

The Irish Feminized Diasporic Narratives: Motherhood and Motherland

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Emigration, exile and diaspora occupy a problematic place in the Irish literary tradition. This article is mainly interested in exploring the importance of feminine narratives in the Irish emigration history and its rich tradition in literary responses and representations. Irish women are no longer the silent objects of poetry and narratives but increasingly they are the authors of it. The article transgresses the national boundaries and offers a voice and a space to the other, namely Irish womanhood. Irish women are usually excluded from the social processes that are of relevance to their lives and nation. So, there is a close connection between gender and nationality that is constructed in relation to the other, the silenced and the oppressed. The article observes that Irish women participate actively in the process of reproducing, maintaining and modifying their roles in the production of national identity. Besides, the Irish feminized narratives in poetry and novels show a sustained interest in recovering the story of the Irish emigrant woman, a narrative that was underrepresented in both historical accounts and literary representations. The current article approaches exile in contemporary Irish literature as it moves away from the set of meanings associated with the largely male-centered Irish literary tradition and advocates a conflated connection between gender and nationality. Therefore, the article underlines the importance of the feminized narratives as they offer Irish female authors a place to engage with the past and the present, charting the processes of social, cultural and national transformation.

Connection with Home is important to the lives of diasporic Irish women and in particular the connection with Ireland which lies at the heart of the diasporic experiences and narratives. Ireland has struggled with its feminine identity throughout its history. The dichotomy between male and female narratives is embedded in the construction of Irishness. Irish women writers have stamped Irish culture with feminist and national concerns. Marjorie Howes suggests that the conflation of gender and nationality are the two most important discourses to shape identity. The cultural representations of gender and Irishness continue to revolve and evolve as Irish women writers find a space and a voice, reinterpreting and rewriting the narrative of Ireland and Irishness. Traditionally, Irish women appear as subordinate mothers and housewives. George O'Brien in her article "The Aesthetics of Exile" asserts that "It seem[ed] only a slight exaggeration to say that without exile there would be no contemporary Irish fiction." (O'Brien, 2000: 35) Irish immigration to the United States, Canada or other parts of the world implies social, political, cultural and political changes.

The Irish feminized narratives that were active in 1920s and 1930s sought progressive Irish national identity that will open new opportunities to women rather than the nationalist focus on women as the repositories of tradition. The Irish feminized narratives record and

recover different kinds of life histories and examine the different ways in which women in emigration have been imagined, remembered and even excluded from the narrative of the nation. The article considers the bond to the land as a metaphor of the bond to the mother in light of their portrayal of the conflictive mother figures that mirror their own shared motherland. Besides, the article asserts the success of the Irish women writers and their aspiring literary attempts of turning exile into a creative experience by presenting a women-centered experience and narration. The Irish women were keen to present their genuine stories and experiences without intervention of their male-counterparts. The typical old portrayal of Ireland “estranges women from their own bodies and abets the exclusion of women’s experience from both literature and history.” (Sullivan, 334) Similarly, Declan Kiberd asserted that it was an ancient notion in Irish literature that “land was a woman, to be worshipped, wooed, and won, if necessary by death.” (Kiberd, 1995: 283) Ireland, Cathleen Ni Houlihan, Dark Rosaleen and Mother Ireland all have in common “Generic and simplified images of women, who can be oversexed or desexualized and whose motherhood, where applicable, is depersonalized and politicised.” (Walter 314)

Catherine Nash asserts that cultural nationalists and the church and new state “denied women an autonomous sexuality in their idealization of asexual motherhood. The young woman was replaced by the depiction of the old peasant woman who could represent the successful outcome of a life lived in accordance with the demands of motherhood... and way of life extolled in the state.” (Nash, 1993: 47) Within this tradition, the feminine narrative is usually an authentic narration involving feminine norms of social and political conformity, as well as, expressing their potential of asserting herself and identity. Carol Coulter points out that “Not only in Ireland, but throughout the colonized world, women came onto the public stage in large numbers through the great nationalist movements of the beginning of this century... However, their involvement in the revolutionary movements was not matched by their place in the newly created states,” (Coulter, 1993: 3) Many writers perceive nationalism and politics as mobilizing women in their interests in the nation-state that used to be dominated by men’s interests. Nationalisms according to Cynthia Enloe have “typically sprung from masculinized memory, masculinized humiliation and masculinized hope.” (Enloe, 1989: 44) Thus, these different perspectives share the view that women have different relationships to national identity than men and it will be the main focus of this article exploring these gendered narratives of national identity. The lack of attention to gender relations in the formation of the emerging national identity had led to many gaps in the theorization of nationalism. Nira Yuval-Davis was concerned with the exclusion of women from the nationalist milieu. She asked “why women are ‘hidden’ in the various theorizations of the nation when women play such a central role in the biological, social, cultural and symbolic reproduction of nations?” (Yuval-Davis, 1993: 628) Yuval-Davis responded by suggesting that one possible reason for such exclusion is the fixed role assigned to women in the private domain by classical and patriarchal theories. The patriarchal nationalists use the ‘woman’ as a symbol of the nation that reinforces dualism: private/ public and rational and emotional, etc.... This negative presentation renders women invisible in their everyday work instead of representing women as maintainers and reproducers of the nation’s culture. Therefore, women are excluded from contributing to the public, political and national movements. A further explanation was the close identification of women with family rather than with productive activities that serve the Irish nation. Sabina Sharkey argues that gendering the symbols of the Irish nation “like other sites of colonization, was gendered female and this rhetorical act engendered a range of further possibilities and strategies within the register of colonial discourse.” (Sharkey, 1994:5) The 1930s marked the rise to power of Eamon de Valera and the Fianna Fail Party and its rewriting of the constitution.

