgotten her "birthday" or her "mother's death" (10) and reacts in anger at what she considers a farce. This reaction reflects the feeling of impotence of the daughter and her difficulty to admit that this process of destruction of the mother's identity has no reversal as well as the false illusion that this is perhaps only a temporary illness and it will be possible to detain or at least to delay its course:

I want to shake you
And say — enough is enough.
Stop this charade
This carnival trick!
At the end of my tether,
Just as you were. (2001, 10)

The poetic persona experiences a sense of unreality and would like to imagine that this situation may be similar to those she remembers happening when they were children "[p]laying disguises" (10) and they were so excited that they

did not know when to put an end to the game. She wants to believe that her real mother is still in there, hidden “under this mask” (10), that she has adopted “[t]his pantomime face / Of decay and confusion” (10) because she enjoys to go on with the game.

In the next stanzas the daughter remembers that when they played “Hide and Go Seek” or “Blind Man’s Bluff” there used to be always a playmate who “[r]efused to give in, who / Clung to concealment / Long past bed time / Or humour” (11) and the daughter recognises that, “now as then” (11), it is useless “[t]o argue or cajole” (11) so that she can convince her mother to stop the game. However, she remembers the well known set of “invocations” (11) that “[r]ise unsought / From a lost treasury / Of barter and bribe” (11) and she decides to make use of this mixture of warnings, threats and reasons in a desperate attempt to tear off her mother’s mask and to force her to come out from the concealment she is hidden in. Hence, the poem represents the paradox of a daughter who, in order to fight against her mother’s infantilisation, resorts to the same tricks and the same language her mother used with her children and this means an implicit acceptance of this inescapable reality:

Give up now or else!
It’s nearly dark
We have to go.
If you can’t be good
We won’t play again.

Obstinate, contradictory
Child — you’d try
The patience of a saint!
If you don’t come out
This instant!
I’m warning you —
I’ll leave you here
And go home without you. (2001, 11)

5.6. Chains of Life

Some of the most outstanding Irish and Galician women writers have expressed their acknowledgment to belonging to a chain of life represented by the women who have preceded them as well as the need to recover their unwritten lives. In this section, we are going to hear the poetic voices of mature daughters, who are able to understand their mothers and grandmothers' toil. We will see this feeling of recognition in some poems of Eithne Strong (1993b) [1990] Mary O' Donnell (2005) [1998], Sinéad Morrissey (1996), Xohana Torres (2004) [1980], Ana Romaní (1998) and Marta Dacosta (1999), which pay tribute to their female ancestresses and, at the same time, place the poetic personas in this genealogy of women.

In her autobiographical account "Married to the Enemy" (2001), Eithne Strong explains the conflict that arose between her and her Catholic Irish parents due to her decision, when she was nineteen, to marry Rupert Strong, a non-Catholic English writer who was twelve years older than her, as well as her subsequent decision to not baptise their children. It took several years to heal the wounds and to re-establish her relationship with her parents. However, in "To My Mother" (*Spatial Nosing* 1993b, 81-82) [1990], the poetic persona addresses her mother, presumably dead, remembering "before sleep" her fight. This remembrance has a strong evocative power and brings about her emotive recognition "with knowledge near to tears" of that "[l]ittle woman / bearer of big men". The repetition of the word "saw" in the first line of two stanzas reinforces the position of the daughter as the witness of her mother's toil and stresses the hard reality of domestic life in contrast to the idealised images of family life presented in public discourses. Eithne Strong's mother was a teacher, and the poem presents us a woman who, like most women who work outside home, was not spared household chores, which she had to alternate with the duties related to her profession; a double load of work that only a "strong will" would endure at the cost of long working hours robbed from rest and sleep:

Saw
the tired body sit so straight
while hands went on mending
into the late night.

Saw
the weary head
yet firm because of the strong will
bend over books that had to be known
for school on the morrow. (1993b, 81)

The first line of the next stanza is the word “knew” and reflects a change in the point of view of the poetic persona, who is now an adult woman and a mother herself and can understand and feel identified with her mother through her own lived experience. She knows “[w]ith surer knowing” her “careful spending / of the much-earning wage” and “the special care of little things” (81). Above all, she is able to see now the pain and grief of a mother when their children go away without having acknowledged her love and sacrifice: “As mothers live, and see / their children pass from them, / unknowing, I knew your grief” (82). She admits that, though she had “lived these years” only now that she is a mother she knows “the pain of mothers / amid their children’s going” (82).

In Mary O’Donnell’s “Materfamilias” (*The Place of Miracles* 2005, 77) [1998], the poetic persona gives us a detailed account of her grandmother’s hard life. The life of a woman whose body and mind were constantly devoted to others, since she had to endure not only the hardship of a body engaged in unending reproductive and nurturing functions, but she also had to be responsible for the wellness of an extended family.

My grandmother had thirteen pregnancies,
Nine full-term. She, who came orphaned
At nineteen from Clogher to Monaghan,
Fell to undreamt streams of constant parenting:
Keeper of children’s needs, keeper of spouse,
Two uncles, a dotting, whispering grandmother. (2005, 77)

The life of this “Materfamilias” is placed in the context of a “tall-storied town house” with “a mysterious attic gloom”, “[b]eds with bolsters” and “a sunny, summer sitting room”, which might give us the image of the scenery where the grandchildren’s happy memories belong. However, the poetic persona transcends the privacy of this individual life by placing it in a historical context in which women had to face the consequences of grave illnesses and wars and she tells us that this house was also the place which witnessed how the grandmother “[b]artered away with diphtheria, TB from her brood / Between two world wars and after” (77). The story of this individual woman brings to the light the silenced stories of women that are not represented in official History, although this is not meant to transform this woman into a victim or into a symbol. The poetic persona gives us details of her grandmother’s personality that make her a flesh and bone woman, who did not renounce some fashionable luxuries, or the control over the education of her children: “A pansy-eyed flapper she tended to herself / Obliquely, in astrakhan, or snug suede shoes; / Ambitious for all, yet slow to praise for fear / Of spoiling with Hollywood notions, child-dreams” (77). A woman who survived the death of two sons and “wore Queen Mother / Hats” (77). When her daughter asked her whether she would do it again, the answer she gives, “no chance” (77), expresses both the fact that she had not had any other possibility of choice and, even in the case that it had been possible for her to go back and start her life anew, she would not feel like going through this experience twice. The poetic persona agrees with her: “Womanhood, the struggle between self and others, / Was costly; to deal once with the rise and fall / Of life, of death, enough” (77).

In Sinéad Morrissey’s “My Grandmother through Glass” (*There was Fire in Vancouver* 1996, 42-45), the characters who appear in this poem are based on former members of Morrissey’s family.¹⁵ There is a symbolic chain that connects the women of the family and erases the boundaries between life and death. The stories of the grandmother, the great aunt Sarah, —who secretly loved the grandfather—, the mother and the daughter, who is the poetic voice, are intertwined at crucial points of birth and death, as two sides of the same process.

This process establishes among all the female members of the family a quasi-religious relationship that allows them to cross the boundaries of life and death in order to help each other.

In the first stanza the poetic voice addresses her dead mother who is going to meet in the afterlife those who loved her and even the spirits of the children she could not have, in a possible reference to abortion or miscarriages. The poem transfers the yearning of the mother for the children she did not have to the other side of life, where she will meet “the spirit-children” [w]hose faces pushed against that line for years” (42 and whose deep desire to be born is expressed with a paradox, since they were “dying to be born” (42), linking death and birth in their yearning. In the next stanzas the poetic persona remembers how these spirit-children have haunted her mother until it was impossible for her to conceive them:

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

Then his pit accident, your hysterectomy
Or the usual, age-seep of indifference
Stopped intercourse for good
After that, those tiny moon-faces were crushed. (1996, 42)

In another section of the poem the poetic persona describes her birth as something supernatural due to the mysterious intervention of the great aunt Sarah who, “from the other side” (44), helped the niece in the delivery of the grand niece, because “[s]he’d seen enough of childbirth to know / How the tunnel of pain can terrify” (44). Thus, Sarah sent the niece “sleep in labour” and “when she woke from her dreaming she just wanted to push” (44), while “the nurses wept with laughter”. The poetic persona in this poem substitutes the religious iconography of the Virgin Mary and the saints, who are believed to help humans to overcome difficult situations, by a genealogy of lay women linked by family ties that can help each other to cross the “tunnel of pain” both ways. Thus, as the newborn “entered the world with a shower of blood” (44) “Sarah saw [her] off with a

message of love” (44) for the grandmother in order to repair the misunderstanding they could not solve when both of them were alive.

In this story of the women of the poetic persona’s family, as portrayed in “My Grandmother through Glass”, the figure of the great aunt Sarah is representative of thousands of women who did not marry and whose lives were invisible and made irrelevant in a patriarchal society since they did not fulfil the established roles of wives and mothers. However, they frequently acted as mothers, caring and nurturing the whole family while their feelings about love, deception or jealousy were ignored or laughed at. In this poem, the voice of the grand-niece, recognises the importance of this woman: “She laid out the dead, delivered / The furious children, buried / Two sisters who were rotten with anthrax, / And never married” (43). In contrast to the magical help Sarah can exert because she is dead, these lines describe her as a woman who played a decisive role in the history of the family and place her in the real context of a difficult time marked by World War II.¹⁶

The character of Aunt Sarah when she was still alive appears again in the poem “Aunt Sarah’s Cupboards and Drawers”, collected in *The State of the Prisons* (Morrissey 2005, 39). The poetic persona describes the confinement that age and a broken hip have brought to the old lady whose life is still full of little things she can enjoy. She sits now in “her high-backed chair watching television /as dust falls over the soup-tin lids/ in the tin cupboard in the kitchen”. But she is not completely alone because her sitting room is “cheerful with photos of relative’s children” and, the previous year, she had enjoyed following the sun’s eclipse and seeing how “the days collapsing wattage” “shuttered each face in unison / and then released them” (39). But now that Sarah is dead, the poetic persona, gives her the status of a virgin mother, in a domestic scale, because she stresses the fact that she died a virgin but she shared motherhood.

The separation between life and death is represented with the image of the glass, through which the characters go and whose transparency shades off the boundaries between the two worlds. This image is opposed to the darkness that

often characterises images of death and expresses the hope of another kind of life after death, which allows a woman, “from the other side” to help those who stay on this side of life as well as the possibility of healing the wounds inflicted or suffered in this world. Thus, the poetic persona describes her mother’s death as the crossing of this glass, with the serene conviction that she is going to meet the people who loved her in another dimension, in which time cannot be measured by human standards:

You’ve gone through the glass and into the arms
Of the children who cried to break into your body.
Your mother will be young again.
No negotiation from this side in—

The glass descended and shimmered open
And then froze hard again beyond all normal view.
No doubt your own face changed.
No doubt memory followed you. (1996, 44)

This blurring of space-time boundaries could be related to a perception of time which is non linear, as Julia Kristeva explains in “Women’s Time”, (1986, 187-211). Kristeva affirms that “female subjectivity would seem to provide a specific measure that essentially retains *repetition* and *eternity* from among the multiple modalities of time known through the history of civilizations” (191). The repetition of cycles determined by the biological rhythms of woman’s body is associated to those of nature and “imposes a temporality” “whose regularity and unison with what is experienced as extra-subjective time, cosmic time, occasion vertiginous visions and unnameable *jouissance*” (191). In relation to this, Kristeva observes the recurrence of the myth of resurrection:

Or one is reminded of the various myths of resurrection which, in all religious beliefs, perpetuate the vestige of an anterior or concomitant maternal cult, right up to its most recent elaboration, Christianity, in which the body of the Virgin Mother does not die but moves from one spatiality to another within the same time via dormition (according to Orthodox faith) or via assumption (the Catholic faith). (Kristeva 1986, 191)

The poems of Galician writers that we are going to comment next reflect the need to recover the story of our female relatives and insert their lives into a history that has undervalued and ignored them. In Ana Romani's "Avoa" (*Arden*, 1998), in one section of Marta Dacosta's *Setembro* and in Xohana Torres' "Elexías a Lola" (2004) [1980], the poetic voices of granddaughters pay homage to the unknown lives of their female ancestresses.

