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## Gender in Metamorphosis

'Metamorphosis' implies fluidity, liminality and processes of change. As a scientific term, it characterises the abrupt biological development of a species after hatching or birth. This idea of an in-between space or state, of growth, transition and transformation has captured the imagination of philosophers, poets and writers throughout history. In rejecting essentialist fixed identity categories, feminist scholars too have sought to understand how gender intersects with other identities, paying attention to how these are performed in and through gendered bodies.

This journal represents a metamorphosis for Sibéal. The evolvement of a network that has provided support and space for researchers in gender and feminist studies to discuss and collaboration for 10 years is important. The publication of this journal is a new departure, a new extension of the reach of the network, providing a much needed publishing platform for post-graduates and early career researchers. Our network continues to grow, and as a result we are expanding to meet the needs of researchers.

This publication has come about because of the hard work and contribution of members in order to support the important research undertaken in gender and feminist studies. Sibéal continues to metamorphosis because of members'.

Our first journal represents the wide reach of Sibéal, with contributions on consent and its construction in rape trials, Beowulf, Frankenstein, and mental health in contemporary Irish Literature. The quality of the contributions we received is a testament to the need for this annual journal. The Sibéal Journal will be space for researchers to develop their work, to be supported by others in their field, and to collaborate on new developments in Gender Studies and Feminist research. Get-Involved: The call for papers for our 2017 journal is at the end of this journal.

**Dr Deirdre Flynn, Noirin MacNamara, Dr Ailish Veale**

# Consent and its Construction in Rape Trials in Ireland: A Feminist Analysis<sup>1</sup>

Sarah Bryan O'Sullivan<sup>2</sup>

Within the criminal law context in general, the issue of consent has proven a contentious concept. However, nowhere has this concept proven more problematic than in relation to the offence of rape. A number of aggravating factors may be identified in this regard. Due to the broad and multi-faceted nature of the term 'consent', a satisfactory definition of the concept appears to have remained elusive, with the legislature in a number of common law jurisdictions failing to provide a statutory definition of the term. The issue is further complicated by the fact that the legitimacy of sexual intercourse hinges on two factors, both of which are directly concerned with consent – 'whether the complainant in a rape trial actually consented to the sexual intercourse and... whether the defendant understood the complainant to be consenting' (Cowan, 2007: 54). However, undoubtedly one of the major criticisms in relation to consent in the offence of rape is its construction. The manner in which the offence of rape is constructed in law has influenced how it is defined and how its presence or absence is interpreted. This issue has led to heated debate, with many commentators pointing to the (ultimately problematic) construction of consent as a significant aggravating factor in rape trial convictions. Indeed, the construction of the concept of consent in these cases allows for clear distinctions to be drawn between rape and other criminal offences, adding weight to the argument that the construction of consent in rape cases is particularly problematic. Hence, given the problematic nature of the term, the centrality of the concept in respect to the offence itself and the issues surrounding its construction, the contention which exists in this area is not surprising.

This paper will present an overview of the various issues surrounding the construction of consent in the offence of rape. First, consent and the origins of the common law offence of rape will be addressed. The manner in which consent is constructed and subsequently interpreted will then be outlined, before moving on to consider the feminist analysis of this construction. Finally, prior to concluding, the current position in this jurisdiction will be assessed and the potential for reform will be evaluated.

## Consent and the Common Law Offence of Rape – Origins

Historically, Blackstone defined rape as 'the carnal knowledge of a woman forcibly and against her will' (Blackstone, 1809). Undoubtedly this definition of rape fed into the culturally engendered implication, which has (arguably) only been dispelled in recent decades, before which time a complainant had to show physical resistance in order to prove a lack of consent.

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<sup>1</sup> As will be outlined, in Ireland the offence of rape, as provided for under section 2 of the Criminal Law (Rape) Act 1981 (as amended by the Criminal Law (Rape) (Amendment) Act 1990) is a gendered offence, it can only be committed by a man against a woman. Nevertheless, the author is fully conscious of the fact that sexual violence can be inflicted upon male and female victims by male or female offenders. However, as Hanly et al note, 'All the available evidence...indicates that men and women do not face an equal threat of sexual violence, and that rape is a crime that is overwhelmingly committed against women' (2009: 13). This point is also highlighted by Bacik who refers to the archetypal gendered nature of the crime, where the victims are predominantly female and perpetrators are overwhelmingly male (2002: 148). Moreover, the gendered nature of the crime has clearly influenced the development of the law on rape and the manner in which the offence is interpreted. By focusing on a feminist analysis of consent in relation to the offence of rape, this paper aims to consider a specific aspect of the gendered nature of the offence.

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However, as O'Malley notes, with the abolition of capital punishment for rape in 1841 there emerged a clear willingness on the part of the judiciary to widen the definition of rape, allowing for the offence to have occurred where intercourse took place with a woman who did not consent, as opposed to intercourse with a woman 'against her will' (O'Malley, 1996: 36). Fortunately, due to increased pressure, campaigning and consciousness-raising by various victim advocacy groups, this is now the accepted view, both from a case law and legislative perspective.<sup>3</sup>

In the Irish jurisdiction the definition of the offence of rape is to be found in section 2(1) of the Criminal Law (Rape) Act 1981, as amended by the Criminal Law (Rape) (Amendment) Act 1990. The provision provides;

- (1) A man commits rape if:
  - (a) He has sexual intercourse with a woman who at the time of the intercourse does not consent to it; and
  - (b) At the time he knows that she does not consent or he is reckless as to whether she does or does not consent to it, and reference to rape in this Act and other enactments shall be construed accordingly.

In this section, which was modelled almost exclusively on its corresponding provision in England and Wales, consent is an element of both the actus reus of the offence, contained in section 2(1)(a), and the mens rea of the offences, as outlined in section 2(1)(b).<sup>4</sup>

In relation to the mens rea element (or mental intent element) of the offence, the test to be applied when assessing culpability is a subjective one. Consequently, the defendant's belief in the complainant's consent does not have to be an objectively reasonable belief; it merely has to be an honestly held one. The subjective test can be traced to the House of Lords decision in *DPP v Morgan*. In this case a majority of the House of Lords held that a man who has sexual intercourse with a woman without her consent cannot be convicted of rape if he honestly believed she was consenting. As per Lord Hailsham, the court held that;

...the prohibited act is and always has been intercourse without the consent of the victim and the mental element is and always has been the intention to commit that act, or the equivalent intention of having intercourse willy-nilly not caring whether the victim consents or not. A failure to prove this involves an acquittal because the intent, an essential ingredient is lacking. It matters not why it is lacking if only it is not there, and in particular it matters not that the intention is lacking only because of a belief not based on reasonable grounds (*Director of Public Prosecutions v. Morgan* [1976] AC 182, 215)

Despite the controversy caused by this judgment, following the recommendations of the Heilbronn Committee (1975) the Sexual Offences (Amendment) Act 1976 was enacted in England and Wales, giving legislative effect to the decision in *Morgan*. By 1981 the relevant

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<sup>3</sup> *Director of Public Prosecutions v. Morgan* [1976] AC 182, 197. Hereinafter *Morgan*. Also, see section 9 of the Criminal Law (Rape) Act 1981

<sup>4</sup> Criminal offences generally consist of two elements: the physical element (the actus reus) and the mental intent element (mens rea). Generally speaking, in order to find a person guilty of an offence both elements of the offence must be proven. Therefore, in the case of rape the prosecution must prove that the accused engaged in sexual intercourse with a woman who did not consent and that he knew she was not consenting or was reckless as to whether she was or was not consenting.

provision of the 1976 Act was replicated in this jurisdiction by section 2(1)(b) of the Criminal Law Rape Act 1981, with much of the rest of the common law world also following suit.<sup>5</sup>

### The Construction of Consent in the Offence of Rape

As highlighted above, the rape trial 'hinges on two crucial issues', both of which are directly concerned with consent: 'on the fact of non-consent on the part of the victim and on the defendant's state of mind or belief about whether the victim was consenting' (Wells and Quick, 2010: 506). Referring to consent and the manner in which it is interpreted in rape trials, the feminist criminologist, Carol Smart stated, '[i]n practice it would seem that consent is assumed and the raped woman must prove non-consent' (Smart, 1989: 33).

From a legal perspective, the necessity to prove non-consent is not unique to the offence of rape (McAuley and McCutcheon, 2000: 505). Within the criminal law there are a number of offences which require non-consent to be proven by the prosecution in order for a defendant to be convicted. For example, the offence of theft under section 4 of the Criminal Justice (Theft and Fraud Offence) Act 2001 provides;

a person is guilty of theft if he or she dishonestly appropriates property *without the consent* of its owner and with the intention of depriving its owner of it (Emphasis added)

Similarly, section 2 of the Non-Fatal Offences Against the Person Act 1997 states;

2. (1) A person shall be guilty of the offence of assault who, without lawful excuse, intentionally or recklessly—

(a) directly or indirectly applies force to or causes an impact on the body of another,  
or

(b) causes another to believe on reasonable grounds that he or she is likely immediately to be subjected to any such force or impact,

*without the consent* of the other (Emphasis added)

Due to the presumption of innocence afforded to the accused in criminal trials and the burden of proof which is placed upon the prosecution, non-consent is one of the elements of the above offences which must be proven beyond a reasonable doubt by the prosecution in order to secure a conviction. While comparisons cannot be drawn between the offences themselves, some similarities can be seen in the necessity for the prosecution to prove non-consent in offences of theft and assault and a similar necessity in relation to the offence of rape. However, there are a number of aspects of consent within the context of the offence of rape which differentiate it significantly from other criminal offences.

First, consent, or a lack thereof, is an element which is integral to both the actus reus and mens rea of the offence of rape in a manner which is distinctive from the above offences. Thus, in order for a conviction for rape to be secured, the prosecution must prove that the complainant did not consent and that the defendant believed the act to be non-consensual. Second, in comparison to the victim of a theft or assault, the complainant in a rape trial is forced to play a significant and extremely burdensome role in proving non-consent, often resulting in a close scrutiny of her present and past behaviour. As Temkin and Krahe (2008: 33) comment, 'there is probably no other criminal offence that is as intimately related to...evaluations of the victim's

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<sup>5</sup> Following the decision in *Morgan* and the subsequent enactment into law of the recommendations of the Heilbronn Committee, a number of other common law jurisdictions followed suit, including Scotland and the majority of Australian states. For further details in this regard see, O'Malley (1996: 57).

conduct as sexual assault'. This is particularly evident in relation to the scrutiny directed at the victim's sexual history. The burdensome role placed on the victim and the degree of scrutiny which she is subjected to is linked to the pivotal aspect of consent in rape trials which significantly differentiates it from other criminal offences. It is the manner in which consent is constructed in relation to the offence of rape which distinctively differentiates it. The law's construction of consent within the context of rape is shaped by myths, stereotypes and prejudices about the offence of rape and the victims of the offence. The interpretation of consent through the lenses of these various prejudices, myths and stereotypes results in a construction of consent which is unique to the offence of rape. Hence, it is on the basis of its interpretation and construction that Smart stated that consent is assumed, leaving non-consent to be proven by the rape victim. Needless to say, this construction has proven problematic from a social, cultural and legal perspective. Many feminist writers and commentators have contributed significantly to the analysis of this issue. Consequently, an examination of the feminist analysis of the law's construction of consent in rape offences is worthy of consideration.

### Feminist Analysis

For many feminist academics the notion of consent, particularly in the context of the offence of rape, is a fundamentally flawed concept as it ignores the argument that 'consent is a communication under conditions of inequality' (MacKinnon, 1989: 182). As a result of this inherent defect, it is contended that any attempts at reformulating consent will only result in the manipulation of the concept, as opposed to offering any meaningful redress. While this contention speaks to broader issues relating to gender inequality and societal constructs generally, feminist analysis of the construction of consent in the offence of rape argues that in order to comprehensively assimilate the criminal law's construction of consent in this regard, it is necessary to consider this construction in the context of the entrenched beliefs about female sexuality in a phallocentric culture. In a culture which is structured to 'meet the needs of the masculine imperative', Smart (1989: 27-32) refers to the pathologising of female sexuality. Through such a process women's sexuality is presented as something which is detached from them (Smart, 1989: 28-32). The pathologising of female sexuality supports the socially accepted belief that women's sexual responsiveness is fickle, unpredictable and often passive and consequently, because women are not fully aware of their own sexual responsiveness and desires, it is thought possible that such desires could manifest in the most unlikely of situations (Smart, 1989: 31).

A repercussion of the construction of female sexuality as problematic results in a focus on the male perspective of what is relevant in relation to the construction of consent. Feminist theorists argue that the law in general is constructed from a male perspective; however this is particularly problematic in relation to rape law given the gendered nature of the offence. The consent/non-consent dyad, which is deemed relevant in (male-constructed) legal terms, can be 'completely irrelevant to women's experience' (Smart, 1989: 33). As a result, the law often precludes the woman's experience. This is particularly evident in relation to the concept of submission in rape trials (Smart, 1989: 34). While it is now recognised that not every submission involves consent<sup>6</sup>, in reality a woman may submit without truly consenting but fail to reach the requisite threshold for non-consent. Hence, it is on this basis that commentators have concluded that 'the only alternative when non-consent is not established is to presume consent – and hence the innocence of the accused' (Smart, 1989: 34).

The subjective approach to the mens rea element of the offence further promotes the male standpoint by requiring consideration of the event as the man (honestly) believed it to be

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<sup>6</sup> See *R v Day* (1841) 9 C & P 722, 724. Also, see (Ormerod, 2011).



(Bridgeman and Millns, 1998: 400). Absence of consent is not sufficient to satisfy the mens rea of the offence of rape. What in fact is required is absence of consent, coupled with the male's belief in that absence, a belief which does not need to meet any requirement of reasonableness. Such an approach significantly limits any space for the consideration of the woman's consent. As Duncan states;

There is no space for the female subject's consent, no space for the female subject...she cannot consent, she cannot desire, she can only mirror – mirror his unreasonable beliefs, whatever her actions or her words, he can sustain that belief (1994: 3)

The side-lining of the woman's consent is troubling from a social, cultural and legal perspective. It brings into question the concept of 'the policy of the law' and what it is we want the law to reflect in terms of what we consider to be socially unacceptable forms of behaviour (Bridgeman and Millns, 1998: 405). The importance of the role played by the law in this respect is commented on by Smart who notes;

In the denial of women's accounts law is not unique, but arguably it is a particularly important forum. This is because legal decisions affect many individual women, but the law also sets and resets the parameters within which rape is dealt with more generally in society (1989: 26)

In this respect, it is arguable that the shortcomings of the law greatly contribute to the low reporting rates, the no-criming statistics and the overall prevalence of 'rape culture' in society.<sup>7</sup>

This policy argument feeds into what feminists have described as the 'symbolic importance of criminalising unreasonable mistakes in the belief as to consent' and the dangers which can emerge when such symbolism is neglected (Cowan, 2007: 60).<sup>8</sup> This issue is aptly surmised by Duncan who refers to the 'permission' created by the law as a result of the subjectivity employed when assessing the male belief in consent, a subjectivity that is denied in relation to the construction of the complainant's consent;

While consent lies within his honest belief, the realm of his desire, her desire remains unsymbolised, unrepresented. Subjectivity denied, she is granted no desire. If she had subjectivity, the legal text would not test for her consent but for her desire. While the law purports to forbid rape, it creates a permission in the mirror which reflects the male subject and his desire – not the rational male subject but the sexual, embodied, desiring male subject (1994: 29)

Therefore, the construction of consent in relation to the offence of rape has led to the development of a legal process which does not adequately acknowledge the true experience of the rape victim. Such a construction has the potential to negate criminal liability, regardless of whether consent was absent. It is this inadequate and often irrelevant construction of consent in relation to the offence of rape which distinctively differentiates it from other criminal offences and results in a series of contentious and problematic issues in rape trials.