Underpinning the new constitution was a document that refined women as mothers and enshrined their special duties within home. There was mounting feminist protest to the proposed constitution. Kathleen Clarke and Hanna Sheehy Skeffington joined nationalist women in contesting the narrow and conservative image of womanhood set down in the constitution. Carol Coutler suggests that “the letter of the Constitution, the accompanying legislation and the spirit it embodies, militated heavily against the involvement of women in public life.” (Coutler, 1993: 27) Heather Ingman points to the fact that Irish woman writing deals with “women trying to find a place for themselves within the narrative of the Irish nation.” (Ingman, 2007:45) and Gerardine Meaney asserts that feminism that does not engage with nationalism “with the hard realities of Ireland’ runs the risk of becoming “a middle class movement directed towards equal participation by privileged women in the status quo.” (Meaney, 85: 1991) Meaney underlines the transformative power of Irish feminist and suggests that “As women claim and change their role and seek a different identity for themselves as women, they will also change the meaning of national identity.” (Meaney, 1991: 22)

Carol Smart underlines the misery of Irish young middle-class women in London who wanted to establish their Irish family, a dream that was impossible then. Smart underlines ‘the anxiety about cultural continuity’ as their young children will be denied an Irish childhood. In other words, it is the lack of connectedness that mothers fear that there would be a disjuncture between the two cultures, “ If my kids grew up here they would see me as being Irish, and having a bit of a funny accent, but they would grew up English and their kids would be English.” (Smart, 2007: 45) Even once these connections are neglected, they continue to resonate and re-emerge through the cycle of their narratives. These connections mean that personal lives are of national and local significance. Smart underlines the sociological significance of connectedness with her family photographs:

Some years ago I became the keeper of my family’s photographs... Having inherited them I then found I could not throw them away either and so they lived for about two decades in the same plastic bag until I was left with another batch from a maternal aunt- this time kept with slightly more reverence in an old sewing box. I was prompted to start sorting them, a task as yet unfinished. In the processes, I found myself going through a journey of the imagination, of memory, of emotion and of history. (Smart, 2007, 1)

Smart describes a particular photograph of her grandparents and this gives her a sense of connectedness with the past and past generation. Furthermore, a sense of physical connectedness is established with the location, a place close to where she was raised herself and consequently an understanding about the ways her grandparents parented her own father. She observes that “Although I feel all these things and these emotions are real to me, I also know that these connections and impressions are largely works of personal/cultural fiction.” (Smart, 2007: 3) Smart observes the close connectedness between photographic records of the real lives of past generation with realm of imagination. Blake Morrison notes how the absence of Irish family photographs exacerbates the past, “The remoteness was increased by the lack of photographs. There were none dating from my mother’s childhood. What did her parents look like? I’d no idea, and wasn’t encouraged to ask.” (Morrison, 2003: 12) Mary Butler perceived in many of her articles published in the Irish-Ireland newspapers that in the socially conservative Ireland, any national movement had to operate within the confines of domestic sphere. She argued that respectable Irish women could still make a significant contribution to building the independent Irish nation through domestic activities undertaken within their own homes, not to mention women’s prominent role in teaching their children pride in their national history and Irish culture. With the emergence of the Irish-Ireland

movement, enormous social, political and national changes affected the situations and aspirations of Irish women. Mary stated in her article entitled “Irish Women’s Work” mothers and maidens of Ireland in their working for the national cause “women not need to clamour for our rights not to thrust ourselves into the position of men.” Instead, women “can be womanly and pure as our blessed Ida and yet help to keep first what Erin has not yet lost – her nationality.” (United Irishman, 25 March, 1899) Butler focused on the domestic sphere as central to the creation of a strong national identity. She maintained in another article published in United Irishman that in the home “atmosphere being that which we breathe the earliest and longest[,] whatever constitutes this atmosphere is the most important factor in building up the national structure.” (United Irishman, January 1901) Irish women are the nation builders and it is only Irish women because of their enormous role in controlling the domestic realm who could complete and fulfill the realization of the Irish nationhood. Eventually Butler turned restrictions most Irish women face in their domestic sphere into a virtue by asserting that the nation could not be created without Irish women.

Feminized narratives tell women’s stories, offering a critical engagement with the concepts of resistance and ruination. What is noticeable about such narratives is that they do not limit themselves to the participation of revolutionary struggle but they are narrated in a literary realm dominated by men, a fact that empower male’s role and image and excludes its female counterpart. The female-centered narrative is playing a substantial role in the national revision of Ireland. Literature is being the site in which Irish identity is being deconstructed, renegotiated and rewritten. Consequently, this enriches our understanding of the diversity of literary stories and narratives, underlines the significance of the feminized resistance of colonization and sheds light on the feminized political agenda. Feminized narratives seek to disrupt and challenge the formation of dominant narratives. Feminized narratives introduce new and different stories which accommodate some of complexities and challenges and open up the possibilities for women to tell their own diverse and different stories. Such narratives challenge the notion of the ‘new Ireland’ that emerged during the Celtic Tiger by charting the individual struggles of Irish women to renegotiate their identity through a re-writing of their stories. The Celtic Tiger has sparked reevaluations of Ireland’s relationship to its past, present and future, as well as, its relationship with the rest of the world. There is a notable fixation on recovering the past. Anne Fogarty asserts that it is through “the production of femiocentric fictions that rewrite and confront the personal, psychic conflicts of the past [that] fresh insights into the politics and ethics of identity in contemporary Irish society might emerge.” (Fogarty, 2002: 16) Social controversies have brought Irish young women to public attention by 1990s. Twentieth-century Irish culture shaped by emergence of colonization and nationalist narratives of blood sacrifice for Mother Ireland out new emphasis on the feminized narratives of individual and national maturation. The stereotyped Irish nationalist movement usually presents a male martyr who sacrificed his blood for the symbolically female Ireland, the poor old woman, the ailing figure and Éire. The image of Ireland as woman is related to the protagonist’s strive for self-govern. There is an emphasis on both the Virgin Mary and Mother Ireland and this focus has resulted in Irish women occupying a unique position not as subjects with their own identity but has been reduced to symbols of the nation. The figure has its roots in Irish mythology and has been transformed across the centuries, especially after Irish aristocracy lost their control over Ireland to England. Irish nationalism’s reliance on women serves as a symbol of the nation and consequently produces certain expectations and constrictions for Irish women who become the bearer of morality. Feminized narratives show that the Irish social, cultural and political conditions provoke urgent reworking of literary conventions and impelled female authors to develop new strategies for representing their repressed narratives. Éilís Ní Dhuibhne depicts in *The*