In Ana Romani's "Avoa" (1998, 29-31), the poetic persona remembers the stories the grandmother told her and the experiences they shared together. In a country like Galicia that has been predominantly rural until the second half of the twentieth century, grandparents have been the repository of a rich oral tradition which covered, not only folk tales, but also deep knowledge about plants, animals, as well as the language and the non-written history of the land, which have been ignored or marginalised by the dominant Spanish culture. To this, it must be added that a close relationship was often established between grandmothers and little children, who stayed at home while adults were outside, working in the fields, with the cattle, or, in fishing villages, at sea. Thus, in the warm atmosphere of the kitchen, grandmothers were the transmitters of a culture that is about to disappear. In Romani's poem, the granddaughter asks her grandma to tell her again "os alcumes e as historias / os perfís das xeografías que habitamos e nos posúe / a terra desde Noia nun mar que non existe / que inventamos" (30). Moreover, the young woman wants the older one to accompany her to be witness to the destruction of the marine environment: "Baixemos avoa ó malecón ver morrer os peixes e o mar" (30).

In Marta Dacosta's *Setembro* (1998, 99), from which we have analysed some fragments in chapter four, there is a photograph of a girl and an old woman with a dedication: "Á memoria de Saladina Ortega. A todas as mulleres da miña familia, fillas, netas e bisnetas". It is evident the intention of the author to insert her own life as a link between a lineage of women that lived before her and those who may possibly continue the chain, as Teresa Seara points out in "Revelación da muller oculta" (1998):

Na figura fundacional da nai reside porén un dobre vínculo que nos fala ecoicamente das *outras*, elos dunha cadea materna que se estende ata os principios do mundo e das estirpes, e anticipa a nai que ela mesma será, as futuras fillas e netas. Mergullándose nesa xinea de descoñecidas antecesoras —tantas que son innomeables e van diluíndo o seu rastro acuático nas augas vitais do propio ser— así como nas nais máis próximas —Saladina, Manueliña, Rosa, Pepa ou Teresa—, o eu poético inicia a procura da súa definición xenérica e familiar. (1998, 10)

In Chapter four we have already seen the symbolic connection that Dacosta's poetic persona establishes between her birth and her revision of Eve's birth, placing herself in a mythological course of history that goes back to the time when the first woman was born, but, in this section, the poetic persona looks back to the story of the real women that belonged to her family and places them in a real past and in a real Galician landscape. Thus, she can see the image of her grandmother "que aínda é tan pequena como eu a recordo / e segue alí no vello paseo Alfonso XII" (99). This urban landscape, "vencido de rúidos" which is separated by one hundred steps from the familiar space of "a praciña de pedra en que aínda hai un pozo / ou a casa pequena da indomable Manuela" (99). This separation/connection between spaces reflects the changes in both urban and rural Galician landscapes, due to the migratory movements from the country to the city that happened in the second half of the twentieth century, which was characterised by the coexistence —not always harmonic— of growing urban spaces surrounded by rural and fishing villages and hamlets where old people remained living in their old houses, keeping the ties with those who went to live in the city and preserving the memory of a rural world from its total disappearance. Thus, the poetic persona wants to recover the memory of these lives and of the people who lived them:

Recupero a memoria de Pepa silenciada
pola peste da gripe cando empezaba o século,
e o misterio da vida en garrafas de barro
e algodón por Gonzalo, que naceu a destempo.
Recupero a friaxe e o sal do mar na noite
e a chalana afogada na outra beira da ría. (1998, 99)

She remembers especially her mother “tirando carbon desde a bufarda / ou atada a unha silla de falar *castellano*” (99). Speaking the Galician language identified you as a peasant, poor and uneducated person and, in order to avoid the consequent discrimination and marginalisation, people compelled themselves to speak Spanish, which was the only language allowed at school. The last lines of the poem express the identification of the poetic persona with all the women of her lineage: “E eu sinto que son hoxe tantas que entón me foron, / Saladina, Manueliña, Rosa e tamén Pepa, / e a mesma Teresa que nos fala incansable / mentres o tempo vai rodando pola tarde” (99).

Xohana Torres dedicates the seven poems collected under the title “Elexías a Lola” (2004, 189-200) [1980] to her dead grandmother “Dolores, nun cemiterio perto do mar” (2004, 185). These poems are, in fact, parts of a long poem made of an introductory one and six sections. All of them have an elegiac tone in accordance with the title and, through them, the powerful image of the grandmother becomes alive in the remembrance of the poetic persona. In the introductory poem she identifies Lola with the river Avia, which flows through the vineyards she cultivated. The constant flowing of a river has often been used as a metaphor of the continuous changes in the course of life, which draws all human beings toward death.¹⁷ The permanence of the river, on whose banks Lola lived and worked, stresses the feeling of an absence that can only be counteracted through the memories that link grandmother and granddaughter to a shared territory and a shared time of childhood:

Podo dicir “O Avia” e es ti,
calmo xurrar do río anegando as orelas.
Tamén podo dicir “Dela non queda nada”
senón este rumor que deixa a folla”...
O meu corazón coñece territorios
que non somete á noite: País onde nacemos
libre de toda sombra.
Así o declaro todo: Infancia coma as aves
e a humidade na arboreda. (2004, 189)

The metaphor of life as a river that runs to the sea of death appears again in a fragment of section “I” (191-192). The poetic persona places herself in the real setting of a house where the sounds of the wind and the sea can be heard and at a specific time of the year, September, that signals the end of summer and the start of autumn. Both place and time acquire explicit symbolic meaning, since the sea symbolises death and September is the time of harvesting the ripe fruit. Also, the falling of leaves has usually been used as metaphors of death. The choice of time and place to say goodbye to her grandmother, represents the acceptance of the inevitable flow of life and death and the solemn invocation “[m]uller da miña casta, Lola das roxas viñas” (192) expresses the pride of belonging to the lineage of this woman, to whom she gives a title of nobility, borrowing the way kings used to recognise the deeds of some outstanding vassals. By calling her “Lola das roxas viñas” the poetic persona wants to underline the nobility of work and stress the character of a hard-working woman as well as the sense of attachment to the land she worked and lived in.

Polo silencio desta casa grande consigo o son do mar.
Ouh, que vento das illas, Lola de amor, que vento,
xa que todos os gozos finan nun mar, ben salado, o
da morte!

Muller da mina casta, Lola das roxas viñas,
este mes e setembro a redimirse
maduramente para alguén no froito.

Ti, acouga en paz. Sobre a violenta verdura da túa
tumba
traballan en ringleiras afanosas formigas. (2004, 192)

In part “II” (193-194), the poetic persona describes with admiration the strong personality of Lola, and admits that she has not inherited her confidence, although she had always tried to imitate her: “Eras precisa e forte. Non tiñas medo a nada. / Lei extraña do herdo: non obstante eu, / aínda na escuridade, aínda hoxe confusa, / ¡tanto que te imitaba!” (2004, 193). The granddaughter can still feel her powerful influence in the atmosphere of the bedroom where she can enter the magic circle that, as it has been said in previous sections, symbolises the protective

sacred space of the great Goddesses: “Cando entro na alcoba / noto no ambiente o teu círculo máxico / e os anos non o levan” (193).

This grandmother, like the one in Marta Dacosta’s poem and the vast majority of Galician women of their age, did not have access to what was officially considered *culture*, but those who lived in close contact to nature had the ancestral knowledge of its cycles and the agricultural practices that did not destroy the environment. The poetic persona wants to present the authentic character of this woman to counteract the bourgeois image of her, dressed in velvet for the occasion, which has been immortalised in a photograph that hangs in the dining room. The photograph reflects a stereotyped image of a woman and the poetic persona considers this to be the photographer’s failure. Against this artificial static representation, she prefers to symbolise her with the image of a “[s]imple cunca / para un simple xantar / conseguido, se cadra, coa suor cotiá” (193) and gives us a description of the dynamic hard-working woman proud of her vineyards:

“Todas as beiras do Avia foron miñas”...
Na encosta campesiña, ao reclamo das cepas,
¡entón si que batías, Viñateira, nas tinas,
cando toda evidencia era unha luz de outono
recubrir de ouros cada acio! (2004, 193)

In part “III” (195-196), the poetic persona describes the family house as the place that has witnessed the lives of the members of the family, whose names are remembered to rescue them from oblivion: “Aquí xogaron / Antón, Manuel, Rosiña, Pepe, Basilisa, Marciana, / a Maruxa, os netos. Tamén morreu Rosario.” (193). The house is remembered through memories of sensorial experiences and is itself personified as one living being that is constantly waiting to hear the dogs bark which will announce the presence of visitors. It is also the place that congregated the family around the grandmother, who helped to maintain the family ties and preserve them from breaking up, thanks to her decision to remain there and not to be transplanted to the city. A decision that has the power of compensating even for the disintegrating force of emigration and the will to

maintain the memory of the hard lives of unknown peasants who are part of the unknown history of the land.

Casa atenta aos ladridos dos cans,
a porta de emparrado que se grava nos ollos
cando imos no tren; a cancela sen chave,
os figos migueliños, os catro limoeiros
que nos convidan dende que nacemos.
Ía e viña a familia só por verte a ti,
os fillos que corrían as millas dos océanos,
os outros, sedentarios, labregos sen historias
aferrados ás cepas e ao pan de cada día. (2004, 195)

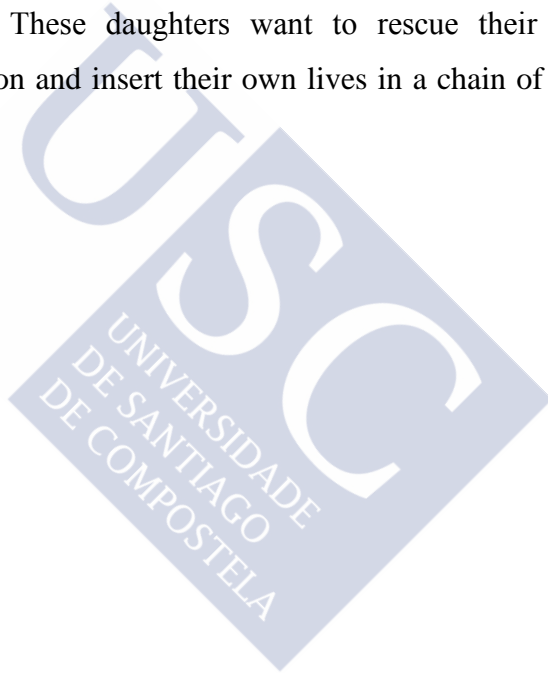
Now that the grandmother is not here, the harmony of nature cannot fill the emptiness of her absence and the poetic persona knows that no matter how hard she would wish to conjure up her presence through the birds, the moon, or the wind, nobody is going to come: “Ninguén virá. Ninguén. / Polo tellado esvara esa tristeza, / oco de ti, e a chuvia, miudiña” (196).