### Ireland – The Current Position and the Potential for Reform

As outlined above, there is no statutory definition of consent in this jurisdiction and the subjective approach to the mens rea element of the offence has been firmly established in

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<sup>7</sup> For further discussion on 'rape culture' see (Henry and Powell, 2014)

<sup>8</sup> For further discussion see (Cowan, 2007: 60).

Ireland since the enactment of the Criminal Law (Rape) Act 1981 (O'Malley, 2013: 58-59). Both these issues have proven extremely contentious, particularly among victim advocacy and support groups (Rape Crisis Network Ireland, 2008a, 2008b).

Following the controversial 1981 Act, an opportunity arose for the Law Reform Commission (1987: para. 64) to address the issue of consent in rape offences in the late 1980's. Initially, the 1987 consultation paper issued by the Commission stated that they 'were not aware of any problems having arisen as a result of the non-definition of consent' and therefore recommended that the law be left as it stood (Law Reform Commission, 1987: para. 64). However, a year later the Commission seemed to have a change of heart. They stated that certain victim support groups were 'strongly of the opinion that the absence of a definition had influenced verdicts' and accordingly they felt it would be 'advantageous if the legislature were to clarify the law' (Law Reform Commission, 1988: para. 16). Hence, they recommended that consent be defined as 'a consent freely and voluntarily given' and they called for the enactment of legislation which would place this definition on a statutory footing (Law Reform Commission, 1988: para. 17).

However, in relation to the mens rea element of the offence the Law Reform Commission were not to be swayed from their original position, as established in the consultation paper. The commission rejected the proposition of substituting an objective test for the one laid down in section 2(2) of the 1981 Act. The commission stated;

We have not been persuaded by any argument that has been advanced to us that we were wrong in our original conclusion that the provisions of section 2 (2) represents a fair and workable test in a difficult area. We accordingly adhere to our original recommendation that no change be made (Law Reform Commission, 1988: para. 21).

Following this report by the LRC, the Criminal Law (Rape) (Amendment) Act 1990 was enacted. While the 1990 Act followed many of the recommendations advanced by the commission, its suggested definition of consent was omitted. Thus, neither the mens rea element nor the absence of a definition of consent were addressed by the 1990 Act.

Since the 1990 Act there have been repeated calls for reform that would provide a definition of consent and would help to clarify and modernise the law. Victim advocates and academics alike have vehemently highlighted the need for change. The RCNI have repeatedly issued publications illustrating this gap in the law and seeking legislative action to rectify the situation (RCNI, 2005:4; RCNI, 2008a: 15). Leahy has highlighted on a number of occasions the necessity for a 'clear statement of what constitutes a legally acceptable consent to sexual activity' which would need to be 'supported by a reconsideration of the honest belief defence which currently provides that a defendant cannot be convicted of rape if he honestly believed that the woman was consenting' (2013a).

It was hoped that the long-awaited review of Irish sexual offences law, which has to date culminated in the publication of the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Bill 2015, would rectify the omissions of the 1990 Act in respect to the issue of consent. Unfortunately, the 2015 Bill appears to fall short. Indeed, from the outset it seemed the proposed legislation would fail to fulfil the hopes of advocates calling for clarification and modernisation of the law on consent. The Law Reform Commission's (2013) consultation paper, entitled *Sexual Offences and Capacity to Consent* (which preceded the 2015 Bill), was predominantly concerned with the capacity to consent as opposed to defining consent itself, and consequently no recommendation was made in this respect. Thus, it is evident that despite sustained calls for reform, the Irish legislature appears to have no immediate intentions to revise this issue.

Leahy (2013b, 2014) ultimately advocates the introduction of a positive statutory definition of consent in Irish law and a reformulated model of the mens rea element of the offence of rape which incorporates an objective element to the construction of belief in consent. Despite a number of shortcomings, the English Sexual Offences Act 2003 can provide significant

guidance in this context. The 2003 Act provides a legislative definition of the term 'consent'<sup>9</sup> and introduces a reasonableness element to belief in consent.<sup>10</sup> While an analysis of the provisions contained in the 2003 Act is beyond the scope of this article, the English legislation offers a persuasive 'template for reform' in Ireland which is worthy of close consideration (Leahy, 2014: 232).<sup>11</sup>

## Conclusion

It is beyond doubt that in the context of rape law, the concept of consent is a particularly contentious one. The problematic nature of the concept and of its construction is reflected in the difficulties encountered when attempting to effectively legislate in this area. These issues are further exacerbated by the ubiquitous nature of consent in relation to the offence of rape. Attempts to reform and reconstruct this aspect of the law have been widely debated, with various reformulations and alternatives being suggested. As highlighted, commentators have suggested that the root of the problems associated with consent lie in the fact that it is a concept which is not equipped to appropriately address the relevant issues in such cases. Indeed, from the perspective of a feminist analysis of this issue, there appears to be strong support for this argument. Consequently, the ill-equipped concept of consent, coupled with its problematic construction, has resulted in modernisation of the law in this area proving a slow and arduous task, with much remaining to be achieved.

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<sup>9</sup> Sexual Offences Act 2003, s. 74.

<sup>10</sup> Sexual Offences Act 2003, s. 1.

<sup>11</sup> For an in-depth analysis of the English legislation and a comprehensive consideration of how the relevant aspects of the 2003 Act could be adapted to offer a suitable model of reform from an Irish law perspective see (Leahy, 2013b, 2014).

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# The Monster in the House: Grendel's Mother and the Victorian Ideal

Alison Elizabeth Killilea

*Beowulf* is the only surviving heroic epic in the Old English language, and is consequently one of the most important works from the Anglo-Saxon period. It tells the story of the Geatish warrior Beowulf and his expedition to King Hrothgar's kingdom in Denmark in order to rid the realm of the cannibalistic Grendel. Beowulf's successful encounter with Grendel leads to the second battle of the poem, in which Grendel's mother, whom this article focuses on, seeks revenge for the death of her son. After taking the life of one of the Danes in exchange for that of Grendel, she is followed by Beowulf to her cave and eventually killed. The poem ends fifty years later with Beowulf's fatal battle against the dragon.

The figure of Grendel's mother, Beowulf's second adversary in the tale, has, since the beginning of the poem's translation history, been characterised as a monstrous figure, a 'great sea-demon woman' (Morgan, 1952: l.1519) and an 'inhuman troll-wife' (Tolkien, 2014: l.1780). She is generally portrayed as a witch-like or reptilian figure in artistic and literary depictions, for instance in John Gardner's novel *Grendel*, where she is described as a 'fat, foul . . . long-suffering hag' (1972: 3-5), in Sturla Gunnarsson's film release *Beowulf and Grendel* (2005), and in Gareth Hinds's *The Collected Beowulf* (2000), among numerous others. Very few exceptions to this consistent portrayal of her as a monstrous being exist, and although Graham Baker's (1999) and Robert Zemeckis's (2007) *Beowulf* adaptations choose to depict her as a beautiful seductress, it is clear that her aesthetic beauty is a disguise for her 'true' monstrous form, and indeed, these films also end up demonising female sexuality in addition to Grendel's mother's particular character.

In a reconsideration of the Old English of the poem, however, it may be argued that this traditional depiction of Grendel's mother is in fact disputable, and it *has* been previously disputed by a small number of scholars, including Christine Alfano (1992) and M.W. Hennequin (2008). Alfano uses her paper to highlight the subjective nature of translation in *Beowulf* and analyses a small number of terms specific to Grendel's mother, while Hennequin's work aims to construct her character as a warrior figure, 'a noblewoman and brave opponent' who was admired by the poet (2008: 513). Although Alfano speculates about the beginnings of Grendel's mother's demonization, the issue is only touched on in the form of a footnote and is not pursued any further. Similarly, although Hennequin challenges the traditional view of her character, its beginnings are not explored. Through expanding on these scholars' works and further analysing the terms used to describe Grendel's mother's character, as well as exploring the formation of her monstrous identity, my broader research aims to argue against the traditional view of her character as a 'monstrous ogress' (Alexander, 1973: 1259) and support the view of her character as a human figure.

Being an Anglo-Saxon poem written sometime between the eighth- and eleventh-centuries in Old English, *Beowulf* is accessible to the majority of readers only through the means of translation, or through the use of dictionaries or glossaries. This, in practice, means that the representations of characters within the poem are majorly dependant on popular translations. This poses a problem, the translated work never having absolute equivalence with its subject language, a point which has been variously argued from Cicero in the first century BCE, through to Roman Jakobson and Eugene Nida in the twentieth century.<sup>12</sup> As

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<sup>12</sup> Marcus Tullius Cicero was the first to bring into debate the issues of 'word-for-word' versus 'sense-for-sense' translation in the 1<sup>st</sup> century BCE. Horace, in the same century, shared Cicero's preference of a 'sense-for-sense'

Nida argues, 'since no two languages are identical . . . it stands to reason that there can be no absolute correspondence between languages. Hence there can be no fully exact translation' (1964: 156). This point is especially relevant for an ancient and obsolete language like Old English, which not only differs linguistically from Modern English, but also applies to a different culture and context. John D. Niles stresses the importance of identifying language as a system which evolves according to the changing 'social matrix in which it is embedded' (1993: 862), and recognising that translations, dictionaries and glossaries should not be taken for granted or ever be treated as an exact record of what the original text says.

Nowhere in *Beowulf* is the subjective nature of translation more clearly evident than in the case of Grendel's mother. Through a reassessment of the poem in its original Old English, there appears to be much at odds with Modern English translations of numerous terms used in descriptions of her character. The most infamous of these terms is *ides aglæcwif* (Klaeber, 1950: l.1259)<sup>13</sup>, a much debated phrase translated variously as 'monstrous hell-bride' (Heaney, 2000: l.1259), 'monster of a woman' (Klaeber, 1950: 298) and as 'ogress, fierce destroyer in the form of a woman' (Tolkien, 2014: l.1045). The stem of *aglæcwif*, *aglæca*, is also used of Grendel, where it is given similar translations,<sup>14</sup> but more significantly, it is used also of Beowulf and of the legendary warrior Sigemund, where it is translated as 'fearsome warrior' (Chickering, 1977: l.1259) and 'great warrior' (Donaldson, 1975: l.1259). It seems quite radical that a definition of a word should be altered in specific cases, and doing so 'completely ignores the possibility that the poet has deliberately chosen to use the same word to describe two sets of characters' (O'Brien O'Keeffe, 1981: 485). In a study of over thirty of the instances of *aglæca* in the Old English corpus Sherman Kuhn concluded that a more accurate translation of the term would be 'fighter, valiant warrior, dangerous opponent, one who struggles fiercely' (1979: 218).<sup>15</sup> Kuhn argues that *aglæcwif*, referring to Grendel's mother, should simply be translated as 'female warrior' (1979: 218). Such a translation has been supported by numerous scholars, including E.G Stanley (1979) and Christine Alfano (1992), and the *Dictionary of Old English* (2007) cites it as an accepted translation, as opposed to translations along the lines of Donaldson's 'monster-wife' and Chickering's 'monster woman'. Despite this generally accepted translation of *aglæcwif* as 'female warrior', the term is still regularly translated in monstrous terms in modern translations, like Heaney's and Chickering's, with any humanity or admiration that the term may suggest being ignored.

Following on from Kuhn's interrogation of *aglæca* and *aglæcwif*, I examine two more terms, *wif unhyre* and *lapan fingrum*, which have not been given the attention that *aglæcwif* and other terms have received. I then explore the possible origins of the more demonic translations of these words. Like *aglæcwif*, *wif unhyre* (Klaeber, 1950: l.2120) is a contested term in *Beowulf*, with various translations of 'ghastly dam' (Heaney, 2000: l.2120), 'the gruesome she' (Alexander, 1973: l.2120) and 'inhuman troll-wife' (Tolkien, 2014: l.1780). The neuter noun *wif* appears countless times throughout the Old English corpus, and is

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rendering, underlining the goal of producing an aesthetically pleasing text. See Jeremy Munday, *Introducing Translation Studies: Theories and Applications* (2001).

<sup>13</sup> All quotes from the Old English poem are taken from the third edition of Klaeber's *Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg* (1950)

<sup>14</sup> For example, 'monster' (Heaney, 2000: l. 433), 'demon' (Morgan, 1952: l. 433), and 'creature' (Liuzzza 2000: l. 732,).

<sup>15</sup> Elliot van Kirk Dobbie (1953) was the first to suggest that *aglæca* needed no more of a specific translation than 'formidable one'.

overwhelmingly translated as 'woman' or 'wife,' with Melinda Menzer arguing that 'wif alone always refers to a human woman, rather than a female being' (1996: 3).<sup>16</sup>

*Unhyre* also does not necessarily imply monstrosity, as many translators have interpreted. Rather, I argue for a translation of *unhyre* as 'awful', 'fierce', or 'cruel', staying consistent with other appearances of the word. As well as its appearance in describing Grendel's mother in *Beowulf*<sup>17</sup>, it is contained in *Genesis A*, in a description of Ishmael - *Se bið unhyre, orlæggifre, wiðbreca wera cneorissum*, 'he shall be **rough**, warlike, hostile to the races of men' (Mason, 1915: I.2287).<sup>18</sup> It also appears in *An Old English Martyrology* describing an *unhyran cwelres*, a 'grim executioner' (Rauer, 2014: I.184.9). *Unhiore*, another form of the word, is used by Boethius in describing 'rough' or 'fierce' weather<sup>19</sup> and there also exists the possibility that *unhyre* is related to the Old Icelandic *u-hýrr*, translating as 'frowning' or 'unfriendly looking' (Cleasby and Vigfusson 1874: 661).

An examination of *unhyre*'s antonym, *hyre* (or alternatively *heoru* or *heore*) can also aid us with a better understanding of the term. *Hyre* is translated by Bosworth and Toller as 'gentle, mild, pleasant' and by Clark-Hall (2011) as 'pleasant, secure, peaceful, gentle, mild, pure, spotless'. It appears in *Beowulf* on line 1372, *Nis ðæt heoru stow*, 'that was not a pleasant place', and in *Genesis A*, *Culufre fotum stop on beam hyre*, 'the gentle bird stepped with her feet on a tree' (Hostetter, 2011: I.1466). In the case that *hyre* is an antonym for *unhyre*, a definition of 'awful', 'fierce', or 'grim' makes more sense than 'monstrous', 'gruesome' or 'inhuman'. Consequently, *wif unhyre* could accurately, and more consistently, be translated as 'grim -' or 'fierce woman', as opposed to the monstrous translations traditionally put forward.

Despite the rather vivid imagery associated with Grendel's mother in translations, adaptations, and artistic representations, there is very little reference to her physical appearance in the poem. Besides the description of her as *ides onlicnes*, 'in the likeness of a woman', (Klaeber, 1950: I.1351) there are only brief references to her physical appearance, one such term referring to her *lapan fingrum* (Klaeber, 1950: I.1505). This term has, like *wif unhyre* and *aglæcwif*, received majorly negative and bestial translations, from 'savage talons' (Heaney, 2000: I.1505) to 'hostile claws' (Liuzza, 2000: I.1505). However, *fingrum*'s rather straightforward and most widely accepted translation is simply '[with] fingers', and is consistently translated as such throughout the rest of the Old English corpus, for example, in Ælfric's *Lives of Saints* and Cynewulf's *Christ*.<sup>20</sup> It appears also in numerous Old English sources in reference to the finger of God, such as in Ælfric's *Homilies*, making a translation of 'claws' or 'talons' rather unlikely. As for *lapan*, this is most likely related to Modern English 'loathing' or 'hateful', or alternatively 'hated' (Clark-Hall, 2011), and appears numerous times in *Beowulf*, such as on line 2910, *leofes ond laðes*, 'the loved and the hated' (Chickering, 1977: I.2910), and on lines 814-5, *wæs gehwæper oðrum lifigende lað*, 'it was hateful to each other that the other lived' (Chickering, 1977: II.814-5). As such, instead of a translation of 'savage talons' or 'hostile claws', a more consistent translation of *lapan fingrum* would be 'hated-' or 'hateful fingers'.