Dancers Dancing (1999) a female protagonist experiencing lateral modes of growth to expand the possibilities for narrating Irish female identity and to denaturalize nationalist representational strategies. Ní Dhuibhne perceives that her literary writing is to produce a new feminine narrative that embodies the Irish nation and represents the shifts and reconfigurations occurring in Ireland in 1990s. Ní Dhuibhne's writing entails deviating from what is generally recognized as Irish literary tradition dominated by male authors and involves approaching symbols that have sometimes been disabling to Irish women generally and to Irish female writers in particular. She enrolls the female body as narrative strategy to engender literary conventions. *The Dancers Dancing* participates in what Eavan Boland calls 'rhetoric of imagery' that fuses the national and feminine. Ní Dhuibhne's cultivates the woman-as-nation trope in presenting Orla and Auntie Annie as meaningful to the Irish nation. Orla and Annie relate closely to two types of Irish persons that former President Eamonn de Valera encapsulated in his "St. Patrick's Day Address" in 1943 and would populate "the dreamed of Ireland, an Ireland filled with sturdy children and laughing, comely maidens; whose firesides would be the forums of the wisdom of serene old age." (De Valera, "St. Patrick's Day Address, (1943). In *The Dancers Dancing*, the force of the woman-as-nation trope revolves around Annie, the inhabitant of the Crilly family's ancestral home in rural Donegal. Annie's home and fireside resemble the forum of old age De Valera envisioned but Annie is incapable of full participation in any forum. Unfortunately, Annie "was deprived of oxygen in the birth canal which results in an array of disabilities of moderate severity that do not need acknowledgement but which cause great anxiety to Orla nonetheless." (Ní Dhuibhne, 1999:16) Orla constitutes a sturdy child and fattish body. Ní Dhuibhne presents Orla as having "sturdy body, sturdy mind, so sturdy indeed that she has one of those stiff natures that cannot bend itself to another role." (Ní Dhuibhne, 1999: 145)

Narrative is the lens through which human experience is made meaningful and it is the foundation upon which self-identity is achieved and expressed. Ultimately, life stories and other forms of identity narrative are important sites for identity narratives. The construction of national identity is infused with reinventions, reconfigurations and contestations of Irishness. For Avtar Brah, diaspora is the nexus constituted by the confluence of journeys and narratives reproduced through individual and collective re-memory. In this sense, Ireland is the ultimate diaspora nation in terms of the extent to which fluidity and movement of people are the defining features of the nation. Irish collective memory is thus underpinned by trauma, losses, opportunities and successes brought by migration. Patricia Coughlan asserts that in spite of the achievements of literary feminism, there remains:

A need for persistent intervention in the canon to redress the occlusion, omission and marginalization of women writers by those male-focused metanarratives which still dominate perceptions of Irish literary tradition. Despite these reshaping initiatives, and many other individual and group interventions, an underlying masculinism persists, at least within Ireland, within cultural, academic and literary practice and institutions at all levels, and visibly within practices of reading and writing, both more generally and in the academy. (Coughlan, 2008:1)

Breda Gray sums up the driving force of the Irish females by stating that:

Women have left Ireland in search of life opportunities, sexual liberation and career advancement, to give birth and to have abortions, as a means of personal survival and of contributing to the survival of their families in Ireland. They have emigrated to escape difficult family circumstances, heterosexism, Catholicism and the intense familiarities and surveillances that have marked Irish society. They have left as migrants and as part of the

nomadic way of life of Irish Travelers. They have left voluntarily and involuntarily, by chance and because others were leaving. (Gray, 2004: 1)

Eavan Boland objectively represents a female allegory of Ireland and establishes a close connection between real women and Ireland by presenting her poetic voice as a female poet, as well as giving voice to everyday Irish woman rather than an idealized woman voicing her womanly experience. She expressed that “Irish women ... became part of a corrupt transaction between nationalism and literature which feminized the national and nationalized the feminine... their place in the poem was prescribed; it was both silent and passive.” (Boland, 1995: 7) Boland tries “to strengthen by subversion how Ireland and Irishness is written, and to open a window on those silences, those false pastorals, those ornamental reductions that have confined us.” (Boland, 1995: 9) She believes that Irish women poets “are “subverting and destabilizing a conventionally accepted fusion of the feminine and the national.” (Boland, 1995: 9) This fusion was achieved through a direct challenge, dislocation and through establishing a dialogue between the mythical and the real in the context of the lived experiences of Irish women. Unfortunately, until recent times, Ireland was not only a text written by men, but it was perceived in colonial and postcolonial discourses as feminine and Boland believed that her role was to illustrate the so called ‘chasmic dichotomy’ of male and female cultural representations of Ireland that will hopefully provide a space and a voice for the marginalized, the silences and the other. As a female poet herself, Boland writes about nationalism and suburban lifestyle and goes against the old tradition of Mother Ireland giving birth. Walter De La Mare asserts that “the female tropes of Irish nationalism as a potent site for revising traditional concepts of femininity, maternity and cultural identity in Boland’s case aligned with women’s lived experience.” (Walter, 1979: 313) In this sense, Boland is rewriting the relationship between women and nation. Her poem ‘Mise Eire’ is a good example that describes Ireland as an ordinary woman especially when she states twice “I am the woman.” (Boland, 1995: 128). The poem expresses a distrust of history and male literature:

The songs
That bandage up the history,
The word
That make a rhythm of the crime
Where time is time past. (Walter, 1979: 128)