Luciano Rodríguez affirms in “As mareas poéticas de Xohana Torres” (*Poesía reunida* 2004, 9-37), that “Elexías a Lola” is “un homenaxe á muller laboriosa, independente, entregada, feble e forte, dona da casa, vencello social, valente e arriscada, muller que camiña cara ó solpor, consciente de que é ave de paso” (Rodríguez 2004, 31).

5.7. Conclusion

The aim of this chapter has been to show an overview of the multifaceted and, sometimes conflicting, aspects of the relationship of the daughters with their mothers as they are represented in the poetry of some of the Irish and Galician writers object of this study. The main conclusion is that these relationships are greatly determined by age, as well as by economic, social and personal circumstances. Consequently, the mother-daughter bond cannot be forced to fit into any of the totalising discourses —Psychoanalysis or Radical Feminism, for instance— that tried to find a unifying theory that could explain the diversity of

situations and changes this bond is subjected to along women's lives. Another conclusion is that most of these poems are based on the women writers' personal experiences, breaking a non-written taboo that has considered these issues as private individual affairs, not worthy of artistic creation. The fact that these women writers use their relationship with their mothers as the subject matter of their poems shows their intention to bring into the light the unknown lives of women who have been absent from official history. Without avoiding the representation of strong conflicts with their mothers, most of these daughters' voices often express a deep understanding of the cultural and social circumstances that have conditioned their mothers' situation. These daughters want to rescue their mothers and grandmothers from oblivion and insert their own lives in a chain of life that links them.



CONCLUSIONS

Celia Shiffer (2009) affirms that post-Structuralism has demonstrated that “institutions are simultaneously created and maintained by discourses, and discourses create/maintain/are power; therefore, the stories we tell and are told construct our experience of mothers and of mothering” (213). Mothers have been denied, in traditional dominant narratives, the ability to speak about their own experiences and the right to tell them from their own point of view, which is essential to the construction of their subjectivity. In this dissertation, I have tried to show how mothers can break their silence, and tell their stories without constraining themselves to theories —philosophical, psychological or biological— that have claimed to be universal. Thus, mothers are able to represent themselves as thinking subjects who can reflect upon the complexity of the relational process motherhood entails.

Most of the texts that have been analysed in this dissertation are related to women writers’ own experiences about motherhood. The mothers’ and daughters’ voices we have studied in this work give us an overview of the variety and complexity of their relationship as well as the changes that affect them, according to personal and social circumstances. By giving voice to these experiences these women writers contradict monolithic images of mothers as silent passive beings, whose experiences were appropriated, defined and encased in universalising theories that focused on the child as the subject and ignored the mother as an individual. These women become resilient subjects who locate themselves between discourses, as individuals who speak about their personal experiences as mothers and/or daughters. They dismantle allegedly universal conceptualisations of the mother-child bond and represent the multifaceted and relational nature of this relationship, while asserting that motherhood does not mean the disappearance of the individual self, but rather the widening of this self-

in-relation to the child. In doing so, these literary voices counter stereotypical images of mothers previously elaborated by religious and cultural mythologies and assert the need to speak up, as Celia Shiffer points out: “Speaking is the means by which we keep ourselves intact and make our way to living —it is the means by which we assert some kind of self and exist in the world beyond ourselves” (2009, 211).

The mothers’ voices we have heard along this work disown some oppositions that have structured the discourse of patriarchy in relation to motherhood —such as male/female, self/other, mind/body, nature/culture. In fact, most of them have demonstrated that motherhood cannot recognise such a logic of binaries and separations. Through their poems, these women writers present mothers whose mind and body partake the experiences of pregnancy, childbirth and mothering, not as mere biological functions, but as a personal project in which the whole person is involved. However, this involvement does not imply the disappearance of the woman’s individual subjectivity, subsumed in the supposedly mother-child undifferentiated unity. Just the opposite, these poems show us “thinking mothers” who address the child as another individual, and accept him/her as such. The fact that they enjoy the moments of close intimacy with a newly born does not mean that these mothers are unable to facilitate the child’s evolvment towards independence.

We have seen images of mothers that disown the traditional maternal role model —characterised by self-denial, endless nurturance and love without a flaw— and represent conflicts and feelings that do not fit into the frame defined by patriarchal discourses. Moreover, we have seen how some of these mothers’ voices do not avoid expressing feelings, such as guilt, anger and destructiveness, which are in open contradiction with the idealised construction of motherhood. Thus, in some poems of Eithne Strong the poetic persona affirms her love for her children but, at the same time, she claims for a space and an identity of her own that cannot be circumscribed to her maternal function. She also recognises that her love has not always been flawless and expresses the feeling of guilt for

having desired the death of her handicapped child. Some texts, like Luz Pozo Garza's *Medea en Corinto*, Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill's "The Battering" and Mary O'Donnell's *The Elysium Testament* show the extreme violence mothers can exert against their children. Regarding maternal violence, Marianne Hirsch observes that anger cannot be stripped of the social situations which provoke it. It cannot be considered only as a private conflict because, "[i]n isolation, anger is privatized and neutralized, unrecognizable" (1989, 193). In this line, the maternal violence represented in the texts mentioned above cannot be seen exclusively as a reaction to an individual conflict, but also as a response to situations of oppression, as well as a rebellion against silent, passive, all-enduring and all-suffering female models.

Breaking the mirrors in which motherhood has been reflected includes a revision of the mythical models that have shaped female identity. The predominance of some myths over others is not a neutral one, since these myths have strongly influenced images of woman/mother that have served and justified the position of subordination of women. This is the case with the myth of the Fall, with the double personification of Eve as the mother of all living and as the symbol of the temptress of man, and its counterpoint in the model of the Virgin Mary, who has been used by Catholicism to repress women's sexuality. Besides, the election of Oedipus myth by Freud has determined the psychoanalytic theories that have defined the mother-child bond and the processes of subject-formation from the child's perspective.

Some of the women writers who have been studied here have revised images of Eve in order to empower her as a positive female model and as an example of rebellion against patriarchal stereotypes and violence. Some others have used the Demeter-Persephone myth to represent the dynamics of separation and dependence between mothers and daughters, which can be seen either from the daughter's or the mother's perspective. Since mothers have been daughters before, they are able to understand the daughter's maturational process and accept her need of independence. Thus, the Demeter-Persephone myth allows mothers to speak not

only for themselves but also for the daughters they were once. This position contradicts some radical feminist discourses about this relationship, as Marianne Hirsch has underlined: “Rather than daughters having to ‘speak for’ mothers, mothers would be able to speak for themselves, perhaps ‘with two voices’. Only thus can mothers and daughters speak to one another” (1989, 197). The use of the Demeter-Persephone myth, done by Eavan Boland, Mary O’Malley and Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill, permits also to expand its possibilities of representation beyond theoretical formulations about the tension of separation-dependence between mothers and daughters. These writers have used this myth to speak about current issues that affect women’s lives, such as sexual abuse, abortion and white slavery. In these poems we have found adult or ageing mothers who are determined to establish a woman-to-woman dialogue with their daughters, contradicting images of passive mothers who should disappear from the scene so that their daughters can achieve their own identity.

Eavan Boland and Luz Pozo Garza have also introduced ageing mothers as poetic personas who, unlike Demeter, know that their decay is irreversible, but their story will continue, in a certain way, through their daughters’ lives. This decay is represented also through the daughter’s perspective in the poems of Mary Dorcey, which reflect the anguish of the adult daughter that witnesses the progressive decline of her mother and her transformation into a dependent child. These representations widen the scene of traditional images of motherhood that have been centred around the first stages of mothering, presenting the mother-child bond as a state of complete blissfulness, but ignoring the complex relationship between mothers and adult children.

In the last chapter we have analysed multiple aspects of the mother-daughter bond, as seen from the point of view of the daughter, which disrupt some preconceived ideas about this relationship and display a rich gamut of feelings and situations. These daughters’ voices place themselves outside the limits of patriarchal definitions of a *good daughter* while maintaining some distance from some trends of radical feminism that encouraged daughters to fight

against *devouring mothers*. They can present images of close connectedness with the mother in a homely atmosphere, as in Lupe Gómez's *Fisteus era un mundo*, but also demystify the warmth of home or the unlimited protection mothers can give. Some poems by Jessie Lendennie and Anne Hartigan show us powerless mothers that cannot protect their children and Paula Meehan represents images of homes in which helpless daughters cannot protect themselves against their mothers' violence. We have also found different kinds of rebellion against the mother in Paula Meehan's, Anne Hartigan's and Marilar Aleixandre's poems. These poems go beyond the adolescent's rebellion against maternal authority and question the traditional role model the mother embodies and helps to perpetuate, although this rebellion does not always represent a total rejection of the mother. Thus, the daughter in some of Meehan's poems can understand that the mother is a victim herself and Aleixandre's poetic persona also recognises that it was her mother who taught her to rebel.

We have also seen poetic personas who speak "with two voices", as Marianne Hirsch puts it, in some poems by Eithne Strong and Mary O'Donnell. It is undeniable that being a mother cannot be considered a pre-requisite to acknowledge our mothers' and grandmothers' toil. However, these poetic voices express their understanding of their mothers' lives from a position of daughters who are themselves mothers and, as such, they can have a different vision of their mothers' and grandmothers' lives. Moreover, the poetic voices of Marta Dacosta and Xohana Torres not only pay homage to their female ancestresses, but they also insert themselves into a genealogy of strong women. By putting their experiences as well as their mothers' and grandmothers' into their poems, these women writers reshape idealised constructions of motherhood and claim their right to bring to the centre of literary creation the marginalised lives of women, transforming the personal into the political, in line with the longstanding claim of feminist movements.