<sup>16</sup> The Bosworth-Toller Anglo-Saxon Dictionary translated *wif* as 'i woman, a female person . . . iii. a married woman, a wife . . . iv. a female', the only exceptions being line 2120 of *Beowulf* and an instance found in *Bald's Leechbook* referring to non-physical women in the context of a charm.

<sup>17</sup> *Unhyre* is also used in *Beowulf* to describe the dragon (*weard unhiore*, 'fierce dragon') on line 2413 and Grendel's *egl unheoru* (I.984), generally translated as 'monstrous-' or 'fierce-' 'talon'.

<sup>18</sup> Or alternatively, 'He shall be fierce, battle-greedy, and an enemy to the men of his generation, his own kin' (Hostetter, 2011: II.2287).

<sup>19</sup> *On wintres tid, weder unhiore* appears in Meter 29 of *The Meters of Boethius*, and is translated by Sedgefield as 'in time of winter, when fierce is weather' (Alfred, 1899: I.61), and is glossed by Bill Griffiths as 'rough, wild' (Alfred, 1991: 188).

<sup>20</sup> Numerous *Beowulf* translations, such as Tolkien's and Alexander's translate *fingrum* as 'fingers'.

*Aglæcwif*, *wif unhyre* and *lapan fingrum*, are only a small selection of the many terms describing Grendel's mother, most of which can be reasonably translated in human terms, rather than the monstrous and bestial translations that are overwhelmingly used. Assuming that Grendel's mother's character can be read in more humanised terms, this begs the question of why this demonization of her began. Unlike her son, she is never depicted as evil<sup>21</sup> and is also never described as an *eoten* or a *þyrs*, both of which are generally translated as 'giant'.<sup>22</sup> Also unlike her son, her actions are never criticised by the poet or by characters within the poem, rather her actions are accepted as part of the blood-feud – King Hrothgar notes that *heo þa fæhðe wræc þe þu gystran niht Grendel cwealde* (Klaeber, 1950: II.1333-4), 'she avenged that feud in which, last night, you killed Grendel,' and Beowulf himself recognises that she *hyre bearn gewræc* (Klaeber, 1950: I.2121), 'avenged her son.'<sup>23</sup> As Kevin Kiernan argues 'she accepted and adhered to the heroic ethic of the blood-feud . . . her single attack on Heorot had the best of motives, vengeance for the death of her kinsman Grendel' (1984: 24). The fact that she is the mother of a son who has explicitly evil (and arguably monstrous) traits does not warrant such monstrous translations of her own character, nor does the fact that she is an antagonist justify her traditional depiction as a 'monstrous ogress'.

The first concrete beginnings of Anglo-Saxon scholarship can be traced back to the Victorian era, with the first transcriptions of *Beowulf* being published by Grimur Thorkelin in 1815, and the first translations into English appearing with Sharon Turner's interpretation of a number of passages from the poem in 1805. Berit Åström argues that in the eighteenth- and nineteenth- centuries history was viewed in a linear fashion; that is, it was believed that civilisation was continuously progressing 'from an obscure and primitive past to an enlightened and highly cultivated present' (1998: 25). He argues that in these centuries Anglo-Saxon culture was presumed to revolve around masculinity, military might, power, and status, with little concern for women's' experiences, resulting in women's experiences being of little interest to the scholars of the Victorian period. Similarly Damico and Olsen assert that 'nineteenth-century studies of the Anglo-Saxon period (as of other literary eras) were androcentric, written by males for a male audience from a male perspective and experience' (1990: 12). It wasn't until the latter half of the twentieth century, with the advent of the feminist movement, that the experiences of Anglo-Saxon women were given much attention.

Besides this lack of interest in Anglo-Saxon women's lives and experiences, the Victorian period is considered to have held a narrow view of femininity and was particularly notorious for its regulation of women. The ideal woman was one who was associated with the domestic sphere and her primary function was to bear children. Physical prowess was seen solely as a masculine virtue, while femininity was perceived to be more along the lines of what Simone de Beauvoir called a "prolonged infancy" — man acted, while she remained in the home without economic or political rights' (1984: 142). Marriage and procreation were seen as the 'perfect lady's' sole function' (Vicinus, 1972: x), and any 'male' characteristics — those associated with action — were seen as unfitting for women. As John Ruskin, a leading art critic of the time, asserted, a woman's 'power is not for rule, not for battle, and her intellect is not for invention or creation, but for sweet ordering' (2008: 66). A figure like Grendel's mother, both independent and proactive, was no doubt viewed as extremely transgressive, and her involvement in the political world seen as an intrusion into the role of men, especially when she is compared to other female figures in the poem such as Wealhtheow. It can be safely assumed that Grendel's mother, described by Victorian

<sup>21</sup> Grendel is referred to as *Godes andsaca*, 'God's adversary', a *feond on helle*, 'an enemy from hell' who is *fag wið God*, 'hostile with God' (Klaeber, 1950: II. 786, 101, 811).

<sup>22</sup> Signe M. Carlson (1967: 361) has suggested a translation of 'bloodthirsty one' as opposed to 'giant' for *eoten*.

<sup>23</sup> My own translations



translators as 'monstrous woman' and 'savage abyss-keeper of the wave'<sup>24</sup> was not considered an embodiment of the ideal woman, a figure who may be epitomised in Coventry Patmore's 1852 poem, 'The Angel in the House'.

It wasn't until the nineteenth-century that angels were to become so equated with women as they are in the present day. Before this, angels were represented most often as male soldiers, such as those who appear in the Old English Junius 11 MS, as androgynous figures, or as cherubim in the form of infants. The popularisation of the 'woman as angel' motif may have its roots in Patmore's 'The Angel in the House', in which Patmore describes an ideal wife, a devotee to her husband, a passive, pious and pure figure – 'Man must be pleased; but him to please/Is woman's pleasure . . . Dearly devoted to his arms/She loves with love that cannot tire' (1863: 110). As Nina Auerbach argues in *Woman and the Demon*, the title of the poem became a 'convenient shorthand for the selfless paragon all women were exhorted to be, enveloped in family life and seeking no identity beyond the roles of daughter, wife, and mother' (1982: 69). The words 'angel' and 'house' became almost synonymous, and consequently left those women who deviated however marginally from this domestic and submissive ideal being placed on the opposite side of the binary, and being characterised as demons and monsters in male writings.

In their feminist analysis of Victorian literature, *The Madwoman in the Attic* (2000), Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar also explore this idea of 'woman as monster'. Through an analysis of Victorian novels written by male authors, they find women categorised in two extremes; the 'angel in the house', whom Virginia Woolf, in her 1942 'Professions for Women', declared must be killed off in order for woman to be freed from the aesthetic ideal which itself has killed her, and its opposite and double, the monster (Woolf, 2001: 244). The 'angels in the house', to use Patmore's term, are women who are 'dearly devoted to [man's] arms', whereas those who are characterised in demonic terms are those who show 'characteristics of a male life of "significant action"' (Gilbert & Gubar, 2000: 28). William Blake, for instance, especially in his later work, extends his often used binary model of bipolar extremes to 'his characterization of the [the female], breaking it roughly along a split between passive and active females' (Essick, 1991: 615). His passive females are presented as virtuous, whereas those who can be considered active are portrayed as evil, a 'threat to the (masculine) imagination and its progress through art toward apocalyptic transformation' (Essick, 1991: 615). Similarly, William Thackeray describes his character, the autonomous Becky Sharp of *Vanity Fair*, as 'diabolically hideous and slimy', and having a "monster's hideous tail" (2001: 607), the binary opposite of the passive and naïve heroine Amelia Sedley. Again, Charles Dickens is noted by Françoise Basch, as including either 'highly venerated' or 'fiercely caricatured' women in his literature, their main functions being to incarnate either good or evil, with little room for that which may come in between (1974: 53). Talking about *Bleak House*'s character Mrs. Jellyby, Basch argues that 'the point was to convince the reader that any woman with a political mission is a monster, an unnatural being' (1974: 55).<sup>25</sup>

Grendel's mother, both active in her military role as can be seen in her battle with Beowulf, and active in a political means as a *wrecend*, 'avenger', joins these other less than ideal women in their monstrous and unnatural statuses. Although she does not elaborate on the point, Christine Alfano argues that it was likely that the 'first Old English scholars were probably at least partially responsible for incorporating feminine monster imagery into the

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<sup>24</sup> *Wif unhyre* as translated by Arnold (1876: l. 2120), and *gryrelic grundhyrde*, 'terrible guardian of the earth/mere' as translated by Kemble (1837: l. 2136).

<sup>25</sup> Although Mrs. Jellyby's character is one so obsessed with philanthropy that she neglects her home, her spouse, and her children, the implication is that her complete attentions should be on the domestic sphere.

*Beowulf* text' (1992: 12) – in other words, *Beowulf* translators of the nineteenth-century created a monster in contrast to the angelic figures of the more submissive and ideal women, Wealhtheow and Hildeburh.<sup>26</sup> This is evident in the descriptions of her character as a 'fiendish mother-hag' by Wackerbarth in 1849 (l.2127), and in Arnold's 1876 description of her as a 'monstrous wit' (l.1259). It is possible that Grendel's mother, deviating so far from the ideal image of the 'Angel in the House', was presumed to be, or cultivated to represent, a demonic or monstrous figure.

The views that led to the creation of this angel-demon binary may have their beginnings in the staunch Christian ideals of the nineteenth-century, and the Bible's often misogynistic depiction of women. As the late-Victorian social observer T. H. S. Escott stated, 'the Victorian age is in fact above all others an age of religious revival' (1897: 399), and according to Kitson Clark, 'it might not be too extravagant to say of the nineteenth century that probably in no other century, except the seventeenth and perhaps the twelfth, did the claims of religion occupy so large a part in the nation's life, or did men speaking in the name of religion contrive to exercise so much power' (1962: 20). In an Age where the theory of evolution was only emerging,<sup>27</sup> the threats to a literal reading of the Bible, and especially sections such as *Genesis* and the creation of Adam and Eve, were limited, and the subjects of Religion and Science were yet to lose, what was called by Adam Sedgwick, their 'beautiful accordance' (cited in Garland, 1980: 92).

The 'Angel-Demon' dichotomy of the Victorian Era may be seen as an evolution or another manifestation of the 'Madonna-Eve' dichotomy that was prevalent in the Middle Ages and early Renaissance era. This dichotomy is apparent in Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* (1590 - 1596) in numerous contrasting figures, in particular the half woman, half serpent figure of Errour, and both Gloriana and Una who are representative of Elizabeth I, 'the Virgin Queen'. The Bible glorifies those women who remain passive and obedient to God's will, namely the Virgin Mary, whom many of the women in Victorian literature appear to emulate, such as Thackeray's dependent and meek, Amelia Sedley. On the other hand, Eve, who eats the fruit in order that she and Adam may 'be as Gods' (Gen 3:5, Douay-Rheims Bible), is seen as an autonomous figure who threatens the patriarchal authority of God, much in the same way that Thackeray's seductive and independent figure, Becky Sharp, is seen as a threat to the patriarchal society of the Victorians.

As with these Victorian novels, the translations of *Beowulf* also appear to have their characters who emulate the Virgin Mary and those who emulate Eve, even if just through a Christian reading of the poem. Wealhtheow, especially, may be seen as the ideal 'Angel in the House', a symbol of Mary; she appears as a passive figure and a foil to her husband: *Eode Wealhþeow forð, cwen Hroðgares, cynna gemyndig*, 'Wealhtheow went forth, Hrothgar's queen, mindful of courtesy' (Tolkien, 2014: ll.458-9). Grendel's mother, on the other hand, has been viewed as symbolic of Eve, an agitator who does not succumb to the Christian ideal of the passive woman, a view expressed in Jane Chance's *Woman as Hero in Old English Literature* (2005). This polaric view of women in translations of *Beowulf* and in Victorian literature is arguably a result of the religious revival in the Victorian age and consequently the Victorians being a 'people of one book' (Larsen, 2011: 4), the dichotomous imagery of the woman as angel or demon hailing from the contrasting figures of the Virgin

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<sup>26</sup> There is however, more recent scholarship on these figures' importance and influence in the poem, such as Helen Damico's (1984) *Wealhtheow and the Valkyrie Tradition* and Dorothy Carr Porter's (2001) 'The Social Centrality of Women in *Beowulf*'.

<sup>27</sup> Robert Chambers's *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* published in 1844 was met with extreme controversy over its contradiction to natural theology. Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species*, published in 1859, was also initially met with hostility.

Mary and Eve. A change to the more secular dichotomy of the angel and demon may have occurred as a result of the conversion to Protestantism in England and the reconsideration of Mary's place within the church and within worship.

The physical attributes given to Grendel's mother, making her so extensively beast-like, such as her 'loathsome claws' (Wackerbarth, 1849: l.1505) and her 'hideous' appearance (Kemble, 1837: l.1505), along with the description of her as a 'dam' (Lumsden, 1881: l.1538), may be as a result of the influence of the ancient discipline of physiognomy on Victorian literature. Physiognomy, which underwent a re-popularisation in the nineteenth-century, involved the assessment of an individual's character based on their outward appearance; John Caspar Lavater, in the early 1800's, wrote that man's 'psychological, intellectual and moral life . . . manifests and exerts itself visibly to the most careless observer' (1800: 8-9).<sup>28</sup> The influence of physiognomy can be seen in Victorian art and literature,<sup>29</sup> such as in works by Dickens and Charlotte Brontë,<sup>30</sup> and perhaps most famously in Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890). Although today physiognomy is regarded as pseudo-science and of no credibility, it is still used in art, literature, and modern media, most notably in films aimed at children, for instance *The Lion King* and other Disney films. Women who did not fit the ideal of the 'Angel in the House' were often ascribed physically unattractive features as an outward manifestation of their inner characters, for example in the many anti-suffragette caricatures of the later years of the Victorian era. Physically revolting features are quite likely to have been attached to Grendel's mother's character in the same way novelists and artists of the time used physiognomy as evidence of characters' negative social traits, and 'the interest and popularity of physiognomy among the reading public ensured that authors could rely on their readers to decode the meaning' of characters' features' (Perrett, 2012: 177). It is difficult to discern whether the terms used in translations of *Beowulf* to describe Grendel's mother were used consciously, as a means of making sure she was seen as a character who was physically, and therefore morally repelling, or whether her character was assumed to be physically monstrous as a result of the influence of physiognomy at the time.

Since the Victorian era, which was clearly influenced by the angel-demon dichotomy popular at the time, along with the great interest in physiognomy amongst artists and writers, modern day translations and adaptations still choose to demonise Grendel's mother, despite the fact that she is never explicitly judged by either the poet or the other characters in the poem for her act of revenge. Rather, *Beowulf* himself notes that it is *selre bið æghwæm þæt he his freond wrece, þonne he fela murne*, 'it is always better to avenge one's friend than to mourn overmuch' (Liuzza, 2000: ll.1384-5). As noted earlier, both *Beowulf* and Hrothgar recognise her actions as part of a legitimate feud. M.W. Hennequin argues that 'in neither dialogue nor narration does the text specifically condemn or even criticise her actions. Instead of a monster, the poem constructs her as a noblewoman and a brave opponent' (2008: 513).

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<sup>28</sup> A wealth of illustrations pertaining to physiognomy, including the relationships between famous men's features and their characteristics, and human features compared to those of animals exist, most notably those of French art theorist Charles LeBrun, which were reprinted in 1827 in *A Series of Lithographic Drawings Illustrative of the Relation between the Human Physiognomy and that of the Brute Creation* (Legrand and Baltard). Also notable are those of Italian scholar Giambattista della Porta in his *De humana physiognomia libri IIII* (1586). Della Porta's illustrations were included in the 1817 *The Pocket Lavater, Or, The Science of Physiognomy*.