As it is common in Boland’s art, separation and femininity are connected in the poem as the poem starts with “I won’t go back to it” (Boland, 1995: 128) and is heavily charged with immigration: the allegory of the country leaving the country. The poem moves towards a promising prospect with “a new language” that is “kind of scar” that will be healed later. (Boland, 1995: 129) This scar is associated with the aging and female body. The scar is connected to femininity and the damages that Irish woman suffered from male tradition and it also refers to the loss of Irish language. There is a parallelism between national perplexities and the female oppression. The new language could suggest new opportunities for Ireland to move on and a new opportunity for women to talk about their historic and everyday experiences. Thus, Irish women became the speaking subjects of poetry instead of being presented by their male counterparts and eventually Ireland in the new allegory is presented as one of these women. Mother Ireland is often present in her poems and is given the chance to talk. Suburban area of Dublin and the everyday life of the suburban mother are recurring in her poems. Separation of mother and child implies the idea of immigration and whether at home or in immigration identity is always emphasized by the newly gained voice that breaks free from the imposed chains. ‘Anna Liffey’ is concerned with defining and voicing the Irish

national identity. The poem flows like a river covering all aspects of Boland's poetry including maternity, poetry and separation. The poem shows Boland's journey from the Gaelic myth through Dublin to the Irish Sea and how she finds her poetic voice changing the past and old traditions. In 'Mother Ireland,' every line narrates the story of Mother Ireland and its transformation from helpless object into confident subject and the physical rising of Mother Ireland, remembering the name and correcting history:

I was seen,
Night and day
Words fell on me. (Boland, 1995: 261)
Then:
"I rose up. I remembered it" (Boland, 1995:261)

Boland's poem 'The Emigrant Irish' calls for collective remembering of the history of Irish emigration and the Irish diaspora. She suggests this history has been forgotten, "Like oil lamps we put them out the back of our houses, of our minds." (Boland, 1995: 129) This poem famously inspired former President Mary Robinson's 1995 address to the Houses of Irish Senate and its cherishing of the Irish diaspora in which she drew special attention to the importance of "our love and remembrance on this island for those who leave it behind." (Mary Robinson, 1995:129) Robinson's lighting of a lamp in the president's residence is an act dedicated to generations of Irish people across the world. It was the catalytic point of upsurge interest in Irish diaspora and diasporic identity. Robinson sought a new appreciation in Irish life:

The men and women of our diaspora represent not simply a series of departures and losses. They remain, even while absent, a precious reflection of our own growth and change, a precious reminder of the many stands of identity which compose our story. They have come, either now or in the past, from Derry and Dublin and Cork and Belfast. They know the names of our town lands and villages. They remember our landscape or they have heard of it. They look to us anxiously to include them in our sense of ourselves and not to forget their contribution while we make our own. (Robinson, 1995)

Boland in *Object Lessons: the Life of the Women and the Poet in Our Own Time* (1995) accounts the ways in which women have been excluded from literary canons and history but she affirms that this exclusion serves the creative processes of Irish literary culture, and explored most fully. This reveals the importance of the exile to the Irish women and unfortunately mirrors the denial of women in Irish history. Boland interrogates the disjunctions produced by "the nationalization of the feminine, the feminization of the national in Irish culture." (Boland, 1996:448) In *Object Lessons*, the author offers a fresh impetus to literary autobiography produced by Irish women. She affirms that Irish women "have only recently moved from being the objects of Irish poems to being authors of them." (146) Boland deploys the symbolism of a defeated and impoverished Ireland as a female and an independent Ireland as a male. In addition, she provides other woman writers with stories about contradictions and constraints she faced as a woman poet in Ireland, "I know now that I began writing in a country where the word woman and the word poet were almost magically opposed. One word was used to invoke collective nurture, the other to sketch out self reflective individualism. Both states were necessary- that much the culture conceded- but they were oil and water and could not be mixed. It became part of my working life, part of my discourse, to see these lives evade and simplify each other. I became used to the flawed space between them. In a certain sense, I found my poetic voice by shouting across the distance." (1996: XI) Boland underlines the woman's poet need for expressive freedom and

the importance of her own experience promotes her to provide a series of object lessons for other women poets based on her own subjectivity. What emerges from these lessons is the persistent use of actual and imagined events to represent a large whole. In her preface, she introduced a leitmotif of the room, “that room appears often in this book. I can see it now, and I have wanted the reader to see it. It was not too large. [...] And yet for me, as for many other writers in so many other rooms, this particular one remains a place of origin.” (1996: XV-VI) Boland’s feminized narratives assert that for Irish woman writer, origins are fraught with absence, obscurity and elision. In ‘Lava Cameo,’ Boland interweaves her search for her grandmother’s life story with her narrative quest for poetic identity but she was astonished at how she feels “the small, abstract wound of not being able to find her grandmother’s grave in a Co. Louth graveyard becomes a sign for a wider loss of voice, memory and identity.” Memory is central in the life stories and although memories tend to be individual, they are acquired interactively so that they are both collective and individual. So the stories narrated by Irish women about their lives have been created through interactions with other people.

The critical interest in diaspora centered on exploiting how emigration has an immeasurable impact on Irish culture. Fintan O’Toole affirms that “Emigration and exile, the journeys to and from home, are they very heartbeat of Irish culture. To imagine Ireland is to imagine a journey.” (O’Toole, 1997: 157) Based on O’Toole’s measure, Ireland is defined by emigrant journeys and eventually Mary Robinson’s address, Boland’s poem and other expressions of the centrality of emigration and diaspora is a public acknowledgement of something that has been excluded from the narrative of the nation. Irish diaspora promises fresh insights into Irishness, Irish people and nation. In terms of exile and the Irish woman writer, there is an unfortunate history of exclusion and marginalization. James Clifford asserts that “Diasporic experiences are always gendered. But there is a tendency for theoretical account of diasporas and diaspora cultures to hide this fact, to talk of travel and displacement in unmarked ways, thus normalizing male experiences.” (Clifford, 1994:56) The feminized narrations explore a range of experiences of the Irish woman emigrant that include their sufferings of departure, looking back to Ireland, cultural uneasy at host communities and reconnecting with home by memory or by return, collective memory, myth, and idealization of real and imagined Ireland. The article will pay special attention to emigration and exile in relation to the exclusion and marginalization of women in Irish life and literature, the quest for female-determination, the female emigrant, the liminal space she occupies and the history of women emigration to England and America that were the two main destinations for women emigrants. Such themes trigger the possibility of a distinctive and creative feminist literary tradition. The article will confine its attention mainly Julia O’Faolain *No Country for Young Men* and *The Irish Signorina* and Edna O’Brien’s *The Country Girls Trilogy* and *The Light of Evening*.