NOTES

Introduction

1. Under a law imposed in 1847, called the “Gregory Clause” no tenant holding more than a quarter acre of land was eligible for public assistance. Thus, those who sought entrance into the workhouses in order to avoid death by starvation, had to surrender their holdings to their landlords. It is estimated that over a quarter of a million people suffered the mass evictions or *clearances* by which they were dispossessed of their land and their homes were levelled or burnt. These evictions worsened the already desperate situation of the peasantry. See Christine Kinealy (1994).
2. Christine Kinealy affirms that “over one million people died and an even greater number emigrated” (2002, 2).
3. ‘Foro’ is a system of tenancy of land that allowed peasants to cultivate the vast amount of land which belonged to the monasteries, the clergy and the nobility. For further information about the system of foros in Galicia, see Ramón Villares (1982a, 1982b).
4. It is estimated that the Irish population was cut by over 25% after the Famine. For further information see Peter Gray (1995), Cathal Poirteir (1995), Christine Kinealy (2002) and James S. Donnelly (2005). In Galicia, seasonal emigration to Castile had taken place along the eighteenth century and continued during the nineteen century but, from 1850 on, massive emigration to Latin-America produced a constant decrease of population. For further information see Ramón Villares (1985) and Pilar Cagiao (1997).
5. “The Galician national anthem, based on a poem by Eduardo Pondal (1835-1917), claims that Galicia is the home of Breogán, Amergin great-grandfather” (Palacios and Lojo 2009, 13). According to the *Lebor Gabála Éirenn* —known in English as the *Book of Invasions*— Amergin, is a mythological Irish druid and bard among the sons of Mil “who allegedly departed from Galician shores” (Palacios and Lojo, 2009, 13) and invaded Ireland.
6. Research done in the field of Irish Studies is currently held in the three Galician universities.
7. This project was funded by the Spanish Ministry of Education (2005-04897) and has been continued in two further related projects (2009-08475, 2012-35872).
8. Through this project, Irish and Galician women writers, as well as scholars, literary critics and editors, have collaborated in different ways —conferences, seminars, poetry readings, essays and translations of poems from Irish and English into Galician and vice versa. All these activities have been extremely fruitful and their

results can be found in the books published: *Pluriversos: Seis poetas irlandesas de hoxe*. (Manuela Palacios ed. 2003) *Palabras Extremas: Escritoras gallegas e irlandesas de hoy* (Manuela Palacios and Helena González eds. 2008), *Writing Bonds. Irish and Galician Contemporary Women Poets* (Manuela Palacios and Laura Lojo eds, 2008), *To the Wind Our Sails. Irish Writers Translate Galician Poetry* (Mary O'Donnell and Manuela Palacios eds. 2010), *Creation, Publishing and Criticism: The Advance of Women's Writing* (M^a Xesús Nogueira, Laura Lojo and Manuela Palacios eds. 2010) and *Forked Tongues: Galician, Basque and Catalan Women's Poetry in Translation by Irish Writers* (Manuela Palacios ed. 2012).

9. Xela Arias died in 2003, aged 41.
10. All the works by Galician women writers selected for this dissertation are written in Galician, except for some poems by Luz Pozo Garza, —written in Spanish— which were first published in 1956.
11. To cite only a few examples: Eithne Strong also wrote short stories and novels; Eavan Boland, prose essays; Mary O'Donnell and Kerry Hardie, novels, and Anne Hartigan, drama; Marilar Aleixandre, Xohana Torres, and Luisa Castro, fiction.
12. Although radically different in their political aims, Irish Republican nationalism and Protestant nationalisms —Unionist and Loyalist— in Northern Ireland shared with Spanish Francoist nationalism the patriarchal discourse about the place they assigned to women. Regarding Northern Ireland, Monica McWilliams affirms: “the traditional link between nationalism (both orange and green) and their respective churches has ensured that the ultra-conservative view of women as both the property of and the inferior of men remains strongly entrenched in Irish society” (1993, 81). In Spain, Galician, Basque and Catalan nationalisms were banned —as political parties— after the Civil War.
13. In Ireland, the lack of representation of women writers became evident when, in 1991, *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing I, II, III* was published by Seamus Deane as general editor and it was found that the vast majority of women writers and artists were omitted in the three volumes. Heidi Hansson (2003) observes that “[i]t would have been considered ludicrous” (149) if those first three volumes had been subtitled “Men's Writing and Traditions” (149), although this was what they were about. Hansson suggests that this was due to the fact that all editors were men but also that “women's issues did not fit into the agenda” (149). In order to repair this omission, which raised a great controversy at the time, a team of women scholars co-edited *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing Volumes IV and V: Women's Writing and Traditions* (Angela Bourke et al. 2002), which was the result of a ten-years work project in which they compiled a great bulk of women's writing from different fields. Hansson underlines “the remarkably long time it has taken to challenge the perception that there have been no notable Irish women writers” (2003, 149). The situation in Galicia has some similarities with that in Ireland. In *Antologia de poesia galega* (ed. Yara Frateschi Vieira, 1996) five women and twenty five men were represented. In *A tribo das baleas. Poetas de arestora*. (ed. Helena González, 2001) there is a balance between contemporary women and men writers. However,

two years later, the *Antoloxía consultada da poesía galega 1976- 2000* (ed. Arturo Casas, 2003) is again unbalanced in favour of men; —six women and twenty men. In this case it is interesting to know the methodology employed for the selection of authors and works, which the editor explains in the “Proemio”: He asked two hundred people —authors, editors, teachers, critics and even historians of Literature— to elaborate a list of fifteen authors and ten poetry books. Almost half the people answered and the final selection of poets was the result of the lists of more voted authors and books. Casas underlines the fact that, although the first list of people consulted was gender balanced, among those who answered, only 27% were women. It seems probable that this may have influenced the results, but the fact remains that in 2003 the work of women poets was neither as well known nor valued as men’s.

14. Clara Campoamor, along with some colleagues from other European countries created the International Federation of Women Lawyers in Paris in 1928.
15. Victoria Kent was General Director of Prisons from 1931 to 1934. During this short period she implemented a great number of measures destined to improve the conditions of life in prison. For further information about the life and work of Victoria Kent, see Villena (2007) and Balaguer Castejón (2007).
16. Clara Campoamor reflected her struggle in the book *El voto femenino y yo: mi pecado mortal* (2006) [1935].
17. Paradoxically, right-wing parties supported women’s suffrage on the same basis. They thought that women would vote conservative, which in fact happened: in 1933 right-wing parties won and Clara Campoamor was not re-elected. However, in 1936, left-wing parties won, showing a significant shift in women’s vote in the short span of three years.
18. We cannot consider as universal democratic suffrage the right to participate in the elections organised under Franco’s dictatorship, since political parties were forbidden and so was the possibility of campaigning against the proposals of Francoist government. Besides, it could be dangerous to abstain from participating in local elections and the two referenda, since this could signal you as a disaffected person by the authorities.
19. This encyclical states: “Let it be repeated as an immutable and inviolable fundamental doctrine that matrimony was not instituted or restored by man but by God; not by man were the laws made to strengthen and confirm and elevate it but by God, the Author of nature, and by Christ Our Lord by Whom nature was redeemed, and hence these laws cannot be subject to any human decrees or to any contrary pact even of the spouses themselves” (*Casti Connubii* 1930, 5).
20. Among the organisations Mac Curtain mentions I will cite The Irish Women’s Franchise League, founded by Hanna Sheehy Skeffington and Margaret Cousins in 1908, the Irish Suffrage Society, founded by Anna Haslam in 1876 and the Ladies Land League, founded by Fanny and Anna Parnell as an auxiliary branch of the Land League, which had played an important role in rural areas after the Famine. Another important women’s organisation was founded in 1914, the Cumann na mBan —the Irish Women’s Council—, which was conservative in its aims but “in the aftermath of

- the Rebellion it proved tireless in organising political prisoners” (Mac Curtain 2008, 95).
21. For further information about women’s poverty see Mary Daly b (1993).
 22. Michaela Schrage-Früh observes that the ideal of the Virgin Mary as the model of Catholic Irish mother is unattainable and points out that “[b]esides political and material consequences, the psychological conflict suffered by individual women faced with the ideal of virginal purity can be equally devastating” (2006, 124).
 23. The Protection of Life During Pregnancy Act became law in July 2013. Abortion is permitted when there is risk of loss of life from physical illness (sections 7 and 8). Among the risks, suicidal ideation is included (section 9). There are no lawful provisions for abortion in case of rape or incest in this act. Abortion is not permitted when there is a serious illness of the fetus, even if there is no possibility of it being viable.
 24. For further information about Galician women’s emigration see Cagiao Vila (1997) and Liñares Giraut (2009).

Chapter 1. Pregnant Bodies/Embodied Subjectivities

1. According to traditional psychoanalytic theory, the lack of a penis originates in woman a feeling of castration that would only be compensated by having a child.
2. In Ireland, The Protection of Life During Pregnancy Act became law in July 2013. Abortion is permitted when there is risk of loss of life from physical illness (sections 7 and 8). Among the risks, suicidal ideation is included (section 9). There are no lawful provisions for abortion in case of rape or incest in this act. Abortion is not permitted when there is a serious illness of the fetus, even if there is no possibility of it being viable.
3. In the Spanish Organic Law 9/1985, induced abortion was legalised in three cases: serious risk to the physical or mental health of the pregnant woman, rape and malformations or defects, physical or mental, in the fetus. The Organic Law 2/2010 of sexual and reproductive health allowed unrestricted abortion during the first 14 weeks of pregnancy. From then on, it was only permitted when the life of either the mother or the fetus was in serious risk. This risk must be established by a committee of specialists. Debate about abortion is a current issue again, in 2014, because the project of a new law has been launched by the Minister of Justice Alberto Ruiz Gallardón. This project considerably restricts the possibility for women to decide about their pregnancy.
4. “In the *Phaedo* passion [the body] distracts the philosopher from the pursuit of knowledge, but in the *Symposium* it motivates that pursuit: love of the body is the essential first step on the spiritual ladder that culminates in recognition of the eternal form of Beauty” (Bordo 1995, 3-4).
5. Descartes affirms that by body he understands “all that can be terminated by a certain figure; that can be comprised in a certain place, and so fill a certain space as

- therefrom to exclude every other body; that can be perceived either by touch, sight, hearing, taste, or smell; that can be moved in different ways, not indeed of itself, but by something foreign to it by which it is touched [and from which it receives the impression]” (html edition 2005. John Veitch’s translation 1901).
6. A new law was presented in the Spanish parliament in November 2010. According to this law, an agreement between both parents is required to decide which surname goes first; otherwise, the surnames will be assigned in alphabetical order.
 7. Augustine affirms that these animals’ seeds are not in their bodies, “but in the elements from which they arise by spontaneous generation”. See Edmund Hill and John E. Rotelle (2002, 227)
 8. This laboratory experiment won Pasteur the prize offered by the Academy of Sciences of Paris in 1864.
 9. Anne Hartigan’s poems “In That Garden”, “Eve—New Mouth” and “From Eden” (1993) subvert the myth of the Fall by representing a powerful Eve who disdains Adam’s cowardice and claims her right to eat the apple. See González Arias (1998).
 10. Fionn/Finn Mac Cumhaill was a mythical hunter-warrior of Irish mythology, occurring also in the mythologies of Scotland and the Isle of Man. The stories of Fionn and his followers, the Fianna, form the Fenian Cycle (or Fiannaidheacht). James MacKillop affirms that “the Salmon has been especially important in Celtic tradition, both Goidelic and Brithonic as a repository of otherworldly wisdom” (1986, 20) The Salmon of Knowledge episode was the first of a series of magical adventures which prepared Fionn for his career as a great chief. When he was young, Fionn met the druid and poet Finnegas, and studied under him. Finnegas had tried unsuccessfully to catch the Salmon of Knowledge, which lived in a pool on the river Boyne —whoever ate the salmon would gain all the knowledge in the world. Eventually he caught it, and told the boy to cook it for him. While cooking it, Fionn burned his thumb, and instinctively put his thumb in his mouth, swallowing a piece of the salmon’s skin. This imbued him with the salmon’s wisdom and with the power of divination. He then was able to call on the knowledge of the salmon by sucking his thumb. For further information see MacKillop (1986).
 11. The *Cancionero de Uppsala* —named after the Swedish university in whose library the book was found— also known as *Cancionero del Duque de Calabria or Cancionero de Venecia*, is a collection of Spanish Renaissance *villancicos* published in 1556.
 12. Demeter, Hecate and many other goddesses bear a torch as their symbol. For further information see Neumann (1972).
 13. Mircea Eliade (1958) affirms: “Principle of what is formless and potential, basis of every cosmic manifestation, container of all seeds, water symbolizes the primal substance from which all forms come and to which they will return either by their own regression or by a cataclysm” (1958, 188). In this line, Barbara Walker draws on Campbell (1959) and Neumann (1972) and explains that water is “the Arché, mother of all things. Water gave birth to spirit, supposedly a male principle; hence the idea of

baptismal rebirth that Christians copied from the pagans involved both water (feminine) and spirit (masculine)” (Walker 1983, 1066).