<sup>29</sup> See Mary Cowling's *The Artist as Anthropologist: The Representation of Type and Character in Victorian Art* (1989).

<sup>30</sup> In *Jane Eyre*, the influence of physiognomy is evident in numerous character descriptions. For example when describing Mr. Mason, Jane states, 'He repelled me exceedingly: there was no power in that smooth-skinned face of full oval shape: no firmness in that aquiline nose and small cherry mouth; there was no thought on the low, even forehead; no command in that blank, brown eye' (Brontë, 1864: 200).

In light of this, an alternative image of her character may be constructed through a re-evaluation of the translated terms, and also through comparison with other female figures from both Anglo-Saxon literature and related literatures, such as Old Norse. Carol J. Clover argues that in an Old Norse context, women as active role-players in society were not all so extraordinary; the Old Norse manuscript of legal texts known as *Grágás* states that a woman was expected to act in the absence of a male relative *sem sonr*, 'like a son' (1993: 369), much as Grendel's mother does in *Beowulf*. Clover lists numerous Old Norse works that feature women who '[play] life like a man', and although such women are 'occasionally deplored by the medieval author' (1993: 371), they are more commonly admired.<sup>31</sup> Saxo Grammaticus in his retrospective thirteenth-century *History of the Danes* makes reference to the belief that:

There were once women in Denmark who dressed themselves to look like men and spent almost every minute cultivating soldier's skills . . . loathing the dainty style of living, they would harden body and mind with toil and endurance, rejecting the fickle pliancy of girls. . . they courted military celebrity so earnestly that you would have guessed they had unsexed themselves . . . [they] sought the clash of arms rather than the arm's embrace, fitted to weapons, hands which should have been weaving, desired not the couch but the kill, and those they could have appeased with looks they attacked with lances (1998: 212).

Among these women are described Stikla, who 'stole away from her fatherland, preferring the sphere of war to that of marriage' (Grammaticus, 1998: 150), and Lagertha, 'a skilled female fighter, who bore a man's temper in a girl's body; with locks flowing loose over her shoulders she would do battle in the forefront of the most valiant warriors' (Grammaticus, 1998: 280). Although Saxo Grammaticus does not distinguish historical personages or women from legend in his history, and although it is clear that they are deviating from the norm, it is notable that none of these women are demonised despite their transgression of typical gender roles.

Although considerably fewer examples of powerful women appear in the extant Old English corpus, there are still some significant examples, most notably the figure of Æthelflæd, 'Lady of the Mercians' and daughter of Alfred the Great. Ruling the Kingdom of Mercia for seven years after the death of her husband Æthelred, her and her brother, Edward the Elder (who succeeded Alfred the Great), raided Danish-ruled East Anglia and repulsed the last major Danish army sent to ravage England. *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* also tells of her alliances with the Scots, the Picts, and Danish settlers against Norwegian invaders, amongst other achievements, before her death in 918 (Giles, 1914: 67-9). She is later described by the twelfth-century historian, William of Malmesbury, as 'Ethelfleda, sister of the king and relict of Ethelred, [who] ought not to be forgotten as she was a powerful accession to his party, the delight of his subjects, the dread of his enemies, a woman of an enlarged soul' (Giles, 1847: 123). Unfortunately, despite Æthelflæd's triumphs, F.T. Wainwright asserts that her reputation has suffered from bad publicity, and she has faded out of history (1990: 44).

Another Englishwoman, although unnamed, is described by Procopius, an official of Emperor Justinian, and a prominent scholar and historian of the sixth-century, in *The History*

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<sup>31</sup> Clover, in both 'Regardless of Sex: Men, Women and Power in Early Northern Europe' (1993), and in 'Maidens and Other Sons' (1986), lists numerous women, for instance Þorbjörg of *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar*, who spends her childhood pursuing martial arts because, as she argues, she is the only heir to King Eirekr of Sweden, after which her father provides her with land and men and she adopts the male name Þórbergr. Auðr of the *Laxdæla saga*, is also mentioned - a woman who assumes male dress and takes revenge on her husband for divorcing her, when her brothers refuse to do so. Alexandra Hennessey Olsen, in 'Women in *Beowulf*' (1984) also describes numerous female figures who take on typically male roles.

of the Wars. After her betrothed married another, she 'took up the duties of a man and proceeded to deeds of war', bringing with her 'four hundred ships . . . with no fewer than a hundred thousand fighting men', with her acting as war-leader of this prodigious army (Procopius, 2001: 258).<sup>32</sup> After her men hunted down her betrothed, Radigis, he pledged to marry her, leaving the unnamed Englishwoman as the Queen of Varni. Despite her '[taking] up the duties of a man', she is never reviled by Procopius, or made appear unnatural (Procopius, 2001:258). The figure of this unnamed woman, along with Æthelflæd, may show us that active women were not necessarily reviled as is often assumed. These Anglo-Saxon women, along with the women of the Norse sagas and Saxo Grammaticus's *History* are evidence that other roles existed (in literature at the very least) besides the ideal of the cupbearer, or similar more passive roles, and those women who participated in such active roles were not necessarily considered monstrous by the Anglo-Saxons or their Norse contemporaries. Grendel's mother may be compared to many of these female figures of both Norse and English origin; not only does she take up the role of vengeance *sem sonr*, 'like a son', but the *Beowulf* poet never condemns her for her actions.

### Conclusion

It would appear, through the exploration of Victorian literature and the societal views of the Victorians, that it is quite possible that the current and overriding view of Grendel's mother as a monster has been handed down to us from the early years of *Beowulf's* translation. This view, developed in the nineteenth-century has been shaped in significant ways by the extremely Christian and rather misogynistic culture of the period. As Berit Åström notes:

in historical study it is important to remember that the past is not a given, but something we create through the choices we make. We choose what sources to use and we choose what interpretations to give them. These choices are guided by our experiences and expectations . . . . Prejudices and preconceived notions have influenced the way Grendel's mother is regarded (1998: 25-9)

Grendel's mother deviated so far from the Victorian's cultural ideal of the 'Angel in the House' that she was presumed to be, or perhaps cultivated to be, a demon, and the imagery used in these translations has permeated down to the present day. As Helen Damico and Alexandra Hennessey Olsen note, the modern idea that the Middle Ages held contemptible views of women, and the characterisation that has resulted from this preconceived notion 'does not reflect the actual representation of women in Old English literature' (1990: 12). Although Grendel's mother was not the Victorian ideal, and most likely not the Anglo-Saxon ideal either, the fact that she is an active female figure, often seen in stark contrast to the other women of the poem, does not justify the physically monstrous image of her that exists today.

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<sup>32</sup> The detail of 'four hundred ships' and 'no fewer than a hundred thousand fighting men' (Procopius, 2001: 258), is most likely a mistake on the author's part, or an exaggeration by the English or Germanic fighters.

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# Monstrous Metamorphosis: Mothers' Bodies and the Science (Fiction) of Birth

Nicola Moffat

An enduring battle for women's reproductive rights and bodily autonomy has been waged for centuries in the West, which is currently demonstrated by recent government cuts to Planned Parenthood in the US, proposals for new abortion legislation in Spain, and the continued deferral of an abortion referendum in Ireland (not to mention the sustained lack of government support for survivors of symphysiotomy, Magdalene Laundries, and Mother and Baby Homes). This battle has its roots in a primordial masculine fear of the feminine capacity to reproduce, which has been extensively documented by feminist writers such as Julia Kristeva in *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (1982) and Rosi Braidotti in *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory* (1994). Kristeva builds her theory of abjection on two existing sociological and psychoanalytic concerns – that of a primal ontological separation from the animal, and an equally primal psychological separation from the mother, where she argues that “[t]he abject confronts us . . . within our personal archaeology, with our earliest attempts to release the hold of *maternal* entity even before ex-isting outside of her” (1982: 13). The maternal is, for Kristeva, a jettisoned fragment of the psyche that is forever held in abeyance and abjection, something that cannot be consolidated with the speaking subject, but which also cannot be done without (1982: 32-55); the maternal is thus a spectre that haunts subjectivity in Kristevan psychoanalysis. Both Kristeva and Braidotti point out the various means of regulation put in place to curb the reproductive abilities of women: for Braidotti, one of the most persistent methods of maintaining control is a sustained discursive project that blames mothers for bringing monsters into the world, one which simultaneously casts mothers as monstrous beings for the very crime of having female bodies (1994: 75-94). Kristeva's argument, meanwhile, is that the feminine and the maternal body are monstrous because they have always already been jettisoned from the Symbolic order and are thus unnameable signifiers (1982: 34-35). This essay argues that these discursive acts, archived in and perpetuated by writing, are performative, in that they not only constitute women as monsters with the potential to produce further monstrosity, but that such acts have contributed to the constitution of the medical sciences, which have fundamentally been formed on the basis on a fictional feminine monstrosity. In other words, the science of birth – obstetrics, gynaecology, and (most especially) teratology – is born from fiction.

What is more, because these discursive acts have historically been disseminated through writing, they have also had the simultaneous effect of constituting their authors' identities, performing a rebirth of the self that, unlike biological birth, does not hinge upon mysterious feminine power or her abject bodily functions. The mind has thus become the site for a masculine reproductive ability that opposes the corporeality of feminine birth. This ability has been made evident most obviously in male writing (especially autobiography), but this is in fact only part of a much larger project born of the masculine desire to elide the reproductive capabilities of the female body, a project which Braidotti notes has its origins in the proto-scientific practices of alchemy (1994: 87). Where writing, particularly autobiography, enacts the (re)birth of the self, it cannot produce a material body; alchemy, however, promises to do just that. Writing that alchemy is ‘a *reductio ad absurdum* of the male fantasy of self-reproduction’ (Braidotti, 1994: 87), Braidotti demonstrates that this is a point not at all missed by Mary Shelley, the author of what is probably the most famous example of male self-birth, *Frankenstein* (1818). The novel is often read as a dire warning against attempting procreation without the female body (Homans, 1986; Mellor, 1988; Gilbert and Gubar, 1986; Johnson, 1996; and Moers, 1996), yet it was first published during a time

when the metaphorical association between birth and writing was probably at its height.<sup>33</sup> Susan Stanford Friedman notes that this metaphor combines male/female and mind/body binaries with a division of labour, that is 'into men's production and women's reproduction' (1987: 52), where the masculine 'mind became the symbolic womb of the universe' (1987: 53). However, the mind/body binary initiated and sustained by opposing masculine writing with feminine birth is complicated in *Frankenstein* by the fact that the novel was written by a woman, during a time in which writing was still largely deemed the province of men.

In this article I examine how the discourse used to perpetuate the concept of writing and birth as binary opposites is made up of narratives stemming from various authorities and disciplines, including literature. The evolution of these narratives over the centuries has been fuelled by the progression of human knowledge, especially the advancement of the medical sciences, yet women's bodily conduct is under no less scrutiny today than it was a thousand years ago, precisely because of continued fears of female reproductive autonomy. While scientific advances have certainly assisted women's sexual emancipation through the development of contraceptives and the administration of both pregnancy care and abortion, birth sciences such as gynaecology and obstetrics owe their naissance to narratives of fictional feminine monstrosity that at all times requires regulation. Along with the regulation of women's bodies, the sustained attempts to make babies outside the female body, and the continued dominance of masculine self-birth through writing, I show that as our understanding of the science of birth has metamorphosed, our reasons behind finding the origins of ourselves have not. I thus note the historical progression of fictional narratives concerning the birth of 'monsters', from antiquity, to early modernity, and through to current obstetrical and teratological concerns, then turning my attention to how these narratives have not only constituted women as potentially monstrous without proper regulation, but that these have in turn constituted men as far more capable of reproduction, in that their reproductive power (writing) is represented as free from abjection and monstrosity, as well as fundamentally unsuitable for women to pursue. Finally, using Shelley's *Frankenstein*, I explain that birthing the self through writing is no less fraught with the potential for monstrosity.

My understanding of 'monstrosity' stems from its etymology (see below), which categorises monsters as bodies that are fundamentally uncategorisable, that is, beyond the realm of the knowable. The signifier, 'monster' is what Jeffrey Jerome Cohen names a 'third-term supplement' (1996: 6-7), precisely because the term designates a body that lacks a signified. Kristeva connects the unnameable to the feminine, which thereby demonstrates its connection to monstrosity: '[w]hat we designate as 'feminine,' far from being a primeval essence, will be seen as an 'other', without a name, which subjective experience confronts when it does not stop at the appearance of its identity' (1982: 58-59). Where Kristeva's analysis centres on the Symbolic, Braidotti's work in *Nomadic Subjects* links the Symbolic to the bodily by stating that because of the feminine ability to reproduce, woman is 'morphologically dubious' (1994: 80). My reading of *Frankenstein* complicates this view of the maternal because the maternal body is circumvented in the novel, where reproduction takes place through a masculine creative force inaugurated by an intellectual desire to know and thus have dominion over 'the tremendous secrets of the human frame' (Shelley, 1996: 32). *Frankenstein* thus subverts the monstrosity of feminine birth by instead proposing the monstrosity of masculine creativity, a subversion that is enabled by the novel's events, which demonstrate the lack of control we have over our creations, whatever those may be. However, this lack of control is coloured by a deep ambivalence regarding our responsibilities towards our creations, which, in a patriarchal society governed by a binary view of the world, ultimately affects women more than it does men.

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<sup>33</sup> Gilbert and Gubar's (1986) extensive study in *The Madwoman in the Attic* demonstrates just how pervasive this metaphor was in the nineteenth century.

## The Metamorphosis of Monstrosity: From Fiction to Science

The birth of children that were once considered monstrous, that is, children with disabilities or birth defects, miraculous births, and even twins or other multiple births, still feature in popular culture as sources of uncanny power and monstrosity.<sup>34</sup> Where antiquity gave us the miraculous births of gods and monsters, including Leda laying an egg after being raped by Zeus in the form of a swan, the birth of the Minotaur after Pasiphae mated with a bull, and the creation of the giants from the blood of Uranus on his castration by his son Cronus, Medieval texts give similar explanations for monstrous births, describing them as a result of external phenomena visited upon humanity by a castigatory God (Wilson, 1993: 10). Dudley Wilson asserts that it was not until the seventeenth-century that explanations for the existence of monsters were internalised and connected to human acts, but his claim is based on his distinction between ‘fanciful’ monsters, those of a literary persuasion, and the birth of disabled children (Wilson, 1993: 10). I am purposefully blurring this line in this paper because the arrival (or birth) of monsters (real or fanciful) has, throughout history, resulted in the regulation of human behaviour by warning us of the consequences of aberrant conduct. Imaginary or not, monsters all have the same function, which is to act as literal signifiers. Most scholars of monstrosity will point out that the etymology of “monster” is the Latin *monstrare*, meaning ‘to teach’ or ‘to demonstrate’; Chris Baldick adds to this the verb’s second conjugation, *monere*, which means ‘to warn’ (Baldick, 1995: 48). In either case, the arrival of a monster always already indicates the arrival of something else, usually the arrival of further misfortune.

Between the early sixteenth- and late eighteenth-centuries, these signifiers acted as warnings to the communities in which these children were born. Wilson uses a sixteenth-century ballad, *The forme and shape of a Monstrous child, born at Maydstone in Kent* (1568), as an example of such a cautionary tale, which in this instance is a warning to the population of England to cease their sinful ways. Using the physical description of the child, the balladeer matches each of the child’s deformities to a transgressive act by the adult population of England, where the child’s existence is read as a bodily signifier of God’s wrath. Alexandra Walsham writes that ‘[t]hese unsightly spectacles unveiled His glory no less clearly than perfect human specimens’ (Walsham, 1999: 194-5), as they not only demonstrated God’s omnipotence but his ability to create ‘physical malformity’, which, as Walsham notes ‘was the outward manifestation of private immorality’ (1999: 201). Thus, in the Maidstone child’s case, his mouth was ‘*flitted to the right fide*’ (Lilly, 1870: 195), because the people of England’s ‘*mouthes they infect/ With lying othes and flaighes,/ Blapheming God, and prince relect,/ As they were brutifh beaftes./ Their filthy talke and poyfoned fpeech/ Disfigures fo the mouth,/ That fom wold think ther ftood the breech/ Such filth it breatheth forth*’ (Lilly, 1870: 196). Similarly, the child’s shortened arm is blamed for the community’s idleness and his left leg growing upwards towards his head is regarded as a warning against refusing to be led by one’s ‘natural’ leaders (Lilly, 1870: 196). However, while Wilson insists that the balladeer’s ‘call to penitence is directed towards England and its people in general’, only giving a cursory nod to the prose introduction’s ‘more precise accusation’ against the child’s mother (Wilson, 1993: 47), closer consideration of one of the child’s afflictions *coupled* with the prose introduction’s accusations results in a reading that clearly shows who is blamed for the child’s malformation.