The novels of Julia O’Faolain and particularly *No Country for Young Men* (1980) and *The Irish Signorina* (1984) are engaged in feminist and historical revisions. O’Faolain’s fiction is most concerned with how Irish women’s lives have been shaped by history and how migrant journeys are narrated in Irish women fiction. O’Faolain’s novels were written in a time of active feminist movement and a growing public awareness of women’s rights that interacted with new feminism in Irish literary criticism. O’Faolain’s novels are engaged with female agency and self-realization. Alice Ridout observes in her study *Contemporary Women Writers Look Back: From Irony to Nostalgia* that the creative rewriting is “born out of a blurring of the line between critical and creative, between reader and writer.” (Ridout, 2011: 67) O’Faolain emerges in her novels as the reader and writer. She had shown remarkable interest in myths of femininity that are sustained by Irish culture and this is apparent in her

1973 anthology *Not in God's Image: Women in History from the Greeks to the Victorians*. Her characters rewrite the Irish literary tradition, as well as the social realities of the twentieth-century Ireland that often excluded women to the margins of social processes. The prolific feminist literary output incorporated important inclusion from new voices in which a new phase in Irish women's movement interacted with and post new challenges to male-centered literary tradition. Angela Ingman's *Women's Writing in Exile* claims that the predicament of the Irish women writers is "exiled less by geography than according to received literary criteria, which in obscuring the complex interactions of race, class, and sexuality, is delineating hierarchies in matters of genre, arbitrarily determine canons and canonicity." (Ingman, 1989: 4) and she concludes that the Irish women writers "in reflecting the master discourses, subvert them." (Ingman, 1989: 4) Such destructive processes are striking in Irish women's writing. In *No Country for Young Men*, there are numerous references that inform Duffy's reading of Ireland and they are the key to interpret the Irish landscape as he encounters them, "A silver drizzle had started up. Umbrellas, down below, jostled on the principle of dodgem cars, nuzzling out space for faceless walkers underneath. A grey, eighteenth-century building pleased by its visual echo of Yeats... But where was the myth and swagger envisaged by Larry? Did Romantic Ireland die cyclically?" (O'Faolain, 1980: 39) Women play a substantial role in the romance of the returnee and the novel shows a remarkable power of Irish feminine archetypes. Duffy's first impressions of Dublin "This was Molly Malone's city- she of the cockles and mussels and hot-blooded fever from which none could relieve her. It was Molly Bloom's city too and the second city of the Bostonian Molly Osgood whose husband had been shot by an Irish Free State firing squad and whose son lived to become the State's president." (O'Faolain:1980: 14) Ann Owens Weeks asserts that this Irish cultural palimpsest is the driving impulse of the novel, "O'Faolain uncovers multiple layers of myth- ancient, historical, and contemporary – and enacting in the development of her novel the preservation and transformation of these deposits, tests the myths." (Owen, 1990: 179) Kerby Miller offers a good interpretation on the myths of homeland that are powerful for the returnee, "All emigrant in America experienced some degree of estrangement, but the Irish view of themselves as exiles sprang from sources more profound than the poverty and prejudice encountered abroad. In short, there seems no reason inherent in either the actual circumstances of most emigrants' departures' or the material conditions of Irish-American life which automatically translated a homesickness perhaps common to all emigrants into a morbid perception of themselves as involuntary exiles, a passive victims of English oppression." (Miller: 1988: 7) The Irish Signorina, the mother figure is embodied in the figure of the governess that occupies a distinct place in the national tale and eventually brings the national context into a sharper focus, "Deferent and over-polite, she reminded him of something and he saw now what it was: the governess arrive, as shown in old cartoons... Here was the governess generation. Ireland had peopled the world with them: nannies, governess, and mother's helps. Catholic and English-speaking, they'd been in demand all over Europe and had travelled in their thousands: decent spinsters for whom there was nothing at home." (1980: 54)

Both novels: *No Country for Young Men* and *The Irish Signorina* engage with Irish and feminist histories of migration and struggle for selfhood. The author casts a critical eye over women's history and Faolain's novels challenge the male-centered histories and open a new path to agency and woman selfhood. The impossibility of achieving autonomous selfhood is a symptom of the larger challenges facing Irish women. The novels are concerned with testing received histories, as well as, contesting the circumscriptions of women's lives. O'Faolain's fiction is concerned with how Irish women's lives have been shaped by history and how similarly migrant journeys are fully implicated in the same issue. Christine St. Peter

claims that O'Faolain's transnational life history is important in her engagement with the feminized narratives of Irish history, "Raised in Ireland and Europe, and living most of her adult life in Italy, England and the United States, Julia O'Faolain occupies privileged insider-outsider perch from which to view Irish nation- building. But as a member of the Irish Diaspora in North America during the time of writing this novel, she was clearly well aware of the ways nostalgic celebration of Irish republican history (the 'old morality tale') in the United States, plays a crucial part in maintaining virulent nationalism in Ireland, North and South." (Peter) St. Peter notes that Irish women writers "face the added hurdle of being the "other" to that normative Irish male artist, of struggling to create new areas of artistic expression in a culture that prides itself on already having achieved a superior form of (male) literature, designated as the generic Irish." (2000: 48)