14. The poetic persona in “Found Architecture” may be addressing Kerry Hardie, to whom the poem is dedicated.
15. Theorising in favour of surrogacy contracts takes for granted that there is no affective bond between the pregnant mother and the child she has been carrying inside for nine months and that giving the child away will not affect her physical and mental integrity.
16. The American actor Michael Douglas acknowledged some years ago that he was a sex-addict.
17. This mention of a new president may refer to Bill Clinton whose Swearing-In Ceremony was on 20th January 1993.
18. For further information about the meaning and symbolism of the circle see Mircea Eliade (1957) and Erich Neumann (1963).

Chapter 2. Tying and Untying Bonds.

1. In Spain, marriage between same-sex persons was allowed in the Law 13/2005, “por la que se modifica el Código Civil en materia de derecho a contraer matrimonio”. Chapter 44 of the existing Civil Code was modified by adding: “El matrimonio tendrá los mismos requisitos y efectos cuando ambos contrayentes sean del mismo o de diferente sexo” (BOE 157, 2/07/2005).
2. In the USA, it is widely assumed that any party can breach a contract. The major remedy available at common law for breach of contract is an award of damages. This is a monetary sum fixed by the court to compensate the injured party. The amount of damages is to compensate the claimant for his loss, not to punish the defendant. (www.goldsmithibs.com).
3. In Spain, the Law 14/2006 states clearly in article 10: “Será nulo de pleno derecho el contrato por el que la gestación, con o sin precio, a cargo de una mujer que renuncia a la filiación materna a favor del contratante o de un tercero. La filiación de los hijos nacidos por gestación de sustitución será determinada por el parto”. (BOE, 27/5/2006)
4. In 1987 the New Jersey Superior Court validated the surrogacy contract and awarded custody of Baby M to the Sterns. However, in 1988 the New Jersey Supreme Court invalidated surrogacy contracts as against public policy but “in the best interest of the child”, remanded the case to family court which awarded the Sterns custody and Mary Beth was given visitation rights. See Chessler (1989).
5. Although the functions of cortisol are complex, this hormone has been called, together with adrenalin, the stress hormone, because it is secreted in higher levels as a body’s response to stress in fight-or-flight situations.
6. Research lead by Margaret Altemus, with the collaboration of Patricia Deuster, Elise Galliven, Sue Carter and Phillip W. Gold (1996), explored the correlation between

lactation and stress responses in humans. Altemus and her colleagues found that lactation seems to reduce the symptoms of anxiety disorders. However, they acknowledged that more work needs to be done to determine exactly which are the elements of lactation physiology that are responsible for producing this anti-stress effect. In another study done by Victoria Hendrick, Lori L. Altshuler and Rita Suri, “Hormonal Changes in the Postpartum and Implications for Postpartum Depression” (1998), they conclude that there seems to be some evidences that the higher or lower level of some hormones like oxytocin—which stimulates uterine muscle contraction at labour and promotes release of breast-milk— “appears to stimulate maternal behaviour” (Hendrick et al 1998, 97). However, it has not been assessed for its relationship to postpartum depression. Among their conclusions, Hendrick and her colleagues emphasised the social aspects that can alter the mother’s mood after childbirth: “Clearly, psychosocial stressors contribute to the syndrome in many women: a lack of support, marital conflict, unemployment, an unplanned pregnancy, single motherhood, and younger age are some factors associated with postpartum depression” (Hendrick et al, 1998, 98).

7. In her critique of post-Freudian psychoanalysis, Jane Flax (1991) disagrees with Lacan and object relations theorists with regard to the relationship between self and other, although she finds relevant differences between them. Flax affirms that Lacan “is so unnerved by his discovery of the desire of the m/other that his discovery results in the (theoretical) annihilation of the self. For Lacan the self cannot really exist precisely because it comes into being in and through the desire of the m/other” (18). Flax observes that object relations theorists differ from Lacan in that they “believe it is possible to be a ‘true’ self, but only in and through a relationship with a ‘good enough’ mother who exists for the child and in the theory as an object” (18). Flax admits that object relations theory is more compatible with feminism because it has emphasised the importance of preoedipal mother-child relation in the formation of a self as well as the role of play “as a source of knowledge” (19). However, she underlines that “despite the centrality of the concept of reciprocity in object relations theory, the mother never appears as a complex person in her own right, with her own processes that are not simply isomorphic to those of the child” (19).
8. An infant’s liquid food preparation based on milk of cows or other animals and/or other ingredients, given as a substitute for breast milk.
9. Virgo is the second largest constellation in the sky. The name means “virgin” or “young maiden” in Latin. Drawing on Jack Lindsay (1971), Barbara Walker affirms: “Virgil said the constellation of Virgo (the Virgin) was Erigone, Goddess of Justice, also known as Atraea or “Starry One”. She identified with Libera, or Libra, the Lady of the Scales, judge of men and ruler of their fates” (Walker 1983, 1051). It has been also associated with Demeter and represented as a virgin holding a sheath of wheat. The brightest star in Virgo is Spica —espiga in Spanish and Galician, ear of grain or wheat— which is also how both Demeter and Persephone are represented.
10. Xela Arias had already developed a career as a writer before she became a mother.

11. In Cunqueiro's *Un hombre que se parecía a Orestes* (1969) the characters of Aeschylus' tragedy fade and dissolve in a world in which unbounded fantasy is mixed with elements of Galician landscape and everyday life. Thus, Egisto and Clitemnestra are getting older and lead an impoverished life while they are waiting for the arrival of the vengeful Orestes who, in turn, delays for years the fulfillment of his aim. Cunqueiro changes the the end of the tragedy. Orestes gives up his revenge, abandons the city and becomes forever "una sombra perdida por los caminos" (1969, 227). Cunqueiro also changes the fate of Iphygenia. The narrator affirms that she did not die and was living in a tower without doors in which Egisto ordered to enclose her so that she could not receive secret messages announcing the arrival of Orestes (1969, 218-221).
12. The Irish called it "the physician's power" because of its diuretic properties and their flowers, when drunk in tea, have first an exciting and then a sedative effect.
13. Strangford Lough is a large sea lough in Northern Ireland separated from the Irish Sea by the Strangford peninsula.
14. The boy in this painting, which has been endlessly reproduced in Flemish tapestries, is dressed in a Flemish fashion that was 150 years behind the time it was painted.
15. Dropsy is an old term that gives name to an illness characterised by the swelling of soft tissues due to the accumulation of water.

Chapter 3. Redressing the Balance

1. Irish Female civil servants and other public servants had to resign from their jobs when they got married, on the grounds that they were occupying a job that should go to a man. Banks operated a similar policy.
2. In Spain, around 1939, women were forbidden to register as workers in the Unemployment Offices with a few exceptions: unmarried women, either without resources or with a degree that would allow them to have a profession, women who were heads of the family and married women who had a handicapped husband. For further information see Ortiz Heras (2006).
3. Around 1961 working regulations in Spain ceased to include clauses of dismissal of women when they got married. However, married women still needed the husband's permission to work outside home, to sign a contract, to open a bank account or to obtain a passport. For further information see Ortiz Heras (2006) and Ruiz Franco (2007).
4. The Civil Service Act 1973 removed the ban on recruitment or employment of married women in the Civil Service, Local Authorities and Health Boards.
5. The Acts 13/1972 and 14/1975, that reformed the Código Civil y de Comercio, removed the need of the husband's authorization for activities like signing a contract or asking for a passport. In the Act 11/1981, the husband ceased to be the only administrator of the family finances.

6. Ireland became a member of the EU in 1973 and Spain in 1986.
7. A report from the Secretaría de Estado de la Seguridad Social done by Marta Ortega Gaspar (2006) states that in couples with children under six years old, men did between 25% and 30% of the tasks related to child-care. For further information see Marta Ortega Gaspar (2006). For information about the involvement of fathers in child-bearing in Ireland see Patricia Kennedy (2002, 156-160).
8. The first volumes of *The Field Day Anthology* were not an isolated example of the absence of women in canonical anthologies. Joan McBreen, who recorded samples of one hundred and thirteen women poets only in the last century in *The White Page. Twentieth-Century Irish Women Poets* (1999), laments in “The Editor’s Introduction” that there was “a serious under-representation of poetry written by women” (1999, vii) in some anthologies published in the last decades of the twentieth century. She observes that women poets like Eavan Boland, Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin, Eithne Strong and Máire Mhac an tSaoi, who by 1980 had already published “substantial bodies of work” (vii), did not appear in *The New Oxford Book of Irish Verse* (ed. Thomas Kinsella 1986). McBreen also underlines the scant representation of women poets in *The Penguin Book of Irish Verse* (ed. Brendan Kennelly, 1970) —only five women—, in *Contemporary Irish Poetry* (eds. Peter Fallon and Derek Mahon, 1990), —four women— in Patrick Crotty’s volume, *Modern Irish Poetry: an Anthology* (1995) —seven women— and in Sebastian Barry’s volume *The Inherited Boundaries — Younger Poets of the Republic of Ireland* (1986), from which women were excluded. More recently, in chapter VIII of *The Penguin Book of Irish Poetry* (ed. Patrick Crotty, 2010), which covers the period from 1971 to 2009, eleven women and twenty nine men are recorded.
9. The Troubles is the name given to the conflict that, for about thirty years, took place in Northern Ireland between Unionists and Loyalists, who wanted the region to remain within the United Kingdom, and Republican Nationalists, who wanted to join the Irish Republic. 3.500 people are said to have died in this conflict, which ended officially with the *Good Friday Agreement* of 1998.
10. Virginia Woolf reflected about the state of mind required for writing poetry and the difficulty for women to achieve this state of mind (2000, 52-53) [1928].
11. Virginia Woolf points out the hostile circumstances women writers had to face; among them, she mentions the lack of a room of their own (2000, 54).
12. The CRSEV states that the number of children murdered at home have increased between 2000 and 2004 a 77% in Spain, from 9 to 16. (prensa.com 01/10/2007).
13. The news underlines several facts: the parents were under divorce proceedings and the judge was about to establish the shared custody of the children. The mother feared that the maintenance allowance that was going to be afforded would not be enough to provide for food and shelter for her and her children. So she decided to put an end to their lives and carefully planned the necessary steps which resulted in poisoning the children first, and trying, unsuccessfully, to commit suicide herself afterwards.