First, the child’s mother, named as Marget Mere, is described in the ballad’s introduction as ‘*being vnmaryed*’ and having ‘*played the naughty packe*’ (Lilly, 1870: 194). Second, the last of the child’s afflictions is described as a ‘*broade lump of flefh, in fashon lyke a rofe, in the myddeft whereof was a hole*’ situated in the middle of his back, which the balladeer explains ‘*flew us playne/ Our clofe and hidden vice/ Which doth behind vs run amayne/ In vyle and*

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<sup>34</sup> See, for example, the characters Addie Langdon and Thaddeus Montgomery in *American Horror Story: Murder House* (2011) and the twins in Stanley Kubrick’s *The Shining* (1980).

*flameful wyfe*' (Lilly, 1870: 197). The alluded physical similarity between this growth on the child's back and female genitalia is, like the balladeer's aforementioned associations, a corporeal manifestation of the child's sinful origin.<sup>35</sup>

Another textual example Wilson examines to build his thesis of an Early Modern understanding of monstrosity is Ambroise Paré's *Des monstres et prodiges* (1573), which gives the following explanations for the cause of monstrous births:

The first is the glory of God. The second his anger. The third too great a quantity of semen. The fourth too small a quantity. The fifth is the imagination. The sixth the tightness or smallness of the womb. The seventh the indecorous position of the mother, as when, being pregnant, she sits too long with her thighs crossed or squeezed against her belly. The eighth, because of a fall or blows directed against the belly of the pregnant mother. The ninth, because of hereditary or accidental illness. The tenth, because of the decay or corruption of seminal fluid. The eleventh, because of the mixing or mingling of the semen. The twelfth, because of trickeries of malignant tavern rogues. The thirteenth, because of Demons or Devils (Wilson, 1993: 68).

Of the thirteen causes of monstrosity Paré lists, six can be attributed to mothers or mothers' bodies, while only four can be attributed to fathers, three to supernatural intervention, and one to fraudulence. What is more, five of the six causes attributed to mothers are the result of unchecked behaviour, such as being careless while in the state of pregnancy (including the self-regulation of the 'imagination', which I will explain shortly), and sexual transgressions such as adultery, the effect of which was considered to be the mixing of sperm and the resultant monstrous births. Wilson (1993: 97) notes that even the birth of twins was regarded the result of two impregnations, something scholars such as Paré may have picked up from studying the works of the ancient Greeks. The twins, Pollux and Castor, for example, were the issue of Leda, Zeus, and Leda's husband, Tyndareus: where Castor had a normal human birth, Pollux, being the son of Zeus (who had taken the form of a swan in order to rape Leda) hatched from an egg. What is clear is that by the time Paré was writing late in the sixteenth century, more emphasis was being put on curbing the behaviour of women than of men, especially with regard to sexual behaviour. Yet, what is also made clear, simply by the vast number of both popular and scholarly publications concerning monstrous birth in this period, is that monstrosity intrigued and fascinated the people of Europe. By the eighteenth-century, monstrous births not only drew a curious crowd but were lucrative business opportunities for relatives of the afflicted. Dennis Todd (1995: 5) points out that the types of monster exhibitions and freak shows made famous by the Victorians were in fact already popular by the early eighteenth-century, meaning that falsified reports of monstrous births were not uncommon amongst those looking to make a quick buck.

Such an occasion was the birth of seventeen rabbits by one Mary Toft of Godalming, Surrey in 1726. Toft was able to convince a local surgeon, John Howard, as well as surgeon to King George I, Nathaniel St. André, that she had birthed sundry parts of a total of seventeen rabbits, as well as portions of an eel and a cat, the motivation for which was the money she could attract as a curiosity to the public. Todd explains that Toft's ability to fool so many people was down to 'the entire mise-en-scène of pregnancy, labor, and birth that [she] staged' (1995: 8), part of which was made possible by the fact that she had only very recently miscarried. Todd writes that '[h]er miscarriage had left her with signs of pregnancy. Often she bled, and often her pain was unpretended. What was not real, she could act, and

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<sup>35</sup> Note that there is no mention of the child's father with regard to this origin.

her most impressive performances were enhanced by her ability to set off powerful, pulsating contractions in her abdomen, contractions lasting for hours at a time' (1995: 8).

However, our understanding of unusual births has metamorphosed in the centuries since Toft's miraculous issue, not just with regard to scientific explanation but also according to the narratives of contemporary knowledge of birth and pregnancy. As utterly convincing as her bodily acts were, what first persuaded the local surgeon, Howard, of Toft's veracity was the story she invented to explain the births' origins, claiming that while five weeks' pregnant and weeding a field, she 'was startled by a rabbit. She and the woman she was working with ran after it but could not catch it. The chase made her long for rabbits' (Todd, 1995: 7). While her narrative sounds far less substantial to a modern audience than her physical symptoms of birth, it rested on a seventeenth century belief in maternal imprinting – the belief that a pregnant woman's thoughts, wishes, and desires somehow transfer to the child in utero (the fifth reason Paré cites as a cause of monstrous birth). Rebecca Kukla explains that the concept of maternal imprinting is based on an ancient view of the womb as permeable and therefore susceptible to corruption (2005: 5), noting the concerns for what 'the pregnant body *craves* – that it is not merely passively prone to penetration, but that it in fact is the seat of capricious and forceful appetites that beckon foreign substances in' (2005: 6). She adds that '[t]he whole notion of a craving – so deeply linked in our imagination with pregnancy – is of not just any appetite but an appetite that is inherently irrational, unpredictable, forceful, and hard to control or deny' (Kukla, 2005: 6). It was therefore not Toft's physical symptoms but the narrative she concocted that convinced others of her authenticity.

Kukla states that imprinting was *the* explanation for monstrosities from the sixteenth-century to the early eighteenth-century (2005: 13); it is, however, a belief that persisted long into the nineteenth-century, and not only by the uneducated masses. What is more, while we no longer believe that a child will bear physical pointers of its mother's thoughts and cravings, 'the theory of the maternal imagination forgoes a crucial link between medical obstetrics and the management of maternal character and ethics' (Kukla, 2005: 17) that still exist today, which includes the careful regulation of what women imbibe during pregnancy. Aside from Mary Toft, one of the most famous historical examples of perceived maternal imprinting was the nineteenth-century 'Elephant Man', Joseph Merrick, whose birth appeared apparently normal, but who began to display bodily abnormalities at the age of two. Citing a contemporary description of Merrick in the nineteenth century, Philip K. Wilson writes that '[a]mong the most prominent of the 'bizarre distortions' upon his body was an 'extraordinary mass of flesh' that 'continued to force its way from beneath the upper lip,' eventually protruding 'several inches' from Joseph's mouth in the form of a 'grotesque snout' that weighed several ounces' (Wilson, 2002: 13). While the diagnosis of Merrick's condition remains disputed, the explanation at the time was that he suffered from maternal imprinting, a result of his mother being startled by a 'parading' elephant at a Humberstonegate fair while in her second trimester (Wilson, 2002: 14). As Kukla states, a dominant belief of the time was that although, 'no one could see into the womb, the resulting child could be 'read' as a kind of biography of the mother's activities and (especially) private passions and cravings during pregnancy' (Kukla, 2005: 15). Thus, Merrick's condition archived his mother's fear of the parading elephant, while Mary Toft's admission at being startled by a rabbit and consequently desiring rabbit meat was understood to be a sound prognosis in the early eighteenth century for her seventeen monstrous rabbit births.

Kukla explains that the link between maternal imagination and monstrous birth hinged not only on the alleged permeability of the womb but on a seventeenth-century understanding of natural philosophy which viewed passions and appetites as inhabiting

..an interesting border territory between the realm of the mental and meaningful and the realm of the bodily and brutally causal . . . Passions, despite their meaningful content, traded in and operated through somatic urges and responses rather than

the cold, dispassionate light of reason. Thus the passions provided the perfect medium for meanings to translate themselves from the world onto bodies. Women's pregnant bodies, with their weaker resistance to passions and their intense cravings, their higher impressionability, and the fragile or nonexistent boundaries separating them from their fetuses, were in turn 'natural' sites for such passionate transmissions (Kukla, 2005: 17).

It is precisely such a passion that a young Victor Frankenstein falls prey to in Mary Shelley's Gothic classic, which results in the misshapen 'birth' of a Creature that, tellingly, has no legitimate name. Braidotti notes that, like the medical sciences use cadavers to study life, the study of monsters (that is, anomalous births) has constituted the norm in biology, by demonstrating its deviations (1994: 84). The fascination with 'monstrous' births led to the study of teratology, which, as Braidotti notes is the study of congenital abnormalities. Braidotti explains that teratology is a 'forerunner of modern embryology', where 'abnormal cases' are set up 'in order to elucidate normal behaviour', a logic she explains psychoanalysis will later follow for mental disorders (Braidotti, 1994: 84). Braidotti's thesis, which is that the birth sciences stem from a patriarchal desire to reproduce without the need for women's bodies and therefore the possibility of monsters, becomes clear when she states that '[o]n the imaginary level . . . the test-tube babies of today mark the long-term triumph of the alchemists' dream of dominating nature through their self-inseminating, masturbatory practices' (Braidotti, 1994: 88). In a sense, then, alchemy coupled with an archaic understanding of the mother's role in forming her foetus, has led to teratology – studying the abnormal to better know the normal – which, in turn, has led to embryology and the eventual making of babies through IVF and surrogacy for example. The point Braidotti is emphasising above is that circumventing the maternal is now *possible* on a physical level, where, before, it could only take place autobiographically.

### Monstrous Misogyny: The Birth of the Birth Sciences

Braidotti notes the ancient view that women were only vessels for the spark of life carried by the sperm, vessels, however, that had the potential to deform the developing child:

[i]t is as if the mother, as a desiring agent, has the power to undo the work of legitimate procreation through the sheer force of her imagination. By deforming the product of the father, she cancels what psychoanalytic theory calls 'the Name-of-the-Father'. The female 'signature' of the reproductive pact is unholy, inhuman, illegitimate, and it remains the mere pre-text to horrors to come. Isn't the product of women's creativity always so? (1994: 86).

The birth sciences of today – gynaecology, obstetrics, teratology, embryology – all have their basis in the fictional notion that women's bodies are a natural danger to the children they carry, children who have, as Braidotti notes above, been considered as created by the sperm alone, where the uterus was thought only to be a receptacle for housing a developing child. Gynaecology and obstetrics are sciences formed on the basis that women's sexual health before, during, and after childbirth require medicalized regulation. Deborah Lupton explains that the underlying reason for the medicalization of women's reproductive health is that 'women have traditionally been defined as the Other in medical discourse, the 'sick' or incomplete version of men: as weaker, unstable, the source of infection, impure, the carriers of venereal disease or the source of psychological damage to their children' (1994: 132). As such, 'twin paradoxical ideologies' have grown through medical discourse, where 'on the one hand, women [were seen] as weak and defective, [and] on the other, women [were seen] as dangerous and polluting' (Lupton, 1994: 132).

Gynaecology is a good example of my argument that the birth sciences were predicated on fictional constructions of monstrous femininity, because, as Lupton points out, it 'identifies

women's reproductive anatomy as a special field of study, for which there is no masculine counterpart' (1994: 133), where the study has 'legitimated views that sexual activity and reproduction are more fundamental to women's than men's nature' (1994: 133). That 'contemporary anatomy textbooks designed for medical students still tend to portray the male body as the standard human body, against which the 'different' female body is compared' (1994: 132) solidifies the notion that women's bodies are a sign of otherness that rests on reproductive difference. What is more, like surgery and anatomy, the birth sciences are concerned with penetrating the body in order to discover its inner workings, where the invention of phallic instruments for looking inside the body, such as the speculum, the gynaecological 'wand,' and even the ultrasound, have become symbols of a penetrative, destructive, and patriarchal discourse. In fact, when I first read about Toft's case (Todd, 1995), my predominant thought was of the amount of invasive examination Toft was subject to, not just by doctors and surgeons, but by an increasingly curious public who came to witness her miraculous births. In many ways, the birth sciences were premised on a desire to witness the miracle of life, if not to recreate it outside the body, then at least to control the end result. Certainly, the current concern for a new generation of 'designer babies' is both born out of and echoes earlier fears that monsters will be born.

I will shortly make a comparison between Frankenstein's 'midnight labours' (Shelley, 1996: 32) and the view that birth is abject, but first I turn my attention to the construction of feminine birth and masculine writing as binary opposites, in order to later demonstrate how Shelley blurs the lines between masculine and feminine, between writing and birth, and between pure and abject.

### The Hideousness of Feminine Birth and the Purity of the Masculine Imagination

In *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Imagination* (1979), Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar write that in men's writing, women are often represented as '[e]mblems of filthy materiality' who 'in their very freakishness . . . possess unhealthy energies, [and] powerful and dangerous arts' (Gilbert and Gubar, 2001: 157). Like Lupton's view that women were seen as 'dangerous and polluting' (1994: 132), Gilbert and Gubar employ the language of monstrosity when speaking of the perceived otherness of women, where the 'unhealthy energies' and 'dangerous arts' practiced by women are indicative of female creativity as a whole, meaning that female reproduction is relegated to the realms of the monstrous and abject. However, in order for the continued propagation of the species, men still rely on women's bodies, which means that pregnancy, birth, and nursing have all been heavily regulated by patriarchal forces, including the dissemination of popular texts that threaten unruly women with the issue of monsters. Where I demonstrated the conceptual reasoning behind these practices in a previous section, this section deals with the flipside of constituting feminine creativity with monstrosity, which is the constitution of the masculine imagination as pure, and its conceptual tools, in this case, writing, as unachievable by women.

The binary of male writing and female birth is made possible by the analogical connection between writing and male sexuality, which Gilbert and Gubar note when discussing Gerard Manley Hopkins' proclamation that '[t]he male quality is the creative gift' (cited in Gilbert and Gubar, 1986: 92). Using Hopkins' statement, Gilbert and Gubar explain that '[m]ale sexuality, in other words, is not just analogically but actually the essence of literary power' (Gilbert and Gubar, 1986: 92), which, they explain, has cast male writers as fathers of their creative endeavours. Furthermore, 'a notion of 'ownership' or possession is embedded in the metaphor of paternity' (Gilbert and Gubar, 1986: 94), meaning that '[i]f male sexuality is integrally associated with the assertive presence of literary power, female sexuality is associated with the absence of such power' (Gilbert and Gubar, 1986: 95). They explain that Hopkins 'was articulating a concept central to that Victorian culture of which he was in this case a representative male citizen' (1986: 92), where this concept encapsulates the

'patriarchal notion that the writer 'fathers' his text just as God fathered the world' (1986: 92). Furthermore, they write, this 'metaphor is built into the very word *author*, with which writer, deity, and *pater familias* are identified' (1986: 92). Conversely, Elaine Showalter argues that 'literary *maternity* predominated in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries' (1981: 188), where she asks, 'If to write is to metaphorically give birth, from what organ can males generate texts?' (1981: 188). This question is particularly pertinent when one considers the number of female-authored texts in the literary canon (which are very few), as well as the scorn which female writers have had to endure from their male counterparts, of which Hopkins' is only one example.