No Country for Young Men presents the pressure placed on women in literary traditions and it is presented in reductive ways and in terms of its interrogation of historical pieties. The Irish-American returnee is the central character in the novel and he enquires the mythologies of the Irish feminine. James Duffy arrives in Ireland to make a promotional film about the Irish Republican Army, as well as to bring a coat of arms back to the United States of America to satisfy his Irish-American patron, Larry O'Toole. Duffy discovers later in the text that the design for the coat of arms is a product "of fraudulent history." (1980: 204) At the beginning of the story, Duffy was having a different position in relation to Irish history and that is why he took his mission in all earnestness, "He had given himself a crash course on Irish history but it was unsorted in his mind and his vision was like that of a man wearing prismatic lenses... A common could probably have sold him O'Connell Bridge." (1980: 16) He conforms to an unfortunate stereotype of the returning Irish-American as a capitalist, "I'm busy man. I suppose you never heard of H.H. Shoes? I'm the man who makes H.H. Shoes. Coast to coast in the United States there isn't a town where you can't buy Hogan-Hannafey Shoes?" (1972: 38) Hannafey imagines himself linked to the homeland in clumsy terms and seeks out opportunities "to commute with my ancestors." (1972:78) He becomes a parody of himself as he exclaims stupidly "I have no wife but Ireland. I love Ireland." (1972: 93) In this case, Duffy's real wife is repudiated in favour of a national fantasy in the playing out of the psychological drama of the returnee. In this context, O'Faolain's offers a subtle reading of the returnee and she does this with the view of complicating the nation and gender. The nostalgia of Duffy appears as macho nationalist posturing. In the story of this returnee, women are placed at the centre of the returning emigrant son's fantasies of the motherland and the mysterious history out of the living memory.

The Irish Signorina presents another story in its search for history through the mother's story. This quest moves from Ireland to Italy in search for self-realization. In this story, history recedes significantly and what remains is a concern with the mother figure as the main source of history. The motif of questing is similar to what Susan Rosowski defines as 'novels of awakening,' "The subject and action of the novels of awakening characteristically consist of a protagonist who attempts to find value in a world defined by love and marriage. The direction of awakening follows what is becoming a pattern in literature by and about women: movement is inward, toward greater self-knowledge that leads in turn to a revelation of the disparity between that self-knowledge and the nature of the world." (1983: 49) O'Faolain's novels attempt to recover oppressed narratives. No Country for Young Men centers on Judith Clancy who lives in her mind in the 1920s and carries a secret with her which is central to the novel's mystery; although the actual time of the novel is set in 1970s. There is a constant mingling of the present time narrative with the scenes from the past: the death of Sparky Driscoll in 1921 and Judith's commitment to a convent in

the 1930s when she is incarcerated because she knows too much about money embezzled from American funds to support the Irish cause. In spite of Duffy's hope, history is neither sequential nor reasonable in the novel. Judith struggles to tell truth from fiction and loses all grip on reality. Her historical narratives are marked by gaps, elisions and confusions. O'Faolain's novels are placed in the confluence of feminist revisionism and political interests. Eve Patten underlines in *Contemporary Irish Fiction* that "Ireland's history, and the recent past in particular, came under intense scrutiny as the testing ground of present-day cultural and political uncertainty. The revisionist controversy which engaged academic historians in the period filtered into popular consciousness through the novel, as fiction writers simultaneously began to exercise a 'robust' skepticism about the pieties of Irish nationalism' and geared their writing towards the subversion of official and casual narratives of the modern nation's evolution." (Patten, 2006: 259-60) and similarly Linden Peach agrees that "Contemporary Irish fiction had offered new interpretations of Irish history ... The contemporary has given voice to what was previously unarticulated." (Peach, 2004: 7) *No Country for Young Men* and *The Irish Signorina* engage with Irish and feminist migration, questing and belonging in ways that underline the feminine struggle for selfhood and self-realization as both novels were produced in a decade marked by victimization of women. Ailbhe Smyth affirms that "Women [in Ireland] were subjected to unprecedented social, psychic, and moral battering." (Smyth, 1993:265) The female characters and their struggle for acknowledgement and the impossibility of achieving autonomous selfhood is part of the larger challenges facing Irish women in this decade. The centrality of feminist revisionism that has exerted pressure on Irish nationalist and patriarchal ideologies are best shown in the pressure the novel places on inherited literary traditions and particularly those traditions that represent women in reductive ways.

Central to the challenge of the received version of history is the figure of the returning American, Duffy. The Irish-American returnee is the spark to investigate the mythologies of the Irish feminine. In narrating James Duffy's return, women are placed at the centre of the returning emigrant's son fantasies of the motherland and the revealing the mysterious history that is out of living memory. *The Irish Signorina* presents a different working of history as it concerns itself with the pursuit of meaning through the mother's story. This quest leads to a journey from Ireland to Italy in search of self-realization through the maternal inheritance. Irish history recedes and what remains is a concern with the mother figure as the source of meaning. So while *No Country for Young Men* interrogates official histories and exposes the emblematic status of women at the heart of them, *The Irish Signorina* belongs to a feminist tradition of questing and self realization. *The Irish Signorina* demonstrates another revealing kind of revisionism. Grainne is presented as having internalized classical modes of femininity, "she recognized Eve's and Pandora's evil curiosity in herself- she knew she'd never sleep peacefully in the house again if she hadn't satisfied herself as to what was there." (1980: 13) Later narratives go to contest images of Irish femininity that perceive Irish women as marginal and excluded individuals in Irish history and culture.

In *The Irish Signorina*, the narrative moves away from the national narrative towards a personal narrative and eventually it approaches a neutral realm. The social fabric of Italy is close to Ireland that the character leaves behind. So this sojourn might be an attempt to reconnect with home as she goes in search for connection with her mother who was an au pair for the family she visits there. The novel is concerned with voyaging and consequently engaged with quest narrative. In both novels, the process of separation and the prospect of self-realization is connected to the main character's relationship with and memory of the mother figure. Anne Fogarty in *Mother-Daughter Relationships in Contemporary Irish*

Women's Fiction observes the dynamic mother-daughter relationship that is driven by 'Matrophobia' as the daughter's situation is resisted by the mother's situation and seeks to avoid it but the daughter is enthralled by the history of the mother, "Matrophobia haunts these texts and is invoked even by feminist writers such as Mary Lavin, Julia O'Faolain, Molly Keane, Lia Mills and Edna O'Brien in order to depict the desperate struggle of the daughter to avoid the trap of female subjugation and the calamity of duplicating maternal experience. Repudiation of the mother coexists, however, in the work of contemporary Irish women writers with an intense melancholia inspired by the fatal lack on which mother-daughter relationships are founded. Despite the desire to break loose from traditional familial and psychic impediments, the urge to recover the history of the mother seems in many of these fictions a necessary concomitant of the daughter's quest for fulfillment and self-knowledge."(2002:113) This quest for fulfillment and self-knowledge marks *The Irish Signorina*. The opening of the novel presents Anne on the verge of change and attempting to break free from the nests of family and home and as suggested by Fogarty this pursuit of self-realization is fraught with complications and sufferings. The realization of Anne's true identity and the exposure of family history are important, given that the identity of her father is revealed before having an incestuous relationship with him. Thus, the novel reveals the impossibility of claiming a quest narrative for Irish woman writer and instead the narrative moves towards the heterosexual romance plots. Ultimately, Anne never escapes the role of substitute figure for her dead mother in the eyes of her lost family.