14. Medea had helped Jason to take the Golden Fleece by soothing with incantations the powerful dragon that guarded it and Jason had sworn to keep faith with Medea for ever. For further information see Robert Graves (1984).
15. The influence of Rosalía de Castro in Luz Pozo Garza's poetry has been often present in her work. She published *Vida secreta de Rosalía* in 1996 and, in the same year, she was the first woman writer who joined the Royal Galician Academy. She considers her entry speech to the Academy —“Diálogos con Rosalía”— “as [her]adoption of feminism” (Nogueira 2009, 208).
16. Postpartum Psychosis is a severe episode of mental illness which begins suddenly in the days or weeks after childbirth. It is much less common than Baby Blues or Postpartum Depression. It occurs in about 1 in every 1000 women who have a baby. Leaflet of Royal College of Psychiatrists, (www.rcpsch.ac.uk/healthadvice/problemsdisordes/postpartumpsychois.aspx)
17. In her opening statement, defense attorney Therese Lavallee told Lewis that this was a horribly tragic case in which Meining, who had no history of violence toward her three children, killed her 20-month-old son, Bryce, in a psychotic episode during which she believed there was a gang of people who were going to torture and kill him. (Stephanie Rice, www.columbian.com/news19/04/2010/).
18. The Roman Catholic version of the “Lord’s Prayer”. Bible (Matthew 6, 9-13).
19. Before July 2013, when “The Protection of Life During Pregnancy Act” was passed in the Irish Parliament, women were not allowed to travel abroad in order to get a safe abortion. However, lots of Irish women travelled to England and other European countries to interrupt their pregnancy.
20. Badinter underlines that, at present, it has become difficult to define what a mother is: “La mere est-elle celle qui donne l’ovocyte, celle qui porte l’enfant ou celle qui l’élève? Et dans ce dernier cas, que reste-t-il des différences essentielles entre paternité et maternité? (2010, 13).

Chapter 4. Revising Myths and Archetypes

1. Even Hélène Cixous, who devoted an opera to this tragedy, presented Jocasta as Oedipus' lover but not as his mother.
2. An attempt to break this silence has been done by the Irish writer Linda Anderson in “Blinding. 2 Jocasta” (1990). In this short story, Jocasta claims that loving Oedipus first as son and then as lover was no crime. She denounces the dichotomy matter/spirit that has shaped patriarchal images of maternal identity and the contradiction inherent in them: “A mother is supposed to be a milky mammal, an oozing sack of moisture. Reduced to pure matter. Mater. And yet she must be pure spirit as well, a white blur of solitude!” (Anderson 1990, 113).

3. Rich draws on the work of Erich Neumann (1972) and Robert Briffault (1969) to support her claim of the need to unearth images of women different from those which have prevailed in Western patriarchal ideologies.
4. Jane Ellen Harrison was the “famous scholar” mentioned by Virginia Woolf in *A Room of One’s Own* (2000, 19) [1928].
5. To marry a virgin was an obligation for the Levites that was recorded in the Bible (Leviticus 21, 13-14).
6. The theory of archetypes was developed by Carl Jung. Jung affirms that the psyche is made of three elements: the ego, the personal unconscious and the collective unconscious. It is in this collective unconscious, which is inherited and does not develop individually, where our shared experiences as human beings are elaborated into universal symbols that he calls archetypes. For further information see Carl G. Jung’s *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious* (1959).
7. Drawing on Strabo and Iustino, García Quintela affirms that Strabo was surprised by the fact that it was the women’s responsibility to find the brides for their brothers and to settle the marriage arrangements. García Quintela also concludes that it must have been the brothers—not the fathers—who provided for the women’s dowry.
8. See the Bible (Genesis 22, 1-19).
9. For further information about this legend see *Gods and Fighting Men: The Story of the Tuatha de Danaan and of the Fianna of Ireland* (Lady Augusta Gregory 2004) [1905].
10. Other revisions of Eve have been done by Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill (1993) and Mary O’Donnell (1993a). See González Arias (1998).
11. The Gnostic Gospels, also known as New Testament Apocrypha, are texts written from the 2nd to the 4th century AD which are not part of the Biblical canon of any of the mainstream Christian denominations. Most of them formed the Nag Hammadi Library named after the Egyptian cave where they were found in 1945.
12. In the legends of the Fenian Cycle we find another character that was turned into a fawn, although in this case it is a girl. The legendary hero Fionn/Finn Mac Cumhaill married the beautiful Sadbh, who had been put in the shape of a fawn by the Dark Druid of the Men of Dea because she had refused the Druid’s love. She recovered her human shape when Finn renounced hunting her. See *Gods and Fighting Men: The Story of the Tuatha de Danaan and of the Fianna of Ireland* (Lady Augusta Gregory 2004) [1905].
13. After this period of exclusion the woman had to bring two animals: one of them for a “burnt offering” and the other “for a sin offering” and “she shall be cleansed from the issue of her blood” (Leviticus 12, 2-8).
14. Ann Rossiter (1993) points out the invisibility of Irish women’s emigration, which has been hidden in the mainstream of Irish emigration, despite the data available on this matter. In relation to Irish female emigration to America, Rossiter draws on the work of Nolan (1989) and Diner (1983), among others, and affirms that “of the 1,357,831, who left between 1885 and 1920, 684,159 were female; of these, 89 per cent were single and most were under the age of twenty-four. (Nolan 1989, 100).

- Diner remarks that this constituted a mass female movement without parallel in the history of European emigration” (Rossiter 1993, 180-181).
15. Boland uses the Roman name for the mother and the Greek one for the daughter.
 16. This Gaelic expression means “A hundred thousand welcomes”.
 17. María Xesús Nogueira stresses the relevance of Luz Pozo Garza in Galician poetry, on the basis of “her unquestionable presence within the canon, but also for her influence as a producer of models, especially followed by younger writers who started working in the 1990s” (Nogueira 2009, 206).
 18. Luz Pozo Garza was the editor of the journals *Nordés* (1980-1985) and *Clave Orión*, founded in 1995. The latter still exists as an international journal, with contributions in several European languages (Nogueira 2009).
 19. The title of Pozo Garza’s poem, “Bosque de rododendros” refers to the wild rhododendron woods that can be found in the gardens of Castle Howth, which is located in the mountain of Howth—Howth Head or *Ceann Bhinn Éadair* in Irish.
 20. For further information see Lady Augusta Gregory (2004 Part I, book IV) [1905].
 21. The author underlines that “this phrase has been used for an annual Conference held on Celtic Studies in Ribadeo” (Nogueira 2009, 213).

Chapter 5. Inflicting and Healing Wounds.

1. Carolyn Dever (1998) had traced women’s mortality rate in the work of Charles Dickens, George Eliot, Wilkie Collins, Sigmund Freud and Virginia Woolf.
2. A hybrid variety of the willow tree—*salix babilonica*—is called *weeping willow*.
3. For further information see Robert Graves (1955, 1958).
4. The willow bark contains the salicylic acid, base of aspirin.
5. For further information see Mircea Eliade (1957).
6. Japanese Haiku poems consist of seventeen sound units called *on* or *moraes*. In English, Spanish and Galician these units are equated to syllables that are distributed in three lines of 5/7/5.
7. María Xosé Rodríguez Galdo (2009) affirms that the incorporation of a perspective of gender to the study of migratory movements has permitted to uncover the invisibility of female emigration. Pilar Cagiao Vila (1991) observes that female emigration was studied as a secondary branch of the main flow of men’s emigration, presenting a topical image of a passive woman who follows her husband, while the complex reality of women’s emigration still needs a lot of research to be done.
8. Pilar Cagiao Vila considers it important to underline that the absence of men forced women to do jobs that had never been within the range of female tasks: “como os traballos nas obras públicas, nas canteiras ou no transporte” (1991, 13).
9. We can find poems devoted to the sewing machine written by several Irish writers. I will mention Medbh McGuckian “The Singer” (1997). Regarding this poem, Laura Lojo observes that it “focuses on the issues of inheritance and reproduction of a particular view of femininity” (2009, 130).

10. Strontium is a by-product of nuclear fission which causes health problems since it substitutes for calcium in bone.
11. Barbara Walker affirms that “[t]hough called ‘the One’, Kali was always a trinity: The same Virgin-Mother-Crone triad established perhaps nine or ten millennia ago, giving the Celts their triple Morrigan; the Greeks their triple Moerae and all other manifestations of the Threefold Goddess. [...] Even Christians modelled their threefold God on her archetypal trinity” (Walker 1983, 491-492).
12. There are strong similarities between the atmosphere of the nun’s school in these poems by Luisa Castro and the orphans’ school reflected by Eithne Strong in part II of *Flesh: The Greatest Sin* (1993a) [1980].
13. María Xesús Nogueira (2009) observes the abundance of well known characters of fairy tales —such as Cinderella, Snow White, Sleeping Beauty and Little Red Riding Hood—in the poetry of some contemporary Galician women writers, pointing out that these characters as well as their stories “are reinterpreted from a feminine perspective” (Nogueira 2009, 116).
14. This issue has also been represented by Ethna McKiernan —an American writer with strong Irish connections— in part II of her poetry collection, *The One Who Swears You Can’t Start Over* under the heading “Alzheimer’s Weather” (2002, 31-42).
15. In a private conversation that took place at Maynooth in 2010, Sinéad Morrissey told me that Great Aunt Sarah was a former member of her family.
16. Experiments with the anthrax bacterium were carried out in Gruinard Island, Scotland, during World War II. The mention of “anthrax” in the poem as well as the memory of the boyfriend, who “had drowned in a submarine” (43), is likely to refer to the same conflict.
17. One of these best wellknown metaphors can be found in Jorge Manrique’s *Coplas a la muerte de su padre*: “Nuestras vidas son los ríos / que van a dar en la mar / que es el morir” (1976, 33) [around 1476].



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SUMMARIES

English

Reshaping Mirrors: Mothers and Daughters in Contemporary Irish and Galician Women's Poetry

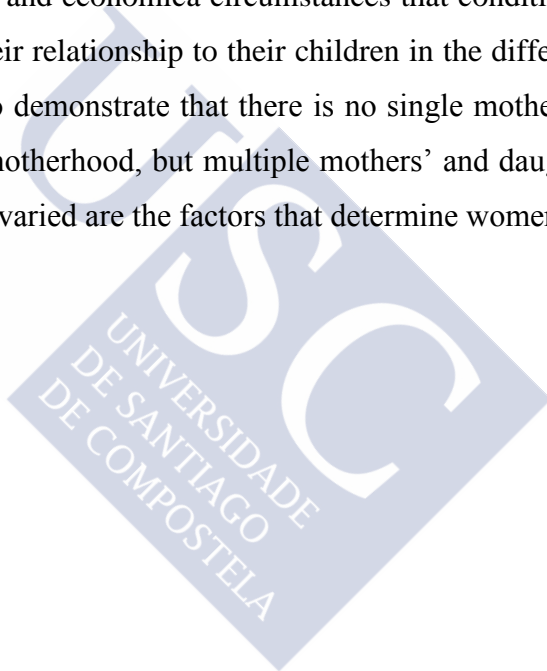
Summary

Among the great plurality and variety of women's voices that can be heard both in Irish and Galician women's poetry, I have focused my attention on those who belong to a generation of women who were brought up in a patriarchal society and have had to struggle hard to get rid of all the oppressive ideological structures that subdued women's lives so that they could find their way into a professional career without renouncing motherhood. Furthermore, most of these women writers translate into their creative work their personal experience as mothers and/or daughters and, putting into practice the feminist claim that the *personal is political*, they give voice to issues that had previously been considered private matters not worthy of artistic representation.

These women's writers speak from different perspectives and points of view and yet, we can perceive a common thread running through most of their poems: the need of breaking women's silence and giving voice to issues which had been ignored, as well as producing counterdiscourses to a number of myths and stereotypes which have shaped the culturally constructed concepts of feminine and masculine identities. Moreover, patriarchal discourses have often identified femininity with motherhood and have constructed an ideology that has idealised

the image of the woman-mother and, at the same time, silenced or ignored the reality of flesh and bone mothers.