There are hundreds of examples of masculine scorn for women's writing throughout history, which feminist literary criticism has painstakingly highlighted in its attempt to explain the inherent misogyny of canonicity. For example, in *Emily Brontë in the Hands of Male Critics* (1971), Carol Ohmann demonstrates the differences between reviews of Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847) and the same novel when it was first published under Brontë's pseudonym, Ellis Bell, who most (male) reviewers thought to be a man. Ohmann finds that where most reviews of the novel are favourable when thought to have been written by a man, when later known to be written by a woman, are often condescending, unfavourable, or positive only in the sense that the novel is seen as 'a work of 'female genius and female authorship' (Ohmann, 1971: 908).

Like the author-patriarch that Gilbert and Gubar invoke in *The Madwoman in the Attic*, Frankenstein pictures himself as godlike in his ability to create, telling Walton that '[a] new species would bless me as its creator and source; many happy and excellent natures would owe their being to me. No father could claim the gratitude of his child so completely as I should deserve theirs' (Shelley, 1996: 32). Yet, the author of the novel is a woman, and what *Frankenstein* does, despite fulfilling the alchemical 'male fantasy of self-reproduction' (Braidotti, 1994: 87), is problematize the imagined purity of masculine 'birth'. Using Early Modern examples of monstrous births, I noted earlier that, if improperly regulated, feminine birth can result in monstrosity. As Gilbert and Gubar have, moreover, explained that nineteenth century male writers (and, I might add, many male writers of the twentieth century) viewed women as unable to write because they do not have the sexual capacity to father a text. Thus, notes Showalter, 'the woman writer experiences her own gender as a 'painful obstacle or even a debilitating inadequacy' (Showalter, 1981: 194-195, citing Gilbert and Gubar 1979: 50), where, in this case, feminine lack results in monstrous birth.

That masculine writing has been compared to fathering a text through insemination, as well as to birthing it demonstrates both the irrationality of patriarchal structures and the doggedness with which patriarchy has confined women to the private sphere. What is more, the strict enforcement of boundaries between the private sphere and the public (a sphere where *publication* takes place), especially during the nineteenth century (where both the new literary form of the novel and women's writing in general were beginning to gain a foothold), is related in no small way to the masculine tendency to naturalize men's creative abilities and pair these with women's procreative abilities (Stanford Friedman, 1987: 52). Whether, as Gilbert and Gubar argue, men 'father' their texts, or, as Showalter contends, they 'mother' them, women were understood in the nineteenth century as inappropriate authors for literary texts, precisely because they already demonstrate the ability to mother children. This is partly why Shelley names *Frankenstein* her 'hideous progeny' in the introduction to the 1831 version (Poovey, 1996: 251). However, as the novel's narrative events reveal, the creative acts of birth and writing are both far too complex to act as a binary pair, and either may result in the making of a monster.

### Making Monsters: Creativity and the Metaphor of Childbirth



If men are said to 'father'/mother texts, and women 'mother' children, Mary Shelley confounds the binary, not merely by subversively performing the masculine role of author, but through the narrative of *Frankenstein*, where the titular character attempts to procreate without the assistance of a woman's body by using an old alchemical recipe he has found and mixing it with contemporary scientific technologies. According to both the popular and scientific discourses of the centuries leading up to the publication of *Frankenstein* (especially popular ballads and proto-obstetrical papers of the sixteenth-, seventeenth- and eighteenth-centuries), pregnant women require strict regulation if they are not to give birth to monsters. Regulatory behaviour includes being wary of strong passions, desires or frights while in this state as these may imprint upon the child. If we take Frankenstein as mother of his creation, it would seem that the logic of maternal imprinting is revealed in the novel's narrative events: before and throughout his 'labour', Frankenstein becomes obsessed with possessing the knowledge of life, but it is not a knowledge born of reason and is, instead, one born of passion. After having discovered the secret of life and thereupon deciding to make a man, Frankenstein describes himself as having 'grown pale with study' and 'emaciated with confinement', because a 'resistless, and almost frantic impulse, urged [him] forward' and he remembers that he 'seemed to have lost all soul or sensation but for this one pursuit' (Shelley, 1996: 32). One could certainly read Frankenstein's desire to know and to usurp women's life-giving abilities as a craving in the sense of a maternal craving, and his pursuit of such knowledge as a passion of the type Rebecca Kukla has described (2005: 17). What is more, Frankenstein's maternal craving is passed on to the Creature, whose desire to know manifests itself in his education by the unknowing De Lacey family, by the books he subsequently learns to read, and in his yearning to know the origins of his 'accursed self'. It is also visibly manifested in the monster's body, who is not actually born in any bodily sense of the term but made from the sutured parts of human and animal corpses Frankenstein has illegally procured.

The belief in maternal imprinting was evidently still widely accepted in Shelley's lifetime, as this interpretation of *Frankenstein* indicates, but also as William St. Clair notes of Shelley's moods while lactating after the birth of her fifth child reveal. He writes that Shelley's anxiety regarding her father's welfare while she was in Italy was blamed for the ensuing case of diarrhoea that Percy Florence suffered in the summer of 1820, the same illness that had killed his sister Clara and his brother William (St. Clair, 1989: 462). St. Clair explains that Shelley's worry and depression were thought by her husband to be the fault of Godwin's letters, which always imparted an often dire need for money, and, by August of that year, Percy wrote to Godwin, '[h]is main point [being] . . . Godwin's effect on Mary's milk' (St. Clair, 1989: 462). Kukla (2005: 11) writes of breast-feeding that '[m]ilk was seen as a direct medium of transference of the nature of the nursing body, not only physical but moral, to the infant', meaning that the nursing mother was just as much danger to her child as she was when pregnant. Mothers' thoughts were so dangerous, they could not only be the cause of monstrosity, but could, quite monstrosity, kill the very child they were expected to 'naturally' protect and nourish, during pregnancy and exceeding that, through the child's nursing and its later life. Shelley knew well the dangers of mothering, losing three of her four children at an early age, as well as having lost her mother during her own birth. Many critics have therefore read *Frankenstein* as a birth narrative, not just in regard to the Creature's monstrous birth outside the womb, but of Shelley as an author. Gilbert, for instance, understands Shelley's 'developing sense of herself as a literary creature and/or creator' as 'inseparable from her emerging self-definition as daughter, mistress, wife, and mother' (Gilbert, 1978: 51). Barbara Johnson, on the other hand, reads the novel as a rejection of bodily gestation in favour of a clean and controlled birth (1996: 244), but this would suggest that writing is an untroublesome act, the effects of which can be predicted. However, writing is the only method in which *men* have succeeded in giving birth to an autobiographical self without the assistance of mothers or mothers' bodies; the alchemical homunculus is, like much of alchemy's more popular pursuits, a sad impossibility.

This is also arguably why *Frankenstein* is a novel that is so lacking in mothers: Frankenstein's own mother dies quite early on in the text; he destroys the female creature before she can reproduce little monsters of her own; the Creature murders his fiancée, Elizabeth, in the very bed that would make her mother to Frankenstein's children; and, it is an Oedipal mixture of Elizabeth and his mother that he dreams of after bringing the Creature to life:

I thought I saw Elizabeth, in the bloom of health, walking in the streets of Ingolstadt. Delighted and surprised, I embraced her; but as I imprinted the first kiss on her lips, they became livid with the hue of death; her features appeared to change, and I thought that I held the corpse of my dead mother in my arms (Shelley, 1996: 34)

While *Frankenstein* clearly demonstrates the folly of male usurpation of birth, it also exposes its young author's anxiety at creating a written narrative in place of birth, which situated her as an authority taking up the mantle of a masculine discursive practice. The rebirth of the self through writing is simultaneously a rejection of the physicality of birth and a masculine appropriation of women's procreative abilities, and, it would seem, this is precisely what Shelley is painstakingly emphasising through *Frankenstein's* narrative of masculine birth and conception.

What is more, Gilbert notes that the Creature which Frankenstein gives life to is 'as nameless as a woman is in patriarchal society, as nameless as unmarried, illegitimately pregnant Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin may have felt herself to be at the time she wrote *Frankenstein*' (Gilbert, 1978: 66). Recalling the very beginning of this essay, namelessness is indicative of monstrosity, where the appellation 'monster' serves as a filler for an otherwise unnameable (and, furthermore, unknowable) entity. The namelessness of women is connected to their exchangeability in a patriarchal system (precisely such a system that Mary Shelley finds herself in), where '[f]or women . . . propriety is achieved through the exchange of names, which means that the name is never permanent, and that the identity secured through the name is always dependent on the social exigencies of paternity and marriage. Expropriation is thus the condition of identity for women' (Butler, 1993: 153). Namelessness as Gilbert invokes it is also linked to Shelley's 'illegitimacy' regarding her ability to wield the pen, and, moreover, recreate herself as writer. Writing, especially autobiographical writing, is profoundly connected to the lack of mothers in *Frankenstein*, and in Shelley's own life, where Barbara Johnson asks if writing is 'somehow always in the process of symbolically killing the mother off by telling her the lie that we have given birth to ourselves' (1996: 244).

What is more, Johnson notes that this 'lie' where we give birth to ourselves through writing is predicated on 'the story of the difficulty of conforming to the standard of what a *man* should be' (1996: 251), and that, for a female writer endeavouring to birth herself autobiographically, twin problems arise. These problems are, as Johnson explains, 'on the one hand, to resist the pressure of masculine autobiography as the only literary genre available for [the female writer's] enterprise, and, on the other, to describe a difficulty in conforming to a female ideal which is largely a fantasy of the masculine, not the feminine, imagination' (1996: 521). The result, as we know, is monstrosity, not just because Shelley lays an 'illegitimate' claim to writing, but because *Frankenstein* is so often read autobiographically.<sup>36</sup>

If we read the novel using Kristevan psychoanalysis, then the killing off or omission of mothers in the text is a masculinist imperative to free the self from the abjection of the mother's body, which signifies, among other things, the decay and eventual death of

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<sup>36</sup> In my view it is impossible to interpret the novel without reading it autobiographically but that is another article in itself

materiality (Kristeva 1982: 13-14; 78-79). It is for this reason that we can read Shelley's appropriation of writing as a specifically masculine endeavour. However, both her femaleness and her motherhood haunt the edges of the novel. For instance, Anne K. Mellor notes that the novel is framed by the narrative Walton sends his sister, Margaret Walton Saville, who has the same initials as Shelley (Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley) and that the novel's narrative progress takes place over nine months (1988: 54). What is more, the novel's central narrative arc is of a birth and the novel's publication performed the birth of Shelley as author (Mellor, 1988: 52), all of which suggest that birth and writing are for Shelley, at least on an unconscious level, conceptually inextricable. Yet, *Frankenstein* also puts forward the idea that a *masculine* attempt at birth is what results in monstrosity, and that perhaps what may be monstrous after all is the symbolic matricide that masculine writing, particularly autobiography, performs.

## Conclusion

While there are definitive parallels that can be drawn between the carrying and delivery of a child and writing, the issue at stake when making this metaphorical connection is the loss of the material body. Rosemary Betterton writes that 'the traditional metaphor of creativity in which the (male) artist claims to conceive and give birth to imaginative ideas' (2006: 84) is paradoxical for female artists because their bodies hold the potential for the literal embodiment of this ideal. Betterton argues that 'the contradiction that the metaphor of male creativity conceals [is] that actual conception and pregnancy are bodily conditions that cannot be 'enabled' by will or desire and in this sense, are quite unlike the practices in making art' (2006: 84-5).

This metaphor quite literally comes to life in *Frankenstein*, writing the mother's body out of the narrative through the artificial birth of the Creature and represented by the lack of mothers and women, who symbolise this materiality, in the text. While mothers are missing in the text, women, as representations of materiality and the potential for motherhood, are also made absent: Elizabeth is killed by the Creature on her wedding night, Safie, along with the De Laceys, runs away from him, effectively abandoning him, and Justine is hanged for the Creature's murder of Frankenstein's brother, William.

At each point in the text where there is potential for female creativity, either Frankenstein or his Creature quash this potential by usurping the role of creator or reinforcing male agency. This is, of course, excepting the female creativity responsible for existence of the novel itself. It is thus possible to read *Frankenstein* as an admission of its author's own guilt at practicing a creative impulse that was deemed not just unseemly, but impossible for a woman to wield. However, it is also possible to read the novel as a critique of male-centred creativity by providing a warning that writing may just be as messy as birth is, if in a different way, for, although Victor Frankenstein is a man, he falls prey to the same irrational passions that the "weaker" sex is said to be prone to.

What is more, after abandoning the Creature to fend for himself right after his moment of 'birth,' Frankenstein eschews his responsibility as a 'father' or a 'mother'. The Creature's unremitting vengeance for his abandonment, coupled with the desolation of solitude, are used by Frankenstein as 'evidence' for the Creature's monstrosity, but this is premised on the inaugural event of the Creature's conception, for which Frankenstein knows he is responsible. The novel raises many ethical questions, not least of which is in regard to parents being held responsible for their children's behaviour or authors being held responsible for the effects of their works. For, lest we forget, the philosophical works of Nietzsche have been held accountable for Hitler's ideas regarding the supremacy of the German people and J. D. Salinger's novel, *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951) has similarly been blamed for many attempted and successful assassinations carried out in the US between its publication and the 1980s. In either sense, what is clear is that the Creature, his conception,

and his birth, act as a warning against assuming that what we create is under our control. Just as *Frankenstein* is interpreted in varying ways, in ways that may not suit its author's intent, the outcome of all our creative endeavours may be hard to predict and may produce monsters. Finally, the novel also warns that any attempts to restrict or regulate autonomy might also result in monstrosity.

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# **'I had to remake myself. I had to unmake myself.' Mental Illness and its Treatment in the Literature of Anne Enright**

Dr Michelle Kennedy

Mental illness has been, and continues to remain, a complex issue in modern Irish society. Research, published in October 2013 by the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland states that currently:

by the age of 13 years, 1 in 3 young people in Ireland is likely to have experienced some type of mental disorder. By the age of 24 years, that rate will have increased to over 1 in 2. Based on international evidence, that means that over one half of young Irish adults are at increased risk of mental ill health into their adult years. (Cannon et al, 2013: 7)

Given the prevalence of mental ill-health in modern Irish society, it is evident that the way in which individuals with mental health difficulties are represented, identified, and treated will have a dramatic and influential impact on a significant section of Irish society. However, despite numerous media campaigns and awareness programmes, it is evident that issues surrounding mental illness, and the treatment of mental illness, have remained, to a certain degree, taboo in modern Irish society.

Anne Enright's work engages repeatedly with issues surrounding mental health and ill-health. Through her prolific body of work, Enright has, both in latent and more direct ways, brought issues surrounding mental illness to the fore, bringing an engaged, sympathetic and empathetic voice to an issue which has long remained hidden in Irish society. In an interview with Shirley Kelly in 2002, Enright stated that 'looking at what happens to people, and how you can come undone...that's very much the job of the novelist' (Enright 2002: 236). Her work reflects, in many ways, what Lacan reminds us, that 'madness is a phenomenon of thought', and enables the repressed voices of individuals suffering from mental health difficulties or depression to be brought to the fore in Irish society (Lacan 2006: 132). An analysis of extracts from Anne Enright's fictional and non-fiction work through the lens of French literary theorists provides an insight into the lived experience of individuals suffering from depression or mental illness. Theorists such as Michel Foucault and Julia Kristeva have explored the discourses, silences, power relations and cultural dictates that have surrounded, and indeed continue to surround, mental illness and those who experience it. Kristeva characterises melancholia as symptomatic of 'inhibition and asymbolia that becomes established now and then or chronically in a person' (Kristeva 1989:9). Michel Foucault's exploration of mental illness, its interpretation, and treatment in *Madness and Civilisation* highlights a traditional desire to silence and confine individuals suffering from mental illness or distress, a desire to separate those deemed to be 'abnormal' or different from the remainder of society. Foucault therefore highlights the socially constructed nature of madness, something which Enright's work similarly focuses upon. Enright's writing highlights the way in which individuals in modern Irish society are similarly silenced and separated from society at large. Enright's work subtly yet powerfully points out the ways in which individuals with mental health difficulties can be silenced and confined through language, in many ways framed to be the 'distant soul' which Julia Kristeva speaks of in her work *Black Sun* (1996a: 79). In both her fictional writing in novels such as *What Are You Like?* and *The Gathering* and her non-fiction work *Making Babies: Stumbling into Motherhood*, Enright explores the very way in which modern Irish society speaks of mental illness and speaks out in relation to the realities of living with and beyond mental illness in modern Ireland.