Moving to Edna O'Brien, O'Brien is a female Irish writer who is concerned with the tradition of imagining the Irish writer in her recent fiction she serves the creative process of rethinking the relationship of the Irish women writers and exile in the Irish literary culture. O'Brien focuses on the individual experiences of post-famine female emigrant to the United States of America. *The Light of Evening* focuses on the individual experiences of post-famine emigrants to the United States and their unsuccessful attempts to find better living conditions abroad or in their homeland. The novel presents the typical motif of mother-daughter relationship that prevails most of O'Brien's plots. The novel deals with an aged woman attempting to reconcile with her estranged daughter on her deathbed. As Dilly is lying on her bed, she sees her life passing and recalls her remote past more than fifty years ago in America, where she met her first love. The failure of this relationship and the death of her brother brought her back to Ireland and to a scolding mother. Dilly was forced to begin a new start and she married a rich man and raised two children. Back home, she realized that she was unable to break with the behavioral pattern she inherited from her mother's reproachful nature and she found herself reproducing the domineering attitude in raising her daughter Eleanora and securing her daughter's emigration to England to keep away from her mother and motherland. In the novel, Dilly's narrative intertwines with Eleanora's who became a successful writer for whom emigration and its workings provide her with inspiration. Fragmentation, the combination of journals, unsent letters and paper notes are the literary devices employed to connect the three generations of women. Tony Murray's article 'Edna O'Brien and Narrative Diaspora Space' investigates the workings and effects of diaspora and Murray underlines the importance of letters and letter writing in *The Light of Evening* in maintaining family histories across generations and particularly between mothers and daughters. Murray asserts that diaspora space is focusing on narrative exchanges, both oral and written as central in defining the relationships between the female migrants and her indigenous peers and understanding how female emigrants position themselves to home. O'Brien is concerned with the complexities of exile and the inclusion of the various forms that include the excluded experiences of the women writer and artist. O'Brien's fiction offers a creative engagement with the contemporary interest in the writings of the Irish woman

author. O'Brien is concerned with the study of the woman writer's experience with homeland and hostland. She succeeded in refashioning the image of the Irish woman writer who is engaged with Ireland as homeland and motherland. Fiona Barnes and Catherine Wiley in the introduction to *Homemaking: Women Writers and the Politics and Poetics of Home* observe that there must be a resistance to the aggrandizement of exile, "We must all write from somewhere, but that place's stability is often illusory. Home is therefore no an endpoint, but a constant movement towards or reconfiguration of the self in a place. If exile is to be in flight from, then home is to move towards. In the continuum of home an exile, if exile contains dislocation, isolation, and individualism, then home incorporates connection, relocation and community. Exile has been the more favored term of the two states in the literary tradition, with many writers and theorists valorizing the tradition that Andrew Gurr terms 'creative exile.'" (1996: XVI)

Irish women writers have sought to identify the domestic with a creative potential. There are numerous clues in O'Brien's writing claiming the domestic sphere as a space of artistic expression as in her short story published in *The New Yorker*. This synergy between everyday realities and artistic expression is important in reading the figure of the Irish women in O'Brien's fiction. *The Country Girls Trilogy* explores the artistic sensibility of its heroine, Caithleen Brady and *The Light of Evening* presents the emergence of a new fiction regarding the Irish woman writer. *The Light of Evening* offers a fictional mediation on her writing history and her consciousness as an Irish woman writer. The intertextual references to Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa* and the poetry of W. B. Yeats situate the novelist within a larger historical challenges encountered by the woman writer. This interest in exploring how past relationships with the literary past are indicating familial ties with contemporary fiction. O'Brien moves away from the promise of creative exile towards a creative reading of home values. *The Light of Evening* charts the creative reconciliation of the Irish woman writer with Ireland. The novel foregrounds the quotidian world of the main character's home place in west of Ireland as a key source of inspiration for the Irish woman writer. This changing relationship of the woman writer with home marks a new chapter in O'Brien's configuration of the fraught connection between the female characters and Ireland that is framed by her memoir, *Mother Ireland* (1976) and her current novel. The fraught relationship with the motherland is a problematic one because of O'Brien's real mother's reaction to her literary success. She dedicated her first novel *The Country Girls* to her mother but the dedication was received with hostility. O'Brien revealed in an interview how after the death of her mother, she found a copy of her novel discarded and expurgated in a shed at the family home. *The Light of Evening* revisits the breakdown of the relationship between daughter and mother and woman writer and motherland and resolves the tensions both literary and familial most evident in *The Country Girls Trilogy*.

Similarly, 'A Rose in the Heart of New York' contains echoes of developed relationships between mother and daughter as the novel offers a conciliatory relationship that reflects the novelist's relationship with her home place as *The Light of Evening* is dedicated both to her mother and her motherland. The novel is concerned with the main character, Eleanora, the writer herself with Ireland. Recalling the process of writing *The Country Girls*, she confesses, "The exercise was as much psychological as literary, like many another writer I was trying to cure myself at the same time as make a niche for myself in Lit. In the 1st two books the shy & soulful Kate is given the Centre Stage & Baba is the foil for her action while also being a wry comedian... I admired Baba but was too afraid to give her full rein. My hopes as much to win the approval of my parents as of the world; in fact they were the odium of my parents and of everyone in the small village where I came from." (O'Brien papers" 47-

9) and later she concludes that “I had never really finished their story, this was left suspended.” (O’Brien Papers: 51) *The Light of Evening* reveals her unfinished story as the novel is rewriting her early work and in particular *The Country Girls*. A key aspect of this return to the origins of O’Brien’s writing lies in the novel’s characterization of the mother. The mother figure in *The Light of Evening* is given full voice and authorship of her story. Her story is rendered in the first person, whereas the earlier mother figure remains a sacrificial victim of patriarchal rural Ireland.