The aim of this dissertation is to see to what extent these mothers' and daughters' voices have become the speaking subjects of their own experiences in the literary creation of some contemporary Irish and Galician women writers. My analysis is indebted to those feminist theories about motherhood that have challenged the validity of a supposedly universal representation of the mother figure, in favour of unfixed multifaceted images of mothers that take into account not only the sociopolitical and economic circumstances that condition their lives, but also the changes in their relationship to their children in the different stages of their development. I try to demonstrate that there is no single mother's voice that can represent normative motherhood, but multiple mothers' and daughters' voices as diverse as multiple and varied are the factors that determine women's lives.



Español

Rehaciendo espejos: Madres e hijas en la poesía de escritoras irlandesas y gallegas contemporáneas.

Resumen

Entre la gran variedad y pluralidad de voces que se pueden oír en la poesía de las escritoras irlandesas y gallegas contemporáneas, yo he querido centrar mi atención en aquellas que pertenecen a una generación de mujeres que fueron educadas en una sociedad patriarcal y tuvieron que luchar duramente para desprenderse de las opresivas estructuras ideológicas a las que han estado sometidas las vidas de las mujeres, a fin de poder desarrollar una carrera profesional sin tener que renunciar por ello a la maternidad. Además, muchas de estas escritoras trasladan a su creación poética su experiencia como madres e/o hijas y, poniendo en práctica el lema feminista de que *lo personal es político*, le dan voz a temas que siempre habían sido ignorados por considerarlos como asuntos privados, no dignos de representación artística.

Estas escritoras nos hablan desde perspectivas y puntos de vista diferentes y, sin embargo, podemos percibir un hilo conductor a través de sus poemas: la necesidad de romper el silencio de las mujeres y contradecir algunos mitos y estereotipos que han conformado la construcción social de las identidades femenina y masculina. Más aún, los discursos patriarcales han identificado con mucha frecuencia femineidad con maternidad construyendo, por un lado, una imagen idealizada de la mujer-madre, mientras que por otro se silenciaba o ignoraba la realidad de las madres de carne y hueso.

El objetivo de esta tesis es analizar en la creación poética de estas escritoras irlandesas y gallegas, como las voces de madres e hijas se convierten en sujetos que describen sus propias experiencias y reflejan los cambios en las teorías feministas acerca de la maternidad. Teorías que han desafiado la validez de discursos, supuestamente universales, que definieron una imagen monolítica y fija

de la madre, en favor de imágenes cambiantes y multifacéticas de madres que integran, no solo las condiciones sociopolíticas y económicas que afectan a sus vidas, sino también los cambios en la relación con sus hijos/hijas en las diferentes etapas de su desarrollo. En este trabajo intento demostrar que no se puede hablar de una única voz de madre que represente la maternidad normativa, sino que las voces de madres e hijas son tan múltiples y variadas como lo son los factores que determinan la vida de las mujeres.



Galego

Refacendo espellos: Nais e fillas na poesía das escritoras irlandesas e galegas contemporáneas.

Resumo.

Entre as características que comparten Galicia e Irlanda podemos citar a súa situación atlántica, que determina o clima e a paisaxe e unha historia de pobreza, como consecuencia dunha fragmentación da terra que obrigou a milleiros de persoas a recorrer á emigración na procura dunha mellora das condicións de vida. Tamén é importante subliñar a forte influencia da relixión Católica, que inspirou o ordenamento legal tanto en Irlanda como en España, ademais da reivindicación das orixes celtas tanto en Irlanda en Galicia. Un pasado celta baseado en mitos e lendas comúns, que, no caso de Galicia, foi elaborado polos escritores galegos do Rexurdimento e os políticos nacionalistas, os cales se inspiraron tamén na loita dos irlandeses contra o dominio colonial británico para desenvolver a ideoloxía dun nacionalismo que reclamaba a autonomía dunha cultura e dunha patria galega.

Non obstante, a coincidencia máis relevante para o propósito desta tese é a extraordinaria emerxencia de escritoras que se deu, tanto en Irlanda como en Galicia, nas derradeiras décadas do século vinte, en particular da poesía de autoría feminina. Ademais, nas tres universidades galegas, aumentou considerablemente neste século vinte e un o interese polos estudos irlandeses en xeral e, especialmente, pola creación literaria das escritoras irlandesas. Neste senso, quero facer mención do proxecto *Poesía y Género: Poetas irlandesas y gallegas contemporáneas*, coordinado por Manuela Palacios e desenvolvido no Departamento de Inglés na Universidade de Santiago de Compostela, xa que foi nese contexto onde xurdiu este estudo.

Entre a gran variedade e pluralidade de voces que se poden oír na poesía das escritoras irlandesas e galegas contemporáneas eu quixen centrar a miña atención naquelas que pertencen a unha xeración de mulleres que foron educadas

nunha sociedade patriarcal e tiveron que loitar arreo para desprenderse das estruturas ideolóxicas que tiveron sometidas a vida das mulleres a fin de poderen desenvolver unha carreira profesional sen ter que renunciaren por iso á maternidade. Ademais, moitas destas escritoras reflicten na súa creación poética as súas experiencias como nais e/ou fillas e, poñendo en práctica o lema feminista de que *o persoal é político*, dánlle-la voz a temas que tiñan sido ignorados por consideralos asuntos privados non dignos de representación artística.

Estas escritoras fálannos desde perspectivas e puntos de vista diferentes e, aínda así, podemos percibir un fío condutor a través dos seus poemas: a necesidade de romper o silencio e de contradicir algúns mitos e estereotipos que conformaron a construción social das identidades feminina e masculina. Aínda máis, os discursos patriarcais identificaron con moita frecuencia feminidade con maternidade construíndo, dunha banda, unha imaxe idealizada da muller-nai, mentres que por outra banda se silenciaba ou se ignoraba a realidade das nais de carne e óso.

O obxectivo desta tese é analizar, na creación poética destas escritoras irlandesas e galegas, como as voces de nais e fillas se converten en suxeitos que describen as súas experiencias e reflicten os cambios nas teorías feministas no tema da maternidade. Teorías que teñen desafiado a validez de discursos, pretendidamente universais, que definiron unha imaxe fixa e monolítica da nai, en favor de imaxes cambiantes e multifacéticas de nais que integran, non só as condicións sociopolíticas e económicas que afectan ás súas vidas, senón tamén os cambios na relación cos seus fillos e fillas nas diferentes etapas do seu desenvolvemento. Neste traballo tento demostrar que non se pode falar dunha única imaxe que represente a maternidade normativa senón que as voces de nais e fillas dannos imaxes tan múltiples e variadas como o son os factores que determinan a vida das mulleres.

O corpus seleccionado para esta tese está baseado principalmente en coleccións de poesía publicadas nos derradeiros vinte e cinco anos, aínda que con

algunhas excepcións, como son uns poemas de Luz Pozo Garza que foron publicados ao longo do ano 1956 en *Vida Galega* e tamén algúns poemas de Eithne Strong, que apareceron por primeira vez en *Songs of Living* (1961), *Sarah, In Passing* (1974) e *Flesh: The Greatest Sin* (1980), así como algúns poemas de Eavan Boland publicados en 1982.

Neste traballo hai unha escolma de quince escritoras irlandesas e dez galegas que foron seleccionadas seguindo o criterio de que na súa creación poética dan voz a nais que reflicten a súas experiencias sobre a maternidade e, noutros casos, a fillas que falan da relación coas súas nais. A razón de que haxa menos escritora galegas que irlandesas está en que hai menos escritoras galegas contemporáneas que teñan representado experiencias persoais da relación nai-fillo/a das que se poden atopar na literatura irlandesa. Isto ben se puidera ter debido a que, despois de case corenta anos de ditadura Franquista, a prioridade das escritoras galegas centrouse na loita polos dereitos das mulleres e na necesidade de facerse oír no eido público, así que temas como o embarazo, o parto e a crianza dos fillos poderían considerarse demasiado privados, có risco de seren reclusas nun gueto de mulleres que escriben sobre cousas de mulleres.

As escritoras irlandesas e galegas obxecto de este estudo pertencen a tres xeracións diferentes. Xohana Torres e Luz Pozo Garza naceron antes da Guerra Civil e comezaron a publicar nos anos cincuenta, nun tempo marcado por unha férrea censura que restrinxía os temas que podían ser obxecto da creación literaria. Luz Pichel, Marilar Aleixandre, Marica Campo, Ana Romaní, Marta Dacosta, Xela Arias e Luisa Castro pertencen a unha xeración de mulleres que naceron despois da guerra e, por primeira vez na historia, puideron acceder a unha educación universitaria e empezaron a escribir nos anos setenta, cando a ditadura chegaba ao seu fin no medio dunha efervescencia política e social que propiciaba a loita polos dereitos civís e en especial, polos dereitos das mulleres. Ademais hai que subliñar o compromiso destas escritoras coa lingua galega. Finalmente, Lupe Gómez forma

parte da xeración de mulleres que naceron e se criaron no máis longo período democrático da historia moderna de España.

Tres xeracións de escritoras irlandesas están de igual maneira representadas neste traballo. Eithne Strong e Mary Beckett son as de máis idade e xa faleceron. Non obstante, podémolas incluír xunto con Eavan Boland, Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin, Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill e Anne Hartigan na xeración de escritoras que nos anos oitenta empezaron a mostrar dun xeito explícito unha conciencia de xénero na súa escrita. Paula Meehan, Mary Dorcey, Mary O'Malley, Mary O'Donnell, Kerry Hardie, Jessie Lendennie, Enda Wyley e Susan Connolly pertencen a unha xeración intermedia que seguiu o camiño aberto pola xeración anterior, afirmándose no seu dereito de poñer as súas vidas e experiencias na súa arte. Finalmente, Sinéad Morrissey é unha das máis novas escritora norteirlandesas que xa ten consolidada unha carreira como poeta. Algunhas destas escritoras escriben en irlandés e inglés e outras fano soamente en inglés pero non parece e o uso dunha ou outra lingua sexa causa de conflito e todas elas consideran que forman parte da mesma cultura.

Resulta obvio que as experiencias e os puntos de vista das escritoras que son obxecto deste estudo poden diferir dunha maneira considerable; non obstante, poderíase dicir que todas elas comparten a intención de falar desde unha perspectiva diferente daqueles temas relativos á vida das mulleres que teñen sido ou ben ignorados ou ben utilizados como idealizacións estéticas nos textos literarios.

O capítulo 1 parte da reflexión que fai Susan Bordo (1995) acerca das dicotomías xerárquicas mente/corpo, espírito/materia, cultura/natureza que teñen impregnado as principais correntes filosóficas do pensamento occidental e pasaron a ser unha parte esencial do Cristianismo. Nesas dicotomías os primeiros termos: mente/espírito/cultura, sempre foron considerados superiores e con dereito a controlar aos segundos: corpo/materia/natureza. Nesta división de funcións, o home apropiouse do primeiro ámbito mentres que a muller foi adscrita ao segundo, debido aos seus poderes reprodutivos, os cales foron considerados asuntos

puramente biolóxicos, que igualaban á muller có resto das femias dos mamíferos e, como tales, tiñan que ser controlados pola autoridade patriarcal e excluídos do *máis elevado* mundo da cultura.