This article examines Enright's work in light of Foucault's argument of the socially constructed nature of madness and Julia Kristeva's examination of the concept of

melancholia and in particular, her call to raise melancholia to 'the level of words – and of life' (Kristeva 1996a: 80). These two lenses are not incompatible, insofar as both theorists seek to examine the ways in which individuals with mental health difficulties are distanced and separated from mainstream society, and the importance of language in framing mental illness in modern society. By utilising the theories of these writers, in conjunction with Enright's work, a deeper insight into the discourse and power relations surrounding mental ill-health can be gained. In so doing, this article seeks to locate the importance of Enright's work in highlighting mental health issues in Ireland and in furthering a growing discourse and engagement with mental illness, and depression, in the public sphere and consciousness.

### Silence and Labels

Enright's writing is littered with both direct and in-direct references to mental illness, and to its place and perception in modern Irish society. Throughout her novels and short stories, Enright highlights the traditional silence surrounding mental ill-health and depression in Irish society, demonstrating the tendency to utilise euphemism and dissimulation when discussing mental health issues, or speaking of individuals suffering from mental ill-health or depression. This tendency is glimpsed briefly in Enright's novel *The Gathering* when Veronica, the main protagonist, recalls being sent to live temporarily with her grandmother in order to allow her mother to recover from an illness which could be interpreted as a nervous breakdown:

this was the year that we were farmed out to Ada, me and Liam and Kitty, and we did not see our mother, not even for Christmas, though our father did arrive with a smug-looking Bea some time in the afternoon. 'Mammy's still not herself,' she said, looking extra pious in her new tank top, a mohair thing in stripes of raspberry and blue (Enright 2007: 86)

Veronica's sister's assertion that 'Mammy's still not herself' is an interesting euphemism for mental illness or distress. It insinuates a division of the self, a separation or marginalisation of Mammy from her real or true 'self'. Veronica's mother is labelled as unwell, yet no further discussion is entered into by any of her family members. Rather than engaging directly with the issue of mental illness which affects their family in such a profound manner, the Hegartys cope with their mother's distress by categorising her as ill, whilst avoiding any interaction with the root causes of her distress. Veronica's mother is defined as ill and abnormal, yet her ill-health and its causes remain relatively unclassified and unconsidered by her family. As Nicole Hurt states in her article *Disciplining through Depression: An Analysis of Contemporary Discourse on Women and Depression*:

Depression greatly varies from individual to individual, but medicalization posits it as a uniform disorder—one that is based on 'biology' and not the specific situation. When the content of women's discontent is overlooked, the unique and complex circumstances that led to these experiences are silenced in the name of medicine (Hurt, 2007: 306)

In much the same way as individuals with mental health issues were classified under various universally understood euphemisms, institutionalisation too was often discussed in hushed tones, using similarly vague language. Individuals who were temporarily institutionalised were often described as 'being away for a while', while being in 'Clonmel', 'Ballinasloe' or 'the Gorman' were popular euphemisms for institutionalisation.<sup>37</sup> This is evident in *The Gathering*, when Veronica recalls a childhood visit to see her Uncle Brendan in St. Ita's

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<sup>37</sup> Terms such as 'being sent away', being 'in the Gorman', Clonmel or Ballinasloe, were universally understood as signifiers of containment or confinement within a psychiatric institution in Ireland in the twentieth century.

mental institution, with her Grandmother Ada and brother Liam. Whilst waiting for the bus which would take them to the institution, Ada, Veronica and Liam were offered a lift by a passing stranger. The man asks Ada if they were 'going to the hospital?' to which Ada replies:

'St Ita's, yes,' on a long exhalation. The stranger lets it lie, this heavy word now beside us in the car. He is not going as far as the gates, he says; he will let us down near enough. It is his habit, evidently, to pick people up at this bus stop, and I know by the way he says 'hospital' that St Ita's is not a hospital. If we were going to a hospital, then Ada would have said (Enright, 2007: 113)

The unspoken understanding that flows between Ada and the driver, and which Veronica, at such a tender age, begins to grasp, is indicative of the discomfort which was, and is, felt by many people when discussing mental illness and its treatment. Just as the driver is not 'going as far as the gates' of the institution, thus perhaps physically avoiding the building and its associations, he also linguistically avoids directly engaging in a conversation with Ada about the institution, or her reasons for visiting it. This behaviour is mimicked by Ada, who seems as eager to remain silent on the subject. St. Ita's, in this instance, becomes a universally understood label which negates, in many respects, the need for further questioning.

This equivocal language is also evident in Enright's novel *What Are You Like?*, when Evelyn, step-mother to one of the main protagonists, Maria, muses upon her step-daughter's recovery from a depressive episode. Following her discharge from hospital, Maria takes up employment as an attendant in a ladies' dressing room in a shop in the local town. Her father, Berts, does not travel into town to see her, but Evelyn visits Maria often at work 'for the barest of reasons' (Enright, 2001: 66).

At least she was able to hold her head up in front of the neighbours and say, when asked, that Maria was between things. That is what you said about children these days, that they were between things – you did not say that this was the place they had ended up (Enright, 2001: 66)

Once again, euphemistic language is used to classify Maria's condition, and Evelyn, in this instance, appears to be more concerned with ensuring that her daughter's recovery and return to the workplace is couched in socially-acceptable terms, than with offering any consideration of the root cause of Maria's depressive episode. In fact Evelyn is seen to feel quite uncomfortable with the upheaval that Maria's depression and abrupt return home has caused, and this is emphasised in the way in which she describes Maria's attempt to recover and move on in the aftermath of her depressive episode:

Maria...was waiting for something and Evelyn did not know what it was. Every couple of weeks she came in to see if she had found it yet and each time she came into the shop she hoped to find her gone (Enright, 2001: 63)

Despite the fact that Maria does not behave, or express herself, in a socially unacceptable manner in the aftermath of her breakdown, Evelyn appears to be overwhelmed with anxiety concerning her step-daughter's potential for embarrassment or even perhaps relapse, and has little difficulty with expressing a private desire to distance her step-daughter, or perhaps more specifically her step-daughter's illness, from herself and from the remainder of her family. For Evelyn, Maria has become defined by her mental illness. Despite the fact that she has undergone treatment and is beginning to reframe her life and live independently, Maria's identity cannot be separated from her illness in her step-mother's eyes. She becomes an individual to be monitored, an individual whose identity must be tailored to conform to the expectations of the 'neighbours' and, by extension, to those of Irish society at



large. Evelyn's hope, that one day she would visit Maria at work only to find her gone, is also significant. It perhaps reflects a hope that, should Maria distance herself or become physically marginalised from the local community, that Evelyn could reframe her situation in what she believes to be more socially acceptable terms, thereby avoiding the shame or negative label that she feels Maria's illness brings upon the family.

Evelyn's fear for her step-daughter's mental health is clearly linked to societal definitions of normalcy and abnormality and the incumbent social inclusion and exclusion which often accompany such societal definitions. Her attempts to reframe Maria's mental health and identity in a more positive light socially highlights the importance which Evelyn places upon being defined as 'normal' within modern Irish society, and her need to distance both her step-daughter, and indeed her entire family from any societal implication of illness or abnormality.

Alongside her fictional work, Enright also draws upon her own personal experiences with depression to explore and critique the classification and categorisation of those deemed to be mentally ill. In a book review entitled 'Fuzzy Edges', Enright compares late pregnancy and depression, claiming that:

The only difference between late pregnancy and depression that I can think of is that loss of a sense of self – at nine months, you feel like a vegetable; when depressed, you feel like a very important vegetable, or a hugely worthless one (Enright, 2003: 50).

It is interesting to note here that Enright appears to be engaging in the type of categorisation and labelling of depressed individuals similar to what is evident in *The Gathering*. However, in this instance, Enright could be viewed as appropriating a label (in this case that of 'vegetable'), and using it to expand current societal discussions centring on mental illness. Having had previous personal experience of depression, Enright, as an author, can be viewed as aiding societal understanding and awareness of depression and indeed of other mental illnesses by categorising and explaining her own personal feelings in relation to her experience of the illness. Lacan makes the point, in *Écrits*, that the 'absence of speech is manifested in madness by the stereotype of a discourse in which the subject...is spoken instead of speaking' (2006: 231-232). Lacan highlights here the difficulty experienced by many individuals experiencing mental ill-health, in distancing themselves from traditional definitions of and discourses surrounding mental illness, and appropriating the space in which to outline and voice their own personal narrative on the subject. Enright, in many ways, appropriates this space, utilising her own personal experiences of depression to re-appropriate the discourse of mental illness, and in the process also re-appropriating the labels associated with mental illness. Also, by associating the feelings experienced by mothers in the latter stages of pregnancy with those experienced by individuals touched by depression, Enright is, to a certain degree, re-appropriating societal conceptions and stereotypes concerning mental illness, and making them comparable to an un-stigmatized, and much cherished, human experience.

Julia Kristeva, in an interview with Dominique Grisoni, stated that 'in the broadest sense of the term...we speak of melancholia as a "distant soul"' (Kristeva 1996a:79). Through her re-appropriation of the certain labels associated with mental illness, Enright's work attempts to bridge the gap between these distant souls and mainstream Irish society in order to de-stigmatise the experience of mental illness and alter the perception of, and labels associated with, mental illness in modern Ireland. This personal engagement with her readers on the subject of living with and experiencing mental illness or depression, which she outlines in a more in-depth manner in *Making Babies*, represents an attempt to voice the feelings and experiences of women living and coping with mental illness in modern Irish society.

In her non-fiction work, *Making Babies*, Enright also challenges and critiques modern Ireland's continued persistence in categorising individuals as either 'normal' or else 'mentally ill' or 'unstable' based upon their outward appearance or on their ability to conform to societal norms and dictates. At one point in the book she asks the reader to:

Look at that lovely woman in the school playground with her lovely children, all scrubbed; the girl in florals, the boy with a baseball hat turned cutely back to front. Normal – ostentatiously so, a pillar of propriety, a devoted mother, the very linchpin of society. While chatting about this and that, she says, 'Oh, I wouldn't let them into the garden . . .' and you have a choice of asking why, or backing slowly away. She is, you realise, completely, fragrantly, bonkers. And not only bonkers, but justified. She could talk about the state of your living-room for a week... (Enright 2005: 159)

While this observation is undeniably humorous, it also serves to make a powerful and pertinent point about the way in which mental illness is perceived and identified in modern Irish society. Foucault argues, in *Madness and Civilisation*, that madness:

is judged only by its acts; it is not accused of intentions, nor are its secrets to be fathomed. Madness is responsible only for that part of itself which is visible. All the rest is reduced to silence. Madness no longer exists except as *seen* (Foucault 1967: 250)

Enright, through her humorous critique of manifestations of madness or mental illness, emphasises the point, made by Foucault, that one is only deemed to be, and thus labelled, mentally ill or touched in Irish society, if one is *seen* to be mentally ill. Latently, through her humorous diatribe, Enright emphasises the link, even in modern Irish society, between being deemed normal or indeed abnormal or mentally ill, based upon one's ability to conform to societal norms or dictates. In an era which has championed the closure of traditional sites of psychiatric institutionalisation and confinement, Enright's work charts the emergence of linguistic walls to replace the physical walls of the asylum which no longer contain the mentally ill. These linguistic walls serve to maintain a distance between the 'touched' and mainstream Irish society through categorisation and judgement. In this manner her work critiques society's passive acceptance of labels such as 'normal' or 'mentally ill' without consideration for the complexities which complicate any attempt to simplistically label any individual.

#### Living with Mental Illness/Depression in Modern Irish Society

Michel Foucault argues that the 'science of mental disease, as it would develop in the asylum, would always be only of the order of observation and classification. It would not be a dialogue' (Foucault 1967: 250). Whilst classification, categorisation and observation of, rather than interaction with, those deemed mentally ill has arguably typified Irish societal responses to individuals with mental health difficulties, Enright's writing challenges the reader to hear their voices and to engage in a dialogue with and about mental illness, in order to bridge the societal distance and alienation arguably imposed upon those deemed to be mentally ill or depressed. One of the most thought-provoking ways in which Enright's work achieves this is by providing characters labelled as 'abnormal' or mentally ill in her work the space and freedom to elucidate the reality of living and coping daily with mental illness. This provides these individuals with an opportunity to reframe their own identity; namely to classify their own condition and how it effects their identity, rather than passively accepting the labels which Irish society imposes upon them.

One could argue that Enright's novel *The Gathering* provides a detailed and complex insight into the complexities of living and attempting to come to terms with depression in modern Irish society. The novel chronicles the struggle of the main protagonist, Veronica Hegarty, to

come to terms with the suicide of her brother Liam, and to acknowledge the repressed memories that this tragic event has brought forward, concerning the sexual abuse of Liam by her grandmother's landlord, which she witnessed first-hand, years previously. While it must be stated that Veronica, is never diagnosed with a mental illness, her grief, coupled with insomnia, excessive and solitary drinking, self-imposed isolation and feelings of inadequacy and marginalisation from close family, could be interpreted as symptoms of a deep depression experienced in the wake of her brother's suicide. Interestingly, Veronica never seeks familial or medical help to cope with the terrible mental anguish that she experiences in the wake of Liam's suicide, nor does she admit outwardly the depths of her despair at any point during the novel, highlighting perhaps the overarching silence that accompanies many instances of depression in modern Irish society. As such, *The Gathering* can be interpreted as Enright's attempt to represent the mindset, and struggles, of a deeply depressed woman, who utilises a self-imposed writing therapy in an attempt to come to terms with the distress that she is experiencing as a result of her childhood experiences, her familial struggles and her bereavement. Carol Dell'Amico attests that:

Although the novel seems to concern itself with the past, it is firmly rooted in the boom-period present of Veronica's response to Liam's suicide, a response that is something like a nervous breakdown and which threatens her marriage. Shifting restlessly between past and present, Veronica's story's main focus is, finally, Veronica herself, her crisis and her recovery (Dell'Amico 2010: 63-64)

While Dell'Amico's article focuses primarily on Veronica's attempt to remember and bear witness to the traumatic events of Liam's childhood, rather than Veronica's struggles with her mental health, Dell'Amico's comment demonstrates an acknowledgment that Veronica's struggle with depression or mental ill-health is a cornerstone of the novel's focus.

Throughout much of the novel, Veronica admits to feelings of inadequacy, blame and insignificance, particularly relation to her interactions with close family. In the aftermath of Liam's suicide Veronica admits that:

There is something wonderful about a death, how everything shuts down, and all the ways you thought you were vital are not even vaguely important. Your husband can feed the kids, he can work the new oven, he can find the sausages in the fridge...And the girls will be picked up from school, and dropped off again in the morning. Your eldest daughter can remember her inhaler, and your youngest will take her gym kit with her, and it is just as you suspected – most of the stuff that you do is just stupid, really stupid, most of the stuff you do is just nagging and whining and picking up for people who are too lazy even to love you, even that, let alone find their own shoes under their own bed; people who turn and accuse you – scream at you sometimes – when they can only find one shoe (Enright, 2007: 27)

Veronica's admission, that she is 'not even vaguely important', represents a distortion of her reality and a loss of self-esteem that makes her feel profoundly isolated from her family. Through this passage, Veronica demonstrates to the reader how difficult it is, both to remain connected to one's family, and to live from day to day, when an individual suffers from depression. Veronica's mental state even hampers her relationship with her children. She limits the time that they may spend watching television as she believes that 'If I don't talk to them I think I will die of something – call it irrelevance – I think I will just fade away' (Enright, 2007: 37-38). It could be stated that the perspective from which the novel is written facilitates its demonstration of the realities of living with mental illness or depression in a modern Irish context. The novel is written entirely from Veronica's perspective and the reader may question whether Veronica's family truly isolate, marginalise and blame her for the litany of faults of which she believes herself to be culpable. However, what is perhaps being highlighted in this work is the unimportance of the veracity of Veronica's claim.