The chapter of *Mother Ireland* describes O’Brien’s departure to England as an escape, “Euston Station was a jungle, grim and impersonal, the very pigeons looked factory-made, and when I saw the faces of the English I thought not of the long catalogue of blood-letting history, but of murder stories I had read in the Sunday papers and of that swarthy visiting English woman from long ago who brought corn caps and a powder puff stitched into her hanky. This was to be home, it had nothing to recommend it. Unhealthy, unfriendly, mortarish and to my ignorant eye morbid because I kept seeing wreaths and did not know that there was such a thing in England as Remembrance Sunday.” (1976, 87) This conjures the image of the Irish woman writer out of the contact with the hostland but refusing to take comfort in the nationalist mythology of blood-lettering history. O’Brien announced at the beginning of the same chapter that “leaving Ireland was no wrench at all” (1976: 87) and consequently repudiates any attachment to home by reading England and the English through the tabloid journalism rather than the grand narratives of Anglo-Irish history. *The Light of Evening* explores the Irish woman writer’s literary allegiances. The mother figure is fashioned anew. Dilly, Eleanora’s mother is not a writer but she is the figure against whom Eleanora defined herself in her life and her literary work. Dilly is given the opportunity to claim ownership of her own story and the opportunity to exchange with her daughter a meaningful communication to arrive at an understanding of each other by the end of the text. The novel does not end up with an idealized reconciliation between the mother and daughter but it makes a progressive step towards engaging Eleanora and Dilly in a dialogue as the mother and daughter discover they have more in common than they have expected. Dilly reveals that she had the same ambition as her daughter and she puts up a fight against patriarchy. By having the two narratives woven together, there is a room for a hopeful reading of the mother-daughter relationship than turbulent relationship in O’Brien’s early work. Fogarty underlines the anxiety of authorship to the Irish woman writer, “unlike their male counterparts, it is not the anxiety of influence that serves as a goal for the individual creativity of the Irish woman writer but rather it is the entire absence of a female line of influence that acts both as a bogey and as a powerful impetus to question, refurbish, and invent poetic strategies of self-definition.” (1999: 259)

Weeks identifies the history of Irish women’s writing as one that has been overlooked, “At first glance a tradition of Irish women’s writing seems more problematic than that of British or American women. In the first place relatively little writing in English by nineteenth-century Irish women has surfaced, and in the second place two separate cultural traditions divided, and to a lesser degree continue to divide, the people in Ireland.” (1990:10) Eleanora’s mother plays a role in her daughter’s coming to terms with the anxiety of the woman writer that is due to the lack of history. At the beginning of the novel, Eleanora was distancing herself from her mother but her mother’s letters from her home leaves an imprint on her writing. O’Brien writes, “I’m sending this though it may not make much sense out of the context. I think (I know I’ve found the key that I have been searching for these last two agonizing years. This is Eleanora’s voice, very different to Dilly’s, both inextricable. I wrote 15,000 news words in a matter of days.” (O’Brien’s papers: 354) Dilly

emerges as a source of inspiration to her daughter's literary imagination so that mother and daughter becomes an important source of inspiration for Irish woman writer. Heather Ingman identifies such favorable connection between mother and daughter as signs "that the mother-daughter story, based on conflict and repudiation of the mother, may be changing, as daughters seek to recover the history of the mother in order to help them in their own quest for identity and self-knowledge." (2007: 81)

Eleanora has been the victim of other's plots. She suffers from the burden of the English literary tradition and from her husband's attempt to control her efforts to assert herself through writing. Eleanora presents herself as self-declared Irish woman writer but she risks having her literary ambition thwarted by her husband. She perceived herself swept away from the canonical stories of love and seduction, but her literary endeavours are implicated in breaking her relationship with her intellectual husband, Hermann. Hermann fashioned Eleanora anew to be affronted by her creative ambitions. Writing emerges as a weapon of rebellion and she finds freedom and escape through the contents of her husband's library, "What it wanted was for them to be more equal, not to be master and slave, because already she was ceasing to be that slave, finding in the books she read not only riches, but rebellion and in some, though as yet convoluted way, she knew she was being unfaithful to him, and he saw it, sensed it." (2006: 133) Eleanora's rebellion is that of an Irish woman writer claiming authorship. The English literary conventions serve the purpose of resisting home nostalgia. Eleanora immersed herself in the writings of Woolf, Swift, Wordsworth, Rossetti and many others. She identifies herself with an English tradition of women writing soliciting courage and sympathy.

To conclude, emigration is central in defining the Irish culture and it has a very particular resonance for the Irish woman writer. The Irish feminized narratives articulate the impulse to recover, reclaim and re-imagine the story of the Irish woman in exile that has been marginalized and excluded in history and literary realm. With this in mind, a new chapter in the history of Irish emigration is being written. The recovery of the missing narrative of the Irish women emigrant addresses not just the many of the ambiguities in Irish women's history but also this tradition can be situated within larger developments in Irish feminism and Irish culture. The creative emigrant woman literary tradition inflected the experiences and the creative life of the emigrant women. Through the narratives of the female Irish writers there has been an acknowledged and visible presence and it is noteworthy that this creative writing is related to the need to evade predetermined roles. The article underlines the meaning of exile in writing by and about Irish women migrants as Irish women writers have written the missing and obsolete. The Irish woman migrant's role in relation to her male counterpart has not always been acknowledged but her journey to inclusion has been difficult one. O'Faolain and O'Brien have made crucial contribution to imaging the Irish emigrant woman. They have mapped and reshaped the relationships with homeland and hostland. They have produced a new category in the Irish novel that not only charts the missing history but also contributes something new and vital to the Irish literary tradition. Both novelists have reclaimed the significance of recovering women's experience of emigration and diaspora.

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