As voces poéticas das nais que aparecen neste capítulo rexeitan as oposicións binarias —tales como mente/corpo, cultura/natureza— que estruturaron o discurso do patriarcado en relación coa maternidade. De feito, as máis delas amósanos que non recoñecen esa lóxica de conceptos binarios e separacións. Nos seus poemas, estas escritoras representan nais que viven as súas experiencias de embarazo e parto, non como simples funcións biolóxicas, senón como proxectos persoais nos que toda a súa persoa está implicada.

Neste capítulo 1 podemos ver, a través do poema “Matter” de Sinéad Morrissey (2009), como ao longo da historia se levaron a cabo algúns experimentos que tentaban demostrar que se podía crear vida sen necesidade do corpo da femia. Tamén podemos observar os efectos devastadores que para as mulleres a tivo obsesión da Igrexa Católica sobre o sexo, a través do longo poema de Eithne Strong “Flesh: The Greatest Sin” (1993), así como o control opresivo que sobre o corpo das mulleres exerceu o patriarcado, tal como se reflicte no longo poema de Anne Hartigan “Now is a Movable Feast” (1991). En contraste cos tintes sombríos que destacan nos poemas anteriores, unha visión diferente aparece nos poemas de Sinéad Morrissey (2009), Luz Pozo Garza (2004), Mary O’Donnell (1993, 2005), Susan Connolly (1993) e Enda Wyley (2009), nos que podemos ver como as voces poéticas das nais integran corpo e mente para falarnos das súas experiencias de embarazo e parto.

No capítulo 2 faise unha breve reflexión sobre o debate esencialista/anti-esencialista no que atinxe á definición das identidades feminina e masculina. Un debate que dividiu aos movementos feministas durante as derradeiras décadas do século vinte. Anti-esencialistas feministas como Monique Wittig (1979, 1981), Christine Delphy (1984), Diana Fuss (1989) e María Xosé Queizán (2008) sosteñen que conceptos como home e muller son construcións sociais e, por conseguinte, tamén o é o concepto de maternidade. A diferenciación que fixo

Adrienne Rich (1976) entre maternidade como experiencia persoal e a construción social que liga esta función co destino inexorable da muller foi compartida por algunhas psicólogas feministas, como Nancy Chodorow (1978) e Sara Ruddik (1998). Sen desbotar completamente a bioloxía, Chodorow afirma que a exclusividade da crianza dos fillos debeuse a unha división do traballo determinada polo xénero. Sara Ruddik divide a maternidade en dúas funcións diferenciadas: dunha banda a función de dar vida —embarazo e parto— e doutra banda a tarefa de criar os fillos. Ruddik non cuestiona o feito de que a primeira función está ligada á bioloxía da muller, agora ben, ela nega que as capacidades que se requiren para coidar e criar os fillos non teñen que estar necesariamente asociadas a procesos hormonais.

Non obstante, outras feministas como Luce Irigaray, Hélène Cixous e Julia Kristeva fan fincapé na necesidade de rescatar os corpos das mulleres da censura que lles foi imposta polo patriarcado, a fin de que poidan gozar das complexas experiencias que o corpo pode proporcionar, incluídas as que teñen que ver coa maternidade, que é considerada como un privilexio da bioloxía da femia.

Neste contexto, analízanse os poemas de Luz Pozo Garza (2004), Eavan Boland (1982, 1991), Mary O'Donnell (2005) e Enda Wyley (2009) nos que se representan diferentes aspectos dos lazos que unen intimamente ás nais cos fillos nos primeiros estadios da súa relación. Ora ben, isto non implica a anulación da nai como individuo cunha identidade propia, que non desaparece detrás da súa función maternal e é capaz de reflexionar sobre esta relación. Daquela atopamos, nos poemas de Sinéad Morrissey (2009), Xela Arias (1996) e Luz Pozo Garza (2004), nais que pensan e que non se limitan a expresar o amor polos seus fillos, senón que, ademais, tentan favorecer o desenvolvemento persoal do fillo, ao que ven como un individuo con autonomía e independencia.

O capítulo 3 trata das consecuencias que trouxeron os cambios nas estruturas sociais e familiares derivadas da crecente incorporación ao mercado do traballo dunha nova xeración de mulleres que tiveron acceso a unha educación superior e veñen reclamando o seu espazo na esfera pública sen ter que renunciar

por iso á maternidade. Para poder desempeñar un papel activo no eido cultural, económico e social era preciso modificar a construción ideolóxica da identidade feminina, que estaba definida polo seu papel de esposa e nai. Este novo escenario trouxo un tema recorrente na escrita das mulleres: o conflito de teren que conciliar a maternidade cunha profesión. Cristine Arkininstall (2002) subliña o feito de que nalgunhas narrativas de autoría feminina pódese ver como esta situación de conflito ten fragmentado culturalmente ás mulleres, facendo delas menos nais se traballan e menos persoas, nunha competitiva sociedade de consumo, se escollen ser nais exclusivamente.

Nos textos analizados neste capítulo vemos imaxes de nais que desmenten o modelo tradicional, caracterizado pola auto-negación, infatigable dedicación e amor incondicional. Estas nais falan de conflitos e sentimentos que non lle acaen ao modelo deseñado polos discursos patriarcais, de maneira que non evitan referirse a sentimentos tales como culpa, ira e afán destrutor, que están en aberta contradición coa visión idealizada da maternidade.

Neste capítulo 3 vemos, nos poemas de Eavan Boland (1995) e Eithne Strong (1993), voces poéticas de nais que reflicten os conflitos internos derivados do seu rexeitamento dos roles tradicionais e reclaman unha identidade individual que non se esgota na súa función maternal. Elas declaran o seu dereito a un desenvolvemento persoal que non ten por que diminuír o seu amor e dedicación aos fillos. Tamén se presentan neste capítulo varias clases de violencia que afectan á vida das nais. Algúns poemas de Sinéad Morrissey (1996) móstrannos como as familias se ven afectadas pola violencia política en Irlanda do Norte e nos textos de Luz Pozo Garza (2002), Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill (1992) e Mary O'Donnell (1999) vemos como situacións de opresión social e política poden desencadear a ira e a violencia materna extrema contra os fillos.

En relación coa violencia materna Marianne Hirsch (1989) observa que a ira non pode ser illada das circunstancias sociais que a orixinan. Se non se teñen en conta os elementos que a desencadear, a violencia convértese nun asunto privado. Neste senso, a violencia materna que aparece nos textos analizados neste capítulo,

non poden ser vistos exclusivamente como unha reacción extrema ante un conflito individual, senón que supoñen ao mesmo tempo unha rebelión contra os modelos femininos de submisión, paciencia inesgotable e resignación ante a adversidade e a inxustiza.

No capítulo 4 faise un breve percorrido polo eido das investigacións arqueolóxicas e antropolóxicas relativas a antigas relixións que adoraban a unha poderosa Deusa-Nai en tanto que eses descubrimentos propiciaron discursos feministas que serven para contradicir imaxes da muller derivadas das relixións Xudeo-Cristiáns, cuxas regras foron presuntamente ditadas por un deus supremo masculino e determinaron a desvalorización e submisión da muller ao dominio do home. Nos poemas de Kerry Hardie (1996) e Anne Hartigan (1991) podemos detectar os sentimentos de nais e fillas que teñen que someterse á autoridade patriarcal, a cal é presentada como unha lei inscrita na orde inmutable establecida por Deus. Neste capítulo trátanse así mesmo as revisións do mito do pecado orixinal e da figura de Eva feitas por Mary O'Donnell (1993), Marta Dacosta (1998), Marilar Aleixandre (2003) e Marica Campo (2007). De igual maneira analízanse algúns mitos e arquetipos relativos á maternidade que poñen o énfase na relación entre nais e fillas adultas e representan unha ampla gama de sentimentos. Estes sentimentos abranguen desde ciumes e sobreprotección por parte da nai, en Eithne Strong (1993) e Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin (2001), ata o uso do mito de Demeter e Perséfone que fan Eavan Boland (1995, 1998), Mary O' Malley (2003) Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill (1999) e Luz Pozo Garza (2004). Estas escritoras aprópanse do mito clásico para manter un diálogo entre nais e fillas adultas que aborda temas de actualidade como a sexualidade, a violación, a trata de brancas, a emigración e a vellez.

No capítulo 5 hai un cambio de perspectiva en relación cos anteriores nos que as personas poéticas das nais eran os suxeitos na meirande parte dos textos analizados. Neste capítulo a reflexión sobre a relación nai-filla está contemplada desde o punto de vista da filla. En primeiro lugar faise un breve resumo do debate feminista que tivo lugar nos anos setenta e oitenta, entre aquelas correntes que

culpaban á nai como axente transmisor da ideoloxía patriarcal e aquelas outras que consideraban que as nais non eran as causantes da opresión das fillas, senón as vítimas dun sistema social económico e político que tiña restrinxido o seu desenvolvemento persoal. Fronte a este debate, podemos observar neste capítulo como a relación da filla coa nai é multidimensional e está mediatizada polos cambios debidos á idade, circunstancias persoais e contexto social.

Ao longo deste capítulo analízanse os sentimentos de perda da nai nos poemas de Jessie Lendennie's (2001) e Luz Pichel's (2006), ademais de o estado de indefensión de nais e fillas fronte a violencia que se exerce contra elas, tal como se reflicte en Jessie Lendennie (2001), Paula Meehan (2000, 2003) e Eavan Boland (2007). Así mesmo atopamos nos textos de Lupe Gómez (2001), Marta Dacosta (1998), Anne Hartigan (1991, 2008), Jessie Lendennie (2001), Paula Meehan (2000, 2003) e Marilar Aleixandre (1999, 2003) imaxes do fogar como un espazo ambivalente, que mesmo pode ser un refuxio cálido e protector, pero tamén ten sido un lugar de violencia e opresión onde os roles tradicionais foron transmitidos de nais a fillas. Algunhas destas personas poéticas desmitifican as tarefas domésticas e rebélanse contra a imaxe da nai como colaboradora da perpetuación da ideoloxía patriarcal, en particular da súa función controladora da sexualidade da filla.

Non obstante, podemos atopar unha perspectiva totalmente diferente da relación filla-nai cando a filla adulta se troca na coidadora da nai. Nos poemas de Mary Dorcey (1994, 2001) podemos apreciar un cambio nos papeis nai-filla que espertan sentimentos contraditorios na filla. Este capítulo remata co tributo que lle pagan ás súas nais e avoas Eithne Strong (1993), Mary O' Donnell (2005), Sinéad Morrissey (1996), Xohana Torres (2004) [1980], Ana Romaní (1998) e Marta Dacosta (1999). Ao escribir sobre as vidas descoñecidas destas antepasadas, estas escritoras non so recoñecen a loita desas mulleres e danlle un lugar na historia, senón que ao mesmo tempo sitúanse elas mesmas nunha xenealoxía de mulleres fortes que loitaron con esforzo coas dificultades da vida. Poñendo as súas experiencias, xunto coas das súas nais e avoas, nos seus poemas, estas escritoras

están a refacer as construcións idealizadas da maternidade ao tempo que reclaman o seu dereito a traer ao centro da creación literaria as vidas das mulleres reais, que foran marxinadas dos discursos oficiais, transformando o persoal en político, en consonancia cunha das reivindicacións dos movementos feministas.