Whether her isolation and culpability is being fostered by her family or not, Veronica's mental state encourages her to perceive her situation in this manner. In this way, the novel clearly illustrates the loneliness and isolation that can be felt by individuals suffering from depression and mental illness, even if they are surrounded by a loving support system. This is evident in Veronica's admission that:

I can not feel the weight of my body on the bed. I can not feel the line of my skin along the sheet. I am swinging an inch or so off the mattress, and I do not believe in myself – in the way I breathe or turn – and I do not believe in Tom beside me...Or that he loves me. Or that any of our memories are mutual. So he lies there, separate, while I lose faith. (Enright, 2007: 133)

Veronica's language here is indicative of her perceived marginalisation. Her inability to connect with, touch or feel her own body, or the body of her husband, highlights Veronica's separation, not only from her husband and family, but even from her own body and the physical world around her.

Despite the anguish and depression that threatens her mental state, familial relationships and marriage, Veronica is seen, by the novel's close, to come to an understanding of her current mental health, and to make the decision to seek help in order to deal with the root causes of her distress. Veronica admits, at one point in the novel, to being 'in the horrors', however she remains, for the most part, silent about the extent and nature of her grief and depression (Enright 2007: 133). Her decision, at the novel's conclusion, to break the silence and secrecy surrounding the sexual abuse of her brother as a child, represents an acknowledgement of how deeply affected she has become by the secret that she has carried since childhood, and her willingness to accept discourse and intimate discussion as a therapeutic aid, in order to combat her depressive feelings and tear down the emotional wall of silence that has existed between Veronica and her husband and siblings:

I know what I have to do...I will tell the truth. I will get hold of Ernest and tell him what happened to Liam in Broadstone, and I will ask him to break this very old news to the rest of the family (but don't tell Mammy!) because I can not do it myself... (Enright, 2007: 259)

Veronica's decision in this regard represents an acknowledgement that her current feelings and mental state can be altered, and that the isolation, fear and guilt that she currently feels need not be a permanent element of her life. Enright brings Veronica's story to a close by bringing her to an emotional crossroads, enabling her to look past her current anguish and toward her desires for the future, which are closely linked to a desire to find an emotional equilibrium:

...I do not want a different destiny from the one that has brought me here. I do not want a different life. I just want to be able to live it, that's all. I want to wake up in the morning and fall asleep at night. I want to make love to my husband again. (Enright, 2007: 260)

This statement highlights Veronica's belief that change is both possible and desired; that her internal struggles can be worked upon in order to attain a greater sense of mental health and well-being. The very fact that the novel closes before Veronica's return home is significant, as the reader will never know if Veronica is able to move on and live her life in the aftermath of divulging her secret. However, Enright's novel depicts the possibility and hope that one can learn to cope with and survive mental illness or depression, whilst similarly foregrounding the argument that women do not necessarily need to conform to societal dictates concerning ideal mental health in order to maintain active and positive familial and

public roles in modern Irish society. Veronica outlines this belief quite frankly in *The Gathering* when she states:

...there is no worse place for me to go. This is the worst place there is. In which case, it is not too bad. If this is as mad as I get then it is not too mad. My children will not be harmed by it; though I may have to change my life a little; get out more, trade in the Saab (Enright, 2007: 237-238)

Veronica's assertion that her situation 'is not too bad' is indicative of an acceptance of the fact that her current mental state does not conform to societal ideals concerning sanity and mental health, which may 'remain forever beyond' her reach, whilst simultaneously exhibiting a distinct confidence that her depression is controllable (Hurt, 2007: 305). Veronica understands and freely admits that her mental distress affects certain elements in her life, yet she refuses to allow it to socially or personally disempower her. Veronica's desire, by the end of the novel, is perhaps, not to permanently exorcise her mental demons, arguably an impossible goal, but rather, as she states herself, 'to be less afraid' (Enright, 2007: 261). Her decision to return and take up her active and prominent familial role at the end of the novel represents 'a major step toward recovering a lost equilibrium', implying an ability to live daily with depression and mental illness, rather than simply living despite it (Dell'Amico, 2010: 72). Whilst Veronica may never fully recover her equilibrium, she nonetheless will not allow her mental state to isolate her or deny her a full and active life.

While Anne Enright writes prolifically in her fictional work about the realities of living with depression and mental illness, discussion of Enright's exploration of mental illness in a modern Irish context would not be complete without evaluating her detailed and frank account of her own personal experience of living with depression, which she outlines in her memoir *Making Babies*. Through this work Enright details her experience of living with, treating and indeed living beyond depression in modern Irish society. In a latent criticism, perhaps, of attempts to write about mental illness, Enright admits that:

It is easy to write nice sentences about this kind of thing, but depression functions in the place where people hate both themselves and other people. It attracts complication, paranoia, impossibility, slippages, sneering, and pride. These emotions are ragged and infectious; they happen, not only inside you, but between you and everyone else in the room. The depressive thinks that they are self-contained, but they never stop leaking misery, banality, and hatred – because it is also a dull state as everyone knows, a grey old thing (Enright, 2005: 188).

In her memoir *Making Babies*, Enright chronicles the help sought and treatment she received for her depression, alongside the author's observations concerning her attempt to come to terms with a debilitating illness and thence to rebuild her life, and as such provide an insight into the difficulties associated with maintaining a sense of identity in the wake of diagnosis, and the intense struggle to regain a powerful and independent sense of self in the aftermath of a breakdown. This struggle is evident in Enright's consideration of the term:

Sick. Well. It was all a new language for me. How long before you don't have feelings, just symptoms, just a direction... 'up' or 'down'... I had to remake myself. I had to unmake myself. I was a bunch of chemicals. I was a dog that had to be walked, or it would bite. I had to be careful with myself, like a trusted cup that you carry to the table as a child and do not spill. I had to think about power – because I was surrounded by the powerless. I was one of them. I had lost, discarded (Enright, 2005: 192).

Enright's discourse latently emphasises the tendency to interpret and classify mentally ill individuals as little more than a product of the symptoms which they manifest. Her

admission that she was 'one of them', is indicative of the dehumanisation and isolation that can be experienced by individuals labelled as mentally ill, a situation which Enright combats through an active engagement with her own sense of self, and attempt to regain a sense of personal power and sense of that self. In this way, her writing can be linked to the assertion made by Julia Kristeva, in an interview with Suzanne Clark and Kathleen Hulley; that there are two alternative ways which a subject can interpret his or her crisis' or mental illness, 'either it can be viewed as 'a suffering', 'a pathology', or alternatively as 'a creation, a renewal' (Kristeva, 1996b: 37). Enright, through her personal portrayal of emotional crisis, postulates the possibility of renewal, of beginning afresh, whilst taking account of the life-lessons learnt by one's experience of mental illness and/or emotional crisis. She chronicles this decision in *Making Babies* when she states that:

There is a certain ruthlessness about a recovering depressive, and like alcoholics we are never cured. It takes rigour. No sharp knives. No breakages of the skin. No baths after nightfall. No pockets. No rocks. You must learn to accept many things: that mornings are like this. That some days you will not leave the house...For six months, the medication turned all my thoughts into symptoms, and made me question everything about who I was. It dismantled my personality. The chemical happiness that crept up on me was not a joyful one, but it kept me alive, and after a while I came to appreciate the soggy buzz of it. I had a place to stand. When I was able to think again, I would make decisions. I would change the circumstances of my life, and so give life itself a chance to return (Enright, 2005: 193)

Like Veronica in *The Gathering*, Enright's personal account serves to point out the incompatibility of societal dictates and norms concerning 'ideal mental health', and the daily lived experience of many individuals in Irish society, and her writing questions the need, even to feign conformity to these unattainable ideals. By foregrounding the reality of living with, and beyond mental ill-health, Enright's writing challenges the reader to deconstruct the terminology surrounding mental health in Irish society. It provides the reader with a multi-faceted view of mental health and ill-health which recognises a myriad of ways in which an individual can live with, cope and live beyond mental illness. This is exemplified at the close of *Making Babies*, when Enright admits that:

I'm still a bit odd. I don't go out a lot. I have an occasional ability to attract people's obsessions or to smell out their damage. So I like a bit of distance. I keep my small paranoidias, a little armoury of them – a quiet, but highly resistant, neurosis about opening or posting letters, for example, and a fairly odd approach to the whole issue of getting my hair cut. But maybe that's doing all right, for forty. And on the plus side – a family, a marriage, this deliberate happiness (Enright, 2005: 195)

## Conclusion

Nicole Hurt states that:

In today's society, it seems plausible to think that the stigma that once plagued depression may have been obliterated due to the significant number of people who now suffer from the disorder. Yet, do the ways in which we currently conceive of women's depression really differ from the intense stigmas of the past? How do we talk about women's depression? Is this discourse empowering and encouraging for women? Or, do we...stifle women's depression and keep it confined to the private and taboo site of misunderstood madness? (2007: 285)

Enright's work aids in de-stigmatising mental illness in Irish society through its open and frank portrayal of both fictional characters suffering from mental illness, and through her own struggles with depression. Through these portrayals and memoirs, Enright provides an

empowering and encouraging discourse, which details the ways which individuals, suffering from a mental illness or depression, can move forward and develop ways with which to live with their illness in a positive manner, despite being profoundly affected by their illness. Julia Kristeva makes the point that 'one could describe melancholia as an unnamable and empty perversion', and goes on to challenge us as a society 'to raise it to the level of words – and of life' (Kristeva 1996a: 80). Enright has succeeded in raising melancholia to the 'level of words - and of life' by providing open and honest portrayal of both her personal experience of depression and her fictional characters experience of mental illness, which serves to add a new and complex dimension to the emerging discourse centring on mental illness in modern Irish society.

Foucault argues that individuals, and society at large, 'confine their neighbors [sic], and communicate and recognize each other through the merciless language of non-madness' (Foucault, 1967: ix). Enright's writing enables those who are confined, by the categorisation and isolation engendered by traditional discourses surrounding mental illness, to in some way free themselves through discourse itself, by voicing their lived experience of mental illness, and by providing alternative perspectives that will promote a dialogue centring on mental illness in modern Irish society. Similarly, Enright's work strives to assess modern societal challenges and prescriptions levelled at Irish women. As Hurt argues contemporary discourse encourages women to engage in 'self-discipline and self-monitoring', not solely in relation to their bodies, but also in relation to 'ideal mental health' (2007: 305). She argues that 'despite women's efforts to achieve the ideal mental health, just like the ideal femininity, it will remain forever beyond their reach' (Hurt, 2007: 305). Enright's work calls into question societal delineations of mental health, by demonstrating that modern Irish women can take an active and independent role in Irish society without having to attain, or even feign achievement of, modern Irish society's definition of 'ideal mental health'. Through the experiences of the fictional character Veronica, and Enright's own frank discussion of her own battle with depression, Enright's writing provides a positive and life-affirming view of living with and beyond mental ill-health, a view which disavows the need to continually correspond to traditional delineations of what is 'normal' or 'socially acceptable' behaviour in order to be deemed mentally well. Through her exploration of the place and position of individuals with mental health difficulties in modern Irish society, Enright's work succeeds, in many ways, in achieving what Foucault terms 'the mediation of madness, through which the world becomes culpable, compelled by it to a task of recognition, or reparation, to the task of restoring reason *from* that unreason and *to* that unreason' (Foucault, 1967: 288).

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# CALL FOR PAPERS – (IN)VISIBLE LINES

## Sibéal Journal, Vol 2

Following on from the success of our 2015 conference we are looking for submissions for our next journal. Papers are invited to engage with the theme of the conference, (In)visible Lines. We are also accepting feminist or gender studies book reviews. The books must have been published since November 2015.

The journal will focus on how the feminist movement has been categorised as a series of different waves, first, second and third, with some contemporary critics suggesting we are now on the precipice of a fourth wave. Each of these stages had their own aims and means of achieving those aims: underlying all was a quest for equality, for some or for all.

Increasingly this neat categorization of the feminist movement has been questioned and challenged, especially with the internet age offering a greater platform of communication for female-identified individuals and feminists alike.

Visible and invisible barriers remain, whilst new forms of inequality and oppression emerge or are simply acknowledged. Different identities intersect and cannot be easily separated, further complicating feminist struggles. Despite these challenges, now is an exciting time for feminist and gender studies. New mediums present new opportunities, old battles take new forms. Masculinities and femininities are no longer defined as rigid categories they once were, gender identities are challenged and the waves of feminism have begun to blur.

Please send extended abstracts of 500 words to [invisiblelines2015@gmail.com](mailto:invisiblelines2015@gmail.com) by April 25, 2016. If accepted completed articles of 5,000 - 6,000 must be sent by June 24, 2016.

## Sibéal Network

Sibéal was formed in 2006 by Susan Cahill and Claire Bracken, postgraduate students at that time who were responding to the great need for an organisation that focused on feminist and gender studies on the island of Ireland. We are now nine years in operation and aim to continue creating networking opportunities for postgraduate students and early career researchers.

Our current committee is enthusiastic to carry on the task of encouraging members to share their work and avail of the variety of opportunities in this field. If you have any questions or comments, please feel free to email us [info@sibeal.ie](mailto:info@sibeal.ie)

# Annual Conference – November 2016

Revolutionary Genders NUI Galway November 18 & 19

Email: [revolutionarygenders2016@gmail.com](mailto:revolutionarygenders2016@gmail.com)

Deadline for submissions: September 21, 2016

The quest for equality always involves change, sometimes revolutionary change. This change, this revolution can be slow, living in the shadows, waiting for the moment to strike. Or it can be loud, visible and quick. Either way the landscape is changed. In the wake of a revolution what remains? What is left behind? What changes? And for whom? What compromises are made?

On the 100 year anniversary of the 1916 Rising equality is still a major issue. Gender recognition and rights could define our next 100 years. Has the gender revolution been written into the history books? How will gender be defined? How does this history manifest itself in culture, in history, in literature, in society, in law? What is the difference between revolution and sustainable transformation? As the revolution continues we must both look back, but continue to move forward.

The conference hopes to explore how definitions have changed, how revolution happens, and how the landscape can change within feminism and gender studies. Influenced by the 1916 Rising we hope to engage and inspire postgraduate and early career researchers from all disciplines to showcase their creative and innovative approaches.

We hope to facilitate practical and theoretical based projects, and encourage researchers to submit panels, proposals for workshops, round tables, feminist performances or exhibitions.

Themes might include but need not be limited to the following:

Revolution and Change

Waking the feminists

Gender identities in transformation

Gender and Politics

Historical identities

Gender embodiment

Gender performativity

Post-colonial identities

'Postfeminism'

Intersectionality

Space, Place and Gender

Gender and Language

Gender and Religion

Medical identities, medicalized bodies

LGBTQIA

Institutions in flux

Gender and Work

Feminism(s)

Masculinities

Gender and Migration

Gender and Sexuality

Sociology, History, History of Art, Theatre, Popular Culture, Music, Law, Politics

Anthropology, etc.

Abstracts or proposals of no more than 250 words should be completed on the template available [here](#) or on [Sibéal.ie](http://Sibéal.ie). We are in the position to offer a selection of travel bursaries.



